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An Examination of Summer Melt for TRIO Talent Search and Upward Bound Alumni

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Missouri-St. Louis

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May 2022

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Abstract

College access programs provide middle and high school students with essential skills to prepare them for a successful transition to postsecondary education. TRIO Talent Search (TS) and Upward Bound (UB) are federally funded programs established to strengthen the likelihood that students from underserved groups will graduate high school and pursue higher education. Both programs offer support to low-income and first-generation students to ensure equitable access to higher education. While these programs offer a holistic approach to student development, including personal and professional support, some students from underserved groups experience challenges during the summer months that prevent them from enrolling in college during the fall following high school graduation.

Summer melt raises concerns about the impact of TRIO TS and UB programs and their effectiveness in supporting low-income and first-generation students to help mitigate barriers and increase college attendance during the fall following high school graduation. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to examine the barriers that contributed to summer melt for TRIO TS and UB alumni at Midwest University. This study utilized purposeful sampling and snowball sampling to recruit 13 alumni from the TS and UB programs at Midwest University to understand the barriers that may have impacted their decision to attend or postpone college in the fall following high school completion. Conley's college readiness theory and Schlossberg's transition theory were the frameworks used to understand the barriers these students may have encountered, which impacted their transition from high school to college.

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Data from this study adds to the scholarly research regarding the barriers that contribute to summer melt for TS and UB participants. In addition, the findings of this study can be used to inform institutional leaders, TRIO staff, and other stakeholders of ways to enhance TRIO TS and UB programs to decrease the percentage of students impacted by summer melt.

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Acknowledgements

(Jasmine Clay)

“And one day she discovered that she was fierce, and strong, and full of fire, and that not even she could hold herself back because her passion burned brighter than her fears” (Mark Anthony).

This dissertation process has pushed me beyond my limits and has been the most challenging experience in my life. However, the peace I found in this process was through God. He brought me to it and through it! For this God, I thank you!

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Chapter One: Problem of Practice

Higher education is known to enhance an individual's overall quality of life by opening doors to more career opportunities and improving a person's overall living conditions (Calderson & Sorenson, 2014). In 2018, according to the U.S. Department of Education (2019), young adults between the ages of 25 and 34 who earned a bachelor's degree had an 86% employment rate in contrast to the 56% employment rate of young adults who did not obtain a high school diploma. In addition to financial gain, college graduates are more likely to volunteer within the community, have higher voting rates, and tend to be more productive in their careers and personal lives (Trostel, 2017). Young adults with a bachelor's degree exercise 22% more than high school graduates, 33% are more likely to volunteer in the community, and 32% are more likely to vote in presidential elections (Ma et al., 2020). "While 97 % of American families agree that the key to achieving that American Dream is through investing in their children's college education, not all high school students attend college immediately after high school graduation" (Taylor, 2016, para 1).

"The immediate college enrollment rate is defined as the percentage of high school completers enrolled in a 2-year or 4-year institution by October, immediately following high school completion" (NCES, 2020, p. 146). In 2016, the St. Louis Post-Dispatch reported that up to 40% or 200,000 college-bound high school graduates who were approved for acceptance to a 2 or 4-year college or university did not successfully enroll in the fall semester (Addo, 2016). This phenomenon, known as summer melt, is defined as "the experience where students who planned to attend college were unable to navigate the additional summer obstacles thereby not attending their intended college the fall after high school graduation" (Tackett et al., 2018, p. 2).

Summer melt is more common among students who are considered low-income or underrepresented (Tackett et al., 2018) due to a lack of resources or knowledge of the college admissions process, lack of family support, and professional assistance (Castleman & Page, 2014). According to the U.S. DOE (2020), “the term ‘low-income individual’ means an individual whose family's taxable income for the preceding year did not exceed 150% of the poverty level amount” (para. 3). Figure 1 provides a snapshot of the Federal TRIO Programs’ current year low-income levels based on family size.

Figure 1

2020 Federal TRIO Programs Low-income Levels.

Federal TRIO Programs Current-Year Low-Income Levels

(Effective January 15, 2020 until further notice)

Size of Family Unit	48 Contiguous States, D.C., and Outlying Jurisdictions	Alaska	Hawaii
1	\$19,140	\$23,925	\$22,020
2	\$25,860	\$32,325	\$29,745
3	\$32,580	\$40,725	\$37,470
4	\$39,300	\$49,125	\$45,195
5	\$46,020	\$57,525	\$52,920
6	\$52,740	\$65,925	\$60,645
7	\$59,460	\$74,325	\$68,370
8	\$66,180	\$82,725	\$76,095

In 2016, the United States college enrollment rate of students from high-income families was 83% compared to 67% of students from low-income families (NCES, 2020). In 2019, NCES (2020) “noted 9% of children under age 18 lived in households where no parent had completed high school, and 19% lived in households where the highest level of education attained by either parent was high school completion” (para 1). In fact, available research indicates “that students whose parents have not attended college often face significant challenges in accessing

postsecondary education, succeeding academically once they enroll, and completing a degree” (Bennett et al., 2018, p. 2).

First-generation students who might identify as low-income are also at risk of experiencing summer melt because they come from similar backgrounds and oftentimes have to navigate through many of the same challenges in their efforts to transition from high school to college (Lee, 2019). “A first-generation student is an individual whose parents or legal guardian did not complete an undergraduate degree” (U.S. DOE, 2020, para 1). In 2018, about one-third of first-generation students whose parents did not attend a postsecondary institution dropped out of college within their first year (U.S. DOE, 2019). Even when families of first-generation students are supportive, they still may lack experience in the provision of support to the student to navigate the college system. According to Castleman and Page (2014), low-income high school graduates ultimately relinquish their school plans because they face difficulties they did not foresee and do not know whom to consult for assistance. Due to these challenges, some prospective first-generation students reconsider their decision to attend college and instead obtain full-time employment to support their families financially. Other students may encounter challenges finding employment and might receive government assistance as a means of support (Castleman & Page, 2014).

Summer melt raises concerns about the impact of federally funded pre-collegiate programs such as TRIO Talent Search (TS) and Upward Bound (UB), which provide many services to support middle school and high school students who have a high probability of identifying as both low-income and first-generation during their transition to postsecondary education. TS and UB programs assist students in their preparation for college entrance exams

and completing college admission applications. A primary tenet of both programs is to provide participants with high-quality academic tutoring services to enable the participants to complete high school and prepare them for postsecondary courses. The services provided by TS and UB align with each program's focus to assist students on their journeys to postsecondary enrollment and aim to minimize the barriers that students who aspire to attend college may encounter. Yet, summer melt is still prevalent among first-generation and low-income prospective high school students who desire to attend college. Understanding the factors that contribute to summer melt is critical to ensure that students who aspire to attend college can navigate those challenges in order to pursue their educational goals. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to examine the barriers that contributed to summer melt for TRIO TS and UB alumni. TRIO TS and UB alumni are defined as any student who participated in the TS or UB programs and are now ineligible to be served due to exceeding age requirements or graduating from high school. The researchers of this study utilized semi-structured interviews to document the experiences of alumni who, while in high school, participated in the TRIO TS or UB program at Midwest University, the grantee site where TRIO TS and UB services were provided.

Background of the Problem

Examining this study from a social, cultural, and historical perspective helped to frame this research within the broader context of scholarly work. In the following sections, we will review the problem using a social, cultural, and historical lens, examine the need for TRIO programs in higher education, and discuss TRIO and historically Black colleges and universities (HBCU).

Social, Cultural, and Historical Perspectives

TRIO programs are defined as "federal outreach and student services programs designed to identify and provide services for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds" (U. S. DOE, 2020b). Pre-collegiate programs are offered at many postsecondary institutions across the country (U.S. DOE, 2020). Pre-collegiate programs offer long-term rewards such as increasing the college-going rate for many students who lack resources. These programs permit students to know and comprehend their psychological and scholarly capabilities to transition to each grade level (Hicks, 2005). Low-income and first-generation prospective college-bound students are counted among the TRIO program's traditional target groups (Balz & Esten, 1998). TRIO TS and UB programs ensure that low-income, first-generation students are ranked as a priority to ensure that they receive support services to help them navigate the college enrollment process once they graduate high school (U.S. DOE, 2020).

In addition, there are social and cultural benefits of these programs that extend beyond higher education. Venezia and Rainwater (2007) noted the university that provides such programs for students is an invaluable asset to their community because these programs encourage the youth to continue their education. From a local perspective, understanding the challenges, complexities, and external factors confronted by TRIO TS and UB students during the summer months can help facilitators of these programs at Midwest University to identify additional programs, strategies, or resources tailored to fill the gap and support the high school-to-college transition for these students. They can also continue to promote an educational culture focused on college readiness for all aspiring students in the surrounding communities.

The Need for TRIO Programs in Higher Education

Since 1964, TRIO programs have served as a gateway to providing resources to eliminate and minimize the barriers first-generation low-income students encounter in their pursuit of higher education attainment (COE, 2020, para 2). TRIO programs revolutionized college access for many students, serving as “the first national college access and retention programs to address the social and cultural barriers to education in America” (COE, 2020, para. 2). College access is “(a) the degree of chance an individual needs to select and finish a postsecondary degree program and (b) a field of work or study made out of legislative offices, private substances, and people” (Barrett, 2017, p.13). President Lyndon B. Johnson acknowledged the growing gap in educational attainment and achievement between high-income and low-income families in the United States (University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 2020). As a result, in 1964, his War on Poverty Act birthed TRIO TS and UB programs, which have served more than 13 million first-generation students, low-income students or both.

TRIO programs provide immediate resources that remove barriers and provide opportunities that empower and encourage students to attend college. Although these programs offer support and education resources, social, cultural, financial, and institutional barriers continue to exist for first-generation and low-income students. TRIO programs receive grant funding from the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) and are hosted at about 1,000 colleges and universities; however, multiple challenges counteract TRIO programs' impact of working with potential first-generation, low-income high school students. These barriers range from financial stability, familial support and understanding, self-esteem, and racial disparity (Falcon, 2015). In addition, the services provided by TRIO programs may not combat some students'

internal barriers, such as lack of motivation and cognitive abilities, which may discourage them from pursuing college and make them susceptible to summer melt. To decrease summer melt rates among prospective first-generation and low-income students, higher education leaders, TRIO staff, and community stakeholders should be aware of the barriers that contribute to summer melt, which prevent students from successfully enrolling in college. By understanding the challenges students face, these key stakeholders can implement programs or provide additional resources to support students during the summer months after high school graduation in order to adequately prepare them to transition to college the following fall.

TRIO and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)

Understanding the foundational characteristics that shape historically Black colleges serve as a framework for examining meaningful equity and access (Brown & Davis, 2001). “The establishment of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) were to support the educational needs of Black Americans” (U.S. DOE, 2020, para, 1). Before the establishment of HBCUs, Blacks admission to traditionally white institutions were denied (U.S. DOE, 2020). As a result, HBCUs became the primary institution for providing postsecondary education to Black Americans. Before the Civil War, higher education systems were not organized to serve black students in various parts of the nation. (U.S. DOE, 2020).

In 1837, the Institute for Colored Youth, now Cheyney University of Pennsylvania, was founded as the first higher education institution for Blacks (U.S., DOE, 2020). “Two other Black institutions followed: Lincoln University, in Pennsylvania (1854), and Wilberforce University, in Ohio (1856)” (U.S. DOE, 2020, para 4). Although these institutions were chartered as a university or institute, the mission was to provide schooling to elementary and secondary

students that did not have any prior education. In the early 1900s, HBCUs began to offer postsecondary courses and programs (U.S. DOE, 2020).

As a result, during the Higher Education Act of 1965 congress established Title III, which officially acknowledged historically Black colleges and universities (Preston & Palmer, 2018). HBCUs founding principle was the belief that every individual deserves access to a college or higher education (U.S. DOE, 2020). According to Brown and Davis (2001), HBCUs provide purposeful resources for their students, which are known as social capital, and this increases a student's network and value in society and the workplace. "Social capital is defined as networks of people and community resources" (Yosso, 2005, p. 79). In this study, TRIO TS and UB programs are housed at Midwest University, which is an HBCU that serves undergraduates and are committed to addressing the educational needs of diverse populations. Midwest University's mission serves a similar role to that of TS and UB, which is to increase the number of youths from diverse backgrounds who complete high school and enroll in and complete postsecondary education. Although TS and UB programs only support middle school and high school students, it is a common goal for Midwest University and TRIO programs to increase college enrollment and completion rates. TS and UB programs are intended to serve as community resources for students because they provide both resources and emotional support to reassure students that they are not alone in the process of pursuing higher education.

Like the TRIO TS and UB programs, HBCUs were established to provide opportunities to underrepresented student populations, including academically disadvantaged and low-income students. According to the Thurgood Marshall College Fund (2019), approximately 52% of students attending an HBCU are first-generation students, and approximately 71% are low-

income, Pell grant eligible students. “Pell grants are need-based grants awarded to low-income students who demonstrate financial need and pursuing their first bachelor’s degree” (U.S. DOE, 2015, para 1). In addition to HBCUs enrolling more than twice the number of Pell-qualified students contrasted with Predominantly White Institutions (PWI) (Hardy et al., 2019), HBCUs are more likely to accept students with lower test scores and socioeconomic status.

Predominantly White Institutions are described as institutions with 50% or higher enrollment of White students (Brown & Dancy, 2010). Hardy et al. (2019) compared the student outcomes, pre-collegiate characteristics, and overall college ranking scores of HBCU and PWI institutions, finding that HBCUs had higher first-year student retention rates and graduation rates.

First-generation, low-income students often come from school districts with limited resources to provide an equitable opportunity to college access and college readiness. HBCUs continue to make college more financially accessible to first-generation, low-income students by offering 50% lower tuition than PWI’s (Welton & Martinez, 2013). HBCUs offer lower tuition while experiencing a lack of funding due to states unequally distributing funding to higher education institutions with greater enrollment numbers and resources, often leaving HBCUs with lower capital funding per student (Hardy et al., 2019).

While Midwest University contributes numerous resources to the TS and UB programs, one of the challenges is to ensure that lack of state funding does not impact the quality of these programs. The partnership between the Department of Education and Midwest University provides the TS and UB programs with various resources to support the mission of both programs and this helps to offset some of the costs associated with lack of state funding to support the services provided by these programs. The Department of Education provides funding

to TRIO TS and UB, while Midwest University provides building classroom spaces for programming, transportation, residential housing, and University faculty resources.

The following sections will provide an overview of the pre-collegiate TRIO programs, including TS and UB, describe the characteristics of TS and UB programs, examine the TS and UB programs at Midwest University and highlight demographics of the Urban County Area which comprises the three school districts served by TRIO TS and UB programs at Midwest University.

An Overview of TRIO Pre-Collegiate Program

Talent Search (TS)

TRIO TS is a pre-collegiate program which is federally funded and provides services to students in disadvantaged areas. The demographics of TS participants consist of, but are not limited to low-income, first-generation, and high school dropout students (U.S. DOE, 2018). According to the U.S. DOE (2018), the goal of TS is to increase high school completion and postsecondary enrollment in student populations from disadvantaged backgrounds. TS provides services to students from low-income households who face the most barriers to success. The services provided include college preparation, career exploration, mentoring, and tutoring (U.S. DOE, 2018). “The education and counseling services provided are designed to improve the financial and economic literacy of students” (U.S. DOE, 2018, para 2).

However, as recognized by researcher 1 of this study, many TS participants are not receiving college degrees. This may be the result of students falling victim to summer melt before enrolling in college. TS provides many services to promote high school completion and going to college. Yet, many students still face challenges after graduating from high school and

prior to the college enrollment process, and many of those unforeseen and extra barriers result in summer melt for some TRIO TS students.

TS at Midwest University

Midwest University proposed an educational TS program to provide services to 635 students, ages 11 to 27. These students range from middle school to high school students to college dropouts who desire to re-enter college to earn their bachelor's degree. A college dropout refers to a student who temporarily withdraws from college and re-enrolls later (Talent Search, 2020). The TS program at Midwest University provides services to these students who live in a target area characterized by low-income households. The target area includes two school districts, and there is a very high poverty rate in these districts (Talent Search, 2020). Each district contains one middle school and one high school. All four schools receive services under the TS grant and will be referred to as the target area throughout this study.

According to the NCES (2018), persistence and graduation rates among students in the target areas are well below national averages, which contributes to a cycle of poverty and limited upward mobility among residents and children raised in these areas. Data from the Missouri Department of Higher Education (2018) revealed that more than 90% of high school graduates from the target area entering Missouri's public 4-year institutions are not completing college degrees. The low levels of college completion could indicate that graduates from the target area were not enrolled in high school courses that adequately prepared them for postsecondary coursework or they fell victim to summer melt. To increase the success rates of students who live in the target area and aspire to enroll in college and complete their college degree, the TS program was implemented at Midwest University.

Upward Bound (UB)

Like the TS program, the goal of the UB program is to enhance the rate of college-ready students by ensuring that they receive the support resources needed to complete high school, enroll in college, and persist to graduation. UB participants are high school students from low-income households or families in which neither parent has attained a bachelor's degree (U.S. DOE, 2019). In addition to income requirements, UB students can only be recruited after completing the eighth grade, and services are rendered through high school graduation (U.S. DOE, 2019). TRIO UB provides academic instruction, cultural and career exploration, and exposure to support and prepare participants for college entrance (U.S. DOE, 2019). UB's academic services include instructional support in math, composition, literature, foreign language, and lab sciences. UB's social and emotional services include counseling, mentoring, work-study opportunities, cultural enrichment programs, and financial literacy programs (U.S. DOE, 2019).

UB at Midwest University

The UB program at Midwest University was established after the institution performed an in-depth analysis of the target area, evaluating school performance and achievement rates of students who live in the target area and concluding that these indicators were significantly lower than the state averages. There was a tremendous need for additional services to support students in the target area's school district. The target area included an increased number of families living in, at, or below 150% of the poverty level. Also included in the in-depth analysis were low educational attainment levels for adults in the target area, high rates of high school dropouts, low college-going rates, and increased student to counselor ratio (Upward Bound Project Narrative,

2017). To aid in additional supports for the target area community, the UB program at Midwest University proposed "to serve 60 disadvantaged participants aged 13 to 19 years old, who have completed eight years of elementary education and need academic support to succeed in a postsecondary education program" (Upward Bound Project Narrative, 2017, p. 9). At least two-thirds of the program participants are low-income and potential first-generation students.

TS and UB Program Objectives

The objectives of the TS and UB programs at Midwest University are to provide services and resources to ensure that high school students graduate and enroll in a postsecondary institution (U.S. DOE, 2018). Each program receives an annual assessment known as the Annual Assessment Report (APR). The APR is used to measure TRIO programs' efficiency and effectiveness using data on student and program performance (U.S. DOE, 2019). The percentage of TRIO TS and UB alumni who enroll in college the fall semester following high school graduation are factored into program performance. When a student fails to successfully enroll in college, the summer melt rate increases and negatively impacts the success rate and validity of TS and UB programs. The establishment of TRIO programs was to increase educational equity for low-income students; however, if services do not prepare students to meet challenges or are not available during the summer months to aid students as they navigate additional obstacles, students may experience roadblocks which make access to college another barrier.

Local Contextual Perspectives in Urban County Area

This study examined the barriers that contributed to summer melt for TRIO TS and UB alumni. The participants of this study are high school graduates, and during the time of their high school attendance they received program services at Midwest University. The participants of this

study also resided in one of the three target school districts that will be introduced in a subsequent section. The three school districts receive outreach support services from TRIO TS and UB programs hosted at Midwest University, an HBCU. The grant cycle for both the TS and UB programs is five years, and the alumni in this study will have graduated within the last three years of the current grant cycle. Students who participate in TRIO TS and UB are not required to attend Midwest University after high school graduation. However, there are college access resources from Midwest University shared with the TRIO TS and UB program participants that assist with academic support and college and career exposure.

Urban County Setting

The TRIO TS and UB programs in this study serve students in three school districts located in a large urban county area. Urban County Area is “a diverse and thriving business community with establishments distributed across several industry sectors” (North County Incorporated, 2013). The Urban County Area is home to over 900,000 residents in 46 municipalities with a total of nearly 400,000 households (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). An analysis of the adult population yielded data to indicate that 93.3% have at least a high school degree or high school equivalency. This is within one percentage point of the average for the state in which the Urban County Area is located. In terms of higher education, 43.2% of the Urban County adult population obtained a postsecondary degree (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). The median household income in the Urban County Area is \$65,300 and is significantly higher than the median income for households in all surrounding counties. This makes the workforce highly competitive among the area's labor force (“Anonymous,” n.d.). Since a primary focus of the TRIO TS and UB programs is to support students from disadvantaged backgrounds, it is

important to provide an overview of the poverty levels for the target area school districts to further understand the need for both programs in an effort to support these students in going to college.

TS at Target School Districts 1 and 2: Low-Income and Poverty Levels

The TS target area within the Urban County Area includes two target area school districts. Each school district contains one middle school and one high school. All four schools receive services under the current 2017 TRIO TS grant at Midwest University and are referred to as the target area school districts throughout this study. Census data from the target area shows that there is a poverty rate in these districts. Table 1 provides data regarding the number of families and the percentage of families living in poverty. Table 2 shows the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced lunch, which is also based on the poverty levels.

Table 1

Low-Income Families Residing in the Target Area Living at or Below 150% of Poverty Level

Target Area Schools	Number of Families	% Families Living at or Below 150% of Poverty Level
Target area school district 1	3,438	35.7
Target area school district 2	762	23.4
Target area State	1,532,908	16.3
United States	76,958,064	15.9

Note. 2017 American Fact Finder Survey, US Census (U.S. Census, 2017).

Table 2*Percent of Students Eligible for Free or Reduced Lunch*

Target area school district 1	Target area school district 2	State of Missouri
100%	96%	51.7%

Note. Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education 2017, National Center for Education Statistics, 2017.

Persistence and graduation rates among students in the target area school districts are well below national averages, contributing to a cycle of poverty and limited upward mobility among residents and children who grow up in these areas (Talent Search Project Narrative, 2017). Individuals in the target area school districts who receive free or reduced lunch are typically students from low-income households. As depicted in the tables above, the household poverty levels are higher in target area one but are not much larger than target area two. Frequently, students who see their families struggling feel obligated to assist with financial responsibilities and leave school to work minimum-wage jobs. Many of the students who live in one of the target areas deem it unnecessary to further their education because of the more immediate need to contribute needed support to their families.

UB at Target School District 3

Target school district 3 is served by the TRIO UB program at Midwest University. Target school district 3 students who qualify to participate in the UB program reside in an Urban County Area characterized by years of civil unrest and racial tension that have impacted poverty levels and lack of opportunity in the area (Upward Bound Project Narrative, 2017). As a result of the civil unrest, there was an increase in focus on “a problem of entrenched poverty and lack of opportunity” (Upward Bound Project Narrative, 2017, p.1) and the desperate need for “additional

support mechanisms to change the current downward trajectory in performance indicators and that of the lives of students, families, the community and region” (Upward Bound Project Narrative, 2017, p. 1) within this target school district.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2017), 30.1% of families (18,348 families) in target school district 3 were living at or below 150% of the poverty level (see Table 3). This is in comparison to the 26.7% of Missouri families living at or below poverty level and the 25% of families in the United States living at or below the poverty level as identified by the 2010-2014 Census data. Specifically, as it relates to the target area high school served by UB, 99.9% of the student population at target school 3 qualified for free and reduced lunch compared to the national average of 51.3% of high school students eligible for free and reduced lunch (see Table 4). Target district 3 only includes one high school that is served by the TRIO UB program at Midwest University. Many of the families residing in the target area are living in poverty. As shown in Table 3 and Table 4, many families who live in the target area have incomes that fall below the poverty line.

Table 3

Families Residing in the Target Area Living at or Below 150% of Poverty Level

Target area school	Number of families	% of families living at or below 150% of poverty level
Target area school district 3	18,348	30.1
Target area State	1,540,854	26.7
United States	76,744,358	25

Note. US Census Bureau, 2010 -2014 American Community Survey

Table 4*Percent of Students Eligible for Free or Reduced Lunch*

Target area school	Free/reduced lunch (low-income) %
Target Area School District 3	99.9
Missouri	45.5
United States	51.3

Note. Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education 2016, National Center for Education Statistics, 2016.

In the Urban County Area, there are several institutions of higher education, including private and public 4-year institutions, community colleges, and other postsecondary schools. Although the opportunity to obtain a degree is available in the region, many students do not have role models who have earned a bachelor's degree. Within the Urban County Area, the percentage of individuals who live in target school district 3 and have earned at least a bachelor's degree is less than the percentage of individuals living in other parts of the Urban County Area and have earned at least a bachelor's degree. In addition to the high rates of poverty, there are also high rates of high school dropouts in the target area. The high school dropout rate is defined as “the percentage of 16- to 24-year-olds who are not enrolled in school and have not earned a high school credential (either a diploma or an equivalency credential such as a GED certificate)” (NCES, 2020, para. 1). The researchers of this study both serve as TRIO TS and UB staff in roles that support TS and UB students and will provide their perspectives in the next section.

Candidate's Perspective

Researcher 1

As a first-generation student whose household family was considered low-income, the first researcher can relate to the TS participant population. Despite this challenge, the researcher has overcome many barriers that could have prevented college attendance and obtaining a college degree. Through personal experience, the researcher gained an interest in advocating for youth that lack resources which will assist them with their journey to postsecondary enrollment. Additionally, while serving as an educational advisor of the TS program, the researcher observed students who had taken full advantage of TS and other TRIO program services but did not enroll in a postsecondary institution. Many of the students the researcher has served were first-generation college students who lacked knowledge of postsecondary enrollment processes.

The lack of understanding of the college application process has resulted in students receiving minimum support and encouragement from families to attend college. Although TS provides students with the necessary tools and assistance to design postsecondary enrollment plans, a few college-bound seniors still graduate from high school and do not attend college. As a result, a specific pool of college-bound students does not appear in the student clearinghouse search as enrolled in a postsecondary institution. What happened to these students once they completed high school and the staff discontinued services for this group? What additional services could have been provided to assist them with seeking college admission and enrollment?

Researcher 2

The second researcher serves as a TRIO UB program director at Midwest University, a small, 4-year public HBCU. Serving within the secondary education setting and working in the

area of college access, the focus of the second researcher's responsibilities is to nurture a college enrollment culture and encourage student motivation to pursue a college degree. Responsibilities include ensuring every student applies to a 2- or 4-year institution, supporting students and parents with Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) completion, recording students' college acceptance successes, and fostering college exposure through college representative visits and campus tours. In addition to college exposure, the second researcher also focuses on implementing college readiness practices to encourage student preparedness once students begin their college careers. In alignment with TRIO UB's purpose of increasing high school graduation and matriculation into college, these college readiness practices include tutoring sessions to increase academic confidence, critical thinking activities, team-building exercises, and study and time management skills. One of the highlights of serving in this role is college decision day when 12th-grade students celebrate and announce the institution they plan to attend in the fall. While this is an exciting time, not all students receive admission to their school of choice, and not all preferences solidify enrollment in the fall.

Once the students graduate, the second researcher no longer has contact with them, and their source of pre-collegiate advising ends. What happens to these students who do not receive the same support during the summer that they received during the academic year? How do the students navigate higher education processes to ensure that they are enrolled in a class or have an identified dorm room within the residential halls? These are all concerns that arise as the second researcher witnesses some students posting pictures of their move-in day on social media. In contrast, other students who originally had a postsecondary plan do not share anything about their next educational journey.

Together, the researchers observed disparities amongst UB and TS participants from the lens of TRIO staff. Although both programs have a common goal to assist students with postsecondary education plans, the strategies to serve students and meet objectives differ. This led the researchers to assume that the difference in structures, policies, procedures, and processes may impact the outcome of participants attending college, particularly if they don't have the support from these programs during the summer months before attending college.

Statement of Problem

Since the 1960s, the United States educational system has strived towards the advancement of civil rights, increasing access to higher education for all Americans. "Title I of the Higher Education Act of 1965, for example, is the most extensive pre-collegiate program to improve access for underrepresented populations" (Reese, 2008, p. 54). The Department of Education (DOE) has also established programs to help students in high school with tasks such as completing college applications and financial aid forms over the years. However, many students still have responsibilities to complete during the summer, such as housing applications, orientation, and placement tests, to ensure college enrollment with little support (Tackett et al., 2018). Those summer tasks can be more challenging for first-generation and low-income college-bound students with a lack of family members who are knowledgeable regarding the college application process (Castleman et al., 2014). The lack of support and knowledge of how to navigate these tasks that arise over the summer months leave students feeling discouraged about attending college, frustrated with the process, and can potentially result in a failed attempt for students to successfully enroll in college, increasing summer melt rates in first-generation, low-income students (Castleman & Page, 2014).

Summer melt raises concerns about the impact of TRIO TS and UB programs, which are designed to provide services that aid students in envisioning and designing a postsecondary education plan that will ensure college enrollment. Both programs are focused on preparing students for college enrollment and matriculation, yet summer melt still exists within the first-generation community of TS and UB participants. Therefore, it is important to identify the contributing factors that result in summer melt to minimize the barriers that prevent high school students from attending college. The researchers have observed that many students who miss the opportunity to pursue postsecondary enrollment are at risk of becoming incarcerated, a victim of homicide, pregnancy, or experiencing poverty.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to examine the barriers that contributed to summer melt for TRIO TS and UB alumni. The alumni of this study participated in a TRIO TS or UB program hosted at Midwest University, a small HBCU and grantee site of both programs. The results yielded by this study will provide an opportunity for the researchers to inform leaders at Midwest University of suggestions for TS and UB program changes that could decrease the percentage of students impacted by summer melt. Both TS and UB are essential educational programs that are vital to promote academic success, retention, and persistence. TS and UB are also essential programs that provide opportunities for low-income, first-generation college students and students with disabilities from diverse backgrounds (U.S. DOE, 2006). The researchers explored the possible disparities and improvements of both programs that could decrease the summer melt rates. Since these programs offer many services

to expose and prepare students for college, it is necessary to examine programmatic support to reduce the number of students that experience summer melt.

Research Questions

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the barriers that contributed to summer melt for TRIO TS and UB alumni, the following questions guided this study:

1. What barriers do TS alumni face that contribute to summer melt?
2. What barriers do UB alumni face that contribute to summer melt?
3. What program changes can be implemented for TS to take preventative action toward summer melt for TS participants?
4. What program changes can be implemented for UB to take preventative action toward summer melt for UB participants?

Limitations

This study had several limitations. First, it focused on a specific group of TRIO TS and UB alumni who participated in one of the two pre-collegiate programs hosted at one institution; Midwest University, which is an HBCU. Therefore, no generalizations could be made about the entire population of alumni who participated in a pre-collegiate program. Second, the participants of this study had to be TRIO TS or UB alumni within the last three years. This limited the researchers' ability to collect a sufficient sample size. Third, participants of this study had to be high school graduates of the three target schools described in this study, which restricted the amount of data collected. Fourth, since participants of this study are first-generation and low-income students, they may not have had access to the technology needed to participate, which impacted the desired sample size of this study. Additionally, since the TRIO

programs in this study are hosted at one HBCU, this study may be limited to participants from the African American group; and this study's findings may only be generalizable to its participants and no other African Americans or ethnic groups. Finally, this study only examined two of the pre-collegiate TRIO programs, therefore results are only generalizable to TS and UB.

Chapter Summary and Organization of Study

In Chapter 1 the researchers introduced the problem, background of the problem, provided an overview of TRIO pre-collegiate programs, offered the candidates' perspective, explained the statement of the problem and the study's purpose, introduced the research questions, and discussed the limitations of this study. Chapter 2 presents the knowledge for action, theoretical framework, and introduces relevant literature related to TRIO TS and UB programs, and summer melt. Chapter 3 introduces and discusses the methodology approach, including design of study, instrumentation, data collection and analysis. Chapter 4 introduces the researchers' findings, and Chapter 5 provides recommendations, including the need for future research and conclusions.

Chapter Two: Review of Knowledge for Action

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to examine the barriers that contributed to summer melt for TRIO Talent Search (TS) and Upward Bound (UB) alumni. This chapter will review the knowledge for action and introduce the two theoretical frameworks for this study. In this chapter, the researchers will also include the respective components of each framework required for TRIO TS and UB students to succeed in their transition to higher education and be college-ready once they get there. In addition, the chapter presents relevant literature regarding TRIO programs, first-generation students, low-income students, summer melt, and college readiness.

Theoretical Frameworks

Conley's (2007) College Readiness Theory and Schlossberg's (1981) Transition Theory were the frameworks used for this study. Since this research utilizes a phenomenological approach to examine the barriers of TRIO TS and UB alumni, these theories are suggested as the appropriate frameworks in gaining a holistic perspective of the barriers TRIO TS and UB students may have encountered, which impeded their successful transition from high school to college and impacted their development of the key dimensions of college readiness.

Conley's College Readiness Model

Nationally, the first indicators of college readiness are estimated by college entrance exams such as the ACT, SAT, or college placement tests, and acceptance into college (Castleman & Page, 2014). However, college readiness can be measured beyond test scores and acceptance into college. According to Conley (2007) college readiness is described as multidimensional interactive skills and knowledge that enhance students' academic and social

skills. College readiness is not solely interpretive of high school academic measures such as test scores and cumulative grade point averages, but also involves students' perception of learning, ownership of learning, time management, and knowledge of college navigational processes.

Conley (2007) described college readiness as “a multi-faceted concept comprising numerous variables that include factors both internal and external to the school environment” (p. 12).

Internal factors include self-confidence, personal beliefs, communication styles, and individual personalities. External factors include family and educators' support, socioeconomic status, and access to academic, social, cultural, and financial capital. Conley's (2007) model identifies key cognitive strategies, key content knowledge, key learning skills and techniques and key transition knowledge and skills as necessary elements of college readiness.

The Four Dimensions of Conley's College-Readiness Model

Key cognitive strategies measure how a student processes information which are the skills students need to engage information at a more profound level (Conley, 2007). These skills allow students to get the work done by making connections with the subject matter and allows them to apply their knowledge beyond the classroom (Conley, 2015). According to Conley (2007), these cognitive strategies are academic practices that are imperative for a student to be college-ready. Examples of key cognitive strategies consist of problem-solving, critical thinking, information collection, interpretation, analysis of information, and evaluation of information.

Key content knowledge is the second dimension of Conley's (2007) model, and it measures what information a student knows. In this dimension, students acquire a foundation of “understanding and mastering key content knowledge” (p. 14). One's foundation is “achieved by processing information so that its structure becomes more apparent and then probing,

consolidating and applying that information utilizing the key cognitive strategies” (p. 35). Key content knowledge is identified by two themes: overarching academic skills and core academic subject knowledge and skills. Examples of overarching academic skills include research and writing skills imperative for college admissions and scholarship essays during the college application process. Examples of core academic subject knowledge include understanding core academic subjects, including English, mathematics, science, and social studies (Conley, 2007).

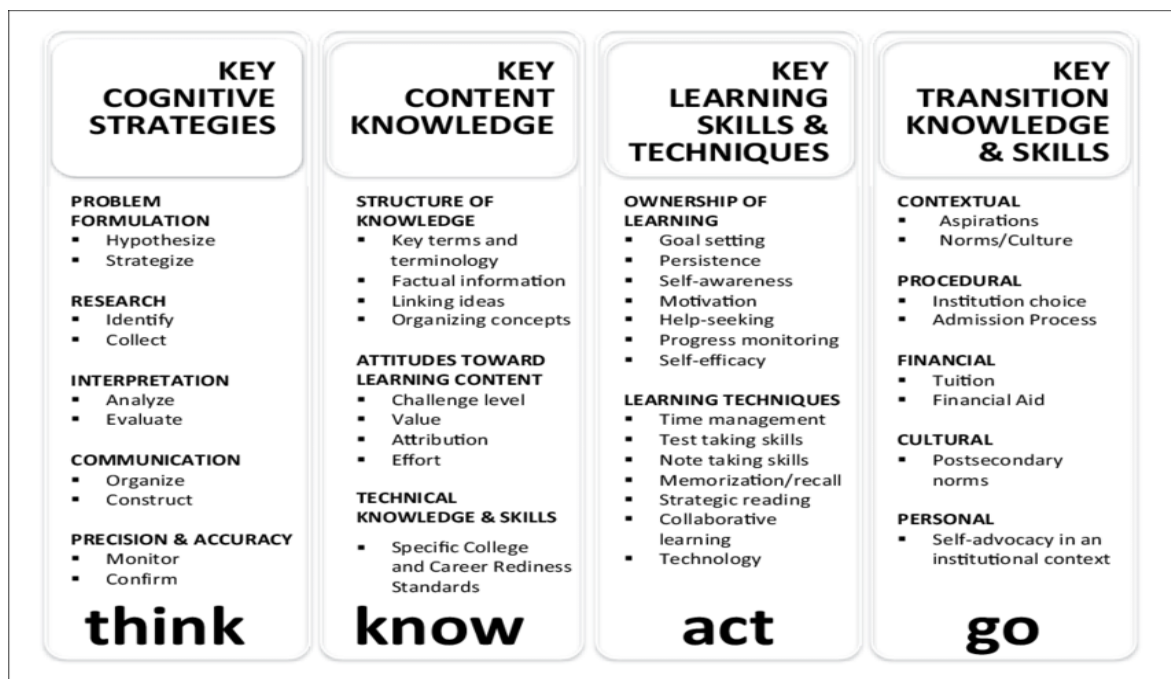
The third dimension of Conley’s (2007) model is key learning skills and techniques, which focuses on academic behaviors such as self-monitoring, self-control, and study skills encompassed by students. Academic behaviors identify how well students master the key content knowledge and persist through academic studies when faced with difficult tasks or juggling multiple responsibilities. This means that students still need to hold themselves accountable for utilizing key content knowledge and managing academic behaviors as needed. Academic behaviors include goal setting, time management, persistence, preparation for exams, and organizational tools such as calendars and lists. Additional academic behaviors include using campus resources, participating in study groups, and utilizing tutoring services. In this dimension, key learning skills and techniques support a student’s independence in college preparation.

Lastly, key transition knowledge and skills, measures how students implement the previous key dimensions to make a successful transition focused on students’ ability to understand the college structure, culture, and college knowledge level students possess (Conley, 2007). Conley (2007) believed students should have a general understanding of college processes and the steps needed to ensure their college enrollment. The college process includes students’

understanding of admissions requirements, various types of colleges, navigating financial aid, college placement tests, and college culture. Each dimension of the college readiness model serves as an integral part of determining students' success in the postsecondary transition. Students must not only be academically prepared for college but also possess knowledge in connecting information. Applying the knowledge learned regarding the college process and displaying key academic behaviors enables students to experience success in matriculating to college. Conley (2007) identified the four dimensions necessary for students to reach college readiness to support their transition from high school to college enrollment (see Figure 2). Each dimension gives a set of skills that should be acquired within each college readiness element to reduce the number of TRIO TS and UB students that experience summer melt.

Figure 2

Theoretical Model of Conley's College Readiness and Skills.



Source: Component of College Readiness. *American Behavioral Scientist*. 58. 1018-1034. 10.1177/0002764213515232.

Conley's (2007) College Readiness Model helps to measure the effectiveness of TRIO TS and UB program's services to ensure students encompass the skills and knowledge to progress in high school, in order to be prepared to transition to postsecondary education. Although Conley's (2007) College Readiness Model provides a framework for the skills students need in order to be ready to transition to college, it doesn't include factors that can affect a student's ability to adapt during a transition. Thus, a second theory is needed for this theoretical framework. Schlossberg's (1981) Transition Theory is the second framework used for this study and will be discussed in the next section.

Schlossberg's Transition Theory

For many students, the transition from high school to college represents a critical change as they enter a new and unfamiliar phase of their academic journey accompanied by additional responsibilities. Schlossberg's (1981) Transition Theory is an "adult development theory which helps to explain the transitions that adults experience throughout life and how they cope and adjust" (p. 2). Schlossberg's (1981) theory emphasizes adult development, which applies to this study since TRIO TS and UB programs at Midwest University strive to promote services that help equip students with the tools to transition into adulthood successfully. Schlossberg (1981) defined a transition as any occasion or non-occasion that changed connections, schedules, beliefs, and jobs. Schlossberg (1981) established the Transition Theory based on a personal belief regarding a need "to develop a systematic framework that would facilitate an

understanding of adults in transition and direct them to the help they need to cope with the normal and remarkable cycle of living” (p. 3).

“Schlossberg (1981) identified three factors that can affect an individual’s ability to adapt during a transition: (a) characteristics of pre-transition and post-transition environments, (b) characteristics of the individual, and (c) the individual’s perceptions of the transition” (p. 3). Schlossberg (1981) further asserted that there are four elements necessary to master change and “influence a person’s ability to cope with a life transition” (p. 3). The four 4 S’s include situation, self, support, and strategies. A person’s success in handling transition is based on his or her resources in these areas. The four elements will be reviewed in the next section.

The Four S Model of Schlossberg’s Transition Theory

Situation is the first “S,” and it involves an individual having a clear understanding of what happened, why it happened, and what it means. Schlossberg (1981) identified the following eight factors as necessary to thoroughly examine a “situation”:

“(1) Trigger: What precipitated the transition? (2) Timing: Is the transition considered "on time" or "off-time" in terms of one's social clock? (3) Control: What aspect of the transition does the individual perceive as being within his/her control? (4) Role change: Is a role change involved, and, if so, is it viewed as a gain or a loss? (5) Duration: Is it seen as permanent, temporary, or uncertain? (6) Previous experience with a similar transition: How effectively did the person cope then, and what are the implications for the current transition? (7) Concurrent stress: Are other sources of stress present? (8) Assessment: Who or what is seen as responsible for the transition, and how is the individual's behavior affected by this person” (p. 7).

Self is the second “S” and is defined as the internal coping resources within an individual. Schlossberg (1981) described “Self” as consisting of two categories, personal and demographic characteristics, plus psychological resources:

“Personal and demographic characteristics affect how an individual views life, such as socioeconomic status, gender, age, stage of life, state of health, and ethnicity.

Psychological resources include ego development, outlook, commitment and values, spirituality, and resiliency” (p. 8).

Support is the third “S” and refers to external or social support accessible to an individual. The support an individual does or does not receive plays a significant role and impacts one’s ability to adapt to a transition. Support can be from all, but not limited to, close relationships, family, friendships, organizations, and various communities. Functions of support include affect, affirmation, aid, and honest feedback.

The final “S” is Strategies, also known as coping responses, and is divided into three categories (Schlossberg, 1981). These three categories for coping responses include “those that modify the situation, those that control the meaning of the problem, and those that help manage the stress in the aftermath” (p. 8). Also included under strategies are four coping approaches: “information seeking, direct action, inhibition of action, and intrapsychic behavior. Individuals may use multiple strategies and coping methods when experiencing a transition” (p. 8).

Schlossberg’s (1981) Transition Model supports this research because it consists of several factors that help to understand how TRIO TS and UB students explore the transition from high school to college based on situations, support, self, and strategies. Combined, Conley’s (2007) College Readiness Theory and Schlossberg’s (1981) Transition Theory are holistic lenses

in identifying the necessary skills and resources needed to eliminate barriers to prevent TRIO TS and UB participants from experiencing summer melt. The next section will provide a review of the literature relevant to this research and supports the need to examine the barriers that contribute to summer melt for TRIO TS and UB alumni.

Literature Review

A review of the research will focus on a brief history of TRIO programs, including the effectiveness of the UB program, low income and first-generation students, and student success. The next section of this chapter will examine the barriers associated with college enrollment for low-income and first-generation students, the barriers encountered by these students and the lack of multilevel capital. The chapter will also present the literature on summer melt, including prevention programs and the effects of college going interventions. Studies on college readiness will be reviewed. Finally, literature regarding a students' transition to college will be discussed. The researchers for this study found that during their review of the literature, there were limited studies regarding the TS program which is one of the programs that will be evaluated in this study.

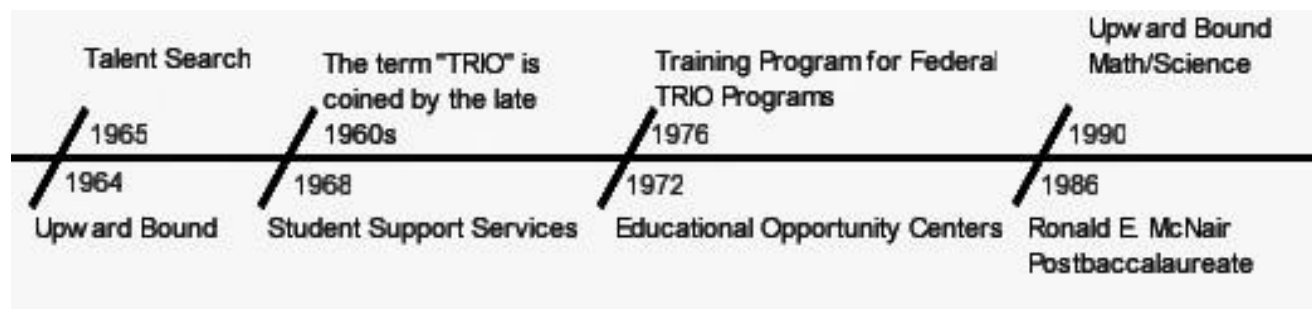
History of TRIO Programs

According to Blake (1998), students who identify as low-income or from racial and ethnic minority backgrounds continue to face obstacles even though they comprise the majority of the U.S. college applicant pool. The first TRIO programs were established to enhance the growth of individuals by addressing barriers to college access. "In 1964, Congress passed the Economic Opportunity Act, authorizing 18 pilot Upward Bound programs" (Blake, 1998, p. 330). Following the launch of Upward Bound programs, under the Higher Education Act the Talent Search program

was created in 1965, and Student Support Services was established in 1968, creating the original three “TRIO” programs. By 1998, under the authorization of the Higher Education Act (1964), “five TRIO programs had provided services to 780,000 Americans nationwide from minority or low-income backgrounds, including 16,000 individuals with disabilities” (Blake, 1998, p. 330). These additional programs include Veterans Upward Bound, Education Opportunity Centers, Training Program for Federal TRIO Programs, Ronald E. McNair Post-baccalaureate Achievement, and Upward Bound Math-Science (see Figure 3). The addition of these programs expanded TRIO programs to eight programs providing a broader range of services and addressing the education attainment gaps for students of various education levels and ages. “The TRIO programs are administered by the Student Service area of the Department’s Office of Postsecondary Education” (TRIO 50th, 2014, p. 3).

Figure 3

History of TRIO programs timeline



Source: The University of Toledo. (n.d.). *TRIO student support services*. Retrieved May 2, 2022, from https://www.utoledo.edu/success/trio/trio_history.html

After the first TRIO programs were instituted, regional associations of program leaders were implemented in numerous countries (Blake, 1998). During this time, the leaders noticed a need for visibility in the national educational policy community to maintain and expand their programs. Therefore, in 1981, these leaders partnered to create the National Coalition of Educational Opportunity Associations (NCEOA, 1998). In 1998, the organization changed its name to the Council for Opportunity in Education (COE). As an outgrowth of TRIO, the Council played an advocacy role for the TRIO programs (Blake, 1998). Blake (1998) noted that TRIO programs have applied a variety of effective strategies with great success from first generation-college, minority, and low-income students.

The Effectiveness of TRIO Upward Bound Program

McLure and Child (1998) designed a study to compare “UB students who completed the ACT college admissions examination during the 1997-98 academic year with non-UB college-bound students in the graduating class of 1998” (p. 346). The study was also developed for comparison of students in each group whose high school course-taking patterns either did or did not comply with ACT’s definition of “Core courses taken.” In developing the research questionnaire for this study, data obtained from the ACT assessment, including its associated demographic and student academic information, were examined. From this examination, McLure and Childs (1998) found the following variables and revealed differences between UB and non-UB students concerning their achievement levels on the ACT and other indicators.

Demographic Findings: A large percentage of UB students were female, and larger percentages of UB students were members of racial and ethnic groups other than White American. *Educational Aspirations and Plans:* Generally, UB students’ aspirations were

as high, if not higher, than those of non-UB students, and their choices of majors were comparable to those of non-UB students. In that regard, from the data provided, it may be possible that UB students' selections are an indicator of UB's success. *Financial Aid Expectations*: UB students were more likely than non-UB students to expect to apply for financial aid to meet college expenses, to want help finding employment while attending college, and to plan to work more hours per week during their first year of college. *Family Income*: A prevailing pattern among all racial and ethnic groups was that larger percentages of UB students than non-UB students were from low-income families-an expected occurrence because low family income is one of the eligibility criteria for participation in TRIO programs. *Expressed Need for Help in Specific Areas*: Higher percentages of UB students expressed willingness to seek specific kinds of help with academic and personal concerns when they reach college campuses. This tendency may indicate greater open-mindedness and a positive academic attitude (p. 350).

“McLure and Child (1998) also noted the following *Years of High School Courses*: Participation in UB appears to increase the likelihood that students will take more years of Core courses” (p. 362). McLure and Child's (1998) study relates directly to some of the most basic characteristics of the TRIO TS and UB philosophy at Midwest University. Although McLure and Child's (1998) study did not directly connect to the prevention of summer melt within TRIO TS and UB programs, their research revealed the relevance of the UB program in encouraging students to set higher goals for themselves.

The Impact of the TRIO Programs

The Council's TRIO Achievers Program annually honors outstanding graduates nominated by TRIO staff throughout the nation (Coles, 1998). The selected achievers are individuals who have successfully overcome adversity and cultural barriers to enrolling and completing college. In this article, Coles (1998) provided a glance of the experience of 332 TRIO graduates; specifically highlighting 10 graduates that were recognized as TRIO Achievers over the past 15 years for their postsecondary attainments, pursued careers, and community contributions. The display on TRIO Achievers' experiences puts human faces on TRIO success stories and demonstrates why Congressional leaders considered TRIO a success in promoting college access nationally.

Coles (1998) found that none of the parents of the 10 TRIO Achievers graduated from college. According to Coles (1998), most of TRIO Achievers' parents had no idea how to guide their children's pursuit of higher education and looked to TRIO for support. Also, some TRIO Achievers didn't receive much encouragement from their families to attend college. Coles (1998) contended that "Their subsequent achievements run counter to the widely held view that parental involvement is essential to children's educational success and that it increases the likelihood that children will attend college" (p. 436). According to Coles (1998), one TRIO Achiever jumped at the chance to attend a UB residential program for six weeks, which allowed him to escape the physical and emotional abuse that was commonplace in his family. This also helped the TRIO Achiever to overcome self-esteem, personal, and social problems. "With the support of UB, he succeeded academically and went on to receive a doctorate in political science" (p. 436). The TRIO Achievers success showed that despite a lack of family support students can still succeed and it "takes a village to raise a child." Collectively, the 332 TRIO Achievers earned 560 degrees. Over

half the TRIO Achiever population also earned advanced degrees. Coles' (1998) work revealed the need for elevating TRIO programs, and their effectiveness.

TRIO Programs Low-Income and First-Generation Student Success Research

As diverse student populations increasingly grow in higher education, institutions must address challenges faced by these student populations to ensure student success (Balz & Esten, 1998). Balz and Esten (1998) "examined private colleges and universities' role in contributing to the TRIO target student populations of low-income and first-generation students" (p. 333). The analysis provided by Balz and Esten (1998) showed how the students' college success and persistence in enrollment was affected by TRIO participation at private institutions. A secondary analysis in this study involved the success and challenges of minority students. Balz and Esten (1998) found that 90 out of 94 TRIO alumni achieved college persistence, completion, and success when broken down by race/ethnicity, regardless of the first-generation-college status.

According to Balz and Esten (1998), many students will attend college from low-income households underprepared. Also, many of these students will be first-generation students. "As mandated by Congress, two-thirds of TRIO participants are low-income, first-generation-college students, more specifically, students from families with incomes under \$24,000, and neither parent attended college" (p. 334). Balz and Esten (1998) stated that families that haven't attended college typically do not have knowledge of the postsecondary enrollment and financial process. Students from families with little postsecondary education experience may also be less likely to see higher education's value.

"Overall, only 54.8% of all students entering public four-year institutions had earned a certificate or degree of any type five years later" (Balz and Esten, 1998, p. 336). Therefore, first-

generation students began to overcome the barriers faced by way of receiving TRIO programs services. According to Balz and Esten (1998), students from higher incomes, regardless of their first-generation-college status, demonstrated more remarkable postsecondary persistence and attainment rates. Further examination of this low-income first-generation-college cohort as a proxy for TRIO-eligible students demonstrated the continued trend of greater success and program completion, particularly degree attainment, at private four-year institutions. “Despite the social and financial barriers to postsecondary access and achievement, low-income, first-generation college students in the United States are attending and succeeding in college in record numbers, and TRIO programs are helping them succeed” (p. 345).

Balz and Esten (1998) study identified two variables similar to TRIO TS and UB participants at Midwest University. TRIO TS and UB students are either low-income or first-generation students. Balz and Esten’s (1998) analysis revealed that this population can successfully attend and complete college if provided the necessary resources. Balz and Esten’s (1998) research is dated and current literature on TRIO program students’ success is limited. Due to a limited number of studies about TRIO programs, this study is vital in highlighting the effectiveness of TRIO programs at Midwest University.

Goldman (2019) pointed out the likelihood of rural students being characterized as first-generation or low-income and facing distinct barriers which result in significant challenges during the postsecondary enrollment process. According to Goldman (2019) “despite a growing number of rural students starting college, additional research is needed on the access and success of low-income, first-generation, rural college students in the United States” (p. 24). In her 2019

study, Goldman utilized digital storytelling to present the experiences of 14 college students who participated in the TRIO program at a public 4-year university.

Digital storytelling was used to highlight and bring awareness to the participants' experiences. Forty-nine students submitted digital stories describing their paths to college and experiences in college. "Out of the 49 students, 11 students were considered rural students by the definition used by the U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics" (Goldman, 2019, p. 25). "NCES (2014) defines rural as under 2,500 residents and classifies rural into three subsets: fringe (less than 5 miles from urbanized area), distant (5 to 25 miles from urbanized area), and remote (over 25 miles from urbanized area)" (p. 18). A total of 14 students participated in the study; six of the 14 were identified as first-generation; 10 of the 14 indicated they experienced financial barriers on their journeys to or in college. A consistent theme among participants was the on-campus support they received from TRIO, which helped them to succeed in college. Goldman's (2019) findings also revealed that study participants' valued the support they received from a transition course which helped them prepare for postsecondary education.

Additionally, Goldman (2019) concluded that participants in this study encountered different barriers based on their journey to college and diversified backgrounds. However, the TRIO program was beneficial in helping participants navigate to college, be successful in, and complete college. Goldman (2019) noted that the study participants' "association with TRIO, provided them with access to tutoring services, books and technology loans, taught them about resiliency, and introduced them to resources on campus" (p. 25). Goldman (2019) suggested that "in a political climate of cutting resources, policy makers and educators should be aware of the value of on-campus support, like TRIO, in helping underrepresented students to complete

college” (p. 25). As it relates to the factors contributing to summer melt for TRIO TS and UB alumni at Midwest University, it is necessary to understand the barriers they encountered during the summer months in order to determine whether TRIO TS and UB programs should be offered after high school graduation to help mitigate obstacles that may discourage students from going to college. Goldman (2019) agreed that “the link between students’ experience in high school and their transition in college needs further study” (p. 26). The next section will examine the barriers to college enrollment and additional obstacles that first generation and low-income students face.

First-Generation, Low-Income Students Barriers to College Enrollment

The college enrollment process includes challenges for every aspiring college student; however, the college enrollment process barriers can be more difficult for first-generation and low-income students (Castleman & Page, 2014). It is vital to recognize first-generation and low-income because each characteristic is a criterion for high school students to become TRIO TS or TRIO UB participants. According to the Department of Education (2009), two-thirds of the TS and UB participants must be low-income and potential first-generation college students. The remaining one-third must be low-income, first-generation, or students who are at high risk for academic failure. While all first-generation students don’t automatically correlate to a low-income student, there are shared barriers that affect first-generation and low-income students in the college enrollment journey.

First-Generation Student Barriers

A first-generation student is an individual whose parents or legal guardian did not finish an undergraduate degree (U.S. DOE, 2020). First-generation students are associated with having

more risks. They encounter significantly more barriers in decision making in the college process than that of continuing-generation students, a student whose parents have received some postsecondary education (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). Due to being the first in their family to navigate through the college admissions process, first-generation students often have a decreased level of support, knowledge, and guidance from family members in the pursuit to enroll in college. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2018), the National Center for Education Statistics data on first-generation student access to postsecondary education reported a “total of 2002 high school sophomores who had enrolled in higher education by 2012. Of that number, 72 percent were students whose parents had never entered higher education. This is in comparison to 84 percent of students whose parents’ attended college and 93 percent of students whose parents completed a bachelor's degree” (para. 2). Parents who attended college are more involved with their children's education, place a higher value on academic expectations, and encourage college educational attainment (Knighton & Mirza, 2002). Due to first-generation students' lack of support and educational guidance from parents, first-generation students do not inherit the social and cultural capital beneficial when navigating to college enrollment (Hirudayaraj, 2011). As a result, first-generation students are more likely to have lower grade point averages, less likely to be involved in college, and it is predicted that only 27% of first-generation college students will complete college and receive a bachelor's degree (Whitley, Benson & Wesaw, 2018).

First-generation student college enrollment challenges result from unequally distributed social capital, contributing to lower enrollment, college completion rates, and degree attainment. “Social capital is the information, support, and resources available to an individual through

connections and networks of relationships” (Bourdieu, 1986). According to Schwartz et al. (2018), first-generation students' transition from high school to college can impact their social capital as their high school community's relationships often begin to diminish. As a result, first-generation students must put in more effort to maintain relationships built-in high school and begin to navigate new academic and professional relationships that will assist their transition to college. In addition, decreased social capital also impacts first-generation students' participation in professional or on-campus opportunities due to being uncomfortable building relationships with faculty and staff on campus, seeking academic assistance, or utilizing on-campus resources (Schwartz et al., 2018).

Schwartz et al.'s (2018) study focused on the impact of social capital on first-generation college students' attitudes, behaviors, and academic outcomes using the Connected Scholars Program (CSP) structure. CSP focuses on developing skills and mindset to foster mentoring relationships among students and college professionals by implementing lessons on CSP components": (a) instruction and discussion of the role of social capital in advancing goals; (b) activities designed to help students identify current and potential connections; and (c) experiential activities and real-world practice reaching out to and cultivating supportive relationships, with a focus on reaching out to university faculty and staff" (p. 3).

Schwartz et al.'s (2018) study included 164 first-generation college-bound high school students attending a 6-week summer remedial program consisting of an academic course in math or English, academic support and tutoring services, and financial aid guidance. During the study, participants engaged in four intervention sessions on CSP components such as discussing the role of social capital and support, the role of mentors, networking while in college, role-playing

networking scenarios, and identifying on-campus and off-campus support. The implementation of the CSP components was used to encourage and increase social capital for the study participants.

Low-Income Student Barriers

“Due to the structure of most institutions of higher education; low-income, underrepresented, and first-generation students find themselves facing tremendous barriers to college access and degree attainment” (Crawley et al., 2019, p.2). College access programs like TS and UB are needed more than ever in high poverty areas. Low-income students are academically underprepared for college coursework rigor, limiting the amount of college acceptance opportunities. According to the College Board (2019), of the 1.4 million high school students that took advanced placement exams in 2018, only about 30.8% percent of those students were low-income students. This data indicates that fewer advanced academic opportunities are provided to low-income high school students, further supporting the increasing gap of college-ready, low-income students and creates a barrier for students aspiring to attend college.

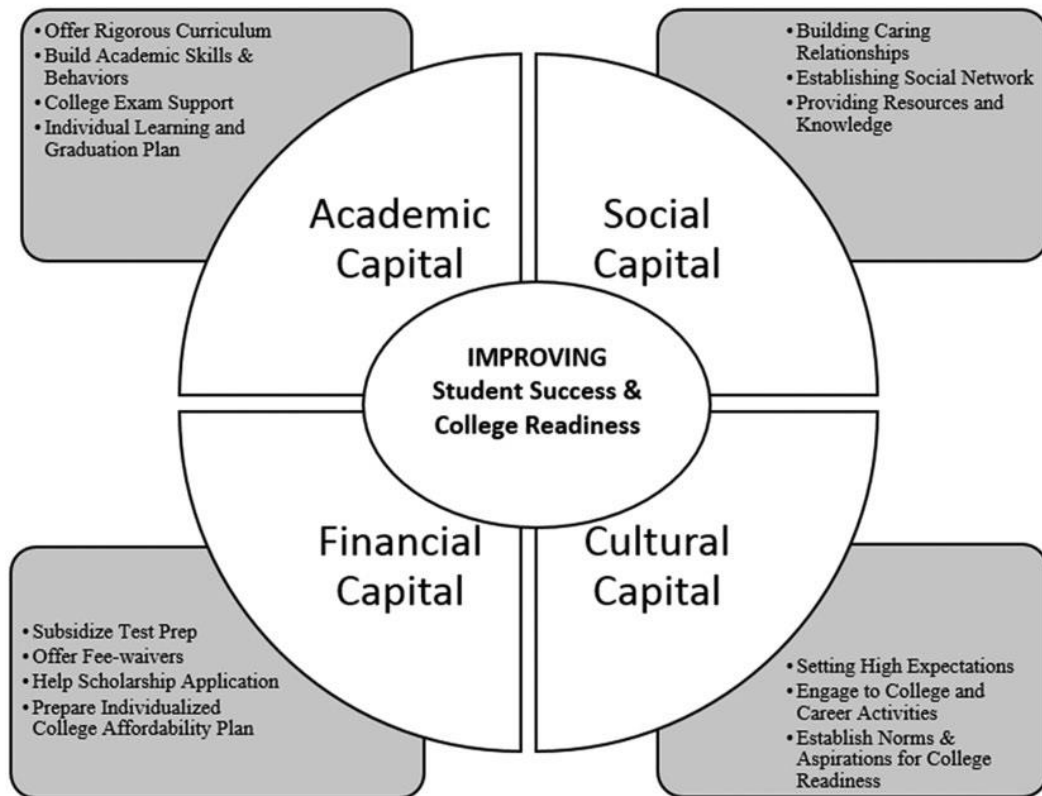
Lack of Multilevel Capital

College readiness for low-income students moves beyond the surface level of meeting academic standards and requires multiple concepts, resources, and support (Conley, 2014; Yavuz et al., 2017). Yavuz et al. (2017) argued that college readiness is achieved with low-income students when effective strategies are implemented using a multilevel capital framework for developing social, academic, financial, and cultural capital, as depicted in Figure 4. In Yavuz et al.'s (2017) study, capital is recognized as various connections and support levels, contributing to

the achievement gap. The multilevel capital framework (see Figure 4) used in this study identified four types of capital: social capital (support systems through personal, social, family, and business networks), financial capital (providing financial aid and financial literacy) workshops, academic capital (offering ACT/SAT preparation, rigorous programs of study), and cultural capital such as “shared norms, high expectations, aspirations, beliefs, and values” (Swail, 2003).

Figure 4

Multilevel framework for developing social, academic, financial, and cultural capital.



Source: Yavuz, O., Parzych, J., & Generali, M. (2019). A systematic approach to exploring college and career readiness program needs within high-poverty urban public schools. *Education and Urban Society* 51(4), 443-473.

Utilizing the multilevel capital framework to identify students' college readiness program needs in high poverty areas, Yavuz et al.'s (2019) quantitative study identified 17 areas of needs determined by students, parents, and faculty within four urban public schools. On a 5-point scale, 16 of the identified areas of need were ranked at 3.5 or higher, signifying them as high needs for low-income students. Participants ranked individual college and career counseling, financial aid counseling, college mentoring programs, career lessons, and fee waivers as core program needs that should be implemented in the school curriculum (Yavuz et al., 2015). Career fairs, college fairs, college trips, college representative visits, and job shadowing programs ranked as the highest need for college enrichment program services.

Yavuz et al.'s (2017) idea of addressing success gaps in low-income students using a multilevel capital framework supports the research argument that first-generation, low-income students served by the TRIO TS and UB programs face barriers beyond the services provided to prevent summer melt. The high-needs programs and services determined by students, parents, and faculty in Yavuz et al.'s (2015) study are services provided and outlined in TS and UB operational plans contributing to the social, cultural, academic, and financial capital of low-income students. However, according to Yavuz et al.'s (2015) study, there are very few college and career readiness services incorporated into a high-poverty area school curriculum. Collaboration and increased partnerships among TRIO TS and UB, school districts, and school counselors will help build capital among low-income students, increase college attainments, and decrease summer melt rates in the student demographic. In the next section, a review of the literature on summer melt will be presented, followed by a discussion regarding the effectiveness of a summer melt prevention program, and the effects of college going interventions.

Understanding Summer Melt

Castleman et al. (2014) indicated that the summer after high school graduation could pose considerable college transition obstacles. “This phenomenon is known as summer melt” (Tacket et al., 2018, p. 40). Tacket et al. (2018) defined summer melt as “the experience in which students who planned to attend college were unable to navigate the additional summer obstacles, thereby they did not attend their college of choice the fall following high school graduation” (p. 40). The importance of examining solutions to prevent summer melt stems from the fact that many students fail to enroll in college because they did not overcome the adversity faced during the postsecondary transition. Castleman et al., (2014) noted that “for many reasons, low-income students’ plans may be particularly vulnerable in the summer following high school graduation” (p. 202).

During the summer, many important tasks are required to be completed to finalize college plans. At the same time, a great number of students have limited access to quality resources. “This isolation from professional support may be particularly problematic for first-generation and low-income, college-bound students, whose families and extended social networks may lack direct experience with the college process” (Castleman et al., 2014, p. 203). Thus, when students experience many critical requirements without adequate support or knowledge to meet them, barriers to attending college may arise. Castleman et al., (2014) noted that researchers have sought to address these roadblocks by developing summer melt prevention programs, post-high school interventions, and college-going interventions.

Castleman et al. (2014) explored the summer melt phenomenon using a national survey and administrative data from a large metropolitan area, and regression analysis to estimate the

summer melt prevalence. Castleman et al. (2014) produced the “first subset of applicants to the Last Dollar Scholarship (LDS) offered by uAspire, a Boston-based nonprofit organization providing financial aid advising and scholarships to Boston public school students” (p. 204). The goal of the LDS program was to cover the remaining college tuition balance after financial aid award packages. The study sample included the graduating class of 2007-2009 students. The analytic sample contained 1,861 students.

“Castleman et al. (2014) analyses revealed summer melt rates of sizable magnitude, ranging from 8 to 40%. In the uAspire analyses, the researchers estimated that of students with an EFC of zero, 78% enrolled in the fall after high school graduation. The on-time matriculation rate did not differ significantly for those with EFCs in the Pell-awardable range but was 4.3% higher for students with EFCs above the Pell-awardable range ($p = 0.087$). Based on these results, Castleman et al. (2014) estimated a summer melt rate among the lowest socioeconomic status (SES) students in their sample of approximately 22%. In addition, 17% of students with an EFC of zero compared to 8% of students with an EFC outside of the Pell-eligible range reported intentions to enroll in a two-year community college” (p. 205).

Overall, Castleman et al. (2014) indicated that low-income, college-intending students experience high summer attrition rates. TRIO TS and UB students are typically lower-income or first-generation students, and a portion of these students fail to enroll in college after high school graduation. Given the goal of improving the number of TRIO TS and UB students who experience summer melt, it is important to evaluate how to effectively close the gap of summer melt. Castleman et al.’s (2014) research addressed “this gap by exploring the extent to which college-intending high school graduates are susceptible to melt”, but there is limited literature

which focuses on high school graduates during the summer months signaling the need for more research (p. 205).

Summer Melt Prevention Program

“Over the years, various programs have been implemented to help students in high school with college applications, financial aid forms, etc., but students still have remaining tasks to complete over the summer with no support” (Tacket et al., 2018, p .40). As previously mentioned, these tasks can be extremely difficult for low-income and first-generation students who do not have adequate support to help them navigate the college enrollment process. Tacket et al. (2018) piloted a summer melt program experience in the summer of 2016 by partnering with nine school districts throughout Kalamazoo County to minimize the number of students that do not attend college the fall after high school graduation. The summer melt prevention program was implemented to assist with the overarching goal of the College and Career Action Network (CACAN). “The goal of CACAN was to increase college enrollment, with an emphasis on closing the existing gap between economically disadvantaged and non-economically disadvantaged students” (Tacket et al., 2018, 40).

The summer melt prevention program had 66 student participants ranging from three to 10 students at each of the nine participating high schools (Tacket et al., 2018). Sixteen of the participating students disengaged from the summer melt prevention program for reasons such as moving out of state, death in the family, and lack of response to counselor communications (Tacket et al., 2018). Students who were full participants in the summer melt prevention program attended school at a higher rate than students in the comparison group (65% and 46%, respectively). Tacket et al. 2018 found that students who participated in the program were 1.4

times more likely to go to college the fall after high school graduation than the matched comparison group and 3.4 times more likely to go when compared to students who disengaged from the program. Although the summer prevention program pilot did increase CACAN's college enrollment goal, there were future recommendations for high school counselors, which include continuing to support students who disclose that they do not plan to attend college and helping to find resources for them to gain viable work experience or apprenticeship/internship experiences, and career exploration if they intend to attend a college/university shift.

Tacket et al.'s (2018) study exposed the gaps in providing specific recommendations for students disengaged from the summer melt prevention program for reasons such as moving out of state or death in the family. TRIO TS and UB students are continuously faced with unexpected situations at home, especially the summer after high school graduation, which creates barriers for them that could hinder their college plans. It is important to examine the events that occur the summer after high school graduation, preventing TRIO TS and UB participants from postsecondary enrollment. The investigation of summer melt within TRIO TS and UB alumni will provide TRIO program staff and other stakeholders with an understanding of how to mend the gaps in postsecondary enrollment for low-income and first-generation program participants.

Effects of College-Going Interventions

“President Barack Obama and the US Department of Education have made increasing college completion rates a national priority” (Carrell & Sacerdote, 2017, p. 125). According to Carrel and Sacerdote (2017), there are many programs, partnerships, and nonprofits that seek to raise college-going rates among students in the United States. For example, TRIO programs are federally funded by the US Department of Education and are available throughout the United

States. Carrell and Sacerdote (2017) investigated two experiments on college coaching/mentoring. The first was the mentoring/college coaching intervention. It consisted of three components: mentoring, funding college application and board/ACT fees, and a \$100 cash bonus for completing the program. The program was targeted toward high school seniors who were on the verge of failing to apply to college. To identify seniors' specific groups, they worked closely with guidance departments at 20 different New Hampshire high schools. During the program, mentors kept track of various tasks and progress for the high school seniors. Carrell and Sacerdote (2017) found that the mentoring treatment raised college-going by 6%, and the effect is significant at the 1% level. The researchers also pointed out that the \$100 cash bonus was fun, but it was not the primary motivation for treatment students to complete the application. They found that offering the cash bonus only to students (with no mentoring) had an insignificant 2% effect on college-going. However, the estimates were very imprecise. As a result, in 2014 Carrell and Sacerdote (2017) tried removing the \$100 cash bonus incentive.

The second intervention in this study was the transcript only/letter of encouragement intervention. In 2013 and 2014, Carrell and Sacerdote (2017) introduced the second intervention, which was designed to test whether the students in their sampling frame would be inspired to attend college if they received a personalized letter of encouragement from college admissions offices. Carrell and Sacerdote (2017) indicated that the findings were small, negative, and not statistically significant for the second treatment. Carrell and Sacerdote (2017) reviewed the findings among students who accepted the treatment, and they still did not apply to the schools that were reaching out to them. Interestingly, it is a common assumption that some TRIO TS and UB students do not attend college the fall after they graduate because of a lack of support from

someone with substantial knowledge of the college enrollment process. However, Carrell and Sacerdote (2017) did find that the treatment was highly effective for students who anticipated needing help. This study further signals the need to examine summer melt within TRIO TS and UB participants. Although interventions are implemented to prevent melt, many do not address the unknown variables.

Carrell and Sacerdote (2017) pointed out that they provided students with the necessary resources and tools in the “transcripts only” intervention, and college admissions counselors even reached out. However, they still received no response or college application from some students. Similar to TRIO TS and UB participants at Midwest University; they are provided with a wide range of resources, experiences, and support, yet some college-bound participants still experience summer melt.

College Readiness

According to Conley (2015), a college-ready student has acquired abilities, content information, and practices before moving on from secondary school; however, there are differing views of the exact skills needed to be considered college-ready. Using social capital theory, Le et al. (2016) argued that low-income, first-generation, and minority students’ lack of social capital inadequately prepares them for college. Social capital was defined earlier as “networks of people and community resources” (Yosso, 2005, p. 79). Le et al. (2016) stated, “Disadvantaged students often lack basic knowledge about college, including knowledge about academic preparation, the application process, and expenses and funding” (pp. 263-264), which can lead to increased summer melt and college dropout rates.

Le et al.'s (2016) study included the College Bound (CB) St. Louis program, a free college readiness program that serves minority students from low-income and first-generation families. College Bound provides services to increase social capital, including academic programming, social networking, financial literacy, and college planning to students beginning in 9th grade and includes support for up to nine years through college completion. Le et al.'s (2016) study sought to examine the CB program participants' postsecondary outcomes from 2006-2014 by evaluating students' grade point averages, attendance, and state-level scores for three school districts in St. Louis, MO. Le et al. (2016) found that students participating in the CB program were more likely to achieve their academic goals, stay on track to graduate from high school, take college preparation classes, and go on to enroll in a 4-year collegiate institution. Le et al. (2016) acknowledged that their study excluded students who failed to enroll in college. The gap in Le et al.'s (2016) research indicates a need to understand the experiences and barriers of high school students who identify as college-ready but continue to face the barriers that prevent them from successfully transitioning to college, leading to summer melt. The next section will review literature on students' transition to college.

Students' Transition to College

While there is literature addressing students who are unprepared for college, there is very little research about students who intend to go to college after graduating from high school but do not enroll (Rall, 2016). Rall (2016) focused on the barriers faced by low-income, racial/ethnic minority students to transition to college immediately following high school graduation successfully. Schlossberg's (1981) Transition Theory served as the study's conceptual

framework, which helped the researcher identify the cause and effects of students' transitioning from high school to college.

Rall (2016) examined students between May and September 2012 to identify the circumstances that led them to alter their original postsecondary plans. The study included two phases of data collection to identify students who experienced summer melt. The first phase of data collection consisted of a 25 open-ended questionnaire that identified students' postsecondary plans, various resources used by the high school, financial aid status, scholarships earned, and college application status. Through the second phase of the study, students who melted or did not follow through with their postsecondary plan were identified as indicated in phase one. "Those students who melted demonstrated one overarching reason for not beginning college— lack of college knowledge with five subcategories: (a) financial struggles, (b) failure to meet requirements, (c) inability to obtain the classes wanted/needed, (d) inadequate support, and (e) unclear communication" (p. 469). According to Rall (2016), the act of students experiencing summer melt can be categorized into Schlossberg's (1981) three classifications of non-events — "(a) personal (tied to the individual desire to go to college), (b) resultant (caused by the abrupt removal of key resources at the same time they graduated), and (c) delayed (as the interview participants expressed that they still plan to try to take college classes at a later time)" (p. 470).

While Rall's (2016) study identified challenges faced by low-income students and minority students, it failed to identify the external difficulties that influenced students' decisions not to enroll in the immediate fall semester. Rall's (2016) study also did not specify the challenges or experiences of first-generation students in their pursuit to transition from high school to college. The gap in Rall's (2016) study and much of the literature regarding the barriers

students face during their transition from high school to college makes it difficult to understand how best to strengthen TRIO TS and UB programs and signals the need to add to the scholarly research available.

Frischmann (2017) examined “a seven-week summer bridge program designed to help students successfully transition from high school to their first year of college at Idaho State University (p. 2)”. According to Frischmann (2017), what is typically known as a summer transition program “is now becoming the academic equivalent of ‘boot camp’ for a larger, diverse population (p. 2).” Founded initially as a TRIO program, the Bengal Bridge program started with a small cohort of 31 low-income and first-generation students in 2013. “Frischmann (2017) explained that the objective of a summer bridge program is to provide necessary skills and additional support for high school seniors to transition smoothly into their first semester at a university” (p. 4).

To begin this process, the researcher collected descriptive statistics and completed various surface-level analyses. The data allowed Frischmann (2017) to serve future students better, improve resource allocation, and conclude whether participation in the Bengal Summer Bridge program increased retention to the fall semester and beyond (p. 1). In 2015, the ISU Student Success Center received additional funding to expand its summer Bengal Bridge program and develop a first-year transition (FYT) program. The FYT program’s purpose was to help first-year students persist at higher rates. According to Frischmann (2017), “in 2016, Bridge became a FYT program, and the criteria for acceptance was expanded to include factors besides low-income and first-generation” (p.3). The new criteria included students that may have “low test scores, low

GPA, disability, underrepresented minority, English as a second language, or lack of familial support for education” (p. 3).

A Principle Component Analysis was also conducted to present the group of Bridge students using fewer variables and identify dominant variables. Frischmann’s (2017) sample for this analysis was comprised of the 117 actively enrolled students, where each student completed his or her “Bridge summer term, fall term post-Bridge, and spring term post-Bridge” (p. 7). A cluster analysis was then performed to compare the qualitative similarities and differences that would emerge if the students were grouped by academic performance. The quantitative characteristics used for clustering these students were high school GPA, standardized test score, and their Bridge term GPAs. In the cluster analysis, the next goal was to use quantitative variables to group students and then analyze similarities and differences between the clusters using categorical aspects. Frischmann (2017) stated that the conclusion for the cluster analysis was somewhat inconclusive. There was no consistent pattern after running many cluster analyses with different variables, different size groups, and other methods.

Due to the 2013-2015 cohorts having limited sample sizes and different leadership, Frischmann (2017) planned to prepare for subsequent analyses. Frischman (2017) also realized that the initial research of the first-year population benefitted from Bridge but was sufficiently impeded by a lack of culture. Even to succeed in the matriculation to higher education, they would need additional implementation in place for the first-year retention plan. “Bridge is an intensely-supported learning environment primarily for first-generation student populations, and many of Bridge alumni report feeling more confident as they begin fall classes” (p. 9). The study

concluded that Summer Bridge programs serve as useful implications for increasing student retention in the fall semester and facilitating a smooth transition for first-year students.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 2 introduced the theoretical frameworks for this study and reviewed the literature relevant to this research. A history of TRIO programs provided insight into the evolution of TRIO and the effectiveness of the UB program. TRIO programs support first generation and low-income students, so it was appropriate to review the literature related to these students. The chapter also reviewed studies that addressed the barriers to college enrollment for first generation and low-income students and additional barriers these students may encounter that could result in summer melt. The lack of multilevel capital was also discussed. Next, literature on summer melt was presented and the impact of summer melt prevention programs. College readiness is vital to a student's success as they transition to college; therefore, literature related to college readiness was examined. Finally, students' transition to college was reviewed in order to create a better understanding of the relevance of examining the barriers that could hinder their successful transition to higher education.

There are limited studies that examine the barriers TRIO TS and UB students face during the summer months after high school graduation which might impact their access to postsecondary education. Although TRIO programs such as TS and UB have been established to help first-generation and low-income students to overcome challenges that impede their entry into higher education, there is still a need to understand the internal and external factors that occur during the summer months for these students. The purpose of this study was to reduce the gap in the research by examining the barriers that contributed to summer melt for TRIO TS and

UB students at Midwest University. By understanding some of the challenges that impact TRIO TS and UB students' progression to college, outreach programs provided by TRIO staff can be reviewed and revised to ensure that the holistic needs of program participants are being addressed, in order to enhance and encourage college preparedness. In Chapter 3, the researchers will present the methodology used for this study.

Chapter Three: Methods and Design for Action

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the research methodology for this qualitative phenomenological study. A phenomenological approach allowed for a deeper understanding of TRIO TS and UB alumni participants' experiences with the programs while helping the researchers gain insights into the challenges that may have created barriers leading to summer melt or the strategies participants used that prevented summer melt.

“A high percentage of students from low-income families who graduate from high school do not graduate from college” (Stinebrickner & Stinebrickner, 2003, p. 593). Among high school graduates, the percentage of students from low-income families who graduate from college is substantially lower than the percentage of children from other families who graduate from college (Stinebrickner & Stinebrickner, 2003). “As the first in their families to attend college, first-generation college students (FGCs) experience a discrepancy between the opportunities available to them and their family members” (Covarrubias & Fryberg, 2015, p. 420). As an effort to minimize the gap of opportunities to postsecondary education for first-generation, low-income families, TRIO programs were implemented under President Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty. These programs provide first-generation and low-income students with the resources, support, and information they need to transition from high school to college. However, there are challenges faced by this population of students that interfere with their transition to college. The research regarding the barriers TRIO TS and UB students face during the summer months after high school graduation before entering college the following fall is limited; therefore, the purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to examine the barriers TRIO TS and

UB alumni face that contribute to summer melt. The participants of this study participated in the TRIO TS or UB program hosted at Midwest University, the grantee site for this study.

Midwest University serves an undergraduate population of about 1,716 students, a 65% retention rate for first-time students seeking a bachelor's degree (NCES, 2018). The Midwest University currently offers one-year certificate programs, 34 bachelor's degree programs, and has created academic partnerships with neighboring Midwest institutions to provide advanced educational opportunities for students interested in pursuing careers in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM). The TS and UB programs are two partnership programs housed at Midwest University. This partnership is created between Midwest University, the Department of Education, and the target middle and high schools in which the TS and UB programs serve. Federal grant funding supports TRIO programs hosted at Midwest University. The institution has received the TS grant for 25 consecutive years and the UB grant for three consecutive years, enabling the University to provide educational resources for TS and UB students and office spaces for staff to conduct the programs' daily operations. The TS program serves 635 middle school and high school students in two target school districts and four schools while the UB program serves 63 high school students from one target district and school.

Both TRIO programs serve to assist and encourage students to enroll in college, yet summer melt still exists within the first-generation community of TS and UB participants. Summer melt has been defined throughout this study as “the experience where students who planned to attend college were unable to navigate the additional summer obstacles thereby not attending their intended college the fall after high school graduation” (Tackett et al., 2018, p. 2). Summer melt raises concerns about the impact of TRIO TS and UB programs that provide many

services to aid students in postsecondary education plans. Therefore, it is essential to identify the barriers contributing to summer melt, in order to enhance the services provided by TRIO TS and UB programs.

Methodology and Research Questions

Conley (2007) pointed out that summer melt is an increasing social problem because there is an increasing percentage of college-ready high school students that are not enrolling in college after graduation. Students face internal barriers and external barriers that can decrease with additional support from high school counselors and college readiness programs such as TS and UB. Since the purpose of this study was to document the lived experiences of alumni who participated in a TRIO TS or UB program at Midwest University to determine if there were barriers that led to summer melt, the researchers felt it was appropriate to employ a qualitative research approach. According to Creswell (2018), in qualitative research, “a researcher purposely chooses a specific locale or persons to participate in a study because those individuals can best help the researcher understand the phenomenon under investigation.” “Qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 4). Semi-structured interviews was used as the qualitative research approach to understand the TRIO TS and UB alumni experiences in the programs (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Phenomenological Inquiry

There is limited research concerning students who participated in a TRIO TS or UB program specifically, related to the barriers they faced during the summer months leading up to their entry into college, which may have caused them to postpone going to college or not attend

at all. This qualitative research utilized a phenomenological research design to capture the events, situations, experiences, and concepts as told by the participant to understand the experiences and barriers faced by TRIO TS and UB alumni that contribute to summer melt. "Phenomenological research is a design of inquiry coming from philosophy and psychology in which the researcher describes the lived experiences of individuals about a phenomenon as described by participants" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 13). Phenomenological research provides an in-depth understanding of the participant's perspectives of their life experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), which allowed participants in this study to describe the components of the TS and UB programs that were impactful or missing on their journeys to college enrollment. In addition, utilizing this approach allowed the researchers to gain a more in-depth understanding of the alumni's experience as told in their own words. According to Creswell (2018), qualitative research focuses on participants' perceptions and experiences and the way they make sense of their lives. Astelin (2013) noted, "Phenomenological research will not necessarily provide definitive explanations, but it does raise awareness and increases insight about the phenomena" (p. 119).

Research Questions

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the barriers that contributed to summer melt for TRIO TS and UB alumni, the following research questions were addressed:

1. What barriers do TS alumni face that contribute to summer melt?
2. What barriers do UB alumni face that contribute to summer melt?
3. What program changes can be implemented for TS to take preventative action toward summer melt for TS participants?

4. What program changes can be implemented for UB to take preventative action toward summer melt for UB participants?

Participants

The researchers employed purposeful sampling and snowball sampling to select 13 alumni students from the TS and UB programs at Midwest University to participate in this study. According to Patton (2002), "The logic and power of purposeful sampling lie in selecting information-rich cases for study in-depth" (p. 230). Cohen and Arieli (2011) explained that snowball sampling is used in many cases to "locate, access and involve people from specific populations in cases where the researcher anticipates difficulties in creating a representative sample of the research population" (pp. 426-427). Seven alumni who participated in the TS program were recruited for this study and six alumni who participated in the UB program were asked to participate, for a total of 13 participants. The TRIO UB program has been hosted at Midwest University for three years and has only graduated two high school cohorts: the total number of graduates from both cohorts is 33. Glaser and Strauss (1967) stated that the sample size in qualitative studies should reach a saturation point or a sufficient number to address and explain the phenomenon. Creswell (2007) suggested that phenomenological study should contain five to 25 study participants; however, Morse (1994) recommended at least six study participants.

The study participants were alumni from the TS or UB programs at Midwest University who successfully graduated from high school and completed the TS and UB program requirements during the 2017-2022 grant cycle. Due to the continuation of the grant cycle of the TRIO TS and UB programs at Midwest University, study participants graduated high school

between the 2017-2020 school years. The participants of this study also had to be enrolled in one of the targeted school districts where TRIO TS and UB programs provide outreach program services to students. Each study participant was classified as first-generation only, low-income only, or first-generation and low-income, which are a requirement of the TRIO TS or UB programs.

Data Collection and Instrumentation

The researchers requested IRB approval from the University of Missouri –St. Louis (UMSL) and then used the IRB approval obtained from UMSL to submit the request for IRB approval from Midwest University. Once IRB approval was received from both institutions, the researchers worked with the TS and UB program directors and Executive Director of TRIO programs (see Appendix A) at Midwest University to request their assistance in contacting alumni students from both programs. Once the TS and UB program directors and Executive Director of TRIO programs agreed to assist the researchers in the study, the researchers sent a follow-up email to the directors, including a script to include in an email message to prospective participants and on social media pages (see Appendix B). Prospective participants were contacted by the TS and UB programs directors through email and social media (see Appendix B) to request their participation in this study. After prospective participants were contacted, they were encouraged to contact the researchers through text or email to learn more about the research. The researchers shared the details of the study with the prospective participants by email or phone (see Appendix C). If they agreed to participate in the study, they received the Consent Form for Participation in Research Activities (see Appendix D) by email. The Consent Form for Participation in Research Activities included the study's purpose, participant

expectations, the researchers' institution, and the benefit of participating in the research study. After reading the Consent Form for Participation in Research Activities, participants were able to click on a link that took them to a Google Form where the Participant Contact Form (see Appendix E) was located. Prior to scheduling the interviews, participants were required to complete the Participant Contact Form. This form confirmed the participants consent to participate in the study.

The Semi-Structured Interview

The researchers collected data using semi-structured interviews (see Appendix F), which allowed participants to share their specific journeys and individual perceptions of barriers faced while transitioning to college. Interviews were conducted by both researchers. Each researcher interviewed the study participants that took part in the researchers' respective programs; for example, Researcher 1 interviewed TS alumni participants, and Researcher 2 interviewed UB alumni participants. Interviews were conducted using Zoom video conferencing, which was the preferred method because it offers audio and video recording for transcribing data. Using Zoom to interview participants also allowed them to engage in the interviews and answer questions in a comfortable setting, which enhanced the quality of feedback for the study. As a backup, researchers used their cell phone's audio recorder feature. The data collected from the cell phone's audio recorder was saved to the researchers' drop box. The mobile device and laptops are password-protected, and only the researchers' have access to the data. The researchers developed 14 semi-structured interview questions (see Appendix F) to use for the interviews. Researchers use a semi-structured format when they want specific information; they introduce

the topic and guide it by asking a specific set of questions (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 5). Each participant was asked the same questions and the interviews last 30-60 minutes.

Data Analysis

After the interviews were completed, both researchers transcribed the data using Zoom's transcription feature. Transcripts were generated for each of the interviews and saved in a Word document. The researchers then reviewed the transcriptions carefully for accuracy, quality and overall meaning. The researchers followed Creswell's (2018) approach in ensuring that the transcripts had wide margins, interview questions were highlighted, the lines of the transcripts were numbered, and the numbers were color-coded to match each research question. The Zoom recordings and transcripts are housed on both researchers' laptops, secured with software installed and password protected to secure the data. The researchers also assigned each of the interviewees a pseudonym and placed the transcripts into individual file folders. The individual file folders were stored in the researchers' dropbox and are accessible to only the researchers. The data will be retained for approximately one year from the completion of the interviews.

Data Coding

Creswell (2018) described coding as a two-step process that begins with organizing the data into "chunks." "A hand-analysis method is used which involves a line-by-line approach to reviewing the data" (p. 261). The interviews were transcribed and analyzed by both researchers as data was collected. A line-by-line analysis allowed the researchers to become more familiar with the data, providing a deeper understanding of each participant's experiences. As the researchers coded the data, themes began to emerge, and the researchers were able to recognize relationships among the participants' experiences resulting in common themes and threads being

identified. The themes were supported with participant narratives that were shared during data collection. Data was collected to the point of saturation. Saturation is “the point in data collection when no additional issues or insights emerge from data and all relevant conceptual categories have been identified, explored, and exhausted” (Hennink, Kaiser & Marconi, 2016, p. 592).

Saturation was achieved once the participant's responses answered the research questions. The researchers ensured the data correlated with the appropriate themes, and no additional themes emerged from the data to explain the summer melt phenomenon in TRIO TS and UB alumni.

Data Presentation

Participants' data will be presented in chapter 4 using a table format. The data will include the year the participant graduated from high school, the TRIO program they participated in, the number of years in the TRIO program, first-generation status, the number of years they participated in a summer TRIO program, and college enrollment status. Each participant was given a pseudonym to protect their identities, along with the identities of the target high schools and any post-secondary institutions students may have attended.

Member Check and Validity

Creswell and Miller (2000) pointed out that validity is one of the strengths of qualitative research and is based on determining whether the findings are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, the participant, or the readers of an account. A form of validity is member checking, which allows study participants to check for the accuracy of their experiences as interpreted by the researchers. To ensure the researchers accurately captured each of the participants' responses, they were sent a copy of their audio recordings and transcripts to confirm the accuracy of the

information. The participants did not request changes and had no additional feedback to add to the data.

Chapter Summary

This chapter outlined the methodology used for this study. The participants of this study consisted of 13 alumni students of the TRIO TS and UB programs at Midwest University. A semi-structured interview was used to answer the following research questions: What barriers do TS alumni face that contribute to summer melt? What barriers do UB alumni face that contribute to summer melt? What program changes can be implemented for TS to take preventative action toward summer melt for TS participants? What program changes can be implemented for UB to take preventative action toward summer melt for UB participants? The questions focused on the barriers contributing to summer melt that impact college enrollment and the effectiveness of TRIO programs at Midwest University; specifically, their impact on low-income and first-generation students. Chapter 4 will present the findings of this study.

Chapter Four: Results

Introduction

In this chapter, the researchers will present the results of this study, participant demographic information, and a review of the findings. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to examine the factors that contributed to summer melt for TRIO Talent Search (TS) and Upward Bound (UB) alumni. Using a qualitative approach, the researchers documented the experiences of TS and UB alumni who participated in one of the TRIO programs at Midwest University. This study addresses a gap in the literature regarding the experiences of former TRIO TS and UB students and their decision whether or not to attend college during the fall following high school graduation. TRIO staff, institutional leaders, and key stakeholders at Midwest University might find this data useful as they consider ways to enhance TRIO programs in order to encourage students to graduate high school and subsequently attend college. Findings of this study can help to promote additional academic, social, or emotional support needed to increase college attendance rates and improve programming for precollegiate programs. Also, if current students were able to understand the factors that contributed to summer melt for TRIO TS and UB alumni, they would gain insight regarding the barriers to postsecondary education access that alumni experienced. The narratives shared by TS and UB alumni may encourage students to work hard to overcome hardships in order to pursue their dreams of going to college after high school graduation.

The method of inquiry used to document the experiences of TS and UB alumni was qualitative research. According to Creswell (2018), qualitative research focuses on participants' perceptions and experiences and the way they make sense of their lives. In order to gain a

holistic understanding of the barriers that contributed to summer melt for TS and UB alumni, the following research questions guided this study:

1. What barriers do TS alumni face that contribute to summer melt?
2. What barriers do UB alumni face that contribute to summer melt?
3. What program changes can be implemented for TS to take preventative action toward summer melt for TS participants?
4. What program changes can be implemented for UB to take preventative action toward summer melt for UB participants?

Participants Demographics

The participants in this study consisted of 13 TRIO TS and UB alumni who participated in one of the programs at Midwest University, the grantee site for the TRIO programs. The 13 participants in this study are currently enrolled in a two-year, four-year, or technical college, are non-degree-seeking students or are planning to enroll at an institution. All participants are currently employed. Pseudonyms were assigned to protect the identities of the participants. The age range of participants was between 18-23 years of age, and the average age was 21. Each participant in this study graduated from one of the target area school districts discussed in a previous section of this study between the years 2017-2020. In addition, the participants of this study were either low-income or first-generation students and participated in a TS or UB program while in middle school, high school, or both. Demographic information is presented in Table 5.

Table 5*Description of participants*

Pseudonym	High School Graduation Year	TRIO Program	# of Years in TRIO Program	#of Years Attended In TRIO Summer Program between 9-11 th Grade	Current College Enrollment Status	First-Generation College Student (Y/N)
TS Participant 1	2018	Talent Search	2	0	Enrolled	N
TS Participant 2	2019	Talent Search	4	0	Enrolled	N
TS Participant 3	2018	Talent Search	6	0	Not Enrolled	Y
TS Participant 4	2019	Talent Search	2	2	Not Enrolled	Y
TS Participant 5	2019	Talent Search	2	1	Not Enrolled	Y
TS Participant 6	2020	Talent Search	4	0	Enrolled	N
TS Participant 7	2019	Talent Search	2	1	Enrolled	Y
UB Participant 1	2020	Upward Bound	4	4	Not Enrolled	N
UB Participant 2	2019	Upward Bound	2	1	Enrolled	Y
UB Participant 3	2020	Upward Bound	2	2	Not Enrolled	Y
UB Participant 4	2020	Upward Bound	3	2	Not Enrolled	N
UB Participant 5	2019	Upward Bound	2	1	Enrolled	Y
UB Participant 6	2019	Upward Bound	2	1	Enrolled	Y

Data Collection

The researchers utilized purposeful sampling and snowball sampling to recruit 13 TS and UB alumni to understand their experiences and whether those experiences contributed to summer melt, which consequently impacted their college attendance during the fall following high school graduation. Data were collected through individual virtual interviews using Zoom. The researchers used their cell phone's audio recorder feature as a backup in the event of any technological complications with Zoom. Using a semi-structured interview approach was appropriate to explore the in-depth experiences of the 13 participants as they shared their perspectives regarding whether the contributing factors of summer melt impacted their journeys to postsecondary education. This interview format also allowed the researchers to capture the factors that TS and UB alumni perceived as barriers to attending college during the fall semester following high school graduation. The researchers developed 14 semi-structured interview questions (see Appendix F), and interviews were conducted by both researchers. The interviews lasted 30-60 minutes.

Data Analysis

Once the interviews were completed, the data was transcribed by both researchers. Kvale (1996) noted that working with the data collected is a continuous process that starts with the first interview and is ongoing until the last one is completed. Transcripts were generated for each of the interviews and saved in a Word document. The lines of the transcripts were numbered, and the numbers were color-coded to match each research question. The researchers reviewed the transcripts several times for accuracy, quality, substance and overall meaning. The transcription process included coding, thematic analysis, and identifying significant statements or events. The

researchers also ensured that the data provided aligned with the research questions. As the researchers coded the data, themes began to emerge, and the researchers were able to recognize relationships among the participants' experiences which resulted in the identification of common themes and threads. The themes were supported with participant narratives that were shared during data collection. The findings of the study are presented in the next section.

Findings of Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to examine the factors that contributed to summer melt for TRIO Talent Search (TS) and Upward Bound (UB) alumni.

Twelve themes emerged in the research study: **(1) unprepared for college, (2) family dynamics, (3) lack of confidence, (4) mental health, (5) COVID-19, (6) family support, (7) difficulty navigating the college enrollment, (8) impact of college tours versus guest speakers, (9) effective activities and field experiences, (10) requiring participation in the summer program component, (11) effectiveness of the UB program (12) and social-emotional supports.**

The twelve themes derived from the data analysis aligned to support the research questions for this study. What barriers do TS alumni face that contribute to summer melt? What barriers do UB alumni face that contribute to summer melt? What program changes can be implemented for TS to take preventative action toward summer melt for TS participants? What program changes can be implemented for UB to take preventative action toward summer melt for UB participants?

Research Question 1: Themes

The first research question was, “What barriers do TS alumni face that contribute to summer melt?” Research question one sought to identify the barriers which prevented TS alumni from attending the chosen college during the fall semester following high school graduation. Four themes emerged from the participants’ responses to the first research question: Unprepared for college, Family dynamics, and Lack of confidence.

Theme 1: Unprepared for college

Underprepared for college refers to participants who either required additional knowledge of college processes, had poor time-management, low ACT or academic scores, or were inconsistent with follow-through in completion of college admissions tasks. One participant shared in great detail how quickly reality set in when she realized that she did not have a clear understanding of everything. Another participant recalled how she struggled academically and because of that she was challenged with selecting the right school. She said, “Finding the correct school was challenging because I didn’t meet the ACT score requirement. So, I would have to say that’s what I struggled with the most. Just finding the perfect school for me academically” (TS Participant 4, personal communication, September 17, 2021).

The participants who did not experience summer melt shared how the ACT preparation courses offered by TRIO TS during the summer enrichment program prepared them academically for college. TS participant 7 said, “ACT prep was one of the most impactful services offered to me through the TRIO TS program because it actually helped me prepare for the test and increased my overall score” (personal communication, October 8, 2021).

Being academically prepared for the rigors of college is vital to the success of students, and many of the participants expressed a lack of complete knowledge regarding the components of the college preparation process. All of the participants recalled their actual experiences as they navigated the process as opposed to what they had heard about the process.

TS participant 1, remembered:

It was a lot and happened so quickly. Like from high school just not fully understanding.... You hear people talk about college but when it's you that is put in the position to go through the process, it's a heavy load and can be stressful. (personal communication, September 16, 2021)

TS participant 1 also discussed how she struggled the most with time management and meeting registration deadlines or staying on task and consistent with her goals during the summer after high school graduation, which led her to believe she was unprepared for college.

She stated:

My consistency and my time management were what I struggled with the most. You hear it's going to be so important in college but no, it really is. That is going to either be your best friend or biggest downfall after high school, if you let it. (personal communication, September 16, 2021)

As the participants in this study reflected on their journeys from high school to college, it was evident that they understood the consequences and value of being prepared to ascend to postsecondary education.

Theme 2: Family dynamics

Family Dynamics refers to healthy or unhealthy events, interactions, and situations with and between family members. Some of the participants of this study said they experienced summer melt due to family situations that were out of their control, including lack of family support, codependent family members, financial challenges, and being a first-generation student. According to Jabari and Rouster (2021), family members tend to rely on each other for emotional, physical, and economic support and can be one of the primary sources of relationship security or stress. Many of the participants agreed that family members have an important role to play in helping to ensure that prospective college students do not experience summer melt. One participant explained that although her family was supportive, it was limited because they all felt that she was a responsible individual.

TS participant 1 shared:

Sometimes I feel like they had this thought like I'm amazing, great, I got it so I didn't need as much but at the same time I did have to let them know that I needed all of the encouragement I could get because this part of life wasn't easy. (personal communication, September 16, 2021)

She added, "If my family could've just held me more accountable" (TS participant 1, personal communication, September 16, 2021). TS participant 1 also shared that while she was seeking additional support from her family to ensure a smooth transition from high school to college, they needed her support which contributed to the barriers she experienced and resulted in summer melt. She further expressed having unhealthy attachments with family members, which hindered her from attending her college of choice. She said, "family issues were going on,

so I didn't want to just up and leave them behind" (personal communication, September 16, 2021).

TS participant 3 also discussed how family issues were one of the barriers that contributed to her experiencing summer melt. She recalled:

Basically, it was more so a family issue why I experienced summer melt. I thought I would be comfortable enough to leave my mom and she would be ok with my two brothers that were still in school. But I just didn't think she would be ok really. So, I felt like I needed to stay where I was, closer to home. So that I could still help her do what I was doing before, I could just leave her by herself and go out of state. (personal communication. September 17, 2021)

Some of the participants were transparent and candid as they described the unexpected challenges that they encountered regarding their transition from high school graduation to college.

TS participant 1 explained:

"It was stressful because everyone automatically has in their head that they want to go away but sometimes that's not feasible for everyone" (personal communication, September 16, 2021).

Similar to TS participant 1, TS participant 5 mentioned how she struggled the most during her transition with "trying to figure out which college would be best for her financially" (personal communication, September 30, 2021). Each of the participants had concerns related to how their family would be able to afford college tuition. Most of the participants in this study were low-income, first-generation, or both.

Data revealed that these participants were aware of the importance of family support,

guidance and acceptance as they pursued their higher education goals. Data further revealed that family encouragement and influence were important factors in motivating participants to pursue their college goals.

Theme 3: Lack of confidence

Lack of confidence refers to the TS participants who questioned their identity and what they could achieve. Some of the participants expressed being stuck in their comfort zones, allowing fear and doubt to overpower them, or being completely overwhelmed with the entire transition to college following high school graduation.

TS participant 6 offered a different perspective regarding lack of support. Another participant was candid regarding how she allowed the idea of familiarity to prevent her from attending her college of choice. Other participants discussed how comfort and fear prevented them from pursuing their college of choice.

TS participant 6 explained:

I feel like I was strongly supported throughout my entire journey. The only support I didn't have was within myself, like believing I can do it...On the other hand I was able to find a school of interest but the pressure of choosing a major and entering college undecided made her feel so discouraged. (personal communication, October 4, 2021)

TS participant 3 added, "Comfort and just getting into a new relationship played a factor in me experiencing summer melt, as well. I was content with where things were" (personal communication, September 17, 2021).

TS participant 3 also stated:

I was originally supposed to attend TSU out of state. I had my mind set on that up until the last two months of high school. It was a lot going on, so I decided to stay where I was comfortable. So yes, I experienced summer melt. (personal communication, September 17, 2021)

TS participant 1 discussed how she allowed fear and doubt to cripple her ability to experience change. She stated:

I had planned on attending Alabama A&M and got accepted but that fear of wanting to go but not sure if being by yourself is the best thing for you at that time. But that could've been my own fears holding me back. (personal communication, September 16, 2021)

Data from the interviews revealed whether the barriers identified by the seven TS participants led to summer melt and, if so, how it impacted pursuit of their college goals following high school graduation. Data further revealed that navigating the college enrollment processes, being underprepared for college, family dynamics, and lack of confidence were the four emergent themes that supported the analysis of research question one.

Research Question 2: Themes

The second research question was, “What barriers do UB alumni face that contribute to summer melt?” Research question two sought to identify the barriers which prevented UB alumni from attending their chosen college during the fall semester following high school graduation. Three recurring themes emerged from the data: mental health, COVID 19, and family support.

Theme 4: Mental health

The first recurring theme from the UB alumni who participated in this study was mental health. Mental health refers to the participant's emotional, psychological, and social well-being. The participants of this study stressed the importance of mental health and the various struggles they experienced pertaining to balancing mental health while navigating the college enrollment process during the summer after high school graduation. Many of the participants shared their experiences and the emotions which contributed to feelings of depression, anxiety, stress, and pressure. One of the participants described the influence and importance of mental health in her journey and community.

Mental health is a major thing... Mental health should be taken more seriously in the Black community as a whole coming to college. Mental blocks are real. They really are real. I just want everybody to take mental health seriously..Mental health, I definitely got over that, but I think that's where I needed the support the most...It helps even if it was just asking me like, are you okay? How are you doing? Like how are you doing mentally? (UB participant 2, personal communication, September 1, 2021)

When asked to describe the transition from high school to college, one of the participants responded:

It was quite stressful. I will be honest, my whole high school career, I was like I have to get in school, I have to get in school. I have to go to college. There's something more for me than just high school afterwards or if nothing, just a job. My brain was just like, I have to do this. Applications came around and I made sure I was on it. Scholarships, I made sure I did it and I think it took me out of that mindset of having to be structured for

so long to more so everything is like a surprise. I think in high school you're told, this is difficult now, but when you get into college, be ready. So I think I went in with a bunch of anxiety and I realized when I got there and it was the complete opposite. I think it was a lot of doubts, like, "Am I good enough for it?", "Will I do well in college?" It's not that I'm only competing with people in my area, I'm competing with people from around the country. It's a little nerve-wracking. (UB participant 6, personal communication, September 27, 2021)

Another participant stated:

For me, in high school, I was going through a lot, and I wasn't really performing my best, and so I was hoping college would be my fresh start, you know. And so it kind of made me a little bit more nervous because I was thinking about if I messed up. I was thinking, like this is it even though I was only 18 years old. I was thinking that if I only made one mistake, this is the end of my collegiate career. (UB participant 5, personal communication, October 1, 2021)

The data revealed that participants in this study felt pressured not to make the wrong decision during the college preparation process, ultimately increasing the pressure they experienced when attempting to make the right decision, which resulted in nervousness and anxiety. For UB participant 5, college enrollment represented not only the next step following high school, but also a second chance to redeem his educational career.

The data showed that participants understood the importance of education attainment beyond high school but underestimated the toll of the process on their mental capacities. UB participant 3 recalled participating in UB programs during the school year and summer session

and the bond that he created with the students and staff in the program. UB participant 3 reflected on his transitional experience and identified struggling with depression after high school graduation (personal communication, September 20, 2021). Similar to UB participant 3, UB participant 5 also discussed his need for mental health support. He shared:

I was going through a hard journey of depression in high school, and looking back on it, it was very obvious. I was missing a lot of school, and I wasn't doing good in school because I wasn't there. But I would always do good on the tests. I was reflecting over this a minute ago, and I was thinking, at what point are they going to realize that I need more support and what they are doing is not enough. (personal communication, October 1, 2021)

In addition to participant transparency regarding their feelings that emerged during their transition from high school to college, a few participants admitted their lack of mental preparation during the transition from childhood to adulthood. One participant mentioned:

My transition has been kind of like a rollercoaster, uphill and downhill because I'm transitioning from high school to college. Then I'm transitioning from being a kid and a teenager to real adult life, so it's like balancing that has been tricky. (UB participant 4, personal communication, September 29, 2021)

UB participant 5 shared a similar narrative:

The thing I struggled with the most was trying to get my mind in the college space, if that makes sense? I was going off and living on my own... And I think that was the hardest thing for me was just recalibrating my brain and my mind and how it operated so it could fit my college schedule. (personal communication, October 1, 2021)

Data from this study revealed that participants understood the importance and impact of mental health and their academic success and preparation for college.

In addition to the challenges accompanying the college enrollment journey, the participants in this study experienced abrupt changes and the effects of the global pandemic, COVID-19, which served as a barrier for many UB participants.

Theme 5: COVID-19

COVID-19 refers to how the coronavirus impacted UB participants' plans to transition to college during the fall following high school graduation. The onset of the coronavirus pandemic shifted the traditional way of life and presented many challenges for students. The data showed that COVID-19 impacted UB participants' academic mindset and preparation and affected the college enrollment process.

UB participant 1 explained:

With COVID going on, I was so used to being at home since the end of high school. I kind of have the same mindset. I was not going to some classes or when I would log into the class, I would be asleep, or I wouldn't be paying attention at all, because I just didn't feel like it was class at all. It really didn't feel like it was school. (personal communication, September 5, 2021)

All of the UB participants in this study were affected by the impact of the coronavirus during the 2020 academic year, as many were sent home from school to prevent the spread of COVID-19. One participant expressed his summer experience and the long-term emotional effects of transitioning to a quarantined environment after high school graduation:

Probably the quarantine and not being able to interact with people. It kind of pushed me into a mini depression. Being here [Upward Bound] was kind of like a family vibe, and I had everyone I knew around me. Just being isolated like that, I don't like the feeling of isolation. (UB participant 3, personal communication, September 20, 2021)

UB participant 3 also explained how the impact of COVID-19 led to a lack of communication and follow-through regarding his pursuit of two of his original college choices during the summer.

So a lot of things had to be done electronically, and I couldn't meet with them face-to-face to actually understand a lot of stuff. I feel like you need face-to-face contact to really understand somebody...So I would reach out to University 1, and I never got a response. I called and left voicemails, and no one would pick up the phone and reach back out to me. The other school I was going to was University 2, but they never received my transcripts, and that goes back to the last question that if we all had physical copies of stuff and everything wasn't electronic, it probably would have improved my chances of going. (personal communication, September 20, 2021)

Similarly, UB participant 4 experienced difficulty connecting with high school and college staff members to submit official documentation needed to complete college enrollment. She explained the support she needed during COVID-19.

I definitely needed help with the hands-on things like paperwork and having to fax things over like medical records. That was hard for me because I know it was COVID, and they wanted me to send over my stuff, so that's what I mean by helping me with hands-on stuff. (personal communication, September 29, 2021)

One participant shared how the pandemic interfered with their ability to connect with their high school educators and mentors to gain more knowledge and insight regarding his postsecondary options to decrease his chance of experiencing summer melt. He explained:

I wish I would have talked more and asked the questions I wanted to ask. Instead of asking one person, I should have asked multiple people the same questions. Hearing one person's answer, sometimes they are biased and talk you out of something. When I started asking other people, I would get different responses and found out that one person just had a bad experience and everyone else had a great experience. I wish that I had just taken the time out, which it isn't totally my fault because COVID came and we were out of school, but I wish I had a chance to talk to Upward Bound staff, my counselors, principal, and NJROTC teachers, to see my options instead of my parents because my parents only gave me one option. I wish I could have asked, how did you make it through college, what was your experience, but I didn't get that chance. (UB participant 1, personal communication, September 5, 2021)

Data from this study revealed how COVID-19 created challenges for participants to stay on track with their plans to attend college. Data also revealed the important role of educators, which is to support students during their journey to college. Another theme that emerged from the interview data was difficulty navigating the college enrollment process.

Theme 6: Family support

Participants shared that support from their family was critical during their journeys to college and this largely impacted their postsecondary decisions. The effects of the impact of family support in this study demonstrated that participants would persist to attend college or

deviate from the original goal of college attendance. Family support refers to the encouragement and assistance received from participants' families that reassured students' mental, physical or emotional needs during the college enrollment process. Some of the UB participants expressed experiencing summer melt due to the lack of support from their families.

In addition to navigating some of the unfamiliar processes related to college enrollment after high school graduation, the UB participant's mental, physical, and emotional capacities were overwhelmed with additional pressures. Many participants noted the implied pressures of being a first-generation college student, the financial challenges, and family involvement. UB participant 5 shared:

I was putting a lot of pressure on myself, and my family was as well because I'm a first-generation college student. So you know, a lot of the time, they expect you to do a lot more than what they would anybody else because you're setting the precedence for what you want your future to look like and stuff like that. (personal communication, October 1, 2021)

As a first-generation college student, participants are at times expected to set a precedent for their families. UB participant 5 also discussed his experience of being a first-generation college student and creating his own future:

Yeah so all of our family, they've had some sort of college, but they've never been to like a four-year degree or even a two-year college like they have certificates and stuff like that. But I'm the first person to go and venture into four years, like a bachelor's degree program, and in my opinion, college can change your life because I see it changing mine (personal communication, October 1, 2021)

Participants shared that they received encouragement and motivation from their families to attend college; however, the actual support and assistance to help them was lacking and led to barriers to enrollment. One participant explained:

So one of the main barriers was a family barrier. They didn't want me to move so far away. Even though it wasn't far, they didn't want me to move so far for my first year, they said. And they said they didn't feel safe with me moving so far away and having nobody there and nobody that I know in Kentucky. It was pretty much that, the main factor was just my family telling me don't do it. (UB participant 5, personal communication, October 1, 2021)

UB participant 3 noted the pressures of feeling forced to attend college but lacking the support to navigate higher education as a first-generation student:

My family views [on college] are kind of in the middle. They wanted me to go. In my family, I would have been the first graduate from a university, and they kind of forced that on me, not realizing that after my junior year, I didn't really need school anymore, I already had all my credits. After a year and a half or a year or so of not having to do any work, school just wasn't a priority for me anymore. (personal communication, September 20, 2021)

Participants were asked to describe their existing support system(s) as they transitioned to college. Most participants reported having an overall combined great support system including their family, friends, high school staff and TRIO UB staff. However, some of the participants recalled how the lack of family support that in various areas of need contributed to summer melt. UB participant 4 shared:

I would say, I would get more motivation than support. They do motivate me to go to college but as far as if I would actually pick a college who would actually like be there with me and help me through that? I would say my dad and maybe my sister. So motivation I would get a lot of, but support is not really that much. (personal communication, September 29, 2021)

UB participant 6 recalled trying to explain the college process to her parents. She said, “My parents don't understand what I'm going through...Because the first time I called my dad about the school, he was like, ‘Get it done’. And I was like, that doesn't help me father, like at all, you know?” (personal communication, September 27, 2021).

UB participant 5 recalled the support he received from his family during the stressful process of choosing a college:

Sometimes I feel that my support system is great but sometimes I feel I can't really dive into things I really want to talk about because of preconceived notions about things. Like my family, they have a certain way of thinking when it comes to stress management because you know they are older, so they like to say “that's nothing” or “that's baby stuff” or things like that so they don't understand because they've never been through it. (personal communication, October 1, 2021)

In addition to the lack of understanding among parents and families regarding the college process, they were unsure how to best keep their students engaged and motivated to matriculate to college. The parents of UB participant 1 attended college, but sometimes their advice prompted him to have more questions regarding how he should proceed. He recalled:

It wasn't helping...They just keep telling me their bad experiences. So they kept saying they were trying to prepare me by telling me their bad experience [and] telling me like what not to do, how I shouldn't do this and why this is bad. And I used to ask them like, "What can I experience for myself?"...Yeah, I fell victim to it. And I'm just like, you know, I'm just going to listen to them because they're my parents. And I thought they wanted the best interest for me. I went on a trip because I wanted to go on vacation because everything was just so crazy. And I didn't want to think about school. I didn't want to think about it, I pushed being a student in the back of my head. I got accepted but I didn't enroll into classes. I did not do any of that yet. I didn't ask them about orientation. I didn't do any of that. (personal communication, September 5, 2021)

Through her own experience, UB participant 6 recognized the barriers that can arise as a first-generation college student and acknowledged ways that parents can be more supportive for students to decrease the chance of summer melt. She noted:

I think families and parents need to realize that they're doing this for the success but they need you as well. Just because they graduated and went off to college doesn't mean they don't need you anymore. You know, I think... probably understanding or at least, maybe doing some type of research when it comes to [college enrollment]. 'Okay, my daughter's in college, if she's going through this, why is she going through this and what can I do to be of service for her?' I mean, that will probably break that barrier of understanding college students' lives on a day-to-day. (personal communication, September 27, 2021)

The participants of this study valued family support and encouragement during their journeys to postsecondary education. Data further revealed the importance of family support for many of the

participants navigating the rigorous process of transitioning to college as a first-generation student.

Emergent theme for Research Question 1 and Research Question 2:

An emergent theme that surfaced from the data for both TRIO TS and UB alumni was difficulty navigating the college enrollment process. Navigating the college enrollment process refers to the way in which participants in this study understood the processes regarding college admissions, financial aid, registration, school selection/comparison, and other major tasks. The participants of this study were exposed to various components of the college enrollment process; however, many had limited knowledge in specific areas which resulted in the experience of summer melt.

Theme 7: Difficulty navigating the college enrollment process

One recurrent theme that emerged from the interview data for TS and UB participants was difficulty navigating the college enrollment process. Throughout the interviews, TS participants expressed how they could have been better supported regarding certain components of the college enrollment process, which could have increased the chances of removing the barriers that they encountered during the summer following high school graduation. One TS participant expressed how she struggled with the college search.

I could have been better supported in ways of finding a college that I really wanted to attend because I feel like I didn't find the university that I really wanted to go to. So, I feel like if I did have a little more support finding somewhere, I really wanted to attend, instead of settling, that would've been better. And also, just a little more support applying to different schools. (TS Participant 4, personal communication, September 17, 2021)

Other participants continued to highlight the challenges of selecting a college that was a better fit due to limited knowledge and lack of support.

Another TS participant stated:

I think I struggled the most with choosing where I wanted to go. I couldn't decide and like four of the schools were out of state. I didn't know if I wanted to go to a university or a community college. It was like the "what if" in the back of my head. So really it was just choosing where I wanted to go. (TS Participant 3, personal communication, September 17, 2021)

A third participant shared, "Worrying about financial assistance and trying to figure out which college would really be best for me financially. So, I guess I was just trying to make sure I was choosing the right college for myself" (TS Participant 5, personal communication, September 30, 2021).

TS participant 1 had an idea of what schools could possibly suit her family financially but stated the "stress of meeting the financial aid and admissions deadlines" became a challenge for her (personal communication, September 16, 2021).

A smaller number of TS participants explained that they did not experience summer melt because they were able to take advantage of the TRIO TS assistance provided prior to graduating from high school. These participants received guidance and support and were able to complete the enrollment process before graduating, which helped them to navigate any remaining tasks by themselves during the summer. TS participant 7 said, "I didn't struggle with anything the summer after high school graduation because I had already enrolled before graduating from high school" (personal communication, October 8, 2021).

Similar to TS, ensuring that high school students go on to attend college after graduation is one of the program goals for UB programs. Among high school students, college acceptance is celebrated and an important step towards enhanced education attainment. While all of the UB participants received college acceptance letters, a few participants in this study were unsupported during their navigation of the college enrollment process. The college enrollment process refers to various activities that participants must satisfactorily complete in order to successfully enroll in college, including course selection and registration, financial aid, and on-campus housing. UB Participants were also asked to describe their transition during the summer and identify ways that they could have been supported. One participant shared the difficulty that she faced while registering for classes and selection:

I would just say not really knowing how much information I had to get together. Also, when I was signing up for classes in Memphis, I had to send my transcripts, and I don't know why it was so hard for me to send my transcripts. I ended up getting them from my counselor. But when I finally sent them over I actually had to pick my classes, and they had us compare our transcripts, and it was just a lot. (UB participant 4, personal communication, September 29, 2021)

Accountability related to selecting the appropriate college classes can be overwhelming for a recent high school graduate who has traditionally received a class schedule from the school counselor each year. In addition to the adversities faced when sending final high school transcripts and registering for college courses, another participant shared their lack of knowledge and support regarding understanding the financial aid process. He noted:

I will also say understanding how financial aid works and understanding loans, because, like interest and APR stuff, I was so lost. I didn't understand any of this. I didn't understand what card I was supposed to pick or which loan I was supposed to pick. I didn't understand any of it. When you go to college, and I think it's set up like this on purpose, but they make it so complicated. (UB participant 1, personal communication, September 5, 2021)

UB participant 6 successfully enrolled into college; however, she continued to face barriers that could have contributed to summer melt. She expressed:

I think when it came to the financial aspect. So I went to orientation in June, and that gave me July and the first week of August to figure out how I was paying for school. I really didn't know anything other than scholarships, financial aid, and the FAFSA... it makes you wonder, what do you do after you have to pay way more than that? Like, where does your money come from? And if you cannot afford a payment plan every month, what do you do? So then, I think I had to get on the internet and do my Google search, and I found out about loans. And at first, that was going to be a deal-breaker, like, should I go, should I not? I don't even like owing people, so that was a really big obstacle that I had to overcome... I think it was just the finances part because I think that's a really big problem with a lot of people. Sometimes it's like you want to do it, but then it comes to actually having to pay for it. It's like I had all the skills [for college] but it's just like the finances part that makes it even harder, and I think that was my biggest struggle.

(personal communication, September 27, 2021)

Another participant added:

I just didn't want to think about it [college enrollment] because it was just such a big step. And like a scary step. Because when you don't like what they don't tell you is like when you get accepted. It's not like, Oh, you're accepted! You know, it's like they throw so many other things, and you get so many emails about stuff you need to send in, and then my college lost my documents. They lost my immunizations, they lost my diploma, and they lost my high school transcript. (UB participant 1, personal communication, September 5, 2021)

All of the participants in this study reported receiving multiple college acceptances. Five of the UB participants enrolled into a postsecondary institution during the fall following high school graduation; however, some of the participants shared the barriers they experienced during the summer, resulting in four students who experienced summer melt and were unable to attend their chosen college. The data from this study provided evidence that additional support for students is vital following high school graduation, as there is an insufficiency of knowledge regarding the navigation of college enrollment. All of the participants emphasized the importance of knowing how to navigate the college enrollment process and being adequately prepared to navigate the enrollment process. The data further revealed that having support and being proactive before high school graduation minimizes the likelihood of experiencing summer melt.

Research Question 3: Themes

The third research question was “What program changes can be implemented for TS to take preventative action toward summer melt for TS participants?” Research question three sought to identify programming recommendations to increase the number of TS alumni that

attend college during the fall semester following high school graduation. A thematic analysis revealed three themes: the impact of college tours versus guest speakers, effective activities, and field experiences, and requiring participation in the summer program components.

Theme 8: Impact of college tours versus guest speakers

Impact of college tours versus guest speakers refers to participants who have determined that they benefit more from campus tours, which provide them with more valuable information and a deeper understanding of college life as opposed to guest presentations regarding the college in a setting other than the college campus. Several participants stated that the college tours sponsored by the TS program were the most impactful activity provided. Participants felt more prepared for their transition to college and more familiar with the available options when choosing a college to attend. TS Participant 1 stated:

They take you on college tours which is a big help because you actually see how it is to be on a college campus, in a college classroom setting and actually seeing students go about their day to day. This is not the same as someone just telling you about their experience...However, I do feel like some students could not grasp the hang of guest speakers coming in and telling them about college because they are just telling you instead of the physical viewpoint or real-life experience. It's really someone telling you about an experience instead of you having your own... Overall, the campus tours were the most impactful activity offered by TS because of that hands-on experience that you get.

(personal communication, September 16, 2021)

TS Participant 4 added:

One of the most impactful services offered by TS was the college and career fairs, what colleges will look like and what to expect. Exploring campus life, meeting people, and networking with people that work at the university of your interest. (personal communication, September 17, 2021)

TS Participant 2 considered himself as someone who overcame summer melt. By being able to accomplish this, he shared:

The college tours were the most impactful to me because I ended up attending one of the schools that we toured when I was in high school... Participating in TS prepared me for college because they exposed me to different colleges, and when I toured different colleges with TS I was able to see what a college atmosphere was like and was able to see how different it was compared to high school. (personal communication, September 15, 2021)

TS Participant 6 explained how the services provided by the TS program contributed to the experience of an easier transition to college. She offered, "The opportunity of college tours through TS broadened my horizon of what I really wanted to do and reminded me of my options and choices" (personal communication, October 4, 2021).

TS Participant 3 recalled the many challenges she faced during the summer following high school graduation, yet she agreed that the college tours were the most impactful TS activity. She explained, "The college trips were the most impactful. I basically had an idea of what I was getting myself into before going to college and knowing what to expect" (personal communication, September 17, 2021).

Data in this study revealed that TS alumni participants were highly impacted by the college tours. Data also demonstrated that TS participants were more encouraged to attend college following exposure to the various college campus environments.

Theme 9: Effective activities and field experiences

Effective activities and field experiences refers to the effectiveness of TS programming and how it impacted TS participant experiences. TS participants in this study shared different perspectives regarding the impact of activities and programs offered by TS.

TS participant 6 stated:

The campus visits and trip to Hawaii was the most impactful activity or TS program I participated in...The Hawaii trip was a STEM conference, and it was students from all over the world that attended from different high schools. We attended different workshops and it just opened my mind to how different people are and how they live differently...The opportunity to travel to Hawaii was amazing. It was one way that prepared me for my transition after high school graduation by expanding my horizon on how many different people live in the United States and not just the people I see every day and go to school with. There are so many different kinds of people. It really exposed and prepared me for life after high school. (personal communication, October 4, 2021)

TS participant 5 shared a different perspective and added, "Certain things we did in the summer program weren't that impactful. Like some of the field trips weren't that impactful. Some of them were just there" (personal communication, September 30, 2021).

A third participant added:

The least impactful service provided by TS was probably when we had to sit in and listen to the lectures because it started to be repetitive information that we already knew. [I joined TS in middle school], so some of the activities overlapped in high school. (TS participant 3, personal communication, September 17, 2021)

Another participant agreed that certain TS activities and programs were not as impactful or beneficial as others. TS participant 4 shared, “I was ok without some of the arts and crafts we did sometimes because I wasn’t fond of that and I think they were filler activities” (personal communication, September 17, 2021).

TS participants in this study concurred the TS program was valuable; however, some improvements in the activities and programs could be considered. The final theme that emerged in support of research question three is requiring participation in the summer program component.

Theme 10: Requiring participation in the summer program component

Requiring Participation in the Summer Program refers to making it mandatory for TS participants to enroll in the summer program to encourage a successful transition to postsecondary education. Four of the TS participants in this study were able to participate in the TS summer program and shared how it assisted them during their transition to college.

TS participant 5 stated:

I would say TS prepared me for my transition after high school by spending the summer at a college for the TRIO Talent Search summer program. It was like being a college student and I got the hang of it because I had to go to classes in the morning, have lunch on campus, and was separated from my family. I pretty much had the pre-college

experience before I actually went to college... Especially because the college I chose to eventually attend was the school where the TRIO TS program hosted the summer program, so I already knew how to maneuver on that campus... Based on the TS services provided, the summer program assisted me the most with my transition to college.

(personal communication, September 30, 2021)

A second TS participant in this study who encountered challenges during the summer following high school shared the benefits of the TS summer program:

My experience from HS graduation to college was easier and less nerve wracking because I already had experience at my college of interest campus through the TS summer program and knew many of the professors which made it easier and less nervous walking into college... The TS summer program prepared me for senior year. I was already working through college classes during the summer program... I would say, the coursework assigned during the TS summer program really prepared me because we took similar classes that we would take at a university. You know over the summertime you lose stuff sometimes. So, it helped me in that way to keep up with my book work... The entire TS summer program experience prepared me because it showed me what college life was like by staying in the dorms. It also helped because we went to a career fair during the summer program. I was exposed to potential employers and potential companies that I could work for after college. (TS participant 4, personal communication, September 17, 2021)

TS participant 2 shared how his participation in the TS summer program aided a smooth transition to college during the fall following high school graduation. He said:

I feel like my transition from high school graduation to college was smooth because I took classes in the summertime which was the semester before starting my fall semester. I was able to pay for it through the A+ program that I was a part of in high school.
(personal communication, September 15, 2021)

The fourth participant concluded:

The TS program helped me to transition to college because at first, I didn't know what college I wanted to go to. Having the TRIO program helped me decide that I wanted to go to the college that I currently attend. Participating in the six-week summer TS program at that same university I currently attend, during my junior year of high school, I had the experience of meeting the people that welcomed me when I officially attended college after high school... I didn't have the experience of summer melt because I participated in a summer program through TS at my choice of college. I explored the college prior to high school graduation and felt welcomed. I knew that was the college I wanted to attend. (TS participant 7, personal communication, October 8, 2021)

Data analysis in this study revealed that TS participants benefitted from participating in the TS program during the summer before attending college during the fall following high school graduation. Data further revealed the TS summer program helped to prepare students academically for college.

Research Question 4: Themes

The fourth research question was, "What program changes can be implemented for UB to take preventative action toward summer melt for UB participants?" Research question four sought to identify programming recommendations to increase the number of UB alumni that

attend college during the fall semester following high school graduation. Two main themes emerged from the data, including the effectiveness of the Upward Bound program and implementation of Social-Emotional supports.

Theme 11: Effectiveness of the UB program

This theme refers to how participants of this study understood the purpose of the UB program and its objective aiding their navigation of many college processes. The UB participants each expressed comprehension of the overall purpose of the UB program to be preparing students for college and providing college exposure and opportunities. All of the UB participants admitted that they felt prepared for life after high school. They accredited their preparedness to the UB program. One student explained:

I feel like TRIO has prepared me 100 percent more than anything I have gotten outside of my home... Once I got into the program, I was taught everything from colleges to life experiences because it wasn't just about college, it was about life. I feel like it definitely helped me outside because I'm way more outgoing than I was before. I feel like before I would be kind of to myself and not really talk to other people if I didn't know them but now it's like...if I was in college and I was on campus and needed help, I'm not scared to say can you help me. So it definitely brought me out of my shell, and it also gave me more experiences to talk about. I literally say TRIO Upward Bound in everything. Like all of my job applications, or interviews, or just talking to different people I always bring it up, so I feel like it definitely brought more characteristics to my life. (UB participant 4, personal communication, September 29, 2021)

Each UB participant also mentioned the UB summer program as they recalled their preparation to transition into college. One student noted that her summer program experience prepared her to live in the residential dorms:

I don't think I would be where I'm at if it wasn't for the TRIO program so it was just like that was the first staple. And the transition, when we lived on campus during the summer, I think that kind of prepared me more...In the summer, we woke ourselves up. Well, we had people knocking on the door, telling us to get up but ...it was more so the independence. I think that's how they prepared us. It's like you are accountable for the things that you do...I think when it came to just like preparing and having the mental mindset, TRIO did a really, really good job at doing that and letting us know that "It's okay. One: be yourself. Two: you also have a brain and we want you to use it." It was just the preparedness. I think the summer program really helped me with time management, being productive, doing what I got to do, and also being able to have fun and being myself. That and just talking with us, having conversations with us and being personable with us allowed us to grow helped us transition, and made it easier for us to go to the next step in our lives...That summer program changed my life. (UB participant 6, personal communication, September 27, 2021)

UB participant 1 credited his social and time management preparation and transition to college to the UB summer program. He shared:

The summer program really helped a lot. Like it gives you the realest experience of how college goes...you have to go to the cafeteria to eat, walk to your classes, get to class on time, if you're not there on time, class will start without you. Like that program really

helped a lot. If you don't go to sleep at a certain time, you'll wake up late and that's your fault and that really helped a lot because that's how college really is. If you want to party and stay up all night and have fun, great! But you still have to wake up at 6 or 7 in the morning to attend this class, and if you don't well you just miss all that work. I would say it also pushes you out of your comfort zone a lot because you're pushed to be around people that you would not normally talk to at school at all, ...It was really fun and really helps you learn that in college you have to go out and talk to people. Your roommate just might be your best friend and you'd never know. It just helps you build that brother and sister bond because you just don't feel alone and I feel that's very important. (personal communication, September 5, 2021)

All of the participants agreed that the UB program helped enhance their social networking skills, college readiness skills, and time management.

The next theme that emerged from the research was social-emotional support and programming.

Theme 12: Social-Emotional supports

Social-emotional support refers to how students process and manage their emotions and develop healthy supportive relationships. UB participants demonstrated confidence in their abilities to attend college and become successful after high school. Their actions portrayed confidence, hope, and motivation to thrive. UB participants were asked to share the most impactful activities in UB and the program's impact on their social-emotional development.

UB participant 3 shared:

I feel like they all were impactful, whether I knew it or not because they all were oriented around family and support systems. So the stuff we did here [in the UB program], the stuff outside of here that made life hard, I knew I could come here [the Upward Bound program] and it would be a safe haven. I considered the whole TRIO program to be impactful in a positive way. (personal communication, September 20, 2021)

According to UB participant 5, “The UB program promoted a social-emotionally safe environment for students” (personal communication, October 1, 2021) dealing with personal issues. A third participant discussed the emotional battles he experienced in high school that affected his academic performance, resulting in summer melt. He shared:

Like all the things I was going through I would think that all of those things would come into play when it came to like my grades and stuff like that so I wish that between my senior year and my freshman year of college I wish I would have been told, yes things happen but here is how you can get over that and transcend above that and do better. I was going through a hard journey of depression in high school and looking back on it, it was very obvious. I was missing a lot of schools and I wasn't doing good in school because I wasn't there but I would always do good on the tests and it just was like. (personal communication, October 1, 2021)

UB participant 5 expressed his desire to have been introduced to coping skills and mechanisms to support him during his depression:

I was reflecting over this a minute ago and I was thinking like, at what point are they going to realize that I need more support and what they are doing is not enough. I thought that is what school was for is for you to find your foundation so when you go off into life

you have the tools, or at least some tools to get you through the simple things. I felt like a lot of those things I needed to know, I wasn't taught and I had to learn on my own.

(personal communication, October 1, 2021)

UB participants in this study expressed the need for and importance of social-emotional support to help them navigate the college-going process and, once enrolled, the support needed to become familiar and comfortable in this new and unfamiliar terrain of higher education.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 4 presented all the TS and UB participant responses from the interview data collection. The 13 participants shared descriptive narratives regarding the barriers they experienced during the summer months after high school graduation and if those challenges contributed to summer melt and postponement of their college enrollment in the fall. There was a unanimous voice among the participants regarding barriers that they experienced before going to college, but they also explained that the TRIO TS and UB programs were beneficial to their personal and professional development. Research Question 1 inquired about the barriers TS alumni face that contribute to summer melt. The findings revealed that, unprepared for college, family dynamics, and lack of confidence were areas of concern. Data showed that these variables are beneficial to the successful transition from high school to college. Research Question 2 inquired about the barriers UB alumni face that contribute to summer melt. The findings revealed the following findings: mental health, COVID-19, and family support. Participants shared that being a first-generation, low-income student attempting to navigate the college enrollment process during COVID-19 with a lack of family support can cause summer melt and impact mental health. An emergent theme for Research Question 1 and Research Question 2 revealed

both TS and UB participants experienced difficulty navigating the college enrollment process. Research Question 3 sought to understand the program changes that could be implemented for TS to take preventative action toward summer melt for TS participants. The findings revealed the impact of college tours versus guest speakers, effective activities and field experiences and requiring participation in summer program components. Data revealed that participants found value in college tours and program activities that equipped them with additional knowledge to help them prepare to transition from high school to college. Data also showed that participants who enrolled in a TS summer program felt confident and prepared for college. Research Question 4 sought to understand the program changes that could be implemented for UB to take preventative action toward summer melt for UB participants. The data revealed that the effectiveness of the UB program and social-emotional supports were significant. The findings showed that UB participants understood the significance of the UB program and found it to be beneficial to prepare them for college attendance. Participants in this study also expressed the importance of social and emotional support systems. Data also revealed how family and parent involvement could help mitigate summer melt for students during the college-going process.

Table 6*Supporting Research Questions and Themes*

Research Question	Emerged Themes
What barriers do TS alumni face that contribute to summer melt?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Unprepared for college ● Family dynamics ● Lack of confidence
What barriers do UB alumni face that contribute to summer melt?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Mental health ● COVID-19 ● Family support
Emergent theme for Research Question 1 and Research Question 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Difficulty navigating the college enrollment process
What program changes can be implemented for TS to take preventative action toward summer melt for TS participants?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Impact of college tours versus guest speakers ● Effective activities and field experiences ● Requiring participation in the summer program component
What program changes can be implemented for UB to take preventative action toward summer melt for UB participants?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Effectiveness of the UB program ● Social-Emotional supports

Chapter five will present a discussion and summary, recommendations, and conclusions.

Chapter Five

Discussion and Summary, Recommendations and Conclusion

Introduction

TRIO TS and UB programs are designed to ensure that first-generation and low-income students have equitable access to the resources that they need to prepare them for a successful transition from high school to postsecondary institutions. The Department of Education (DOE) established these programs to aid students in high school with the completion of college applications, financial aid forms, course selection, degree planning, registration, and other tasks. During the summer months following graduation from high school, many students navigate family responsibilities while trying to complete additional college requirements such as housing applications, orientation, and placement tests to ensure college enrollment with limited support from parents or family members (Tackett et al., 2018). Those summer tasks can be more challenging for first-generation and low-income college-bound students with a lack of family members who are knowledgeable regarding the college application process (Castleman et al., 2014). The lack of support can leave students feeling discouraged regarding college attendance and frustrated with the process, which can result in a failed attempt for students to successfully enroll in college, increasing summer melt rates in first-generation, low-income students (Castleman & Page, 2014).

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to examine the barriers that contributed to summer melt for TRIO TS and UB alumni. This phenomenon, known as summer melt, is defined in this study as “the experience where students who planned to attend college were unable to navigate the additional summer obstacles thereby not attending their intended college the fall after high school graduation” (Tackett et al., 2018, p. 2). This study can be used

to inform institutional leaders, TRIO staff, and other stakeholders of methods to enhance TRIO TS and UB programs to decrease the percentage of students impacted by summer melt. The findings of this study can also help current and future TS and UB students understand how best to advocate for themselves as program participants to ensure that they receive the services that will adequately prepare them for college. The narratives shared by TS and UB alumni may encourage students not to be discouraged but to work hard to overcome hardships in order that they can pursue their dreams of college attendance following high school graduation.

The researchers utilized a phenomenological approach to examine the barriers that might have contributed to summer melt for TS and UB alumni. Creswell and Creswell (2018) noted that phenomenological research provides an in-depth understanding of the participant's perspectives of their life experiences as described in their words. Conley's (2007) college readiness theory and Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory were the frameworks used to understand the barriers that these participants may have encountered, which impacted their transition from high school to college. This study utilized purposeful sampling and snowball sampling to recruit 13 TS and UB alumni who participated in the TS and UB programs at Midwest University. Semi-structured interviews using Zoom allowed the researchers to capture the narratives of these participants as they shared their experiences during the summer months following high school graduation and whether those experiences impacted their persistence to attend college during the subsequent fall semester. Data for this study was analyzed using Creswell's (2018) two-step process that begins with organizing the data into chunks, followed by "a hand-analysis method which involves a line-by-line approach to reviewing the data" (p. 261). Data analysis revealed 12 themes: 1) unprepared for college; 2) family dynamics; 3) lack of confidence; 4) mental health; 5) COVID-19; 6) family

support; 7) difficulty navigating the enrollment process; 8) impact of college tours versus guest speakers; 9) effective activities and field experiences; 10) requiring participation in the summer program components; 11) effectiveness of the UB program; and 12) social-emotional supports.

The 12 themes aligned to support the research questions for this study: 1) what barriers do TS alumni face that contribute to summer melt; 2) what barriers do UB alumni face that contribute to summer melt; 3) what program changes can be implemented for TS to take preventative action toward summer melt for TS participants; and 4) what program changes can be implemented for UB to take preventative action toward summer melt for UB participants. The next section will present the findings of the study.

Summary of Findings

RQ1: What barriers do TS alumni face that contribute to summer melt? This research question allowed TS alumni who participated in this study to identify and describe the barriers they experienced during the summer following high school graduation and how those experiences impacted their decision to attend college in the fall. Data revealed three emergent themes for this research question: unprepared for college, family dynamics and lack of confidence.

RQ2: What barriers do UB alumni face that contribute to summer melt? This research question allowed UB alumni who participated in this study to identify and describe the barriers they experienced during the summer following high school graduation and how those experiences impacted their decision to attend college in the fall. Data revealed three emergent themes for this research question: mental health, COVID-19, and family support.

Emergent theme for RQ1 and RQ2: Data from this study revealed that TRIO TS and UB alumni concurred that additional support with certain components of the college enrollment process would have helped mitigate some of the barriers they encountered during the summer following high school graduation. Difficulty navigating the college enrollment process surfaced as an emergent theme for RQ1 and RQ2.

Participant responses to Research Questions 1 and 2 were gathered from nine interview questions:

1. Did you attend college the fall semester after graduating high school? Why or Why not?
Are you still enrolled in the same school? Why or Why not?
2. Are you currently enrolled in a postsecondary program? Why or Why not?
3. In what ways do you feel the TRIO Talent Search or Upward Bound program prepared you to transition to college?
4. Can you describe your experience transitioning from high school graduation to college?
When trying to enroll in college, what did you struggle with the most during the summer after high school graduation?
5. In this study, Summer Melt Summer melt is defined as “the experience where students who planned to attend college were unable to navigate the additional summer obstacles thereby not attending their intended college the fall after high school graduation” (Tackett et al., 2018, p. 2). Do you think you experienced summer melt?
6. If they answer yes to A7: Q8A –What, if any, barriers did you face as a high school graduate intending to attend college after high school, which contributed to “summer

melt”? If they answer no to Q7: Q8B – What, if any, barriers did you overcome that prevented you from experiencing “summer melt”?

7. How would you describe your support system (family, school, and friends) as it pertains to attending college?
8. Explain you or your family’s views on attending college.
9. In what ways do you think you could have been better supported in your journey to college after graduating high school?

Based on participant responses in this study, the barriers TS and UB alumni faced during the summer months included being unprepared for college, family dynamics, lack of confidence, mental health, COVID-19, and family support. Several TS and UB participants in this study did experience summer melt, and although they attended college in the fall following high school graduation, it was not their college of choice.

RQ3: What program changes can be implemented for TS to take preventative action toward summer melt for TS participants? This research question allowed TS participants to recommend programming changes to strengthen the TS program based on their experiences. Data revealed three themes for this question: the impact of college tours versus guest speakers, effective activities and field experiences, and requiring participation in the summer program components.

RQ4: What program changes can be implemented for UB to take preventative action toward summer melt for UB participants? This research question allowed UB participants to recommend programming changes to strengthen the UB program based on their experiences.

Data revealed two themes for this question: college enrollment process versus college admission process and social-emotional supports.

Participant responses to Research Questions 3 and 4 were gathered from six interview questions:

1. Describe your understanding of the overall purpose of the TRIO Talent Search or Upward Bound program?
2. In your own words, describe postsecondary enrollment?
3. In what ways do you think you could have been better supported in your journey to college after graduating high school?
4. What programs and activities did you participate in the most while in Talent Search or Upward Bound?
5. Which TS or UB programs and activities were most impactful in your transition to college? Which programs or activities were least impactful in your transition to college? Explain.
6. How did the TS or UB programs provide assistance with academic classes during high school?

Based on participant responses in this study, college tours, exposure to effective activities and field experiences, participation in the TS and UB summer programs, and gender-specific empowerment sessions had the most impact on their personal and professional development, which helped them during their transition to college after high school graduation. Most of the participants echoed the importance of social-emotional support and felt that they would have

benefited more if parents and family members took a more proactive approach as they embarked upon this personal milestone and unfamiliar terrain of college attendance.

Key Findings

Data analysis from this study revealed 12 emergent themes; however, several key findings emerged from the data regarding the aspects of TS and UB programs that participants felt contributed to either the experience or prevention of summer melt. The following themes reoccurred throughout the findings and were identified as highly beneficial to provide programming recommendations to increase the number of TS and UB participants who attend college the fall semester after high school graduation: **(1) unprepared for college, (2) family dynamics, (3) lack of confidence, (4) mental health, (5) COVID-19, (6) family support, and (7) difficulty navigating the college enrollment process.**

Unprepared for college

College readiness is not solely determined by high school academic measures such as test scores and cumulative grade point averages; it also involves students' perception of learning, ownership of learning, time management, and knowledge of college navigational processes (Conley, 2007). All seven TS participants emphasized the importance of being academically and mentally prepared for college. TS participants discussed the importance of being proactive rather than reactive, prioritizing tasks and deadlines, and fully understanding future challenges during the transition following high school graduation.

TS Participants 7 stated:

I didn't struggle with anything because I had already enrolled in college before high school graduation. During the summer I only had to wait on my move-in date to attend

school and I was already familiar with the college...I explored the college and felt welcome there. So, I knew that I was prepared to go there. (personal communication, October 8, 2021)

Family dynamics

Castleman and Page (2014), noted that low-income high school graduates ultimately relinquish their school plans because they face difficulties they did not foresee and do not know whom to consult for assistance. Four TS participants spoke directly regarding the challenges they encountered during the summer following high school graduation that was directly linked to a lack of family support, family issues, or financial matters. The participants explained that these events were unforeseen circumstances, and the best decision at that time was to choose what would benefit the entire family, even if that implied an adjustment of their college-going plans. Most of the TS participants were first-generation students, hence their families lacked the knowledge to adequately support them during their transition. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2017), first-generation students are associated with having more risks. They encounter significantly more barriers related to decision making during the college process than continuing-generation students, a student whose parents have received some postsecondary education. Without guidance and direction, many first-generation students might not be prepared for the rigors that accompany the task requirements for college admittance and enrollment.

All seven TS participants were determined to attend college and their families supported their decision and felt that it was a great opportunity for the participants' future. TS participant 5 shared:

We all do believe in going to college, but we also know that it's not for everyone. So, both of my parents did go to college, it's just that neither one of them graduated. And as for their kids, I'm the only one that went to college. So, we do believe college is an important thing to do as long as that's what you want to do. (personal communication, September 30, 2021)

TS participant 1 added:

Attending college wasn't an option. I had to go to school at some point. I could see if I had another talent that they pushed but I didn't, so they were like you're going to college to get your degree and you're going to be great. By growing up with that instilled in me there was no other thought, but they do know that you don't always have to go to college to be great and they just want me to be the best that I can be in whatever I choose to do. (personal communication, September 16, 2021)

Lack of confidence

Conley (2007) described college readiness as “a multi-faceted concept comprising numerous variables that include factors both internal and external to the school environment” (p. 12). Internal factors include self-confidence, personal beliefs, communication styles, and individual personalities. All of the TS participants stated they received support from TS staff, school staff, or family; however, several TS participants candidly admitted that they lacked support within themselves at times. They explained how they should have held themselves more accountable, pushed harder, and dismissed doubt and fear, which overpowered them at times. A lack of confidence resulted in summer melt for a few TS participants, but one TS participant

shared how self-encouragement aided her during the journey toward college attendance. TS participants 6 offered:

Although I had doubts about what field I wanted to major in and I was discouraged about starting college undecided, I would say I learned that it is ok to enter college undecided. Really all that matters is that you're in college and you're figuring out what you want to do and that's a part of the college experience. You are still trying to figure it out. Many people don't know what they want to do for the rest of their life. So, it's okay to come in undecided and take it day by day. (personal communication, October 8, 2021)

Mental health

Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory describes transitions experienced by adults and how individuals cope and adjust within the presented situation. According to Schlossberg (1981), there are four stages necessary to master change and "influence a person's ability to cope with a life transition" (p. 3). The four 4 S's include situation, self, support, and strategies. Five UB participants identified struggling with mental health or needing mental and emotional support throughout the college enrollment process. As several of the UB participants began their transition to college, they experienced the need for assistance during the 'Self' stage of Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory which identifies participants' ability to use coping strategies to support themselves during the process. UB participants who experienced mental health struggles relied on their educational community and their families to support them when they felt that the process was overbearing. UB participant 5 shared that he expected to learn coping strategies in high school to prepare him for his adult life after he graduated (personal communication, October 1, 2021).

COVID 19

The coronavirus pandemic had a significant impact on UB students' transitions following high school graduation. Some of the UB participants expressed experiencing a lack of communication with their colleges of choice, which hindered them from accurately submitting the necessary documentation that would enhance the college enrollment process. In addition, three UB participants began virtual learning prior to high school graduation, and the pandemic altered their academic mindsets, which left them ill-prepared for the transition to college. UB participant 1 admitted not logging into school, sleeping or simply not paying attention because school didn't feel important (personal communication, September 5, 2021). According to Conley's (2007) college readiness model, college and career readiness consists of four skills: key cognitive strategies, key content knowledge, key learning skills and techniques, and key transition knowledge and skills. Based on narratives shared by some of the UB participants, the pandemic impacted these four essential skills as outlined by Conley (2007). As students were required to shift to virtual learning, they began to lack critical information as a result of lack of focus or motivation to proceed with the necessary steps required for college entrance.

Family support

According to Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory, support is accredited to the external support available to an individual. As the findings revealed, the level of support UB participants did or did not receive during their transition to college played a significant role in their ability to adapt to the transition. All six UB participants mentioned having some form of encouragement or motivational family support regarding the support received during their transition to college.

However, five of the six UB participants shared the lack of support from their families as they began to complete paperwork for the college enrollment process. UB participant 6 recalled:

Like I'm telling him all the time, I'm stressed out. I'm struggling, and he's like "You need to be on your stuff". It's kind of like that doesn't help me. You know, I need you to be able to be like, "It's alright." I think that's what a lot of parents should do with their kids is...just having those lines of communication open to where that person can come to them. (personal communication, September 27, 2021)

One UB participant recalled wanting to attend college out of state, and his family did not have the knowledge or experience to support him with the ability to answer questions and navigate the process. He shared:

Nobody can help you and you know, they start putting those fears into me. And I started listening to them and I started putting those fears in myself. So then I'm just like, No, I can't go to that college. And I felt like I needed to go to a college that had like family [living in the city] or somebody to help me. And I wish like, I can go back in time, and just change it (UB participant 1, personal communication, September 5, 2021)

Difficulty navigating the college enrollment process

Tackett et al., (2018) pointed out that summer melt is more common among students who are considered low-income or underrepresented due to a lack of resources or knowledge of the college admissions process, lack of family support, and professional assistance. Even when families of underrepresented students are supportive, they still may lack the knowledge to help them successfully navigate the college system. Four TS participants and five UB participants explained the difficulty they faced when attempting to navigate the college enrollment process

after high school graduation. TS Participant 4 stated that he did not experience summer melt, but he faced challenges in the transition from high school to college. He recalled:

I struggled the most after high school graduation with finding classes that were geared towards my degree of interest. I was shown what classes I could take but all of them weren't offered during the summertime when I began college. So, it was a little bit of a struggle finding the classes that I needed. (personal communication, September 15, 2021)

Several of the UB participants also expressed the difficulty of navigating the college enrollment process. Of the six UB participants in this study, five UB participants faced challenges in the college enrollment process. Although five participants enrolled in college, four of those participants reported experiencing summer melt due to the lack of understanding regarding the college enrollment process. UB participant 1 shared his struggle during the college enrollment process following high school graduation:

What they don't tell you is like when you get accepted. It's not like, 'Oh, you're accepted!' You know, it's like they throw like so many other things, and you get so many emails, about stuff you need to send into them, and then my college lost my documents. They lost my immunizations, they lost my diploma, and they lost my high school transcript. (personal communication, September 5, 2021)

Although not all of the TS and UB participants in this study experienced summer melt, each of them did reveal personal challenges that they navigated during the summer months following high school graduation. The participants worked through the barriers, as they were determined to pursue their goals of attending college.

Based on the findings of this study, the researchers will present recommendations in the next section.

Recommendations

This section provides recommendations for TS leaders, UB leaders, TS and UB participants, and future research. The researchers also provide program implications for the TS and UB programs at Midwest University.

Recommendations for Talent Search (TS) Leaders

Based on the findings of this study, researchers recommend that the TRIO TS program implement a high school tracking plan for each participant to assess and measure their progress before high school graduation. The plan should consist of high school and pre-collegiate college goals with timelines and milestones included. This holistic student development plan can assist TRIO TS leaders as they attempt to ensure that high school TS participants are working towards transition goals. It would also help TS to identify the areas in which additional assistance is needed. The researchers of this study suggest that students are required to attend the summer TS program, and TS leaders should provide incentives for program completion. The researchers also recommend that TS leaders create ways to bring in TS participant families to learn and partner with their students so they can better understand the college-going process and support their students throughout their journey.

Recommendations for Upward Bound (UB) Leaders

The UB participants in this study shared the barriers that they encountered which resulted in summer melt and the strategies they used to overcome summer melt. Intentional programming directed towards addressing the specific barriers encountered by participants can promote

decreased summer melt rates. Based on the findings in this study, the researchers recommend the implementation of programs and activities that incorporate social-emotional learning and reflections for students. The introduction of social-emotional exercises would increase their student levels of self-awareness, self-management and promote regulation of feelings and emotions when experiencing pressure brought on from external situations. In addition, the researchers recommend incorporating transitional workshops to introduce and familiarize students with how to address scenarios and situations during the summer months. Moreover, providing a community of support for parents and families to include them in their students' college preparation process. As UB advises students, UB parents should also access resources to become familiar with information to help the student and potentially encourage parents to seek post-secondary education, as most UB participants are potential first-generation students. The data revealed how imperative it is for parents and familial supporters to understand the college-going process and best practices to support their students. The creation of a program that would introduce parents to the college admissions and enrollment process and the incorporation of family-related workshops helps to encourage an environment of inclusiveness and increase support for college-going UB participants, thereby decreasing their chances of summer melt.

Recommendations for TS and UB Participants

The researchers of this study recommend that TRIO TS and UB students participate and engage in as many activities and services offered to gain a deeper understanding of the rigors of college in order to experience a successful transition. TS and UB participants who commit to being intentionally involved in the programs will find them beneficial. Researchers also recommend that participants of the programs advocate for themselves by seeking help when they

are unsure and doubtful. "If you do not go after what you want, you'll never have it. If you do not ask, the answer will always be no. If you do not step forward, you will always be in the same place." Anonymous Quote

Recommendations for Future Research

Additional research regarding TRIO TS and UB alumni from other institutions may result in more in-depth outcomes for TRIO TS and UB programs nationwide. In addition, broadening the criteria of participants can increase the number of participants, resulting in a more diverse population of alumni and experiences. A larger population and sample size may also result in more quantifiable data. Furthermore, the increase of the age range of participants may reveal common trends amongst participants or varied barriers by generation.

Program Implications for Talent Search (TS) and Upward Bound (UB)

The TRIO TS and UB participants in this study believed opportunities for postsecondary education would enhance their quality of life and help them achieve their goals. The TS and UB programs are designed to increase the percentage of college-going students and encourage students to pursue higher education. In pursuit of this goal, the TS and UB programs offer resources catered to the students' academic engagement and preparation, social and cultural exposure, and the college admissions process. The mission of both programs is to increase college-going rates for participants. The researchers propose the following programmatic changes to decrease summer melt rates. According to the results of this study, each TS and UB participant would have benefited from additional support during the summer months leading up to college matriculation. While the TS and UB programs at Midwest University offer summer programs, participants who graduated can no longer take advantage of the summer program

opportunity and are relinquished of their support received throughout high school. The UB program does offer a summer bridge program for recently graduated students, but the program only provides services for students who enroll in Midwest University to take a course for credit and transfer to their college of choice if they do not plan to attend Midwest University. However, what happens to the recent graduates who do not have a clear college plan and have not enrolled in a post-secondary institution? The researchers propose that TS and UB programs incorporate a Summer Melt Bridge program and scholarship incentives specifically for TS and UB participants.

The Summer Melt Bridge program is an approach toward the mitigation of the summer melt phenomenon, and the program should be held at the beginning of the summer. A Summer Melt Bridge program would cater to the individualized needs of each recent graduate and identify the status of each participant regarding the college enrollment process. The Summer Melt Bridge program would present the process of college enrollment, including class registration, placement testing, orientation, FAFSA verification, housing selection, and identifying critical offices for participants to connect with once they are on campus. Each participant would participate in workshops designed to aid their navigation of each step of the enrollment process, and they would have the opportunity to receive individualized assistance. If the program is appropriately implemented, participants would be equipped with the necessary information and strategies needed to conquer summer melt and successfully enroll in college the fall semester following high school graduation as the TS and UB programs intend.

In addition to the Summer Melt Bridge program, the researchers recommend that TS and UB staff partner with Midwest University to implement a scholarship incentive program for

participants to attend Midwest University upon graduation and completion of the TS and UB programs. The advantage is that TS and UB program participants would become familiar with the Midwest University campus, including staff, students, and campus resources while they participate in the programs. This promotes Midwest University as a welcoming campus that is interested in the success of all students. The offer of a scholarship incentive to attend Midwest University will increase the likelihood that graduates of the TS and UB programs will embrace college matriculation, decreasing the risk of summer melt.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to examine the barriers that contributed to summer melt for TRIO TS and UB alumni at Midwest University. The researchers utilized Conley's (2007) college readiness model and Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory to gain a holistic understanding of the barriers TRIO TS and UB participants encountered, resulting in summer melt or preventing them from attending their college of choice after high school graduation. Through virtual interviews with 13 TS and UB alumni participants, the researchers identified several barriers affecting the participants' college journeys. By uncovering the barriers faced by TS and UB alumni participants that could lead to summer melt, TS and UB staff can be proactive in supporting and preparing students and their families for a successful transition into college. As a result of this study, the researchers hope to contribute to the gap in scholarly research to decrease the summer melt rates to enhance the persistence and college matriculation of TS and UB participants.

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Appendix A: Email to TRIO Directors to Obtain Research Participants

Dear TRIO Executive Director, Talent Search and Upward Bound Directors:

We're Jasmine Clay and Jasmine Lewis, part of a team completing a co-authored dissertation research project in the College of Education at the University of Missouri – St. Louis. Our research focuses on factors that impact summer melt for TRIO Talent Search (TS) and Upward Bound (UB) participants. Summer melt refers to the phenomenon of students who plan to go to college after high school but don't attend due to various reasons. Specifically, we're interested in uncovering the best practices to be implemented in the Talent Search and Upward Bound programs to decrease the percentages of summer melt in TS and UB participants to ensure that they go on to attend college during the fall semester after they graduate high school

We are requesting your assistance in reaching out to potential participants for this study. Specifically, we are asking you to contact alumni on our behalf who graduated high school between 2017-2020 school years and participated in a TRIO TS or UB program during the 2017-2022 grant cycle. The participants will be asked to participate in an interview lasting 45-60 minutes. Participation in this study is completely voluntary; participant identities will remain anonymous; the information collected during the interviews will be kept confidential and will not be used for any purpose other than this study.

If you have any questions regarding this research study, please contact Jasmine Clay at jdchc8@umsystem.edu or Jasmine Lewis at jlkw@umsystem.edu. This study is being supervised by Dr. Shawn Woodhouse, who will also be glad to answer any questions. Dr. Woodhouse can be reached via email at shawn_woodhouse@umsl.edu or by phone at 314-516-5889. You may also contact UMSL's Institutional Review Board via phone 314-516-5897. Thank you in advance for your time and consideration in helping to support our research. We look forward to hearing from you and hope that we can count on your support.

Sincerely,

Jasmine Clay and Jasmine Lewis
Doctoral Candidates, University of Missouri-St. Louis
Educational Practice, Higher Education Student Services
College of Education

Appendix B: Follow-Up Email to TRIO Executive Director, Talent Search and Upward Bound Directors (If They Agree to Participate)

Dear TRIO Executive Director or (Talent Search Director) or (Upward Director)

The researchers would like to thank you for agreeing to help us with our study. We are attaching a flyer that we would like you to send to prospective participants with information on how to contact us if they agree to participate in our research. We would also like to ask if you would put the flyer on the TRIO TS and UB websites to recruit prospective participants for our study. Thank you again for your assistance, and please let us know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Jasmine Clay, Jdchc8@umsystem.edu and Jasmine Lewis, jclkwd@umsystem.edu
Doctoral Candidates, University of Missouri-St. Louis
Educational Practice, Higher Education Student Services
College of Education

Social Media:

Hi {Student Name}

Are you a TRIO Talent Search (TS) or Upward Bound (UB) alumni at Midwest University?

Ms. Jasmine Clay and Ms. Jasmine Lewis are conducting a study to examine the factors that Midwest University TRIO TS and UB alumni experienced which contributed to them enrolling or not enrolling in college, during the fall semester after they graduated high school. By participating you could win 1 of 2 \$20 Amazon or Starbucks gift cards.

Would you like to participate? If yes, then please complete the Contact form included in this message. Thank you for your time and consideration.

CALLING TRIO TALENT SEARCH AND UPWARD BOUND ALUMNI TO PARTICIPATE IN OUR RESEARCH!

The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine the barriers that contributed to summer melt for TRIO TS and UB alumni.

**Text "TRIO" to
314-458-8179 or
708-600-7463, if
you are
interested in
participating in
this study.**



If you have any questions or concerns, contact co-investigators Jasmine Clay (jdchc8@umsystem.edu) or Jasmine Lewis (jclkwd@umsystem.edu).

This study asks that you participate in a 45-60 minute interview via Zoom. Participants will be entered into a raffle to win 1 of 2 \$20 Starbucks or Amazon gift cards upon full completion of the study.

Appendix C: TS and UB Alumni Participant Solicitation Scripts**Email:**

Dear {Student Name},

Thanks for participating in TRIO Talent Search (TS) or Upward Bound (UB) at Midwest University. We'd love to get some feedback from you so we can make the programs better. We are Jasmine Clay and Jasmine Lewis. We're passionate about helping students and want to make sure more students who want to go to college, make it to college.

In addition to our work at Midwest University in TS and UB, and as part of our doctoral work at the University of Missouri –St. Louis, we are conducting a study to examine the factors that Midwest University TRIO TS and UB alumni experienced which contributed to them enrolling or not enrolling the fall after they graduated high school. By participating you could win 1 of 2 \$20 Amazon or Starbucks gift cards.

To learn more reply “Yes” to this email and you'll receive more information.

Sincerely,

Jasmine Clay and Jasmine Lewis
Doctoral Candidates, University of Missouri-St. Louis
Educational Practice, Higher Education Student Services
College of Education

Phone Script:

Hi {Student Name}

Thanks for participating in TRIO Talent Search (TS) or Upward Bound (UB) at Midwest University. We'd love to get some feedback from you so we can make the programs better. I'm Jasmine Clay/Lewis. I'm passionate about helping students and want to make sure more students who want to go to college, make it to college.

That's why in addition to my work at Midwest University in TS and UB, and as part of my doctoral work at the University of Missouri –St. Louis, I'm conducting a study to examine the factors that Midwest University TRIO TS and UB alumni experienced which contributed to them enrolling or not enrolling the fall after they graduated high school. By participating you could win 1 of 2 \$20 Amazon or Starbucks gift cards.

Would you like to participate? If yes, then please provide your email so that I may send you more information. Thank you for your time. If no, then thank you for your time.



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Appendix D: Consent Form for Participation in Research Activities

An Examination of Summer Melt for TRIO Talent Search and Upward Bound Alumni

Principal Investigators: Jasmine Clay and Jasmine Lewis

Dear Participant,

This study is part of co-authored dissertation research through the College of Education at the University of Missouri – St. Louis. The researchers’ Jasmine Clay and Jasmine Lewis are doctoral students in the Higher Education Student Services program in the College. We humbly request your participation in our research study that we are conducting titled: An Examination of Factors Contributing to Summer Melt for TRIO Talent Search (TS) and Upward Bound (UB) Alumni.

Summary of Study

The purpose of this research study is to examine the contributing factors that Midwest University TRIO TS and UB alumni experience which results in the barrier of summer melt. Summer melt is when students who planned to go to college, don’t enroll in the fall after graduating high school.

Your participation will include:

- An in-depth interview lasting 45-60 minutes using Zoom video conferencing on a date and time convenient for you. The interviews via Zoom will be recorded. The researchers will also use their cell phones audio recorder as a backup.
- Possible follow-up email for clarification.
- Approximately 30 TRIO TS and UB alumni from Midwest University may be involved in this research conducted by doctoral students at the University of Missouri-St. Louis.
- There is a loss of confidentiality risk associated with this research, but the researchers will do everything they can to protect your identity. You will be identified in the research using a pseudonym. When the results of this research is published your identity will not be

disclosed or revealed. Recordings will be stored on both researchers' laptops and password protected to secure the data. The data collected from the cell phone's audio recorder will be saved to the researchers' dropbox. The data stored via the dropbox will also be password-protected. Only the researchers will have access to the data. As a participant of this study, you may request a written copy of your transcript at any time. All research data will be retained until December 2022.

- In rare instances, a researcher's study must undergo an audit or program evaluation by an oversight agency (such as the Office for Human Research Protection) that would lead to disclosure of your data as well as any other information collected by the researcher.
- There are no direct benefits for you participating in this study; however, the findings of this study could help to improve, inform, and support services provided by TRIO Talent Search and Upward programs.

For participating in the interview, participants who complete it will be entered into a drawing for one of two \$20 gift cards from Amazon or Starbucks. This random drawing will take place after the conclusion of the interview data collection.

Your participation is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate in this research study or to withdraw at any time. You may choose not to answer any questions that you do not want to answer. You will not be penalized in any way should you choose not to participate or to withdraw.

We will do everything we can to protect your privacy. As part of this effort, your identity will not be revealed in any publication or presentation that may result from this study. Data will be kept in a password protected site and the audiotape will be erased at the completion of the project.

Included below is a link to a Demographic and Contact Form. If you agree to participate in this study, complete and submit the form. Please feel free to contact us via email at jelkwd@umsystem.edu or jdchc8@umsystem.edu should you have any questions. You may also contact our faculty advisor, Dr. Woodhouse at shawn_woodhouse@umsl.edu or by phone (314-516-5889) or contact the Office of Research Administration via phone (314-516-5897), regarding your rights as a participant in this study. Thank you in advance for your participation!

Link to Contact and Demographic Form: <https://forms.office.com/r/QdLUX5E3BX>

Sincerely,

Jasmine Clay and Jasmine Lewis
Doctoral Candidates, University of Missouri-St. Louis
Educational Practice, Higher Education Student Services
College of Education

Appendix E: Participant Contact Form

The purpose of this qualitative study is to identify the barriers that TRIO Talent Search and Upward Bound alumni participants faced that contributed to enrollment or lack of enrollment in college the fall after graduating high school. If you agree to participate in this study, please submit this electronic form. Submitting this form confirms that you have read and understand the information in the invitation cover letter and are voluntarily participating in this study. Thank you!

Use this link to complete the Participant Contact Form:
<https://forms.office.com/r/QdLUX5E3BX>

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Name:

Cell:

Email Address:

Indicate two options for your preferred day and time for your Individual Zoom Interview:

Option 1 - Specific Day of the Week:

Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday Saturday

Specific Time of Day:

____ Morning (8:00 am-12:00 noon CST)

____ Afternoon (12:00 noon-5:00 pm CST)

___Evening (5:00 pm-9:00 pm CST)

Option 2 - Specific Day of the Week:

Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday Saturday

Specific Time of Day:

___Morning (8:00 am-12:00 noon CST)

___Afternoon (12:00 noon-5:00 pm CST)

___Evening (5:00 pm-9:00 pm CST)

Indicate any questions or concerns that you may have. If none, then put “None” or “N/A”:

Expectations or Concerns:

If any, what are your expectations of participating in this interview?

Appendix F: Interview Guide and Questions

Interview Guide

Thank you for volunteering to participate in this interview! My name is (Jasmine Clay/Jasmine Lewis) and I am a graduate student in the Higher Education Student Services Program at the University of Missouri-St. Louis.

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to examine the barriers that TRIO TS and UB alumni face that result in summer melt and hinder alumni from enrolling into college. Your participation in this study consists of a 45–60-minute interview on Zoom and to protect your privacy your identity will remain confidential, anything you share will be stored in a password protected platform, and all audio recordings will be deleted in December 2022 in accordance with APA research guidelines. You will be entered into a drawing to receive one of two \$20 Amazon or Starbucks gift cards for your participation. Your participation is completely voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time.

Do you have any questions or concerns about this study or this interview? Let's begin. Do not hesitate to stop me at any point throughout the interview to ask questions or to ask me to clarify. To ensure we have accurately captured your responses, you will have the opportunity to review your interview transcripts. Would you like to have an opportunity to review your interview transcript for accuracy? By continuing you agree to be audio and/or video recorded. Thank you! Let's get started!

Interview Questions

1. Describe your understanding of the overall purpose of the TRIO Talent Search or Upward Bound program?
2. In your own words, describe postsecondary enrollment?
3. Did you attend college the fall semester after graduating high school? Why or why not?
Are you still enrolled in the same school? Why or Why not?
4. Are you currently enrolled in a postsecondary program? Why or Why not?
5. In what ways do you feel the TRIO Talent Search or Upward Bound program prepared you to transition to college?
6. Can you describe your experience transitioning from high school graduation to college?
When trying to enroll in college, what did you struggle with the most during the summer after high school graduation?
7. In this study, Summer Melt Summer melt is defined as “the experience where students who planned to attend college were unable to navigate the additional summer obstacles thereby not attending their intended college the fall after high school graduation” (Tackett et al., 2018, p. 2). Do you think you experienced summer melt?
8. If they answer yes to A7: Q8A –What, if any, barriers did you face as a high school graduate intending to attend college after high school, which contributed to “summer melt”? If they answer no to Q7: Q8B – What, if any, barriers did you overcome that prevented you from experiencing “summer melt”?
9. How would you describe your support system (family, school, and friends) as it pertains to attending college?

10. Explain you or your family's views on attending college.
11. In what ways do you think you could have been better supported in your journey to college after graduating high school?
12. What programs and activities did you participate in the most while in Talent Search or Upward Bound?
13. Which TS or UB programs and activities were most impactful in your transition to college? Which programs or activities were least impactful in your transition to college? Explain.
14. How did the TS or UB programs provide assistance with academic classes during high school?

This concludes the interview! Thank you so much for your time and answers! I really appreciate your help with my study! Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions by email (jkldwd@umsystem.edu or jdchc8@umsystem.edu) or by phone (314-458-8179 or 708-600-7463).