

Unheard Voices: First Generation Students and the Community College

Unheard Voices: First Generation Students and the Community College

by

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Abstract

First generation students are less likely to persist in college than their peers who have grown up in college educated families. This qualitative research study explores the experiences of 38 first generation students enrolled at four different community colleges in Northern and Central Oregon.

During my research into first generation students, I became convinced that there was a gap in examining the lives and self-reported experiences of these students in the community college environment. The majority of first generation research has been conducted on traditional aged first generation students at four-year universities, and this research is used to inform practices at community colleges where the populations are markedly different.

I chose to use the research methodologies of Narrative Inquiry and Phenomenology to examine first-hand the experiences of these students. In order to tell the stories of these students, I used Autoethnography to reflect upon my own personal experiences as a first generation student.

The study sought to provide answers to the following questions:

1. How do first generation community college students balance the academic rigours of college along with the external responsibilities they have outside college.
2. What are those external and internal factors that affect the persistence of first generation students in the community college setting?

The research was conducted using interviews, from which themes of shared experiences were developed. Some of these themes include factors that are tied to the success or persistence of first generation students, and provide unique insights into the lives of this population.

The purpose of this thesis is to expose the lived experiences of first generation students attending community college. My hope is that this study will raise a greater awareness of the needs of first generation students and in turn improve practices in higher education.

Structure of the Thesis

- Chapter one introduces the reader to the differences in which socioeconomic status or class are perceived in Ireland, the UK, and the US. The chapter will also identify who first generation students are, and how they differ from college familiar students. This chapter will also explain the significance of the study and the research statement. The setting at Central Oregon Community College in the United States will also be introduced.
- Chapter two will discuss my own personal journey as an immigrant to the US, and my formative years in Ireland and England. This will help the reader understand my own experiences and biases, and also why the study of first generation students became important to me as I progressed in my education.
- Chapter three introduces the conceptual framework for the study and explores the literature on higher education, class, identity, and first generation students. The literature review is broken down into sections that include the foundational theorists and the works of researchers that focus on factors that are common to the first generation experience. The literature also identifies gaps in the current literature.
- Chapter four describes the reasons I used the research methodology and methods that I did. Qualitative research and specifically Narrative Inquiry, Auto-Ethnography, and Phenomenology are the focus of this chapter. An explanation of why these research methodologies were chosen will be delved into. The methods used for capturing the

data along with the practices for participant selection, and the location of the studies are clarified.

- Chapter five is the heart of the study. This chapter contains the voices of the students arranged into themes that show common experiences that were derived from multiple interviews, a pilot study and focus groups. The themes articulate the community college experiences of the students and the obligations and responsibilities they have outside the college setting. This chapter also exposes some findings unique to this study.
- Chapter six delves further into the findings of the study and the unique contributions to the field that this thesis offers. The chapter also ties into the literature and highlights similarities and differences to the literature. This chapter synthesizes the discussion, and highlights the empirical findings from the field research. Unique findings, and theoretical implications will be discussed along with further research suggestions and implications for practice.

US Higher Education Terms

Explanatory Notes

The American education system and the Irish education system have some very distinct differences. This section aims to describe some of the terms that are used in the American system of education, primarily for the Irish reader.

Adjunct Faculty: These are considered part-time faculty. They are not tenured employees of the college or university. Adjunct faculty are hired to teach classes on a temporary basis and do not receive health care benefits. It is considered more cost-effective for colleges and universities to hire adjunct faculty, due to the fact that they do not have to provide medical and other benefits for these employees. Ireland and the UK also have faculty who have no long-term status. In the Adult and Further Education sector, faculty can be employed under a Contract of Indefinite Duration (CID), but even that title makes no promises. The hiring of adjunct faculty without contracts has become an international trend.

Adult Degree Programs: Online, weekend, and evening programs directed towards mature students. They are offered in a format which allows mature students to attend college/university and still maintain their external responsibilities. In Ireland, adult degree programs do not necessarily equate with flexibility in terms of modes of delivery.

Aspire Program: Aspire is an Oregon state, grant funded mentoring program that matches trained and supportive community college student mentors with middle and high school students to develop a plan to help them meet their education goals beyond high school.

Assessment Test: Community colleges are open access, but they need to assess the reading, writing, and arithmetic levels of students, so that they can be correctly placed in the appropriate coursework. Incoming students are required to take an assessment test to determine course placement prior to registering for their first term. In Ireland, assessment tests are sometimes referred to as a diagnostic.

Associate Degree: This is the first two years of a four-year BA Degree. All community colleges offer Associate Degrees. This consists of general education requirements that satisfy many BA Degrees. This would include coursework in mathematics, English, the Humanities, and Science amongst others.

Community College: A two-year Associate Degree granting institution. Community colleges also offer certificates which are usually vocational in nature. Some degrees and coursework are transferrable to a four-year university. Other degrees and certificates are terminal in nature designed to transition students into the workforce. The community college is similar in mission to the UK and Ireland's Further Education colleges. However, Community Education coursework does not have the social change component as is the case in Irish Community Education.

Community Education: Community Education coursework is non-credit in nature. These courses are for self-improvement, workplace, and skill enhancement. They may include courses such as personal finance, nature hikes, kayaking, and cooking amongst others. The fees associated with these courses are lower than college credit classes. Community Education is generally run on a self-support model and is not funded by the college.

Course: A single class, usually consisting of 1-5 quarter credits. In Ireland, a course can equate to an entire programme or module, whereas in the US a course is usually a 10-16 week long class, many of which comprise a programme.

Credit: A BA Degree consists of 180 quarter credits or 120 semester credits. All of Oregon's community colleges are on the quarter system. The quarter system consists of fall, winter, spring and summer quarters. Each class in a quarter lasts about 10 weeks, and a class is counted in credits. A class usually consists of 1-5 credits. An Associate Degree consists of 90 quarter credits or 60 semester credits. A semester usually consists of 15-20 weeks. Two semester hours is equivalent to three quarter hours.

Dreamers: Undocumented students who have attended a US high school and are enrolled in a community college or university.

Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA): An application form that is filled out by prospective or current students on a yearly basis. It captures the tax and employment information of students and their parents. Students are given loans funded by the government and payments on the loans begin 6 months after exiting the college or university. Some of the funding for FAFSA comes in the form of the Pell Grant, which is for students from lower socioeconomic status. This is a small portion of the award for most students and does not need to be paid back. The costs of attending college include a small living allowance so students have the ability to attend college full-time. Most students would be unable to attend higher education if this loan source was not available. The interest rate is controlled by the government and is far more reasonable than private loans through banks.

First Generation Student (FGS): A student who is first in the family to attend college/university.

For-Profit Universities: These institutions market to mature students on a large scale. They are not situated in a traditional campus setting, but instead are often in office buildings in major metropolitan or suburban areas. The preferred educational delivery method is hybrid, with most of each class taking place in an online environment with a small amount of face-to-face interaction. These universities are not funded by the state and are owned by corporations.

Freshman: First year college/university student.

GI Bill: In America, people who serve in the military are given the opportunity to enrol in the GI Bill. While serving in the military, personnel contribute some of their own salary towards the GI Bill; however a large share is contributed by the government. This money is then available for service members to utilize towards higher education. There is a time limit on how long the GI Bill lasts, and recent changes in law allow the GI Bill to be used by dependents.

Grade Point Average (GPA): In America, classes are graded using a decimal system known as Grade Point Average. An "A" grade is 4.0, a "B" grade is 3.0, a "C" grade is 2.0, and a "D" grade is 1.0. Cumulative or term GPA is used to describe the overall GPA for an academic term or the combined grades of all coursework taken. US grading does not recognise an "E" grade. In Ireland a "D" grade means no grade. Any grade below "D" is considered a failing or "F" grade. GPA is used in all aspects of the US educational system from primary school through to the university sector.

Homeschooling: In America, many families choose to homeschool their children. There are many reasons. Some choose to do so for religious reasons, others for a more liberal experience for the children, and for others it is because they might live at an extreme distance from the nearest school. Homeschooling still follows the same curriculum required by every child in the K-12 system in America, and standards are required of parents who choose to homeschool their children.

Hybrid: Hybrid modules are offered in a format that combines face-to-face classroom time with online learning. Most of each module is online and students usually visit campus several times per quarter for classroom learning.

Ivy League: Four year universities that are considered elite. These are private universities with very high costs that cater to students primarily from the upper classes. These eight universities are located in New England. The term 'Ivy League' refers to the football conference they belong to, and the traditional ivy covered campus buildings.

Junior: Third year college/university student.

Junior College: Older term for community college. Community colleges offer the first year (Freshman) and second year (Sophomore) of a university education. Junior also refers to the lesser standing of community colleges in relation to universities. This term is becoming less frequently used.

K-12: Kindergarten (age 5) through 12th grade (age 17-18). This is the formal mandatory schooling period for children in the US. This encompasses the same span as primary and secondary school in Europe.

Middle School: An intermediary school between elementary/primary and high school. Middle schools comprise of 6th, 7th, and 8th grade. Not all school districts have middle schools. If not, those children attend primary school until completion of 8th grade.

Pell Grant: A Federal Pell Grant, unlike a loan, does not have to be repaid. Students who are considered low income may be eligible for Pell Grant funding when they apply for Federal Financial Aid. The amount depends on a student's financial need, costs to attend school, and status as a full-time or part-time student.

Private Schools and Universities: These institutions receive no state funding and are often religiously affiliated. Tuition at private universities is usually higher than at state universities.

Public School: This describes state funded K-12 schools. These are free to the public, however, in some states, parents are expected to contribute funds to attend Kindergarten full-time. In the UK, public schools are elite and private.

Remedial Coursework: When students apply for entrance into community college they take an assessment test. This gauges their level of math, reading and writing skills. Students are then allowed to register in class according to how they scored in each component of the test. In the community college many students test into reading, writing and arithmetic at below-college

levels. They are then required to take coursework to bolster their skills to college level norms. This coursework is referred to as remedial, pre-college or gateway.

Quarter: Some colleges and universities offer courses on the quarter system, others on the semester system. Quarters are around 10 weeks long and follow the seasons. These include fall quarter (start of the academic year), winter quarter, spring quarter, and summer quarter.

School District: A district may comprise numerous primary schools, middle schools and one or more high schools. A school district is similar to a county in that it can serve a wide area.

Semester: The academic year is broken up into two terms or semesters, fall semester and spring semester.

Senior: Fourth (final) year college/university student.

Sophomore: Second year college/university student.

State Universities: Universities that are public in nature, funded partially by the state. Unlike the community colleges, they are not open access.

TRiO: TRiO includes programs targeted to serve and assist low-income individuals, first generation college students, and individuals with disabilities to progress through the academic pipeline from middle school to college

US Coast Guard: This is a branch of the US Military, and has many missions including; search and rescue, illegal alien interdiction, drug enforcement, ice-breaking and scientific expeditions.

Veteran: Anyone who served in the US Military and received an honorary discharge.

Vocational Education: These courses and certificates are usually directly applicable to workforce needs. Some areas might be automotive technology, welding and phlebotomy.

An Explanation of the US System of Education

Pre-School through High School

Education in the US consists of several different levels. Prior to the age of 5 many children attend pre-school, often in the form of Montessori, religious pre-schools, co-op preschools (where parents volunteer their services at the school), and other non-denominational pre-schools. This is similar to Junior Infants in the Irish school system. Children are usually 3-5 years old. Many children from lower socio-economic means are not able to avail themselves of pre-school as an option due to the fact that pre-schools are not funded by the state and are not compulsory. Most pre-school programs are not free and tuition payments are required. Some parents offset the tuition in cooperative pre-schools by volunteering in the classroom.

At the age of 5 or 6, children in the US start their first formal education in the form of Kindergarten (a German term meaning children's garden). This would be similar to the senior infants in the Irish education system. Upon completion of Kindergarten, American children enter the grade system of Elementary-Junior High-High School Education. This consists of 12 grades. In America when referring to compulsory education most people call it K through 12

which translates as Kindergarten through 12th grade. 1st grade children are 5-6 years old and in 12th grade they are 17-18 years old.

The K through 12 system is usually split up into groups built around the age and development of children. Kindergarten and Elementary (primary) school are usually separate from middle school (junior high) and high school. This varies state by state. Some elementary and middle schools are combined which includes the grades Kindergarten through 8th grade. The table below displays the US grading system. Depending on the state, students can leave compulsory education between the ages of 14 and 17. Compulsory education in the US is paid for through state taxes and is funded by the federal government, state government, and local county government. One significant difference between primary and secondary schools in Ireland is that they are associated with religious institutions, primarily Catholic and Church of Ireland. All primary and secondary education is funded by the state in Ireland. In the US, all schools associated with a religious denomination are private and tuition is for paid by parents.

Table 1

The US education system grades from Kindergarten through to BA Degree.

Kindergarten	Age 5	Elementary School
1 st Grade	Age 6	Elementary School
2 nd Grade	Age 7	Elementary School
3 rd Grade	Age 8	Elementary School
4 th Grade	Age 9	Elementary School
5 th Grade	Age 10	Elementary School
6 th Grade	Age 11	Junior High (Middle) School
7 th Grade	Age 12	Junior High (Middle) School
8 th Grade	Age 13	Junior High (Middle) School
9 th Grade	Age 14	High School
10 th Grade	Age 15	High School
11 th Grade	Age 16	High School
12 th Grade	Age 17	High School
Freshman	Year 1	Community College/University
Sophomore	Year 2	Community College/University
Junior	Year 3	University
Senior	Year 4	University

The above table illustrates the way the US education system breaks down compulsory education by age and college and university by year. Each academic year also equates to an amount of credits. One year of college or university education equates to 30 semester credits or 45 quarter credits. The equivalent in an Irish BA Degree would be 80 credits. Part-time and many full-time students often take longer than the four years recognised as the standard by the American higher education system.

Homeschooling

The tradition of homeschooling has been a part of the US system of education since its inception. A country with such large open spaces and families living vast distances from the

resources of towns and cities has to offer alternatives to the traditional school. Homeschooling still follows the same curriculum required by every child in the K-12 system in the US, and standards are required of parents who choose to home school their children. However, in recent years parents have started homeschooling their children in greater numbers than ever before. What are the reasons for this increase?

The Department of Education's (2013) report showed that homeschooling has risen by 36 percent between 2004 and 2009. In my own experiences working at four year colleges and meeting new students that had been homeschooled there were a number of similar reasons their parents chose homeschooling as an option. Most common in my experience was that the parents of homeschooled children felt that the school curriculum did not offer religious instruction or that the curriculum was too conservative or not liberal enough. American public schools separate religion from instruction. Even the pledge of allegiance is banned from some schools because it references God. This type of stance alienates many who would like to see Christianity infused in education. Liberals also homeschool their children for reasons, such as a belief that the curriculum has been designed by a state that wishes to keep the masses in check. Some parents who have children with disabilities also choose to teach their children at home. Others feel that the standard of K-12 public education is not adequate, and that schools are unsafe.

Table 2

Why Parents Choose to Homeschool

Concern about the school environment, including reasons such as safety, drugs or negative peer pressure	88%
A desire to provide religious or moral instruction	83%
A dissatisfaction with academic instruction at other schools	73%
Non-traditional approach to children’s education – or “unschoolers” who consider typical curriculums and standardized testing as counterproductive to quality education	65%
Other reasons, such as family time, finances, travel and distance	32%
Child has special needs (other than physical or mental health problems) that schools cannot or will not meet	21%
Child has a physical or mental health problem	11%

Note, Adapted from *National Center for Education Statistics (2013), Department of Education, USA.*

Homeschooling is the preferred choice for many parents, and even in the midst of a city, homeschooling is not unusual. However, when these students transition to university or college their experience of education will change dramatically. In my own experience, I have met many homeschoolers who perform well in college and university, however these students

are often not as socially advanced as their public school educated peers. They are often at odds with other students in that they have been conditioned to some extent by the values of their parents, whether they are liberal or conservative. That said, many homeschool parents actively pursue social activities with other homeschool families to foster the development of children's social skills.

Postsecondary Education in the United States

In this section I will give a brief overview of higher education in the United States. The different types of higher education will be described in order of when they came into existence.

The first institutions of higher learning in the original English colonies were private universities. After the American Revolution, the United States expanded its borders at the expense of the indigenous population. As it added to its territories the state system of education was developed (Goodchild, & Wechsler, 1997). Shortly after the private colleges and universities, the US implemented a system of state universities which were funded by local and federal government. Community colleges were later to the game and most were established in the mid-20th century (Thelin, Edwards, & Moyen, 2014). Finally, in recent decades, for-profit colleges have become a part of the higher education establishment in the US. There are several key differences between private universities and for-profit universities. Firstly, the private universities are the strongest bastion for the liberal arts, and they often have a strong focus on critical thinking. Faculty wield a lot of power, and the curriculum and classes are geared towards traditional students transitioning from high school. Most students are required to live on campus for the first two years of their education, and classes are usually offered in a

traditional face-to-face format. For-Profit colleges and universities focus primarily on mature students. Classes are offered online and face-to-face to meet the needs of the busy lives of mature students. Liberal arts are not the focus, instead the degrees offered generally have a direct link with employment, such as business, organizational communication, or marketing. Faculty teach courses developed nationally and have little input in regards to adapting the syllabus or even choosing text books. The power in for-profit universities resides in the administration and the corporation running the universities. Profits are distributed to shareholders.

Upon leaving or graduating from high school students have the option of joining the workforce or attending college/university. The terms 'college' and 'university' are used interchangeable to some extent, however the word university usually indicates that the institution offers BA Degrees, and graduate level (post baccalaureate) degrees such as Masters Degrees and Ph.D.'s, while colleges primarily focus on Associate and BA Degrees.

Private Universities

The earliest universities in the US were all private institutions loosely based on the model of the English and German universities. Early settlers in each state often congregated in religious groups and eventually opened their own colleges and universities. Harvard for example was started in 1636 to train puritan clergy for the new colony of Massachusetts. Yale was founded in Connecticut in 1701 by Congregationalist Ministers (Goodchild, Wechsler, 1994). Catholics, Baptists, and other religious groups quickly developed private universities to train clergy, teachers, and lawyers for the rapidly growing colonies (Thelin et al., 2015). In the

modern era, private colleges are a mix of universities with a strong religious presence or universities that may take pride in their religious heritage, or those that claim no religious leaning and are liberal leaning. For the most part, the private colleges and universities are considered a bastion for the classic liberal arts curriculum and are considered the strongest line of defence against a corporate influenced curriculum (Goodchild, & Wechsler, 1997). Tuition for the most part at private universities is more expensive than state universities or community colleges. Institutional scholarships are often given to students in order to make private colleges more accessible. They are funded primarily through tuition discounts and donor contributions.

Most private colleges offer BA and graduate level degrees. Associate Degrees are uncommon in private institutions. Private colleges are known for having smaller class sizes and a more personal college experience. There are elite private colleges that cater primarily to the wealthier classes and little diversity can be found at some of these institutions. In contrast, the who's who of American politics and power correlates closely with an educational background at the private (Ivy League) colleges. Ivy League colleges are amongst the oldest in the US. They were established by the elite and have continued to cater to the wealthy (Goodchild, & Wechsler, 1997). Other colleges and universities are more likely to cater to the middle class. The original founders of the country, and people of power have traditionally attended the Ivy League institutions. When the expansion of settlers settled territories as far west as California, they also founded private colleges. However, these did not compete with the reputation of the original institutions. This pattern has continued to the present era. Admission to the Ivy League schools is extremely competitive. For example from 1991 to 2001, all four of Al Gore's

children enrolled in Harvard, defying the one-in-ten odds against admission (Golden, 2006). This is not an unusual case or a one-off. Politics and power in the US have become a family business and the Ivy League universities recognise this. They use the term “Legacy” to describe preferential admissions for the sons and daughters of powerful alumni. “President George W. Bush, the last two Democratic candidates for president, former Senate majority leader Bill Frist, and four of the nine Supreme Court Justices are either alumni children themselves or have legacy offspring, or both” (Golden, 2006, p. 10). While the American Dream espouses equality and equal opportunity for all, the truth is that the United States has a ruling class that holds power from generation to generation and will continue to do so with the help of the Ivy League Universities.

The private universities are often the oldest and most beautiful looking of campuses. For example this is an image of Reed College, one of the most elite colleges on the West Coast of the US, situated in Portland, Oregon.



Figure 1. Photograph of Reed College, State of Oregon

Reed College attracts primarily affluent students from the East coast, however, according to the Reed College website: in recent years Reed has increased the diversity of its student body to 25%. On the downside, the competitive entry application processes into colleges like Reed can be difficult for local students. Only 12% of Reed students actually come from Oregon and the other states in the Pacific Northwest which includes Washington, Oregon, and British Columbia in Canada (Reed College, 2013). Reed is often referred to as a west coast Ivy League college.

Apart from the prohibitive costs of private colleges and universities, there are a number of other factors that exclude first generation students. For example, the tuition and board (including living expenses, books, and dorm room) at Linfield College, a private college near Portland Oregon is \$51, 174 per year (Linfield, 2014). For a student who completes their degree in four years that would equate to \$200,000. The reality is that most first generation students balk at the costs of attending private colleges. However, private colleges and universities offer scholarships that can significantly decrease tuition.

Many of the students in the community college cohort are tied to their community and leaving home to attend university also means leaving behind their support system. Many first generation students are also mature students and are unable to attend school full-time during the day. Part-time options at private schools are extremely limited. Private college and university students almost exclusively come directly from high school. Their parents pay for their tuition and they have the luxury of not being required to work or look after children or

aging relatives as do many first generation students. Private schools are not even on the radar as a realistic option for most first generation students.

The State Universities

State Universities are publicly supported. They were established in every state by the Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890 (Cohen, Brawer, 2003). Each state has a number of state funded universities and community colleges. For example, Oregon has seven state funded universities: Oregon State University; Portland State University; Southern Oregon University; Eastern Oregon University; Western Oregon University; University of Oregon; and Oregon Institute of Technology. These are spread out through the state of Oregon based on population density and other factors. This is typical in other states also, as are the names of state universities. They are usually easily identifiable by the inclusion of the words state, the city name, the area of the state, etc. The four-year universities, as they are known, provide BA Degrees that are possible to complete in a four-year span. Many BA Degrees in other parts of the world consist of 3-year degrees with a fourth year option for honours. In the US, all BA Degrees are four years in length. The four years have names: Freshman, Sophomore, Junior, and Senior. Students can often take much longer than four years to complete a BA Degree for various reasons including class availability, funding, changing major, transfer, etc. The state universities and community colleges are partially funded by the state in which they are located. Much of the rest of funding comes from tuition and private donors. Entry into state colleges/universities can be competitive and not all students are accepted. However, if students do not get accepted into a state university, many take the option of attending community college for a

period of time in order to build their Grade Point Average (GPA), whilst taking equivalent classes at about one third of the price and then transfer to the four-year university.

Historically speaking many state universities were agricultural institutes or teacher-training colleges little resembling modern universities, they did provide a lower-cost alternative to private colleges (Goodchild, & Wechsler, 1997). The state universities introduced an ever-increasing number of programs and occupations such as business, forestry, journalism and social work (Cohen, Brawer, 2003). This attracted a more diverse student body than the private institutions. The state universities are by far the largest institutions. Many are research hubs for the sciences and are most likely to attract students from middle class origins. These universities also have large sports and athletics programs which compete at a national level and can bring lots of alumni dollars and donations to a university. Colleges that have successful sports teams also engender student and alumni pride and identity in a way that is not as visible at other higher education institutions.



Figure 2. Photograph of University of Oregon football field. State of Oregon

State universities usually consist of sprawling campuses and are what movies and media usually portray as the American university experience. For the first two years many students live in dormitories on-campus and have a shared university experience. This differs significantly from community colleges in that few community colleges offer living accommodations. The majority of State Universities attract a greater number of traditional aged high school students than they do adult students.



Figure 3. Photograph of University of Oregon. State of Oregon

For-Profit Colleges and Universities

There are two major types of for-profit universities. There are those that offer Associate degrees, BA Degrees and graduate degrees, and those that offer certificates and non-degree qualifications that are vocationally focused. The largest of the degree granting for-profit colleges are The University of Phoenix, Capella, and DeVry. These universities are planning to also open campuses in the UK within the next decade. They will change the way colleges and

universities in the UK operate. Barber, who was chief adviser on delivery to Tony Blair, said “The threat to UK Universities is from giant US for-profit colleges, such as the University of Phoenix, DeVry University and Laureate, and free online courses” (Baker, 2013).

The University of Phoenix and DeVry are owned by the Apollo Group which is a corporate for-profit entity. The University of Phoenix has over 200 locations throughout the US. For-profit campuses are usually located in office buildings such as the University of Phoenix Tigard Campus below. They are situated close to freeways so that prospective students see them as they commute back and forth to work.



Figure 4. Photograph of The University of Phoenix, Tigard. State of Oregon

The target demographic for these colleges and universities are primarily mature students who are looking to expand their careers or to start a career. Many first generation and military/veteran students choose for-profit colleges and universities because of the online/low residency requirements. With so many campuses across the country a student who

is also active duty military can transfer from one base to another and continue to take courses towards their degree at another location of the university simultaneously. The University of Phoenix also has a consistent nationwide system of education. The syllabus for a course taken in Kentucky is the same as one taken in Oregon. The class content is practically the same. The faculty are mostly on an adjunct model, meaning that they are part-time employees. The tuition at these institutions is usually higher than a state university, but less than a private college/university. The for-profit colleges are almost entirely tuition funded, and they invest a lot of their budget in marketing. The University of Phoenix was recently listed as Google's biggest advertiser spending \$170,000 per day during 2012 (Kavoussi, 2012).

The University of Phoenix has also spent money and time targeting veterans over the last decade.

According to Weinstein (2011):

Online ads are just the opening salvo in the for-profit schools' recruitment campaign.

The 400,000-student University of Phoenix runs a "military division" that employs 600 vets, operates satellite campuses on military bases worldwide, and publishes an online military newsletter called the *Patriot*. (p. 3)

Veterans who receive an honourable discharge receive the GI Bill and earn a substantial amount of free tuition to spend on higher education. Enlisted veterans have for the most part not attended college or university prior to service. Some take coursework during their enlistment, but many wait until the end of their enlistment to attend colleges and universities. Many of them are first generation students and are not knowledgeable about college or

university life. The University of Phoenix targets the veteran population primarily because of the reliability of tuition funding from these students and the federal government.

For-profit universities are also impacting four-year institutions. The state universities often realign their business departments and base them on the successful for-profit models. They align themselves closely with the corporate sector and often receive endowments from corporations. Business Schools, while often the newest schools on campus, end up being the largest departments and become more and more powerful while the Social Sciences and Art Departments struggle to find a voice. This reflects what Harvey (2005) refers to as Neoliberal economic thought.

Schefner (2007) argues that:

Capitalist class segments in the United States and the United Kingdom worked together with pro-business intellectuals, using tools of international financial institutions, to forge a message articulating that the enemy of the economy is state intervention, and that the market must be left to resolve social and economic needs. Neoliberals first experimented with the financial problems of New York City, squeezing city government with predictable results of urban decay, unemployment, decline in social services, and crime, coupled with greater generation of polarized wealth. From there, a template emerged which relied on diminishing certain state regulations, liberalizing trade relations, and loosening capital restrictions. (p. 260)

The US is moving away from a college/university environment that lauded the liberal arts and critical thinking graduates, to a system dominated by big business that aims to produce

unquestioning workers in the system which has been redesigned to generate wealth for a tiny segment of the population while depriving the majority of people of financial security and social safety nets. The for-profit higher education model epitomises the move towards deconstructing higher education.

The Community College

Community colleges were first developed in the early 20th century. Secondary schools were finding that only 10% of their graduates attended university, and so they started developing college level classes on high school campuses. This increased the number of students entering the workforce with college coursework under their belt. This was problematical to some extent as this system was loosely governed and not consistent across school systems and states. Then a shift occurred where community colleges were created independently of high schools.

According to Cohen and Brawer (2003):

During the 1950's and 1960's, whenever a community college was established in a locale where there had been no publicly supported college, the proportion of high school graduates in that area who began college immediately increased, sometimes by as much as 50 percent. The pattern has not changed. (p. 16)

Business leaders saw the community college as a way to provide workers trained at the public expense.

Cohen and Brawer (2003) argue that community leaders saw the development of community colleges:

As an avenue to community prestige. Even the grand scheme to keep the poor people in their place by diverting them to programs leading to low-pay occupational positions has found some acceptance, particularly among those who perceive a capitalist conspiracy behind all societal events. (p. 9)

In 1909 there were 20 community colleges in the US, and there were 170 community colleges only ten years later. Community colleges now operate in every state. There are 17 in Oregon and 34 in Washington State. Community colleges now enrol half the students who begin college in the United States (Cohen, & Brawer, 2003). “After WWII, the community colleges opened up to ethnic minorities, lower income groups, and those whose prior academic performance had been marginal. Of all the higher education institutions, the community colleges contributed most to opening the system” (Cohen, & Brawer, 2003, p. 27). The community college became the place of access for underserved populations, women and the working class. To this day community colleges still hold this role.

Community colleges are also often referred to as junior colleges or two-year colleges. These cover the first two years of higher education – Freshman and Sophomore. Students can earn an Associate Degree (first two years of higher education) and can then transfer to a four year college to finish a BA Degree. Not all courses transfer however and students need to be in contact with the four-year college they attend to transfer to in order to make sure they are taking the correct coursework. In the US, modules are referred to as courses or classes.

Community colleges also offer technical Associate Degrees that are terminal in nature (not transferable) where students receive skills specific to an industry or job market such as; Medical Assistant, Landscape Architecture, Criminal Justice, Automotive Technology, or Computer Information Systems. These allow students a quick-track to the workforce in two years or less. These programs are also referred to as Workforce Development.

This brings up the conundrum facing colleges and universities in the US. When academic programs are dictated by the needs of the workforce, it puts under threat the liberal arts core which is central to the concept of higher education.

Macrine, (2009) reports:

In the context of US social reality, critical pedagogy has always confronted a number of obstacles. Among them, the relentless subordination of schooling to the corporate order in which education is reduced to training for jobs, and the concepts of citizenship conflated with loyalty to the existing social and economic system and participation in democratic life confined to the act of voting. (p. 10)

The social sciences in particular are under siege in today's world of academia. Students and their parents come to college admissions offices and one of the first questions they ask is "what kind of job will I get with this major?" If a major does not tie closely with a lucrative career field, then the major or the academic department can end up on the chopping block. "As market ideals take precedence over democratic values, and individual rights outweigh collective concerns, the university is increasingly transformed into a training ground for the corporate workforce" (Giroux, 2009, p. 15). Nowhere is this more obvious than at the

community college. In particular, vocational programs are aligned directly with local employers. For instance, Clark College in Vancouver, Washington, has a Toyota Automotive Program which trains students in auto care, and the students simultaneously are employed in a Toyota dealership. At the end of the day, the community college and the students are footing the bill to train employees for Toyota. This begs the question on why our state funded resources are being utilized to train people for corporations? Why does Toyota not train its own employees on the job? This is a cost savings measure for Toyota, and the community college is being used as a way to save costs and increase profits.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The American community college is an institution like no other. It offers open access to all who apply, and is the starting point for a large majority of first generation students and students from diverse backgrounds. Community colleges also have the lowest success rate in the nation for student completion. According to a recent study by the National Student Clearinghouse, 15 percent of students who started at two-year institutions in 2006 completed a degree at a four-year institution within six years (Shapiro et al., 2012). There are many reasons that the persistence and completion rates of community colleges are so low. This is where those students who are low income, or those from traditionally underrepresented groups are likely to take their first steps in higher education. According to Shapiro (2012), 44 percent of low-income students attend community colleges as their first college after high school along with 50% of Hispanics, and 31% of African Americans. A recent Department of Education study by Lynch (2013) reported that 48.5% of Latino students and 45% of African-American students were first generation. Lynch, (2013) found that 60 percent of the US college population is made up of first generation students, yet colleges and universities for the most part have retained their traditional model of catering to the traditional middle/upper class population of students.

In the existing grand narrative about first generation college students, there is much research focusing on the ability of colleges to successfully help first generation students transition into higher education, and in turn adapt to the norms of the middle class. By middle class, I refer to the college educated class who have careers, and different social and cultural capital to first generation students. This will be discussed further in the literature review.

Rarely addressed in the existing literature are the difficulties and hurdles that first generation learners undergo while adapting and learning in college. This research thesis aims to explore the in-college and external experiences of first generation community college students as they attempt to succeed academically while maintaining their personal commitments and responsibilities.

The research methodologies I chose to use in this dissertation are Narrative Inquiry, Phenomenology, and Autoethnography, so that I could better understand the lived experiences and stories of these students as they attended college, whilst also exploring my own journey as a first generation student. The primary reason I used these methodologies was to make a contrast to the significant amount of quantitative research on this population.

My paradigm or worldview is centred on access and equality in higher education, and by adding the voices of first generation students to the literature, it will help inform practitioners of the gaps in the literature and thus impact access, persistence and completion. To truly develop access and equality further, researchers need to include student voices in the dialogue. Words and lived experience are the qualitative evidence that frame an alternative to current research on this population. This chapter will set the foundation for the study by establishing its purpose and overall significance. The chapter will also offer a brief overview of the most important literature on the experiences of students who are not part of the commonly portrayed scenario: that of middle-class white students attending university full-time with few responsibilities other than academic success. The students in this study are stepping outside of their own familiar environs to attend college in spite of circumstances that would deter many

from even considering such an investment. The poor and the working class often think short-term when it comes to financial investments due to the precarious nature of their existence. Living paycheck to paycheck is the norm. Paying out tens of thousands of dollars to invest in the chance of a career that may pay enough to pay back the debt is a risk that many are unwilling to take. The environment in which these students live is an important factor in their persistence in community college. Because of this, the context and research setting in which the participants live, work, and socialize will also be addressed in this chapter.

Along with the research that is presented in this dissertation, I have worked in higher education for over 14 years. These years have been spent in Student Services at several colleges and universities. These include private universities, state universities, and the community college. My exposure on a daily basis to first generation students has given me many insights and experience on which to draw. As a practitioner, my first-hand experience of working with first generation students and addressing their needs and concerns in the community college setting allowed me to frame my research with the added bonus of an insider's perspective. This approach fits well with the field of Autoethnography. I was able to reflect on my own personal experiences and add those to the research as a way of understanding the lives of the students in this research study.

Socio-economic Status and Class in American Society Contrasted with Ireland and the UK

American research has focused primarily on the experiences of African American, Hispanic, Native American, and Asian American students and their experiences in college and for the most part has avoided the conversation around socioeconomic status and higher

education attainment. First generation students are most likely to be in the working and lower classes.

According to Jenkins et al, (2013):

First generation students are more often from low SES families or racial/ethnic minority cultures; thus, they may experience SES linked stressors as well as lower available material social support because of the scarcity of financial and other resources within their social networks. (p. 131)

In the US, higher education practitioners and researchers are far more comfortable with research on diversity in education, but are for the most part quiet about the effects of class on college access, retention and completion.

By ignoring class, our colleges only focus on what they can do to help students on campus, and ignore the immense difficulties along with the external commitments and responsibilities of this group of students. Colleges need to adapt to meet the needs of the increasing body of first generation students. To do this, they need to first understand the reality of their day-to-day lives. Education after high school is often not a high priority for families from working class backgrounds. That is the dilemma facing first generation students. Many have not been brought up being familiar with the norms and expectations of higher education. There is a research gap on the identities, and lives of these students. Who are they? What are their needs and concerns? What outside forces dictate whether these students succeed and fail in college? What can colleges do to better help these students? By researching and analysing the internal and external experiences of first generation community

college students, this thesis seeks to identify areas where community colleges might be able to better understand and serve this population.

This research thesis is transatlantic in its nature. I worked on my PhD at Maynooth University in Ireland while my thesis focuses on first generation college students in Oregon, USA. Partly because my own life was spent in Ireland, England, and the USA, I was made aware of the differences in the way these countries perceive socioeconomic status/class. When I first visited Maynooth University I met with Professor Ted Fleming, his work and perspectives on the experiences of the poor in higher education was inspirational. I appreciated the fact that poverty and education were at the forefront of Fleming's research, and this had some influence on me. I became keenly aware that poverty, class, and education were topics that were widely discussed and researched in Ireland, the UK, and Europe. Due to these early experiences, I deliberately included in the literature review a mix of American and European authors largely because many of the experts in socioeconomic factors and persistence in higher education are from Europe. There is a plethora of US research on first generation students; however, this for the most part seems to avoid focusing on socioeconomic factors such as financial resources or income, occupation, and level of education.

The next section will seek to explain the differences between American and Irish/UK class systems and definitions.

Ireland, the UK and First Generation Students

Ireland's population is currently close to 4.6 million (Central Statistics Office, 2011). According to Table 1 below, only around 740, 000 of the current population in Ireland have

completed a third level degree or higher. That would equate to roughly one sixth of the population. Based on this figure, the likelihood is that many of the current or future third level students in Ireland Higher Education are likely to be first generation students.

Table 3

Persons, Males and Females Aged 15 Years and Over Classified by Highest Level of Education Completed, 2011.

		Males	Females	Persons
Total aged 15 years and over		1,771,510	1,837,152	3,608,662
Total whose full-time education has ceased		1,473,483	1,530,007	3,003,490
Highest level of education completed	Primary (incl. No formal education)	239,616	217,280	456,896
	Lower Secondary	268,192	231,297	499,489
	Upper Secondary	512,108	520,012	1,032,120
	Third Level (Non-degree)	59,359	75,763	135,122
	Third Level (Degree or higher)	326,735	412,357	739,992
Total whose full time education not ceased		298,087	307,145	605,172

Note, Adapted from *Central Statistics Office, Cork, Ireland. Persons, Males and Females Aged 15 Years and Over Classified by Highest Level of Education Completed, (2011)*. Retrieved June 4, 2014.

Ireland's increase in first generation students is also partly due to the larger numbers of mature students taking certificate and degree programmes at Ireland's Higher Education (HE)

institutions. However, the number of mature students in Higher Education in Ireland is still quite low compared to the US or the UK. Inglis, Murphy, (1999) reported that mature students account for only 5 per cent of full-time students in higher education. The major problem with access for mature students in Ireland is the allotment of spaces in academic programmes.

Inglis & Murphy, (1999) reported that:

Rejections for most people, came through the post from the Central Applications Office in Galway. The majority (84%) of our respondents received no letter or telephone call explaining to them why they had not been admitted to University College Dublin (UCD). When they inquired, ten respondents were simply told that there were a limited number of spots. (p. 23)

Mature students compete for openings with traditional aged students. Many are not accepted. There is a bottleneck in access for mature students. The above study was completed fifteen years ago; however time has not changed this fundamentally. Mature students still compete for a limited number of openings with traditional aged students.

In the US, the situation for mature students is very different. Community colleges, state universities, private universities, and for-profit universities compete to attract mature students. Many higher education institutions offer adult degree programs in online, evening, and weekend models to appeal to students who have other commitments and responsibilities. There is not a limit to the amount of places available for mature students as is the case in Ireland.

During the last two decades universities in the United Kingdom have become far more accessible to students from working class backgrounds. However the problem of class in the university is still an issue. To meet the need of this diverse student body, a profusion of further education colleges and new universities were opened primarily in urban areas close to where the students live. The further education colleges are different to the new universities in that they provide basic skills training and vocational education, and “further education has a higher proportion of their students from lower socio-economic groups (34%) compared to 25% in sixth form colleges and 8% in private schools” (King, Widdowson, & Brown, 2008, p. 17). Some further education colleges are also referred to as community colleges. Further education colleges and community colleges have similar missions.

Jephcote, & Raby (2012), explain that:

Each college maintains a multi-purpose curriculum, providing both a general or so-called academic curriculum and a vocational curriculum related to occupational and technical fields. Students can receive a single-focus certificate in academic, vocational, occupational or technical fields, as well as a Diploma or an Associate/Foundation Degree that includes a range of subjects. In addition, both systems provide pathways in which students can transfer their studies to complete a degree at other institutions. (p. 4)

Community colleges are funded based around student access, transition points, and completion. Further education colleges do not offer the first two years of a BA Degree.

According to a report from the Irish Department of Education (2013):

Further education covers education and training which occurs after second level schooling but is not a part of the third level system. There are number of providers of

further and adult education and training and a wide variety of schools that are involved in the delivery of continuing education and training for young school leavers and adults.

(p. 1)

While the further education colleges and new universities may have been realized as a means to educate the working class, and lower middle class, in order to develop a competitive workforce, the middle class and upper class continue to attend elite universities and then move on to the more lucrative positions in society. Access to higher education has become a reality in the UK, but the rules of the game changed. Universities were traditionally the realm of the middle and upper classes. That changed with the introduction of further education colleges and new universities, but the middle and upper classes continued to attend the prestigious institutions, in effect keeping the class balance intact. Reay et al., (2001) address this in their description of how habitus can be applied to describe this class realignment. Reay refers to habitus as “reproduction of the occupationally based class structure” (Reay, et al., 2001, p. 856). Reay was describing the system of universities in England, and how the older universities still cater to the elite, while the newer universities cater to the lower-middle and working classes. The academic programs in the newer universities set up graduates for occupations that are usually better than their parents, but they do not have the social capital that students at the elite universities do. This limits the chance of their moving up to the next level of class and they are unlikely to compete for occupational positions with their elite counterparts. While these students may be advancing their education to places their parents never did, the system is set up to assure that they are excluded from making major inroads into class mobility.

The United States and Class

In the US, class seems to be far less tangible. Most people would not claim to be 'working class' as the connotations that go with the term are perhaps not looked upon positively. The days of the powerful trade unions are now part of secondary school history books. The strong working class culture that existed in America since the industrial revolution does not seem to be visible in the same way anymore. The world has changed and so has stable employment for the working class. With manufacturing jobs being shipped overseas, the opportunities for a long-term labouring job seem to be a thing of the past. The US lost 6.1 million manufacturing jobs between March 1998 and Jan. 2010, the lowest point for manufacturing employment in the Great Recession (Scott, 2012). The majority of people in America claim to be middle-class, however this is such a vague definition that it needs to be broken down. The middle class by one definition consists of an upper middle class, made up of professionals distinguished by exceptionally high educational attainment, as well as high economic security; and a lower middle class, consisting of semi-professionals who are college educated with higher than average incomes (see Table 2-Academic Class Models in the United States). While the groups overlap, differences between those at the centre of both groups are considerable. The lower middle class has lower educational attainment, considerably less workplace autonomy, and lower incomes than the upper middle class. With the emergence of a two-tier labour market, the economic benefits and life chances of upper middle class professionals have grown considerably compared to those of the lower middle class (Thompson, Hickey, 2005). Lower middle class households need two income earners in order to sustain a comfortable standard of living, while many upper middle class households can

maintain a similar standard of living with just one income earner (Portier, 2003). The table below gives a very real snapshot about the percentages of people in specific classes in the US.

Table 4

Academic Class Models in the United States.

Dennis Gilbert, 2008		Thompson, Hickey, 2005		Leonard Beeghley, 2004	
Class	Typical Characteristics	Class	Typical Characteristics	Class	Typical Characteristics
Capitalist Class (1%)	Top-level executives, high-rung politicians, heirs. Ivy League education common.	Upper Class (1%)	Top-level executives, celebrities, heirs; income of \$500,000+ common. Ivy league education common.	The Super Rich (0.9%)	Multi-millionaires whose incomes commonly exceed \$350,000; includes celebrities and powerful executives/politicians. Ivy League education common.
The Upper Middle Class (15%)	Highly-educated (often with graduate degrees), most salaried, professionals and middle management with work autonomy.	The Upper Middle Class (15%)	Highly-educated professionals & managers with household incomes commonly above \$100,000.	The Rich (5%)	Households with net worth of \$1 million or more; largely in the form of home equity. Generally have college degrees.
Lower Middle Class (30%)	Semi-professionals, white collar, and craftsmen with a roughly average standard of living. Most have some college education.	Lower Middle Class (32%)	Semi-professionals and craftsmen with some work autonomy. Typically, some college education.	Middle Class (46%)	College-educated workers with considerably higher-than-average incomes and compensation; a man making \$57,000 and a woman making \$40,000 may be typical.
Working Class (30%)	Clerical and most blue-collar workers whose work is highly routinized. High school education.	Working Class (32%)	Clerical, pink- and blue-collar workers with often low job security. High school education.	Working Class 40-45%	Blue-collar workers and those whose jobs are highly routinized with low economic security. High school education.
Working Poor (13%)	Service, clerical and some blue-collar workers. Some high school education.				
Underclass (12%)	Those with limited or no participation in the labour force. Reliant on government transfers. Some HS education.	Lower Class (14-20%)	Those who occupy poorly-paid positions or rely on government transfers. Some HS education.	The Poor (12%)	Those living below the poverty line with limited to no participation in the labour force. Some HS education.

Note. Adapted from *The American Class Structure: In an Age of Growing Inequality*, by Gilbert, D. (2008), Belmont, CA: *Society in Focus*, by Wadsworth; Thompson, W., Hickey, J. (2005), Boston, MA: *The Structure of Social Stratification in the United States*, by Pearson, Allyn, Bacon; Beeghley, L. (2004), Boston, MA: Pearson, Allyn, Bacon.

According to Gilbert's (2008) American Class Models (above), 55% of the American population is at working class or below. This is contradictory to how people in America view themselves. Within the educational system in the US, affluent students do not attend community college or four year state universities. They do not pick majors such as nursing, or teaching. Affluent students major in the critical thinking liberal arts and are often immediately employed through a network of contacts gained through class reproduction.

Churchill (2011) argues that:

The best undergraduate programs in America are known worldwide for their focus on a strong liberal-arts foundation. If we know that this is the best type of education our country can offer, why aren't we advocating for this type of education for all of our college students? (p. 2)

Churchill has a good point. There are differing standards for the differing classes. At the community college and many state schools the goal is to align your academic major with a profession. Many of the staff and faculty also buy in to this, and at the end of the day it may get students from the lower classes into the middle class, but the reality is they will not make it further than that. The education they receive is limited.

The Last Great Shake-up of the American Class System

During the years following WWII the returning troops demanded access to higher education. The GI Bill allowed millions of former military member's access to the nation's colleges and universities. The GI Bill helped students who would never have been afforded the opportunity the chance to attend college and receive tuition free. In the peak year of 1947, veterans accounted for 49 percent of college admissions. By the time the original GI Bill ended on July 25, 1956, 7.8 million of 16 million World War II veterans had participated in an education or training program (Cohen, & Brawer, 2003).

This period also coincided with the rise of the community college. According to Cohen and Brawer (2003), there are several reasons for the rise of the community colleges. The idea that rapid growth in the high school population in the early years of the 20th century led to student demand for additional years of schooling could be rationalized, but so could many others. The claim that businesspeople supported the institutions so that they would have a ready supply of workers trained at public expense also has some adherents. And the literature certainly supports the idea that community leaders saw the formation of colleges as an avenue to community prestige. Even the notion of a grand scheme to keep poor people in their place by diverting them to programs leading to low-pay occupational positions has found some acceptance.

The Ivy League Universities were slow to accept the new diverse face of the student population and maintained their elite status, while those from the rising middle class attended community colleges and four-year colleges or universities close to home.

Whatever the reasons for the rise of the community college, there is no similar type of higher education institution that allows people from any walk of life a comparable amount of access to higher education and the opportunity to bridge social class. Through education, first generation students may improve their social situation, however they, will continue to be excluded from the upper classes due to habitus, social and cultural capital. They do not have the network, family and connections to truly level the playing field.

In a recent survey by Zagrebina (2013), first generation respondents were asked: What they felt their chances were of achieving a higher level of well-being than their parents had. Half the respondents rated their chances of achieving intergenerational mobility as high or very high, while half rate their chances as medium, but hardly anyone rated them as low. (P. 33)

These survey results indicate that people still believe in their ability to succeed and be upwardly mobile in spite of their habitus, social, and cultural capital.

Class and Diversity in the US, Ireland and the UK

In the UK and Ireland, the discourse has traditionally focused on class differences, while in the US, diversity has become an area that has been addressed in education. Class does not receive attention in the same way as diversity. A poor white, black, or Hispanic person will not receive scholarships or admissions preference based on socioeconomic status, but they may if they are from an ethnic group that has little representation in universities. Oregon Health and Science University is an example of this. I worked as a university admissions representative there for five years. During that time the Federal Government passed a ruling where all higher

education institutions were required to catch detailed ethnicity information. This information has also proved useful for universities to better serve their diverse populations. This is not an argument against the needs of diverse students, but an argument that socioeconomic status needs to be included in the conversation. One of the major reasons I chose to focus on first generation students in the US was really to bring the social class and socioeconomic differences to light. However, as I conducted the research on first generation students through the lens of class, I found that they were reluctant to converse with me on this subject matter. They believed themselves to be a part of the middle class and actively avoided conversation about class identity.

With that in mind it is also important to note that social class is only one facet of the lives of first generation students. There are more interconnected pieces to the lives of first generation students than class alone.

Purpose, Focus, and Research Question

The purpose of this research thesis is to find out more about the lives of first generation community college students so that they can be better understood and served at community colleges in the US. This research thesis aims to explore the in-college and external experiences of first generation community college students as they attempt to succeed academically, while maintaining their personal commitments and responsibilities. This research study will shed light on those academic experiences and external commitments and responsibilities in a way that has not been explored deeply in the current literature.

My Intellectual and Practical Goals

My intellectual goals are based on my experiences as a first generation student. My personal journey showed me that colleges were not really interested in the first generation student experience outside of school, or the repercussions that attending college might have on their family, community, and the identity of the individual. Many university and college faculty and staff have a strong belief in the rightness of the curriculum and its goals, while not questioning the class-based nature and belief system that is inherent in the system of higher education. The system was developed by white males from the middle and upper classes. To a great extent, the research done on working class or first generation students attending college focuses on how to better help them adapt to be successful in college. The university/college systems do not try to help students navigate their way around dealing with the issues that face the students caught between two worlds. A large amount of the literature also focuses on the success or failure of these students at college, by looking at factors like academic preparation, working while attending college, and funding.

The practical goals of my study are to educate higher education professionals on some of the blind spots that they have in their perceptions of these students and their backgrounds. I intend on presenting to the administrators/faculty at Central Oregon Community College and the other community colleges where I held focus groups, along with international conference presentations in order to disseminate the findings of this study. By infusing my own experiences with my practical goals I aim to uncover as much as possible the lived reality of first

generation students in the community college setting. This will lead to a greater understanding of the distinct differences and needs of this college population.

Significance of the study

One of the reasons the study is significant is because it captures the lived experiences of first generation students in their context. The focus is on recorded stories of lived experiences rather than reliance on quantitative surveys. This is not to argue against the use of quantitative methods, but to add qualitative research to the conversation. The experiences of students can add skin to the bones to the body of the current literature, and help build a better holistic view of the lives of these students, and the human aspect that is not captured in raw data.

Initially I hoped to capture the experiences of the students as they struggled to fit into the middle class world of the American College. Instead, the community college seemed a comfortable environment for them, a bridge between their working class world and the world of the middle class or the four year university. This may also have to do with the fact that the community college is geographically close to home, so these students have not had to leave their families or relocate to another area. For those that decide to move away and transfer to a four-year university, they will likely encounter an unfamiliar world, “The resulting disjuncture’s can generate not only change and transformation, but also disquiet, ambivalence, insecurity and uncertainty” (Stitch, 2005, p. 105). Their habitus or social view of norms, culture, and their world will be put under strain as these students attempt to not only succeed academically, but also face the challenge of adapting to new norms and an alternate habitus to their own. Habitus can be described as the acquired values, lifestyles, and norms of a group of people. A

recent study on the social mobility costs of attending university found working-class students at elite universities faced a number of dilemmas that their middle-class counterparts at elite universities did not have to confront (Jetten et al., 2008). Financially, these students often struggle to support themselves while in school. In order to eat and have a social life, they take on part-time work. This can conflict with studies and set them aside from many of the other students. This is not the only dilemma that working class students face. “Such dilemmas include the ability to maintain connections to one’s social background, including family, friends, and the wider community” (Reay et al., 2009, p. 3). While the students in this study may not be going to elite universities, they will be leaving a small community college in their geographic location and transferring to what is most likely a large state university or private college with very different norms from what they are familiar. For adult students in small towns this may include relocating their families, and lead to other issues such as school placement for children, spouse employment, renting or buying homes, and other considerations that traditional middle-class students do not have to face.

Personal Inspiration for the Study

During my time working at several universities over the last 14 years, I became aware that the experiences I underwent while attending college were not unique to me. It became clear to me that there were many of us; first generation students. We are from every ethnic group, and age group. First generation students are not always easy to identify. Many of us hide the fact that we came from humble beginnings, others flaunt their hard knock backgrounds, but we all have commonalities, such as working while attending college, financial

hardship, a fear of been found out as not worthy to attend college, or attending college to provide for others. We are for the most part trying to improve on our past, to be successful or at least be perceived as being successful. We see college success as a means to break out of an inter-generational cycle of economic stagnation or a way to provide access to a better job or even a career that would be unattainable without college credentials. We see college attendance as a way to inspire our children. If a child is sitting at the dinner table doing homework next to a parent that is also completing college homework, the message is clear to the child that education does not end with compulsory education. First generation students are trail-blazers in their families and will end up modelling behaviour for the next generation, yet they themselves are probably not exposed to a pro-education environment in their own youth. First generation students, through the tool of education, break out of the working class into the middle class. This lays a foundation and breaks the class barriers for siblings, cousins, and even their own children. The importance of access and retention for first generation students has effects that impact subsequent generations.

Participants and setting for the study

The primary study takes place at Central Oregon Community College (COCC). Along with the focus groups and interviews at COCC, the study also includes focus group data from Mount Hood Community College, Chemeketa Community College, and Tillamook Bay Community College.

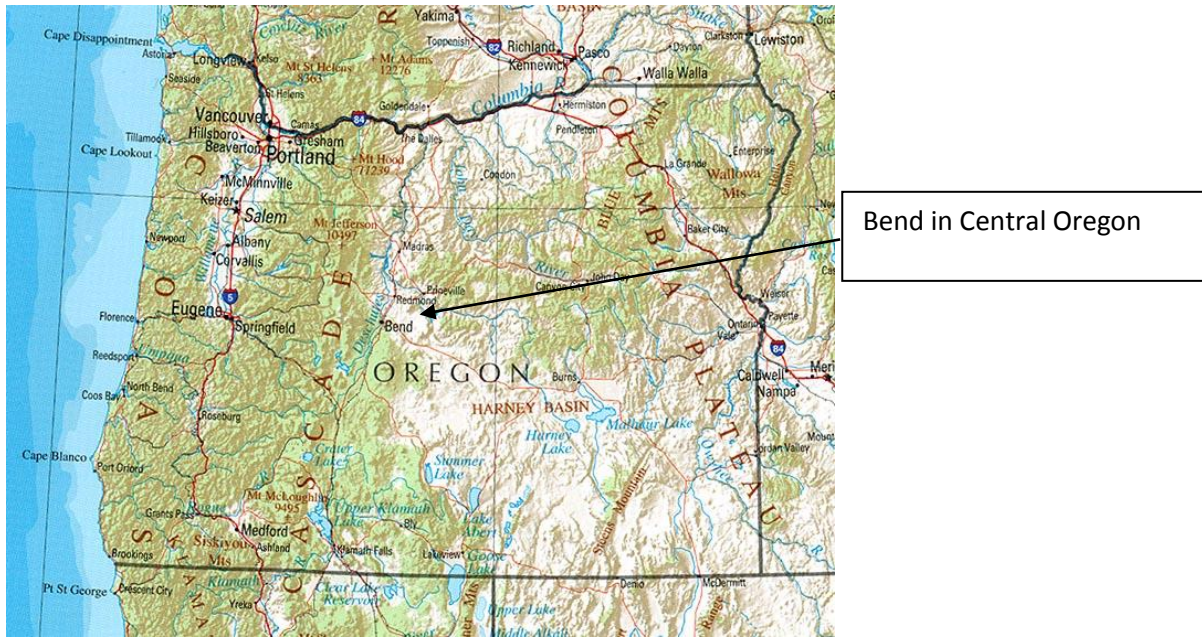


Figure 5: Map of Oregon

Geographically the Bend/Redmond area is isolated by the Cascade Mountains which run from north to south through the entire state of Oregon.

Central Oregon Community College is a two-year community college with a population of students who are working on Associate Degrees, vocational certificates, and non-credit community education classes. Central Oregon Community College serves Deschutes, Jefferson, and Crook Counties along with areas in Wasco and Klamath Counties. The area is primarily rural, with small and mid-sized town’s spaced at large distances apart. Bend and Redmond are the largest towns in the region, which is part of the high desert plateau, and the nearest large city is Portland, Oregon, on the other side of the Cascade Mountains at a distance of 160 miles.

Bend did not escape the global recession. In fact, Bend has fared worse than many towns and cities in the region.

Berkes (2009) reports that:

In just 30 months, starting in 2007 the unemployment rate went from a record low 4.3% to a record high 12.6%, showing how quickly a boom can go bust. People moved there in droves, attracted by beautiful snow-capped mountains, a sunny high-desert climate with sparse rainfall, skiing, fly fishing, rock and mountain climbing, backpacking, white water rafting, and other outdoor activities. (p. 17)

On the back of this population explosion, Bend went through a huge spurt of growth in the housing industry which fuelled the local economy. When the bottom dropped out of the national real estate market, the economy of Bend stagnated. There is little diversification in Bend and Redmond's local industries where tourism, skiing, hiking, and other outdoor activities draw visitors, but it is not enough to provide employment for the current population.

The Central Oregon described in this study is the place where the participants live, work (or not), raise families, and lead their day-to-day lives. Many of them have never lived anywhere else, and have only visited regional neighbouring states and cities. The economy and outside forces have a direct impact on the lives of these people that might be more severe than for people from similar backgrounds living in the city. Cities tend to have more opportunities, so if a person loses a job with one employer, they will probably find another in time. In small towns, there are only a limited number of employers, and an infrastructure small enough that job and promotion possibilities are extremely limited.

Lareau (2003) describes the experience of people in this type of community well:

Their lives are within a specific social context. They did not determine the availability of high paying jobs in their area, set the education and skills required to fill those jobs, pace the growth of the national economy, or guide the position of the United States in the world economy. Yet these elements impinged on the lives of these families, albeit on some more directly than on others. One way to conceive of this context is to say that individuals carry out their lives within a social structure. (p. 15)

The participants in the study were far more intertwined with outside economic forces than I had expected when starting the research. I understood that the economy would be limiting to the participants, but had no idea of the true impact on their lives and the choices they would be required to make to keep up with the global changes affecting their part of the world.

Berkes (2009), reporting on a live broadcast on National Public Radio (America's equivalent to RTE), aired this interview with a Bend resident who was experiencing the effects of global changes personally:

The Bend bust transformed 56-year-old Jay Swanzy from working man to unemployment statistic. Wood products had once been the mainstay in the Bend economy. When Jay Swanzy was a kid, sons followed their fathers and grandfathers into the mills. But the industry has been declining for decades. The sealed letter Swanzy brought home from work had been expected, but it was still unsettling news, as Frankie Swanzy recalls. 'It was like your chest does fall to your stomach when you see that you're no longer employed.' It's especially stressful for someone his age. At 56, Swanzy is too young to retire. And he wonders whether he can compete, 'especially with so

many things getting computerized. I didn't grow up with a computer like these kids did,' he says. 'I've got nieces and nephews and great-nieces and nephews that know more about a computer than I do. So there's no way I can go out in the market and compete with them.

But Swanzy is not surrendering to unemployment. He goes into the Oregon Work Force Centre in Bend, where he practices his fledgling computer skills and meets with employment counsellor Bobbie Faust. She lists the traits that make him a good prospect. 'He has a good work history. He has definable skills. He also has excellent references about his communication, his quality,' Faust explains. 'If there were manufacturing jobs open, he'd be there.' That's a big "if" in Bend right now, and Faust acknowledges the harsh reality. 'This is a very, very tough job market. There are very, very few jobs advertised. It's going to be a difficult challenge for him.

After an assessment of skills and experience, Faust steers Swanzy to computer-aided design training at the local community college. Stimulus package funds and federal retraining programs will help with tuition, books and unemployment payments. So Swanzy is planning to take the computer-aided design classes and apply for federal assistance. 'It sounds promising in the long run,' he says. 'I know it's going to be a rough go for a while. I've got to look long road, not immediately, to get something going. So it sounded good. (p. 17)

Swanzy's experience is typical of many students currently attending Central Oregon Community College. Outside forces have forced many people to focus on developing a larger array of skills or attempting to complete academic degrees with the intent of riding out the

recession and re-entering the workforce with a better chance of gaining long-term steady employment with the hope that the increased skills and degrees they have earned might in turn improve their earning potential.

Central Oregon Community College saw a significant increase in enrolments during the worst years of the recession in 2008-10. According to the COCC Annual Enrolment Report 2009-10, there was an increase of 40% for full-time credit seeking students and an increase of 7.1% of part-time credit seeking students (COCC, 2010, p. 1). In the 2012-13 Annual Enrolment Report the data shows that the number of full-time credit seeking students has gone down 4.8% and the part-time credit-seeking population also decreased 2.1% during the same period (COCC, 2013, p. 2). From this data it can be reasonably safe to deduce that the drastic increase in full-time credit seeking students was due to the lack of employment opportunities in the region, and the belief among these students that additional education will increase their chances of succeeding.

According to the Central Oregon Community College website (2008):

Preliminary reports from community colleges show a trend of increased enrolment during economic downturns. Community colleges see increased demand for their workforce-training programs from people who have been laid off or need additional skills. As the economy picks up the numbers of students decrease as they enter the labour market. (p. 3)

As of 2013 the student body of Central Oregon Community College is 53% female and 47% male. The average age of COCC students is 30 years old. The student body is primarily

Caucasian at 80%, with other ethnic groups represented included Hispanic, Native American, Asian/Pacific Islander, and African American/Black (COCC, 2013, p. 2).

In the 2009-2013 COCC Graduate Survey, 72.6% of students attended COCC because it was close to home. Many first generation students attend college or university within commuting distance, and with COCC's rural setting there are few other choices for students to take coursework other than online options. The majority of students at COCC are aiming to complete an Associate Degree (64%). A further 19.7% are taking courses necessary to transfer to a four-year college or university (COCC, 2013, p. 2). In 2008-09, approximately 65.7 percent of certificate/degree seeking students received financial aid (depending on their enrolment status) via Federal Financial Aid or scholarships (COCC, 2014, p. 1). This snapshot of demographics at Central Oregon Community College shows that its population is not untypical for a community college population. The diversity rate, age, gender, financial aid awarding and reasons for attending are similar to other community colleges in the region.

Summarizing this chapter, quantitative data has informed colleges and universities about the difficulty first generation students have in adapting and persisting in the college environment. Qualitative research could enhance the pre-existing data by sharing different perspectives and thus create a better understanding of this group of students. This chapter also included an introduction to Central Oregon, and the context in which the study takes place.

Chapter 2: Background and the Journey to Becoming a Researcher

In Chapter one the focus was on how class is defined and perceived in the US, Ireland, and the UK. Chapter one also described the reasons for this study, the development of the research question and summarised the entire thesis. This chapter focuses on why this research came to be, the context for the study, and how my own personal journey influenced my desire to research first generation college students. This section also ties in my own Autoethnographic self-reflection to the study.

My personal Journey

As a first generation student who was from another country, I found college difficult to navigate in my first term. The language, norms, and customs all seemed alien to me, and I struggled to adapt to the college environment. I spoke with other students, and we shared similar experiences in feeling like fish out of water. Some of us persisted through the first term, while others just did not show up in class one day, or the next. They stopped out of college for reasons of which I was unaware. Other students seemed comfortable in the college classroom and knew how to get the resources and help they needed. They seemed entitled and were primarily focused on getting good grades.

The initial culture shock had a profound effect on me. I retreated into a shell during that first time, and found it difficult to focus on my classes when I did not know if my veterans funding would arrive in time to cover my tuition. I did not know if I belonged in college and felt like I would likely fail in my classes. I questioned the choices that had taken me to college,

while at the same time I knew I did not wish to wait tables or work in a fish factory like I had done to get by in my younger years. I did see that there were other people like me, and we were silent for the most part. We would ask each other questions about faculty, how hard classes were, about homework assignments, about financial issues, and about family.

After many years of education, I eventually became a college administrator with first-hand experience interacting with first generation students, and came to realize that their voices were still silent in a different way. They were absent from the current literature on first generation students. The stories and experiences of first generation students deserve to be heard, and that is why I chose to use Narrative Inquiry, and Phenomenology as research methodologies to expose these voices to the higher education community. This is also why I feel my own story needs to be shared through Autoethnography, as a way of understanding how I came to this place as a researcher and doctoral student.

“College isn’t for the likes of you. Someone like you should join the armed forces or go on a youth training scheme.” These were the exact words expressed by my secondary school Career Counsellor during our one and only meeting prior to my completion of secondary school. I still recall sitting in that office, head down, thinking that everything I had done at school had come to nothing. I really had tried hard. It did not matter. My CSE exam results were all fairly good with the exception of mathematics. Nobody in my Anglo-Irish family had ever been to college, and so it had never been something that was talked about in our home. I am sure I did not look like college material. My uniform was well worn; my hair out of fashion and my accent was a blend of working class Northern England with a bit of Irish thrown in. I did not know how

to ask questions about careers. Who had a career? We never used that word in our house, a career was for other people, a good and steady job was our dream. Maybe that was why the Career Counsellor suggested what she did. My own lack of self-worth probably shone through in that advising appointment. Perhaps I put myself in 'my place'. Nevertheless, those words have haunted me for close to 30 years.

The Career Counsellor herself was part of the system. When she looked at me she saw somebody that experience had told her should be put on a certain path. University was for the brightest, the students with respectable backgrounds, and those that scored well in school exams. Technical college was an option for those who were blue collar, but smart enough in mathematics, technical drawing, and science to succeed in a tradesmen's career. The rest of us were funnelled into youth training schemes, a program set up by the Thatcher government to put people to work with pay barely above the amount one would receive on the dole. The Youth Training Scheme jobs lasted six months, and the idea was that the employer would spot those with talent and a strong work ethic and hire them full time. The reality was at the end of six months, no matter how hard you worked or how much talent you displayed, you were most likely let go. Most employers were satisfied with paying minimum wage to temporary workers, rather than paying more to a full-time long term worker.

The Career Counsellor would meet with students for a maximum of 30 minutes and map out your future into one of four directions: university, technical college, a youth training scheme or the armed forces. In 30 minutes, my fate was decided for me: a youth training scheme or the armed forces.

This also happened in the years before the Celtic Tiger, where Irish pubs popped up all over England, movies like *The Commitments* and *The Matchmaker* made it cool to be Irish in England. This was before Riverdance and Frank McCourt's *Angela's Ashes* brought about a resurgence in the Irish arts and culture scene. I finished secondary school years before there was peace in Northern Ireland, and the English thought it was trendy to be Irish or Celtic. This was also before Tony Blair and the new universities and further education colleges became an option for secondary school graduates from the working class. Sadly enough, the Career Counsellor was probably giving the best advice she knew how to give in that particular time and place.

I recall having some small hope that she would tell me I could go onto great things (since I did have good grades), and I then remember the effect her words had on me, and the sadness and realization that I might have to go out and get a mindless job and live the same life as my parents. Not that I looked down on my parents. My mother in particular had worked hard all her life to pay the rent and make sure we were fed and clothed. I just did not want to face the same hard existence if I could help it. I recall spending a lot of time thinking about jobs that might withstand recession. I left school and took jobs in pubs because I knew from experience that even in recession people would want to drink.

It was as much as my mother could do to pay the rent on the council house, keep the electricity and gas bills paid, and get us to school in a series of cars that were long past their due date. My father did not participate in the weekly struggle to survive. We nicknamed him "The Lodger" due to his estrangement from the family while continuing to live in the family

home. He lived like a single man, going to the pub on the way home from work, gambling, and keeping his own hours. I felt bitter after leaving school and travelled Ireland and England seeking seasonal work and adventure. After stints in fish factories, hotels, pubs, and time at a potato farm and pig farm, I started looking further afield for opportunities to break the cycle.

In 1992, I applied for and received a Morrison Visa (Green Card) that allowed me to travel to America and earn a living. The opportunity seemed like a gift from the Gods at a time when Ireland had not shrugged off its seemingly eternal recession. My working experiences in England had left me with the feeling that the class system was still alive and strong and that I would always be working class in that environment. This was my opportunity to escape from the identity that the world I lived in had imposed on me. I knew it would be difficult to move to a new country with hardly any contacts, but I also knew that things would be different from what I had known before.

Upon arrival in Boston I worked in an Irish pub in located in the financial district. It was a good introduction to Irish-American culture, although I found after a year that I did not know anybody that was not Irish! An older bartender and mentor of sorts suggested to me that I should "Check out Bunker Hill Community College if you don't want to become a career bartender." I went to the community college the next day and felt very intimidated by all the confident people walking around campus. I stood and stared at the information booth located near the admissions and financial aid offices. My courage deserted me and I fled the college, telling myself that I could not afford it and that my Career Counsellor was right. Shortly after that I decided to join the US Coastguard so that I could get out of Boston and separate myself

from the Irish Community. My reasons for this were that I was working at a pub, visiting bartenders and waiters at other pubs and was caught up with the drinking culture. From my upbringing I knew how hard it could be to break that cycle if it went on for too long.

At the time, I also dreamed of seeing the wilderness of Alaska and the Pacific Northwest. After boot camp, I was sent to Seattle and attached to a ship which allowed me the break from a series of mediocre jobs. I was finally in a job that allowed me the opportunity to make a difference. On a daily basis I was involved in search and rescue, fishery patrols, and other missions. I was able to travel to Alaska, California, Oregon, Mexico, Hawaii, Australia, New Zealand, Antarctica, and numerous other places. At the same time I earned the GI Bill, an educational allowance that allows servicemen and women to attend college and pay for tuition, so that when I left the service I was able to fund my education.

My first introduction to Higher Education was in 1998. I had spent the previous four years in the US Coast Guard and had left my ship in the Arctic Ocean, and flown via helicopter to Barrow Alaska, where I caught a passenger jet to Anchorage and finally to Bellingham, Washington where I spent my last few weeks being processed to end my enlistment in the Coast Guard. The US Coastguard is a branch of the US Military and the process for separating from Active Duty can be cumbersome and time consuming. I had recently met my wife, and we had decided to relocate to Portland, Oregon 260 miles south of Bellingham. It was the end of September, and I drove down to Portland where I enrolled at Portland Community College (PCC). My reasons for enrolling at the community college quite simply were the low cost of tuition compared to four-year universities, a lack of confidence in my own abilities to succeed in

the university setting, and my wife's parents suggested community college as a good way to start. With regards to access, it also seemed like the easiest way to attend college - I did not have to supply recommendation letters, fill out lengthy applications, interview, etc. One of the other benefits is that one can enter a community college in autumn, winter, spring or summer. I had done little research myself on college opportunities, and so found myself sitting in a Portland Community College classroom taking an assessment test to determine my levels of English writing, and reading comprehension, and of course my old nemesis, mathematics.

I took the test seriously and had even tried to brush up on my long-dormant maths skills. Even with the study preparation, I did not do well, and tested into pre-college maths which required me to take four remedial classes in mathematics before I could even take a college level maths class. I succeeded admirably in English and was able to start at college level immediately.

My first two weeks of attending PCC required me to drive 260 miles, 3 days a week. I took evening classes, so that I was able to get off work and drive to Portland, then drive back to my US Coast Guard ship in Bellingham, Washington State, immediately after class was completed. I would arrive back at the base at about midnight and would head straight to my rack on board ship for a few hours' sleep.

In that first term I really had no idea how college worked. I knew that I needed to attend classes, and figured out the times and locations of the classrooms easily enough. However I was very uncomfortable on campus. I did not see an academic advisor, counsellor, look into scholarships, or ask any questions of the staff. I had a genuine fear that college staff

might pull up my record and tell me that I had been admitted by accident, and I would find myself being escorted off campus. The one office I did go to was the Veterans Centre. They made me feel welcome and helped me set up college tuition funding through the GI Bill. Other than that I tried to stay under the radar, attending classes, eating at the cafeteria, but not availing myself of any of the college resources. When I looked around I saw many centres and offices were available to help students. These included the Multicultural Centre, Tutoring Lab, Student Government, and Career Services. I did not feel that I belonged with any of those groups. At first glance people treated me like I belonged there, my difference was not visible. I was not a student of colour, was not gay, and was not a student with a disability. Mine was a problem that was invisible on campus. I did not feel entitled to be at college and that was a constant until academic success in the classroom built my self-confidence. For the first time in my life I felt a sense of validation. I found that I was good at this and had proven the naysayers wrong.

After a year and a half at community college I transferred to a Marylhurst, a private Catholic University and learned much about critical thinking. My confidence had improved so much that I decided to apply for work at the university at which I was enrolled. Eventually I became employed at Marylhurst University. I had found a home and the elusive career that I had been searching for. I was no longer just in a job, but was working at a real bona fide university! I had also simultaneously transitioned into the realm of the middle class. At least externally that is how it would seem, yet inside I would continue to be constantly at odds with my new existence and my old working class roots. I was not earning middle-class wages, but I was living and working in that environment. My time in college had caused me to question my

religious beliefs, my attitudes to class, diversity, and my overall identity. I could not be sure of anything anymore, and I missed that self-assured way of looking at the world. Education had replaced it with a critical thinking intellect.

During my time in college I learned to self-advise, and create my own degree plans. I made a number of mistakes on the journey that I probably would not have made were I more knowledgeable about college/university life. For instance, I received advice from another first generation student that the best way to take classes was to always register for one more class than you wanted. During the first week of term I would figure out the workload, teacher compatibility, and other factors before deciding to drop one of the classes. I did this term after term and ended up with a bunch of 'W's' (withdraws) on my transcript due to dropping the classes later in the term. While this strategy worked in the short term, it left me with a transcript that may have hurt my chances were I to apply to law school or medical school or another competitive graduate degree.

Immediately after finishing my BA Degree with honours, I applied and was accepted into a Master's of Science in Education at Portland State University. The focus of the degree was in Postsecondary, Adult and Continuing Education. My experiences as a student and budding higher educational professional had made me realize that I wanted to invest myself in furthering my education in college administration and the theories of adult education. The degree consumed me, and I learned far more about the issues facing underserved populations and the need for higher education to recognise and serve this diverse group of students. I worked at several institutions of higher learning while I continued my academic journey. Now I

have returned to the community college setting at Clark College in Vancouver, Washington where I oversee Admissions, Registration, Recruitment and Testing. I am able to make a difference in the lives of many students.

After completing my Masters, I took a three year hiatus and focused on my career in Admissions, Enrolment, and Academic Marketing. While it was certainly enjoyable to take a little time off from studying, I found myself anxious to take the final step and applying for a terminal PhD degree in Education. I looked at Portland State University and many other options in the US, but felt something was missing. During my time at Portland State, I had learned a little about first generation students. One evening the discussion in the classroom turned from diversity in the classroom to first generation students. To be truthful this was the first time I heard the term described, and it had a profound impact on me. For the first time, I read articles that described the experiences of people like me. I decided that this was the direction that I wished to continue researching in my Ph.D. I had found much research done on areas such as ethnic and cultural diversity in the US but apart from the few articles I had read in my Master's program I felt there was little representation for social class in American higher education literature.

I started to look further afield, and recalled growing up in Ireland and England, and how class was discussed more openly. I conducted some initial research and found that far more research had been done on the topic of social class in education in Ireland, the UK, and mainland Europe. This piqued my interest and led me to think about applying to University in Ireland or the UK. I researched numerous programs and found that the Department of Adult

and Community Education at National University of Ireland Maynooth was a perfect fit for my area of interest. The faculty and researchers at Maynooth University had a wealth of research experience and were published in many areas that dealt with mature students and first generation students.

For me, there was a feeling of coming full-circle. I had been told by my Career Counsellor in the North of England that “College isn’t for the likes of you...” and here I was with a chance to prove to myself that college was for the likes of me, and to prove to the system that generalizations should be avoided. Working class does not equate to being incapable of academic success. I feel that in some way I have proved that. I was brought up without any encouragement to continue in higher education. I was actively discouraged from pursuing higher education by the Career Counsellor in my secondary school. During that time and place many others like me were not given the opportunities and were not encouraged to pursue education as a means of advancement to the middle-class. The American system of education helped me to make that transition and the opportunities I had here were not to be found as easily in England or Ireland at the time. I was able to gain access to higher education and succeed in ways that I do not feel I could have if I had never left Ireland or England.

In summary, this study is important to me for a number of reasons, but primarily it is because I was excluded from the opportunity to attend university or college because I was both working class and Irish. Opportunities that were available to others were denied to me. That experience shaped my life direction. I also knew my place during that point of my life. I was a product of the class system I was brought up in. While I strained against the boundaries

enforced on me, I also accepted them. I did not question the Career Counsellor. Instead, I did what I was told. Bourdieu (1984) writes of how objective limits become transformed into a practical anticipation of objective limits; a sense of one's place which leads one to exclude oneself from places from which one is excluded. For me, questioning of my own self exclusion would come later. What Bourdieu did not understand is that when one is excluded from a group it can lead to a re-forming of the person's identity. I had looked to turn away from my background, to put it behind me and hoped I could move into the middle class. When that opportunity was denied me I developed a pride in my origins and background in spite of the system that locked me out.

The experience of being excluded and excluding myself stayed with me. When I finally attended community college in America I realized that I was college material and that I had been excluded based on factors other than my own intelligence level. This experience informed my future career decisions. I would strive to be an advocate for those that may experience exclusion based on socioeconomic status, race, gender or any other similar factors.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

Introduction

In Chapter 2: I told my own story, and how I came to be a researcher, and higher educational professional. Chapter 2 also showed the reasons why studying this population is important to me. It also touches on my experiences in the US system of higher education, and how I adapted, and learned the system.

The US system of education has some major problems in catering to students from lower socioeconomic status groups and those from diverse backgrounds. The ideal of an education for all is alive and well at the K-12 level, but the level of education that is received by the poor is very different to that received by the wealthy. Those from the upper classes are likely to buy a private education and the network that comes with it to maintain or improve the habitus, social and cultural capital opportunities for their children. The type of institution a student attends for postsecondary education also has a direct influence on their ability to succeed and improve their chances at class mobility.

The university and college-going populations have changed significantly in the last decades, and yet, our higher education system has not refocused or adapted to the shifting face of the student body. Higher education was once the domain of the middle and upper classes. First generation students are now the largest group on college campuses. Choy (2001) points out that in 1995–96, 34% of students entering the nation’s four-year institutions and 53% of students starting at two-year colleges were first generation students. Yet, the universities and

community colleges still focus on the needs of middle class students and traditional aged students, although some of the latter may also be first generation. The college/university system in America is a model that has not adapted to meet the needs of the students now attending. The system is still focusing its energy on traditional middle class students who are now becoming a minority on many campuses. At best, a special course (such as college survival skills) or a mentoring program are all that many colleges offer to help first generation students adapt to the higher education environment.

This chapter will focus on and critique current research that pertains to these students. The literature review will also focus on first generation students, diversity and the community college, and will examine some of the few qualitative studies on this population.

Conceptual Framework

My own experiences as highlighted earlier in chapter two exposed me to the reality of the differences facing first generation students as they navigate higher education. Those experiences formed my “idea context” that is the foundation of my study. My primary concept was to study a phenomenon, that of first generation students and their experiences at community college. The biases formed during my own educational journey were at the forefront of my mind when I set up this study. What was important for me when I initially organised this study was to examine the difficulties and hurdles that first generation learners undergo while adapting and learning in college. Primarily, my aim was to explore the in-college and external experiences of first generation community college students as they attempted to succeed academically, while maintaining their personal commitments and responsibilities.

There are two parts that stand apart in this study. Firstly, I am exploring the experiences of students both at the college and in their home lives. Secondly, I am using qualitative studies to better capture the human aspect of the students, and this differs from the majority of studies on this population. This is important in many ways, but primarily because it captures the student's point-of-view on their own experiences instead of surveys and statistical norms.

As a result of the study, I can say that I expected key themes to emerge that showed a commonality between the student participants. Of course these were assumptions, but I did expect there would be differences in the experiences of the students, based on age, gender, and class. However, the results proved to me that the differences and like experiences were not always what I expected. For example, the concept of a shared working-class identity was all but absent from the study. According to Bernd Heinrich (1984), "Even carefully collected results can be misleading if the underlying context of assumptions is wrong" (1983, p. 151). My own experiences growing up in Ireland and England were of a tight-knit working class community, and the people within that same community identified as a part of it. My assumption of a shared working-class identity did prove to be wrong, however many of my other assumptions did prove to have some validity. The literature review is not necessarily my attempt to cover the field, but focuses on the studies and research that are relevant to my research on first generation students.

The students in this study, whether in Bend, Redmond, Portland, Tillamook, or Salem were attending college during the Great Recession. The older students, in particular, were attending college for different reasons than their traditional college aged counterparts. The

shifting economic and technological needs of society had left them without a skill set that would equate to them being competitive in the labour market.

According to Knowles (1980):

Up until the early part of the twentieth century the time-span of major cultural change (e.g., massive inputs of new knowledge, technological innovation, vocational displacement, population mobility, change in political and economic systems, etc.) extended over several generations, whereas in the twentieth century several cultural revolutions occurred and the pace is accelerating. Under this new condition, knowledge gained at any point of time is largely obsolete within a matter of years; and skills that made people productive in their twenties became out-of-date in their thirties. (p. 41)

Knowles points out something that was very clear in this study, the days where students graduated high school and attended college, or university, and then entered the workforce for life, are now over. These students will return to education throughout their lifespan in order to keep up with ever-accelerating changes in technology and workforce needs. They must constantly adapt and acquire new knowledge to be competitive in the global economy.

Students persist or do not persist in college for many reasons. Prior to the 1970's there had been little research on the reasons some students persist and others do not. Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) *Theory of Student Departure* is widely referred to as the "standard framework for guiding research into the complex persistence-related interconnections among students and their college experiences" (Pascarella, & Terenzini, 2005, p. 425). Tinto's work looked at a number of factors that influenced persistence in students. Some of these factors include living

on campus, being involved in on-campus activities, and the threshold for hours worked in external jobs and the effect on grades. Tinto's earlier works focused on traditional students at large universities and was not representational of all college populations. Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) *Theory of Student Departure* was also difficult to apply to the community college environment. For example, a large part of Tinto's findings were centred on how student involvement on campus can lead to increased persistence. At a community college, the majority of students are commuter students, and many have external responsibilities such as families, and jobs. First generation students do not tend to become involved on-campus, and many would consider it a luxury that would require time and energy they do not have.

Like Tinto, Astin, (1975) and many others (e.g., Attinasi, 1989; Berkner, Horn, Clune, 2000; Billson, Terry, 1982; Choy, 2000; Horn, 1998; Nunez, Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Richardson, Skinner, 1992; Warburton, Bugarin, Nunez, 2001) have conducted much research on the first year experience at traditional four-year institutions. This literature relating to the student's first year at college is focused primarily on the experiences of middle-class students attending four-year universities. This leads to research that has less relevance for first generation students attending community college. The experience of community college students is very different. With no dorms, and limited student life, community college students live close to their college and commute back and forth while holding down jobs and many provide for families. Community college professors are generally paid to teach classes and advise students, and are not required to complete research as are their university counterparts. In the community college environment, faculty's "primary responsibility is to teach; they rarely conduct research or scholarly inquiry. On a full-time basis, they conduct four or five classes

each term” (Cohen, & Brawer, 2003, p. 46). This is one of the reasons that there is less research on first generation students at community colleges where the representation of these students is greater. There is a research gap on the identities, and lives of these students: Who are they? What are their needs and concerns? What outside forces dictate whether these students succeed and fail in college? What can colleges do to better help these students? The findings and conclusion in this dissertation will hopefully provide insight and generate ideas for higher education professionals, and improve the support for first generation students.

One of the biggest problems for two-year colleges is the number of students who are not prepared for college level coursework. In the US, students entering community college are usually required to take an assessment test which gauges reading, writing, and mathematics abilities. Many students, even those fresh from high school do not test highly, particularly in mathematics. If a student tests below college level readiness they are required to take remedial (pre-college) coursework. This delays the length of time for students to complete a degree. An Associate Degree should take two years to complete for a student attending full-time. There are a number of different types of Associate Degree. Some consist of two years of general education classes geared towards transferring to a BA Degree. Others are professional/technical in nature and are designed to set up students in the workforce. If a student has to take between 3-4 pre-college math classes then the Associate Degree could take 3+ years to complete.

College and University faculty often blame the high schools for not preparing students for the rigours of college, but that lack of preparedness is most likely a symptom of class, poverty, and the juggling of conflicting priorities in first generation students’ lives. This is

especially the case during the transition to college. African American, Hispanic, or low-income students have a higher chance of testing low in math and English and then being required to take below-college level coursework prior to taking college level coursework.

Table 5

Percentage of Community College Students that start College in Remediation

Percentage of Community College Students that start College in Remediation	
African-American	67.7%
Hispanic	58.3%
Caucasian	48.9%

Note. Adapted from *Remediation: Higher Education's Bridge to Nowhere*, (2012).

Even as these students arrive in college, they are at a significant disadvantage. Another serious problem for students is that Federal Financial Aid does not cover remedial coursework. If students test at high school levels in maths, reading and writing they are required to take coursework that is below college level. Students are left to pay out of pocket and for those who are poor with limited financial resources this can be enough to derail them entirely.

The picture actually gets worse. Remedial courses can be a roadblock for the vast majority of all students — regardless of race, age, or income. Primarily this affects mature students who have been apart from formal education for an extended period of time. Their maths and writing skills may have deteriorated or might not have been at college level when graduating high school. When they test low, this might be viewed as an indication to the student that college is not a good fit.

Table 6

The percentage of students who did not complete remediation and associated college-level courses in two years

Did not complete remediation and associated college-level courses in two years	
African-American Students	85.6%
Hispanic Students	76.2.3%
Caucasian	76.9%

Note. Adapted from *Remediation: Higher Education's Bridge to Nowhere*, (2012).

Clearly, the current system of higher education access is not working for students from minority backgrounds or for those from lower socioeconomic means. The numbers above show that it is extremely unlikely that a student who tests below college level in mathematics and English is likely to complete an Associate Degree within two years. That decreases the chance of that student persisting right from the point of entry into higher education.

So far I have covered some of the reasons many first generation students do not persist in college. The context in which these students exist, also works against them. Many come from backgrounds of poverty and are thus underprepared by the time they arrive in college. Tinto, Astin, (1975) and many others (e.g., Attinasi, 1989; Berkner, Horn, Clune, 2000; Billson, Terry, 1982; Choy, 2000; Horn, 1998; Nunez, Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Richardson, Skinner, 1992; Warburton, Bugarin, Nunez, 2001) have researched the reasons these students often fail to persist in universities. I would like to now look at the foundational theorists for their insights

into working class and first generation students, and the context and societies in which they exist.

No work on class systems and higher education can be complete without first referring to the works of Pierre Bourdieu. Pierre Bourdieu was a French Sociologist/Anthropologist/Philosopher who came from a rural background in a French small town. Bourdieu (1999) focused much of his research on the peripheral peoples, those living in inner-city ghettos, colonized towns in Algeria, immigrant populations, or people in rural areas. Bourdieu (1999) gave insights into the way that the people struggling through poverty with limited education end up in a seemingly never-ending cycle of struggle. In American higher education, the peripheral peoples would be students from marginal communities such as African American, Hispanic, Native American, students with disabilities, and undocumented students, i.e. Dreamers. In this study, there were participants that were Hispanic, students with disabilities and Dreamers. Each group struggles to some extent in navigating higher education. Hispanic students, like Native American and African American students have been historically underrepresented in higher education in the United States, and continue to be so. Dreamer students are also less likely to attend college, and those that do face a difficult road to success. Their undocumented status gives them few rights and much support is denied to them. They face the threat of deportation and often hide their identity as undocumented students from all but those closest to them. According to Perez (2010), over 65,000 Dreamer students graduate from high school each year and are denied equal opportunities in higher education.

Bourdieu, (1999) describes interviews with a number of different peripheral peoples, such as children of migrants living in French cities. In the interview titled 'The Order of Things'

Bourdieu through the use of interviews describes the lives of two young men, very good friends who live in council housing and are in a vacuum without help from anywhere (Bourdieu, 1999). Society has swept them under the carpet and does not give them any opportunities for advancement in life. Carr, & Kefalas, (2009) researched the experiences of students in Ellis, a small American mid-western town.

Carr, & Kefalas, (2009) explain:

It is an irony not lost on the young people who would grow up to stay, the same teachers who inspired the town's best kids to dream of a life far beyond the countryside told the stayers they would never amount to enough to get out of Ellis. The fact that young people rarely rebelled against the assumption that they would inherit their parent's place in the world demonstrates how powerful and all-encompassing the tendency toward social reproduction could be. (p. 58)

First generation students are often raised in circumstances similar to this. They grow up believing that their lives are pre-ordained and that they will end up working in minimum wage jobs, if they find work at all, with all the outsourcing of manufacturing and other jobs overseas. Social reproduction is at the heart of these people's lives, and many do not have the knowledge to take advantage of the system to make it work for them.

Growing up in the north of England, the people I knew had a deep distrust of government, only paying attention during general elections and on budget day. They were resigned to a life of unpredictable employment and periods of unemployment. "It's a truism of social policy that the best anti-poverty program is a job. But in the economy of the 21st

century, the best way to get and keep a job is to have a college degree” (Earnings and Unemployment, 2014, p. 1).

The Earnings and Unemployment Report (2014) also states that:

The unemployment rates fall and wages rise as educational attainment increases. As of October 2009, the aggregate jobless rate for people with a high school degree or less was 12.2 percent, compared with 6.6 percent for those with some college or higher. Similarly, average yearly earnings jump at each additional level of educational attainment: in 2008, someone with an Associate Degree earned an average of more than \$7,500 more than an individual with no schooling beyond high school. (p. 1)

It can be difficult to think in the long term when you struggle to make it through each week, and that is what first generation students have to overcome to leave the habitus they have grown up in.

Pierre Bourdieu grew up in similar circumstances to the participants in the Carr, & Kefalas, (2009) study. While he was not raised in as harsh an environment as the struggling town of Ellis, he was part of the lower-middle class establishment. Through education he became a member of the elite classes, yet much of his research and writing was focused on identity and context in regards to class reproduction.

American culture has a class system that is difficult to pinpoint because the people do not easily fit into categories or do not wish to be labelled as working class. There are connotations that pervade society that people in the lower groups on the socioeconomic ladder are lazy, work shy, and spend all their earnings on alcohol and drugs. In the run up to the 2012

General Election, Republican Presidential Nominee Mitt Romney wrote off an entire 47% of the American Public as fitting in that category.

This is a taped transcript of Mitt Romney, by Corn (2012):

Well, there are 47 percent of the people who will vote for the president no matter what.

There are 47 percent who are with him, who are dependent upon government, who believe that they are victims, who believe that government has a responsibility to care for them, who believe that they are entitled to health care, to food, to housing, to you-name-it. That that's an entitlement and government should give it to them. And they will vote for this president no matter what. I mean, the president starts off with 48, 49 . . . I mean, he starts off with a huge number. These are people who pay no income tax; 47 percent of Americans pay no income tax. So our message of low taxes doesn't connect. He'll be out there talking about tax cuts for the rich. I mean, that's what they sell every four years. And so my job is not to worry about those people. I'll never convince them they should take personal responsibility and care for their lives. What I have to do is convince the 5 to 10 percent in the centre, that are independents, that are thoughtful, that look at voting one way or the other depending upon, in some cases, emotion, whether they like the guy or not, what he looks like. (p. 1)

This quote cited by Corn is a videotaped conversation that captured Republican Presidential candidate Mitt Romney's speech to a group of influential donors during his campaign for office. The above quote should not be seen as a one-off. This example perfectly illustrates the pervasive perception that many in the upper socioeconomic classes have of those in the lower classes. The belief that they are living on the system, taking a government cheque

and not contributing is a commonly held belief. What is unusual about the above quote is that it was made publicly and well documented. Rarely is something uttered in an open forum by a politician that perfectly describes their perceptions of the American people. It might also be argued that the politicians are using a “divide and conquer” method to keep power. If the middle class are turned against the working class, they will not spend the time questioning the ruling establishment.

Bourdieu developed a number of concepts which are useful in analysing class, which at times can seem intangible or hard to quantify. One of the concepts he coined is social capital (Bourdieu, 1977), or the network of friends and contacts that a person has. A doctor may have a network of friends such as other physicians, professors, and lawyers. The doctor is unlikely to know somebody that works in a factory, or a shelf stacker in a grocery store. Likewise, a factory worker is likely to be networked with other factory workers, and perhaps has a network of other blue collar colleagues in professions like iron working or plumbing. This person will likely not count doctors, lawyers and other professionals as part of their network. The participants in my study are mostly from working class backgrounds, and if they know a lawyer or doctor it is most likely on a professional level and not as a contact in their network. In the interviews I was privy to a glimpse at the world of these students. The social capital of these people is extremely limited. They may have a friend who can loan them money until payday or the financial aid payment comes through, but they have no access through social capital to improve their lot in life. Their friends and acquaintances, like themselves, are struggling through life on a day-to-day basis.

First generation students come in all shapes and sizes, and many of them are adults who have a variety of life experiences. These students often struggle to adapt in a college or university environment that treats them the same as high school students. Their wealth of life experiences need to be addressed and validated in the college classroom. Adult learners “benefit from being directly involved in the development of their learning activities” (Davis, 2013, p. 68). Programs such as Credit for Prior Learning or Prior Learning Assessment are also very helpful for helping adults receive college credits for life experiences that are equivalent with academic coursework. This type of program also gives the message to adult students that their life experiences are recognised and are worth something in the academic environment.

According to Knowles (1980):

Adults enter into learning with deep ego-involvement, with results that are frequently startling, both to themselves and their teachers. Teachers who have helped their adult students to achieve this breakthrough report repeatedly that it is one of the most rewarding experiences of their lives. (p. 46)

Social capital is an important lens to view first generation students through. It highlights in particular the areas that community colleges do not address; the external factors that often influence whether a student is able to attend and persist at college. Without looking at social capital we ignore a part of what makes first generation students what they are.

Another important concept developed by Bourdieu is cultural capital (Bourdieu, Passeron, 1973). This describes the type of education, knowledge or skills or other types of advantage a person has that will benefit them in numerous ways in their given society. For

example, if a person graduated from Stanford University, they would normally have a higher status in society than somebody who graduated from the University of Arkansas. If both people had similar work experience and applied for the same job the outcome would be obvious.

Cultural capital is fostered in the language, and norms of a family. An upper class family will have very different discussions and rituals than a working class family. Dinner table conversation may revolve around homework, politics, travel, or the arts. For a working class family this would hardly be the case.

(Bourdieu, 1986), states that:

Cultural capital can be acquired, to a varying extent, depending on the period, the society, and the social class, in the absence of any deliberate inculcation, and therefore quite unconsciously. It always remains marked by its earliest conditions of acquisition which, through the more or less visible marks they leave (such as the pronunciations characteristic of a class or region), help to determine its distinctive value. It declines and dies with its bearer. (p. 247)

I would argue against Bourdieu on the acquisition of cultural capital. A person may adapt their speech and local mannerisms through education, and cultural capital does not die with the bearer. As is the case with the upper classes, the education, styles of speech, dress and physical appearance can and do often change for entire families, and preceding generations after acquisition by one, or more member of the family. The students in this research study were, in essence, attempting to do this exact same thing.

In the interviews, I was able to learn that most of the students had never left their state, or if they had it was because they were born elsewhere and their parent/s relocated to Oregon for work and opportunities. As for the arts, the community college is the first introduction to the arts for many of these students. Cultural capital is a very important factor in the study of students who are the first in their family to attend college. Many have grown up in homes whose cultural capital will be very different from other students whose parents attended university. We do not start from birth with an equal chance at success. Using a baseball analogy, some kids are born on third base where success is all but guaranteed. First generation students are disadvantaged from the start, because they do not know the rules of the game, and cannot get access to it through their informal and cultural networks. The playing field is not level in the US, and access to the upper classes is denied to most. Social capital and cultural capital are intimately connected, and one cannot go without the other. However, the notion of social or cultural capital being something that is attached primarily to family norms, and origins can be misleading. Goldthorpe, (2007) argues that "Family is not the only locus of either the creation of or transmission of cultural capital. Contrary to Bourdieu's claims, educational institutions also can, and do, play a major role in this regard" (p. 16). To some extent this is why I work in higher education, to help others succeed in changing their life paths, and that can involve moving into a different social class. Bourdieu (1986), does not attribute as much stock to cultural capital being acquired through education, "With the academic qualification, a legally guaranteed value with respect to culture, social alchemy produces a cultural capital at that moment in time" (p. 250). Bourdieu's thoughts on the matter seem to be sceptical of the quality of cultural capital gained through educational achievement. Bourdieu (1986) goes on to

talk about academic qualifications as having monetary value for exchange on the labour market, but he fails to attribute academic qualifications to improving the quality of cultural and social capital in the familial environment.

This is not only a US issue, but can be found in many industrialized countries. In the UK class is more ingrained and obvious. However, over the past two decades more access has been granted to working class students who had not previously attended higher education. The Leathwood, (2004) study looks at students in three post-1992 universities (or new universities as they are referred to) situated in London (North London, London Guildhall, and Thames Valley), and three of the older elite universities (Oxford, Cambridge, and Imperial College). Leathwood (2004) argues that the same students who attend the private primary and secondary schools are more likely to be the students in the elite institutions, and those attending state schools are less likely to attend the elite institutions and attend the new universities or further education colleges if they proceed to higher education at all. These students are more likely to be poor, female or diverse. Leathwood (2004), also goes on to show correlations that students graduating the elite institutions are more likely to receive greater salaries upon graduation and have greater cultural capital. Approximately one third of the current members of the cabinet are from Oxbridge (Oxford/Cambridge), and this proportion appears to be replicated in the House of Commons (Ryle, et al., 2000). Each generation replicates the next, and opportunities are hereditary in a way that is not tied to royalty as it once was, but through the transfer of wealth, capital, and power, it continues from one generation to the next.

Similarly American community colleges like further education colleges in Ireland and England, are more likely to have a student body that is working class, diverse, and with less cultural capital than their peers at an Ivy League University or a state university that receives research grants. Students graduating from a community college find that their credentials do not open doors or allow them to access the same resources that their Ivy League and state university counterparts. Students with lesser social or cultural capital will likely find themselves attending further education colleges, new universities, or community colleges and will be excluded from the social and cultural opportunities presented to those at the elite universities. In this way, a society reproduces itself. The new universities, further education colleges, and community colleges may offer first generation students the opportunity of gaining a college degree and the chance to move into the middle class at best.

Bourdieu further developed another concept - that of habitus. Originally this was a term used by Aristotle to describe societal norms and a person's unquestioning position in that society, whether in the form of social differences or class.

According to Reay et al., (2009):

Habitus are permeable and responsive to what is going on around them. Therefore, although habitus is a product of early childhood experience and, in particular, socialization within the family, it is continually modified by individuals' encounters with the outside world. (p. 1105)

This is extremely important in the study of first generation college students, who like Bourdieu are defying habitus, and deliberately taking the alternate path (in the form of

education) that often leads to dissonance with their former habitus. Goldthorpe, (2007) critiques Bourdieu on his concept of habitus. “There is little place in Bourdieu’s approach to re-socialization, and certainly not as this might occur through the agency of the educational system” (p. 6). The re-socialization of children in school or adults in university can happen, and a newer habitus can be claimed. The educational system, however, is controlled by the ruling elite and this can quash the majority of those seeking to improve their habitus.

Habitus describes how the class structure reproduces itself, especially in regards to occupations. Reay et al., (2001) describes the system of universities in England, and how the older universities still cater to the elite, while the newer universities cater to the lower-middle and working classes. The academic programs in the newer universities are set up graduates for occupations that are usually better than their parents, but they do not have the social capital that students at the elite universities do. This limits the chance of their moving up to the next level of the class system, and the class system in-turn reproduces itself. However, Reay et al., (2009) does not address that there have been improvements in the system. While the class system may remain intact, college graduates from working class backgrounds are able to find white collar careers with better pay and prospects than anything their parents had ever known. The era of outsourcing labour jobs to other countries also leaves working class people in a tenuous position in the employment market. By attending college or university, they are more likely to maintain employment during times of recession. The acquisition of knowledge, and the ability to critically think will help them to be more politically aware and hopefully lead to a greater level of advocacy for themselves and their communities. Freire, and Horton (1990) discussed the education of people who were historically denied access to education. They

believed that a higher level of education would lead to a better society. Knowledge equals power, and if the majority of people do not have education, then they are easier to manipulate.

Goldthorpe (2007), also disputes Bourdieu's failure in regards to social reproduction. "The development and functioning of modern educational systems essentially confirm and stabilise the processes through which individuals and families maintain their social positions over time lacks prima facie plausibility" (p. 8). In his argument Goldthorpe (2007) uses the huge increases of English working class secondary students completing secondary school and moving onto further education at rates similar to their middle-class counterparts.

One other important term that Bourdieu criticized was the idea that those who come from a habitus different to the middle class or upper class and still manage to succeed are seen by many to be 'gifted' (Reed-Danahay, 2004). This way of thinking can be dangerous. It implies that a whole class of people are ungifted, and only a select and special few stand out from the crowd and can succeed in crossing class boundaries successfully. Bourdieu and Passeron wrote that "all value is incarnated in the child prodigy, the brevity of whose path through school testifies to the extent of his gift" (Reed-Danahay, 2004, p. 48). This quote is has meaning for me in my own experiences. As a first generation student who did reasonably but not exceptionally so in secondary school, I was in no way considered gifted by my parents. After successful completion of a BA Degree, my parents acted as if I had been "brainy" all along. The quote "I don't know where he gets it from" has been uttered more than once. I would argue that "gift" can be used to discriminate against most people from the poor classes. By saying that only some of the people are "gifted" enough to attend a prestigious school, it also says

that most people are ordinary and not intelligent enough to do so. However, those rules do not appear to apply to the upper classes that get to attend the elite institutions based on social and cultural capital and habitus. At one Ivy League school 60% of the slots were taken by students who had academic preference, which means they were legacy children or had ties to politics, were from old money, newly rich, or were children of famous parents (Golden, 2006). Class really does reproduce itself. These students were not all academically superior to the 40% who were not legacy children.

I would also argue against the “ideology of gift.” I would argue that validation plays a far bigger part in the success of students from lower economic status. If a student feels validated by the experience of higher education they are far more likely to persist. Students need to matter. “Once adults make the discovery that they can take responsibility for their own learning, as they do for other facets of their lives, they experience a sense of release and exhilaration” (Knowles, 1980, p. 46). Students who question whether they belong in higher education especially need to be made to feel that they matter. “Mattering refers to the beliefs people have, whether they are right or wrong, that they matter to someone else, that they are the object of someone else’s attention, and that others care about them” (Schlossberg, et al., 1989, p. 21). If our faculty and administrators are able to connect on a deeper level with first generation students, their chances of success will improve. Being made to matter is especially important for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. These students are likely to feel out of place both at home and in higher education. Validation can help students to bridge the gap between worlds.

Deborah Reed-Danahay (2004) wrote:

As a scholar, Bourdieu was interested in the consequences of becoming educated for children from rural and/or working-class backgrounds, and his own experiences of estrangement from his origins motivated his interest in education. Bourdieu referred to himself as 'class defector,' unveiling the shame of his origins and guilt at being upwardly mobile. He also noted that his having undertaken research in his native region of Béarn was part of a personal quest. (p. 28)

What Bourdieu did not focus on, however, was the voices of those that successfully straddled both worlds, being at home in academia/the middle/upper class and at home in the rural/urban/provincial origins. That said, Bourdieu did develop the concept of *habitus clivé* (split habitus) as a way of describing the dichotomy faced by those that come from one world and enter another. Bourdieu focused on the difficulties associated with living in two worlds, but did not share the experiences of those who successfully managed to belong in more than one habitus.

While Bourdieu developed the concept of *habitus clivé* (Reed-Danahay, 2004), Alfred Lubrano (2004) took the concept further. He describes himself and those like him as "straddlers," people who live between worlds. To support this concept Lubrano interviewed a group of people living professional lives and records the stories of how they moved from humble beginnings into the middle or upper classes. Ironically, of all the people Lubrano interviewed he claims that "Professors are the most self-conscious straddlers with middle class colleagues who do not understand them at all. Teaching middle class kids how to become the bosses of their parents, siblings, cousins and friends" (Lubrano, 2004, p. 2). Higher Education,

particularly in four-year universities is a competitive arena for faculty. Tenured positions are gained at a high cost. Faculty must show that they are effective researchers and publish often. They have to compete for positions with other faculty, and their resumes list universities attended and former employers that sound like a who's who of the university world. To bring up the fact that you came from a working class background or even attended a community college can be tantamount to career suicide or at the least a professor might risk promotion, respect or inclusion into the elite faculty inner-circle (Lubrano, 2004).

Working class or first generation students attending community college or university are in effect leaving one world to enter another. It is a place where middle class norms rule, and where success depends primarily on the ability to adapt to this environment.

According to Maslow (1943):

All people in our society have a need or desire for a stable, firmly based, (usually) high elevation of themselves, for self-respect, or self-esteem, and for the esteem of others.

Secondly we have the desire for reputation or prestige, recognition, attention, importance or appreciation. (p. 437)

The students in this study were seeking to be validated for who they were. By being successful in college, they hoped to earn physical credentials but also the respect of the greater community. College was being used as a tool to help these students navigate into a different social class.

That said, some straddlers manage to live between worlds. According to Lubrano, "With one foot in the working class and the other in the middle class, people like me are straddlers, at

home in neither world, living a limbo life” (Lubrano, 2004, p. 2). On the other hand, first generation students attending community college might not have the sense of displacement on the same level. They are the majority on campus and the culture shock of split habitus has not yet become a part of their world. They are not yet in the middle class. They go to college with people who are like them and return home to their existing life every day.

During my own time attending community college, I found myself questioning concepts I had never previously questioned such as religion, politics, and societal attitudes. This might sound inconsequential, but to question your own foundations can lead to a lot of cognitive dissonance. Also, while drifting away from my former beliefs I started to adapt to a new set of beliefs, primarily those of the educated middle class. For me, this created conflict when I returned home to my former community. I had become different now and my family and peers knew it. After a few initial conversations around religion in particular, I found that my new educated opinion was not worth salt. How could I effectively challenge their beliefs, and why should I? Were my beliefs better? What gave me the right to say I had learned all these new things and you should too? How could I debunk the values, beliefs and norms of the working class for those of the college-educated middle class? That would have been seen as some kind of class betrayal. At that point, I became quiet about what I had learned, and while over time I became more comfortable sharing my stance on a wide variety of subjects, during the early years of my college education it was not the case. Eventually my family did come to understand and respect my opinions.

Reay, et al, (2009) covers the experiences of working class students in adapting successfully to life at an elite university. Building upon Bourdieu's acquisition of cultural capital, she describes the uphill battle of working class students who stood out in their own communities, and find themselves in a similar situation in elite universities. She identifies common traits amongst these students such as; self-developed study habits, self-reliance, and a familiarity with being a fish out of water since that was the way they had felt in secondary school as "swots". They had stood out in their working class secondary schools as children who were "brainy", not unlike the "gifted" children whom Bourdieu refers to. Because they felt comfortable in mathematics, science, and reading they were considered different in their own environment, and this had become part of their identity. The transition to the elite university for some of these students was less of a culture shock than might have been the case had they fit in at their secondary schools.

Most of these students were not encouraged by family members, rather a member of the community; a teacher, or lecturer. Others were actively or passively discouraged by family, friends and teachers. Working class students are described as "being in the process of invention or reinvention-making dreams come true rather doing what everyone like us does" (Reay, et al, 2009, p. 1110). The students in the research study are focused forwards on achieving dreams. They have split to some degree with their expected path and are trailblazing a new and different territory. They wish to be nurses, IT workers, and forest rangers. Theirs is a dream that has led them from the comfort of their own community to move into a world where they will find themselves facing many uncertainties.

However, these working class students have had very different lives to their middle class counterparts and may have been socially conditioned in ways that can affect them negatively in the university setting.

Lareau (2003) states that:

Typically, children from working-class and poor families do not learn how to choose among conflicting organizational commitments, sign identification cards, travel out of state, or work on an adult-led team with formal established roles. Nor do they have the same experience of thinking of themselves as entitled to receive customized attention from adults in institutional settings. In fact, working-class and poor children are regularly instructed to defer to adults. (p. 67)

I certainly feel sympathetic to some of the straddlers quoted in Lareau's research. I am now an Associate Dean with 40 full-time and part-time staff. That said, I still help move furniture, carry boxes, and those typical things that someone from my class does without thinking. Others in similar positions might be inclined to stand back and watch. Some parts of adapting to the middle class can seem uncomfortable and pretentious. Standing back and letting others work is not something I think I will ever feel comfortable with. Given the different early life experiences that middle-class and first generation students have, it is no wonder that many first generation students have trouble adapting to the middle-class norms of the university or the workplace. The students in the Reay, et al., (2009) study talk about university as a bubble, and in a reaction to life with the elite, they develop an appreciation for normal people, normal conversations, and their working class background, which they are in essence moving away from. This may be the first time in their lives that the students

appreciate the simplicity of their home lives or former habitus. Eventually this may turn into pride about their humble background and beginnings. Students compartmentalize their university life and their 'home life' in an attempt to exist in both worlds. "Students seem determined to hold aspects of self even when they gained new ones" (Friedman, 2005, p. 318). In my own experience, this was certainly the case. When attending university, I marvelled at new ways of seeing things, but I also became more proud of my background than I had previously been. I realized that I had overcome a lot to earn a place in college, and my working class work ethic and pride kept me attending in spite of having a full-time job, a wife, and children.

Reay, et al., (2009) describes that nearly all working class students went through a "crisis of confidence" in their first year at the elite university.

Reay, et al., (2009) recalls:

One student seemed particularly evolved in realizing that the other students "weren't particularly bothered whether they came from a comprehensive or not. In some ways they think you must be cleverer if you've come in from a comprehensive, but I just thought they'd think I was stupid and it took a year to get over it and feel I was their equal. (p. 1115)

This student shows that many of the 'class issues' are not necessarily top down, but can also be bottom up. During my formative years, I lived in the North of England and witnessed first-hand the effects of the miners' strike on the region. The news was filled with images of Arthur Scargill, Margaret Thatcher, and miner's standing outside fences shouting at the "scabs"

that went to work and did not support their striking brethren. Scab is a term used to describe those that go back to work during a strike. This undermines the only tool the striking workers have, the ability to refuse to work until the corporation negotiates with the union and the workers. The upper classes were looked upon with disdain by the people I grew up with, and even hated for their lack of concern for “the people”. Whole communities died on the vine during these years, and the views of the working class in regards to government decision makers and anyone in the “south” was negative yet, there are people in the upper classes and working classes that do not think this way and are able to avoid generalizations about classes of people, and that was what the working class student in the Reay, et al., (2009) study encountered at the elite university.

The question might be asked: is there a difference in the experiences of male and female first generation students in their pursuit of a college education? I would argue that there certainly are differences. Even the reasons that male and female students chose to attend college are different. Many males choose higher education for reasons that are individualistic, and they are likely to be focused on career aspirations and future goals. Women, in many cases, choose higher education to provide for their current family and for reasons to better support those around them. For women, “Increased earning power was generally regarded as an important motive for higher education, but the focus of that earning power was generally the improvement of a family situation rather than that of a single individual” (Evans, 2009, p. 345). Women’s reasons for attending university were often much more altruistic in nature than their male counterparts. According to Phillippe (2000), over 1.6 million women over the age of 25 attend community colleges primarily for work-related goals

and family responsibilities. In my experience working at Clark Community College the case is similar. There are now more female students than male students, however the female students are more likely to be primary caregivers. According to Johnson et al., (2000) in a survey of 350 adult female students, 84% of the women students were responsible for children in the home. Because of these extra responsibilities, many adult female students do not persist in college. According to Hallman (2013), "More than a million students who are mothers attend community college. Unfortunately, students with children are more likely to drop out of school, and when they do, they cite their care giving responsibilities as a main reason" (p. 1). Colleges need to be cognizant of the care giving needs of many adult female students.

Pierre Bourdieu, was a first generation student who managed to become part of the academic elite in France. His reasons for pursuing his academic goals were similar to the men mentioned in Evans' (2009) study. In regards to Bourdieu's lifelong pursuit of the recognition of social class and the permanence of a bourgeoisie, Bourdieu did have advantages. As a white man in the mid-twentieth century, he was far more able to break away from his rural background and succeed in France's elite higher education institutions than would have been the case were he female. A woman in the rural environment that Bourdieu grew up in would not likely have been encouraged or had the option of attending higher education. Most likely she would have been tied to a future of domestic obligation in the area she grew up in. The uneven burden of caring that is unequally distributed among the sexes allowed and still allows men to succeed in greater numbers at higher levels than females who have the care of family to consider. This in effect is what happened to Bourdieu. He came from a background where it was not common for somebody to become a part of the bourgeoisie, but he had that chance. A

woman would have had a far more difficult time doing so, especially during the time period of Bourdieu's ascension and acceptance into a group of greater social and cultural capital.

This was not an area that I originally expected to be a central part of my thesis, but my pilot research at Central Oregon Community College opened my eyes to the continuing problems that women face while attempting to attend college, or transition into the middle class. First generation female community college students have added obstacles to overcome. Not only do they have to adapt and meet the demands of life as a college student, they also have the expectations of societal female roles to contend with such as; spouse, primary care giver to children, and elder support. When and if these students graduate college they will find that they have to face the conundrum of being a carer and attempting to succeed in the workforce. The chances of these women/carers achieving similar levels of employment and pay as their male counterparts is significantly less (Lynch et al., 2009). Not only do women receive the greater share of the caring burden, but in order to succeed in higher management positions many of them find themselves being full-time carers and successful managers simultaneously. The terms "double day" and "second shift" have been used to describe the phenomenon of women who are income earners yet at the same time continue to perform their traditional roles as household managers and care providers (Lynch, et al., 2009). Similar results were found in another qualitative study.

According to Lareau (2003):

When both parents were present, most family labour fell to Mrs. Tallinger. She was the one who found and ironed the boy's pants the day of the piano recital and who arranged the recital refreshments, who bought the children's teachers Christmas and

end-of-year gifts, and who wrote the teachers notes to thank them for their efforts during the year. Significantly, the pattern of gendered labour met the expectations of both children, and school personnel: Mothers, not fathers, were expected to sign permission slips and help children with routine life tasks. (p. 52)

Women for the most part have a more difficult journey through community college, particularly those that have outside responsibilities. Female immigrant children in particular are often dissuaded from attending college by family members. "It's not uncommon for immigrant parents-fathers especially-to prevent their daughters from attaining college degrees or to present some conflict on the matter. Some people believe the adage that if you educate your daughters, you lose them" (Lubrano, 2004, p. 39). Education may not be valued as highly in certain cultures, and parents have a genuine fear that their children will lose touch with their own customs, language, and culture. Education could be seen as a threat to an ethnic community. Those that attend college might end up leaving a tight-knit community, and that would be considered a loss. Leaving home can be exceptionally difficult for first generation students.

Dittman, McGinney, & Trimble, (2009) explain:

For the first generation student who feels guilt about abandoning family tradition by pursuing higher education, or who feels that he/she should have remained home to help support the family, such feelings may drain the student of the energy and will necessary to become fully involved in establishing new ties. Caught between two cultures, that of home and that of school, the student may find it difficult to function

effectively in the social realm. This difficulty is further compounded for those first generation students who find it necessary to work significant hours off campus to fund their education. These students are even less likely to become involved in campus activities which allow for a high degree of peer to peer interaction and the development of close friendships. (p 10)

In the community college this is certainly the case. There are rarely dorms on community college campuses and commuter students are usually not as involved in campus activities. That social bonding and involvement is not as evident as it would be at a four-year university.

Carr, & Kefalas, (2009) conducted a mixed methods year-long study in rural, small-town Iowa. They interviewed 100 high school students and collected survey data on another 300 high school students. The authors immersed themselves in the field, living in the small town and becoming part of the community. As a result of their yearlong observations the researchers become aware of an alarming trend, that of the most educated young people leaving town for further education, and never returning home. They broke down the participants into four groups based on their decisions to stay or leave their community:

- Achievers
 - High School students who leave for good colleges. They are encouraged by the small town community. More than half of these leave the state after graduation and those that remain in the state tend towards employment in the cities. They value encounters with diversity.
- The Stayers

- Stayers do not leave the small town. They quickly take on the appearance and actions of adults. They transition quickly to jobs and families. They do not attend college and end up working in blue collar positions. These are the group most at risk of unemployment and stagnating wages.
- The Seekers
 - Seekers are those that end up leaving the small town, but not for college. Most of them join the military. A number of these did not attend college because their parents could not afford it. They want to travel and see different things; not getting married and staying at home.
- The Returners
 - Returners are those that shun the city life and did not fit into college. Being surrounded by strangers in a fast pace of life is difficult for these people. They generally succeed in college, but choose to return home for the comfort of small-town life. They have no desire to postpone marriage and getting a job in the small town.

The Carr, & Kefalas, (2009) study was very useful in regards to my research on community college students in Bend Oregon. The findings of the COCC study showed a common theme of students facing the choice to leave after completion of college. While (Carr, & Kefalas, 2009) work managed to effectively cover the decision making process of the participants choices to stay or leave the small town community, they did not delve deeply enough into the experiences these students have, both in college, and when they return home. The exposure these students have during their time in college is likely to change them in ways

that make the transition home less than ideal. Also, one issue that is evident in the COCC research is the lack of employment opportunities in small towns for college graduates. Those college graduates that return home will likely see themselves underemployed and struggling to fit in due to changes in identity.

My biggest problem with this body of work was the way it labelled each group of students. At times, Carr and Kefalas' way of describing 'The Stayers' seems like they are being referred to as 'The Failures'. Granted, the lives of those that remain home might be very hard, living paycheque to paycheque, but not everybody can leave home or feels they should have to leave home to seek happiness. They did, however, address some of the serious concerns facing small town communities such as population haemorrhaging, declining jobs, and drug/alcohol problems.

Carr, & Kefalas', (2009) main focus is the conundrum facing small towns in the US Mid-West. These small towns spend much of their scant resources on the 'achiever' students, knowing that these students will most likely not return home to reinvest in the community. The 'stayers', those that end up setting up roots in their community achieve little 'real world' skills from their time in high school and end up with a limited skill set for the rapidly changing workforce that awaits them upon graduation from high school. The authors appear to hold some resentment towards the school system and society at large. This same problem was certainly noted at Central Oregon Community College and Tillamook Bay Community College, where there are few employment opportunities in these small communities. Tillamook and

Central Oregon did rely on the timber industry as a large contributor to the local economies.

Tillamook also experienced a decline in the fishing industry.

Van Gundy (2006) explains the impact of a rural recession:

Industries that traditionally sustained rural people and places—farming, timber, mining, fishing, and manufacturing—are employing fewer workers than they have in the past.

Some communities, especially those distant from urban areas and with few scenic amenities, are struggling with low incomes, a low-skill labour force, limited access to services, and weak infrastructure. (p. 5)

When small towns and rural communities suffer from prolonged recession the use of alcohol and drugs are on the increase.

Van Gundy (2006) continues:

Rural and urban places today have similar rates of substance use and abuse, and, for abuse of some substances, rural Americans are at an even higher risk than their urban counterparts. For instance, rural youth are particularly at risk for substance abuse, and stimulant use among the unemployed is higher in rural America. (p. 5)

Life in many small towns is not as quaint as it might at first seem. These towns tend towards educating their best, knowing that they will leave to seek employment and opportunity in larger cities, and thus the cycle of economic stagnation continues.

Students with disabilities are another group that often have difficulty navigating college successfully. These students, like others could be included in other groups simultaneously. They might be first generation students, veterans, or from any ethnic group. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504) and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of

1990 (Title II), prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability. This requires colleges and universities to provide accommodations to students with documented disabilities. Students are required to inform colleges of their disability, if they wish to be granted accessible and academic adjustments based on their disability and individual needs.

According to the US Department of Education, Students with Disabilities Website (2011):

Academic adjustments may include auxiliary aids and services, as well as modifications to academic requirements as necessary to ensure equal educational opportunity.

Examples of adjustments are: arranging for priority registration; reducing a course load; substituting one course for another; providing note takers, recording devices, sign language interpreters, extended time for testing, and equipping school computers with screen-reading, voice recognition, or other adaptive software or hardware. (p. 1)

Students who have disabilities may struggle with college in a variety of ways depending on the type of disability. Returning veterans may have Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder; other students might have learning disabilities or require wheelchair accommodations. Some students might have vision or hearing impairment. This research seeks to expose the difficulties of first generations attending college. Imagine how much more difficult it must be for first generation students to attend college with any one of a myriad of disabilities?

“Because disability status is a risk factor for academic difficulties in its own right, first generation college students with disabilities are a particularly vulnerable subgroup of students within university environments” (Lombardi et al., 2012, p. 820). The added factors of first

generation status and disabilities decrease the chances of successful completion of college goals for this group of students.

In high schools, middle schools, and elementary schools the teachers are expected to be able to identify students with learning disabilities and refer them to the help they need in order to succeed. At college and university, faculty do not have this responsibility, and the student is expected to self-advocate and self-identify. High school students transitioning to college are often caught unawares by the change in approach. Professors are not expected to perform the same function as teachers in K-12 schools; however, some do refer students to the counsellor's office or disabilities student services office. Mature students attending college for the first time might not be aware they have any kind of learning disability. Perhaps they attended high school many years previously and had difficulty. Sometimes mature students are referred to the Students with Disabilities Office to find they have a learning disability, which was not detected in their K-12 schooling since that was not part of a teacher's responsibilities in past decades.

Colleges and universities usually have a department for students with disabilities on campus to educate students on their rights, and to be an intermediary of sorts between the academic and enrolment experience of the students and the administration and faculty. Their role is to interpret the laws and requirements in respect to students with disabilities and to provide reasonable accommodations to students. In a recent study however, students with disabilities cited that negative attitudes of faculty were the primary reason for their withdrawal from higher education (Beilke, & Yssel, 1999). These students might certainly feel marginalized

by not only being first generation, but by the position they find themselves in during their classroom experience.

Carr, & Kefalas (2009) did bring up the subject of race and ethnicity only in the changes that were starting to take place in the small town. What was once a predominantly white Lutheran Mid-Western town had recently seen an influx of Hispanic farm workers. Initially these were seasonal, but over the decades a small community had settled in the area and were starting to become part of the community. This is also common in many small towns in Oregon and throughout the Pacific Northwest. The demographics of small towns are shifting drastically as migrant workers settle down and develop roots. The first generation of these immigrants are likely to spend their years investing in finding stability in living accommodations, raising their family, and improving their financial situation. The second generation students attend the local schools, become Americanized and are an integral part of the community. Over the past 50 years, mass immigration to America from non-European countries has begun to change the college student population (Schwartz, et al., 2013). A mix of first generation immigrants or the children of the first generation immigrants are now attending US Colleges and Universities. This pattern increased between the 1950's and the current era. "Indeed, many first generation and second generation immigrants could be characterized as bi-cultural, that is, both acquiring American cultural practices and retaining those from one's heritage culture" (Schwartz, et al., 2013, p. 294). Many in this group become first generation college students, and this leads to increased diversity on college campuses.

Studies like this tend to be inclusive of race and while they do address socioeconomic issues they do not bring up the “class” word. A very interesting point made by (Reay, Crozier, Clayton, 2009) is that British researchers have primarily been preoccupied with higher education research focused on class and gender, while race and ethnicity have largely been neglected. In the US, the focus tends to be on race, ethnicity, and gender, while very little attention is placed on class. Like Reay, Lubrano also argues that in America, “Race and gender have had their decades in the sun. Class is the ‘C’ word” (Lubrano, 2004, p. 4). I agree with the need to put a greater focus on class; however, I disagree with Lubrano when it comes to class and gender. We are far from true equality and representation, and we should not put down one cause to pick up another. As a society, we should be able to focus on any and all groups that are underrepresented and not afforded a seat at the table. As this study will show, gender equality is not an issue of the past.

One very noticeable difference between minority applicants in Britain is that they apply in greater numbers to higher education than the rest of the population. However, these applications and eventual acceptance are to the further education colleges or new universities, which end up with the result of replicating the class system. This sounds very similar to the community college system in the US where there is a far greater representation of students from diverse backgrounds than there is at the four year university systems. “In 1997, community colleges, with 38% of the total enrolment in American higher education, were enrolling 46% of the ethnic minority students” (Cohen, & Brawer, 2003, p. 46). The tuition at community colleges is often about a third of what a state university might charge. Community

college is often the only financially viable option for students of colour and first generation students.

In Ireland and the UK, new universities are seeing a rise in diverse and working class applicants, while elite institutions continue to educate the privileged. Working class and diverse students are less likely than ever to apply to elite universities, since they can study alongside their peers at the new and urban universities. They are far less likely to be ‘fish out of water’ than their counterparts attending elite universities (Reay, Crozier, & Clayton, 2009). In the same way, first generation and diverse students are more likely to attend community college than four year institutions or Ivy League Colleges. Cost and location are key factors in these students decision to attend community college.

Santiago (2011) speaks of her own personal experiences as a member of the Latino community and the issues facing Latino’s in attending college. Santiago primarily focuses on the importance of family in the college decision-making-process of Latino students. Latino college attainment levels are significantly lower than white students. One of the reasons for this, Santiago (2011) explains, is because the relative youth of the Latino population-the median age of Latinos is 27, compared to 37 for all other groups. And the other major reason according to Santiago is that many families have a limited knowledge of the college process, including financing education and navigating through red tape. Santiago has some useful suggestions for colleges to educate Hispanic families on the college-decision-making process. These include orientations for parents, families, and even mother-daughter orientations. Some of the universities cited provide orientations and supplemental materials in English and Spanish.

In my research studies and literature review, I have found many research articles in the US that focus on the experiences of minority students on predominantly white campuses. What tends to be missing from these accounts is that there is a commonality between many minority students and an increasing number of white students,-the issue of class. The experiences of students who come from a habitus where college education is not the norm tend to be alike. This crosses racial and cultural divides. I do not want to say that the experiences of both groups are entirely alike, but white students from the working class can often feel out of place on college campuses.

I would argue that the system of Higher Education in the US should start to look at first generation students in a different light. "Feeling out of place on a college campus is not the sole domain of students of colour; gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered students with disabilities or women students" (Vander Putten, 2001, p. 16). First generation students often feel an imposter complex on the college campus and that college is not "their world". The imposter complex, or syndrome is described by Bahn (2014), as "The feeling that, regardless of your accomplishments, you're still about to be unmasked as a fraud" (p. 51). These students might experience feelings of identity crisis trying to fit into a different cultural class with strange norms and customs. Some students refer to feeling like they are 'faking it' by hiding who they are and where they are from. First generation students are more likely to view the campus environment and faculty as less supportive and less concerned about them (Pike, & Kuh, 2005) and they are more likely to report having experienced discrimination on campus (Richardson, & Skinner, 1992). Other students might find a "safe place" on campus such as a Veterans Centre or TRiO office where they might find a refuge in an unfamiliar world. Our college and university

campuses need to start including the invisible population on campus-first generation students. In particular, community colleges are the place where most first generation students enrol, and while the community colleges have been the place of greatest access for first generation students, persistence to graduation is still very problematic. The need to be more inclusive of first generation students is extremely important not only for the students themselves, but to improve persistence and completion rates which in-turn impact college funding.

In light of the problems of retention, some state governments are instituting new funding mandates for community colleges. Until recently community colleges were funded based on the number of students attending with a focus on open access. States are now changing the funding model for community colleges. They are increasingly more likely to be funded based on transitions. For example, if a General Education Diploma (high school equivalency test) student upon completion of the GED applies and is accepted into an Associate Degree, the college is awarded funding based on the successful transition of that student. As students reach milestones, completing one year successfully, completing a certificate successfully or transferring to a four year university, then the college receives additional funding. Because of this, community college administrators are now scrambling to improve retention. According to the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (2014), "Rigorous data analysis found common achievement measures that, when attained, substantially improve degree or certificate completion" (p.1). Many community colleges are looking at successful retention models implemented at four-year universities such as the first year experience, and attempting to start such programs at community college campuses. The return on the college's investment could be significant. At Clark Community College in

Vancouver Washington the student body identified as 71% first generation for the academic year 2013-14 (Clark College Enrolment Facts, 2010). The time is right for community colleges, in particular, to focus on this population of students as a means to improving completion and retention figures in order to continue stable federal funding. With the shift of focus towards retention there is a very real possibility that community colleges might attempt to specifically recruit students who are more likely to persist, and those groups that historically have retention problems might be seen as less desirable because of the diminished return on investment.

Reay et al., (2001) describes the effects of individual, peer group, familial, and institutional influences and the processes in choice-making for diverse and working class students who aspire to higher education. Reay et al, is aware of how class can be a commonality between poor whites and students of colour. One example is how in urban and rural community colleges, the majority of students state their major reasons for attending being cost and proximity. From personal experience, the close location of the community college was one of the primary reasons for my attendance at college/university, and it is interesting to see how that factors into the decision making process of other working class students.

Britain's system of higher education has a Registrar General that defines different levels of social class groupings. In the US, federal financial aid is based upon means, but students are not aware of how they fall into a particular level of social class. There is no visible tool where

students can self-categorize where they stand in the class structure. Class is kept hidden from sight even at this level.

Reay et al., (2001) addresses the economic constraints on working class students, but also tries to look at the psychological constraints in the form of self-exclusion. Another concept Reay introduces is the process of 'dis-identification' where a student is questioning and changing their current social position. This is a frequent occurrence for first generation students as they attend college. In essence, they are learning the ways and norms of the middle class and this can leave them with cognitive dissonance as they struggle to come to terms with who they are, where they are from, and who they hope to be.

West (1995) describes the research pilot stage as:

A series of interviews with access students which was used to further develop topics and themes for the research project. Such themes were: education as a response to change and crisis; unhappiness with present identities and how this was or was not being transcended; the role of significant others in facilitating progress and new social affiliations; and education as a source of fracture as well as strength. (p 25)

West's themes relate closely to my study at Central Oregon Community College, Mount Hood Community College, Tillamook Bay Community College and Chemeketa Community College. More on this will be discussed in the conclusions chapter.

Many working class students feel a need to justify going to college, especially to friends and family. One of the students in this study was having a difficult time between classes and cultures. "Michael represented a threat, a reflection, at some level, of his siblings' own

dissatisfaction, envy and desire” (West, 1995, p. 28). In America, with such a large divide between rural and urban communities this can be even more difficult for students.

Terenzini, et al., (1994) point out that at least initially, working class, first generation, and diverse students often do not get involved on campus. The reasons for this are varied. First generation students might focus on getting the academic part of the university under control. While they are focusing on competing academically, they are not able to avail themselves of the social opportunities on campus. This in turn may leave them at risk of not becoming acculturated to the university. First generation and diverse students might also be struggling to bridge the two worlds of academia and home.

This transition period is extremely difficult for diverse students who may not see other people like themselves on a college campus. In fact, for many of these students attending college constituted a significant split in their life course (Terenzini et al., 1994). Many students learn to bury their opinions, attitudes, and beliefs in order to succeed. They find out quickly that the college or university requires that they adapt and learn to produce papers, take tests or answer questions in a specific way. According to Fleming and Murphy (2005), “The college never compromises. The students themselves are always on the losing end, and the process of skills learning, of playing the game, is the only realistic way students have of losing less” (p. 58). For many students this transition required a redefinition of self and values. The message is loud and clear: “Adapt or Fail.”

Our colleges and universities need to learn that this approach can be damaging to students from diverse backgrounds and first generation students in particular. This includes a

shift towards having their previous work and life experiences acknowledged as valid forms of knowledge and learning, and have their contributions in class accepted as important (Terenzini et al., 1994). What are legitimate forms of knowledge and work experiences? Our colleges and universities need to re-evaluate the way they recognise and validate these students' prior and current life experiences. Dewey (1938) argued that all experiential learning occurs within a social environment, and knowledge is socially constructed and based on experiences. "Colleges across the country are awarding prior-learning credits to help older students earn degrees more quickly and more cheaply" (Diamond, 2012, p. 1). Many colleges now have prior learning programs where students are able to submit portfolios of life knowledge in exchange for college credit. For example, a student might submit written experiences of their time working in an office. This might include using Microsoft Excel, PowerPoint, Word, and Access. By comparing this experience to a syllabus from a class such as Computer Concepts, this student would likely gain credit if the learning outcomes of the class and the experience of the student were similar or matched. This is a start, but more needs to be done to help these students feel like they are not only tolerated but are viewed as a valued part of the campus community.

Before WWII the community colleges had grown to serve a significant part of the population. "In the years immediately following the war, junior college enrolments passed the 200,000 mark, rising to about 10% of all students in higher education. . .by 1958 community colleges enrolled almost one out of four new freshmen" (Brint, & Karabel, 1989, p. 71). This was primarily due to the returning troops and the GI Bill provided to help them reintegrate into society.

Field, & Hebel (2008) describe how the GI Bill came to light:

The original GI Bill was born out of necessity and fear. With millions of soldiers returning from the war, politicians were worried there would be mass unemployment and social unrest. The legislation, which was to provide veterans with \$500 a year (enough to pay for any university back then), was an attempt to delay their re-entry into the crowded labour market and to pacify the returning troops. (p. 2)

After the Great Recession, there was a genuine fear in the US that all of the returning troops would drive the economy right back into recession. They war years had improved the economy significantly, and the GI Bill was seen as a tool to delay the entry of the troops into a saturated labour market.

The numbers of students in the nation's colleges increased dramatically; 2.2 million veterans attended private universities, with another 4.9 million enrolled in technical, and vocational training of which the community college was the biggest provider (Field, Hebel, 2008). Since that massive influx, veterans have continued to attend community college in large numbers, however the military is much smaller today than it was then so the numbers are fewer. "In 2007 a total of 344,000 veterans used the GI Bill in the nations universities and colleges . . . and of these, three out of five students enrolled in community colleges or for-profit institutions" (Field, & Hebel, 2008, p. 2). With fewer veterans, and due to the fact that the GI Bill funds these students, colleges and universities compete to attract veterans to their campuses. Institutions of higher education create veteran centres, host events, and attempt to create a supportive atmosphere for these students. Veterans are also generally older than traditional aged students.

Field, & Hebel (2008) report that:

Half of GI Bill recipients are between the ages of 25-34, and are often married. Many of them return home looking to build on specific skills they gained in the service, and much like other adult students, they seek programs that allow them to balance work, studies and family obligations. (p. 4)

Like other populations in this study, there is intersectionality at play. Veterans might be mature students, and are also likely to be from diverse backgrounds, and perhaps suffer from PTSD, and have learning disabilities. Since Vietnam, the US Military is a volunteer force, and so it attracts volunteers from minorities and people from lower socioeconomic status, and a large number of these have little or no college experience.

Neither of the above authors addresses the other issues that face veterans on community college campuses. During their time in the military service members are directed in every task. There is little room for creative or critical thinking. Service members give and receive orders and are a team in every endeavour. Individuality is not valued, whereas in the realm of higher education, the opposite is the case. The work of the individual is the primary indicator of success. Students who are veterans feel cast adrift in the community college environment.

According to Ruman, Rivera, & Hernandez (2011):

Student veterans likely experience a sudden change in environments when enrolling in college following active-duty military service. Adjusting to the less structured nature of

the college environment can be challenging—especially initially—for some student veterans who have grown accustomed to the structured daily routine in the military.

(p. 54)

Being first generation in itself is a challenge; however these students are also going through a culture shock of sorts. The transition from a world where teamwork is ingrained, these students find themselves alone and adrift with a lack of direction. Many do not persevere in the college environment due to the military environment being so different from academia. Academic success in higher education rewards individual performance over teamwork. Many student veterans also report a sense of isolation and do not feel connected with other students who have not served in Iraq or Afghanistan. Civilian students have little understanding of the reality of a service-members life experiences (Ruman, et al., 2011).

First generation students are also more at risk from external forces such as a recession or stagnant economy. During the recession years, the people most likely to be unemployed were those without a high school diploma or those without an Associate or BA Degree. Oregon along with much of the rest of the country underwent what has been coined as the long recession. Unemployment along with a move towards exporting manufacturing jobs overseas left a large segment of the population unemployed or underemployed. The country, and in particular, college campuses underwent turbulent times. Antonio Gramsci saw in the education and cultural formation of adults, the key to the creation of counter-hegemonic action. He considered the processes essential for subordinated social groups to engage successfully the 'war of position' necessary to challenge the bourgeois state and transform it into one that

represents broader interests (Mayo, 1999). This process is currently happening in America. The 'Occupy' movement recently focused on the declining standard of living for 99% of the population, while the top 1% are earning far more than at any period in history. The movement shifted focus from occupying downtown parks to occupying colleges and protesting the rapidly inflating tuition prices, which have a large impact on the access to a better way of life for most of the population.

Employment opportunities for those without college degrees or credentials are limited to minimum wage jobs and menial work. Opportunities for advancement and successful earning potential are extremely limited. The reason many first generation students attend college is to escape the cycle of economic stagnation and the lack of opportunities. College still offers the best chance of attaining a professional career and increased earning potential, however, many first generation students work long hours, while they are attending community college to help cover the costs and to support family members. "Low-income first generation students receive slightly more financial aid than their peers despite having greater financial need. The result is that these students fall about \$3,600-\$6,000 short of the amount they are determined to need to pay for college" (Engle, & Tinto, 2008, p. 22). This is the reason that first generation students feel compelled to work long hours that can affect their persistence at college in a negative way.

The entire system of higher education is currently being questioned by many in the population as being archaic and out of touch with current economic needs. Recent changes in the UK reflect this. The burden of paying for higher education is increasingly shifting from the

tax-payer to the student (Holmwood, 2007). The business world complains that graduates are unequipped to join this and future workforces. “However, in truth, they have put the market at the heart of the system. The neoliberal drive is to render all higher education activities to the market.” (Holmwood, 2007, p. 4). What is not being questioned is who is writing the curriculum and why? Lynch (1989) argues that schools have hidden aspects that enable an unequal environment for students. Although some of them are visible such as syllabuses, school time, and exam procedures that might be accepted as universalistic, some of them are hidden such as social activities, reward systems that might be accepted as particularistic. Should not the curriculum challenge the norms of the present and create a better future or is the curriculum truly something that is designed to keep the current social order in place?

Freire (1978) explains:

Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize and repeat. This is the ‘banking’ concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits. (p. 72)

Many first generation students find themselves in college learning about subject matter that does not seem relevant or meaningful to them. Those from rural areas may often hear derogatory comments by faculty and other students about the perceived backwards ways in rural communities, the focus on religion, and family values. Those from inner city areas may hear terms like ghetto, Section Eight Housing, that is council housing, and food stamp families, that is, those receiving welfare for basic food needs. For the most part, they are excluded from

adding to the dialogue, and as Freire (1978) puts it, “they find themselves being transformed by the ‘banking system’ of education” (p. 72). Some do challenge the reasons for learning what they are prescribed and are likely to find themselves ‘not adapting’ to college, and in turn will likely drop out.

First generation students are considered peripheral in the world of higher education. Freire’s description of the way those with literacy difficulties are viewed by society might also be applied to first generation students in academia.

According to Freire (1998):

The ‘nutritionist’ concept of knowledge, so common in current educational practice, is found very clearly in the primer. The uneducated are considered ‘undernourished,’ not in the literal sense in which many of them really are, but because they lack the ‘bread of the spirit.’ Consistent with the concept of knowledge as food, illiteracy is conceived as a ‘poison herb,’ intoxicating and debilitating persons who cannot read or write. Thus much is said about the ‘eradication’ of illiteracy to cure the disease. In this way, deprived of their character as the linguistic signs constitutive of man’s thought-language, words are transformed into mere ‘deposits of vocabulary’-the bread of spirit that the illiterates are to eat and digest. (p. 45)

The community college, and especially four year state universities and liberal arts universities may teach the rudiments of critical thinking, yet they do not acknowledge first generation students as bringing anything of worth to the college. Their experiences are not valued, and so they are considered uneducated and informed, in need learning and knowledge

to make them complete. In college curriculum, there are courses that teach students about the value of diversity, yet this group is not included. They are ignored and not focused upon because they do not fit into the diversity category put forward by the Federal Government. That said, first generation students are also more likely to be diverse than college familiar students. By not acknowledging most diverse students as first generation, our colleges are ignoring a major factor in student persistence.

Conclusion

The literature review identified that there are gaps in knowledge about the lives of first generation community college students and the external college experiences that dictate their decision to persist at college. The literature showed that there has been extensive research on persistence at universities, and to some extent community colleges, yet there remains a significant gap in the literature. The literature review reading and research gave me a greater appreciation of the amount of work done in this area; however it also clarified the need for a study such as this research dissertation.

According to Creswell (2007):

Qualitative Research is not the discovery of new elements, as in natural scientific study, but rather the heightening of awareness for experience which has been forgotten and overlooked. By heightening awareness and creating dialogue, it is hoped research can lead to a better understanding of the way things appear to someone else and through that insight lead to improvements in practice. (p. 102)

As pointed out in the literature, the educational journey for first generation students is wrought with barriers and difficulty in many forms. Most of the literature cited has been part of studies in which different methodologies and methods were used to capture the experience of first generation students as they attend higher education. However, the opinions, experiences, and lives of first generation students have not been a part of this literature. The research in the literature review has also been conducted primarily at universities and not community colleges. This research study will add the voices of the students from a community college perspective to the literature in order to redefine the conversation

Chapter 4: Research Methodology and Methods

In the literature review, I introduced the educational theorists such as Bourdieu and Freire, Reay, Tinto, and Lynch, and I explained their ideas around class, and the power behind the curriculum. I also introduced the research that has been written around diversity at the community college, and finally the current research on first generation students in America and the UK. In this research study, my goal was to add the voices of first generation students to the literature. In essence, I wanted to let them tell their own stories about how they were experiencing their academic journey in the community college setting. This realisation led me to look at the different research methodologies available, and I came to observe that both Narrative Inquiry and Phenomenology were best suited to facilitate the collection of student voices that described their lived experiences. My primary goal was to find out more about the in-college experiences combined with the external-to-college experiences of first generation students to get a well-rounded picture of their lives as they attempt to succeed in college. I also used Autoethnography as a lens through which to reflect on my own experiences while contrasting them to the experiences of the participants in this study.

In this chapter, I discuss research approaches in education, and the traditions of Narrative Inquiry, Phenomenology, and Autoethnography, along with the history of qualitative research in education. I will also explain why the methodologies and the methods identified were used in this study. I clarify how these methods were implemented and how they support the purpose of this research and add to the body of knowledge while meeting the standards of qualitative research.

Research Approaches in Education

To a great extent the research on social phenomena in the twentieth century was dominated by Natural Science methods in the form of quantitative research. This was not “without contestation: critiques of the straightforward transfer of Natural Science methods to human issues appeared, and alternative methods came to be on offer” (Freebody, 2003, p. 19). However, in education, qualitative research had been used extensively even before the rise of quantitative research. Qualitative research has been an integral part of Human Sciences research for many years. “Each discipline approaches people’s experiences with a particular goal and a preferred set of explanatory techniques. What is clear is nonetheless is that they all have an interest in what people say and do” (Freebody, 2013, p. 56). In the case of Naturalists, they aim to observe and record reality as closely as possible in an organic and natural way. They immerse themselves and live alongside the participants in the goal of experiencing the phenomena personally. Critical Scientists may include the Naturalist spirit, but also criticize the status quo and attempt to “use the context of the research process to help develop a productive community of change” (Gitlin, & Russell, 1994, p. 200). Much like Freire and Horton (1990), these researchers aim for their research to be used to challenge the status quo. These are just a couple of examples of research approaches in education.

Educational researchers explore many facets of education including curriculum, student aptitude, and poverty. This research helps guide changes in education at the local and national level. Social justice is also an area highly researched in education. To some extent, that is my own reason for researching first generation students. I hope to bring to light the struggles

these students go through in order to receive an education, and the lack of support from not only the colleges, but from greater society.

Research Methodology

When I started work on my PhD several years ago, I was working at Oregon Health and Science University and was surrounded by researchers who used scientific method or positivistic research, and my world view on research was confined to this viewpoint. Experiment and observation were the key aims of this research, and I was very surprised to learn about other methodologies. I can almost hear the voices of the health research scientists balking at the idea of alternative types of research. I, myself, struggled to come to terms with the validity of other methodologies and was worried when starting to research using qualitative research methods that the study would not be considered valid by my peers.

While I may have struggled with this question, I was also aware that the voices of the group I wished to study were all but silent in the current research. Much data had been collected on first generation students, and study after study proved the importance of key factors in helping this population adapt to college, but I was concerned that the actual words, experiences, and thoughts of these students were not prevalent in the current literature. “The most advanced survey procedures themselves only manipulate data that had to be gained at some point by asking people” (Silverman, 2008, p. 39). In my own higher education experiences with first generation students, I felt that the quantitative approach to research did not adequately capture their experiences. “The scientific approach which positivism espouses is rightly thought to be inadequate when it comes to learning about how people live, how they

view the world, how they cope with it, how they change it, and so on” (Antonesa, et al., 2006, p. 14). With this in mind, I began the journey of looking at other methodologies that were better suited to capturing those lived experiences of the participants in this study. As I researched more qualitative studies, I also became aware that my own story and experiences could not be separated from the group I was studying. My own experiences had led me to believe that some of the findings in the study might mirror my own journey through higher education, and I was pleasantly surprised to find out I did not need to exclude this from the study.

Marshall, & Rossman (1999) argue that:

Attempting to exclude your personal goals and concerns from the research is neither possible nor necessary. What is necessary is to be aware of these goals and how they may be shaping your research, and to think about how best to achieve them and to deal with their influence. In addition, recognizing your personal ties to the study you want to conduct can provide you with a valuable source of insight, theory and data about the phenomena you are studying. (p. 27).

This concept was difficult for me to align myself with in the early parts of the study. My years at Oregon Health and Science University had trained me to believe that quantitative research was the only valid and scientifically based approach. However, as time went on and I became more proficient as a researcher, I discovered that I was writing in a self-reflective form known as Autoethnography. Ellis (2004) explains, Autoethnography is a form of self-reflection and writing that allows the researcher to explore their own experiences while connecting it to the external world.

Clandinin & Connelly (2005) explain their stance on the different schools of research: The distinction between the two research paradigms rests not on the decision to use numbers or not, since researchers from either of the paradigms might employ numbers. Instead, the assumptions underlying the research distinguish one from the other (although in terms of practice the boundary is porous, particularly in terms of specific methods). Quantitative research rests exclusively in positivistic and post-positivistic assumptions. In contrast, qualitative research forms around assumptions about interpretation and human action. Another difference is the purpose of the research. Qualitative researchers are interested not in prediction and control but in understanding. (p. 5)

Qualitative research was viewed at Oregon Health and Science University, as unscientific and lacking discipline. However, I have since discovered that this is not the case. At Oregon Health and Science University the researchers I spoke with did not actually know much about qualitative research, but still felt compelled to debunk it. The irony is that they did not resort to scientific method to prove or disprove the effectiveness of qualitative research, but took an unscientific approach in discounting it without data to prove their point. “Qualitative researchers suggest that we should not assume that techniques used in quantitative research are the only way of establishing the validity of findings from qualitative or field research” (Silverman, 2008, p. 43). Over the next few years, I pushed myself out of my comfort zone and learned the rigour, patience, self-analysis, and immersion that is crucial in the development and implementation of a qualitative research venture. During the many hours of interviewing students and hosting focus groups, I came to realise that there was so much more to the

experiences of the participants than could be captured in a quantitative study. Their lives have many intertwined and myriad components that make any kind of research limited in what it can capture, however qualitative research is best suited to capturing the essence of lived experiences and that is why the methodologies of Narrative Inquiry, Autoethnography, and Phenomenology were the best fit for this study.

Why I chose Narrative Inquiry, Autoethnography, and Phenomenology over other methods/epistemological approaches?

In my years as a student and admissions officer, I had many conversations with first generation students who were often quite willing to share their experiences of adapting to the college environment, and I became aware of how their responsibilities often conflicted with their academic world. I wanted the students own voices to be more present in the literature. My goal then became to gather the stories of these first generation college students, but in their own voices from lived experiences. This would capture the real lived experiences of a cohort of students over an extended period of time in order to articulate the real concerns of the students themselves. My own background and journey through higher education made it easier for me to discourse with these students in a trusting two-way dialogue. That I had been through college and had similar experiences to the participants often made them feel that they could trust me enough to open up and share at a level that may not have been possible in a more formal study. I realized that my own story was also tied into the initial research questions. For that reason I decided to include Autoethnography as a means of explaining my own story within the context of the study.

Narrative Inquiry could be described as the telling of a narrative through a lived experience (Connelly, & Clandinin, 1990), and Phenomenology might be described in this context as following a group of students as they experience a shared phenomenon—that of attending college as a first generation student. The common themes and narrative derived from those experiences made it clear to me that Narrative Inquiry, Autoethnography, and Phenomenology made these the right methodologies for this study.

I used the discourse model of collecting data (Antonesa, et al., 2006) because I felt it the most appropriate to allow the participants and myself as the researcher to be on a more equal level, and to take away the image of the researcher being an intimidating data gatherer.

According to Antonesa, et al., (2006),

The discourse model of collecting data assumes that the researcher and the participant both have active roles . . . most importantly, meaning and experience are considered to be formed, not merely expressed or reported, through the speaking that takes place in the interview or focus group process. (p. 78)

I felt that the student participants formed meanings around their experiences during the interview process, and both the interviewer and interviewee's learned during the process. I was certainly active in shaping the dialogue and due to the nature of my own higher education experiences chose not to distance myself from the participants.

Ethics and Practice

At some points in the interview process, several of the participants ended up sharing experiences that they might not have expected to share when they had signed up for the study. Ethically this might have had negative consequences, but I believe that the participants were in

a situation where they were able to share some of these experiences to a willing and empathetic ear for the first time. “Participating in research can be an unsettling experience for some people, particularly older people or others who may feel marginalized . . . the well-being of the participant is paramount” (Connolly, 2003, p. 23). In line with Connolly’s (2003) research the interviews took place in a comfortable environment and the atmosphere was not intimidating. Participants were in no way pushed for responses, and I as the researcher did not dwell on areas that seemed uncomfortable for the participants. The participants were reminded that they had the right to remove their consent to include their interviews in the thesis, and were also encouraged to seek support from the college in certain cases.

Each of the student participants was asked to read through the Consent form into Human Experiences which detailed the ethical guidelines I was following as a researcher. The following sections on confidentiality were a part of the consent form:

- The data will be kept secure at all times. Participant data will be kept safe on the researcher’s password secured computer. No other persons share access to this computer. Audio interviews will be deleted after they have been transcribed into a MS Word document.
- Tapes or transcripts/notes can be accessed at any time only by participants in the Pilot Study. Participants can only see their own transcripts and not the transcripts of other participants.
- The study results may be used in presentations (keeping all participants anonymous) and used in the researcher’s Ph.D. Dissertation. This work may be published in Academic Journals or other similar works.

- Withdrawal – Candidates may withdraw from the study at any time or they may withdraw their data up until the work is published.
- The focus group and interviews do not constitute any kind of counselling.

I, as a first generation student, also shared stories of my journey, and both the participants, and I, had much in common. I immersed myself in the process, as both a first generation student and a researcher. The interview process for some was cathartic, and several of the participants shared how they actually looked forward to the interviews, that they felt more inspired afterwards to continue their academic journey. I did suggest courses of action to some of the participants such as tutoring, counselling, and academic advising. This was partially because the discourse model of collecting data allowed me to become close enough to the students that it felt appropriate to be able to share resources with these students. My current role as a higher educational professional and my experience also gave me legitimate standing to offer suggested actions.

This research approach led to a greater understanding of the perceived needs of first generation college students that are/are not being addressed by higher education institutions. The ultimate goal of this research is to provide an insight into the lives of first generation students that will hopefully lead to awareness, inclusion, and improved practices on college and university campuses. By simply enlightening the college administrators of the experiences of these students, it will hopefully lead to greater awareness and eventually action. My contribution to the field is valid based on knowledge gained during my own experiences as a first generation student. These coupled with my in-depth analysis of the experiences of first

generation community college students' unearthed complex and rich data that will be a significant contribution to the field of higher education and in particular the further study of first generation students.

Narrative Inquiry, Autoethnography, and Phenomenology, a Description and History

Although Narrative Inquiry has a long intellectual history both in and out of education, it is increasingly used in studies of educational experience (Connelly, & Clandinin, 1990). One theory in educational research holds that humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives. Thus, the study of narrative is the study of the ways humans experience the world (Connelly, Clandinin, 1990). Throughout human history humans have related their experiences through story, and before written language the stories of indigenous peoples were passed down through the generations. Even with the advent of writing, humans continued to relate their life experiences in a chronological way.

In the mid-20th century, quantitative data research came to dominate the field of educational research, assessment, and testing. Clandinin and Connelly described this time as a battle between Edward L. Thorndike and John Dewey, with Dewey being the loser. Dewey's focus was on the educational experiences of the individual as they relate to society.

Clandinin, & Connelly (2000) speak about Dewey:

For Dewey, experience is both personal and social. Both the personal and the social are always present. People are individuals and need to be understood as such, but they cannot be understood only as individuals. They are always in relation, always in social context. The term 'experience' helps us to think through such matters as an individual

child's learning while also understanding that learning takes place with other children, with a teacher, in a classroom, in a community and so on. (p. 2)

Narrative is understood as a spoken or written text giving an account of an event/action or series of events/actions, chronologically connected. In this research study the social context was a primary focus. During the course of the interviews and focus groups, America was going through the biggest recession since the great depression. This profoundly affected the lives of all of the participants, and for many the recession was the main factor that initiated their enrolment at college.

In the tradition of Narrative Inquiry, I wanted to make the research as participatory as possible. This involves me as the researcher developing relationships with the participants.

Pinnegar, & Daynes (2007) expand on this:

As researchers collect stories, they negotiate relationships, smooth transitions, and provide ways to be useful to the participants. In narrative research, a key theme has been the turn toward the relationship between the researcher and the researched in which both parties will learn and change in the encounter. (p. 14)

This was true during the focus groups and interviews. Several of the participants spoke to me and asked advice on college decisions, and my perspectives on the experiences of individuals has been forever changed. I know now that a number of students are attending college, in spite of the fact that it is incredibly hard for them to do so. External factors often make it difficult for students to get through a single term, let alone complete a degree. The participants all have their own ways of coming to terms with the external obstacles.

Ellis, & Bochner, (2000) explain the difficult these students go through:

They create the effect of reality, showing characters embedded in the complexities of lived moments of struggle, resisting the intrusions of chaos, disconnection, fragmentation, marginalization, and incoherence, trying to restore the continuity and coherence of life's unity in the face of unexpected blows of fate that call one's meanings and values into question. (p. 774)

The participants in this study are complex beings who are living through a multitude of life events and changes. Attending college is just one of their conflicting priorities and certainly may not be the number one priority much of the time.

One of the primary differences between Narrative Inquiry and other kinds of research is not finding out what is happening, but focusing on the meanings that people find in what is happening. How do people experience and make sense of the phenomena in which they are involved? This question strikes me as one of the major reasons I chose to use Narrative Inquiry as a methodology.

My own life has been one filled with a diverse array of experiences and stories. I grew up in a working class family and experienced a childhood between two very different countries. I eventually moved to America to seek adventure and opportunity. I served four years in the US Coast Guard and learned different ways of experiencing the world.

The experiences I have had in higher education and the Coast Guard, Portland State University, and Maynooth University differ very much from my earlier experiences growing up in Ireland and England. The early-life experiences were more basic, yet at the same time could

be more profoundly satisfying; you saw something, touched something, or heard something and it was concrete and real. My experiences in higher education and the Coast Guard led me to question the world around me, and the experiences I was undergoing. The world is grey, and nothing is definite. Nobody says 'this is the only way to do something' or 'here is the answer'. You are more likely to hear 'it depends' or 'what is truth?' When other students or faculty are exposed to your work, they do not say 'this is wrong', instead you would be exposed to different ways of looking at the same problem, and the reality is that there are many perspectives and there are no absolutes.

Autoethnography, and the self-reflective journey I took during this research helped me to remember what it was like being a first generation student, and the difficulties in adapting to the culture of higher education in America. Hayano (1979) coined the term "autoethnography" to describe "ethno-graphic research done on one's "own people" through an insider's perspective" (p. 99). This fits perfectly with my study. I identify with first generation students, and think of myself as an insider. My journey was similar in some ways to the students in the study. These differing and conflicting views of life are shared by people like me that move from one class to another, from a physical world to an esoteric world.

According to Hoppes (2014), "Autoethnographers methods generally include discussion, reflection, note-taking, recollections, and identification of categories and themes yielding a narrative that affords both the inside view of a research participant and the outside view of a researcher" (p. 64). In this study I used the majority of the methods listed above to help me explore my own role as a researcher and a first generation student.

In regards to understanding the students, both Phenomenology and Narrative Inquiry offered me what I felt was the best chance of doing so. I also feel that due to my working class background this type of research seems more respectful to the participants. As a researcher, I feel that I am asking them about their experiences, not plying them with surveys of preselected questions and answers. These research methods start with the view that something can truly be learned from simply listening to the stories and experiences of participants, and then analysing and searching for commonalities or themes among those shared experiences. When I read the works of researchers such as Van Manen, Moustakas, Clandinin or Connelly I sense a shared respect for the research participants that seems less clear in quantitative research.

I, myself, had experienced community college as a first generation student and that experience so radically altered me that I wanted to use student voices as a way of describing the participants radically altered selves to the world. This research aims to seek out the narrative stories of other people going through the same phenomenon. "In essence, Narrative Inquiry involves the reconstruction of a person's experience in relationship both to the other and to a social milieu" (Clandinin, & Connelly, 2000, p. 5). As a researcher and as a first generation college student I interviewed the participants and reconstructed their stories into common themes which illustrate the commonalities and differences in their shared experiences.

The main problem I found in looking at Narrative Inquiry as a research methodology is that the examples I had researched displayed Narrative Inquiry as the study of a single individual's experiences. I am not disputing the fact that in certain instances this is a solid

methodology, but in the case of this study I saw that there would be problems if I were to use this as my only research methodology. If I were to record the experiences of one first generation student, it would be very enlightening and may expose one person's experiences; however, it is my opinion that this would not be adequate for my purposes. The field of higher education in the US is still very much used to quantitative studies as the primary source of evidence about student experiences. Generally speaking, the quantitative studies in higher education gather the experiences of hundreds or thousands of students and use this data as evidence to support a theory. When I thought about presenting the results of the study to a group of administrators and faculty at Central Oregon Community College, I realised that Narrative Inquiry alone may not be appropriate. There is a serious risk that the administrators would view the life experiences of one or two students as interesting, yet anecdotal. Using Phenomenology allowed me to restory a number of participant's life stories and search for themes in common. This would be more likely to be viewed as 'evidence' in regards to addressing the issues these students are facing. If a cohort of students have similar experiences, this might be viewed as more concrete evidence, and changes may be implemented based on the results of the study.

Husserl's (1938) ideas about educational experiences relate directly to adult learning theory. "I assume that amid all uncertainties there is one permanent frame of reference: namely, the organic connection between education and personal experience" (p. 25). The students in this study learned about the experiences of other first generation students through group interaction. They were able to relate and apply that learning to their own experiences.

In regards to Phenomenology, not everybody sees it as a strong methodology. Bourdieu critiqued Phenomenology in his *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977) and *The Logic of Practice* (1990). Bourdieu believes that neither subjectivism nor objectivism provides a sufficient explanation for social action.

Throop, & Murphy (2002) expand on this:

Subjectivism, according to Bourdieu, concentrates too heavily on the immediate experience of the individual and his own interpretations of the social world.

Objectivism, on the other hand, refuses to take account of individual actor's actions, and instead relegates them to the social framework within which they serve as virtual automatons, shackled to objective relations of social structure. (p. 189)

Bourdieu uses Habitus to describe a middle-ground between these two viewpoints, and his main critique of phenomenology is focused within his critique of subjectivism. Bourdieu believes that "Phenomenology is mistaken in its view of society as an emergent product of decisions, actions, and cognitions of conscious, alert individuals to whom the world is given as immediately familiar and meaningful" (Throop, Murphy, 2002, p. 189). By focusing attention on the description of lived experience in an attempt to make explicit the "primary experience of the social world", Phenomenology is limited to apprehending 'the world as self-evident', 'taken-for-granted" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 4). Bourdieu's argument is valid, but I would argue that an individual's own view of the world is 'self-evident' in their own eyes. The way a person experiences the world is also valid, and I would argue a more 'real' perspective than other options. To really understand why a person makes the decisions they do, you have to understand their perceptions of the world.

Narrative Inquiry helps us to record and re-story the lived experiences of the individual, while also describing the context of the society in which these individuals live. The stories that these people tell about their experiences are their own truths that are entwined with their place in society. These lived experiences are not captured in quantitative studies.

According to Denzin, & Lincoln (1994):

Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Qualitative research involves the studied use of and collection of a variety of empirical materials . . . that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals' lives. (p. 4)

As I noted earlier in this dissertation, there are a number of quantitative studies on first generation students. Tinto, Astin, (1975) and many others (e.g., Attinasi, 1989; Berkner, Horn, Clune, 2000; Billson, Terry, 1982; Choy, 2000; Horn, 1998; Nunez, Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Richardson, Skinner, 1992; Warburton, Bugarin, Nunez, 2001) have gathered much meaningful data on patterns and trends of student enrolment. That said, they do not capture problematic moments and meanings in individuals' lives. This study seeks to add a qualitative voice to the current literature.

Dewey (1938) informs Narrative Inquiry and Phenomenology in terms of the nature of experience. Dewey viewed experience as having both social and personal meaning, believing that people should be analysed both as individuals and as part of a group or social context.

Dewey (1938) believed that:

Experience does not occur in a vacuum. There are sources outside an individual which give rise to experience...no one would question that a child in a slum tenement has a different experience from that of a child in a cultured home. (p. 34)

In this view of experience, nothing and no one exists in isolation (Clandinin, & Connelly, 2000). We are educated in all the experiences of our lives. Each experiences helps us grow and Dewey firmly believed that the learning we experience outside the classroom has value. With respect to adult learning, Narrative Inquiry can record the lived experiences of participants in a more intricate and detailed way.

Clandinin et al., (2007) expand on this:

To employ Narrative Inquiry, researchers should: a) recognise that people, places, and events are always in transition, having a past, present, and future; b) be sensitive to the personal feelings and external surroundings of the participants; and c) understand that the place where inquiries take place affect individuals experiences. (p. 8)

In the research study at Central Oregon Community College, the region where the study takes place seems to be very tied in to the experiences of these students. The local economy was in a tailspin from 2008-2012, and the participants lived stories reflect the surroundings they live in. Their lives were intertwined with the local and regional economy.

“Whereas narrative study reports the life of a single individual, a phenomenological study describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon” (Creswell, 2007, p. 57). I decided that a study using Narrative Inquiry and

Phenomenology would be appropriate for this study. I wished to record the lived experiences of a group of individuals going through a similar life choice-that of attending college, in spite of the fact that they are taking a path that leads them in a different direction to most of the people they know, and away from their own habitus. I realized that if I were to interview a number of participants and record their stories, I might find similar themes related to the phenomenon of these students going through a life transition or rite of passage.

“Phenomenologist’s focus on describing what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon” (Creswell, 2007 p. 58). By recording the stories of the participants in a narrative fashion and adding the thematic approach of Phenomenology I was able to share the stories of shared experiences which would have been difficult with other research methods. The two types of research methodology have much in common in their focus on the lives of the participants. “Evidence from phenomenological research is derived from first-person reports of life experiences” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 84). Phenomenology is different from almost any other science in that “it attempts to gain insightful descriptions of the way we experience the world pre-reflectively, without taxonomizing, classifying, or abstracting it” (Van Manen, 1997, p. 48). Both Narrative Inquiry and Phenomenology gain evidence in the same way; that of first person reports of life experience. By mixing these methods I can ‘restory’ the lived experiences of individuals in a narrative form while searching for themes that these participants have in common. Simultaneously, through Autoethnography, I can explore how my story connects to the participants. “The inquirer collects data from persons who have experienced the phenomenon, and develops a composite description of the essence of the experience for all the individuals. This description consists of “what” they experience and “how” they experienced it”

(Moustakas, 1994, p. 13). While the participants in the study are unlike in many ways, their stories show similar themes. It was my goal to develop the truest essence of these themes and not to create my own analyses.

This description gives a good overview of what a Narrative Inquiry research study should look like and this led me to question using Narrative Inquiry alone:

Creswell, (2007) states:

The procedures for implementing the research consist of focusing on one or two individuals, gathering data through the collection of their stories and reporting individual experiences, and chronologically ordering (or using life course stages) the meaning of those experiences. (p. 54)

Phenomenology to some extent is centuries old, however, it really came into its own through the writings of the German mathematician Edmund Husserl (1859-1938). Husserl was originally a mathematician who also styled himself as a classical philosopher. He argued in favour of a philosophical approach to the human sciences, in an era where philosophy was all but ignored in favour of scientific approaches to phenomenon. He advised human scientists to “withdraw completely into themselves, while seeking to acquire knowledge of science through concentrated studies of experience and the reflective powers of the self” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 25). After Husserl, a series of researchers expanded on his views including Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Sartre (Spiegelberg, 1982). Phenomenology is used primarily within the social sciences and has become a popular qualitative research method in the field of education particularly through the works of Van Manen and Moustakas. More recently, (Moustakas,

1994) and (Stewart, & Mickunas, 1990) emphasize four philosophical perspectives in

Phenomenology:

- A return to the traditional tasks of philosophy.
- A philosophy without presuppositions.
- The intentionality of consciousness.
- The refusal of the subject-object dichotomy. (Creswell, 2007, p. 58)

Epoche, and Phenomenological Reduction

Schmitt, (1968) wrote, “In the Epoche, we set aside our prejudgements, biases, and preconceived ideas about things. We “invalidate,” “inhibit,” and “disqualify” all commitments with reference to previous knowledge and experience” (p. 59).

Moustakas (1994) adds to the description:

The world is placed out of action, while remaining bracketed. However, the world in the bracket has been cleared of ordinary thought and is present before us as a phenomenon to be gazed upon, to be known naively and freshly through a “purified” consciousness. (p. 85)

This seems the most difficult part of Phenomenology and something of a dilemma. On the one hand, a researcher is expected to be aware and knowledgeable about their own life experiences, and in this instance the researcher is expected to cleanse themselves of all preconceptions and to look upon the phenomenon as something newly experienced for the first time.

Moustakas (1994) takes a more realistic view of the process:

Ultimately both personal and social knowledge are needed to arrive at valid understandings of reality, but I must first be attuned to my own being, thinking, and choosing before I relate to others' thoughts, understandings, and choices. I must arrive at my own sense of the nature and meaning of something, make my own decision regarding its truth and value before I consider the point of view of others. (p. 19)

Myles Horton (Horton, & Freire, 1990) also speaks of bias as an absence of neutrality and a more honest position to be in during a conversation with Paulo Freire:

As soon as I started looking at that word *neutral* and what it meant, it became very obvious to me that there can be no such thing as neutrality. It has nothing to do with anything but agreeing to what is and will always be --- *Neutrality is just following the crowd*. Neutrality is just being what the system asks us to be. . . Of course, when I got more into thinking about educational ideas and about changed society, it became more and more obvious that you've got to take sides. You need to know why you take sides; you should be able to justify it. (p. 102)

We are influenced by our interactions with others in our given society. Many first generation students attend college and are profoundly changed by the experience, however, the colleges and universities are not changed in any significant way by the arrival of these students who do not fit in the traditional identity of what a US university student is. The university is an agent of a system that has a set of ideals and norms that it does not wish to see challenged. It claims to be neutral, however the norms and education it portrays are those of

the middle and upper classes, and do not represent the ideas and culture of those who do not fit in that world.

Husserl (1931) contrasted the phenomenological universal Epoche with Cartesian doubt: The phenomenological Epoche does not eliminate everything, does not deny the reality of everything, does not doubt everything-only the natural attitude, the biases of everyday knowledge as a basis for truth and reality. What is doubted are the scientific "facts," the knowing of things in advance, from an external base rather than from internal reflection and meaning . . . all sciences which related to this natural world. . . though they fill me with admiration... I disconnect them all, I make absolutely no use of their standards, I do not appropriate a single one of their propositions that enter into their systems, even though their evidential value is perfect? (p. 111)

At the time Husserl lived, this approach to the sciences must have created quite the stir. By placing lived and reflected experience as a new (old) way of approaching discovery, the likes of Husserl and Descartes were most likely considered outcasts during the age of reason.

According to Lauer (1967):

Both Husserl and Descartes recognised the crucial value of returning to the self to discover the nature and meaning of things as they appear and in their essence. Only one source of certainty exists, what I think, what I feel, in substance. (p. 155)

Husserl asserted that "Ultimately, all genuine, and, in particular, all scientific knowledge, rests on inner evidence; as far as such evidence extends, the concept of knowledge extends also" (Husserl, 1970, p. 61). Phenomenology, in its analysing of lived experience captures and

creates meaning of phenomenon as it relates to the shared experiences of a group of individuals, thus allowing us to elucidate that this may be true for many people living a shared experience.

Narrative Inquiry in Education

Narrative Inquiry pioneers Clandinin and Connelly have embraced the use of this research methodology in education. Their aim has been to apply Narrative Inquiry in order to record the lived experiences of students and teachers. One example is a recent research study where they actively used Narrative Inquiry to promote the image of teachers as curriculum makers instead of how they have been historically recognised, as curriculum planners. To Connelly and Clandinin (2011), “teachers actively make curriculum alongside the students, not merely implement curriculum as dictated by policy makers” (p. 21). This qualitative study helped to identify the perspective from the teacher’s point of view which was missing from the literature at the time. The results of the study helped reframe the discussion of the role of teachers, and also advanced the use of qualitative study in education.

Within Britain one of the first collections or articles that present the practical, political, and personal side of educational research was edited by Martin Shipman (1976) who persuaded six authors of highly respected research reports to write about the origins, organization, and implementation of their projects (Walford, 1998, p. 1). Since that time, the use of Narrative Inquiry as a research method in higher education has become widespread. This was almost certainly due to the rise of feminism in the 1960’s and 1970’s. At that time, feminists realized

that quantitative research had ignored the voices of women and that qualitative research was a way in which their voices could be heard.

Oakley (1998) states that:

The dualism of quantitative and qualitative methods became inextricably bound up with the central contentions of women's studies. That traditional social science ignores or marginalises women, that all the major social theories explain the public world of labour, but not the private world of work and the home and that the areas of social life which have particularly concerned women – caring, bodies, emotions – have hardly been part of the sociological landscape at all. (p. 709)

Oakley's point about research not being made in the home sphere also relates directly to my own research. By taking much of the focus away from the college and university point of view, and learning what was going on in the participant's lives it opened up a world of which I was partially unaware. Specifically speaking, I acknowledge the trials and tribulations facing women students as they face not only attending college, but being the primary responsible party in childcare, eldercare, providing, and nurturing. Much of the first generation student research as I have already stated is from a quantitative viewpoint and does not capture what this qualitative study revealed.

Ontological Positioning

Walford's *Doing Research in Education* (1998) points out one of the most important criticisms that has developed in regards to language and representation within educational writing (Walford, 1998).

For example, Atkinson (1996) discusses the genre of the autobiographical or 'confessional' account, in which:

Ethnographers, in particular, 'tell it like it was' and reveal the personal and practical issues they experience in the course of their own fieldwork. Such stories often recount hardships, deprivations, danger and fortitude but, Atkinson argues, such accounts are no less contrived or more authentic than any other genre of sociological reportage. (p. 56)

This could certainly be an issue in Narrative Inquiry, if the researcher focuses more on their writing craft and less on the words of the participants. This dissertation is not an exercise in fiction writing, but an attempt to gather and honestly portray the experiences of participants in their own words. As a researcher, I have striven to keep the authenticity of the participant's own words, while describing the themes in my own words and experiences. While my story is referenced in relation to the first generation students in the study, I did not, as Walford put it, try to contrive or be in any way unauthentic when restorying the experiences of the participants or in telling my own story.

Prefacing the Study

Ideally Narrative Inquiry should be a methodology where the researcher can immerse themselves while completing the study. The researcher should be not only aware, but familiar with the social context of the world in which the participants exist. In this case, I chose Central Oregon Community College (COCC) since I live in Oregon and am very familiar with the local

economy, and have visited COCC on many previous occasions. Narrative Inquiry is also an extremely difficult to employ as a research tool.

Creswell, (2007) gives advice to new researchers:

The researcher needs to collect extensive information about the participant/s, and needs to have a clear understanding of the context of the individual's life. It takes a keen eye to identify in the source material gathered the particular stories that capture the individual's experiences. (p. 57)

After I had completed the Pilot Study, I was tempted to phone-interview the participants. After giving this more thought, I felt that this would not be a true narrative or phenomenological study if I did not meet with the students in the context of their own habitus or everyday lives. This required me to spend many hours driving across the state, and spending days interviewing students at four different community colleges. A number of the trips required to Central Oregon Community College required me to book a local hotel because of their distance from Portland, and the treacherous drive through the mountain passes during winter.

Central Oregon Community College is set in the beautiful high desert in Central Oregon. The town of Bend is surrounded by snow-capped mountains, and forests of Ponderosa Pines. The weather is dry for over 300 days a year, and the area is known for cattle, and horse ranches along with a profusion of outdoor recreation opportunities.

The Central Oregon Community College campus is spacious and set on the side of a large hill. The panoramic views are stunning, and there is lots of growth on campus evidenced by building construction. Walking between the buildings, one is aware of just how hilly the area is,

by the shortage of one's breath. Most of the buildings on campus appear to be new, and are airy and light, with views of trees, and mountains.

The images below illustrate the beauty of the area, and the Central Oregon Community College campus that is the heart of this study.



Figure 6. (2012) Photograph of Central Oregon Community College Campus. Bend, State of Oregon

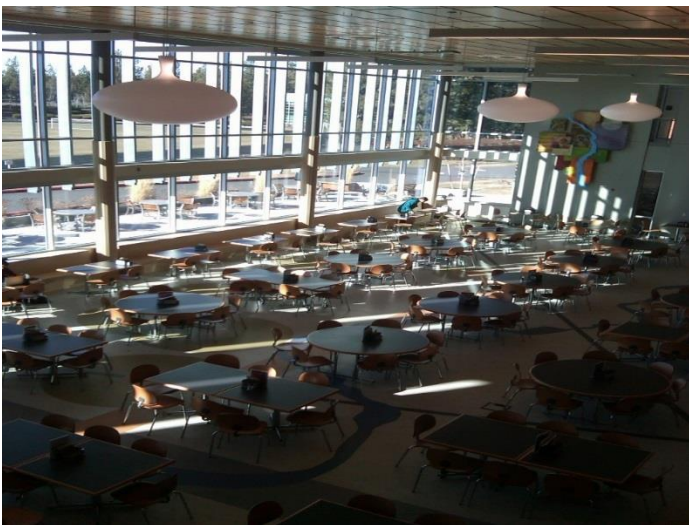


Figure 7. (2012) Photograph of Central Oregon Community College Student Cafeteria. Bend, State of Oregon



Figure 8. (2012) Photograph of Central Oregon Community College Campus Environment. Bend, State of Oregon

This study took place at the Central Oregon Community College campuses in Bend, and Redmond during the biggest economic downturn in decades, referred to as the Great Recession. The economy, jobs, and college as a tool to acquire financial stability are a consistent theme in the lives of the participants. If I were not very familiar with the towns of Bend and Redmond, I might miss some of the important context that comes with living in a close proximity to the participants of this study. For example, at first glance, Bend looks like an

affluent town, high end shops and restaurants are visible throughout the downtown. A local mall features all the top stores, and the area is free of graffiti and litter. What is not obvious is that many of the restaurants and shops are supported by visitors who come to Bend to ski or outdoor pursuits. Bend is also a popular place for retirement. While Bend does look like it is thriving, most of the jobs are minimum wage in the customer service sector. The infrastructure of the Bend/Redmond area is not large enough to support a large workforce. While many of the visitors and resident retirees are affluent, many of the local population struggle to earn a basic living.

My bias in doing this research is perhaps more partisan in nature. From my own experiences as a first generation student and hearing the stories of many first generation students over my higher education career has turned me into more of a supporter of a cause, rather than a researcher that strains to sit on the fence and deny any connection to the participants and subject. My aim is to try to expose some of these key areas that our colleges are not effectively helping first generation students and to offer suggestions based on the findings. As a reflexive researcher, I did expect to encounter more of a shared class identity amongst the participants in this study. All of the participants in the study came from backgrounds that would normally be considered working class, however they did not identify as such. I thus changed my approach and questions and took a different direction to learn more about these students. This was a bias of mine, however, as a reflective researcher I reflected on my own beliefs and realised that the initial pilot study data was different to my own expectations and I changed accordingly.

Research Methods, Parameters, and Implementation

On April 19th and 20th 2011, Pilot Study Focus Groups were conducted with first generation students at the COCC Bend and Redmond campuses. At the Redmond Campus there were three participants, and at the Bend Campus there were eighteen participants. Criteria for the focus group required participants to be first in their family to attend college and for students to have attended college for less than two academic quarters. Several of the attendees did list that they had a sibling in college and one reported that she was attending college with her mother.

In an effort to communicate to students about the Pilot Study groups at the Central Oregon Community College Bend and Redmond campuses, an e-mail was sent out from the Dean of Student and Enrolment Services. This approach garnered about 7 participants between the two campuses. I was a little concerned about the low numbers, particularly since I wanted a diverse cohort of students. It was my aim to “adequately capture the heterogeneity of the population in order to ensure that the conclusions adequately represent the entire range of variation, rather than only the typical members or some ‘average’ subset of the range” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 89). At this point I took further actions to assure a more diverse cohort and greater number of participants. I arranged to staff an informational table at the dining area on the Central Oregon Community College Bend Campus during lunch time. Redmond does not have a cafeteria, and so I decided not to recreate the same approach there. The table I set up had informational fliers, a signup sheet, and chocolates.

I posted fliers on both campuses including the Multicultural Centre, Veterans Centre, and the offices of the Associated Students of Central Oregon Community College. The flier encouraged students to attend the Pilot Study, and I offered a free pizza/soda lunch and a \$10 Starbucks gift card to all participants. I also stopped by and visited the student newspaper to ask them to put an informational piece in the next edition. All of the costs were personally paid for by myself. I had not gained enough student participation in my initial approach and realised that a boots-on-the-ground approach might be more likely to work. This did help in garnering participants. The students who attended were what are referred to as “commuter students”. The time they spend on campus is limited. There are no dorms, and students often attend class, visit the library or tutoring centre and leave. A free lunch and a coffee gift card can be hard to refuse, particularly when students are pinching pennies. From experience working with students, I knew that this approach was likely to succeed. It worked out really well, and after the pilot study concluded, student participants took food to go for themselves and family members. I would also like to say that I did not feel I was exploiting the students in any way. I shared their journey and had nothing but respect for them. Over time, I grew to know a number of them personally during the study and I still feel the need to know how they are getting along even as time has passed. To some extent the research methods were ethnographic in nature. I immersed myself in the subject and shared my own experiences as a first generation student. I gained their trust and was to some extent one of them. I was able to study this population as an insider, and this made the entire research experience so much richer.

The participant dialogue in the pilot study groups was not influenced in any way by the free lunch and coffee. I would argue the opposite was true. The students seemed quite relaxed as they ate dinner and spoke of their experiences. The act of eating made the gathering far less formal and conversations flowed in a more natural way than would've been the case had we all sat in a classroom type setting without the dinner and drinks. The approach worked and the numbers of participants increased significantly. Eventually there were 18 participants at the Bend Campus and 3 participants at the Redmond Campus.

The Redmond campus research was not as fruitful as I had hoped. The turnout for the pilot study group was small (only 3 participants). The pilot study itself was successful and the conversations of the students certainly added to the direction; however none of the three participants chose to continue with the interview portion of the research study. Because of this I feel that the findings from the study of the first generation students at Central Oregon Community College might be applied at Redmond, but there may be some differences in the population that were identified at the Redmond Campus. There were only three participants, but their external lives and responsibilities appeared to have a far greater impact on their ability to attend college. This included homelessness (one student was sleeping in a car), mental health disabilities, and unemployment.

A similar method of gaining the interest of participants was used at Tillamook Bay Community College, Chemeketa Community College, and Mount Hood Community College. I developed student affairs contacts at each of the institutions and sent fliers with details about the event including the free pizza, soda, and Starbucks gift cards. At Tillamook Bay Community

College the students were notified via internal e-mail. Chemeketa and Mount Hood Community Colleges were approached somewhat differently. Both had a TRiO Centre on campus.

According to the US Department of Education Federal TRiO Programs website (2013): The Federal TRiO Programs (TRiO) are Federal outreach and student services programs designed to identify and provide services for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds. TRiO includes programs targeted to serve and assist low-income individuals, first generation college students, and individuals with disabilities to progress through the academic pipeline from middle school to post-baccalaureate programs. TRiO also includes a training program for directors and staff of TRiO projects. (p. 1)

The TRiO program directors helped facilitate the focus groups and spoke individually with the first generation students in their programs to encourage them to attend.

The focus group attendees filled out a brief survey/questionnaire before opening up some of the survey questions for discussion. Both of the focus groups were recorded and the data was transcribed. Initial themes from the focus groups and questionnaire included; male and female roles and identity issues, college as a way out of town, family and relationship problems, work competing with college, layoffs and retraining for employment purposes, financial difficulties, marital problems and college as a means towards independence.

In the course of the pilot study and focus groups 38 students completed the survey. The main focus of the study is qualitative; however I decided to use the survey to facilitate the conversations and also to gather quantitative data to help complement the study. The survey

also helped me as a researcher to get a higher level picture and identify some of the issues that arose for first generation students in the colleges selected. After the first Pilot Study and interviews, I adapted the survey based on the data I had collected. There were findings I did not expect and based on the new knowledge, adapting the survey questions helped to better capture the experiences of the students. “Qualitative research has an openness and flexibility that allows you to modify your design and focus during the research to understand new discoveries and relationships” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 22). By being reflexive, I was able to learn that if I had not changed and adapted the questions in the survey, I would have certainly missed some key themes or directions that eventually became a core part of the study. I felt that this openness helped me grow as a researcher. I continued to allow myself to learn as the study continued.

After analysing many different types of research methodologies I chose to embark on a qualitative study using a phenomenological and Narrative Inquiry approach to the study. A group of students was selected from those that participated in the pilot study. These include students from the Central Oregon Community College Bend and Redmond Campuses. Semi-structured interviews with selected students started in October 2011.

Of the original 18 pilot study participants I chose eight students to continue interviewing in the actual research study. These students were picked based on the following criteria:

Age-a mix of traditional age college students and mature students

Gender-an even mix of male and female participants

Diversity-I had hoped for greater diversity, however the pilot group did not provide me a diverse group of students in regards to ethnicity. Only two of the attendees were not Caucasian and one of those was chosen/volunteered to participate in the long-term study.

Authentically first generation-several of the pilot study participants answered questions in an initial survey which indicates they may not have been the first in their families to attend college. Ethically I felt these participants should be removed from the long term study to protect the integrity of the research results.

Reliability-Several of the original participants were not overly responsive to e-mails and phone calls. I did not wish to include participants that would not be reliable in meeting for interviews. This would have left me in a predicament in regards to searching for other participants mid-study.

Ability and willingness to share experiences-Of the original participants I also looked to include those who seemed more willing to share their experiences in an honest and forthright way.

During the 12 months (4 academic quarters) the selected eight students were interviewed once per quarter (some students did not attend every quarter) as they attended Central Oregon Community College. The interviews concluded in June 2013. All participants were required to sign a human subject's review form (see Appendix B).

Permission was granted to conduct the studies at Central Oregon Community College by the Central Oregon Community College Executive Committee. I worked closely with Alicia Moore, Dean of Student and Enrolment Services who helped expedite the process.

The data collection in the field was conducted in the form of explorative semi-structured interviews (Cohen, Crabtree, 2006) with first generation and traditional college students about their experiences while attending college/university, and how they perceive themselves and their backgrounds. Semi-structured interviews are flexible and fluid. The structure is usually formed around an interview guide, with themes and questions to be brought up in a more naturally occurring way (Lewis-Beck et al., 2004). I was honest and open with the students about the use of the data collected in the interviews. My goal was to use the data to help higher education practitioners better understand first generation students and their needs. This was not to be a smash-and-grab research project where the researcher gets what they need from the participants without much thought or heed to the lives of the participants and the courage it takes to share their stories with the world.

The dialogue helped guide my hypotheses about the context which first generation college students make the decisions to renegotiate their 'home world' and adapt to the university. This is an example of an interview question, "Now you are attending college are there any changes in your interactions with your family or friends?" I focused on the stories and experiences of the participants, but also was aware of the social context and outside economic forces that impact the daily lives of the students.

Semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to build a rapport with the subject students. Seidman, (1998) made the important point that it is possible to have too much rapport, as well as too little. I would add that the rapport I had in this study was the “right” amount. The participants grew to trust me and openly shared their experiences in a frank and honest manner. When I set up the study, I quickly realized that structured interviews would create a formal and artificial aspect to the communication with the students that could have the effect of making them less open in their responses. Semi-structured interviews allowed me to prepare questions, but also to delve more into areas that would come up through the natural style of conversation allowed by this method. The forms the students filled out in the focus groups helped me to naturally start the conversation where the focus groups left off. Each interview was recorded and common themes/responses were explored in order to synthesize the student experiences into workable data that illustrates the shared experiences of the phenomenon of being first generation students at a community college.

Data Analysis

Data collection was something I put a lot of thought into up front. I collected multiple forms of data and spent time in the field observing long before the interviews took place. Initially, I drove out to Central Oregon Community College to meet with the Dean of Student and Enrolment Services, but I also spent some time walking around campus, observing students in their context, and taking pictures of buildings, and the research setting. I chose not to take pictures of students, as written permission would have been required and it would have also made me stand out on campus. I wished to be able to observe and reflect without interaction

during the early part of the study. I collected and read student newspapers, read fliers on the bulletin boards, and took copious notes of observations. I also spent time in Bend, Redmond, Tillamook, Salem, and Gresham (Portland) wandering the campuses, reading newspapers, drinking coffee, and stayed overnight on a couple of occasions to get a better feel for the environment the students were living in. I personally paid the costs of hotels, meals and travel.

Reasons for using Narrative Inquiry, Auto-Ethnography, and Phenomenology in this study:

- Narrative Inquiry is well suited to studying the chronological life story of an individual in a natural story form.
- Both Narrative Inquiry and Phenomenology are both appropriate for unfolding and describing the lived experience-the story of the participants.
- Phenomenology is useful for developing themes and clusters of meanings of a shared phenomenon experienced by a group of participants.
- Autoethnography is a way of exploring one's own experiences in relation to the study.

With reflection to my own experiences I used the Phenomenological and Narrative Inquiry approaches to develop theme clusters from the interview data. The frequency of themes in essence provided the results for the research project. To support the theme clusters the narrative lived experiences of the students were gathered and explained from the point of view of the participants. Theme clusters were developed with titles such as "Financial Issues" or "Family/Peer-Anti College" to describe the repetition of particular responses.

As I related earlier, I chose the discourse model of collecting data primarily because it allowed me to have natural (semi-structured) interviews or conversations with the participants. In time, I developed relationships with the students and they were eager to share their experiences whether they were good or bad. I was able to commiserate with them or celebrate their successes and this seemed natural to me as a person and a researcher. The students shared with me their lived stories and experiences as they continued in college. I shared with the participants some of the similar experiences I had, and this helped the bonding and building of trust between the participants and myself. This was particularly helpful with the adult students in the study. They, like myself, had come to college to attempt to gain control of their lives, and set a direction to improved circumstances. According to Knowles, (1980), many adults when they return to learning are working through educational trauma from earlier in their lives. This needs to be overcome quickly in order for these students to succeed in college.

I came to the interviews as open-minded as I could be, while acknowledging my own thoughts and experiences of being a first generation student. I prepared some discussion questions based around the methodologies of the theorists such as Bourdieu and Freire, yet I also strove to let the conversations take a natural direction. I have found that this model of collecting data to be very appropriate, in that it has shown several areas (or themes) that are important in the lives of these students, that I as a researcher may not have paid attention to if I had went in with a structured interview data collection technique or with the use of quantitative surveys. According to West, (1995) many of the important reasons students turn to education are missed by occupational choice type surveys. This is a key reason I chose to use Phenomenology and Narrative Inquiry to create a mixed methods study, in order to capture the

voices and lived experiences of the participants and not focus on a prescribed list of questions in the form of a survey and use this as the only source of data. Autoethnography allowed me to pull in my own experiences and from those I was able to take on this research as an insider.

The Next Step: Focus Groups at other Community Colleges.

By the end of fall term 2012, interviews at Central Oregon Community College had reached a point where, in consultation with my supervisor Brid Connolly, I felt I had saturated the data. The twelve months of interviews and the initial pilot study had come to an end. I had been transcribing the interviews and starting on data analysis. Some obvious themes were visible in the experiences of the students at Central Oregon Community College. Based on the early findings and a review of my work so far at Central Oregon Community College, I expanded the scope of the research and conducted focus groups at other community colleges in order to see if there were shared experiences and the themes held true across the institutions. I really wanted to get an idea of what might be a local phenomenon at Central Oregon Community College and what was a common shared experience for first generation students at community colleges in the region and perhaps the nation.

I then conducted focus groups at Chemeketa Community College, Tillamook Bay Community College, and Mount Hood Community College. Access to these institutions was granted due to relationships I had with colleagues in Student Affairs at the four community colleges. I chose the community colleges I did for the following reasons:

Chemeketa Community College: Chemeketa is a very large urban community college situated in one of the biggest cities in Oregon, and also the state capital. The campus is very diverse

with a large Hispanic population. I have a working relationship with a Student Affairs professional at Chemeketa, and this helped open the doors of communication to set up a focus group.

Mount Hood Community College: Mount Hood is a mid-to-large sized community college in the suburbs of Portland, Oregon. I wanted to have a suburban community college as part of the study. The community college is well known regionally, and I knew the Director of the TRiO Center. This helped facilitate the setting up of the focus group.

Tillamook Bay Community College: I chose Tillamook Bay because it is a very rural community college serving a geographically dispersed population. I wanted a small community college and Tillamook's population is under 500 students. I also have a working relationship with several staff members at Tillamook Bay Community College and was granted permission to host a focus group.

The community colleges for the focus groups were set in very different locations to Bend. A city community college of substantial size, a suburban mid-sized college, and a rural community college on the coast all added a different context to the study and allowed me the chance to see whether the themes discovered at Central Oregon Community College were unique or whether they were similar to the other colleges in the region.

About the Community Colleges in this Study

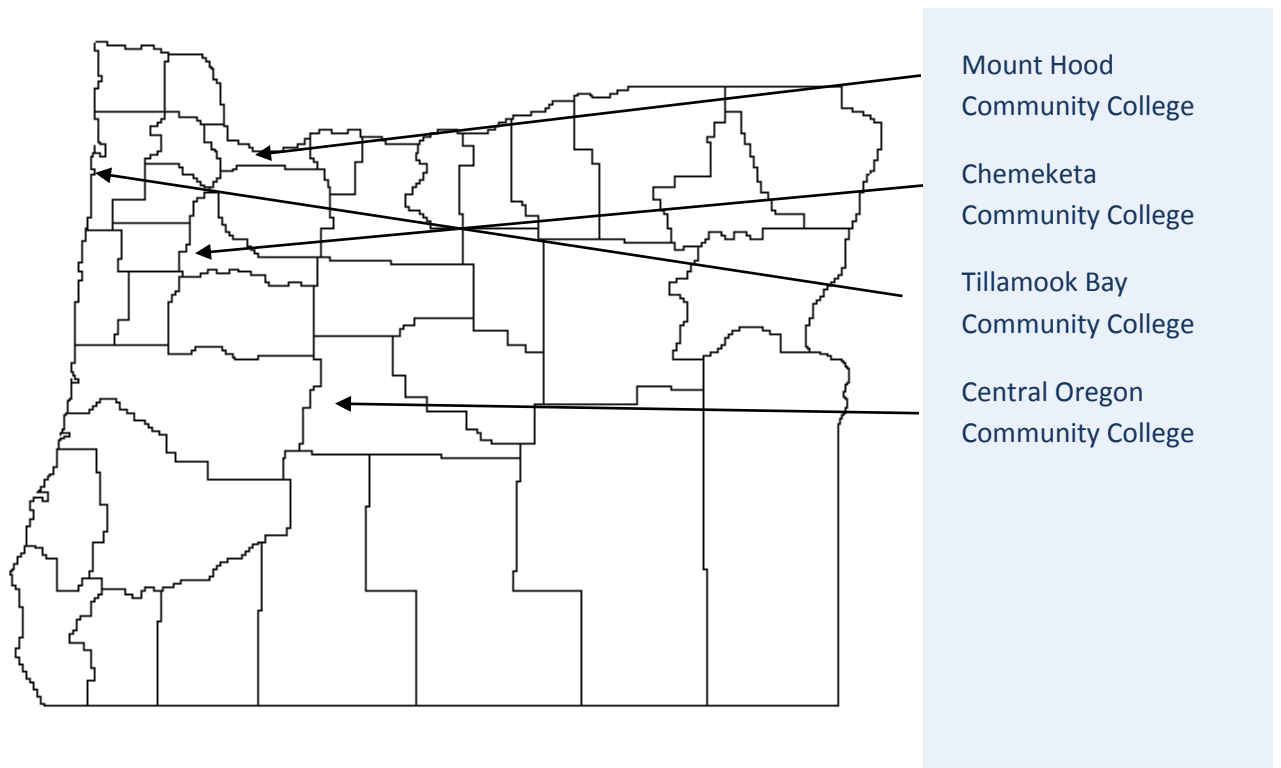


Figure 9: Community College Districts of Oregon

These community colleges were chosen for specific reasons. Central Oregon Community College is situated in a mid-size city in a mostly rural district. Chemeketa Community College is located in an urban mid-sized city and is a large community college with a diverse population. Tillamook Bay Community College is set in a rural working class coastal community and is a very small institution. Mount Hood Community College is situated in the largest population centre in the state, Portland Oregon. This is also a very large urban college with a diverse population. The community colleges described below are a part of this research study. I visited each of the community colleges and observed the population, demographics, setting and also took pictures of those I was unable to find any online. I corresponded with

TRiO Directors, Deans, and Enrolment Services Directors to arrange visits to the campuses. I asked those contacts to e-mail prospective first generation students on campus with criteria I had set out beforehand.

Chemeketa Community College

Chemeketa Community College is located in Salem, Oregon. Salem is the state capitol, however that does not mean it is the largest city in the state. Salem falls 3rd in population size with 142,940 next to the largest city Portland with a population of 545,140. Salem is a sprawling city, without the downtown skyscrapers that are evident in some small cities. Salem is surrounded by farm country, suburbs, apartment complexes, shopping malls, and strip malls.

Table 7

City of Salem, Oregon Population by Ethnicity

Ethnicity		
Caucasian	79.0%	2010
Hispanic or Latino	20.3%	2010
Asian	2.7%	2010
Black	1.5%	2010
American Indian/Alaska Native	1.5%	2010
Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0.9%	2010

Note. Adapted from *City of Salem Demographics*, (2014)

Based on the table above the city of Salem is 75% Caucasian, with a large Hispanic population. On campus this appears to be less the case.



Figure 10. (2013) Photograph of Chemeketa Community College. Salem, State of Oregon

As you can see in Figure 10, Chemeketa Community college is fairly expansive, a series of very large two-to-three storey red-brick buildings that have the appearance of being built between the 1970's and the 1990's. The community college is situated on a large swathe of land that is surrounded by suburban neighbourhoods and apartment complexes. The campus is also located close to the strip malls and Lancaster Mall. Only a couple of miles away is Chemawa Indian School. This school has been in operation since 1880. Originally the school was created to teach natives Christianity and western values. Native children were forcibly removed from the reservations and put into Chemawa Boarding School to assimilate. Chemawa currently serves Native American students in 9th through 12th grades. The school's focus is now on both academics and a reverence for tribal values and culture. The close

proximity of Chemawa gives students the opportunity of furthering their education at Chemeketa Community College. Chemawa also serves as a visual reminder of the continued Native American presence in the area.

At community colleges and four year colleges the focus tends to be one the largest populations of diverse students such as Hispanic or African American students. Native Americans are such a small population that they are often overlooked. The main administration hub on Chemeketa CC's campus is the Student Services building. When visiting campus, it is obvious that this is where the biggest crowds of students congregate. Offices for Enrolment, Disabilities Support Services, Financial Aid, and many other services can be found here. The building is a hive of activity and even has a food court in the central lobby. Diversity is the norm at Chemeketa. Hispanic students, in particular, are a visible part of Chemeketa's campus population with 20.3% of the population identifying as Hispanic (equal to that of the Hispanic population of Salem). Also visible, are students with disabilities, and students of all age groups. The building feels like a shopping mall, a self-contained small-town where students shop from one office to the next, picking and choosing the services they need.

Above the ground floor is a secondary floor with a walkway that goes around the outside of the building, and railings where you can look down at the main floor below. The upper floor is where support services are housed including marketing, College Assistance Migrant Programs, Veterans Services, and of course the TRiO Office.

According to the US Department of Education Federal TRiO Programs website (2013): TRiO Programs are Federal outreach and student services programs designed to identify and provide services for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds. TRiO includes programs targeted to serve and assist low-income individuals, first generation college students, and individuals with disabilities to progress through the academic pipeline from middle school to college. (p. 1)

I had to ask for directions to find the office. I bumped into somebody from the marketing office who walked me to the TRiO Office, as he said, "I expect you'd get lost if I sent you with directions." TRiO signage was poor, and I came away with the feeling that only those who knew where they were going had any chance of finding the place.

The TRiO Office felt very different from the rest of the building as soon as I walked in the door. My first impression of Chemeketa was that of a diverse college population. In the TRiO Office, that impression was amplified. Study tables took up most of the main lobby area and students were seated at the tables, books, and laptops spread out. Easy and respectful conversation snippets could be heard between students seated at the tables. About half of the students were Hispanic, African American, or Native American, and the rest Caucasian or mixed race students. The student on the front desk appeared to be Native American, in his early 20's. The age range was also very diverse. Students ranged in age from teenagers to perhaps sixty years old. Students asked questions of their peers at nearby tables, and an air of shared mutual respect and experiences filled the room.

At the back of the room were the staff offices. I found the TRiO representative that had organised my visit and he seemed very proud of the group of students. He seemed quite proud of the TRiO students. We had originally communicated via e-mail, and he had not given me an accurate headcount of the number of students that might participate in the research focus group. The RSVP protocol I had developed did not appear to have been used at Chemeketa. I would soon find out why. We chatted for a while until the pizza and drinks for the participants arrived. He then went out to the study area and asked the students seated if they wanted free lunch and to participate in the study. A number rose immediately and went into the conference room where I had set up, and he coaxed some of the others by name. They were good natured about it, although one, a lady in her 50s, took the opportunity to escape out the door, mumbling something about not getting involved. The group of participants mirrored the population of the TRiO Office with half of them being Hispanic, and the rest Caucasian. I found the focus group worked well. All of the attendees were legitimately first generation students; however I felt that I had little control of who attended the focus group. This was a learning experience for me. I asked the other focus group attendees to RSVP to me in person, so I could follow up with them and have more of an idea about what to expect at each campus.

Tillamook Bay Community College

Tillamook, Oregon is situated about 80 miles West of Portland. The drive can be treacherous in the winter months as the road winds through the Coastal Range, a mid-sized mountain range that separates the Willamette Valley from the Pacific Coast. The road winds through the forest alongside the Wilson River. Ice, freezing fog and snow are common in

winter. Animals such as elk, coyotes, raccoons and deer are a common site on the roads and can make driving even more hazardous.

Tillamook County is really three distinct places within one county. The town of Tillamook is situated in the centre of the county and is the provincial hub of the area. The major employers and businesses are situated in this town. The population of Tillamook is also greater than any of the other towns and villages in the area. The north and south of Tillamook County tend to vie against each other and the town of Tillamook for allocation of scarce resources. For example both north and south county would like to see a greater number of classes offered by the community college along with more of a presence (small campuses offering classes for the populous). The efforts of the community college to meet those needs are mixed, and limited resources make this difficult to envision.

The community college itself is in a building only five years old. The county passed a bond measure (a tax ballot initiative) to build a new college since the old college was in a donated building that was entirely inadequate. In Oregon public schools, libraries and community colleges can bring forth a tax increase proposal to pay for expansion and place it on the ballot as an initiative. Voters in the county choose whether to increase their own taxes to improve local facilities. The building in Tillamook that housed the community college was previously a funeral home with stained glass, cadaver tables and a viewing room. Classrooms, science labs and most of the facilities were inadequate for college coursework.

Tillamook Bay CC has a full time enrolment of about 350 students. Students at Tillamook Bay are either from around the area, or have transplanted here (often from the

Portland metropolitan area). There are not many full-time employers in the area. Tillamook Cheese Factory, The Tillamook County Smoker, Safeway, and Fred Meyer are the largest employers. Most other employers in the region are small businesses or family run farms. Downtown Tillamook shows obvious signs of neglect and has the feel of a place long past its heyday. Old buildings display faded signs, and the walls are held together by crumbling plaster. Outside of the town is a long strip mall leading to the cheese factory. The area is stunningly beautiful with mountain ranges, forests, farmland, rivers, bays and the Pacific Ocean on all sides. The population of the area is a mix of families that have been here for generations, going back as far as the pioneer era, and modern day transplants who seek escape from city life and their past experiences.

Tillamook Bay Community College is situated next to the county fairgrounds. Walking inside the community college lobby is a friendly experience. The staff and faculty have mostly worked there for many years and the size of the college means that the students, staff, and faculty all know each other personally. It has a different feel to most colleges and universities. Students may not have access to the resources that larger colleges offer, but they do receive personal advice and support at a level unknown at most other institutions. Practically all of the students that attend Tillamook Bay are destined to leave the area. There are very few employment opportunities in the area for these students, and to continue their education, they will have to transfer to a four-year university in the Willamette Valley where large metropolitan areas such as Portland, Salem, and Eugene are located. The county of Tillamook funds the Community College to teach and improve the lives of the students and in-turn help improve the

community. In turn, the college graduates (Tillamook’s best resource) leave the county for employment and further opportunities and are unlikely to return.

The Tillamook Bay focus group took place in a conference room behind the administrative office spaces. The staff arranged for me to have a private conference room for the purposes of the focus group. This conference room is usually reserved for executive/faculty/staff meetings. The students arrived in waves. There were two students at the start of the focus group, and the rest drifted in as the focus group was already in process. This was not ideal but also not entirely unexpected. In Tillamook, things move a little slower. Arriving on time is not seen as overly important. In my own experience, small towns like Tillamook have a different definition of time, and those attracted to live in these communities tend to adapt or leave.



Figure 11. Tillamook Bay Community College with the Coastal Range Mountains in the background



Figure 12. The Town of Tillamook



Figure 13. The single building Tillamook Bay Community College campus

Tillamook's population is 4,350 and the population of Tillamook County is over 25,000. Tillamook is less diverse than the other locations in the study. The numbers recorded in the census table below do not seem entirely accurate. Some students may have reported more than one race.

Table 8.

Tillamook County, OR Population by Ethnicity

Caucasian	88.6%
African American (Black)	2%
American Indian	1.8%
Asian Pacific Islander	3.9%
Hispanic	12%

Note. Adapted from *US Census Bureau State and County Quickfacts*, (2013).

Mount Hood Community College

Mount Hood Community College is located in Gresham, Oregon. Gresham is part of the Portland Metropolitan area, and if one were to drive to Gresham, there would be no green spaces or visible division at all between Portland and Gresham. At one time, the town may have been separated by fields or forested area, but now miles of Portland and Gresham suburbs connect the two places.

The campus itself is set up in a U-Shape and the buildings are mostly interconnected. The buildings for administration and classrooms are mostly concrete and have a stark grey feel to them. An open outdoor corridor runs between the buildings and seems to shut out the sunlight. It feels cold and breezy at almost any time of year. Mount Hood Community College

opened in 1966 and has approximately 15,600 students. The campus is quite diverse owing to its proximity to Portland.

Table 9

Mount Hood Community College, Portland OR Population by Ethnicity

Caucasian	57%
N/A	11%
Hispanic	12%
Asian Pacific Islander	7%
African American (Black)	5%
Multi-Racial	6%
American Indian	1%

Note. Adapted from *Mount Hood Community College Quickfacts*, (2013)



Figure 14. Photograph of Mount Hood Community College Campus, Portland, State of Oregon

Mount Hood Community College, like Chemeketa has a federally funded TRiO program. Some community colleges give a name to their TRiO Program. At Mount Hood, it is known as The College First TRiO Program. In 2012, I met with the Director of the Mount Hood Community College TRiO program. She spoke about the experiences of the first generation students, but primarily we talked about the plight of Dreamer students. The Dream Act (Dream is an acronym for Development, Relief and Education of Alien Minors) is a bill that was first proposed in the Senate in 2001 and is still in process. The bill would grant temporary legal residency for undocumented students who have attended a US High School, completed two years of a four year degree or served in the military.

While the Federal Government has still not passed the Dream Act, 11 States have passed their own versions. Washington State passed their bill in 2003 and Oregon passed their Dreamer Bill in April 2013. The TRiO Director mentioned that there were many undocumented students at MHCC and that they were really struggling just to pay for tuition, attend classes, and study. The College itself did not go out of its way to help these students, and so the TRiO Director, with a network of educators and staff organised a set of safe places and advocates to help these students navigate the system. They help the students look for scholarships and tuition support and give them encouragement on their journey. One focus of the College First TRiO program is working with students from the middle schools in the area to educate the children on the possibilities of college and helping individuals from underserved populations to succeed through high school and apply for college.

Overall, my experiences in visiting the community colleges were very successful. I became aware at the lack of research going on, and the genuine interest of the staff and faculty at those institutions in my focus on first generation students. I came to realize through conversations with the staff and faculty, in particular that research in general was something out of the ordinary at their institutions. They all had strategic plans and had done some demographic and retention research on their students, but nothing that appeared focused. They all asked me to come back and present the findings of this study, as they were very interested in the experience of first generation college students at their institutions, and how they differed from other community colleges in that respect.

The experiences I had in interviewing the students at all of the community colleges proved to be even more eye-opening than I had expected it to be. My original reasons for interviewing the students in the community college had been in the hopes that I would uncover an essence of what I felt was missing in the current literature and research. The open-dialogue with these students exposed me to more than I had envisioned from the outset of this project. It provided me with unique insights into the daily experiences and perceptions of these students. I was exposed to their daily lives and all the small victories, problems, and emotional journeys as they happened in the environment where they lived. I feel privileged that I am able to share their words with the public.

I soon realized that my research was very important, and it truly was an area where little had been done before. Researching the experiences of community college first generation students is an extremely important endeavour and I feel pride that I am a pioneer in the field.

The staff and faculty at these institutions were trying to help these students within the confines of their own knowledge and training. The research I conducted, along with the literature review I developed, will hopefully give them further insight to first generation students and their needs, and in turn help inform their practice.

The questions asked of the students focused on the themes that were developed from the data collected in the interviews and original focus group. The focus group at Chemeketa Community College took place in January 2013. Participants were selected in a different way to Central Oregon Community College. Chemeketa CC has a federally funded TRiO program, and I contacted the TRiO Director to help me pick a group of first generation students with the same criteria. TRiO programs serve several populations; first generation college students, students with disabilities, and students from lower socioeconomic means. TRiO grants can only serve a limited number of students on a college campus, the vast majority are unable to avail of TRiO's services. The Director of TRiO's programs reached out to the first generation students. Pizza and drinks were provided to the focus group students. The group meeting was during lunch.

I was immediately aware of the diversity of the group. Six participants in total showed up to the meeting. Female and male students were equally represented. Two of the participants were Hispanic, and there were a mixture of traditional and mature students. The focus group consisted of a survey which asked questions based on the findings in the COCC interviews. This was followed by discussions about the answers the students had provided. Conversations were recorded with a Sony H2 recorder and transcribed later. The focus group data correlated for the most part with COCC. The experiences of first generation students were

similar, with one key difference. Transportation was not as important to this group due to the urban location of Chemeketa Community College. Most students appear to live within an easy commute of the campus and buses provide regular access to the main campus resources.

Participants were selected in a different way to Central Oregon Community College. Like Chemeketa CC, Mount Hood Community College has a federally funded TRiO program, and I contacted the TRiO Director to help me pick a group of first generation students with the same criteria. The Director of TRiO's programs reached out to the first generation students. Pizza and drinks were provided to the focus group students. The group meeting was held in May 2013 during the afternoon. Six participants attended with an equal mix of mature and traditional aged students. Four participants were female and two were male. The focus group consisted of a survey which asked questions based on the findings in the COCC interviews. This was followed by discussions about the answers the students had provided. Conversations were recorded with a Sony H2 recorder and transcribed later

The focus group data correlated for the most part with Central Oregon Community College and Chemeketa Community College with several differences. The participants reported greater problems adapting to college life, and instances of disabilities were more prevalent.

The focus group at Tillamook Bay Community College took place in February 2013. Seven participants in total showed up for the focus group. Of those seven participants five were female and two were male. One student was Hispanic and the rest were Caucasian. Two of the students were traditional aged and five were mature students. The focus group consisted of a survey which asked questions based on the findings in the COCC interviews. This

was followed by discussions about the answers the students had provided. Conversations were recorded with a Sony H2 recorder and transcribed later. Tillamook Bay Community College does not have a TRiO program, however there were similarities to the Colleges with TRiO programs. Due to the small student population at Tillamook Bay Community College (500 students), the participants seemed to be very familiar with each other in a similar way to the students in the TRiO programs. They were very much tied into the college resources and were able to receive personal attention from faculty and administrators in a way that was unheard of in the other colleges in the study, with student populations over 10,000.

Table 10

Timeline of Pilot Study, Interviews, and Focus Groups (names have been changed for purposes of confidentiality).

Name	Location	Date	Number of Participants
COCC Bend Campus Pilot Study	Bend, Oregon	April 2011	18
COCC Redmond Campus Pilot Study	Redmond, Oregon	April 2011	3
Interviewee Bill Ugall	Central Oregon CC Bend, Oregon	June 2011, November 2011, April 2012, July 2012	1
Interviewee Cindy Gomez	Central Oregon CC Bend, Oregon	June 2011, November 2011, April 2012, July 2012	1
Interviewee Charles Schweitzer	Central Oregon CC Bend, Oregon	June 2011, November 2011, April 2012, July 2012	1
Interviewee Katie Murray	Central Oregon CC Bend, Oregon	November 2011, February 2012	1
Interviewee Melanie Van Maanen	Central Oregon CC Bend, Oregon	June 2011, November 2011, April 2012	1
Interviewee Clare Moneat	Central Oregon CC Bend, Oregon	June 2011, November 2011, April 2012	1
Interviewee Gilberto Kay	Central Oregon CC Bend, Oregon	June 2011, November 2011	1
Interviewee Jason Williams	Central Oregon CC Bend, Oregon	June 2011, November 2011	1
Chemeketa CC Focus Group	Salem, Oregon	January 2013	6
Tillamook Bay CC Focus Group	Tillamook, Oregon	February 2013	7
Mount Hood CC Focus Group	Portland, Oregon	May 2013	6

Conclusion

I contend that the methodologies used in this research design were both fitting and appropriate for several reasons. They allowed me to collect data in a deep and meaningful way, were ideal for exploring student voices and experiences and were suited to the development of themes and trends in those experiences. The research methods used were ethical, and best for exploring the lived experiences of the students. Semi-structured interviews were such a rich source of data collection and proved to be a wonderful source of insight into the unique experiences of students that I as the researcher did not expect to such a level.

The painstaking work of transcribing interviews and focus group recordings was completed entirely by me. I did not outsource this part of the process. I became aware of the importance of immersing myself in the data transcribing process as a way of re-living the interviews. This proved extremely useful to me. As I listened to the participant responses, the easy conversation, the pauses, tears, and laughter, I not only transcribed the details of those interviews, but was able to re-connect and understand the students in a way that would not have been possible if I had outsourced this part of the process. Chapter 5 will illustrate how effectively the use of the research methodologies and methods worked, in order to bring the voices of first generation community college students into the current literature.

Chapter 5: Findings

This chapter is not filled with bar graphs, statistical findings and averages. Instead the reader will find the voices of real first generation students recorded during the time they were experiencing their academic pursuits at community college. The experiences we gain in life are not visible in data reports. The truest essence of these experiences can be found in the words and stories people use to describe their lives. While 'truth' might be impossible to capture, and is based on an individual's own recollections, I would argue that the student persistence data we use to make decisions is missing a vital component - the authentically recounted experiences of the students.

At the heart of this research study, the goal is to expose the reality of these student's daily lives and how they navigate their external life and responsibilities while simultaneously persisting at community college. This study captures the duality that is the reality of these students' lives. My own experiences as a first generation student have made this subject matter a passion for me. I knew that much of the statistical data did not capture many of the emotions and experiences of my own academic journey, and I felt it was important to conduct research to record the experiences of first generation students. It seemed crucial to capture their stories, but also of import to the colleges themselves, so that administrators, staff, and faculty can better know the reality of this group of student's lives. The purpose of this research is to expose the lived experiences of first generation students through qualitative data collection. By mixing the methodologies of Phenomenology and Narrative Inquiry the experiences of the students are recorded and common themes are developed to illustrate the

shared experiences of these students. My own experiences as a first generation student and higher education professional allowed me to gain the trust of the participants in sharing their experiences. The participants for this project were all volunteers and were eager to share their experiences with others in order to benefit future first generation students.

The names of the students have been changed, and identifying data has been removed in order to protect the privacy of these participants. In this chapter, I will present the findings from the focus groups and interviews with the first generation students. This includes the findings from Central Oregon Community College, Chemeketa Community College, Mount Hood Community College, and Tillamook Bay Community College.

The research conducted was set up through the use of focus groups and semi-structured interviews, so that the participants were able to talk freely and given room to develop thoughts and explain their experiences in detail. In many of the cases, the students frankly shared their stories in an open and trusting manner, allowing me to delve into the personal experiences of these students as they experienced college and how it impacted their lives. The findings will provide an overall picture of the experience of first generation students.

The experiences that show up most commonly are addressed as themes. These themes cover the shared experiences of the students in their pursuit of higher education. In order to make the many themes more concise, I clustered them into categories. The two categories break down the themes into off-campus and on-campus experiences that affect student persistence. These will be discussed in development of themes section of this chapter.

Exploring the research question

College is not a clean slate for first generation students. College is not a natural progression from high school. College is not a clear and expected life path for first generation students. Whether they are young adults or mature students they bring with them experiences that are different to students who are more college familiar. Real problems such as unemployment, financial difficulties, lack of encouragement, and external responsibilities are part of the daily life of these students.

First generation students could be viewed through Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. This hierarchy is commonly referred to as a way of describing the stages of human motivation. Maslow's hierarchy was an important shift in the field of psychology. Prior to Maslow's theory, psychology focused on abnormal behavior and development (Cherry, 2012). Maslow's focus shifted the focus of psychology onto self-actualization and the development of a humanistic approach. In concept, Maslow did address the human needs for safety, warmth, and self-actualization, but in real life those stages are not clear and the lines between are blurred. I would further argue that Maslow's pyramid should not be constructed of linear stages, but should be constructed as more of a flowing visual with overlaps across the different stages.



Figure 15. McLeod, S. A. (2007), Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.

Maslow's pyramid has not gone without criticism from a number of researchers since its conception in 1954.

Tay and Diener (2011) offered this critique:

The needs should have a degree of independence from each other making a contribution to subjective well-being beyond the effects of the others. That is, regardless of whether other needs are met, each need will enhance well-being to some extent when it is fulfilled. (p. 354)

I would add that it is next to impossible for many in the working classes to achieve safety and physiological stability without taking risks, such as investment in higher education as a means to break out of cycles of insecurity and fear.

The participants in the study are trying to cope with getting by each week. Living accommodations, along with paying the bills are the main priorities. There is little if any

stability in this cohort's lives, and security is all but unknown. They are in effect skipping up to the top two levels of the pyramid, in an order to escape the cyclical nature of scraping from week to week with no end in sight. Without the opportunities that education offers, these students might spend their lives in the first 2-3 levels of the pyramid. The journey they are undertaking is long and many do not succeed. Through education, they strive to become professionals with legitimate careers, and this cohort also seek careers that allow them to give back to the community. They yearn for the recognition, respect, and fulfillment that come with completing higher education, and the gateway it can afford to a higher calling in life. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs does not account for people skipping whole sections on the pyramid, and there lies its fault. First generation students know that they cannot achieve safety and stability unless they accomplish it through education.

The participants in this study do not have the luxury of spending four years living at a beautiful college campus, making friends, becoming involved in student clubs, fraternities and events, and having the quintessential college experience. Their college experience is more likely to be a stressful undertaking. The social part of college life usually comes second to juggling childcare, employment responsibilities, and bills. For this population, college is just one more responsibility amongst many other competing needs. This study seeks to identify the differences between the experiences of traditional aged first generation students and non-traditional or mature first generation students. Many of the mature students have had life experiences that have formed them into people that look at the world in a practical and real-world manner, and thus they are likely to have more conflict with the collegiate path if it has little relation to their perception of the reality of the outside world. Traditional aged first

generation students for the most part seem to be more adaptable than mature first generation students. In an era where colleges are performing outreach to high schools, the transition is fostered to an extent that the experiences for some of these students are similar to their college familiar peers.

When I put together this research study, the results I most clearly expected to find were not those that appeared in the study. My own experiences as a first generation college student had led me to expect similar experiences from a population of which I considered myself to be a part.

My most clear memories of being a first generation student are around feeling the imposter complex. I felt like I did not belong in college . . .it was not a place my friends or family saw as a part of our lives. Furthermore, my exposure to different ways of critical thinking and the middle-class world left me with cognitive dissonance. I ended up questioning my politics, lifestyle, and religious beliefs. College left me feeling like I was living between two worlds. My heart and background with the working class, and my career, future, and new friends were with the middle class. Part of my experience also had to do with being an international student in an American community college. Perhaps the change was not as transforming for the first generation students in the study because of the fact that higher education for these students was more of a continuation from K-12 in a system they understood better than I.

Another key difference was that I was not struggling as much with financial problems. I had served in the military and was awarded the GI Bill which provided me with tuition enough

to pay for college. I worked full-time to cover bills, mortgage and family, but had not the struggles many of these students did.

In the course of the interviews with individual students and the focus groups at all the colleges, I first used a form that asked questions that I hoped would tease out responses that would not be Y/N specific, but might lead the students to ponder their own experiences in ways they had not done previously. Semi-structured interviews allowed me to build a rapport with the subject students. Seidman (1998) made the important point that it is possible to have too much rapport, as well as too little. I would add that the rapport I had in this study was the “right” amount. The participants grew to trust me and openly shared their experiences in a frank and honest manner.

Prior to the interviews and focus groups, the data from the Pilot Study and Focus Groups was gathered, and some important data regarding the lives of these first generation students was garnered from the original session at Central Oregon Community College. The pilot study informed the Narrative/Phenomenology direction of the study and guided the early interview questions. The following data was collected from the surveys and Pilot Study conversations.

Of the students who participated in the Pilot Study, 63% reported that they work while attending college. In the case of first generation students, working while attending college is the norm and to do otherwise is sometimes not an option. They must keep up with their responsibilities such as providing for family or paying rent whilst working on furthering themselves in college.

Table 11: Survey Question, “Are you working while attending college?”

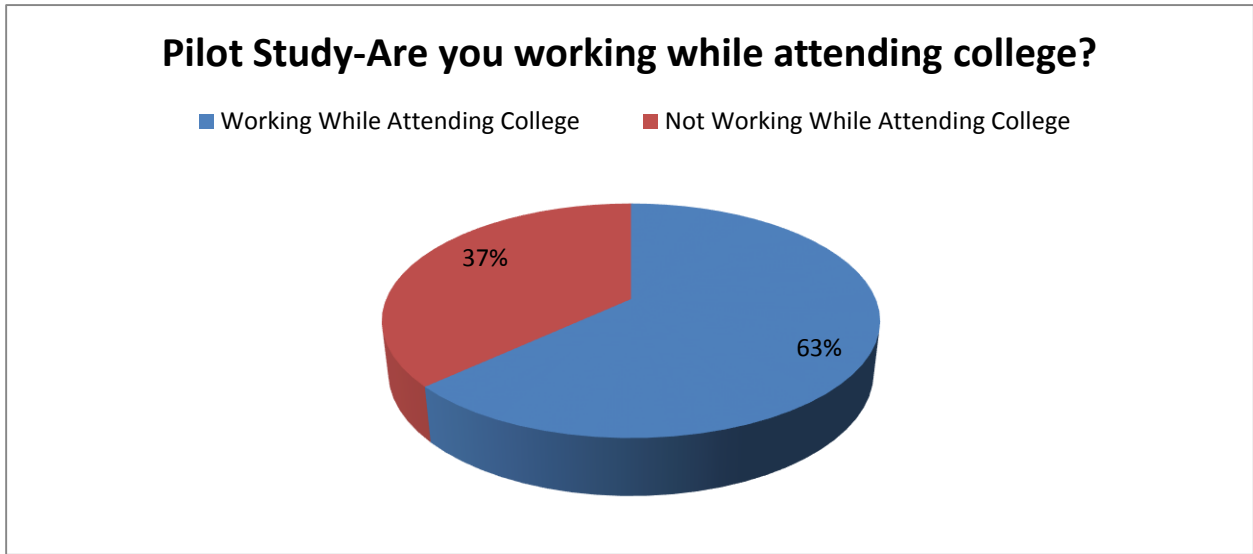
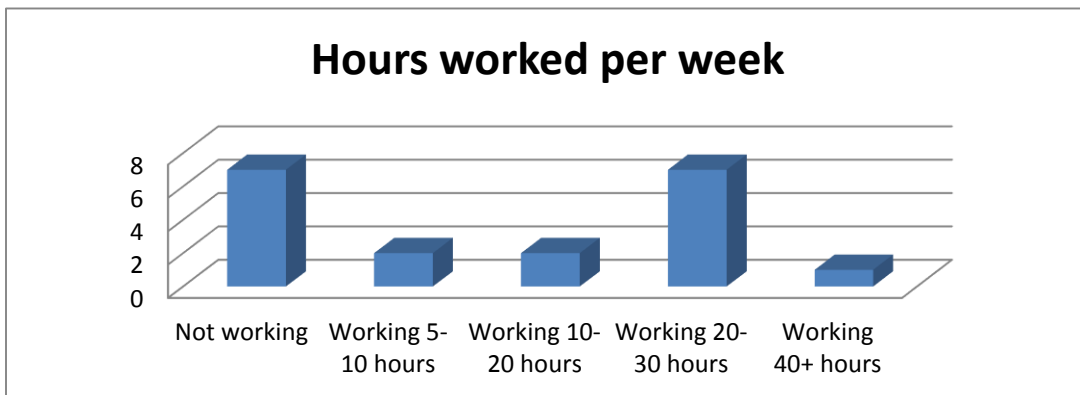


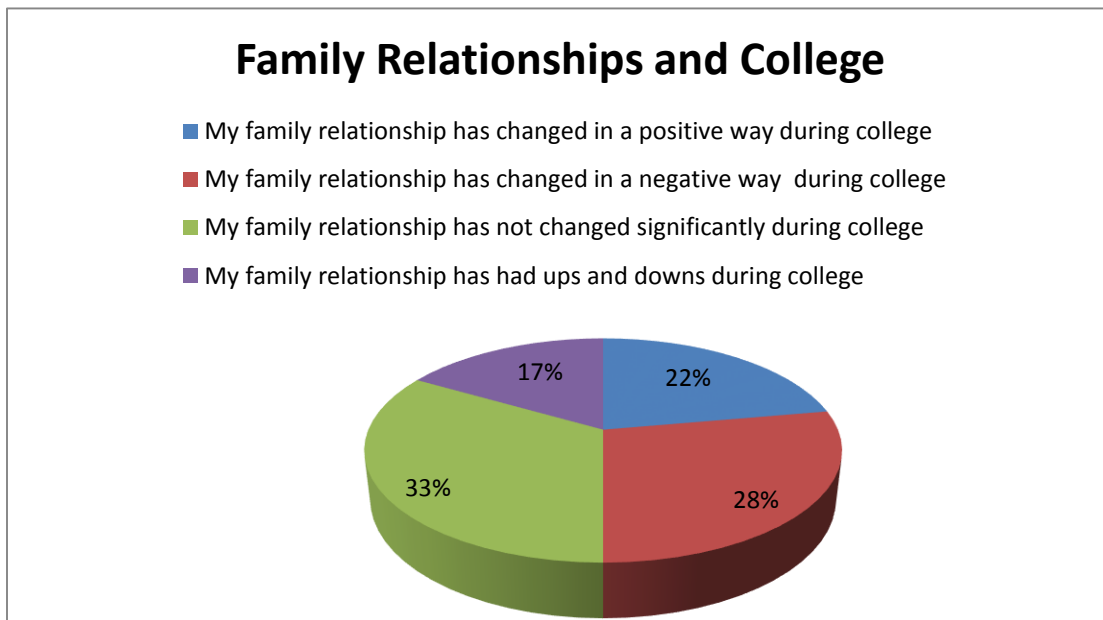
Table 1 displays the amount of hours that the students reported working per week. The student that reported working 40+ hours per week did state that they worked seasonally, so for half of the year she worked 40+ hours and the other half of the year the student reported not working at all.

Table 12: Survey Question: “How many hours a week do you work while attending college?”



The study participants were asked whether they planned to stay in Central Oregon upon expected graduation. The results were very surprising. Over 50% of students plan to leave Central Oregon for work or to complete further education by attending the next two years at a state college. The universities the students planned on attending were Oregon State University, Portland State University, and the University of Oregon. All of these universities are between 1 ½ hours and 3 ½ hours' drive from Bend and Redmond.

Table 13: *Survey Question: "Have your family relationships changed during college?"*



Based on the results of the survey in regards to family relationships, I realized that this theme was likely to come up in the interviews and other college focus groups. The number of participants that had negative interactions with family member's equated to about half of the pilot study participants.

The Development of Themes

These early findings were able to guide me in my interview questions and the focus groups at the other community colleges. They laid the groundwork for the entire study. The themes developed intuitively from these conversations. Initially, as I transcribed the data from the focus groups and interviews I developed looked for shared experiences amongst the participants. “Categories develop or reflect the understanding of the research participants or document writers, and they emerge as you examine the data” (Antonesa et al., 2006, p. 14). As the data gathering continued the themes changed somewhat. Eventually, I used the tried and tested method of theme discovery. I made hard copies of all of the interview transcripts and surveys, and used different coloured highlighters to mark themes that fit into broader categories. I chose not to use software to transcribe this for me. The reasons were that I wanted to immerse myself in the data, and to better learn the practice of data analysis at a personal level. While the original questions in the survey may have been used as a tool to provoke the conversations, the reality is that the conversations developed lives of their own as unique as the experiences of the individuals themselves. “Using research interviews (or focus groups) involves actively creating data which would not exist without the researcher’s intervention (researcher provoked data)” (Silverman, 2008, p. 274). While each of the individuals seemed to have unique experiences, the researcher noticed some common themes that related these students to each other. The students and colleges were in very different settings; urban, suburban and rural. While the settings may have been different there were some commonalities that appeared clearly as shared experiences.

This section of the chapter breaks down these intuitive themes into common experiences or perceptions that the students had. The themes are analysed and further delved into in order to see if they are standard across colleges or just local to rural colleges/urban colleges or a specific college.

Table 14: *The Five Themes and their Sub-Categories.*

Category	Theme
On-Campus Experiences That Affect Student Persistence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive College Experiences and Validation • TRiO or the Small College Experience as a Differentiator • Informal Mentors • High School Transitions • Mature students • Health problems and Disabilities
Off-Campus Experiences that Affect Student Persistence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support by Family and Peers • Family/Peer Anti College • Employment • Women and the Uneven Burden • Transportation • Addictions • Financial Problems • Helping Professions • Homeschooling/Dreamers-Fringe Groups • Church Support • Military

Category 1: On-Campus Experiences That Affect Student Persistence

Positive College Experiences and Validation

The initial experiences of attending college were mostly difficult for the students in this study. The bureaucracy of financial aid, admissions, registration, scholarships, and disabilities services were barriers that most of the students found hard to navigate. However, once the students had overcome the enrolment hurdles and were taking classes, their experiences were more mixed. A number of the students found validation in their successes in college and this in turn improved their perceptions of college.

I have a 4.0 (See US grading standards¹) and I just got accepted into the mental health/human services program and everything has been going picture perfect and I haven't met any obstacles . . . so I feel like this is really where I am supposed to be.
(Victoria, age 19)

The above quote could have come from a non-first generation student. This student feels enabled and entitled to be at college primarily because of her academic success. Victoria's success has reinforced her self-belief that college is where she is supposed to be. Victoria, like most of the other students in the study struggled through the initial enrolment steps prior to matriculating. However, once she was in the classroom, she found the college experience to be positive.

¹ US Grading Standards: D = 1.0, C = 2.0, B = 3.0, and A = 4.0. In Ireland a passing grade would be an "E". This would equate to a "D" grade in America. US grading does not recognise an "E" grade. Any grade below "D" is considered a failing or "F" grade.

Another student named Melanie had a difficult life outside of college. She had several children and had recently undergone an extensive divorce battle. Melanie was struggling to find long-term housing, and eventually she found a friend who gave her and the children space to live in her house in return for domestic work. Melanie came to college with very low self-esteem, and an observant faculty member recognised it and engaged her.

When I started school, you know, I thought I was stupid, I wouldn't even get a degree, I just wanted to take some classes, maybe go through a program to get a certificate.

Then I took a class and my psychology teacher said "I don't know who told you that you were stupid, but you need to not listen to that, they are wrong and you can do whatever you want to do." SO I DECIDED THAT IM JUST GONNA GO ALL THE WAY. (Melanie, age 37)

In Melanie's case, a positive intervention in the classroom transformed her outlook on college, and her own sense of self-worth.

TRiO or the small college experience as a differentiator

TRiO is a federally funded program that supports students with disabilities, first generation students, and students from lower socioeconomic means. These are usually located on community college campuses. These students receive focused attention from TRiO funded staff and are given tips and tools on how to survive and succeed in college.

Central Oregon Community College does not have a TRiO Centre on campus. The comments below are from students in the TRiO programs at Mount Hood Community College and Chemeketa Community College.

I wouldn't have known about TRiO . . .and I wouldn't have known certain things I needed to do like when I get my refund for Financial Aid . . . if I need to verify through the bank . . . there's little stuff that you don't know if you don't experience it . . . no-one really tells you . . . I was pretty lucky in that respect. (Victoria, age 19)

I actually went to the new student orientation the second time around and that helped me. I didn't know TRiO existed until that . . . and now here I am planning to move on to a university. (John, age 25)

TRiO is like family for me. (Maureen, age 44)

The first two terms I probably lived in the TRiO Centre because I was so scared about coming to college and being one of many. (Vanessa, age 52)

TRiO was crucial to some of the student's successes and the TRiO Centres were viewed by the students as a sanctuary on campus. They were seen as a safe place where students could seek support from staff and peers. Alternatively, the experiences of the students at Tillamook Bay Community College were similar. The small campus and the low student to faculty/staff ratio meant that the students experience in the college was friendly and supportive.

Umm getting to know people here, uh Karla, Kerry, the President . . . for me that was anyhow. It was the networking that was really dynamic in the first place. It helped me. (Gilberto, age 20)

I think it's very natural for everybody . . . but the teachers are very friendly . . . ah, just hearing them talk about that they were available and I knew if ever I needed help that I could ask anybody, students, teachers, anyone and they could help me . . . The President of the college was actually my teacher for college success . . . It was very interesting . . . like someone who is actually like the top person actually comes down to our level and teaches us so it was nice. (Patricia, age 28)

Both TRiO and the small community college were able to make a difference with first generation students. The focused engagement with the students that either a small campus or a TRiO program can provide creates an environment conducive to first generation success and persistence. In the case of Tillamook Bay Community College, the first generation students were familiar with all the staff and faculty at the institution and this helped give them a personalised educational experience.

Informal Mentors

One of the more obvious differentiators between first generation students and their college savvy counterparts is that they often do not have the same level of family support and mentoring. Having a person believe and support you on your academic journey can be the impetus that drives a person to succeed. Some first generation students have support from family members and friends, but many find that their parents, colleagues, or friends are

ambivalent or even threatened by the idea of the first generation student attending and succeeding in college. In lieu of typical support, first generation students often find mentors in community members, high school teachers, and other people they connect with.

Victoria, a student at Mount Hood Community College, was lucky enough to have a friend who knew the ropes.

It's hard to really remember my first day or week at school and it wasn't even that long ago (laughter). I was really lucky to have my friend actually who knew everything . . . she knew all the ropes . . . she knew where I needed to go, who I needed to talk to . . . and she was by my side during the first part of me getting back to school because I really didn't think I wanted to even come back so . . . it was pretty easy for me, but without her though I probably would've been really lost. (Victoria, age 19)

Victoria's friend, mentioned in the above interview, was also a first generation student. She had figured out the ropes independently and was thriving in college. Her success had turned her into an educational missionary of sorts and she was seeking to share the news with Victoria about the benefits of college. Victoria herself at some point may be that influencer/mentor like her friend and assist others in their educational journey. Many first generation students even end up working at the college they attended. For many first generation students, this may be the greatest sense of validation they have encountered in their lives, and they in turn see the college or university as a place where they might have a career. I myself am an example of this. I started college as a means to an end, in order to get a good paying

career. I became successful at college and enjoyed the intellectual atmosphere so much that I made it my career to help others succeed and share that same experience.

High School Transitions

One of the biggest transitions in the US Educational system is that from high school to college. Each high school usually has a counsellor on staff, that helps many students transition to college, and they keep in contact with numerous colleges and universities in the local area so they can be prepared to counsel students. Faculty at the high schools are often well-meaning in the advice they give to students about college or university, but their knowledge can often be dated or based on their own experiences which may or not still be relevant.

Ya know, I think it's weird that the high school sort of pushed you by saying certain things were important like taking your SAT's, and doing certain things like taking a language class, but you find out that when you are going to community college that those things were useless pretty much and it does seem like, who's gonna look at your high school transcript really? (Cindy, age 20)

In regards to attending community college Cindy is correct in that SAT scores mean little in most cases. Students attending community college take an assessment test prior to enrolment. This gauges their college readiness in areas such as mathematics, reading, and writing. Based on the results of this test, students are placed in the level of English or Math appropriate for their skill level. In community colleges students often test below college level and are required to take coursework to build them up to the college level. In four-year colleges SAT Scores have much more import in the admissions and acceptance phase in a similar way to

Leaving Cert scores in Ireland. Cindy displays a realization that many community college students discover for better or worse: that their high school performance matters little in the community college. Students for the most part start with a fresh slate. However, when transferring to a four-year university, prior high school grades may be taken into consideration in the application process.

One major difference in the study was the experience of first generation high school students transitioning to community college versus that same transition for first generation adult/mature students. Central Oregon Community College appears to be involved in a program specifically geared towards students at local high schools that may not be college aware.

In high school you meet up with Aspire mentor leaders and during junior year they help you fill out resumes and just show you what you are gonna be doing like signing up for colleges, and so you meet up with them and talk about like what we are gonna do when we graduate. You take surveys about . . . what kind of questions like what kind of college you wanna be in. And in junior year it gets bigger. You fill out scholarships and have to apply to colleges. If you can't pay for it they help you get waivers to pay for it. They show you the GPA average and everything you need to know about applying for colleges. And they help you fill out Financial A—FAFSA, they help you fill out everything. And so they are just a really big help and I am sure that if it weren't for them helping me to get here I wouldn't be here. They have it at school and usually. I think every junior

gets to meet with them. I don't know if it's a choice or not. I just got a slip one day saying you've got an Aspire mentor. (Cindy, age 20)

Cindy's experience was the norm for students who transitioned from high school to Central Oregon Community College. The bridge between the community college, grant funded programs like Aspire, and outreach between the community college and the high schools appears to be making the transition of high school aged first generation college students a positive experience. They are much more informed on college knowledge than their older peers.

I think they pretty much tried to get every student an Aspire mentor but some students, ah, I think they work on a bit more. The one's they notice that ah, they need a bit more. And I thought it was pretty cool, and for me I started to get looking at all these different colleges I could go to, and they have you try to plan out actually how much it's gonna cost you and living expenses and whatnot. It shows you like the reality and also I found a couple of colleges I really liked. (Charles, age 20)

Like Charles and Cindy, the high school students in the focus groups and interviews who had transitioned to community college were usually prepped while still attending high school. The bridge between high school and college was also visible at Mount Hood Community College and Chemeketa Community College, although it did not seem quite as effective. At Tillamook Bay Community College, there did not seem to be the same relationship between the district high schools and the college, however many high school students take college level courses at Tillamook Bay Community College to satisfy high school requirements.

At Central Oregon Community College, the students had received help from the Aspire Program in particular which left them college-ready in a similar way to students who were not first generation. The transition and success of these students was evident in the interviews. In researching the goals of Aspire, it appears that they align well with first generation needs.

Aspire is a mentoring program that matches trained and supportive community college student mentors with middle and high school students to develop a plan to help them meet their education goals beyond high school. First generation students may not have the good fortune to have someone to help them figure out what to do after high school, let alone the myriad of education and training options. Aspire bridges the gap between school children without college knowledge to college students who know how to navigate the system. (Aspire, n.d). During the interviews the students who were mentored in the Aspire program seemed to be extremely well adjusted to Central Oregon Community College and their comfort level on campus combined with their degree planning was at a different level to the other students interviewed.

In the case of a number of the traditional aged students in this study, the Aspire program or community college Outreach to the high schools appears to be a contributing factor not only to helping these students adapt to college, but also in helping students communicate earlier to their supporting family members and others the possibilities of college attendance.

One significant finding in the study was that first generation students of all age groups self-reported that they had taken too many classes (academic overload) in their first term. The first term is crucial for first generation students and academic overload leads to many students

dropping out of college entirely. At the very least this can result in poor grades, and leave students questioning if they “belong” in college.

I know that during my first term here I had like about 19 credit hours and then I cut it down to 16 . . . and my thought was just to try and get as much done as possible and still be able to do it . . . but then I learned that the teacher was pretty hard and it was a lot of work and I eventually withdrew from that one . . . so I’m still trying to learn . . . I just gotta make sure I don’t overload with classes because that can be stressful. (Cindy, age 20)

The tendency to overload in the first term or two was evident in both high school students and adult/mature students. Community colleges are aware of the dangers of academic overload, and cap the amount of courses a student can sign up for. These students are often working up to 40 hours a week outside of school and many have long or difficult commutes. When they sign up for a number of credits close to that academic overload threshold, it does not set off alarm bells in the way it should for college staff. A more holistic approach needs to be developed that looks at the other factors that take up a student’s time and energy along with the credit load they sign up for. Academic Advisors often ask these questions, but in this study a number of the students found themselves overloaded immediately on transition to the community college, and this is a persistence issue. I work at Clark College in Vancouver, Washington. It is now a requirement that every new student has to go through an advising session (offered in-person or in an online format) before being allowed

to register for classes. However, this seems to be only one part of the solution. New students still fail to persist in greater numbers than continuing students.

The first term in particular is very confusing for first generation students. There tends to be a period of transition, like an immigrant's first months in a new country. The environment, rules, language, culture, and expectations are all different and not all people are able to adapt and persevere through the period of confusion and otherness.

*I think as a first generation college student it's just really confusing . . . **it was like stepping into the unknown**, whereas in public school everyone just goes with the flow, there's nothing you have to worry about. I was sorta confused, I didn't know where to go or how to handle it . . . I couldn't really look up to a family member for direction really . . . Yeah, I didn't know how to talk about degrees or where I wanted to go or even if I wasn't even saying it right . . . (Selena, age 20)*

Selena's experience of "not knowing" how to navigate college is very common amongst first generation college students. The terminology used by college staff and faculty can often seem like another language: Registration drop dates, cumulative GPA, matriculation fees, FAFSA, add/drop deadlines, and many other terms are bandied about by staff and faculty who have heard and understood these terms for years. They unthinkingly expect students to understand them immediately upon arriving on campus. When a new first generation student arrives on campus, they are bombarded with details they receive in new student orientations, meetings with college staff, financial aid applications, and making sure everything is in place prior to attending classes.

Central Oregon Community College hosts a number of student activities that welcome new students and attempts to make them feel a part of the campus. This can help first generation students acclimatize to the new world they have stepped into.

I think the coolest thing about COCC is how they welcome people. Like I was always scared of college in high school, I was like oh my gosh I was so scared it's gonna be so hard, and then I got here and all these jump start events. They just welcome everybody, I just felt welcomed and I enjoy it here and I just really love it. (Cindy, age 20)

This response was not echoed in the adult/mature student population. A few of those students indicated that they preferred college because it was not cliquish like high school but for the most part they did not feel welcomed in the same way. However, those that were part of a TRiO Program were an engaged part of the campus community and felt they 'belonged' in college.

Mature Students

Community college is the point of entry for the majority of first generation students. These students might be fresh out of high school or may even be in their 60's attempting to get credentials for a 'twilight career' and stave off financial woes as they get closer to retirement. First generation students span multiple generations, and it is not uncommon to see parents sitting alongside their children in the community college classroom. Initially, younger and older students have feelings of anxiety around opposite age groups. Younger students feel intimidated by the real world knowledge of older students. Conversely, older students often feel that they should not be in college, that college is a place for the youth.

I think I was the oldest one in there, I mean the rest were in high school still, like transfer out of high school program and I'm ya know 25 and just sitting there . . . it's just like everyone else is just like 17 or 18 in the classroom . . . It felt awkward ya know . . . I sat back in the corner and no one saw me like that . . . but it seemed like everyone kept to themselves . . . ya know I felt kind of excluded a little bit, but as I went on I tried mingling a little more with the people there. (Ernesto, age 26)

Ernesto's experience was echoed by most of the other mature students in the study, however, his attempt at "mingling" was different to most of the other adult students. Generally the older students felt like they were imposters in a young people's world and they kept distance between themselves and the high school aged students.

This conversation was typical of mature students describing how they felt being in class with younger students. In this instance, one of the younger students, Selena, responds in kind to say how strange it felt for her to be in class with older students.

I think the only time I feel too old to be here is every fall. (Vanessa, age 52)

When all the high schoolers come. (Elizabeth, age 38)

I am the same like you, I walk in and I am like . . . is there anyone here older than 18?

(laughter) (Jason, age 50)

That's funny because in my first term it was weird to me . . . You felt weird with all the young people, but I felt in this class I FELT WEIRD, because everybody looked like adults, 25 to probably 40 . . . there was a lady that was about 55. (Selena, age 20)

This conversation shows that first generation students are keenly aware of the age difference in the community college classroom. The students at all of the colleges in the study reported anxiety around how they fit in at college in regards to age. Younger students felt intimidated by older students and older students felt that college was for kids and they were intruders in their world. The differences in age is not something I have seen addressed in new student orientations, or in on boarding for new students. There can be benefits to having a mixed age group in the classroom. The learning environment can be richer due to such diversity. Perhaps, the elephant in the room could be made visible in a more positive way to offset the anxiety that comes with the current state.

Many community college students are afraid to ask questions on campus. When they do find a person or office that helps them they might visit that place exclusively as a safe zone or a place to ask questions about college processes. While it is important for first generation students to find places they can feel comfortable on campus, this can also be problematic.

I didn't know any of the support services existed until ah, fall . . . fall this year, and that's why I drifted around for years, going from job-to-job and like I said . . . I finally realized college is right for me . . . the first time I went everything was overly intimidating and I didn't know anything about the support services that existed . . . so I was just walking around in a circle hoping I'd find what to do . . . um I remember meeting with Financial Aid a lot . . . they brought me some help but they could only help with Financial Aid stuff . . . so they're not going to tell you the entire campus. (John, age 25)

John's problem is not untypical. I recall as a student at Portland Community College that the only place I felt safe on campus was at the Veterans Office. Once I had made a contact there, I recall asking questions about advising, registration etc. I was fearful of going to the other support services offices for fear of being singled out as a person that did not belong in the college.

Health Problems and Disabilities

Health problems in particular were one of the areas that I did not expect to be a theme in the onset of the study. As a researcher, I can see that if I had relied on surveys alone or on quantitative data, I would most likely never have discovered this theme or some of the others in the study. Health problems in particular were common amongst the participants in this study. The problems were varied, some were physical and others psychological. One of the repercussions of the health problems, however were financial. First generation students, if employed, are often working part-time and thus are not eligible for healthcare benefits. When health problems occur the students can accrue large debts or receive bad credit for not paying bills they cannot afford.

My name is Mitch and I tried to start here back in 2006 after I got out of high school but I had some vision problems and folks at the high school were "Oh no you can't go to college you can't do this . . . you're this and there's nothing you can do about it." And so I tried community college back in 2006 and failed miserably because I thought it was going to be exactly like high school. (Mitch, Age 27)

Mitch is diagnosed as legally blind. During the survey, he held the paper directly to his face and used visual aids in order to complete the survey. I offered to read him the questions, but he preferred to continue on his own. His high school did not counsel him well about college expectations, and Mitch was unaware of the Disabilities Support Services available to him as a student at Mount Hood Community College. In the past decade, many community colleges have implemented a required orientation where students are introduced to all of the support available at the community college. Mitch's story may have been different were he to apply to college now.

Several of the older students in the study found themselves being diagnosed with disabilities later in life. In the case of Mike, he was not even aware of his learning disabilities until he was in fact attending college and running into academic problems.

I have talked to several professors and told them that this is going on with me and I don't know why. What they've said is that I might have a learning disability. When we were young, when I was young, I may have touched on this a little, we were either lazy or didn't apply ourselves. If he just applied himself. They didn't say oh he's got ADD. That's what I give them. The bloody knuckles didn't work for long, then I would be back cutting out of line, disrupting things you know. Oh Gosh, he's the smartest guy in the world and he just runs off and we don't know why. (Mike, Age 51)

The instructor helped Mike to identify the fact that he might have a learning disability, and was able to suggest services on campus that might help and identify his problem, while providing Mike with tools to be successful in his academic pursuits.

Maureen has numerous health problems, and these have a definite impact on her ability to succeed in college. Maureen has started and backed out of college a couple of times. This time, she seems set to finish her program, and Maureen intends to transfer to Portland State University.

I also have Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder from a bank robbery that I was in . . . in 1992, so I had been doing construction work and I had been an in-home care provider person. In 2010 I was rear-ended by a woman and I got hurt pretty bad and um, and I have Fibro Mialgia now and I can't lift . . . and so I am forced to go to college because I have to find a job where I can, where I don't have to do physical labour. And so when I came here I was having some panic attacks and so I got linked in to the disabilities services because, well I needed their support and I got involved in transitions and that's how I started my journey here. (Maureen, age 44)

Some medical problems and disabilities might be more short term, but the financial repercussions can be long lasting. Healthcare in the US can be incredibly expensive, even if you are covered with health insurance, part of the costs often fall to the patient.

Due to some medical expenses . . . a recent stomach infection and (some other medical problems) I lost all my money for college. (Margaret, age 22)

Margaret was struggling to stay in college even with a good GPA. Her medical bills were forcing her to seek employment in order to make payments. Her Federal Financial Aid would help her pay for tuition and living expenses, but it was not enough to pay her healthcare bills.

Maureen's health problems actually prevented her from participating in a normal day on campus. Anxiety attacks and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder left Maureen in a breakdown of sorts on her first day of campus.

My first day to come to the campus . . . well I had to acclimate myself to the environment of the college because of my post-traumatic stress disorder. This seems like its own world. I had trouble with public things and so I would just acclimate myself a little bit at a time to college and so I came to football games . . . I didn't really know my way around campus and I just really went into this anxiety attack and the world closed down to about this big (hold up her finger and thumb and demonstrates space the size of a grape) and all I could see in the hallway . . . head in one direction because it ends in both directions, so I ended up going the wrong way and by the time I finally did find my classroom I was pretty much a mess, and I tried to calm down and that was when I realized I needed to be involved with Disabilities Services. (Maureen, age 44)

There are a significant number of students with Disabilities on community college campuses. If students do not self-declare any documented disabilities, they do not receive support. Each class syllabus asks students if they have any disabilities or believe they may have, and they are encouraged to visit with Disabilities Support Services to ask for accommodations. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder has become increasingly common on college campuses with many veterans returning from Afghanistan and Iraq. A number of civilians are also diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and Traumatic Brain Injury from car accidents and other traumatic episodes. Colleges do offer support, but only if the student seeks it out. Students

with disabilities face hurdles that none of the other groups have to face. Their journey is extremely difficult. Colleges are required to assist students with study aids, and accessible classrooms and buildings. However, older buildings are not ideal for these students, and only the newer facilities are designed with students' disabilities in mind.

Category 2: Off-Campus Experiences That Affect Student Persistence

Positive support from family/peers

While some students may face conflict while attending college, many receive support and positive feedback. This can be essential in the student's long journey to college completion. This support can come from family, friends, peers, and from other less likely sources...a high school teacher, a distant relative, a grandparent. Knowing that somebody believes you have what it takes to succeed in college can be enough to help a student stay the course during trying times.

I didn't live with my father at the time . . . he lives in Wyoming. He didn't really have a reaction at the time, it's more like a 'so you're going to college-not a big deal, I don't think he thought I was gonna stick with it . . . like sometime I am gonna get over it and drop out . . . my husband, boyfriend at the time –he was really supportive, you know we took classes together till I, you know I was kind of nervous so he took classes with me to kind of help me . . . get the groove of it I guess. My boyfriend, well my husband, was the only one who really had a reaction to it and it was a good one. (Katie, age 22)

While Katie's father was far from supportive her boyfriend encouraged her and even took classes to help support Katie's dreams. However, over the long term Katie's boyfriend (eventual husband) began to criticize Katie for going to college. He felt it took away from the time to work on his vehicles and affected the family financially.

Selena's husband and family take a primary role in supporting Selena as she attends college, and also providing care giving to Selena's infant child.

My family is very supporting . . . my husband . . . I live with my husband, and he is also a student so we are each other's support, and my mother who tells me I am her hero for going back to school, .and I tell her about things I have learned and she's like "Selena, you're my hero, I love you so much, I am so proud of you." Ya know, I have other friends that go here and that's how I found out about TRiO . . . umm very supportive and I have been very blessed that way. (Selena, age 20)

Selena's experience was very positive. Her family is Mexican-American and traditionally these families have a strong support network that extends beyond the immediate family to the extended family. Many immigrant families do not pursue higher education, however Selena's family is very supportive of her endeavours.

Gilberto is also Mexican-American, and his parents are undocumented workers living in America. Gilberto found a guide and mentor in a hospital setting, while he was working part-time.

My mentor, he's a professor of neurology, a professor of pharmacology . . . he actually mentored me to get into nursing school, and to become a nursing student, and from his input . . . I basically, that's how I got in here. (Gilberto, age 20)

Gilberto's parents did not encourage Gilberto to attend college. This is not unusual as undocumented workers often try to stay under the radar, and attending college is something many fear, due to the risk of exposure to the authorities and potential deportation. Simply by attending college a student like Gilberto can put his family at risk of consequences that could be terrible to comprehend. Parents and grandparents can be deported and might leave children who are US citizens in the care of the system. Many families are split up through deportation. However, during the latter part of this study, President Obama enacted a sweeping overhaul of US immigration laws and shifted the focus from deporting any undocumented immigrants to specifically deporting undocumented felons.

Madeline had a positive experience in attending college and has become a role model for her sibling. This is often the case with first generation students.

Yeah, my family is really interested in all my experiences here at college. I talk to them a lot about it and my sister is getting to the age of enrolling for college and I encourage her to pursue that choice. (Madeline, age 25)

When one person in a family unit breaks the cycle, the other family members see that college is something they can also aspire to. I was the first in my family to attend college, after that my sister attended, and now other family members in Ireland and England are now attending.

Selena's Mexican-American family were very involved in the decision for Selena to attend college. Their acceptance and encouragement of Selena's academic journey made it possible for Selena to break the cycle. By attending college however, Selena was also changing roles and identities within her family's domestic culture. This one change will be sure to affect the family dynamics far into the future.

And I talked to my grandparents about it, and they said "I think you should. There is no need for you to stay at home and wait a year, two years, three years, you are gonna just start getting too comfortable at home . . . just go, we are gonna be there for you if you need somebody to take care of him, if you need money we'll pay, like whatever you need to do to go, just go." And my husband at first, he was a new dad, he was starting to get used to this working every single day (laughter from the group), and learning to pay for food, rent, me . . . "Oh, she's gonna want some shoes or something you know." And I am like, what do you think? And he's like "Ah, I dunno. It's like I'm scared, and I don't want you to go, but I do want you to go, do you wanna go?" And I am like, yes! "Well then, I am there for you." But that first year for him was a little complicated because he was working and he would get home at 5 . . . I would get home at 3:30 to 4, and here I am cleaning-taking care of my son and I have to cook and he gets home and the food's not ready and the house is not cleaned and he's like "I'm hungry." And I'm like, let's cook together! (Laughter from the group). And that first year for him . . . he's more used to like food being ready with his sisters or with his mom in Mexico, so he was used to his house, food, laundry to be ready when he needed it . . . It should be ready, and then here he is waiting for me to clean or here he is cleaning himself, and it was pretty hard that

year, but then this year it's like everybody does what everybody needs to do . . . like if he gets home first he needs to know that he needs to start cleaning or he needs to start cooking and then I get home and I am like, Oh, you haven't cooked? And he's like "But I CLEANED!" (Loud laughter from the group). "But I cleaned, and now you can cook, but while you cook I'll take care of the baby", who by now is almost two in March . . . so not it's just normal, everybody just gets up early, everybody does everything, and nobody says anything about it anymore . . . this is all just so relaxing, we are all just used to it and the family is proud, it's like yeah, I am so happy. (Selena, age 20)

Selena's story shows that the family took some time to adapt to the new normal of attending college while bringing up a child, and dividing up the domestic activities. It took time for Selena's husband to adapt to taking on a greater role in parenting and supporting his wife while she attended college. It went against the grain of his own upbringing where men were entitled to being looked after by women. Selena's college attendance shifted the family roles in a way that will never be the same again. If and when Selena graduates college, her experiences will make it so that she is not easily able to slip back into a traditional role. Education will change the family dynamics.

Jason came off as slightly introverted in the focus group. He did not speak up often, preferring to sit back and let the group share. When he did open up it was to talk about his family support group.

I do get a lot of support from my family, like if I am struggling with something, and I'll call and tell them about it and they'll give me that little extra . . . boost of

encouragement and they are like “Aww, you can do it” and that kind of thing, so I use it whenever I need to ya know . . . cos I know if I call and tell them I am struggling, they’re gonna pick me up so ya know. (Jason, age 50)

Jason is going through a mid-life transition. The field he worked in has evolved and changed in the result of certain trade positions being consolidated. People like Jason find themselves transitioning from being in once-stable technical careers to being college students seeking a new set of skills for the ever-changing economy.

The examples above prove one thing. There is no typical experience for first generation students. Some students might receive lots of support from their network, others might be discouraged, and still others may see family and friends mixed in their attitudes towards college. What is proved though, is that support is certainly not universal for first generation students. The journey to achieving that elusive college degree is more difficult for first generation students from the onset and if that student does not receive support then the likelihood of persistence is less sure.

Family/Peer Anti-College

While many first generation students may receive positive feedback from parents, siblings, spouses, partners, colleagues, and peers, others have a very different experience. A first generation student attending college often find themselves in conflict with those close to them. Family members and friends might display jealousy towards the college-going student. These students may feel that they are betraying family values by moving into a different world and class than the place they came from. Women, in particular, may find that their spouse or

partner feels threatened by the new life, experiences, career path, and friends the first generation student gravitates towards.

So people thought that I couldn't do it, that I couldn't make it, but also, since I am a first generation college student, ummm . . . from a single parent . . . my mom was extremely jealous . . . and IS extremely jealous . . . because ummm . . . I did go to college . . . I am making it on my own, ya know, I am paying my way and I don't need any help. (Vanessa, age 52)

In the study, the female students tended to have a more difficult time attending college in regards to how well they were supported. In Vanessa's case above, she was actively deterred from attending college. Other students have an even more difficult journey. Victoria was a foster youth who faced pressure to find paying employment as soon as she was old enough.

I lived in a foster home and the people I lived with didn't really see college as a necessity . . . they just wanted me to go out and get a job like their other kids did, but I just . . . ever since I was young, I felt like it was something I needed to do because I didn't want to end up like everyone else around me I guess . . . so I started college without the support at home and with no resources. (Victoria, age 19)

Victoria's decision to refuse the advice of her foster parents and instead enter college left her with no support or resources. She was entirely on her own, unless she was eligible for aid through the Federal Government or college scholarships.

Ernesto's peers actively discouraged him from attending college. The primary argument they had for dissuading him from academics is around the financial implications.

There are other people who I tell that I am going to college and they are like "Oh? Why? I thought you had a good job already. I thought you were ok, what more do you want?" It's like, I was working two jobs . . . I was working at a (mumbled) for \$2 an hour. It was a good job, and I was working at a hotel at night . . . so I was working seven days a week, sometimes it was just back-to-back and you know it was just too many hours . . . and that's when I . . . instead of working all these hours I'll just invest in something else, and you know maybe I'll get something out of it at the end, get a job for 40 hours paying more than I got for the two jobs. Exactly. But there are those other people who are 'Why are you going back? Do you think it's a good investment and do you think you'll get a job afterwards . . . My brother made a comment, "Like are you sure you wanna, cos you know." Because before I went to school I did whatever I wanted, and now I am a homebody because you try to stay home and save a little more. You know it's hard, but even he notices my spending is down and he's like "Are you sure you don't wanna go back to work and just quit now?" And I tell him, well I am already in the hole like \$12,000 ya know (laughter from the group). I am not getting the free money, I am getting loans, so it's kinda tough. (Ernesto, age 26)

Ernesto has to battle against short-term-thinking when it came to attending college. He knows that he is missing out on making a good living while he is attending college. Ernesto is also aware that by attending college, he knows that the long term prospective earnings

associated with a college degree will put him in better standing for the future. He will be able to work less hours and command a higher salary.

When Cindy approached her mother about attending college, she only received negative feedback. Cindy had to convince her own sister to attend college in order to share transportation and make college a possibility.

I'm gonna help my sister out who's a senior, and I have an older sister out since she's never been to college . . . she's like 'I'm gonna work. "And then two years later, I said "You should go when I start", and she's like "And how are you going?" and I said "Well you can get your financial aid, and I'll show you how to sign up for classes and how to do your FAFSA." and she really didn't know what to do so my mom helped her and went to the college with her and WHEN I TOLD MY MOM that I was going to college she said "WHAT?, HOW YOU GONNA DO THAT-YOU AINT GOT NO MONEY AND OH WELL YOU'RE NOT GONNA GET A RIDE THERE. "She just didn't like have faith in me or whatever, she's just thinking all the negative stuff, just like and then I kinda got like yeah, how am I gonna get there but then I was like there'll be a way because there's always a way and so my sister got a car during the summer and I was like "This is perfect. We can carpool together" . . . laughter . . . yeah I basically got my sister into going to college and she's "yeah I wanna be a nurse", yeah and my younger sister is in high school still and I wanna get everything and help her out . . . most of my family members, my aunts and uncles dropped out-in and out of prison, jail and I was always scared of that, ya know there was no one in my family that was actually successful and I am like, and it was hard for me,

how am I supposed to do that but most of my family members were like “Cindy you wanna go to college right?” and I was like I’d never really thought about it and then in high school I was scared having to live up to their expectations. I wanted to go to college too and I was just scared . . . it’s actually pretty easy just doing it one by one. (Cindy, age 20)

Cindy ended up being the trailblazer in her family by attending college for academic and career reasons. She had seen the cycle of life in her family with debts and prison, and Cindy decided that she would overcome all of the obstacles in her path and succeed. By doing so, she also encouraged her sister to attend with her, while also solving her transportation problems. During my interviews at Central Oregon Community College, one of the student participants was a young Latino female. She explained to me the difficulties she had in initially attending college. Her father wanted her to attend, while her mother wanted her to stay home, get married and not leave the community. An uncle of the young woman interceded and is paying for her to attend college, but only at a location close to the family. When she transfers to a four-year university, it will be in a location where extended family are present. This kind of family decision-making would be considered unusual to most Caucasian families.

John lives at home with his father to save money. He has many obstacles to overcome with his disability and succeeding as a student. Added to that is the task of proving to his father that he is serious about education and not attending college for the financial hand-out.

My stepfather thinks that I am just trying to steal financial aid money because his brother did it and his sister did it so that is what he thinks I am doing . . . taking financial

aid money and running so he doesn't really support the idea. He wants me to show him that I can actually get a degree and then he will back me. (John, age 25)

John's father is cynical and distrustful of his son's intentions. Based on our conversation John will only receive positive feedback after he has completed his degree. Once he has proven his intentions and reached his goal, then he will be accepted. John's problem is that he could really use the positive support while he is attending college and not after. John has taken his father's negative feedback and is determined to prove him wrong. He has taken what could be a defeating situation for many and used it to motivate him to reach his goal.

Maureen's siblings seem to have sibling rivalry in regards to their educational achievements, but not in a typical way where they seek to outdo each other in educational achievements.

My family of origin . . . they just wonder why I have to have letters after my last name, you know because I would like to have a master's degree because I want to be a hospice social worker so Oregon requires you to have a master's degree. It's not that I am craving to have letters after my last name . . . I just don't understand why they would seem so intimidated by it . . . my um uh my brother is a waste water treatment operator and to work for the city he has had to have education for his job and then my sister, she took some classes to become a medical transcriptionist you know but it wasn't like going to university or whatever but I don't feel that what I am doing takes away from their education but when I labelled myself a first generation college student, because they read some of my personal statement when I was applying for scholarships they got really

mad and were offended. Just because I know more math it doesn't make me better than anybody (comments of agreement from the other students) and well I had a boyfriend when I first started school and I needed to have a weekend because there was a paper I was working on cos I am doing this research paper . . . I had to cite sources . . . I hadn't written a paper like that in a long time, well . . . he got really weird about the time I needed to spend with my homework and I thought well, if you can't handle me doing this well you probably can't handle me doing a job someday so I ended up . . . breaking it off with him, and well sometimes. (Maureen, age 44)

Maureen's siblings feel threatened by her academic goals, particularly in that she is going further than a certificate or specialized courses, and even beyond a BA Degree. Their feelings of self-worth have been challenged. They are also upset with her for accepting the mantle of "first generation student" and her choice to apply for scholarships. In Maureen's family, there are issues with perceived identity, class, and sibling rivalry.

Ernesto has a strong work ethic that is common amongst first and second generation immigrants. The first generation usually works hard to provide stability and opportunities for their children to succeed. This was the case with Ernesto.

There's um . . . not really much support in my family at all . . . they ah . . . don't see from my point of view the ah . . . significance of education and getting a college degree because they, ah, never got a degree. (Ernesto, age 26)

Ernesto's parents probably never had the opportunity to think of college as an option after settling in Oregon, working, and creating a new life. Higher education is not on their

radar, as it probably always seemed out of bounds. Ernesto is going against the established cultural norms of his habitus and family.

In America, as in other countries, there are people who live in a permanent underclass. Some choose to stay in that cycle and not attempt to breakout. For others, there is little choice as they strive to hold down minimum wage jobs, and care for family. A small number manage to overcome their situation and break the cycle through education. Patricia is one of the latter.

I don't talk to my family very much because they are not . . . they don't support me succeeding. They want me down on their level, poverty, that's not what I want.

(Patricia, age 28)

Patricia's experience shows that some families of first generation students feel threatened and even feel betrayed when one of their own seeks further education. It is perceived by the family as if the student actively de-values the culture and values of the people who raised them.

When I started college in the fall, all of my friends my peers or whatever were really like shocked or concerned like "Don't blow it for yourself." Because all they had saw was me not really care. But my friends were supportive, but just really worried about me, they just thought I was pushing it and then the foster family that I was with, they just disregarded it like it was a waste of time and I guess no one really had faith in me that I could do it and that was a big factor in maybe why I couldn't because when I got here and got that support system it's just like I just haven't stopped, I am just on a roll.

(Victoria, age 19)

Victoria is one of those students, like John, who choose to use negative feedback as a motivation tool to prove their naysayers wrong. Victoria also seems to feel validated by her successes in college thus far and is elated to discover her own inner resources.

Maureen not only struggled against her siblings, but challenged all of her family members by attending college.

My Godmother was just like you should just get a job after high school . . . I was quite good at school ya know, sorry my life was not like yours. We came from two completely different backgrounds . . . I want to have a job and not be living off the government at your age. (Vanessa, age 52)

Attending college for a first generation student can expose the low self-esteem of the family members and friends of these students. For example, Vanessa's grandmother telling Vanessa to get a job right after high school might be to increase the income coming into the home, but more likely it could be that if her daughter went to college, it would change the family dynamics. The daughter may become different, be more independent, and more successful than the grandmother or anybody else in the family. Family relations can be very complex and a daughter or son straying away from what is comfortable and "known" might be deemed irresponsible or even a betrayal of sorts. The student would be viewed as thinking they were superior or be perceived to look down at the family that raised them.

Employment

Many first generation students work while attending college. There are numerous reasons. One of the primary reasons is to reduce the amount of college loans they will need to pay off on completion or transfer. Also, these students work to support their external responsibilities, such as family and other dependents. Work may also be a chance to gain experience in a field that matches their degree path.

In this study, one of the items of note was that few of the students worked on the college campus they were attending. According to numerous studies, working part-time on a college campus is a positive indicator of college persistence. Other students worked seasonal jobs in tourism and forest fire-fighting. In Oregon, there are seasonal fires every year that threaten towns and rural communities.

I work for the forest service. I'm a firefighter for them and I usually work from the end of spring term through fall. So I miss out on fall term but then I come back winter and spring. I started in fall term 2008 and I went that fall and that winter and then I took a year off because of my pregnancy and my son and then I came back . . . I think it was 2010 winter term and I have been going winter and spring terms. (Katie, age 22)

Interviewer - So you've been going to college winter and spring terms and then fighting forest fires in summer and fall terms. That's got to be hard keeping up two lives?

It REALLY, REALLY is . . . I thought it was going to be simple but it's not, so I decided this last . . . at the end of the season that I am not going to be working anymore, just going

to school full time to finish my degree and knock it out and my husband has you know, a career, so I have the opportunity to do that, you know, so I am taking advantage of it (quiet laughter). (Katie, age 22)

Students like Katie have jobs that do not fit neatly with the quarter system or semester system offered by Oregon Colleges. Taking off large periods of time for seasonal work is something of a tradition in Oregon. Many students work at the ski slopes during fall/winter terms and others work as forest fire-fighters, or Alaskan fisheries in the summer. For first generation students this is much needed income to support themselves as they attend college. The students below, worked full-time hours which could certainly have a detrimental effect on their academic success.

I work at the hospital as a nursing assistant. I am in training right now so it's 36 hours one week and 12 hours the following week. (Morgan, age 25)

I work at Safeway stocking. Right now, this week I've got 10 hours and it differs, sometimes in February I'll have a week where it's four hours and then in summer it can be as much as 35 hours. (Matthew, age 26)

The first year I worked full-time and went to school full-time with an 18-credit course load. (Morgan, age 25)

At Central Oregon Community College, along with Mount Hood Community College, Tillamook Bay Community College, and Chemeketa Community College, the first generation students were often likely to be working long hours outside of college that would be likely to

affect their studies. A 20-40 hour working week can take priority for students seeking to support themselves and others. Research shows that this level of work does have detrimental effects on student persistence (Lederman, 2009). In the results of the Central Oregon Community College Pilot Study, 63% of the students were employed while attending college. About 30% of these students worked over 20 hours per week.

Women and the Uneven Burden

The first generation college student faces many hurdles to successfully adapt and succeed in college. However, the female first generation college student often has a far more difficult journey. Female first generation college students are also more likely to be the primary caregiver of children or elder relatives. They may also be living in or escaping from abusive situations at home and be suffering from guilt. This guilt most often manifests in the view that the mother/daughter/spouse attending college is being selfish and not adequately performing the roles that are expected.

This study overwhelmingly showed that women were more likely to have feelings of guilt about attending college. This usually related to not being as present for their children, house cleaning, bills, and looking after elderly relatives or pets. The men in the study showed little to no feelings of guilt in regards to attending college.

I feel really guilty because . . . my husband has to take over the finances and stuff. I feel like I should be helping out, like paying stuff, having a job to help support us so I feel guilty cos he . . . sometimes I'll need gas money or need to pay the babysitter, and I think that if I wasn't going to school, we wouldn't have to have these bills . . . but my husband

is supportive and doesn't think about it but I still think about it, and then I feel guilty for the time I have to spend on homework and I'm . . . I can't give my son all that attention so, I should really play with my son, but I need to write this paper (Sigh). I feel guilty about that . . . but I always try to remind myself that you know this isn't going to go on forever. Eventually I'll graduate and be able to spend time with my son, and we'll have more money to do . . . to travel and do fun things. (Katie, age 22)

Katie had further difficulties. The job she held as a forest firefighter also took away from time with her child. She was left with the decision to either quit college or quit her job.

Yeah . . . (Sigh) It was extremely difficult, um . . . I definitely saw the effects on my son, cos he'd like pick at this part of his nose. He'd pick at it like a nervous thing, and when I came back a week later after I'd been with him the whole time, it would clear up and it was gone. I saw the effects it had on my son, especially when I was away he was always calling for me and stuff like that, and I'm just you know, I'm a mother . . . it's just that type of career is more for a single person and I realized I'm glad I realized that early and so I changed. I obviously can't do it if it's gonna do that to my son. (Katie, age 22)

Katie struggled between her identity as a student, her career path, and her identity as a mother. The constant warring of those roles left her feeling that she was not a good mother and that by being successful as a student and in her job, it only left her feeling more guilty for time not spent with her child.

Vanessa struggled to overcome the pressures of faring better than her family members, and attended college even though it drove a wedge between her and her mother.

And you know she's jealous because I am here and as a single mom she had to work and you know, do all those things . . . And I feel bad but there's nothing I can do for her, you know, about it. So that's my sad story . . . sorry to bring you guys down. (Vanessa, age 52)

Vanessa's mother was living with the regrets of not being able to have the experiences of her daughter in attending college. Instead of feeling pride, it appears to have brought up emotions that were negative, and she grew to resent her daughter, who was only now attending college at the age of 52.

Amongst women, single mothers have the most difficulty in attending school while attempting to work and provide for children. Madeline is one such example.

When I was going to school there I worked full-time, and I have a son, I'm a single mom who I was supporting all by myself, so I was working to pay the childcare so I could go to school so anyways . . . I got burned out pretty fast and then I came back here . . . family is here. (Madeline, age 25)

Madeline was unable to juggle all of her obligations and attend college without her family support, and her return to Tillamook was the only way she could continue with her dream of succeeding in higher education and pursuing her career objectives.

Stephanie did not want to give many details about her family in the city. She said that she had helped them get on their feet, but that they were not likely to stay that way for long

and that she felt the need to remove herself, so she would not get dragged back down into poor circumstances.

My family was very dependent on me. I got them through a rough patch and then I needed to move far away and regroup. So . . . I have a little cabin up highway (redacted) in the woods in the middle of nowhere, and its bliss. (Stephanie, age 28)

Stephanie was seeking to distance herself not only physically from her family, but also through education. Stephanie had very practical goals and did not want to continue what she referred to as an enabling relationship.

I have four kids but they are all adults now. Now it's my turn to focus on my . . . I came here to complete my GED (high school graduation equivalency). (Elizabeth, age 38)

A number of the female students in the study were in circumstances similar to Elizabeth. They had brought up children without the help of men, and now their kids had grown up and left home they were focusing on their education. Several times during the interviews and focus groups I heard the term, "It's my turn" being used to describe the sacrifice these women had made for others, and now for the first time in their lives they were putting themselves first.

There seemed to be very little help for the female students on college campus, and yet so many of these first generation students had responsibilities at levels far greater than the men. The following conversation shows how little support there is on the Tillamook Community College Campus for these students.

I am volunteering right now, but I'm hoping to get on . . . with the resource centre . . . the Women's Resource Centre. (Stephanie, age 28)

Interviewer-Where is the Women's Resource Centre?

It's over by the library (public library-not on campus), ah, but we help women transition out of domestic violence situations and things like that so. (Stephanie, age 28)

Interviewer-Do they have a group on campus or anything like that or connections to campus?

Shakes her head, uh, uh (no). (Stephanie, age 28)

I asked a similar question of the focus group at Chemeketa Community College to see what resources were on campus for women.

Interviewer-Is there a women's centre on campus?

No replies for about 10 seconds.

One of the participants (female) muttered "I don't know." Vanessa shook her head from side to side

Interviewer-A place where you can go to meet other women, and share experiences, receive support

I've been here a long time and I have never heard of one. (Vanessa, age 52)

There's an AA Group on campus. (Elizabeth, age 38)

We have three women and you have never heard of one have you? (No responses)

(Vanessa, age 52)

Of all the groups in the study, women who were primary caregivers seemed to be the students who were struggling most outside of campus. Issues such as employment, housing, study time, and negative family dynamics seem to be a part of daily life. This group received no more support than any of the other students in the study, yet they also had the most difficult journey to completing their education. Campuses lacked Women's Resource Centres and these students were left to fend on their own.

Transportation

First generation students often attend college within close proximity of where they live. The financial challenge of moving away and living on a college campus can be financially prohibitive for this group. They often have children, family and other obligations that leave them no option rather than to attend college near where they reside. This means that first generation students often stay at home while attending college. Community colleges rarely have dorms on campus. In Oregon, only two of the seventeen community colleges have dorms for students.

This theme surprised me in some ways. My own community college experiences were at Portland Community College and in such a large urban environment public transportation was readily available. I expected that the close proximity of the community college to students living accommodations would negate the effects of reliance on transportation. At Central Oregon Community College and Tillamook Bay Community College, many students lived quite a

distance from campus. Chemeketa and Mount Hood CC are more urban and the problems of transportation did not appear to be as pronounced. Reliance on old unreliable cars, buses, and rides from classmates, friends, or family members are the norm for first generation students. This adds another element of chaos in the ability of these students to show up for classes on time. While online courses offer a remedy to the transportation problems faced by these students, many suggested a dislike of online courses and preferred face-to-face interactions with their classmates and teachers. Also tutoring resources and other services are still mostly only offered on the campus.

You have 10 minutes to get to another class, then back to Brooks and then back to the Salem campus and I mean it's hard enough sometimes to get across campus and go from one class to another and stop to go to the restroom, and now you are coming from a total different campus to get to another class here, so you either have to leave that class early or get to that class late. (Vanessa, age 52)

Vanessa is referring to Chemeketa Community College's main campus in Salem, and the satellite campus in Brooks. Satellite campuses are a good idea, in theory, in that they offer classes in more remote areas, so that students can take classes locally rather than always have to go to the main campus. However, courses are not always available on satellite campuses and students end up commuting to the main campus frequently. Logistically, this can be problematic and costly in gasoline or bus fares.

Interviewer-You've got a bit of a commute don't you? Where did you say you live?

LaPine, It's probably a 45 minute drive so I have to leave an hour early to get anywhere.

(Katie, age 22)

At Central Oregon Community College a large number of students commuted from distances of around an hour away. These rural communities have infrequent buses to Central Oregon Community College or Bend and most of the students relied on cars that were prone to have mechanical problems.

Carpooling is an option some of the participants at Central Oregon Community College chose to commute to school. By splitting the cost of gas (petrol) the students were able to save money. They also met on campus and studied together.

Yes, pretty much, but with carpooling you gotta take what classes you gotta take or some things are only offered at one time only once during the year so it's like I have to take this class. (Charles, age 20)

We all carpool together, all four of us. Yeah my sister drives us everywhere like to school. So we put our schedules close to the same times. It's kinda frustrating sometimes, like we have class at 7:45 and he doesn't start till like 12:45 and then after we are out of class at 9:30 we have to wait till like 2 until he gets out of his class (laughter). But it gives us time to work on homework and to you know catch up on work instead of going home and having to face it all. (Cindy, age 20)

The students who carpooled were still early in their educational journey at Central Oregon Community College. Initially, the system of carpooling seemed to be working, but as

these students near the completion of their programs, they will find that the scheduling of courses becomes more difficult as only specific courses will meet their degree requirements. The carpooling system may not be able to work when students schedules begin to conflict.

Addictions

Alcoholism in particular is problematic in all social classes and age groups. Regular beers after work can be the norm for many people, and this can grow to be habitual. Hunting trips, fishing trips, and other pastimes include alcohol, and many people drink alcohol in the home. In Oregon, Marijuana is common and actually became legal in 2014. Harder drugs such as meth, heroin and cocaine are less visible, but still present. During my interviews, there were a number of students that were recovering drug or alcohol addicts. All claimed to be clean, and of course none of the students in the interviews claimed to be an addict at the current time. It is not something that people admit often, until they are going through treatment and recovering.

Some of the medical problems are due to the harder lifestyle that first generation students often live on a daily basis. Poor nutrition, stress, and an unhealthy lifestyle can be key contributors to long term health problems. "One of the main impacts of educational attainment on health is manifest in its influence on lifestyle or health-related behaviours. Net of confounding factors such as age, race, sex, marital status, income, and employment status, educational attainment tends to have significant, negative effects on cigarette smoking, alcohol abuse or dependency, and cholesterol level (Crum, Helzer, Anthony, 1993; Darrow, Russell, Copper, Mudar, Frone, 1992; Gilleskie, Harrison, 1998; Kenkel, 1991; Sander, 1998; Winkelby et

al., 1990) and significant, positive effects on aerobic exercise, a healthy diet, and consumption of dietary fibre.” Education has been proven to have a significant effect on the long-term health and well-being of students (Pascarella, & Terenzini, 2005).

Mike - I'm 51 ½, I'm thinking I wouldn't mind getting a job here. I mean it's safe here, it really is.

Interviewer-What do you mean by safe?

Mike-Good environment safe. I told you that I am an alcoholic and I go to meetings. There's a really good meeting I am going to tonight with a friend of mine. Um that's what I mean by its safe here. Well most of the time. While I sit in my forestry classes with my professors and I know what they are doing. They're trying to connect with the students, and they see a lot of these college students that are hung-over and they'll say yeah-and they'll start like promote getting drunk, and it's not their problem it's my problem and I have to deal with my problem, that's how it works. And I'll sit there thinking, it pisses me off sometimes, why not put a bullet in a cylinder, spin it around and shoot it at me. It's not their problem, it's my problem and I have to deal with it. (Mike, age 51)

Mike is a recovering alcoholic and enjoys college for reasons of safety and support. To Mike the college campus is a place of structure and a safe place from outside temptations. He described the college as a “good environment-safe.” The college is a place where Mike does not feel temptation to drink, a place where drinking is prohibited. The institution is geared towards the academic and career development of individuals, and this is where Mike feels comfortable. The culture does not revolve around bars. Central Oregon Community College is

a campus without dorms, and this also aids the non-party atmosphere. Mike would find a four-year university environment much less safe than a community college. Students live on four-year university campuses, and alcohol becomes more commonplace.

Being brought up in trying circumstances, poverty, homelessness, and in foster care can have damaging effects on young people who often seek escape in addiction. A number of students in the study who have faced problems with addictions see college as a way of studying an area they have come to know through experience.

Elizabeth-I am studying social work . . . and I plan to get my Associate Degree in Social Work and Addictions and then a Bachelors in Social Work.

Interviewer-So are you currently working in the field of Social Work?

Elizabeth-No, not yet. I've been there . . . ya know. I'm a foster child and you know, an abusive family and I suffer from, ya know so I have experience. (Elizabeth, age 38)

Elizabeth's experience with social workers in her life as a foster child obviously led her to see this as a career path. By fighting her own addictions with the help of addictions counsellors and social workers, Elizabeth has decided to give back by helping others. This method of "giving back" as a career was common in the study. Community college and educational credentials were seen by these students as the only way into a respectable profession.

Financial Problems

Of all the hurdles that students must face while attending college the one that many students have difficulty comprehending is financial aid. Almost all students (with the exception

of Dreamers and those with enough money to pay for their education) apply for the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). This is a government funded loan and grants program. To apply, students need to provide a profusion of paperwork including tax statements. Traditional aged students are required to submit their parent's tax information as part of the application. All loans are required to be paid back in monthly instalments 6 months after a student stops attending college. This can be deferred if a student signs up for further education in an approved certificate or degree program. If a student defaults on loans, their credit record is seriously damaged and buying houses, cars and other credit based purchase may be affected if students have a bad credit record due to unpaid loans. Pell grants and other monies are not required to be paid back, and some students receive these as part of their financial aid package when they apply for FAFSA.

One of the problems that first generation students face is projecting their future earnings after they complete college. If they succeed in college and do end up in a career, their earnings can increase exponentially. However when students first sign up for Financial Aid and learn how much they are expected to pay back, the shock can be enough to turn them off their dream of college. Annual tuition might be twice what a student is earning in the workforce in their current position, and the idea of taking on that much debt seems like such a financial risk many are unwilling to take it on.

I think my very first term I took three classes and that just wiped out my savings and then every other term, I would try to go as much as possible and be like one class here and there . . . and my life kind of went downhill for a variety of reasons. I hated my job, I

was kind of depressed doing this and that . . . but then finally when I got out of that slump, at the same time, I became eligible for financial aid and all these Pell grants (limited free tuition support from the government) and stuff like that and so I started to go full-time. (Matthew, age 30)

Some students are denied financial aid, and usually, it is because they owe outstanding school loans and have stopped making payments. If a student starts up a payment plan and pays on time, then they can go back to college and defer further payments until 6 months after graduation. Matthew never admitted to owing outstanding college loans, but from experience I have seen that this is often the case with students who are unable to receive financial aid.

In recent years, many people have applied for admission to community colleges and have collected the financial aid, dropped classes, and used the money to be able to survive. During the recession years this became commonplace.

I remember my grandma tried going to school, but she mainly went for the money and my uncle went, but he just wanted the money, and it was confusing for me cos I just wanted to go and that's when I figured out 'ah that's why they want to go to school, cos they said they're paying me money . . . and I was like that's cool, I wanna do that and then I saw them and asked why aren't you in school anymore . . . and they were like 'we owe a lot of money' and I don't want to do that. (Cindy, age 20)

Cindy's family used financial aid as a survival tool, however the debts came back to haunt them. Without the wage-earning credentials that come through higher education, they were saddled with the debts and were most likely unable to pay.

Of course finances were a HUGE THING and completely dictated whether I would go to school. What really sticks out those first few terms going to school was, um . . . number 1..financing, tuition, costs, and things like that and working with the administration to try to get them to help me, because I find that a lot of new students, they find that they get really stuck trying to work the bureaucracy so that they can take the classes they want and. (Ernesto, Age 26)

Finance is probably the one theme that almost all first generation students share in common. First generation students find themselves paying for; medical bills, mechanical problems, childcare, tuition payments, rent, or car payments. These students struggle week to week and money problems often have no end in sight. During the interviews I often felt that it was a miracle that they ever even managed to attend college.

Unique Dimensions

One of the benefits of a qualitative study is the way that the participants can share information in a natural way. Their unique experiences cannot truly be captured in a survey or in statistical data. My research found some themes that I did not expect to find and will be useful for further research. The more we know about these students the better our colleges can serve them.

Helping Professions

An interesting trend that emerged from the interviews and focus groups was the likelihood of first generation students being focused on earning degrees and starting careers in

the helping professions. This was not something that I, the researcher, was looking for in the study, but in analysing the data I felt that this theme could not be excluded.

The helping professions consist of those that ideally make the world a better place, such as nursing, mental health, addictions counselling, teaching, and social work. There are several reasons that first generation students may be choosing these career paths. Students coming from backgrounds where poverty, abuse, and chemical dependency are prevalent may have had positive experiences working with professionals within these groups. A nurse, teacher, social worker, or mental health/addictions counsellor might also be one of the only professionals that many first generation students have met personally.

Another element is that the healthcare professions, in particular, are relatively stable and according to the Occupational Outlook Handbook (Bureau of Labour Statistics, 2015) are predicted to grow steadily over the next ten years. Anybody who reads Yahoo or a daily newspaper, such as the Oregonian, has seen multiple articles promoting healthcare professions as the place to be in our uncertain economic times. Nursing, in particular, is one of the only careers that offers competitive wages and ample time off for graduates fresh from college. Job stability, helping others, and earnings potential are important to students who have had little experience of those prior to college.

I am gonna be going on to Portland State to get ah, to get a degree in psychology and go into the Master's program and do some kind of an educational institution/mental health psychology thing. (John, age 25)

I'm looking into nursing as my platform and I plan to transfer to either OHSU or Clatsop Community College and do their RN to BSN program. (Gilberto, age 20)

I plan to get my Associate Degree in Social Work and Addictions and then a Bachelors in Social Work. (Elizabeth, age 38)

What I want to go into is more like the social work but I also like counselling and there's actually a program at OSU that offers it's like ummm family studies, so like if you do that you can be either social work or you can go into counselling, but like I just want to work more in a hospital setting just talking to people about . . . cos when . . . I have an aunt and when her daughter got sick from an infection that was going on and my aunt, she tells me that she wishes there had been counselling at the hospital to where she could have talked to someone specifically to tell her how she felt and that could help her with her stress and everything that she was going through . . . and I am like, maybe you just didn't find out and I am sure there is that kind of counselling . . . through hospitals maybe. (Cindy, age 20)

I want to be a residential counsellor and work in group homes . . . from what I understand . . . I plan on going to a four-year college . . . if I get an Associate Degree . . . then I am pretty sure I can find a job like that right off the bat. (Victoria, age 19)

There was a mental health/human service program and umm and it was something that I had been interested in. (Maureen, age 44)

I have a 4.0 and I just got accepted into mental health/human services program and everything has been going picture perfect and I haven't met any obstacles . . . so I feel like this is really where I am supposed to be. (Victoria, age 19)

I wanted to do something to make the world a better place and that is why I am looking at environmental engineering. (Vanessa, age 52)

Looking back at my own decisions when I started attending college, I can see a similar pattern to those of the first generation students in the study. Initially, when I first started attending Portland Community College, I was majoring in Computer Science. I wanted a good paying job for the first time in my life. After a few terms I realized that a) I had no passion for the subject, and b) In the Coast Guard I had a mission and a job that impacted peoples' lives. I missed that and chose to work in higher education where I could continue to have an impact, but this time in my local community, not unlike the students in the study.

Homeschoolers, Dreamers, and Fringe Groups

With any sample there will be outliers. In this study, there were several. Gilberto is a young Hispanic male only a few years out of high school. Gilberto was brought to the country by his parents who are undocumented. The law in the US requires that K-12 schools provide free education for undocumented students. Gilberto managed to get citizenship early in his college journey which makes it possible to get financial aid and scholarships. Dreamer students (students who are attending college in an undocumented status) are not eligible for tuition support or government loans. They end up paying for college out of pocket, and this is next to

impossible for this particular group. Even after completing degrees in college, they might still not be able to find work due to their status.

For such a long time I was undocumented (not legally in the US) in this country. I was brought here by my parents illegally at the age of eight. (Gilberto, age 20)

Gilberto is one of the fortunate Dreamer students that became a permanent resident while attending college. The process went on for many years, and now he is able to attend college, receive Federal Financial Aid and partake in any of the usual student activities. Undocumented students often face many barriers to successful completion of college or university. Gilberto, at least will be able to pursue his dreams of a career in medicine.

Homeschooling is an option that many rural families or those that are at either end of the political spectrum, both liberal and conservative choose over the public school system.

Well, I've been home-schooled throughout high school, so it was a little nervous for me going the first day to a classroom. I had a really good day, so I felt really comfortable and welcome and that has continued and I really enjoy the college. I think it's better than what I had back in California, so I am excited to go ahead, go forward with my life. (Madeline, age 25)

Homeschooled students are becoming increasingly common in the US. This pattern will continue to be the case as states continually cut the amount of state support. K-12 schools are shut down and students are merged into other schools, school days are shortened, libraries are not staffed by librarians, and physical education programs are also often on the chopping block.

Parents become disheartened with the level of education their children are getting, and the trend is moving towards more parents choosing to school at home.

With the increase in homeschooled students applying to universities and community colleges, admissions officers are finding it difficult to assess these students prior to admission. “Many college and university admissions offices struggle with how to fairly and accurately assess homeschooled applicants seeking admission given that these students typically lack a high school diploma or regionally accredited academic transcript for presentation” (Sorey, & Duggan, 2008, p. 23). Four-year universities also have stricter and more competitive admissions requirements. It can be difficult for four-year admissions officers to gauge a homeschooled student’s academic abilities. Some four-year colleges and universities recommend that students seeking admission to their institutions first attend a community college (Sorey, & Duggan, 2008). Ironically, while four-year universities tend to be hesitant in accepting homeschooled students, a Texas community college study (Jenkins, 1998) found that homeschooled students were likely to have higher community college GPA’s than traditional high school graduates.

Homeschooled students are different in some major ways to traditional high school graduates. They are unfamiliar with the processes and requirements for college entry. Applications for financial aid, admissions requirements, and standardized testing are not familiar territory for these students. Similarly, once these students reach the classroom, they may also face some challenges. Lecture styles, small group projects and presentations and

other norms in the higher education classroom may be something of a culture shock to these students.

Church Support

Two of the students in the study were being supported outside of college by church members. While this might not seem a large number, it was significant enough that I felt it needed to be included. My initial reaction was not to include this theme. I realized that this was biased due to my own experiences with religion. Not to include this section would be unethical in my role as a researcher.

The experiences of the two students listed below have been very positive. Both students are able to care for their families and attend college with assistance from church goers or pastors.

I'm busy, but I pay attention to them. A lot of parents these days I see them use their TV as a babysitter . . . My parents were busy. I was always outside playing, so I grew up with old-fashioned values and morals. I try to teach my kids that but it's hard in society today because everything's been turned upside down. Everyone is always complimenting me on how well-behaved my kids are, but I pay attention to them. But I've got support from my friends and the pastor and his wife. He's not my pastor, but the pastor and his wife from the church here . . . they adopted me and my kids, so I have their support now. People at church are definitely people you want in your life. (Patricia, age 28)

Patricia found a place to live with the support of her pastor. Her family had the stability they needed while Patricia continued her college education. Melanie also found support from the church in the form of a generous parishioner.

I have jumped in with both feet to a really great church that's been helpful and they will come and pick him up and take him to things . . . there's moms and stuff. I have just really tried to get a good support group around . . . they just love our kids. They just love em. It's been really nice. A lady from our church actually asked us to move into her house so we recently did that. She has a huge house-it's like 6000 square feet, enormous . . . it's one of the houses I clean (laughter) so I can clean in exchange for rent and she helps out umm with the kids and it's just been, it's been so nice seeing people come together . . . my kids are in a safe place. (Melanie, age 37)

Melanie and Patricia were going through times of extreme hardship, and they were both on the verge of homelessness. Having children to support gave them the added responsibilities, and the men in their lives did not appear to in any condition to support their families. Abuse and alcoholism were the reasons these families were forced into the situations they were in. College did not offer the support in the form of a women's centre, and resources such as childcare in the way these women were desperately in need. The generosity of a pastor and church parishioner appears to have filled the needs of these two families and allowed them some stability and safety while the mothers completed their education in the hopes of secure employment.

The Military

Military students often have trouble navigating the college campus and adapting to the norms of being a college student. In the US, an enlisted military member will serve a minimum of four years. The military consists of five branches: Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, and the Coast Guard. The experiences of these students are very diverse and many have served in war zones or in situations that also make the transition to college more difficult. The military environment has little room for critical thinking. Orders are given and orders are carried out. The military requires a group to work as a team in all things, whereas the college is an environment focused on individual growth and independence. Critical thinking, critiquing and questioning are the rule of the day on the typical college campus and the cognitive dissonance that veterans face can add to the difficulties of transition.

In the military you have that foundation of family, because everyone's your battle buddy. Everyone looks out for you and then it took me so long to transition to being a civilian because like . . . I have no-one there . . . I feel like I am constantly watching my back . . . it's hard, I don't feel safe. I feel safer in the military. (Patricia, age 28)

What Patricia refers to above is a camaraderie that most people experience in the military. Your experiences are so extreme, and the bond between service members becomes stronger than friendships formed in civilian life. I myself still have former and current military friends across the US, and we stay in touch, camp, visit, and have reunions in ways that are not common amongst civilians. Part of the difficulty in adapting to college for military members and veterans is missing that bond, that camaraderie.

Serving in the US military makes service members eligible for the GI Bill which helps them pay for college while serving or after their enlistment. Officers attend academy and receive a BA Degree upon completion and then serve in the military afterwards.

If you join the military after you earn an Associate Degree you get in at a higher rank. I only know the army, but the Coast Guard wouldn't take me cos I'm a single parent, but in the Army you get in at a higher rank and your job could be medical field and stuff since that's what you wanna do and you might like the military and wanna stay in but when you get out that REALLY helps you get another job. (Patricia, age 28).

Patricia is referring to an alternate path into the military. If you enlist with an Associate Degree, you have the opportunity of being hired at a higher rank and earning more. Laura was also trying to convince another participant of using the military as a way into the medical field. The military is a viable choice for many first generation students and the GI Bill can make college possible for many who would otherwise never attend.

Conclusion

The findings in this chapter are directly related to the experiences of the students. The first generation students are allowed to speak for themselves and their voices articulate experiences that illustrate the common themes that these students encounter on their educational journey. As a researcher, I actively worked to bring the stories together in a form that allowed the original integrity of the interviews to come through in a way that was authentic. The number of students interviewed and those that participated in the Pilot Study

and Focus Groups add validity to the strength and reliability of the themes. The concluding chapter will explain how the findings are a unique addition to the literature on first generation students in the community college setting.

Chapter 6: Unique Contributions to the Field and Concluding Comments

From the first moments of inception, this research dissertation was planned in a way that aimed to gather the first-hand accounts of a population who lacked a voice. The current research on first generation students is extensive to say the least; however, the data gathered on these students is around persistence, test scores, and comparisons with college savvy students. Colleges are awash with data on this specific population. In some ways, the approach of the majority of research conducted on first generation students is similar to the approach that colleges and universities have towards these students. Colleges and universities expect first generation students to adapt to higher education in order to succeed. Research on first generation students takes the same approach by identifying factors that influence first generation students' ability to adapt and persist in higher education.

This research dissertation was never set up in a way to identify solutions to problems, but instead the aim was to educate the college and university staff on the complicated lives of first generation students. They do not all fit into one category and should not all be painted with the same brush. Intersectionality is a term that can be used to describe first generation students. A first generation student might be an immigrant, veteran, female with a family to support. Alternately another first generation student might be a white male high school graduate with no responsibilities outside of college. While these students do have much in common, there are also clear differences between them.

This research study takes a different approach to previous studies. Firstly and most importantly, this study takes place in the locations that most first generation students take

their first steps into higher education, the community college. This was very important to me during the decision making process used to decide where I would conduct the field research. As I was conducting the literature review, I became aware that there were more first generation studies conducted at four-year universities than there were at community colleges. As a practitioner, I am also concerned that first generation student persistence findings at four-year universities are applied wholesale to community colleges. The student population at the majority of four-year universities is usually traditional, with students transitioning directly from high school. At a community college, the average age is generally much higher, and the external responsibilities of students are usually much greater. With that in mind, along with my own first impressions of higher education as a first generation student at Portland Community College, it seemed fitting that this study should take place in the community college environment. 50.5% of first generation students are enrolled in 2-year community colleges, which is a much higher representation of first generation students than are at four-year state universities, for-profit organizations and private universities (Nunez, & Carroll, 1998). Since this report was published, the pattern of institutional attendance for first generation students has not changed significantly.

Secondly, the first generation student participants in this study gave voice to their own experiences of higher education in a way that encouraged them to use their own words and impressions. The use of Phenomenology and Narrative Inquiry greatly facilitated this form of data generation and collection. This study identifies common experiences that the first generation students shared with the researcher. This is important because the students through the medium of interviews revealed themes which have not been prevalent in the

current literature. These themes were derived through identification of common experiences, such as the ordeals faced by the women students or the difficulties facing adult first generation students. In the literature review, I covered areas which had been previously studied, such as persistence of first generation students and their likelihood to start college less prepared than their college familiar counterparts. Finally, as a first generation student and a higher education administrator with 14 years of experience, I was able to develop a dialogue with these students from a position of trust. My unique insights and experiences allowed me to speak the same language as the students, and this in turn led the student participants to open up to me and share their experiences from a place of comfort. I would argue that they shared themselves to a level that would not have been possible had I not come from a similar place.

First generation students do not have the capital they need to be as successful as they would like to be. According to Bourdieu (1986), “There are three main forms of capital: - economic, cultural and social – and the distribution of capitals among individuals determines the chances of success” (p. 242). The circumstances that first generation students are born into dictate their distribution of capitals. The environment they are brought up in leads to limited opportunities for these people. The types of cultural, social, and economic capital available to these first generation students is why they are more likely to attend community college and why affluent students might attend an Ivy League university. Without the finances and network required for entrance to an Ivy League university or a prestigious four-year state university, these students look towards a college or university that is more of a reality for them within the limits of their own economic, social, and cultural capital.

Addressing the Themes

The themes addressed in chapter six exposed the lived existence of first generation community college students. How do those themes reflect what has already been addressed in the literature and how they are different from the findings reported in the literature review? This section will explore those themes further and will reflect how the themes fit in with the current knowledge on first generation students.

Looking at the themes through Bourdieu's (1986) lens of economic, cultural and social capital, it is clear why first generation students struggle to attend and complete college. The distribution of the types of capital is limited and thus this impinges on the successful outlook for these students. The circumstances and context that first generation students are born into dictate their distribution of capitals. Their opportunities are limited and shaped by this environment. The students in this study may be breaking out of their cultural and social capitals by attending community college, however, this is only a small step within the unspoken limits defined by social reproduction. Community college is practically the only option available to most of the participants in this study. Few, if any were able to visualize a bigger dream of attending a prestigious university or moving away, giving up work and responsibilities, and investing in their education.

Answering the Research Question

This study was set out to explore the experiences of first generation students in the community college setting, and the research methodologies used were chosen primarily as a tool to give voice to the students themselves. The study sought to find out what experiences

these students were having both on and off-campus and how that might affect their success in the community college setting. The research gap is twofold. The majority of research on first generation students has been conducted at four-year state universities, and there has been little qualitative research on these students in the community college environment. There is also a research gap on the first generation experience using qualitative methodologies. The scarcity of qualitative research on first generation students is a primary reason I chose to use Narrative Inquiry and Phenomenology to examine first-hand the experiences of these students.

The study sought to provide answers to the following questions:

3. How do first generation community college students balance the academic rigours of college along with the external responsibilities they have outside college?
4. What are those external and internal factors that affect the persistence of first generation students in the community college setting?

The remainder of this chapter will clarify the answers to the two research questions through the lens of Bourdieu's different types of capital. The themes and findings will be analysed under the following headings:

- Economic capital and first generation students
- First generation Students viewed through the social and cultural capital lens

These lenses will help us to focus on the true societal problems at a higher level before addressing the themes that are a result of the environment that has been shaped by state and

federal decision-making. First generation students are a product of their environment. The careers, trades and identity that was once a part of working class culture has undergone radical change in the latter part of the 20th century and the early decades of the 21st century. First generation students are attending college with the main goal of improving their economic, social and cultural capitals.

Economic Capital and First Generation Students

Financial Problems

In regards to economic capital, finance almost without exception was a constant problem for the majority of the students in the study. To attend college in the first place is hard for these students to imagine. Financially, they are at much risk while attending college, and providing for their families is something that becomes even more difficult during their time in school. Their precarious financial situations are a result of their lack of economic capital. This is tied directly to their lack of employment prospects and the economy's lack of value for these people as part of the system. The economy has shifted away from fields that these students' parents were once able to work in, and has morphed into a world economy with constantly changing skill sets. The students in this study were involved in realigning their skill sets to become productive members of the new economy.

The participants in the study were unable to fund their own education and were almost all receiving federal financial aid in the form of loans and grants. The majority of the students did not realize that they might be eligible for scholarships. In my work at Clark Community College, I see students withdraw from classes on a regular basis due to financial problems. The

financial aid these students receive pays for more than classes. Students also use these funds to pay for rent, gasoline, bus passes, and groceries for the family. With the tuition at community colleges averaging at about a third of the tuition at a four year institution it makes financial sense to attend community college to complete the first two years of a BA Degree and then transfer to a four-year university to complete the BA Degree.

First generation students struggle to stay in college for a variety of reasons, and money is often a part of the problem. Some students are recruited away from campus by military recruiters serving the Army, Navy, Marines, and Air Force. Recruiters can be seen at information tables at community college and university campuses. Some even have recruitment offices on college campuses. They encourage students to enrol in the military for many reasons such as career training, travel, and tuition support through the GI Bill. A steady job and a living wage can be difficult options for struggling students to refuse.

In my own experience working at a community college, I have come into contact with a number of first generation students. Many of them are loan adverse, meaning that they will actually try to attend community college and pay as they go rather than take a loan or even apply for scholarships. Many scholarships are not available to students who are not also receiving Federal Financial Aid. This leaves these students paying cash each term for tuition and fees.

According to Burdman (2005)

It is often said by financial aid analysts that low-income students, minority students, and students who attend lower-cost institutions are loan-averse, but what that means is less clear. Is aversion to borrowing for educational expenditures a rational preference or a misguided choice by students who lack sufficient information about the benefits of a college education? Does an aversion to borrowing lead students to attend community colleges rather than four-year institutions, or to attend part-time? Does the lower sticker price at community colleges or a decision to attend part-time drive the decision not to borrow? Or are students who come from a background of less opportunity and less resources simply less optimistic about their futures – and therefore more risk-averse. (p. 3)

In my experience this is certainly the case. Students take years and years to complete their degree in order to pay for it in cash, and risk spending longer before they are able to reap the financial and career rewards of a college degree. I attended community college for similar reasons. The price burden of four-year universities was too high for me and even my GI Bill funding would have been drained before I had completed university if I had attended a four-year university for the entire degree. One of the biggest risks for first generation students is that if they fail to complete their degree at college or university, then they have no degree or certification and on top of that they have to pay off college loans. Many poor students are worse off than if they had never attended in the first place (Howard, 2001). This is without doubt the worst possible scenario, and yet it happens all the time. At Clark College in Vancouver, Washington in 2013, 22% of first-time students did not enrol for a second quarter

(Clark College, 2013). The majority of students receive financial aid, and this is due for repayment six months after they stop attending. One term may cost thousands of dollars, and if a student completes several terms without completing a degree or certificate then the amount of debt that student owes will increase dramatically. Traditional students and their families are more knowledgeable about how financial aid and scholarships work. They are more likely to apply early and receive more monies in the form of grants which they do not have to pay back. Traditional students also are more likely to have a better GPA, and are thus eligible for more scholarships, further reducing their loan burdens. These families also create college funds for their children many years before they attend college or university. By preparing so far in advance, they are able to cushion the financial impacts of their college/university attending children.

Employment

The participants in the study were all attending community college primarily to improve their social capital by using education as a tool to increase their earning potential. The focus on improving their financial situation was a common conversation amongst the first generation students in interviews and focus groups. The limited employment opportunities available to the students through their lack of social and cultural capital had driven these students out of their comfort zones to seek education as a tool to improve their job prospects in an economy where the jobs in their social class had been sent overseas or restructured to require educational credentials.

Understandably, it is difficult for colleges to provide help in the employment arena, however, of all the students in the study, only one was employed on a college campus in some capacity. Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) theory of student departure pointed out that student persistence was directly related to involvement on campus. Many of the students were employed off-campus in minimum wage positions. The students who participated in the study needed to be employed to support either their families or to help them eek by whilst attending community college. Several of the students reported that their shifts at work had a negative impact on their ability to attend classes. The level of importance that the participants attributed to completing college was often superseded by more urgent needs such as working long hours to pay for rent, food, and transportation. In comparison, attending class seems like a luxury that can be cut. This is one of the primary reasons it is difficult for first generation students to succeed in college. Each community college in the study had on-campus employment opportunities for students, but these students seemed unaware of these opportunities. According to Astin (1985), "Students learn by becoming involved" (p. 133). First generation students in the community college setting are unlikely to avail themselves of involvement in student clubs. The research I conducted at the community colleges in this study confirmed that to be the case. However, I would argue that our colleges need to encourage our first generation students to apply for positions on campus and thus lead to greater retention of this population. Employment is crucial for first generation students. Working a moderate amount of hours at the community college could significantly improve their bond with the college. Of the 38 students in the study many worked long hours at minimum-wage jobs that would affect their ability to succeed in college. On-campus positions would also give these

students the chance to interact with staff and faculty and gain a greater degree of college knowledge. One of the differences between first generation students and college familiar students is that first generation students do not always know what questions to ask, and what resources are available on a college campus. Their college-familiar counterparts are often aware of opportunities due to their social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1977). I would encourage community colleges to advertise student worker vacancies to new students who fit the first generation criteria. Further persistence studies could be focused on first generation students employed within their respective educational institutions.

Transportation

Transportation issues were especially noticeable at Central Oregon Community College. Transport did not seem to be as much of a problem for students at the other sites. Central Oregon Community College supports such a wide service district that this is inevitable. For example, the distance from the town of LaPine to Bend is 30 miles and Prineville to Bend is 35 miles. The students had real problems with automotive transportation. Car reliability and affordability was a constant factor attributing to their success or failure. They had a limited network of friends and family (limited social and cultural capital), and were frequently faced with figuring out alternate modes of transportation at the last minute to get to class. As it was, students in the study were struggling to get to classes and when they got to campus having to spend the entire day before the bus home was available. Students in Central Oregon, carpooled and took classes together during the same timeslots on the same days. This could only work temporarily as a solution. As the students progressed towards their different degree

paths, finding similar classes at times that would work for all those carpooling would eventually prove too difficult. Hybrid courses may be another form of reaching out to students to limit the transportation burden. Hybrid courses are offered with a combination of online and face-to-face classroom sessions. Redesigning course offerings to create hybrid opportunities for students would help them both financially and in time savings, whilst negating the reliance on transportation.

According to a study by Moore (2014):

The sense of community (in the hybrid course) was significantly higher (than the online only course). The level of frustration the students experienced in the hybrid course were more in line with those experienced in the traditional face-to-face course, and students preferred the hybrid and face-to-face learning environments over the online course. (p. 24)

However, first generation and at-risk students often prefer face-to-face classes and online options might decrease the transportation problem, but might have an adverse effect on students who need contact with the campus to create a strong bond and connection, which leads to persistence. In a recent study Lederman (2013) reported that of all 34 Washington State Community and Technical Colleges, virtually all groups of students performed less well in online courses than they did in face-to-face coursework. Also tutoring resources and other services such as academic advising are still mostly only offered on the campus.

First Generation Students Viewed through the Social and Cultural Capital Lens

For the participants in this study, the network of friends, colleagues and those who might influence on their behalf was extremely limited. They did not have a wealthy aunt or uncle that was able to ease their way into a respectable university or a foot in the door at a company job with earning potential. The students in this study did not have access to those kinds of benefits. All of the students in the study were taking courses at the community college because it was the only option they felt that was affordable, and their ability to leave the area for higher education was made more difficult with family, work and other responsibilities.

Women and the Uneven Burden

In the colleges that participated in this study, there was a distinct lack of resources for female first generation students. I would argue that of all the findings in the study, gender difference is the area that needs a greater amount of research. The community college experience proved to be very different for the female first generation students in the study. Their level of responsibilities far outweighed that of the men. One suggestion in particular is analysing the amount of debt women students with dependents accrue during college versus males with no dependents. The women in this study were using financial aid not just as a means to pay for tuition and fees, but also to pay bills, rent, and to provide groceries for their families. Male students with no dependents would not likely need to take as much on in the form of loans as their female counterparts with dependents.

All the community colleges in the study all operate differently, and the lack of state-wide oversight is evident in the differences in the funding and support services available at each

of the colleges. In my conversations with college administrators, I have found out that some colleges once had Women's Centres on campus, however in the past decades the budget cuts on campus have cut what many feel are non-essential programs. At Clark College where I am employed, the same scenario is true. There was a Women's Centre, which for budget reasons became defunded and closed several years ago. Nothing has been created to fill that void. There are more female students at college now than there are males, and the landscape of education has changed, but if this study proves anything it is that we are certainly far from equal in the burdens of care giving and social responsibilities. Many women students carry a far greater wealth of responsibilities than do their male counterparts.

This is often the norm for working class or first generation students. Evans' (2009) study showed similar results. "For the girls in this study, there was a widespread recognition that application to a university close to their home was the only financially viable way of securing higher education" (Evans, 2009, p. 346). Of the entire sample of female students in the same study, only two of them intended on moving away from home to attend university, and those two were moving to a town where they had family ties. The women in the study were focused on improving their social and cultural capital to increase the standard of living for their families.

The women in this study were almost without exception placed in the role of primary caregivers. The women identified with the role; however, they did see the unfairness of it. Most were doing it all themselves. Some of the women were even made homeless through divorce, unemployment, and abuse. That they were attending community college at all is nothing short of a miracle. The reasons these women were attending college was almost

without exception as a means to increase earning potential in order to support their families. Like the female participants in Evans' (2009) study, the women viewed increased earnings as a way of improving the living circumstances of the entire family. They have split to some degree with their expected path and were trailblazing a new and different territory. The world they grew up in was different. Men might have played a bigger role, been the breadwinner, the provider. Many of the female participants were divorced or estranged from their husbands. They were going it alone. The women in this study showed similar trends to Reay et al.'s (2009) study. They found themselves without strong male support and were succeeding in their goal to become nurses, social workers, and treatment counsellors. They were turning the tables, and were focused on providing for others and becoming self-reliant. However, they were doing this while still managing to be the primary caregivers. Their burden was much greater. The benefits to the family are also an item for discussion. The female participants were improving the general living circumstances for their families, and changing the cultural and social capital for the next generations. Their children will not be first generation students and will have experienced their mothers' college attendance and the benefits such as improved employment opportunities that come with college success. However, the women also reported feelings of guilt and frustration because attending college took them away from their children.

Taking on the role of primary caregiver and the responsibilities associated with it can be an enormous burden for the female student.

According to White (2001):

The unique characteristics and experiences of this non-traditional female population result in support and counselling needs that differ from those of traditional age college

students. Increased awareness of the stresses, challenges, and additional responsibilities faced by adult re-entry women can be helpful to administrators and student services personnel interested in providing a supportive environment. (p. 3)

None of the community colleges in the study provided significant support to these students. The students seemed to feel that they were on their own for the most part. Women from immigrant families also faced cultural hurdles to overcome in order to attend college. They needed to convince their families of the importance of higher education. Immigrants might have a negative perception of education, and fear for their children's future. They might fear the inability to maintain the traditions of the family, or a fear their children might marry someone not from the immigrant community. "Young women in immigrant families have a difficult time. Some parents believe the adage that if you educate your daughters you lose them" (Carr, & Kefalas, 2009, p. 39). College is a big unknown, and many immigrant parents do not want to lose control of their children in what is still a new country to them.

I would argue that it is not only the domain of female students to be primary caregivers. The female faculty and staff in higher education institutions also face the reality of missed career opportunities due to shouldering the greater caring burden at home. In my experience in several higher education institutes in the US, women are represented in far greater numbers in entry-level positions and up to the manager level. At the director level, the number of women tends to be equal to that of men; however, in the executive positions such as Dean, Vice President, Faculty Chair, President and Provost, the positions are disproportionately held by men. "While new managerialism gave the impression that it was gender neutral, allowing new

opportunities for women through a meritocratic code, in reality it was not” (Grummell et al., 2008, p. 2).

Grummell et al., (2008) state:

The highly individualised capitalist-inspired entrepreneurialism that is at the heart of the new academy has allowed old masculinities to remake themselves and maintain hegemonic male advantage. Not only has the new capitalist academy provided global opportunities for mobile transnational masculinities, it also imposes expectations of performativity that only a care-less worker can fully satisfy. (p. 192)

The community colleges in the study did not provide support for female students with caregiver burdens. The environment in which they grew up is a place where many women are left in situations where they are primarily responsible for being primary caregivers while men are not attributed the same responsibility. The female participants have become aware that the surest way to break the cycle of economic stagnation is to improve their economic, social, and cultural capital through education and increased employment opportunities.

Mature Students

There is a significant difference in the way that first generation high school students perceive the community college versus those that attend community college as mature students. For those that attend community college directly after high school their transition is smoother. For the most part, the results of this study showed that they adapt and quickly adhere to the norms of the community college environment. Of course, there may be other factors that affect their ability to stay in college such as transportation, finances, and

dependent care. The adult/mature first generation students were attending college primarily because their traditional avenues of employment had ceased to exist. They found themselves without any value as workers in the global economy, and realized that college offered them the opportunity of updating their skill sets to become of value in the job market.

The mature first generation students in the study struggled to adapt to the norms of the community college. "Returning to a formal learning environment poses a somewhat paradoxical experience for mature-age learners in that they need both change and stability for personal growth, yet to achieve and maintain stability, they must undergo personal change of some nature" (Willans, 2011. p. 2). Their cultural and social capital was not of a level to allow them to survive in the great recession and limited job markets. Not only the level of change involved, but their external obligations such as childcare, employment, divorce, financial issues, and transportation problems were much more prevalent than with the younger students. These responsibilities often trumped college as the most important part of their lives.

Adult learners are self-directed and independent, with a wealth of experience from which to draw when learning, and a need to see immediate relevance in their education as it relates to their current social roles (Knowles, 1980). In retrospect, my own first impressions of the community college were most likely influenced by this being my first experience in the American education system, and the fact that I was a mature learner with life experience. Like the mature learners in the study I felt there was little recognition of my life experiences.

According to Knowles (1980):

The psychological climate should be one which causes the adults to feel accepted, respected and supported; in which there exists a spirit of mutuality between teachers

and students as joint inquirers; in which there is freedom of expression without fear of punishment or ridicule. People tend to feel more 'adult' in an atmosphere that is friendly and informal, in which they are known by name and valued as unique individuals, than in the traditional school atmosphere. (p. 45)

The only validation these students encountered was directly attributed to their own success in the classroom. They were not receiving validation or respect for their experience as adults. As Schlossberg, et al., (1989) stated, the feeling of mattering keeps adult students engaged in learning. Many of the adult students in the study had not felt validated, and several of the students mentioned that they looked forward to our interviews, because it made them feel that they were important, and after our meetings they felt more inspired and confident in their abilities to succeed.

I would argue that our community colleges recognise the difference in the different types of first generation students and aim to meet their needs in a more thoughtful way. During the intake process community colleges may want to consider different information sessions for mature students in a similar vein to how they are conducted in the Irish universities and technical colleges. Ireland's higher education system employs Mature Student Officers who are a first point of contact for adult students applying to university. They plan information sessions specifically for this group of students where they learn about the resources available such as childcare, financial opportunities, time management skills, and other areas important to this group of students. A similar model might be advisable for community colleges. Colleges should develop different approaches to first generation students who are transitioning from high school and those that are mature students. Teaching styles should also be analysed to

address the mixed classrooms containing both adult and traditional aged students. Since community college classrooms may include students that are mature and traditional, classroom conversations incorporating the lived experience of the adult learners may help to support the learning of those with less experience (Davis, 2013). As Wells and Arauz (2006) stated, “Not only does working with peers harness the social orientation of students’ interests, but it also enables them to achieve together more than any of them individually could have achieved alone” (Wells, & Arauz, 2006, p. 415). This kind of approach could be beneficial to both types of learner and create a richer and more dynamic classroom environment.

Further areas for research should focus on how to validate and recognise adult students who are going to college for the first time. This population seemed to be neglected by the colleges in the study, primarily because they were hard to reach before they arrived on the college campus. High school students can be found in high schools and bridge programs are a way to help them learn about college before they arrive. There is no similar way to provide outreach to adult students. One clear need is that we need to reach out to all adult prospect students after their first contact to try to help them prepare for when they arrive on the community college campus. Community colleges have open access and admissions for any term in the year. Students can start in fall, winter, spring, or summer and can do so with only days, or weeks’ notice. This further complicates outreach initiatives to help these students prepare for their time in college.

Family/Peer Anti College

First generation students often face criticism for their decision to attend college. This criticism comes from family and peers and relates directly to the limited social and cultural capital these students have. Some parents actively discourage their children from attending college. This research study showed real examples of this. *“My mom was extremely jealous...and IS extremely jealous . . . because ummm . . . I did go to college. I am making it on my own, ya know, I am paying my way and I don’t need any help” (Vanessa, age 52).* The reality for the parents, family members, and peers is that the first generation student will move away, learn different ways, clash with the family culture, or even become like the white collar manager that they dislike. *“To have a child jump from worker to middle-class manager in a generation would be an outright betrayal for some working-class people” (Carr, & Kefalas, 2009, p. 33).* For some tight-knit families, there is the very real fear that their child might move to another city or even state. Other families are so focused on survival that college seems like a dream for other people. I was brought up in that kind of family. College or university is what the smart kids, the well-off kids did. We were a hard-working family and our ancestors were farmers, crofters, pub workers, rebels, and factory workers. We were expected to work to retirement age, if we lived that long and to be content with a good job and a roof over our heads. Taking a different path to that kind of upbringing will always bring dissonance, some good and some bad. However, once one of the family takes the plunge into higher education and the cultural and social capital changes that come along with it, a doorway is opened for other family members to take the same journey and the cycle is broken. With the global economy and the reality that many working class jobs have been shipped overseas, and the

weakening of unions, many of the reliable jobs that were a part of the working class world are no more. This makes it somewhat easier for the first generation student to make that leap towards a college education. If they hope to have any chance of steady and long-term employment, they do not have a choice.

Many first generation students survive on their own merits. Without support and mentoring they apply to colleges and universities and industriously take on the challenge. “The working class students’ turn towards a cultured habitus was not due, in the main part, to the strong support and active mentoring of their teachers. Rather, it was predominantly work on and of the self” (Reay, et al. 2009., p. 1105). This seems more reflective of my own journey through higher education. I was trying to prove something to myself and others. In reflection I see that I was not too different to the male participants in my study. I was self-directed, but also selfish to some extent. I was focused on the opportunities that lay in the future rather than seeing my education as a way to help my family of origin. However, the female participants in the study were focused on their current living situations and education was a way of bring the entire family into an improved cultured habitus.

Positive College Experiences and Validation

By the seventh to ninth (12-14 years of age) grades most students have developed occupational and educational expectations that are strongly related to socioeconomic status (SES). “These SES-based differences subsequently manifest themselves in differences in college-going persistence, and degree attainment rates, all of them unfavourable to low-SES students in comparison with their more affluent counterparts” (Terenzini, et al., 2001, p. v).

These facts are disconcerting and illustrate how our system works to reproduce itself. This is described as “reproduction of the occupationally based class structure” (Reay, et al. 2001, p. 856). How can we break this cycle? It is a difficult concept, when many of the people living in poverty or close to it, discourage their own children or peers from seeking to improve their quality of life. Those that discourage first generation students from attending college are also stuck in their own habitus. They have learned to yearn only for what society says is possible for them and not to aspire for what is deemed as out of reach.

Obviously our colleges, universities, and high schools need to break down the silos and work together to catch these students as early as seventh grade and perhaps earlier to encourage them to think of higher education as an option. This would require validating these young students and believing in them.

Honneth, (1995) surmised:

Whereas self-respect is a matter of viewing oneself as entitled to the same status and treatment as every other person, self-esteem involves a sense of what it is that makes one special or unique. What distinguishes one from others must be something valuable. Accordingly, to have the sense that one has nothing of value to offer is to lack any basis for developing a sense of one’s own identity. In this way, individuality and self-esteem are linked. (p. 16)

If people feel they have something of value to offer society, their self-esteem will improve and they will likely persist in their education. If expectations are set low, low self-esteem will lead to decreased persistence and success. Just the fact alone that we need to

validate students is a symptom of a larger problem. Students should have self-esteem, confidence and a belief they can and will succeed. That they do not, is directly related to their habitus, and a society that manipulates people into believing they are not entitled to the same opportunities as others. Thus, we need to focus on validating the worth of our young and mature students to help them develop their self-esteem and self-worth. Validating younger students before they make their life decisions is important, but it is equally important to engage adult learners in a similar way.

Schlossberg et al., (1989) reports that:

Recently, adult learners were studied who had participated in some of the non-traditional educational options designed by the Council for the Advancement of Experiential Learning. Over and over adult learners said they felt they mattered to an advisor, to an institution. (p. 21)

I have talked to many adult students over the years, and those that are successful and felt rewarded in the community college or university environment end up themselves being the biggest advocates of attending higher education. Many of these same adults now work at the same community colleges where they graduated. The feelings of validation and acceptance in the academic environment led them to pursue careers in the community college setting to help others like themselves.

During my first term in community college, I struggled to adapt to the new environment. I had lunch at the same place each day, visited the Veterans Centre, and studied in the library. I did not avail myself of any of the services available at the community college due to my feeling

out of place. I felt this way primarily due to my own fears that I did not belong in college. The students around me looked affluent by the standards I grew up with and I felt I was masquerading as one of them. I felt like I was faking it. My experience was similar to those in the Reay et al., (2009) study. While Reay's participants were in a different context, that of working class students attending elite universities, my own experience was a working class immigrant attending an American community college which appeared very middle class by my standards. The imposter complex feeling I was experiencing ended by the end of the term when my grades arrived. I felt a significant psychological boost by my academic success. The students in this research project experienced similar self-validation through classroom success. For some students this might be the first time they have truly been successful at an endeavour and they end up thriving in higher education. Victoria is a good example of this:

I have a 4.0 and I just got accepted into mental health/human services program and everything has been going picture perfect and I haven't met any obstacles . . . so I feel like this is really where I am supposed to be. (Victoria, age 19)

Victoria, like the majority of female students in this study was also choosing her academic career path in health and human services, which is a way she could give directly back to the community. This correlates with Evans (2009), whose study results showed evidence that working class women are more likely to choose to engage in higher education to support their families and community.

In other cases, a positive interaction with faculty or staff can be what they need to invest themselves in their academic pursuits. Not all families or peers of students are

supportive of the first generation college attendee, but support and praise does seem to be a differentiator in college success. However, also common amongst first generation students is that they can take negative interactions from family and peers and use it as a tool to help them prove the naysayers wrong.

When it comes to support and validation, I would argue that it is our responsibility as academic professionals to not only provide a rich academic experience, but to also strive to acknowledge the wealth of experiences that our first generation students bring to the classroom, and to take the time to give positive and critical feedback in ways that ensure the students strive to succeed both academically and in the outside-college environment. Dewey (1938) believed that education was more about developing student judgment with the goal of greater participation in democracy. However, the current system of education does not have that same goal. Freire, (1970) also argued that education in his native Brazil was a system which educated one way. Students were looked upon as open receptacles where the education mandated by the state was to be deposited.

Rendon, (1993) also speaks about validation and acceptance:

Today's model of education forces students to assimilate, to compete against each other, to think only in abstract and complex ways, and to believe that cultural separation leads to academic power. For many minority and nontraditional students, this traditional model is inappropriate. It results in many first generation students being told that they are not college material, and consequent feelings of doubt, fear, and frustration when entering college. Many students feel disappointed because they feel

that their life experiences are not valued, and they yearn for acceptance and validation.

(p. 1)

Validation is the key to helping first generation students. If we do not value what they bring to the academy then we will continually see many drop out of what they consider to be a hostile environment. We need to nurture these students and help them to feel comfortable on our campuses while also accepting and valuing the wealth of experiences they bring to college.

In regards to students who are first in their families to attend college, family members and peers may feel betrayed by their child/spouse/parent/friend attending college. Their reactions may be far from supportive (Lubrano, 2004). If the family and peers of the first generation students are invited to be part of this journey and are invited to events such as family night or family orientations, it might help the family members and peers understand why the first generation student is attending college. It might even convince some of the detractors to be supportive of the student attending college. In the case of Hispanic students and other populations, colleges should provide college materials and web pages in other languages. The first generation student from a diverse background may speak English fluently, but their family or support group may not. With materials in different language it can help the student bridge the knowledge gap between college and family.

Many of the first generation students in the study did not feel supported or validated in the community college. They only tended to seek out institutional support when they ran into trouble academically or were referred to a specific place such as the Office of Disabilities or the Tutoring Lab. The colleges did not appear to be doing much directed outreach to proactively reach these students prior to them having problems.

I would suggest an emphasis on College Survival Skills classes as a requirement for incoming first generation students. This would help them navigate the services and also improve their study skills during their first terms. Learning communities have also proven to be successful. Simply described, learning communities are linked classes with learning outcomes that cross between classes. Faculty work together and provide content that crosses traditional academic boundaries. One of the primary reasons these are successful is that students take the same classes as each other. On a large campus, this helps them develop peer-to-peer friendships since they are taking the same classes for an entire term. Mentorship programs have also proven to be successful. First generation students often arrive at college with no mentors in their lives, and a mentor in the form of a successful student, staff or faculty member could make the difference in that transitional time.

TRiO or the Small College Experience as a Differentiator

One of the most important findings in this study was the benefits of a TRiO program for first generation students. These students were much more informed about college knowledge (Fleming, & Murphy, 2005) than their counterparts at community colleges with no TRiO program. The support these students receive is crucial to their success, and the cohort-style feel of the TRiO community provides first generation students a long-term network. These TRiO program students come from a place of limited cultural capital. They have been brought up with a set of cultural ideas and norms that are challenged by higher education (Bourdieu, & Passeron, 1973). The students in the TRiO program support each other and are supported by the institution as they adapt to the expectations, ideas, and norms of the middle class. This is

also reflected in findings by Bean, & Eaton (2001). Students interacting and socializing with other students are a positive predictor of student persistence, even more so than their interaction with faculty. In the TRiO programs the students are connected in a way that feels like a school within a school. The level of peer support was a primary reason for this. The banter between the students in those focus groups was quite enlightening. When a student spoke of struggles, the other students were empathetic and shared how they had overcome similar obstacles. They propped each other up and encouraged each other to reach their shared goal of graduation.

They were receiving, support, advice, and all the services they needed to be successful. The same case was evident at Tillamook Bay Community College where the students felt part of the community. They knew the staff, faculty, and each other personally, and their journey through community college was more social with a greater sense of interaction than the students reported at Central Oregon Community College. In this study, it was evident that students in smaller learning communities were both more knowledgeable about college and more invested in persisting. Further research opportunities on college-size and first generation success are needed to validate the findings in this study.

Church Support

Another interesting finding in this study was the role of churches and community organisations in helping students. The state seems unable to provide support and housing for some of the female students in this study. The female students that required the support were primary caregivers who were completely responsible for the welfare of their children. None of

the men in the study responded that they were solely responsible for their children's welfare. Two of the participants in the study were able to attend college only through the assistance of their local church. Both students had children and were homeless. In one case, the pastor's family took in the female student and her family. In the other case, a parishioner took in a female student and her family in exchange for helping to clean the home. Both students were in precarious situations and the financial aid they were receiving through college was not enough to cover their tuition, fees, living costs, and provide support for their families. The system does not appear to provide an adequate safety net, and churches seem to be providing a service normally provided by the state. Again, this ties into the social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1977) of the students. They do not have a support system that can aid them, and have no financial means to create a cushion for times of struggle. They are supported by the resources provided by volunteers, and limited social services.

Without the church support in both these instances neither student could attend college or even afford to rent accommodations for their families. This is not an uncommon situation. I have volunteered at Goose Hollow Family Shelter in Portland, Oregon. Each night throughout the year, a dozen or so families spend the night on a basement floor. Sleeping alongside the families, I have learned that only a couple of runs of bad luck can be the difference between having a roof over your head and being homeless. The support system in the United States is not as robust as it should be, and thus many find themselves without shelter.

In this case, both female students managed to stay in school and find shelter, food, and stability for their families while they attended school. A possible action for community colleges

might be to gather a list of surrounding churches and community organizations that can provide support to students in these situations. Community Colleges are not allowed by law to have an affiliation with a church, due to the rules surrounding the separation of church and state, therefore simply giving direction to these external support organizations might be the only option available.

Addictions

One of the ills that plague first generation students are addictions. This is not to say that first generation students are more likely to be addicts than other people, but merely to address that this was a theme that was visible in this study. A number of students in this study were recovering addicts. In this study, at least one in five of the participants self-disclosed as being a recovering drug or alcohol addict. The numbers were disturbing, as were the experiences related by the participants. Some had lost their families, and friends; entire support systems had been eroded by dependency and the issues that come along with it. These students saw the community college as a safe zone, as a place where they could rebuild their lives. They had finally gained the upper hand on alcohol and drug dependency and were enroute to become addiction counsellors, social workers, and other positions that had the possibility of impacting their local communities. All of these students were over the age of 25, and were rebuilding their lives with a strong sense of direction and purpose. Whether this is a typical representation of the numbers of first generation students recovering from addiction would be useful to know. As would further research on the career paths of students who are first in their family to attend college, and are recovering from dependency.

The participants were very open about their experiences and college seemed somewhat cathartic for them. College provided them with goals, dreams, and validation which seemed to help them in their fight towards a brighter future. Some community college faculty and staff seemed to be unaware of the number of students who are recovering and this seems something of an awareness issue. These students are in a fragile place and faculty and staff need to be aware of their impact on these students. This is not unusual on college campuses, and I would argue that colleges for the most part tend towards ignoring the problem of alcoholism and substance abuse on college campus. "As many as 31 percent of college students meet diagnostic criteria for alcohol abuse. Another 6 percent were found to be alcohol dependent" (Higher Education Centre for Alcohol, 2010, p. 1).

US Society, particularly through the medium of movies portray college as a place where students are able to invest in a journey of self-discovery which also includes experimentation in alcohol, drugs, and promiscuity. However, many students end up suffering from alcoholism during their time in college. Not only is this a place where alcoholism and drug abuse are prevalent and practically ignored, but this can lead to issues such as rape and violence. This environment can also be straining for recovering alcoholics who are enrolled in academic programs. For some, the college or university setting may even escalate alcohol or drug use. This is more likely on a college or university where resident housing is the norm. "While community college students drink alcohol at lower levels than students at four-year institutions they reported using tobacco, cocaine, and amphetamines at higher levels" (Ryan, 1998, p. 15). Community college students usually live in a close radius of the community college and their use of these drugs might not actually be on campus. Ryan's report asked students whether

they did any of the above drugs but did not ask whether they took the drugs on campus. Another report (Van Gundy, 2006) focuses on how bad drug and alcohol problems have become in small towns and rural communities. Prior to the 1990's the urban areas had the highest instances of drug and alcohol use, but now rural America has become the place where these problems exist at a higher level.

Prevention is not likely to work if it is only messaged on the community college campus. "Because community colleges are so closely linked to the communities they serve, prevention strategies that are based on collaborations and coalitions with organizations, institutions, and businesses are likely to yield the most successful outcomes in terms of reduced problems" (Ryan, 1998, p. 11). Indeed, it should be a community wide effort to prevent the increase of drug and alcohol use. Ryan did not include the school districts, and in the case of prevention we need to focus on the next generations before they make the same mistakes.

Poverty, and poor living circumstances can lead to an increase in alcohol and drug use. By supporting first generation students in the community college, the children of these students will have a better chance of breaking the cycle. College education improves health, finances and self-esteem (Pascarella, & Terenzini, 2005). They will see an improved living environment in almost every way.

Health Problems and Disabilities

A significant number of the students in the study had a documented or undocumented disability. The students with physical disabilities often had difficulty in navigating the services offered through the colleges. This included the services offered by Disabilities Student Services. This equates directly to a lack of social and cultural capital or to a lack of college knowledge

(Fleming, & Murphy, 2005). The transition from high school was difficult for these students in that the disabilities support the college offered differed from that in the high school setting.

Students with disabilities often do have difficulty transitioning and receiving the support they need in college. “They encounter more academic, attitudinal, and physical barriers while attending college than students without disabilities. Specifically, they are more likely than their non-disabled peers to have difficulty in the following areas: study/test skills, note-taking, and listening comprehension” (O’Neill, et al., 2012. p. 22).

According to Lederman (2005):

Disabled students were far less likely to attend a four-year university: 6% percent were enrolled at a four-year institution in 2003, compared to 28% percent of all students. But disabled students were nearly as likely as other students (10% versus 12%) to be enrolled at a community or two-year college. (p. 1)

This matches up similarly to the percentage of participants in the research study at all four community colleges. A number of students in the study also suffered from recently diagnosed learning disabilities. The colleges helped these students to seek help and resources, yet many of the students found resources only after spending some time at the college and becoming aware of the support available. These students were mostly unaware during the first term. For some of the mature students the learning disabilities were only discovered as a result of poor academic performance. This also relates to social and cultural capital. The students with recently discovered disabilities might have been more self-aware, and educated on their symptoms had they been brought up in a more educated and questioning environment. One of the students, Bill, spoke of having trouble in high school. The teachers complained that he did

not pay attention, and he became known as a troublemaker. Perhaps this was before more was known about Asperger Syndrome, Autism, and Attention Deficit Disorder and other problems that could have an impact on learning. It could also have been that Bill attended school in an impoverished school system and was not given the attention he needed. Bill believed he was a poor student and had never thought of himself as intelligent due to those experiences. He was actually relieved to know that he had Attention Deficit Disorder, because it helped him to identify his problem and seek help to overcome it in his studies.

Somehow, students had slipped through the cracks in the K-12 education system and were only being diagnosed in their first attempts at higher education. Students are expected to seek help when they believe they may have problems. Faculty are also expected to refer students to counselling and other services if they feel the need is appropriate. This is where the gap persists and students fail to receive the support they need. Faculty are not trained healthcare or mental health professionals and are not equipped to diagnose students. Based on perceptions they can encourage students to use the services offered at the colleges, but that does not always happen. This is an area that requires more study to improve the practices of referral and diagnosis.

Homeschooling/Dreamers-Fringe Groups

No other group struggles more in US higher education than Dreamer students. They have few rights and every step they take in higher education has difficulties associated with it. Dreamers are more likely to attend community college than four-year universities, primarily due to ease of access and tuition costs. Dreamers are not able to apply for Federal Financial Aid

and are thus required to fund their own education entirely. However, they are entitled to free K-12 education.

Perez (2010) explains:

Education access for undocumented students came as a result of the 1982 Supreme Court case of Plyer v. Doe. The Court ruled that undocumented children must be provided access to a public education, indicating that denying education to children who cannot affect their own status would impose a lifetime hardship. Presently, however, court-mandated equal access to education ends every year for approximately 65,000 undocumented students when they graduate from high school. (p. 32)

Despite the fact that they are offered K-12 education they are repeatedly denied equality in higher education in Congress and the Senate.

In the US system of higher education, students are constantly asked for their Social Security Number (SSN) which is equivalent to Ireland's PPS Number. This number is a part of college application forms and is required to receive Federal Financial Aid or loans and most scholarships. Undocumented students do not have a Social Security Number and so are not able to avail themselves of much of the support they need. These students also have a very real fear that if they give personal information to a college, that they may risk deportation for themselves and their families. By attending college and pursuing their dreams, undocumented students risk compromising the wellbeing of their families.

President Obama passed a law known as Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), which grants temporary amnesty to Dreamer students that meet a specific criteria. Part of the criteria is that Dreamers need to have arrived in the US before their 16th birthday and were

under the age of 31 in 2012. These students needed to have resided here permanently since 2007. What DACA allows is for Dreamer students to attend college in a form of amnesty. They are also issued a temporary Social Security Number which allows them to work while in college. This does not allow them to apply for Federal Financial Aid however. A large percentage of Dreamer students do not meet the above criteria and continue to attend colleges and universities in spite of the hurdles set against them.

At Clark College, in Washington State, we have a significant population of Dreamer students. Exact numbers are hard to calculate as we are not permitted to track them for the students own safety. National figures are easier to come by.

Perez (2010) expands on the data:

Due to failed immigration policies as well as economic push and pull factors, among the immigrant population are 12 million undocumented persons. Among these are approximately 3.2 million youths under 24 years of age who were brought to the US by their parents. (p. 32)

This indicates that the population of Dreamer students will continue to grow in the upcoming years since this number is higher than earlier estimates. Our colleges and universities need to prepare to be able to help these students in access, persistence and completion and not treat them as illegal aliens, when in truth many were brought here as children by their parents and were not offered a choice in the matter. Undocumented students have been given access to K-12 education but are still fighting for the right to equality in higher education.

These students give back to their communities and are often very involved on campus. At Clark College I have had repeated contact with undocumented students. Some are involved in athletics and others in student clubs.

Perez (2010) explains the value of our undocumented students:

Research on college-eligible undocumented students indicates that they exhibit academic achievement, leadership participation and civic engagement patterns that are often above that of their US-citizen counterparts. More than 90 percent report volunteering and 95 percent participated in extracurricular activities. In those activities, 78 percent held a leadership position such as club president. (p. 32)

The politicians and many citizens complain that these students want to live off the system; however they are practically the only students on campus who pay cash for their education because they are not eligible for Federal Financial Aid. And I would argue that it is better to have an educated workforce on the path to citizenship than a population living in fear and on the poverty threshold.

Dreamers may have the social capital of strong ethnic communities; however, their undocumented status is an enormous barrier in their attempts to achieve greater opportunities. They are not eligible for federal financial aid and are attending school in spite of the fact that they may not even be able to gain employment in the field they are studying before due to their legal status. They attend college with the risk that they might not be able to find work afterwards. Their investment might be for naught. At Clark, we have a Dreamers Taskforce of which I am the Chair. My work experience in the community college setting has exposed me to this population and their issues with access and persistence. Their difficult

journey to education is something I have learned much about in my two years at Clark College. I have become an advocate for improving their experiences on Clark's campus and my hope is that our taskforce is able to be a model for other community colleges. The Dreamer's Taskforce gives presentations to staff and faculty on the experiences of Dreamer students in the hopes that if our staff and faculty are more knowledgeable about this population then their experiences on campus will be more positive. We should not discriminate against this population of students, and I would argue that we need to make our campuses more accessible, welcoming and aware of Dreamer students.

In November 2014, towards the end of this study, President Obama announced and Executive Action to fix some of the problems with immigration in the US. Part of that plan included an amnesty for law-abiding undocumented immigrants. His plan was announced publicly and this gave some relief to undocumented students. There is still fear however; and it may take some time for undocumented students trust colleges to act in their best interests, and that they will not be deported for being open about their status.

In order to make the path to degree attainment easier, Dreamer students need to have specific instructions and resources available on college campuses. These instructions need to explain to Dreamers how to navigate the system within the established state and federal laws, but still be able to access education. Dreamer students have the right to an education like anybody else, but they are often placed in situations where they fear they will be exposed and risk deportation for themselves and their families. Faculty and staff should also learn how to address and support these students in a respectful way.

The homeschooled students in the study appeared to be adjusting well to the community college environment and did not report any initial difficulties navigating services, academics or with external issues. The homeschooled participants in the study were also being supported by family members in a way that was much more central to their experience than first generation students who were not homeschooled. According to the US Department of Education (2006), over 1 million students were homeschooled in the US in 2003. There was a 10% increase in homeschooled students between 1999 and 2006. As numbers of homeschool students increase at the K-12 level colleges and universities can expect to see a steady growth in homeschool students in the coming decades. Several homeschool students participated in this research study and identified as first generation students. This is another example of intersectionality and as I spoke with these students I found that they had little experience in a formal education setting prior to attending college. The students did seem to be doing well academically, however I believe that further research should be conducted on how these students adapt to the community college environment.

Helping Professions

One of the most positive findings in this study was the career and academic choices that the first generation students were making. Almost without exception the students at all of the community colleges in this research project were progressing towards careers in the helping professions. There was a sense of idealism amongst the students that showed strongly as a theme throughout this project. The participants wanted to give back to the community in a significant and rewarding way. Whether through fields like social work, teaching, or healthcare

these students wanted to contribute to the common good. The flip-side of this is that with the exception of nursing and medicine the salaries in the fields the students indicated are not as high as in the for-profit sector. These students may be able to improve their circumstances and give back to the community but they will not likely reap financial benefits from these professions.

Another point worth making is that the first generation students in the study were more likely to choose vocational careers for other reasons that should be explored further. I would argue that these students are likely to focus on career choices that impact the family and community because this mind-set is aligned with working class cultural norms and not the individualistic attitudes of the middle class. First generation students might not be able to visualize themselves taking bigger career leaps such as Medical School or Law School, due to a limited habitus, social and cultural capital. Without such examples of doctors and lawyers in the first generation student's networking world, options such as this may seem out of reach. In Evans' (2009) study, the majority of participants were focused on vocational career paths, and this finding was replicated in this study to some extent. However, I would argue that it is also due to the first generation students being inspired by somebody in their lives that represented that career possibility and they wanted to be able to see themselves in a similar role in order to have that same effect on others. The first generation students in this study with their limited social and cultural capital were able to overcome adverse circumstances and focus their attentions on educational career pathways that will help not only the greater community but help to inspire others first generation students to academic and career success.

I was unable to find any research in the literature on the correlation between first generation students and the helping professions, however, based on my research data, there may be a correlation between first generation students and the helping professions. If further research proves this to be the case, we need to view these students as valuable resources for our communities, and when it comes to the brain drain problems facing our rural communities, then students taking these academic and career pathways may be more inclined to return and reinvest in their hometowns.

The Importance of First Generation Students

The first generation students in this study are all undertaking a dramatically different path to their parents and families who came before them. They are stepping into uncharted territory without a map and the inherent survival skills needed to succeed on this journey. These students do not always arrive at community college directly from high school. Many start at community college after a period of unemployment or a recent layoff. Others see college as a way to escape from an unsatisfying job or they may be attempting to improve their family's circumstances. First generation students are coming to college in greater numbers than ever before, and I would argue that they are not receiving the type of help they need to succeed. In an attempt to improve the retention of these students, colleges focus on efforts to enhance academic performance, develop study skills, and improving time management practices. We need to do further research on the external factors contributing to the persistence of first generation community college students. This thesis which gathered data from 38 students at four different community colleges was able to expose some of those

external and internal factors that contribute to the student's decisions to persist or stop out of college.

It has never been more important to focus on first generation students as it is now. As their numbers increase on our college campuses the sheer size of the population demands that we address their needs. In regards to context, the research that has been conducted has been primarily at four-year state universities. This in itself is problematic. Four-year state universities approach education in a far more traditional way than do community colleges. They attract traditional students directly from high school and help indoctrinate them to the norms of campus culture, activities, dorm life, academic standards, student clubs, fraternities and sororities. This has been the traditional way of on-boarding new students for decades. Much research conducted on first generation students come from helping them adapt to a university setting and context like that described above. However, first generation students are more likely to attend community colleges as their first entry point into higher education. Missing from the literature to a great degree is how community colleges can better facilitate the access, persistence, and completion of these students in a setting that is very different and with far less resources than four year state universities. The current body of knowledge is missing a more holistic picture of these students and this study helps better define first generation students, specifically in the community college setting. As it stands, I would argue that community college first generation retention strategies are based upon data from four-year universities. We are in effect comparing apples to oranges. Significant research needs to be conducted on the first generation experience in community colleges in order to better inform the practice of interventions, retention, and outreach.

I would argue that it is important to help these students because they have potential and in the bigger picture our society will be improved with a populace that is educated at higher levels. I would also argue that first generation students need extra help specifically because they do not always know the questions to ask and do not have the college knowledge of college-familiar students (Fleming, & Murphy, 2005). Without the basic tools and familiarity which are required to succeed in college they are at risk of failing in this endeavour.

In my many years working in the university and community college setting, I have come into contact with many first generation students. Those that succeed in their educational endeavours become the most vocal supporters of higher education. They are able to recognise how far they have come since starting that journey, and how much it has impacted their lives.

Empirical Findings

First generation students do not easily manage to balance their academic requirements with their external responsibilities. Their likelihood of continuing on and completing college are significantly less than those students from college-familiar families. “First generation students are associated with a 45% decrease in the odds of returning to the second year of study” (Soria, Stebleton, 2012, p. 678). Another study by Ishitani (2006) had similar results. First generation students were 51% and 32% less likely to graduate in the fourth and fifth years than were students whose parents graduated from college. As the themes in this study explained, first generation students often have conflicting priorities and responsibilities to maintain while keeping a focus on their college goals. We know that first generation students do not persist at the same levels as their college savvy counterparts. The findings in this study help achieve two

outcomes. More knowledge is added to what we already know about first generation students. Some of the findings corroborate prior research which connects to the literature review, yet many of these findings give a greater insight into the lives of first generation students. What I learned as a researcher from this dissertation is that first generation students lead complex lives. They struggle through a variety of issues external to their college experience which in turn affects their persistence and completion of their academic or vocational goals. These issues include financial problems, employment issues, the uneven burden for female students, transportation problems, the responsibilities of mature students, negative family and peer impacts, the importance of validation, the positive impacts of TRiO or small college interactions, church and community resources, addiction problems for first generation students, the difficult road for Dreamers, homeschoolers as a peripheral population, health problems and disabilities, and finally the possibility of first generation students being focused on careers in the helping professions.

Theoretical Implications

Much of the prior research on first generation students focuses on their lack of academic preparation (Remediation, 2012, Soria, Stebleton, 2012, Ishitani, 2006) and difficulty adapting to the academic rigours of higher education. This study also showed that to be the case, however what this study also uncovered was that the difficulties were primarily based on other factors such as age differential, disabilities, and external responsibilities. Other studies (Burdman, 2003, Howard, 2001) have reported the financial hardships facing first generation students. This research study also found that first generation students struggled financially while attending college. Much of this was due to a lack of college knowledge (Fleming, &

Murphy, 2005). The students were mostly unaware of scholarship opportunities and on-campus employment opportunities. However, most of their financial hardships were due to adverse living circumstances along with poorly paid and inconsistent employment.

Both finance and academics are areas that colleges and universities feel are within their purview. These are areas that are addressed with college survival skills classes, learning cohorts, first year experience programs, scholarships, and other methods. However, this study showed that there is far more to the first generation college experience than financial problems and academic difficulties.

The participants in the study were adapting and struggling to keep up with external commitments, however they were still persisting. The research findings show that there are areas in which the colleges in the study could have greater impact. I would argue that the primary reason these results differ from other studies is because of the use of qualitative methodologies, and that the study took place in the community college setting and not on first generation students at four-year universities.

My findings differ from the literature in a number of ways. Firstly, the recorded experiences of the students offer a perspective that is uniquely different to other studies. Secondly, the themes that came from the methodologies and methods used describe themes that have not been developed significantly in the current literature. This dissertation also proves that the lives and needs of first generation students are far more complex than colleges and universities account for. "Intersectionality is a newly recognised field of study within the academy whose purpose has been to analyse social inequality, power, and politics" (Collins,

2012, p. 449). Intersectionality is a useful way of looking at first generation students. As this study has shown, the lives of these students are not the same as traditional student populations. Poverty, race, gender, inequality, and other factors are a daily part of first generation students' lives. First generation students should not be addressed as one homogenous group. They do have some similar defining characteristics, yet within the larger group is a great deal of complexity and to truly make an impact on the access, retention, and completion of these students then the our colleges and universities need to drill down further.

In terms of the lives of the students in this study, there is an intersectionality of habitus at work. The students have one commonality, that of being first in their families to attend college. Yet, they have much more complicated and complex lives than might be imagined at first glance.

According to West, L., Fleming, T., & Finnegan, F. (2013):

Notions of capital might be broadened to include psychological and familial dimensions. These might encompass, in the case of older learners, resilience forged in diverse forms of lifelong learning, such as surviving various life crises like divorce or unemployment.

(p. 120)

In this study, this was certainly the case with the adult students. Their life experiences outside of college had a profound effect on how they viewed the self, and how much they adapted to the academy. If they felt their life experiences were validated, then the students appeared to connect with the community college and invest in the academic journey, otherwise they questioned and fought against what they perceived to be an authoritative organization

standing in the way of them and a solid job or career. “Self-confidence can be enhanced through acceptance by lecturers and significant others: producing the feeling that we can play in this space” (West, et al., 2013, p. 126). The college can, and will become part of the adult, or first generation student’s habitus if they undergo positive and validating experiences.

Limitations to the Study

The amount of data uncovered in the interviews and focus groups was enough to fuel many further studies. However, as a researcher I tried not to focus too specifically on any one area and risk expanding the scope of the research project too greatly or perhaps make the mistake of ignoring aspects of the participants shared experiences.

The study took place during the greatest recession that America has gone through since the great depression. The context of this study was directly impacted by the recession. The students attending Central Oregon Community College, Mount Hood Community College, Chemeketa Community College and Tillamook Bay Community college were all directly impacted by the recession. Their decisions to attend college were to some extent directly attributable to the recession. However, I would add that the experiences they went through both in and out of college were still representative of first generation students in general and not specific to a time of recession, with the exception of a greater scarcity of employment opportunities.

Another limitation to the study was time. The participants in this study were juggling life responsibilities whilst attending a community college somewhat close to their home environment. Ideally the study would have been more enlightening were the researcher to

follow these students further to their experiences transitioning to a four-year university and then on into the workforce post-degree. How well would these students adapt to the four-year university? Would they fare better or worse in the four year institutions than their first generation counterparts that started at the same university as freshmen? This study captured an important stage in the first generation student's experience, but would be more effective if the other components were focused on equally.

This chapter delved into the different themes through the lenses of social, economic and cultural capital. The issues facing these students are directly related to societal problems. The ability of students who are first generation to succeed in higher education is directly influenced by the amount of capital these students have.

Final Commentary

It is no surprise to researchers and higher education faculty and staff that first generation students are a group that need extra help and resources to ensure they succeed in college and university. However, the insistence that we require they adapt to the higher education institution norms is antiquated and rooted in the historical middle and upper class dominance of higher education. "The process mature students go through is one of constant compromise with the demands of the college, of a giving in to an authority which will not accept their experiential knowledge" (Fleming, & Murphy, 2005, p. 58). If first generation students are to succeed in higher education at our community colleges and universities, we need to recognise that their lives are not those of traditional students who leave home, stay in dorms, get involved on campus and can focus all their energies on academics, sports, student

life, and socialization. First generation students have so much more life experiences, responsibilities, and social differences that they cannot be treated in the same way as more traditional college familiar students. I would argue that more qualitative research studies such as this set in different contexts such as the transition from community college to four year universities, and the transition to life after university would enlighten us further on the real needs of these students.

I would add that there is also more complexity to first generation students than first might meet the eye. There are first generation students who may be from diverse backgrounds, be a veteran, have a disability, be undocumented, or homeschooled. These students are individuals with their own life stories and needs. While there are some commonalities in their experiences I would argue that we need to recognise and become more knowledgeable about the populations that fall under the first generation umbrella.

In regards to rural communities and community colleges, it is important to try and retain some of the graduates to help invest in the local communities. A recommendation for practice might be to set up an incubator for entrepreneurship centre to retain the graduates and bring them back into the community to set up small business and grow the local economy.

An increasing trend in US Higher Education is the growth of for-profit universities. They attract a sizeable share of the adult students and specifically veteran populations. The state and private universities along with the community colleges have been slow to react to the increasingly competitive student market. The constant reduction in state funding of higher education is forcing colleges and universities to be more creative and competitive in student

outreach and retention practices. This will surely foster a greater focus on the needs of first generation students.

First generation students are limited from the onset, and their road is a more difficult journey than that of their college-savvy counterparts. Many do not succeed. However, those that do end up having a positive effect on their families. A successful first generation student is often followed by their siblings, nieces, nephews and their own children. This multiplying effect will create a whole new generation of students that have been taught the ropes by the successful first generation student.

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Community College Focus Group Questions

Name _____ Age _____

E-Mail for possible follow-up questions _____

What were your experiences on your first day on campus? Can you remember your first class, the first time you went to admissions, saw a tutor etc.?

How did the important people in your life react when you told them you wanted to go to college?

How did you find out about TRiO's first generation program?

Did you attend community college after High School? Yes / No (please circle)

If you did attend community college after high school, did the community college reach out to your high school and help you with the transition to college? Please explain:

If you did not attend community college directly after high school, how did you transition into college? Did you feel that help was available and received information on what college services were available to you?

Please explain:

Do you talk to your family/friends about what you learn in college or about your experiences in attending college?

Please list the following items in order of importance on how they affect your ability to successfully stay in college and succeed. Please number them 1-7 in order of importance with 1 being the most important and 7 being the least important. Please add a category and rate it if you feel it has not been addressed.

- Finances
- Family/Guardian/Peer support
- Academic success
- TRiO support and services
- Transportation
- Lodging
- Other-Explain _____

Do you plan to leave the area after college?

Are you going to college to support- or care for others? If so, explain?

Does what you have learned in college challenge the beliefs you were brought up with in any way?

Are you working while attending college? Yes / No (please circle)

If you are working please answer the following question/s (you may check more than one box if applicable).

- I work 40 hours or more a week
- I work 20-30 hours a week
- I work 10-19 hours a week
- I work less than 10 hours a week
- I work on campus
- I work off-campus

Consent Form into Human Educational Experiences

- Personally identifiable information will not be made available beyond the research project. All participants will remain anonymous.

Study Title: First Generation College Student Interviews. Central Oregon Community College: October 2011-May 2013.

1. Researcher Information: Colman Joyce, OHSU School of Medicine, Division of Management, BICC 4DM. 3181 SW Sam Jackson Park Road, Portland, OR 97239. 503-346-0370 joycec@ohsu.edu
2. This is a pilot study interview to gather data about the experiences of first generation college students. This data will be used to guide a long-term research study on the lives of first generation students as they attend college. This is part of a Ph.D. Research project at National University of Ireland Maynooth, by Colman Joyce
3. Confidentiality of data –Who will have access to the data?
 - a. The data will be kept secure at all times. Participant data will be kept safe on the researcher’s password secured computer. No other persons share access to this computer. Audio interviews will be deleted after they have been transcribed into a MS Word document.
 - b. Tapes or transcripts/notes can be accessed at any time only by participants in the Pilot Study. Participants can only see their own transcripts and not the transcripts of other participants.
4. The study results may be used in presentations (keeping all participants anonymous) and used in the researcher’s Ph.D. Dissertation. This work may be published in Academic Journals or other similar works.
5. Withdrawal – Candidates may withdraw from the study at any time or they may withdraw their data up until the work is published.
6. The focus group and interviews do not constitute any kind of counselling.
7. Participants are encouraged to contact Colm Joyce (Researcher) if they have any problems or concerns. I am available to meet in person or via phone: 503-346-0370 or e-mail joycec@ohsu.edu. Alternately participants may contact my Ph.D. Supervisor Brid Connolly should they experience any kind of discomfort/stress as a result of the study. brid.connolly@nuim.ie
8. Finally, I thank you - the participant for sharing your experiences and allowing me to learn from you as I move forward in my Ph.D. Dissertation.

If during your participation in this study you feel the information and guidelines that you were given have been neglected or disregarded in any way, or if you are unhappy about the process please contact the Secretary of the National University of Ireland Maynooth Ethics Committee at research.ethics@nuim.ie. Please be assured that your concerns will be dealt with in a sensitive manner.

9. Subject’s Signature _____ Date _____