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The Perceptions of Second-Year, First-Generation Minority Students Regarding the Influence of AVID Mentoring on Students' Retention

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This dissertation, directed and approved by the candidate's committee, has been accepted by the College of Graduate and Professional Studies of Abilene Christian University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

Nannette W. Glenn, Ph.D.

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Abilene Christian University

School of Educational Leadership

The Perceptions of Second-Year, First-Generation Minority Students Regarding the Influence of

AVID Mentoring on Students' Retention

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction

of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

by

Nisha Mary Mathews

December 2023

Dedication

To God, who has provided guidance, wisdom, and grace, thank you. I hope it serves as a testament to His infinite love and kindness, and as a source of hope and inspiration.

To the future generations who will inherit this world, I dedicate my dissertation. May the knowledge, insights, and perspectives that have been gained through this work contribute to a better understanding of the complex issues facing our society and, ultimately, to the creation of a more just and equitable world. It is my hope that the research presented in this dissertation will inspire and empower future generations to build upon these findings, to continue to push the boundaries of knowledge, and to work towards a brighter future for all.

Acknowledgments

This has been a long time coming, and I am humbled and grateful to have completed this dissertation with the support and encouragement of many wonderful people. First, I want to acknowledge God, whose grace have been instrumental in bringing me to this moment. When in doubt of the career path, He placed me where I least expected to be. It is only because of Him I am where I am and able to focus on His divine purpose for my life.

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Abstract

Despite the increase in diversity, institutions continue to struggle to provide, retain, and graduate students of color to the same degree as their counterparts (Banks & Dohy, 2019). The purpose of this narrative qualitative research study was to examine the perceptions of second-year, first-generation minority college students regarding the influence of the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program on their persistence and academic achievement. The study was framed by Swail's (2004) geometric model of student persistence and achievement, aimed to identify the cognitive, social, and institutional factors contributing to student retention. The following questions guided the study: (1) What are the perceptions of first-generation minority college students regarding the cognitive factors associated with AVID mentoring programs?; (2) What are the perceptions of first-generation minority college students regarding the social factors associated with AVID mentoring programs?; and (3) What are the perceptions of first-generation minority college students regarding the institutional factors associated with AVID mentoring programs? The researcher conducted interviews to reveal the perceptions of six students who participated in AVID programs in high school. The major themes that emerged were the importance of AVID and teacher support, academic rigor and learning, social support, expectations and goal commitment, and challenges transitioning to the postsecondary institution. The study demonstrated that these factors significantly contribute to student persistence and retention. The results provide educational leaders with evidence to support adjustments to their practices and initiatives essential to student retention.

Keywords: First-generation, minority, postsecondary, AVID, persistence, retention

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Challenges in retaining students at postsecondary institutions is a persistent and widely discussed concern within the academic community (Alford, 2017; Bonaparte, 2014; H. G. Staples, 2014). Seidman (2012) and Tinto (2012) agreed that the success of higher education institutions in retaining students plays a crucial role in the U.S. economy. Additionally, there is a recognized connection between effective retention strategies that bolster student persistence and their impact on the workforce (Johnstone, 2007; Marshall & Case, 2010; Tinto, 2012). In his 2009 State of the Union speech, former President Obama emphasized that the United States needs better educated citizens to compete in the global economy, and that by 2020, the United States population will be led by college graduates (Obama, 2009). Despite increased educational initiatives to educate more individuals, on average, first-year college students that do not persist are unlikely to obtain a degree in their lifetime (Phillips & Lambert-Snodgrass, 2021).

Significant economic and sociological shifts have underscored the importance of acquiring a college degree as a pivotal means of achieving a satisfactory lifestyle (White & Ali-Khan, 2013). The monetary and social benefits of higher education are associated with successfully earning a college degree and require the attention of administrators at postsecondary institutions (Tinto, 1987; Xing & Rojewski, 2022). Postsecondary education has become more accessible than at any point over the past 50 years (Pew Research Center, 2019). Yet, college completion rates are lower in the United States compared to other first-world countries with more than one in five full-time freshmen failing to return for their second year (Goings, 2017).

One potential path for high school graduates as they prepare for their future is to pursue postsecondary education while still in high school (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2023). According to the U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2022), of the 2.7 million

people ages 16 to 24 who graduated from high school between January and October 2021, 1.7 million or 61.8% were enrolled in colleges or universities in October 2021. The college enrollment rate of recent high school graduates in October 2021 decreased from the 62.7% enrollment in October 2020. Between Fall 2010 and Fall 2021, total undergraduate enrollment in degree-granting postsecondary institutions decreased by 15%, from 18.1 million to 15.4 million students (NCES, 2023). According to data from the American Community Survey (2020 U.S. Census) from 2021, 37% of the population aged 25 and over had never enrolled in college and 56.3% had no college degree. The survey also showed that 28.3% of children under the age of 18 lived in a household where their parents had never enrolled in college and 42.3% lived in a household where their parent or guardian did not have a college degree.

Escarcha (2018) conducted a study revealing that first-generation college students (FGCS) tend to face challenges that make them less likely to persist and graduate, often due to a lack of awareness of potential challenges they face. Research has demonstrated that first-generation students are more prone to leaving college during their first year compared to non-FGCS counterparts (Pratt et al., 2017; Skomsvold, 2015; Staklis & Chen, 2010). According to data from the National Center for Education Statistics (2023), 33% of FGCSs discontinue their education within 3 years and only 27% manage to complete college within 4 years. The lower retention rates have been attributed to several factors, including a lack of meaningful connections with faculty, lower levels of academic preparedness, challenges integrating into campus life, and limited familial support (Covarrubias et al., 2019; Gardener & Holley, 2011; Pratt et al., 2017; Soria & Stebleton, 2012). Additionally, factors such as likelihood of pursuing full-time employment (Gardener & Holley, 2011), experiencing feelings of disconnection (Covarrubias et al., 2019; Pyne & Means, 2013; Stephens et al., 2012), uncertainty about institutional systems

and available resources (Eitel & Martin, 2009), and not feeling valued or integrated within the institution (Pratt et al., 2017) have also been identified as contributors to lower retention rates among FGCSs.

Researchers have identified the connection and interaction between students and their faculty to promote a satisfying experience and success and aid in student retention efforts (Robertson & Mason, 2008). Likewise, the relationships formed with high school mentors have proven to instill hope and inspire students to succeed (Weiss et al., 2019). These relationships create a new pathway to college and career choices and aid students to believe they can accomplish their goals (Weiss et al., 2019). Wilkins (2014) identified that educators influence students' social, emotional, and academic well-being through daily interactions.

Chapter 1 includes the study's background, the statement of the problem, purpose of the study, theoretical framework, research questions, and rationale for the study. To conclude, the chapter includes key terms used throughout the study and their definitions.

Background of the Study

The primary objective of education is to equip students for their future endeavors and empower them to navigate life successfully (Heimlich, 2011). However, enrolling in college is a complex multistep process that includes completing college preparation courses in high school and navigating admissions and financial processes (Pew Research Center, 2021). Extensive research has been conducted on students' experiences in higher education to reshape the educational process to better serve all student demographics (Alford, 2017). In August 2013, President Obama introduced the College Scorecard ranking system as an effort to evaluate the performance of higher education institutions based on criteria such as accessibility, affordability, outcomes, student retention, and graduation rates (White House, Office of the Press Secretary,

2013). Although it did not gain widespread traction, the College Scorecard remains a tool for prospective students to make informed decisions about which institutions align with their goals and potential for success (Fain, 2015). In 2018 leaders continued to support initiatives focused on student completion, allotting $4 billion to the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018 to fund programs aimed at enhancing college completion rates and affordability (Harris, 2018).

For years, postsecondary institutions have concentrated their efforts on addressing the needs of first-generation students to boost retention rates. State and federal governments have continued to offer programs that promote college preparedness and financial support for higher education institutions (Ricks & Warren, 2021). Yet, a Pew Research Center (2021) analysis of data from the Federal Reserve Board found that first-generation college graduates are not on equal footing with their peers who have college-educated parents. Students with parents without a postsecondary education have lower incomes and wealth compared to those with a parent who has a degree (Pew Research Center, 2021). Soria and Stebleton (2012) emphasized that FGCSs often lack confidence in their academic abilities and preparedness for college. Earlier research also uncovered that approximately two-thirds of college-enrolled students do not persist and leave with their first year (Habley & McClanahan, 2004; Tinto, 1993). Additional research by Soria and Strebleton (2012) highlighted that FGCSs are 45% less likely to return for their second year at college. Many of these students belong to minority groups and encounter distinct challenges (Alford, 2017).

According to Alford (2017), it is imperative for leaders at various levels to collaborate and advocate for higher education institutions to counteract the trend of declining student retention. Similarly, Roscoe (2015) and Robertson and Mason (2008) stressed the responsibility

of campus officials to ensure the success of minority students in college and recommended emphasizing the availability of diverse resources throughout the campus.

Though research by Tinto (1993) offers valuable insights into the challenges faced by minorities, the concern remains that a one-size-fits-all approach may not suffice. Johnson (2013) reiterated the need to design and develop initiatives focused on specific student populations. Students enter postsecondary institutions with a wide range experience that shape their characteristics, abilities, and aspirations (Choi et al., 2019). Thus, they cannot be viewed as blank slates when they enter postsecondary education, and institutions cannot assume they need the same support (Choi et al., 2019).

Despite advancements in innovative initiatives aimed at enhancing student engagement, retention, and persistence in higher education, research consistently highlights that student retention remains a substantial concern at postsecondary institutions (Alford, 2017). To illustrate, approximately 60% of FGCSs do not continue beyond their first year, a rate that is four times higher than their counterparts (Covarrubias et al., 2016). Of the 16.6 million undergraduate students enrolled in fall 2019, some 8.5 million were White, 3.5 million were Hispanic, 2.1 million were Black, 1.1 million were Asian, 670,100 were of two or more races, 116,400 were American Indian/Alaska Native, and 45,000 were Pacific Islander (NCES, 2021). Between 2009 and 2019, full-time enrollment decreased by 7%, from 11.0 million to 10.2 million students, and part-time enrollment decreased by 1%, from 6.4 million to 6.3 million students (NCES, 2021). Even as enrollment continues to rise, with increases in student debts, the long-term financial benefits of a 4-year college degree remain unquestionable (Pew Research Center, 2021). There are still challenges with improving and implementing initiatives to improve minority student retention rates significantly (Alford, 2017).

Statement of the Problem

Higher education in the United States has faced student retention issues for many years (Morrison & Silverman, 2012). Since 2009, approximately 1,360 institutions have seen a decline in first-year enrollment (Butrymowicz & D'Amato, 2020). A study conducted by Covarrubias et al. (2016) found that only 11% of minority students managed to obtain a bachelor's degree, in contrast to 55% of their White counterparts. Students from minority racial and ethnic groups and lower socioeconomic backgrounds exhibit lower achievement scores, attendance rates, and high school completion rates compared to their White peers (López, 2018). In addition, Roscoe (2015) theorized that minority students, including African American and Hispanic, often enter postsecondary institutions underprepared, increasing their likelihood of dropping out before obtaining a degree. FGCSs struggle with academic readiness and face lower graduation rates (Scott-Clayton & Rodriguez, 2012; Walpole et al., 2008). These academically underprepared students are often then placed in noncredit bearing developmental education courses, further delaying their graduation (Booth et al., 2014). A report from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board's (THECB, 2016) 60 x 30 initiative indicated that 48% of college students do not meet college readiness standards. Despite the adoption of theoretical models like Tinto's student integration model, the first-year student retention rate in the United States remains at a discouraging 30% (Lau, 2003; O'Keefe, 2013; Tinto, 2017). Therefore, it is imperative to classify FGCSs as high-risk and should be provided with additional support, as they experience a harder time persisting at colleges and universities than their counterparts (Collier & Morgan, 2008; Ishitani, 2016; O'Keefe, 2013).

The importance of postsecondary education cannot be overstated. Most jobs that provide a living wage, employment security, and a promising career path require some level of college

education. Rosser-Mims et al. (2014) revealed that nearly 60% of the fastest growing jobs demand an associate degree, with 46% requiring a bachelor's degree or higher. Therefore, graduates without the proper education find it difficult to succeed in the workplace (Naylor et al., 2015). Ensuring students' persistence toward completion and graduation at higher education institutions benefits both students' and its institutions (Burke, 2019). In addition, college graduates are most likely to be engaged citizens, provide better opportunities for their children, and be healthier (Ma et al., 2016; McMahon, 2009; Turk, 2019).

"Prior to the first and second Industrial Revolutions, education opportunities in the 13 colonies during the 17th and 18th centuries varied considerably depending on one's location, race, gender, and social class" (Course Hero, 2019). During this time, the literacy rate was relatively high among the White male population residing in the northern and middle colonies (Course Hero, 2019). Present day, there are thousands of public and private schools for American children with millions of teachers serving them.

Advancement via Individual Determination, also known as AVID, works with teachers and students to create more advanced classrooms (AVID Center, 2012). The program is designed to support students of low socioeconomic backgrounds to increase academic performance. The program was designed to empower students of underrepresented minority and low socioeconomic groups to succeed in school. When students are fully invested in the AVID program, they are presented with an opportunity to attend and succeed in colleges and universities. The creation of AVID programs in high schools have accelerated the closure of achievement gaps between people of color and White students (Potts, 2021). According to Wilson (2016), people of color will become most of the American working class by 2032. Since the data projections predict this population shifts, educators must act in a proactive manner to

prepare the minorities for leading the nation forward. The AVID program helps prepare this demographic group by building skills in areas of education, occupations, and technology to sustain economic growth (Potts, 2021).

FGCSs encounter challenges—relocation, separation from family and friends, and the need to adapt to the academic and social expectations of a college campus (O'Keefe, 2013). These students can be defined in various ways, including those whose parents' attended college but did not graduate or those whose parents never attended college (Shumaker & Wood, 2016). Seeking education to create better opportunities and lives for themselves, FGCSs often lack the social capital provided by their parents to navigate the college admission process (Pelletier, 2010; Thelin, 2011). Social capital refers to the knowledge shared through lived experiences (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, n.d.), and its absence makes it challenging for these students to integrate academically and socially into college environments (Tinto, 1975).

Cuseo (2014) identified that first-year programs that support transitions from high school to college environments through an emphasis on academic and personal development are most effective, as measured by academic success and student retention. However, many institutions fail to serve FGCSs because of their distinct challenges and barriers (Thelin, 2011). According to Tilbury and Wortman (2004), education needs a reorientation toward practices in which students can challenge their own models of thinking and practice, develop their own innovative and creative projects, or explore alternative ideas and choices. Crede and Niehorster (2012) quantified that support from higher education institutions and their staff positively affects academic adjustment and institutional attachment.

While many factors lead and influence decisions to enroll, high school mentors can play a crucial role in helping FGCSs navigate the college access process and develop pathways to success (Bryan et al., 2017). These interactions influence students' sense of belonging, their ability to navigate college environments, meet goals, and ultimately graduate (Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011). Research showed that mentoring does influence high school completion (Giraldo-Garcia et al., 2018) and college access curriculum increases college-enrollment rates by 5% (Oreopoulos & Ford, 2019). Tello and Lonn (2017) found that counselors provide these students with the social capital they lack. Despite their importance to higher education institutions, there are lack of studies focusing on the specific circumstances in which FGCSs academically succeed or fail (Carpenter & Peña, 2017). Particularly, there is less evidence of direct accounts of FGCSs' lived experiences in higher education (Carpenter & Peña, 2017).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this narrative qualitative research study was to examine the perceptions of second-year, first-generation minority college students regarding the influence of Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) on their persistence and academic achievement. By identifying key characteristics and patterns through a students' perceptions, the study aims to strengthen existing literature and theoretical frameworks or provide foundations for new research.

The review of literature assisted in exploring the perceptions of minority FGCSs and helped connect these experiences to current theories and methods. Using the findings, institutions may be better equipped to develop theory-based solutions for retaining minority FGCSs and combat enrollment issues at four-year colleges and universities.

Research Questions

The central question for this study was as follows: How do mentorship programs in high school aid first-generation minority students to stay enrolled at a public 4-year university? The following research questions guided the study:

RQ1: What are the perceptions of first-generation minority college students regarding the cognitive factors associated with AVID mentoring programs?

RQ2: What are the perceptions of first-generation minority college students regarding the social factors associated with AVID mentoring programs?

RQ3: What are the perceptions of first-generation minority college students regarding the institutional factors associated with AVID mentoring programs?

Definition of Key Terms

Academic achievement. The process of gaining essential knowledge and skills through academic coursework, which is necessary to fulfil proficiency standards and educational objectives required for progressing to the next grade level (Rouse et al., 2020).

Academic advising. An interactive and collaborative approach where an advisor actively assists the student in setting and accomplishing academic goals. This process also includes providing relevant information and support while empowering the student to successfully navigate and persist in academic pursuits (Larson et al., 2018; National Academic Advising Association [NACADA], 2019).

Academic experiences. This encompasses a range of factors, including time devoted to studying, the workload of coursework, the number of credit hours taken, grades achieved, social interactions with peers, computer usage, and experience related to reading and writing (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID). A educational intervention program designed to assist middle-achieving students by providing academic support and fostering the development of essential skills and behaviors necessary for success beyond high school (Kolbe et al., 2018).

At-risk students. Those students who have been identified as being at risk of either dropping out of high school or not graduating within 4 years (Heppen et al., 2018).

Developmental education course. As defined by Allen et al. (2017), this is a series of classes that a student must complete as a prerequisite before enrolling in traditional credit courses.

Developmental education programs. As defined by Booth et al. (2014), these are structured courses designed to elevate students from a level of underpreparedness to that of a college-ready student.

First-generation college student. Individuals whose parents have achieved the highest level of education at or below a high school diploma, excluding those uncertain about their parents' educational attainment (Coleman Tucker, 2014; McFadden, 2016).

Institution of higher education or institution. Public technical institutes, public junior colleges, public senior colleges or universities, medical or dental unites, or other higher education agencies as outlined in the Texas Education Code, Section 61.003(8) (THECB, 2016).

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Established by former president George Bush in 2001 to address the achievement gap among minority students in public schools, particularly in reading and math (Adler-Greene, 2019).

Persistence. Refers to the enrollment of individuals over time, which may be continuous or intermittent and may or may not lead to the completion of a degree (Tinto & Pusser, 2006).

Retention. Ability for higher education institutions to retain enrolled students as they work toward completion of their college education (Hagedorn, 2012).

Student engagement. Involves intentional thinking, effort, and awareness exhibited by students throughout the learning process (Burns et al., 2019).

Transition. Denotes the challenging academic experience that students encounter as they move from one educational setting to another (Benner et al., 2017).

Summary and Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 included an introduction to this research study, the background, the statement of the problem, the purpose of this study, the three primary research questions, and key definitions of the terms that will be used throughout this research study. Chapter 2 presents an exhaustive literature review, identifying factors related to first-generation minority college students (FGMCSs) who completed their first-year college courses. In Chapter 2 I also summarize the history of student retention and the challenges and discuss mentoring experiences that aid student retention efforts. In Chapter 3 I outline the research methodology used for the study, including the selection of participants, sample size, data collection and analysis methods, and ethical considerations. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the research study, derived from the data collection and analysis process. Finally, in Chapter 5 I provide a summary of the results, discuss limitations, outline research implications, and offer recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this narrative qualitative research study was to examine the perceptions of second-year, first-generation minority college students (FGMCSs) regarding the influence of AVID on their persistence and academic achievement. Academic leaders in the United States have long prioritized the academic success of high school students (Uretsky & Henneberger, 2020). Numerous scholars and experts have devised strategies and initiatives to support student retention and persistence, not only in higher education but also in the K-12 education sector (Alford, 2017). Unfortunately, students from various racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds often face challenges such as lower achievement scores, attendance rates, and high school completion rates (López, 2018).

Nevertheless, there is a substantial body of evidence demonstrating that mentoring programs in high schools can positively influence students, encouraging them to enroll in and graduate from higher education institutions (Hickman et al., 2020). Student retention remains a paramount concern for all higher education institutions, as it affects their financial stability and long-term community support (Barclay et al., 2018). Furthermore, both accreditation agencies and the federal government evaluate graduation and retention rates as indicators of institutional strength. Students who do not attain a higher education degree often face limited opportunities for decent wages, professional networking, and maintaining a good quality of life (Torkzadeh et al., 2016).

In this chapter I provide a review of the literature, an overview of Tinto's (1987) theory of student departure, self-determination theory, and Swail's (2004) geometric model of student persistence and achievement. This chapter also covers mentoring initiatives and aspects of the

retention of minority students to present a holistic approach to the literature of student retention literature.

Theoretical Framework Discussion

Student attrition at higher education institutions occurs when students fail to persist. This has been a concern at universities and colleges since their inception (Burke, 2019). The issue is critical as it serves as a key metric of institutional success (Barclay et al., 2018; Burke, 2019). Retention, defined as the ability of an institution to maintain student enrollment from the time of initial admission through to graduation (Berger & Lyon, 2005), also involves institutions meeting their commitments to help students remain enrolled and successfully complete their academic requirements (Burke, 2019; Schuh et al., 2017).

Undergraduate student attrition has been a longstanding concern across higher education institutions since the establishment of formal educational systems and has continued to be a focus for educational leaders (Aljohani, 2016; Jüttler, 2020). Data indicate that about 30% of students entering higher education institutions in the United Stated do not continue beyond their first year of enrollment (Payne et al., 2013). This issue is particularly acute for FGCSs and those from low socioeconomic backgrounds, who have graduation rates approximately 42% lower than their peers (NCES, 2015). The transition from high school to college is often challenging for FGCSs because they are often underprepared, significantly reducing their likelihood of graduation (Joy, 2017).

FGCSs encounter numerous obstacles, including financial difficulties, lack of support networks, and inadequate academic preparation (Rubio et al., 2017). They encounter a myriad of decisions and factors leading to enrollment in a higher education program (Falcon, 2015). These students often do not utilize available resources on their campuses, resulting in low retention

rates nationwide (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014; Rubio et al., 2017). The financial burden of attending postsecondary institutions is considerable, affecting students, their families, and other entities (Kirshstein & Hurlburt, 2012). Tinto (2006) suggested that all higher education institutions should consider offering accessible services that support academic, social, and personal factors.

Many higher education institutions fail to adequately support and serve FGCSs due to the unique barriers and challenges they encounter (Thelin, 2011). Research and evaluations of college campus environments provide empirical evidence regarding the academic and social experiences of FGMCSs. Compared to White students, with the exception of Asians, minority students have a more difficult time completing their bachelor's degrees and typically take longer than 4 years to do so (Slovacek et al., 2011). For example, Harper and Hurtado (2007) found that minority students perceived the college campus climate as more negative compared to their White peers. According to Ishitani (2016), early identification, effective policies, and appropriate programming can help higher education institutions successfully support FGCSs.

The extensive body of research available on student retention contributes to the development of methods that can address this overarching issue. Tinto (2006) articulated that little progress has been made to improve student retention in postsecondary institutions due to a vast separation between knowledge and the implementation of that knowledge.

This *gap* problem, as Tinto (2003) described, is the failure to apply research finding effectively to enhance student retention. Credé and Niehorster (2012) explored the complex nature of adjusting to college, noting it as a multifaceted process and suggesting that students may successfully adapt to certain aspects of college while struggling with others. This variability in adjustment highlighted the need for a nuanced understanding of student experiences in higher

education. Additionally, Banyard and Cantor (2004) focused on the specific challenges faced by students who have experienced trauma before entering college. They emphasized that recognizing and understanding the full range of factors influenced by such trauma is critical. These factors can significantly increase the risk of students facing difficulties in transitioning to college life, underscoring the importance of targeted support for these individuals. Thus, despite decades of attention, new approaches are required to provide effective options for students. Seidman (2012), Credé and Niehorster (2011), and Tinto (2012) emphasized the need for diverse retention efforts to cater for all students. Young-Jones et al. (2013) suggested that student success depends on their placement in environments conducive to their persistence and excellence.

Researchers have studied the impact of college and career preparation in high school and its contributions to how a student matriculates into colleges. Upon entering a college campus, students face a multitude of issues including increased academic demands, greater autonomy, and reduced academic structure (Credé & Niehorster, 2011). One of the main challenges for teachers in higher education is designing learning activities that allow students to effectively acquire sustainable competencies (Molderez & Fonseca, 2018). Research shows despite examples of sustainable development in higher education, there are tendencies to compartmentalize these efforts (Lozano et al., 2015). Molderez and Fonseca (2018) highlighted the influence of disciplinary thinking in shaping higher education institutions and revealed that a traditional, discipline-focused approach in higher education has significant implications for how these institutions function and interact with their broader communities. High school counselors play a vital role in this context, delivering comprehensive counseling that promotes academic, social, and career development for all students (American School Counselor Association, 2017).

They act as advocates and change agents who strive to eliminate barriers and enhance access to college (Lapan et al., 2014; Poynton et al., 2021).

Importance of Postsecondary Education

The belief in the transformative power of higher education, often linked with the pursuit of the "American dream," is deeply ingrained in society. This perspective is supported by census data with clear correlations observed between the level of higher education attained and various indicators of economic success, such as earning potential and social mobility (Hendrickson et al., 2013). The evolving attitudes towards college education are evident when comparing data from different periods. In 2012, a significant majority (87.9%) of freshmen at 4-year universities cited better employment opportunities as a primary source of motivation for pursuing higher education, a substantial increase from 67.8% in 1976 (Beaver, 2014).

In addition to economic benefits, a college degree offers a range of personal and social advantages that enhance overall quality of life (Carnevale & Rose, 2012). However, despite these identified benefits, the changing economic landscape in America has led many institutions to reconsider the practical utility of the offered services (Hendrickson et al., 2013). Students are seeking more convenient and quicker ways to obtain a college degree and have increasingly turned to online programs offered by both for-profit and traditional nonprofit institutions (Hendrickson et al., 2013). This shift has raised questions about the traditional model of education and degree requirements. However, as highlighted by Beaver (2014), the high rate of unemployment or underemployment among recent college graduates continues to fuel skepticism about the value of attaining a college degree.

The Federal Student Loan program, established in 1965, has been pivotal in facilitating access to higher education, with around 70% of students utilizing loans to fund their college

education (Beaver, 2014). Yet, the escalation of tuition costs has led to a dramatic increase in student loan debt, reaching $1.1 trillion, up from the $300 billion a decade earlier (Beaver, 2014). This financial burden had ripple effects, such as reducing the likelihood of 30-year-olds with student debt to take out home mortgages, impacting both the housing market and the living arrangements of underemployed college graduates (Kitroeff, 2014; Beaver, 2014).

Retention Complexity

The issue of premature student departure from higher education is multifaceted and has been a long-standing concern to educational administrators and policymakers (Braxton, 2005). Although measuring college student success from year to year along with degree completion is pertinent, addressing student retention is crucial for achieving broader forms of success (Braxton, 2005). These additional dimensions of success extend beyond academic achievement and include development of academic competencies, preparing for adulthood, achieving professional goals, and experiencing personal growth (Braxton et al., 2013).

The adverse effects of attrition extend beyond individual students to impact higher education institutions and their surrounding communities (Braxton et al., 2013; Seidman, 2012). Student departures lead to economic strains and can negatively affect perceptions of institutional quality (Braxton et al., 2013; Seidman, 2012). Seidman (2012) observed that even a small number of students leaving can create significant financial challenges for higher education institutions, affecting revenue streams from tuition, fees, and auxiliary services. Furthermore, local businesses that rely on students also suffer from this loss. Seidman (2012) also noted that widespread social media usage exacerbates the problem by allowing negative experiences to spread rapidly and influence recruitment efforts.

Student Population and Completion Rates

The challenges associated with the evolving student population in higher education have become complex issues (Berger et al., 2013). The composition of the student population has shifted significantly over the past years, transitioning from a small, predominantly privileged, and homogeneous group to a diverse and expansive group of students, resulting in a corresponding increase in retention issues (Berger et al., 2013). The demographic shift and transformation have been well-documented in the literature, with studies consistently highlighting the attrition among FGMCSs in the United States (Lancaster & Xu, 2017; Peña, 2013; Seidman, 2005).

The landscape of college enrollments in the United States has seen a significant shift over the years. In 1990, White students formed the majority with 77.5% of enrollments, while minority students made up 19.5% (NCES, 2010). By 2017, there was a notable improvement in the immediate college enrollment rates among minority student groups: 50% for Black students, 67% for Hispanic students, and 69% for White students (NCES, 2019c). However, the rise in minority student enrollment rates did not translate equally into completion rates for minority students. For instance, the 6-year graduation rate at 4-year universities was only 39.8% for Black students, 55% for Hispanic students, and higher at 64.4% for White students (NCES, 2019a). A similar trend of lower completion rates among minority students was also evident in 2-year higher education institutions (NCES, 2019b).

Several factors, such as college and career readiness, financial resources, social and parental support, influence college degree completion for socioeconomically disadvantaged college students (Atherton, 2014; Cabrera et al., 2012; Kabaci & Cude, 2015; Ruth, 2018; Wang, 2014). Although higher education institutions have invested significantly in resources, continued

efforts are essential to improve the student success rates of underrepresented students (Ruth, 2018). Additionally, understanding college completion rates requires distinguishing between first-generation and non-FGCSs.

Theoretical Models

Numerous efforts aimed at improving student retention are grounded in prominent retention theories. One of the earliest comprehensive studies related to student departure across multiple higher education institutions was conducted by McNealy in 1938 (Berger et al., 2013). Unfortunately, McNealy's work did not gain momentum or recognition among scholars and institutions until the 1970s, a period marked by intensified scrutiny of enrollment. Over the past few decades, concerns, such as financial stability, global competitiveness, shifting student demographics, and reduced state and federal funding, have been consistently raised by institutions (Berger et al., 2013).

In the 1990s, academic literature focused more intently on students of color and underrepresented and underserved student populations. However, systematic and empirical research central to the study of college student retention commenced in the 1970s. Before this period, research predominantly concentrated on individual student characteristics rather than the interactions within college environments (Aljohani, 2016). As researchers moved towards systematic and sociological perspectives, including the institution's role, the study of student retention grew more complex.

Several theoretical models emerged during this period, significantly shaping the study of student retention in higher education, These include Spady's (1970) sociological model of student dropout, Tinto's (1975) student integration model, Bean's (1980) student attrition model, Pascarella's (1980) student-faculty informal model, Astin's (1984) student involvement theory,

and Swail's (2004) geometric model of student persistence and achievement. These models identified numerous variables that influenced a student's commitment to their institution. However, as noted by Milem and Berger (1999), most models lacked specific research on the retention challenges faced by FGMCSs.

Tinto (1987) was a distinguished scholar in higher education, renowned for his influential theory on study departure from college. Tinto (1993) identified groups, such as African American, students of low-income families, adults, and transfer students, as those who require special interventions and policies for success. His model of student departure represents a foundation for student retention and establishes a theoretical foundation for academic advising. To further explore and explain the student retention phenomenon, Tinto (1993) used a qualitative approach to delve deeper into student retention, investigating perceptions, types of colleges, and student demographics. His theory aimed to consider both the role of the higher education institution and the student in the decision-making process regarding persistence and retention.

In the theoretical framework, Tinto (1993) asserted that a student's departure from college could be attributed to various factors, including their personal attributes, skills, commitment, intentions, and their interactions within the college community. Additionally, the level of a student's integration into the academic and social aspects of college life held paramount importance, as greater integration correlated with a higher likelihood of persistence. Tinto drew upon insights from anthropology and sociology to formulate his theory, which delineated three key stages that students must navigate to achieve integration: separation, transition, and incorporation. However, Tinto cautioned against viewing these stages as strictly sequential or rigidly defined. Depending on individual circumstances, students might partially experience each stage, and in some cases, they could simultaneously engage with all three stages

(Tinto, 1993). This perspective allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics surrounding student persistence in higher education.

Attribution theory, proposed by Heider (1958), explored the internal and external outcomes of the events people encountered in their lives (Alford, 2017; Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011). Demetriou and Schmitz-Sciborski (2011) posited that individuals from different cultures and socioeconomic backgrounds responded to internal and external factors differently; they placed emphasis on luck and the difficulty of the job. Until then, researchers identified factors ranging from mood to instructional bias to illness as influencing student persistence (Weiner, 1979). Approximately 25% of undergraduate students are first-generation, with a majority (75%) beginning their college academic courses at two-year colleges (Chen, 2005; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Gibson & Slate, 2010). Tinto (1993) described the challenges faced by FGCSs in their first year of college, both academically and socially. This group of students is reportedly four times more likely to leave during their first year of college compared to non-FGCSs (Engle & Tinto, 2008).

In alignment with Tinto's work (1987), Astin (1975, 1985) emerged as a notable scholar in the field of student retention. Astin's significant contributions focused on the interaction between personal and environmental factors in determining student persistence. In his 1975 research study, Astin identified individual factors, such as academic background, educational goals, and demographic characteristics along with environmental factors like residence, employment, and academic environment, as key determinants of student success in the retention equation. Astin's 1985 theory of student involvement outlined five principles, with a central idea that students' prospects of remaining enrolled increased with deeper integration into their academic experiences.

Tinto's Theory of Student Departure

Tinto's (1987) longitudinal model of departure (see Figure 1) presented a comprehensive framework for understanding the experiences of students as they transitioned into their first year at higher education institutions. This model emerged as a response to growing concerns in the higher education sector, particularly the steady decline in student enrollment that Tinto observed (Tinto, 1987). It focused on the process through which students decide to leave an institution and emphasized that the decision is not instantaneous but evolves over time (Tinto, 1987). Braxton et al. (1997) underscored the importance of this model by highlighting its focus on the longitudinal nature of the student departure process and pointed out that this process is significantly influenced by how students perceive and describe their interactions and experiences on a college campus.

Figure 1

Tinto's Institutional Departure Model
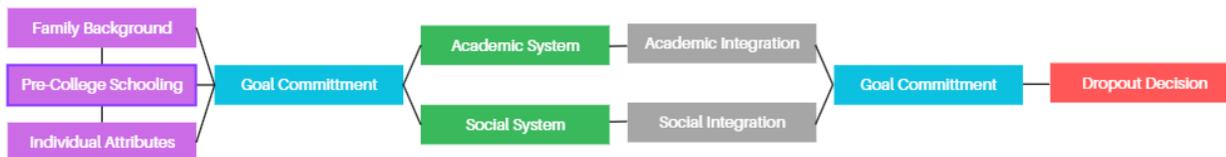
Note. From "Dropout from Higher Education: A Theoretical Synthesis of Recent Research," by V. Tinto, 1975, *Review of Educational Research*, *45*(1), 89–125, (https://doi.org/10.2307/1170024)

Tinto's theory conceptualized that a student's goal to attend a higher education institution is widely influenced by family background, college preparedness in high school, and individual attributes (Tinto, 2006). As a student progresses through their academic setting, they interact with a social system consisting of peers and faculty or staff that evolves into academic integration that reinforces their academic commitment (Choi et al., 2019). Therefore, the more

academically integrated students are, the more likely they will graduate. Similarly, the more socially integrated they are to their college and or university environment, the more likely they are to commit to the institution and less likely to leave (Choi et al., 2019).

Tinto (2017) described *persistence* as "the quality that allows someone to continue in pursuit of a goal even when challenges arise" (p. 2). Tinto underscored the importance of colleges and universities finding what motivates students and their reasons to persist. While Tinto (2006) acknowledged the depth of research available regarding persistence, it is a "complex web of events" (p. 1). The freshman year of college was identified as the most vulnerable year in terms of student retention and the need for institutional efforts (Tinto, 2006).

Self-Determination Theory

Self-determination theory (SDT) offers a comprehensive framework for understanding human motivation and personality, complementing, and extending beyond the scope of Tinto's theory of student persistence. Tinto's theory of student persistence, first published in 1987, is among the most widely used theories in higher education (Braxton & Lee, 2005). While his theory places a strong emphasis on student commitment, it fails to describe motivation that led to academic commitment. The self-determination theory, along with Tinto's theory, recognized the relationship between motivational orientation and student persistence and achievement (Guiffrida, 2006, 2009). According to Vansteenkiste et al. (2010), self-determination theory is a macro theory that encompasses aspects of emotion, personality, and motivation and is built upon five mini theories: cognitive evaluation theory, organismic integration theory, causality orientations theory, basic psychological needs theory, and goal content theory. This multifaceted approach provided a more comprehensive understanding of what drives individual behavior and development (Vansteenkiste et al., 2010).

Ryan and Deci (2017) emphasized that self-determination theory explores factors intrinsic to individual development as well as those within social contexts that foster vitality, motivation, social integration, and well-being. At its core, self-determination theory distinguishes different types of motivation along a continuum, from controlled to autonomous (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Rigby and Ryan (2018) further clarified that self-determination theory identified three basic psychological needs—competence, relatedness, and autonomy—that are essential for high-quality motivation across all cultures and environments.

Ryan and Deci (2017) clarified, "The theory is inter-concerned with how the social contextual factors support or inhibit people's thriving through the satisfaction of their psychological needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy" (p. 3). The theory integrates the understanding of psychological growth with social behavior, highlighting how these factors collectively facilitate or hinder individual satisfactions, motivations, and overall wellness (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Swail's Geometric Model of Student Persistence and Achievement

Swail's (2004) geometric model of student persistence and achievement (Figure 2) is a theoretical framework which is student-centered, unlike other models which prioritize the institution and institutional factors related to student persistence and completion. However, given the complexity of first-generation students' lives outside of a college environment, this study intends to understand the experience of the student. Swail (1995) developed the model to provide a new platform upon which students and the institution could mutually benefit.

Swail's (2004) geometric model of student persistence and achievement uniquely centers the student within its framework and comprehensively examines how social, cognitive, and institutional factors collectively influence a student's journey towards persistence and

completion in higher education. The model presents these factors as the three sides of a triangle that interact to influence the student experience in a postsecondary setting. The base of the equilateral triangle represents Institutional Factors consisting of elements such as financial aid, student services, recruitment and admission policies, academic services, as well as curriculum and instruction. These are the structural and supportive aspects provided by the institution that can either facilitate or hinder a students' ability to persist. One side of the triangle focuses on the cognitive factors, the academic and intellectual aspects of the student experience. This includes academic rigor, quality of learning, aptitude, content knowledge, critical thinking skills, technology proficiency, as well as study and learning skills. Time management, and involvement in academic-related extracurricular activities also fall under this category. The final side of the triangle represents social factors consisting of financial issues, educational legacy, attitude toward learning, religious background, maturity, social coping skills, communication skills, attitude toward others, cultural values, expectations, goal commitment, family influence, peer influence, and social lifestyle.

This model argues that for a student to persist and succeed, there must be a balance among the three sets of factors. Each factor interacts within or across the axes, contributing to either the stability of instability of a students' path towards persistence and completion. The model posits that if any one of these factors is lacking or inadequate, the student's experience becomes imbalanced, reducing the likelihood of persistence (Swail, 2004).

Figure 2

Geometric Model of Student Persistence and Achievement
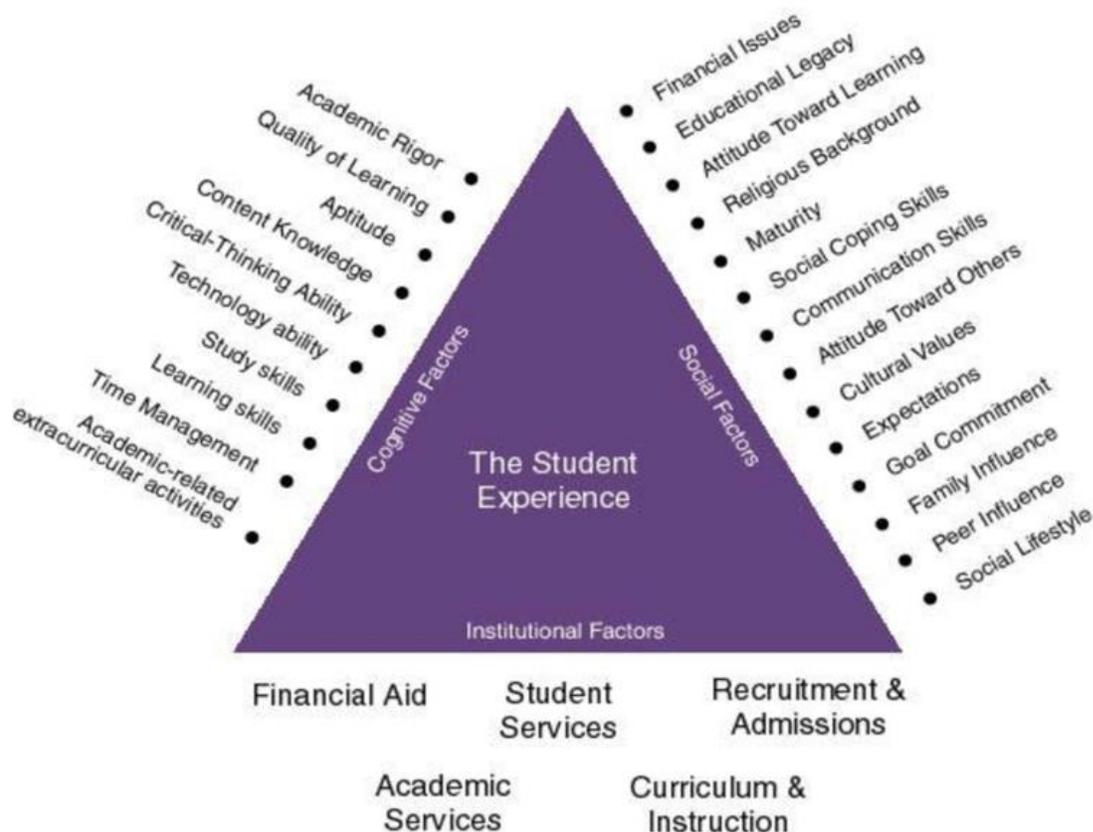
Note. From *Retaining Minority Students in Higher Education: A Framework for Success* (p. 77), by S. S. Swail, K. E. Redd, and L.W. Perna, 2003, John Wiley & Sons. Copyright 2004 by John Wiley & Sons.

Swail's (2004) geometric model of persistence and achievement, as depicted in Figure 2, centers the student within a triangle of influences—institutional, social, and cognitive factors—each crucial for student retention and persistence in higher education. When one category is absent, the consequence is that the students' experience falls out of a state of equilibrium, thereby reducing the likelihood of student persistence (Swail, 2004). Moreover, Swail's (2004) model allows the capacity to incorporate explanatory variables spanning the individual's entire

life, encompassing aspects that are typically beyond the scope of persistence and completion. Given that Swail's model considers the intricacies of the students' lives beyond the institutional environment, it aligns with the examination of perceptions of FGMCSs' persistence and completion.

As detailed in Figure 2, the three components of the triangle—cognitive, social, and institutional—are broken down to provide a deeper understanding of their impact on student retention. The cognitive factors focus on the student's academic capabilities, encompassing areas like academic preparedness and depth of content knowledge. The social factors consider elements such as the strength of their social networks and the influence of their family background. Meanwhile, the institutional factors address the challenges students encounter within the campus environment, including navigating institutional obstacles and adapting to the campus culture.

Cognitive Factors. The cognitive factors impacting student retention encompass a range of academic-related elements, such as preparation, language development, technology literacy, critical thinking, as well as essential skills like time management and study techniques. Lareau (2011) noted that many first-generation college students come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, which often result in disparities beginning with childhood, particularly in language development (Adelman, 1996; Lareau, 2011). Lahey (2014) pointed out that children raised in poverty are exposed to significantly fewer words compared to those from middle-class or affluent families, leading to gaps in vocabulary and role models. This deficit can contribute to lower self-efficacy in academic contexts for FGMCSs (Vuong et al., 2010).

Self-efficacy, a crucial component of motivation, plays a significant role in a students' ability to persist in their educational journey (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014). The higher the level of

self-efficacy a student demonstrates, the higher their ability to make decisions and solve

problems. This skillset is especially important in overcoming academic challenges and barriers

(Vuong et al., 2010). However, FGCSs often face struggles in academics due to inadequate

college preparation, frequently leading to their enrollment in remedial courses (Chen, 2005;

Clawson & Lieblum, 2008). Adelman (2004) found that about 70% of students enrolled in at

least one remedial course do not obtain a degree or certificate within eight years of starting their

program. Consequently, FGCSs tend to have lower completion rates, devote fewer hours to study

each week, and achieve lower grade point averages (Bowen et al., 2005).

    Social Factors. In Swail's model (2004), the social factors that influence student

persistence and success include educational legacy, social coping skills, family influence, and

cultural values. Earning a college degree is a valuable way for many students to escape poverty

and move up in society. However, FGCSs from low-income backgrounds have a much lower

graduation rate compared to non-FGCSs (Clawson & Lieblum, 2008). Howard (2010) identified

several key gaps contributing to this disparity: the opportunity gap, which is how socioeconomic

status and background can restrict educational opportunities; the achievement gap, highlighting

differences in educational resources and access across social groups; and the awareness gap,

referring to a lack of familiarity with college cultural norms, such as navigating the admission

process.

    Traditional students typically have more comprehensive support systems for college

courses. They often have parents who attended college and can provide guidance and resources.

Such students usually reside on college campuses, are less burdened by financial concerns, and

can concentrate on their academic studies without significant outside distractions (Laing et al.,

2005). In contrast, FGCSs , often categorized as nontraditional, tend to live off-campus, balance

work and school, and are less involved in extracurricular activities, all of which can negatively impact their likelihood of persistence (Cataldi et al., 2018; Ishitani, 2006; Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005).

Fryberg and Markus (2007) argued that first-generation, low-income students are often driven by values of relationships and interdependence rather than by independence and personal achievement. This difference in motivation can create a cultural disconnect with faculty and staff, who mostly come from middle- or upper-socioeconomic backgrounds (Cataldi et al., 2018). Such misunderstandings can contribute to lower retention and graduation rates among FGCSs (Fryberg & Markus, 2007), often leading to a sense of alienation from college campus communities and a decreased likelihood of utilizing available college campus resources (Housel & Harvey, 2009; Johnson et al., 2011; Ostrove & Long, 2007).

Warburton et al. (2001) suggested that traditional students begin preparing for college as early as eighth grade with parental involvement and support, while a nontraditional student will take advantage of campus tours and review all aspects of the admissions process (Banks-Santilli, 2011). While FGCSs are comfortable seeking the information they need prior to deciding on a college, they still consider attending college at a much later time (Banks-Santilli, 2011). They find motivation to attend college to improve their socioeconomic status (Ayala & Striplen, 2002). Most FGCSs choose to stay close to home based on financial constraints (Banks-Santilli, 2011).

Institutional Factors. Swail's (2004) geometric model of student persistence and achievement includes factors such as financial aid, academic services, student services, recruitment, retention, admissions, curriculum, instruction, and campus environment. The inequalities between socioeconomic backgrounds contribute to the achievement gap through the

costs of application fees and processes, standardized testing, and resources not readily available. FGCSs often come from low socioeconomic families and cannot afford to apply to multiple institutions due to the cost of application fees associated with it. They often apply to one college that is least financially constraining (Ishitani, 2006). McDonough (1997) found that FGCSs are more likely to feel lost and overwhelmed with navigating college environments. Zinshteyn (2016) added the following:

> About 90% of low-income, first-generation students do not graduate within 6 years. Part of the problem is that these students are likely unfamiliar with the "hidden curriculum" that determines students' success in their first year of college, which includes navigating higher education bureaucracy and practicing good study skills. These students tend to come from lower-income backgrounds and must work 20 hours a week to finance their education, leaving them too preoccupied to crack the hidden curriculum code. (p. 1)

Researchers stated that the lack of cultural and collegiate exposure for FGCSs leads to the lack of knowledge about resources (Engle, 2007). Oftentimes, this leads to them not taking advantage of the resources available to them at their respective universities, which can limit their success at a higher education institution (Calarco, 2011; Housel & Harvey, 2009).

First-Generation Minority Students

While FGCS enrollments have been rising, research studies have indicated that minority students and economically disadvantaged high school students are less likely to graduate from high school or enroll in college (Bouye et al, 2016; Hughes et al., 2021; Jackson et al., 2013). Despite several initiatives, workplaces in the United States continue to lack diversity due to the decreased number of minority students who enroll (Hughes et al., 2021). Specifically, minority and economically disadvantaged students are less likely to enroll in science and engineering

programs (National Science Foundation, 2019). These programs, designed to improve diversity, target students who are enrolled in college courses and others in the workforce. Hughes et al. (2021) stated that although there are high school mentoring programs available, the literature evaluating the efficacy of those programs is limited.

FGCSs, defined as those whose parents have not obtained a 4-year higher education college degree (Phillips et al., 2020), often emerge from low socioeconomic backgrounds and face unique challenges (Shumaker & Wood, 2016). As of 2015, of 56% of undergraduate students enrolled nationally, 59% of those students were the first of their siblings to attend college (RTI International, 2019). These students typically encounter difficulties adjusting to college life and generally have lower success rates, lower graduation rates, and a higher likelihood of dropping out compared to other groups (Jackson et al. 2013; McCallen & Johnson, 2019; Schelbe et al., 2019).

Demographically, FGCSs are often older than 24 years of age, come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, are single parents, and belong to minority ethnic groups (Engle & Tinto, 2008). About half of these students come from families unable to afford tuition and take longer to complete their education due to added obligations and responsibilities (Chen, 2005; Engle & Tinto, 2008). This extended time in college decreases their chances of persistence and graduation (Ishitani, 2006). The Community College Survey of Student Engagement (2005) identified common characteristics prevalent among FGCSs that threaten their persistence and graduation: academic underpreparedness, delayed college entry, part-time attendance, single parenthood, financial independence (i.e., students who rely on their personal income or savings), and extensive work hours, and being a FGCS.

Demographics, academic performance, cognitive abilities, and family support are a few of the attributes that impact persistence for a FGCS (Tinto, 1993). Many researchers have detailed the lack of preparation between first-generation and traditional students (Ishanti, 2006). Choy (2001) stated that FGCSs begin college with a lower mathematical skill set, thus making it difficult and creating a disparity between first-generation and traditional college students.

Social integration, crucial for retaining students in higher education institutions can be particularly challenging for FGMCSs (Alford, 2017). Tinto (2003) concluded that for students to feel connected to the institution, there must be a level of integration that is presented to them. Students from different backgrounds face challenges when they enter culturally different environments. According to Allen (1992), students have a negative experience when socially integrating within institutions. Alford (2017) identified that positive and negative experiences are associated with how a student fits in with the formal and informal academic and nonacademic arenas of the institution. Moreover, a student's interaction with their faculty members influences their sense of connectedness to the college environment (Alford, 2017).

At the university level, student commitment hinges on academic and social integration (Jüttler, 2020). Research has increasingly focused on FGMCSs, revealing substantial gaps in degree attainment based on income and ethnicity (Coles, 2002; Payne et al., 2013; Swail et al., 2005). For example, Coles (2002) found that only 17% of low-income students earn a bachelor's degree by age 24 while 52% of students from upper incomes graduate. Furthermore, the percentage of degree rates for African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans is significantly lower than those of their White or Asian counterparts (Payne et al., 2013). Less than 25% of Hispanic Americans graduate with a 4-year degree (Swail et al., 2005). Many minority students struggle with a sense of belonging and adjusting to academic challenges (Heisserer &

Parette, 2002). Tinto (2006) stated that while low-income students have access to higher education, the promise of a bachelor's degree remains unfulfilled.

Despite these challenges, ethnic minority students often display remarkable resilience and motivation in pursuing higher education (Paat, 2017). The challenges include but are not limited to college readiness, familial support, social and academic integration, self-efficacy, and financial challenges (Ober et al., 2020). However, approximately 80% of FGCSs are at risk of dropping out during their second year of college (Ishitani, 2016), and they are not as likely to persist compared to their counterparts whose parents are college graduates (Ishitani, 2016).

FGCSs are perceived to have limited resources, which contribute to challenges in persistence within their academic settings (Arch & Gilman, 2019; Taylor et al., 2019). This perspective stems from the reality that these students have less access to various forms of support, both financial and educational, that are crucial to navigate the complexities of higher education. Helker (2020) shed light on another aspect of educational dynamics, emphasizing that high-performing students and their parents frequently play a significant role in influencing the curriculum offered by schools. This situation benefits students who are already at the top of their class, largely because they have parents who are actively involved and can provide direction and support (Archambault et al., 2017). However, middle-class parents often find themselves as the last stakeholders to voice their opinions or seek interventions that could facilitate their child's educational progress (Helker, 2020).

First-year high school students often struggle with academic and environmental stressors and face higher risks of disengagement and dropout, leading to setbacks throughout high school (Flannery et al., 2020). These issues underscore the need for higher education institutions to

create inclusive environments and strategies to understand and address the unique needs of minority students (Harper & Kuykendall, 2012).

To understand how to better assist their students, it is imperative that institutions develop a strategic plan to understand their students' perceptions and needs and offer an inclusive environment (Ellis, 2019; Williams et al., 2018). Hoffman et al. (2019) stressed that there are oppressive higher education institutions that marginalize minority students. Engle and Tinto (2008) noted that strategies, such as course preparations, advising, and peer mentoring prior to entering college, improve completion and persistence. College outreach programs widen students' opportunities and give access to resources that support academic and social effectiveness (Ghazzawi et al., 2019). Students who feel connected or have a sense of belonging to their college environment are less likely to leave the institution and more determined to graduate (Engstrom & Tinto, 2008; Tinto, 2017).

Educational Legacy

The educational attainment of parents is a key variable in research focused on FGMCSs. The term *first-generation* encompasses students whose parents either did not attend college or did not attain a college degree. Research has consistently demonstrated that students whose parents did not attend college are less inclined to pursue higher education themselves (Choy, 2001; Ward et al., 2012). Furthermore, when they do enroll, they exhibit lower rates of persistence or degree completion compared to their peers with parents who had a college education (Choy, 2001; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Gibbons & Woodside, 2014). Cataldi et al. (2018) reported that a significant difference in educational persistence: 33% of FGCSs left postsecondary education within 3 years of initial enrollment without obtaining a degree, compared to 14% of their counterparts. Ishanti (2006) demonstrated that being a FGCS reduced

the likelihood of graduating within 4 and 5 years by 51% and 32%, respectively, compared to peers whose parents had a higher education.

A notable challenge encountered with FGCS research pertains to the variations in definitions applied to this variable. The Higher Education Act Amendments of 1998 defined a FGCS as one whose parents have not earned a bachelor's degree (2020). However, some researchers and states may employ alternative definitions, such as including students whose parents have not attended any postsecondary education (Auclair et al., 2008; Spiegler & Bednarek, 2013). These differing definitions can create challenges in accurately studying and understanding the experiences of FGCSs.

College Readiness

College readiness has historically been associated with academic preparedness for postsecondary education, often measured by standardized test scores, grade point averages, and similar metrics (ACT, 2012; An & Taylor 2015). Expanding this concept,(2008) emphasized the importance of specific critical thinking skills to succeed in college-level coursework. According to Conley (2008), "At the heart of college readiness is development of the cognitive and metacognitive capabilities of incoming students; analysis, interpretation, precision and accuracy, problem-solving, and reasoning" (p. 5). College-level skills and knowledge, indicators of college readiness, along with a students' aspirations and participation in college and career readiness programs in high school shape their college outcomes (Avery & Kane, 2004).

Although educational aspirations are increasing across all ethnic and racial groups, graduation rates for minority and low-income students remain disproportional to their high aspirations (Morley et al., 2021). FGMCSs, whose parents did not attend college, often lack parental guidance and insight into the cultural norms and knowledge required to navigate higher

education (Horn & Nunez, 2000). They lack knowledge of college admission processes, academic expectations, and norms of college life (Engle, 2007). The gap in college knowledge among FGCSs is well-documented, but less is known about how institutions are successfully addressing this issue.

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) plays a critical role in shaping educational policies and best practices in Texas. Their mission is to "provide leadership and coordination for the Texas higher education system and to promote access, affordability, quality, success, and cost efficiency, resulting in a globally competitive workforce that positions Texas as an international leader" (THECB, 2016, p. 3).

According to the THECB (2018), over 40% of students entering Texas public institutions do not meet college readiness standards. Williams et al. (2018) highlighted the ongoing necessity for postsecondary institutions to develop new practices to help students prepare for the demands of college-level courses. Despite collaborations between community college faculty and high school teachers in over 21 states to prepare students for rigorous college-level courses, budget constraints limit the resources available to high school students (Goldwasser et al., 2017). Therefore, despite the access to college education, student attrition rates are at record low and remain a significant challenge in Texas and across the United States (Aljohani, 2016; Booth et al., 2014; Hawley & Chiang, 2017; Jüttler, 2020).

Previous research stresses that a students' first 2 years at the university are the most crucial year for student retention, this period being most susceptible for dropouts or transfers to a different higher education institution (Achinewhu-Nworgu, 2017; Manyanga et al., 2017).

Ertem (2020) supported the idea that providing guidance to students in making successful choices assists with maximizing retention and that more resources should be invested in

providing necessary support. Elliott and Healy (2001) suggested a students' life is "a web of interconnected experiences that overlap and influence student satisfaction" (p. 2). They emphasized the importance of interaction with faculty both inside and outside the college classroom (Elliott & Healy, 2001; Schuh et al., 2017; Tinto, 2006). However, Schuh et al. (2017) posited that one theory cannot describe all students and capture all outcomes.

Stone and Lewis (2012) determined that being college and career ready means that a student must master academic knowledge, technical skills, and employability skills such as soft skills. Likewise, Conley (2010) defined college and career readiness as the "level of preparation a student needs to enroll and succeed, without remediation, in a credit bearing course at a postsecondary institution that enables students to enter a career pathway with potential future advancement" (p. 21). Martinez et al. (2017) showed that counselor-led guidance programs in high schools can lead to college and career readiness.

High school students spend over 1,000 hours in the classroom annually (Ansari et al., 2020). The relationships they form with their teachers have a direct effect on student performance (Ansari et al., 2020). However, due to the large classroom sizes, they lack the sense of connection and trust with the teachers (Martin & Collie, 2019). McCallumore and Sparapani (2010) hypothesized that teachers who recognize the needs for students can cultivate a relationship, which has proven vital to their development and success.

Positive peer relationships, advocated by teachers, can significantly improve a student's personal and emotional well-being (Martin & Collie, 2019). Hajovsky et al. (2020) highlighted that students tend to exhibit healthier behaviors and greater motivation when they perceive their teachers as being genuinely interested in them. This teacher-student relationship dynamic plays a critical role in shaping students' attitudes and behaviors in school. Ma (2003) emphasized that

high school students are less prone to academic failure when they feel a sense of connection to their academic environment. Such a sense of belonging can have a profound impact on a students' academic journey. They are more likely to pursue academic goals and display positive behaviors when teachers create an atmosphere of inclusiveness, value, and belonging (Ellerbrock et al., 2014).

Mentoring Initiatives

Students learn in many different ways; thus, educators are responsible to facilitate instruction to fit the needs of their students. However, in order to accomplish the professional goal of providing an equitable education, teachers need to have an understanding of how the brain works, learn the culturally responsible principles, and be able to operationalize those principles in the classroom (Hammond, 2015). Gay (2018) affirmed that it is not enough for teachers to know individual facts and concepts, but to understand how students learn so they can convey new knowledge through students' own learning systems. Analyzing through this process, one can better support their students.

Daily et al. (2020) identified that student dropouts are a daily occurrence in schools, often due to ongoing distractions and stressors. They stress the crucial role of teachers and administrators as key stakeholders in addressing the issue. By implementing effective strategies to enhance academic achievement and assist students in overcoming challenges, educators can mitigate the factors that lead to student dropouts (Ruiz et al., 2018). Academic achievement as defined by Rouse et al. (2020) involves acquiring the proficiency required to advance from one grade to the next. Therefore, creating an inclusive and supportive educational environment is vital for fostering academic growth among all students (Ruiz et al., 2018).

The goal of education is to help students learn how to learn versus forcing them to be full of information and facts. Teaching involves transitioning students from dependent to independent learners. According to Hammond (2015), "A dependent learner is not able to do complex, school-oriented learning tasks such as synthesizing and analyzing informational text without continuous support" (p. 13). Minority students are taught based on low expectations and are expected to perform below grade level due to their race, culture, and background (Potts, 2021). Minority students struggle because they are not offered sufficient opportunities to develop cognitive skills and habits that would prepare them to handle advanced academic tasks (Hammond, 2015). The AVID initiative at high schools incorporates best practices used to build student skills in areas of writing, reading, and inquiry. It is designed to challenge cognitive resilience and help a student grow into independent learners.

Mentoring minority students has had a great influence on student retention (Alford, 2017). Researchers have connected mentoring and retention of minorities to several retention strategies (Campbell & Campbell, 2007; Nora & Crisp, 2007; Smith, 2007). Mentoring can be multifaceted and contribute to career development, role modeling, and advocacy (Barker, 2007). It is not just the interaction between students and teachers, but active development of relationships (Alford, 2017). Researchers agree on the positive role of mentoring relationships, which foster leadership development (Crisp & Alvarado-Young, 2018); promote student spirituality (Gehrke & Cole, 2017); develop personal and career goals (Maier, 2014); and increase student retention and degree completion (Schriner & Tobolowsky, 2018). However, shifting a student from being dependent to independent is a challenging task.

In 1990, under the guidance of the U.S. secretary of labor, the United States Department of Labor formed a committee to evaluate the effectiveness of high school education in equipping

students for the workforce. This marked the first instance where businesses could directly inform educators about the essential skills required in the job market (Alston et al., 2009). The Department of Labor later released a report which identified and detailed critical workplace competencies and skills necessary for efficient job performance. This encompassed three foundational skills—basic, thinking, and personal qualities—and five key competencies, which included resource management, interpersonal and information skills, system management, and technology utilization (U.S. Department of Labor, 1991). This initiative aimed to connect real-world experiences with student preparedness for the workplace and enhanced performance levels (Villareal et al., 2018). Unfortunately, this initiative did not gain momentum or recognition among higher education institutions, school boards, administrators, and teachers, largely due to its revelation that students were not academically prepared to meet the demands of the 21st-century workforce.

Eventually the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 gained momentum (No Child Left Behind Act, 2002). For decades, educational administrators have been engaged in efforts to enhance academic performance, focusing on areas like testing, literacy, and critical thinking skills. This was highlighted in a report by the National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983). In response to these ongoing challenges, several legislative measures have been enacted. These include the Improving America's Schools Act of 1994 (Johnson, 1997), and Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (Adler-Greene, 2019). Additionally, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (Adler-Greene, 2019) was a significant step in this direction. Yet, many high school students continued to face difficulties in meeting academic expectations, which led to serious consequences including academic setbacks and an increased risk of dropping out (Flannery et al., 2020).

Big Brothers Big Sisters of America is a federation founded in 1904; it is the largest mentoring program in the world (Big Brothers Big Sister of America, n.d). Since the early 1990s, the National Mentoring Partnership has also helped over 4.5 million youths engage in mentoring relationships (Bruce & Bridgeland, 2014). In 2014, former President Barack Obama also launched the My Brother's Keeper initiative, a nationwide mentoring program for inner-city students (White House, 2016). Since then, corporate America has also implemented mentoring initiatives to improve relationships within the workplace. Chun et al. (2012) stated that engaging in mentoring increased the transformational leadership attributes of employees, which affected their well-being. Although mentoring takes many forms throughout organizations and institutions, studies have continued to support that student-faculty relationships have a positive impact on undergraduate academic success, career development, and personal, moral, and spiritual development. Crisp (2010) established that mentoring directly impacted students' ability to integrate in their institution both academically and socially, which also influenced students to complete their college education.

Dual Enrollment and Early College

Dual enrollment programs and early college high schools represent some of the most rapidly advancing educational innovations (Villareal et al., 2018). Dual enrollment, as defined by the National Center for Educational Statistics (2013), is a structured program that permits high school students to take college-level courses while in high school. Early College High Schools (ECHS) are specialized smaller schools designed to enable students to complete their high school diploma while simultaneously earning an associate degree or up to two years of credit towards a bachelor's degree (Villareal et al., 2018).

These programs are seen as potential avenues to enhance high school graduation rates and better prepare students for their careers. They achieve this by immersing students in a challenging, college-preparatory curriculum and shortening the time required to obtain a college degree (Early College High School Initiative, 2013). Furthermore, in Texas, the passage of House Bill 5 by the state legislature in 2013 led to significant enhancements in the curriculum and graduation requirements, assessment programs, and accountability systems within the state's education system (Texas Education Agency, 2013). However, despite continuous efforts, empirical research focusing on college and career preparedness remains limited.

Surgical Simulation Program

Hughes et al. (2021) defined surgical simulation laboratories as a vital training component for a surgical student. Some of the functions are the firsthand nature of training modules, the ability to perform surgical maneuvers in a relaxed training environment, and the visual nature of the simulation activities (Thisgaard & Makransky, 2017). These types of environments are ideal for high school students, who are likely to react in a positive manner to a highly visual, stress-free atmosphere (Benninger et al., 2014; MacDougall et al., 2013). Furthermore, simulation-based training has been shown to increase a student's motivation, interest in learning, and confidence (Tenenbaum et al., 2017).

Thirty-two high school students between 9th and 12th grades from an urban environment were invited to participate in a longitudinal mentoring program and were given multiple lectures by one surgeon regarding college admission strategies to overcome socioeconomic and cultural obstacles and tuition expenses (Hughes et al., 2021). Along with the surgeon faculty member, several residents and medical students aided in teaching basic surgical skills such as knot-tying, suturing, and laparoscopies. Students who participated in the weekend simulation mentoring

program were asked to complete anonymous surveys before and after their session that confirmed their level of self-confidence, interest in science, and likelihood of attending a college or university. Hughes et al. (2021) concluded that simulation labs are ideal environments for high school students to learn because the youth are more likely to be visual learners or have grown up with access to multimedia and technological advances.

Advancement via Individual Determination

Advancement via Individual Determination (AVID) is a college preparatory program established in the 1980s to serve underrepresented students (Watt et al., 2008). The AVID program was created with the premise that students can succeed in rigorous courses such as advanced placement (AP) classes. From the initial AVID class of 30 students, 28 of them enrolled in college (Mehan et al., 1996). Most students selected to participate in AVID programs are underrepresented minorities, who are often economically disadvantaged and first-generation college attendees (AVID Center, 2006).

AVID's approach to college preparation and success involves placing students in an advanced curriculum that ensures that the student graduates with the college requirements for enrollment and provides exposure to college-like environments (Watt et al., 2008). Skills, such as study, organization, time management, critical reading, and standardized testing preparation, are areas of focus for AVID teachers and mentors (Watt et al., 2008). Research indicates AVID students are most likely to enroll in colleges and universities, attempting to complete their degrees (Watt et al., 2008; Slavin & Calderon, 2001).

"Prior to the first and second Industrial Revolutions, education opportunities in the 13 colonies during the 17th and 18th centuries varied considerably depending on one's location, race, gender, and social class" (Course Hero, 2019). During this time, the literacy rate was

relatively high among the White male population residing in the northern and middle colonies (Course Hero, 2019). AVID is a program implemented in high schools to give underrepresented students an opportunity to succeed. The history of AVID demonstrates that success is a collaborative effort. In 2018, over 78% of students reported taking at least one rigorous course and about 94% of AVID students completed college entrance requirements (AVID Center, 2019). By examining the history of AVID and its implementation, one can gain a better understanding of how this program supports over two million students in over 7,000 schools (AVID Center, 2019).

History of AVID. The AVID program was implemented at Clairemount High School in San Diego, CA, in a classroom of 32 students. In 1980, an English department chair, Mary Swanson, recognized the inequity of expectations for students at her school (AVID Center, 2019). She believed that if students have the will to be successful, there was a way to teach them to be college ready. By 1986, California Department of Education provided funds to implement the AVID program in most of San Diego County's schools once the program was a success at Clairemount High School. By 1989, the AVID Summer Institute was created to foster professional development for teachers at the University of San Diego (AVID Center, 2019). After Swanson won the Dana Award for Pioneering Achievement in Education, the AVID program received national recognition. As a result, the AVID center was established to support schools across the country and around the world (AVID Center, 2019).

The AVID Elective. The AVID elective class was designed to support students who are taking honors and advanced placement classes. Part of implementing the AVID elective begins with establishing an AVID team consisting of teacher, counselor, and administrator for each content area. The school then sends their AVID team to the summer institute for training on

effectively implementing an AVID program at their respective high school. The conference provides a variety of courses for educators: educators are taught to access the AVID curriculum, utilize the best strategies, and create an inclusive culture at their school. The four domains on an AVID program include instruction, systems, leadership, and culture (AVID Center, 2019).

Summary

This chapter offered a comprehensive review of literature, centered on Swail's (2004) geometric model of student persistence and achievement. This model helped me understand student experiences through social, cognitive, and institutional factors. Previous studies have indicated that high school administrators and teachers play a vital role in a students' academic success. Creating inclusive environments in high schools is essential to foster student learning and academic achievement (An & Meaney, 2015).

Chapter 3 delves into the research methodology I adopted, the selection of participants, sample size, and methods I employed for data collection and analysis, as well as ethical considerations for the study. Chapter 4 presents the findings obtained through data collection and analysis, providing insights into the outcomes. Last, Chapter 5 offers a concise summary of the results and discusses the limitations and implications of the findings.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this narrative qualitative research study was to examine the perceptions of second-year, FGMCSs regarding the influence of AVID on their persistence and academic achievement. The aim was to shed light on the educational leadership of higher education institutions, emphasizing students' experiences and their journey towards graduation. This study was grounded by Swail's (2004) geometric model of student persistence and achievement. I sought to identify key characteristics and themes within the literature and students' perceptions, either strengthening existing theoretical frameworks or potentially introducing new ones.

This chapter provides the research methodology employed for the study, structured into the following sections: research design, population, sample, materials and instruments, data collection and analysis procedure. Additionally, the chapter covers the researcher's role, ethical considerations, limitations, delimitations, implications, and summary to provide a concise overview of the research methodology.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1: What are the perceptions of first-generation minority college students regarding the cognitive factors associated with AVID mentoring programs?

RQ2: What are the perceptions of first-generation minority college students regarding the social factors associated with AVID mentoring programs?

RQ3: What are the perceptions of first-generation minority college students regarding the institutional factors associated with AVID mentoring programs?

Research Design

In this study I adopted a narrative qualitative design to deeply explore the challenges faced by FGMCSs in maintaining continuous enrollment at 4-year higher education institutions in Texas. It utilized this approach to address overarching research questions pertaining to the factors contributing to the success of FGMCSs, particularly their cognitive, social, and institutional influences as outlined in Swail's (2004) geometric model. This approach allowed for a comprehensive, longitudinal perspective on student retention, emphasizing the cognitive, social, and institutional factors that participants expressed through interviews.

Qualitative research is particularly suited for this study due to its focus on understanding the experiences and perspectives of participants (Lodico et al., 2010; Lewis, 2016). Creswell (2009) suggested that qualitative research methodology offers an avenue to investigate and gain profound understanding of the importance attributed by both groups and individuals to social and human issues. Qualitative researchers employ their studies to interrogate, examine, and explain the behaviors and natural occurrences of individuals (Orb et al., 2001). Given that this study centers around the experiences as narrated by students, the adoption of qualitative research methodology was imperative to effectively capture the participants' perspectives. In a qualitative study the researcher emphasizes the importance of understanding how people interpret their experiences, construct their worldviews, and attribute meaning to their experiences (Merriam, 2009). This emphasis on the individual's perspective made the qualitative approach essential for accurately capturing student experiences in this study.

Several key areas, including high school preparedness, mentor-mentee interactions, and social integration, serve as foundational elements for institutions seeking to develop initiatives to retain FGMCSs (Astin, 1993; Tinto, 1975; Wyckoff, 1998). The interactions that students engage

in with individuals within academic, person, and support service centers at postsecondary institutions can significantly impact their sense of belonging. Furthermore, these interactions can influence their capacity to navigate campus culture, fulfill academic expectations, and ultimately succeed in graduating (Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011). Qualitative research studies allow the participants to express themselves through lived experiences and share their perceptions the way they see fit (Alsae, 2017). In this research, the primary objective was to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences and perceptions of minority students who participated in mentoring programs at 4-year universities. Specifically, I focused on exploring how students navigated and succeeded beyond their initial year of enrollment. Additionally, I aimed to understand the underlying reasons why challenges in retaining students from their first to second year persist at 4-year higher education institutions.

Population

The population for this study included students enrolled at a 4-year public university in the Southwest United States. Students needed to be a sophomore; participate in AVID, a college and career mentoring program in high school; be a FGCS, and (d) identify as a minority. To select participants, I worked with AVID personnel and higher education institutional offices to gather email addresses for current students in their second year of enrollment. I also implemented snowball sampling to identify students. The list included the student's first name, last name, and email address. Once identified, I emailed invitations to students to participate in the study until I could select enough participants. I selected six students to participate in the research.

All participants identified as a minority and were enrolled as a sophomore, junior or senior at a 4-year university in Texas. Students were enrolled full-time and were in good

academic standing. Being enrolled and in good academic standing demonstrated persistence towards completion and earning a bachelor's degree. In the final selection process, students identified participation in the AVID college and career readiness program at their respective high schools. They were not required to be from the same high school or same mentoring program.

As a researcher, I also identified any student support services available for minority students on campuses that assist in providing services. Once a relationship had been established with the support center, I was able to easily promote the research study through flyers to solicit student participation.

Study Sample

For the research study, I employed a snowball sampling strategy to select the sample of minority students. This type of sampling is particularly useful when identifying participants who meet specific criteria can be challenging (Ghaljaie et al., 2017). This method leveraged existing study participants to recruit additional participants who shared similar characteristics or experiences relevant to the research topic. With snowball sampling, participants of AVID programs could help identify peers who had also been enrolled in AVID programs.

Materials and Instruments

Lewis (2016) identified that most of the research focused on student experiences in higher education predominantly utilizes interviews as a method of investigation. In qualitative research, data are commonly collected through various means: conducting interviews, making observations, reviewing published documents, and analyzing audio-visual materials (Orb et al., 2001). According to Willig and Rogers (2017), interviews are the most popular manner of gathering information, and for good reason—real-time interaction with the participant provides the researcher a great deal of flexibility to make it easier for participants to explore their

experiences. For this study, I utilized a guided protocol and pre-interview questionnaire to confirm information from the participants to ensure they met the criteria. The semistructured interview requires the interviewer to develop a set of issues that are used to direct rather than dictate the interview process (Willig & Rogers, 2017). Therefore, I used in-depth interviews and guided interview protocols to explore the academic experiences of the participants within the study. These questions were delivered in a semistructured interview format.

I analyzed the interview data by transcribing and condensing the information. Through storytelling, I had the opportunity to examine the students' experiences and issues that existed underneath the surface (Rooney et al., 2016). Through interviews, participants have the opportunity to express themselves (Jamshed, 2014) and the researcher gains an understanding of students' shaped meanings of their own experiences and perceptions (Rooney et al., 2016).

The main approach to data analysis included the coding of themes. The interviews, once transcribed, were coded and quotes were used verbatim. The transcripts were read and transcribed by a transcription service. Once transcribed, I was able to identify emerging themes and use constant comparative analysis while engaging with the data (Straus & Corbin, 1990). Once the data and themes were exhausted and no new emerging themes were identified, I developed the identified themes and began axial coding.

Axial coding, as identified by Straus and Corbin (1990), is a phase in qualitative data analysis where the researcher starts to link the gathered data to theoretical constructs. In this process, I identified various categories during the initial coding phase related to the core phenomenon along with their conditions and consequences. This linkage was crucial as it helped in understanding how different categories interacted with each other and contributed to the student retention phenomena.

Data Collection

Before I initiated the data collection and analysis process, I obtained appropriate approval from Abilene Christian University's Institutional Review Board (IRB; see Appendix E), ensuring that the research adhered to ethical standards. With IRB approval in place, I commenced the participant recruitment process. Interested students were contacted via email (see Appendix C), where they received a consent form (see Appendix B) and information regarding eligibility for the study. A follow-up email was sent to reinforce the study's nature, intent, and purpose. Prior to recording, I received consent from each participant to record the interview for accuracy of notes, transcription, and condensation of data. Once the participant signed the consent form and agreed to participate, I scheduled an interview with each participant via Zoom or Microsoft Teams.

In-depth interviews with FGMCSs constituted the primary data collection method in this study. As described by Queiros et al. (2017), interviews were loosely structured, personal, and tailored to each student. Guided protocols (see Appendix A) were created from the research questions and researcher experience and used to conduct the interview. All interviews varied depending on participant availability. All interviews were recorded using Zoom or Microsoft Teams, a videoconferencing application. Jamshed (2014) supported interview recording as it is essential to data collection and transcribing.

I tracked and kept field notes written during each interview session (see Appendix D). Ensuring that each interview was accurately transcribed was crucial for the integrity of the study. After each audio file was transcribed to text files, I gave participants the opportunity to verify transcripts for reliability and accuracy. For security and confidentiality, I securely stored all files on my home computer and deleted after completing the necessary transcriptions.

Last, I employed data triangulation to strengthen its validity (Patton, 2015). This approach involved multiple data collection and analysis methods to support the study's conclusions, enhancing the robustness and credibility of the findings.

Data Analysis

Once the semistructured in-depth interviews concluded, the captured information was analyzed by transcribing the interview recordings one-by-one. Verifying the credibility in the transcription process and financial availability, I used a professional transcription application to assist with participant protection, alleviate the tedious aspects of the process, and analyze the study in an effective and efficient manner.

The constant comparative method combines systematic data collection, coding, and analysis with theoretical sampling to generate theory that is integrated and expressed in a clear form for further testing (Conrad et al., 1993). With this method, first referenced in 1968 by Glaser and Strauss, my objective was to categorize data through a comparative analysis of different incidents (Knotten et al., 2017). Individual interviews were the main source of data collection that allowed participants to speak freely and elaborate their experiences candidly (S. Staples, 2014).

I carefully analyzed participants' experiences to discern similarities and differences, which were then grouped accordingly (see Appendix D). I benefited from utilizing two types of analytical coding: inductive and deductive. As suggested by Saldaña and Omasta (2018), coding in qualitative research involves using the language of the subjects themselves as a means of symbolizing and interpreting the data. My primary goal in coding was to categorize and make sense of the data, focusing particular attention on identifying actions and reactions as revealed by the participants. To ensure the research questions were appropriate and comprehensive, an expert

review was conducted by an individual possessing extensive knowledge of the subject matter. This review was crucial in validating the relevance and efficacy of the research questions. If any of the questions deemed unsuitable or irrelevant, they were refined and adjusted before the first interview took place, ensuring the interview process was as effective and informative as possible.

Several measures were implemented to ensure data security and confidentiality. I stored the interview recordings on a flash drive and home computer, which was kept in a secure and confidential location both during and after the study. Additionally, information identifying participants was noted in Microsoft Excel and Word files for the data collection and analysis process. Any findings containing confidential information were stored on a password-protected computer at home.

Researcher's Role

School transitions are challenging and filled with mixed emotions (Van Rens et al., 2019), and students' transition experiences are different. As an Asian student, previously identified as a minority, I know the barriers that are common within higher education. Throughout my high school and college experience, I received little to no introduction to college and career services, leading to majoring in a degree that did not interest me. Being brought up in an Asian family, the choices were being a medical doctor or an engineer. However, once I graduated with my Bachelor of Science degree in Kinesiology, I realized the career choices were minimal in the field without a graduate degree. With no interest in pursuing a medical degree, I took an intentional year off to explore other opportunities, thus, wasting 4-years of education, while incurring tuition debt. However, outside of my own experiences, I also gained a better understanding of minority challenges while working as a recruitment specialist at a technical state college in Texas.

A researcher's main role includes actively listening to their subjects and observing them in their natural environment (Orb et al., 2001). Although knowing the barriers within higher education, I had a subjective approach to identify any similarities and differences with my experience versus those I interviewed. When interviewing, I refrained from sharing my experience at a 4-year university and only focused on the participant's experiences. An important aspect of ensuring trustworthiness is that the researcher is trustworthy in carrying out the research in an ethical manner (Merriam, 2009).

Establishing Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in research is crucial to convince readers of the honesty and reliability of the findings reported. In qualitative research, there's an inherent assumption of bias due to the methods and hypotheses reported by the researcher. To address this and ensure trustworthiness in this study, I focused on establishing a balanced relationship with all participants, which was key to fostering trust, disclosure, and awareness. Privacy protection for research participants was a priority. I conducted the study in discrete locations, and recordings were made with privacy fully ensured. Each participant was provided with a consent form, which the participant and I signed. As indicated by Creswell (2007), consent forms are vital for outlining the purpose of the study, potential risks, participants' rights, the voluntary nature of participation, and the guarantee of confidentiality. Using the semistructured interviews allowed participants to have access to their studies after the research was conducted. The consent forms were presented to the participant in advance of their interview to allow each participant to thoroughly review them and pose any questions before the interview commenced.

It was important that participants were aware their identity would be masked. To protect the identity of the participants, each participant was coded in chronological order based on an

alphabet, in no order of the participant interviews. For example, participants were coded as A, B, C, D, E, and F. Participants also had access to their interview transcripts, which allowed them to verify the accuracy of the information captured and request any necessary revisions.

Credibility in research was established primarily through member checking, which is the most important process (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Member checking is a technique used in qualitative research to validate finding with participants. It is a key strategy to ensure the credibility of results (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). This technique involves sharing finding with the participants to confirm the accuracy and resonance of the reported data with their experiences and perspectives.

Ethical Considerations

Orb et al. (2001) emphasized the importance of ethics in research by defining it as the commitment to doing what is right and preventing harm. This ethical standpoint is vital in research studies as it serves to protect participants from any potential harm. Some of the ethical considerations prevalent are (1) preconceived participant bias, (2) confidentiality, and (3) third-party influences. All three considerations would cause an issue if not mitigated efficiently. As part of any third-party influence, it is important that students are not persuaded to volunteer by any faculty member. Therefore, as the researcher, I ensured that any flyers were placed in public places.

Prior to initiating the study, I submitted the research protocol to the Abilene Christian University (ACU) Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval, ensuring that all ethical standards and guidelines were met. The questions designed for the study were carefully constructed to avoid causing any stress or emotional harm to the participants. To protect the confidentiality of the participants, all personal information was anonymized, with any identifying

details excluded. Before the interview, participants were given a consent form, as detailed in Appendix B. This form clearly explained the purpose of the research, their role in the study, and importantly, their right to withdraw from the study at any time. To maintain anonymity throughout the research process, I assigned participants with pseudonyms. These pseudonyms were used in all aspects of data collection and in the write-ups of the study, ensuring that the participants' real identities were masked. All information that could potentially identify participants was stored securely on a flash drive and a password protected home computer, which was accessible only to me. I conducted all procedures and material handling in strict compliance with the IRB protocols, reflecting a commitment to maintaining high ethical standards throughout the research.

To avoid preconceived bias, I removed my opinions and thoughts. I reviewed the interview questions carefully to assist in minimal risks of bias. Being aware of biases and preexisting opinions helps protect ethical considerations (Polit & Beck, 2012). Consent forms were distributed to the participants to establish confidentiality and trustworthy processes. If questions or concerns were raised, I addressed them for clarification and protection.

Assumptions

In conducting the research study, I made several assumptions. Assumptions in research are essentially realistic expectations that are believed to be true, although they lack empirical evidence to substantiate them (Patidar, 2013). These assumptions are critical as they underpin the framework in which the research operates. One key assumption was that participants accurately self-identified based on their ethnicity. This is important for ensuring that the research accurately reflected the experiences of the target demographic. Another assumption involved the participants' ability to recall their experiences effectively and accurately to provide perspectives

that were as unbiased as possible. As a researcher, I was under the assumption the students were truthful about their high school and college experiences. In addition, I assumed that selected participants were a representation and generalization of sophomores, juniors, and or seniors from the identified research site. Additionally, it was assumed that this qualitative study would yield a deep understanding of how high school mentoring programs translate into student retention in postsecondary education. This assumption is significant as it relates to the potential impact and applicability of the study's findings. Finally, I also assumed that there was an unbiased approach in both the data collection and analysis of the findings.

Limitations

For this research study, I identified the following limitations. Limitations, as defined by Terrell (2016), are "constraints outside of the researcher's control and inherent to the actual study that could affect the generalizability of the results" (p. 260). The purpose of this study was to present and discuss the perceptions that support student retention; therefore, quantitative data were not available for the study. It is important to exercise caution when considering the application of these findings to colleges and universities that differ in size, region, demographics, and or other distinct characteristics from those studied. Moreover, the use of Swail's geometric model in this study offered insights specific to the sample and settings involved. To generalize these results more broadly, additional research would be required, ideally applying the model across a diverse range of higher education institutions.

The research was also limited to and provided experiences of sophomores, juniors, and seniors. Freshman experiences were omitted from the study. The study only captured the perceptions of self-identified minority students. The study presented challenges recruiting an adequate number of participants due to the virtual nature of recruitment and decrease in

participation efforts from high school counselors and AVID support staff. Last, the mentoring programs offered at high schools vary and students at the same higher education institution might not have had the same opportunities presented to them.

Despite any limitations, I obtained necessary consent from the participants, school officials, and parents if needed. Participants had the opportunity to withdraw at any time they deemed uncomfortable. They had access to their interviews, transcriptions, and the opportunity to revise as needed.

Delimitations

Delimitations are described as qualities that restrict the scope and determine the boundaries of a research study (Simon, 2011). The study had set parameters of who could participate and limit the possibility of findings. Perspectives from high school AVID teachers, counselors, and mentors were not captured; neither were faculty perspectives from the postsecondary institutions. The study also focused on AVID mentoring program and could have excluded other mentoring or career counseling initiatives available in high schools.

Summary

Chapter 3 detailed the qualitative research methodology and design implemented for this research. My primary objective in this narrative qualitative research was to examine the perceptions of second-year FGMCSs regarding the influence of AVID on their persistence in college and academic achievement. The study was structured as a basic qualitative study and employed semistructured interviews as the main tool for data collection. This approach allowed for a deeper understanding of the experiences and perspectives of FGMCSs and provided a platform for these students to express their views and experiences openly and in detail. I recorded interviews and made interview transcripts available to participants for accuracy and

reliability. The result helped promote mentoring programs in high schools and aid higher education institutional leaders to provide better resources for student retention at their universities. It might also help mentors provide a culture of engagement and connectedness on high school campuses and help improve collaboration between stakeholders.

Chapter 4 presents the data finding, describes the sample size, connects the data, and highlights the results. It identifies the themes that emerged during the data collection and analysis process. Chapter 5 reviews and summarizes the study, and provides implications, limitations, and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this narrative qualitative research study was to examine the perceptions of second-year FGMCSs regarding the influence of AVID on their persistence and academic achievement. The complexities that characterize the academic pathways of FGMCSs are vast, with numerous factors influencing their collegiate success. Therefore, this study collected data from second-year minority students who participated in an AVID mentoring program while in high school, providing insights for higher education institution leaders to foster a more inclusive and supportive environment for these students. Interpretation of the data was guided by Swail's (2004) geometric model of student persistence and achievement to understand the different facets of student retention challenges.

I utilized a qualitative methodology to ensure a deep engagement with participants, allowing their authentic voices and experiences to inform the study's findings. The research was structured to elicit detailed narratives from students, capturing their experiences with AVID and their academic endeavors. I primarily conducted data collection through semistructured interviews complemented by member checking, adhering to Van Manen's (1984) assertion that interviews offer the richest insight into individual experiences.

The primary research questions that guided the interview were:

RQ1: What are the perceptions of first-generation minority college students regarding the cognitive factors associated with AVID mentoring programs?

RQ2: What are the perceptions of first-generation minority college students regarding the social factors associated with AVID mentoring programs?

RQ3: What are the perceptions of first-generation minority college students regarding the institutional factors associated with AVID mentoring programs?

Each question probed into the different facets of the students' perceptions of the AVID mentoring program: cognitive factors, social factors, and institutional factors. These inquiries were framed within the conceptual lens of Swail's (2004) geometric model of student persistence and achievement, which highlighted the interplay between cognitive, social, and institutional elements in a students' postsecondary life.

In summary, this chapter outlines the study's intent, the qualitative approach taken, the fundamental research questions, and the conceptual framework underpinning the analysis. The introduction states the research questions that guided the interviews. The chapter focuses on the comprehensive review of research focus, the methodological process, presentation of collected data, and emergent themes.

Review of Research Focus and Processes

The research study utilized a qualitative approach. I conducted semistructured interviews as the primary tool to explore the effectiveness of the AVID mentoring program in retaining second-year FGMCSs at public universities in Texas. Participant recruitment was achieved via snowball sampling, resulting in six students taking part in the study. Prior to the interview, each participant was provided with a consent form, detailed in Appendix B, which was duly signed and returned prior to the interview. The guided interview protocol (Appendix A) was designed to guide the participants through the research questions, focusing on the connection between AVID and student retention in higher education. I interviewed all six students. All the interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim by a third-party company: Transcription Star. Once the interviews were transcribed, the data were analyzed and coded, and emergent themes were identified.

The data illustrated the perceptions of the FGMCSs. In-depth interviews were segmented into sections, starting with each participant's academic history, their personal accounts, followed by the identification of key themes. Multiple methods were used to ensure and enhance the trustworthiness of data gathering and analytic processes. To look at different perspectives, I used semistructured interviews and gave each of the participants a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality. The purpose of the semistructured interviews was to delve into the students' viewpoints and understand how they connect with cognitive, institutional, and social influences.

Upon completing the analysis, emergent themes were highlighted and tied to the cognitive, social, and institutional areas of Swail's (2004) model. Though all the students' experiences were different, there were several common themes that emerged during the data analysis process. The common themes were linked to cognitive factors such as academic competencies, social factors exemplified by individual traits, and institutional factors representing institutional practices and culture. The common themes identified throughout the interviews were the student's ability for decision-making and problem solving, support from peers and teachers, and the resources available to the students at their respective institutions.

Collected Data

The purpose of this narrative qualitative research study was to examine the perceptions of second-year, FGMCSs regarding the influence of AVID on their persistence and academic achievement. The study was driven by research questions aimed at understanding the cognitive, social, and institutional factors influencing first-generation minority students' perceptions with AVID mentoring programs. By examining the students' perceptions, I sought to enrich the existing literature and conceptual frameworks or lay groundwork for future studies. Data were collected by interviewing six second-year minority college students who volunteered to

participate in the study. To protect the anonymity of the participants, each student was labeled as Student A, B, C, D, E, and F.

Five participants for this study self-identified as Hispanic, and one identified as Asian. One student identified as male and five identified as female. All six students verbally confirmed that they were first-generation and active participants of the AVID mentoring program in high school. All participants identified as sophomores or second year by grade level and were also academically in good standing at their 4-year universities.

Table 1

Participant Background and Identification

Student	Gender	Ethnicity	Type of college or university	University	Academic year	Year joined AVID
Student A	Female	Hispanic	4-year University	3	Sophomore	7th grade
Student B	Male	Hispanic	4-year University	1	Sophomore	7th grade
Student C	Female	Hispanic	4-year University	2	Classified as Junior, sophomore by year	9th grade
Student D	Female	Asian	4-year University	3	Sophomore	9th grade
Student E	Female	Hispanic	4-year University	1	Classified as senior, sophomore by year	7th grade
Student F	Female	Hispanic	4-year University	2	Classified as Junior, sophomore by year	7th grade

As reported in Table 1, all six participants attended a 4-year public university in Texas. As reported by College Factual (2023), the student population at university 1 consisted of 38% White, 22% Hispanic, 21% Black or African American, 2% Asian and 17% Other. The student

population at university 2 was 41% White, 27% Hispanic, 14% Black, 7% Asian, and 11% in the Other category. Last, the student demographics at university 3 were 32% Hispanic, 28% White, 15% Asian, 12% Black, and 13% Other (College Factual, 2023). Four out of the six students mentioned that they chose their respective universities because of their AVID teacher. All six students are classified as sophomores by grade level; however, three of the students were classified at a higher level due to credits earned prior to college. The AVID personnel at the respective high schools were White and Hispanic female teachers.

Once the participants' eligibility was confirmed, I scheduled interviews. I conducted the interviews with each individual participant using Microsoft Teams, a video conferencing platform. Efforts were made to ensure the interviews were recorded and ensured the recordings were clear of background noise. At the outset of each interview, I reiterated the criteria for participation and obtained signed consent forms. Participants were notified that the interview would be recorded and transcribed using Microsoft Teams and a cell phone, with the assurance that all recordings would be securely disposed of upon the study's conclusion. The duration of each interview was approximately 40 minutes.

This section is organized by the emergent themes from each of the research questions. The three research questions addressed the perceptions of FGMCSs regarding the cognitive, institutional, and social factors associated with AVID. Five themes emerged from the student interviews. Each theme is categorized under the cognitive, institutional, and social factors of Swail's (2004) geometric model of student persistence and achievement.

Data Analysis and Coding

Saldaña and Omasta (2018) highlighted that coding in qualitative research involves using the language of the subjects themselves as symbols to facilitate data analysis. The objective of

coding data is to pinpoint and group the actions and responses of participants as evidenced by the data collected. The first step to coding is to engage deeply with the raw data, breaking it down to manageable data and assigning preliminary labels to that data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I familiarized myself with the data by immersing myself in the raw data by reading through transcripts, listening to the interviews, and reviewing field notes, staying connected to the data, and identifying patterns, themes, and or concepts that emerged.

Once familiarized with the raw data, I began to generate initial codes and search for themes through the process of deductive and inductive coding, and hybrid approach to coding. The hybrid approach is a dynamic method that supports the analysis of qualitative data with a structured and explorative lens (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Deductive coding, often rooted in existing theory, involves applying preexisting codes to the data, while inductive coding emerges directly from data without any preconceived framework (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Through a hybrid approach, I used a predefined set of codes based on the research questions, and applied the codes to the data as I reviewed the data. However, I remained open to data and identified new codes when new codes were identified. This iterative process, moving between theory-driven and data-driven coding, provides a comprehensive view of the data, capturing both anticipated and unanticipated insights (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006).

For my data analysis, I used both descriptive and in vivo coding. According to Miles et al. (2014), descriptive coding involves assigning labels to data in a manner that summarizes the primary content of that segment and is especially useful to get a broad overview of the dataset. In vivo coding, on the other hand, uses words or short phrases from participants' own language in the data as codes and is particularly effective when the researcher wants to honor the participant's voice or preserve their way of expression (Saldaña, 2015). While these coding

strategies can be used independently, the combination of the different stages of this qualitative

data analysis process was particularly useful for my study. Through the initial coding, I was able

to familiarize myself with the data, use in vivo coding when participant's language was

expressive, and use descriptive coding to consolidate my understanding of broader patterns from

the data.

The interviews served as an opportunity to collect data on the participants' perspectives

within a higher education context. Audio recordings of the interviews granted the opportunity for

an in-depth analysis, facilitating a more nuanced understanding of the participants' experiences.

These interviews were transcribed, allowing for a thorough examination to uncover recurring

themes. While the themes were common across all six participants, each reflection was unique to

the student and their journey from a high school AVID program to a 4-year university.

Research Question 1

RQ1: What are the perceptions of first-generation minority college students regarding the

cognitive factors associated with AVID mentoring programs?

I asked study participants if they had planned on attending college or university if they

had not been in the AVID program, and five of the six participants (83%) stated that they had

planned on attending college even if they had not been in AVID. Participants were then asked if

they believed that they would graduate from college because of AVID program participation. All

six participants (100%) stated that "yes," they believed they would graduate college because of

AVID program participation.

Additionally, participants overwhelmingly stated that they believed AVID participation

resulted in them being more college-ready than non-AVID students, with 1 study participant

(17%) reporting negatively. The responses from these questions indicated that students perceived

that the AVID program did influence how they view their own college readiness; however, the students did not perceive AVID as the catalyst for their choice to attend university.

Theme 1: The Importance of AVID and Teacher Support

The first theme that emanated from the student experiences was their determination to succeed. Participants were asked to start by answering what sparked their interest in joining the AVID program. It was apparent that students were fueled by the advantage of receiving additional information and support for their college and financial application processes. All six participants were determined to excel in high school and graduate with a college degree. The participants emphasized the significance of the AVID program in helping them navigate the college application process and supporting their academic journey, especially as an FGCS.

Student A. She learned about AVID in 7th grade from other AVID members at her school. She shared her reasoning for joining:

> The reason I joined AVID was because I was informed that it helps you with your college application and stuff. And that intrigued me since I'm the first one in the family that was planning to go to college. My parents had no idea how anything was going to work out. It all depended on me. And so, the reason I joined was so that it could help me ease my way and then . . . if I had any questions regarding the whole process, I could just ask the AVID teacher.

Student A noted that AVID was a foundation for her academic success, support for college preparation, and goal setting throughout high school. She emphasized the significance of the AVID program in helping her navigate the college application process and supporting her academic journey, especially as a first-generation college student. She continued to be an active participant in the AVID program throughout middle school and high school.

When asked about high school academic experiences that contributed toward her decision to enroll at her respective university, she stated that her AVID teacher was an integral part of her enrolling at the 4-year institution she chose. Her AVID teacher organized three field trips to 4-year universities around [the city]; however, "None of [them] clicked with [her]." She stated that her interest and decision to enroll at her university was ultimately due to the fact that her AVID tutor attended the college and "liked it there." She stated that her AVID teacher was "keen to help us out," especially during her junior year.

While her high school provided college and career counseling opportunities through academic advisors, Student A was more comfortable asking her AVID teacher and tutors for help. During her senior year, when prompted to pick a major, she said she was not sure what to pursue. However, her AVID teacher helped her figure out what she should pursue. Student A reported the following:

> So I had a whole bunch of things that I wanted to do or liked, a whole bunch of options that I was looking at. But then how much time we have, like, we had bonded, [AVID teacher] kind of had a better idea of what she [saw] that worked best for [her]. And she was great because I do love what I'm learning right now.

Student B. The interviewee highlighted the significant role the AVID program played in his academic journey, especially as an FGCS. AVID provided valuable resources, guidance, and support that helped them prepare for college and develop essential skills. He emphasized the positive impact of their teachers, who not only provided academic guidance but also offered emotional support and encouragement throughout his time in AVID and beyond.

The student was introduced to AVID in seventh grade and was not positive about the impact it would have on his college and career development. He stated the following:

But once I reached high school, I realized college is something that is real and it's something to actually look into. I knew that AVID was going to help me for those reasons, which is why I stayed in it, because I wanted to go to college, but I wasn't sure how to get there. So, my idea was to continue being in AVID and that will help me reach my college goals.

Student B explained that his decision to enroll at his respective university was influenced by his AVID teacher. Both his father and mother were elementary or middle school dropouts. Therefore, he did not have the wealth of knowledge available from his parents:

The main thing was my teachers; if I'm being honest, my teachers influenced me to go out there and look for where I want. It was a little weird for me, because in my senior year, we were still coming out of the pandemic. My teacher gave us virtual tours on the projector. And then she told me about seeing [the university]. Although we could not go on a field trip, she told me to personally go and explore it. And then, after visiting it, I really liked it, and it was really cool. And then I decided to apply to the Honors College here.

According to Student B, he and his peers had a close relationship with the AVID teacher, who suggested the university at which he enrolled. His AVID teacher attended the same college and shared her experience with the class, inspiring Student B to attend the same college. As part of the college application preparation process, she was also a vital component of helping him with the financial aid process. As part of the process, she helped students learn more about the [city] promise, a scholarship available to students from a certain region. His teacher also read his personal statements, made corrections as needed, and provided recommendation letters for the

Honors College at his choice of university. He stated his teacher would help with scholarships by requiring students to complete around 20 scholarship applications per month.

Student C. The interviewee did not have much exposure to college and was introduced to it through AVID in high school. Her AVID teacher helped with researching universities and building a 3D model of the career she wanted. Ultimately, the student chose the university due to financial situation, environment, and diversity.

While growing up, attending a higher education institution was not advocated as much in her family. When the student reached high school, she learned about the AVID program and thought it was beneficial for her college and career goals.

The program was really interesting to me because I didn't really have a lot of exposure to colleges, but I knew that I wanted to eventually attend. So as a freshman, I ended up joining and I really liked some of the different techniques that there were, like the note-taking. I still use that sometimes in college. I was investing into myself as I joined AVID. I did it for all 4 years.

Her AVID teacher inspired her to be an active learner, so she enrolled in summer classes ahead of freshman year in college. While she is a second-year college student, she stated that she is classified as a junior from the college credits she has. She stated that her teacher "really oriented us in doing projects where we expressed what we wanted to do. So I remember we built a 3D model of the career we wanted and doing research of what university we wanted to go to."

Overall, she chose to enroll at the institution because of her financial situation and the environment it provided as a minority student. She stated that it was because of AVID, she was able to analyze her wants and needs and pick the right institution for her:

Because I am Hispanic, I was also looking for a university that served Hispanic students and I knew that [this university] had the right crowd and the diversity amongst other institutions. And since I'm from [city] as well, it was more of an easier transition into living in [this city]. Ultimately, the distance to [this city] is a little better, the community as well, because where I come from it was just Latino and Black students in my classes at the high school. I wanted to be around the environment I was used to. So that was kind of what I was reaching for when going to [the university].

She stated that it was because of AVID, she was able to analyze her wants and needs and pick the right institution for her. Despite coming from a low socioeconomic background, the student understood that receiving a higher education meant a better standard of living. She admitted there were no role models while growing up and attending college was not a dream for kids in her community. AVID facilitated a positive environment that allowed her to shift her mindset about attending a higher education institution.

Student D. The interviewee was introduced to the AVID program in 7th grade. She was partnered with a core content teacher who helped her with short- and long-term goals for college and enrollees researched colleges and universities. She was also part of the National Honor Society and student council and had supportive teachers in high school who guided her for college and career development. An only child of immigrant parents, Student D had no expectations for middle school and high school other than making good grades to attend college one day. While she expected to attend college and get a higher education, she did not know the appropriate path to find the right college and decide on a career. Being in AVID her junior and senior year of high school played an important role in shaping her college and career choices:

My cousins and I migrated when we were young, so we didn't have a lot of help when it came to figuring out what we needed to do. Thankfully, I am the youngest in the family, so I was able to rely on my cousins when it came to college. However, with AVID, I was able to figure out most of my choices on my own, especially since my cousins were in college and had a tough schedule of their own.

The student emphasized that her AVID teacher set her up for success and helped her continuously on college and scholarship applications. She was encouraged to apply for at least one scholarship every week or two. Her teacher helped the students with the personal statements and edited as needed. She also encouraged the students to continue researching outside of class:

We started off with setting up our AVID binders, which our teachers would check periodically. Our AVID teacher was able to answer any questions we had and guide us with college applications and stuff. She helped with short- and long-term goals for college and helped us research colleges and universities that we would be interested in. She encouraged us to present about a college or university we would be interested in and talk about the various activities on campus. This helped me to learn about some of the options I had not looked at before. I thought that was helpful.

The student mentioned that the structured classrooms set her up for success in high school and at her respective college. She stated that she was able to transition to the college environment smoothly and apply the skills she learned through AVID, especially note-taking and socializing. She stated, "When I moved from India, I was only around my cousins, who helped each other. But through AVID I met my best friend and other people who I keep in contact with." Though AVID helped her, she mentioned that she also relied on her family members for

help. In regard to applying for federal student aid, her older cousin, a college graduate, assisted with the initial process but her teacher was available if she needed additional help.

Other than AVID, Student D was a member of the National Honor Society (NHS), an organization for high schoolers that promotes leadership, service, character, and scholarship. She was also a member of the student council, an organization that fosters skills like leadership, communication, teamwork, organization, and public speaking. She emphasized that her teachers supported her throughout high school and the advisors were very encouraging and easy to talk to. AVID enabled the student to think at a higher level. She stated that all questions were set for the students to think deeper and converse in a safe environment, boosting confidence.

Student E. As an FGCS, AVID helped bridge the gap between high school and college for Student E. The program provided academic support, guidance, and resources that were not readily available, as her family lacked experience with higher education. The student emphasized that her AVID teacher had a profound impact on her success in higher education. Through their instruction, guidance, and encouragement, her teacher helped high school students build a strong foundation of knowledge and skills that will benefit them throughout their college years and beyond.

AVID helped the student prepare for college by teaching her organization and time management skills. Student E stated, "I think it just cleared a lot of clarification for college preparation that I did not know". She stated that the program prepared her to look at college and career options. She mentioned that "friends who weren't in AVID were completely lost on things like the college application process."

She was very thankful to be in AVID because it helped her be successful in high school and college and clarified her questions regarding attending college. She stated that her AVID

teacher taught her to be productive and focus on assignment deadlines, a tool that helped her throughout college. Though AVID ensured the student was prepared for college, she was also able to rely on other teachers that she could count on.

> They kind of switch up teachers every now and then, but I had the same teacher for my freshman year and senior year. She is basically the main AVID teacher at the high school. We mostly had her mentor the whole class, but she was available for any one-to-one mentoring if we needed it. I did one-on-one sessions a couple times during classes that I really needed. During the mentoring sessions, she would help me think more in depth about the assignments I had to complete. She really encouraged me and all the students to do and be better every day.

Due to the pandemic, the student was unable to visit college campuses around the state; however, her AVID teacher prompted the students to research and initiate virtual tours. Her teacher provided a lot of information about colleges and guided students through the websites. The students' high school also hosted college fairs and resources for students to receive more information on colleges and universities around [the city]. Her AVID teacher also assisted the student with the financial aid application, reading it line by line. With the help of her teacher, the student was able to identify her university as an institution affordable for her to attend:

> Overall, I am very thankful to be part of AVID. I would always talk to my parents about AVID and they struggled to understand what AVID was. They wanted me to attend college, but they didn't know how that would be possible. We aren't rich, so I knew I would have financial restrictions to attend a college. But thanks to AVID and my teacher, I knew my options and was able to get the financial aid I needed. To this day, I am still able to guide myself through scholarship applications without anxiety because of AVID.

Student F. The participant found significant support and guidance through the AVID program. This program helped her explore her career interests, guided her towards suitable colleges, and provided resources and opportunities such as field trips, college fairs, and tutoring sessions. The student's AVID teachers played a crucial role in her academic and personal growth. In college, she found support through the Trio program and her work-study supervisor, which provided similar guidance and resources. The student expressed gratitude for the financial support she received from her AVID program.

> Initially, I didn't really know much about AVID. In sixth grade, my teacher explained the advantages of the program for first-generation students and how it was going to help me. If I'm being honest, I didn't really know anything about college. I didn't know that you had to go. And I didn't know there was a difference between bachelor's, master's, and associate degrees. So, I didn't know that I wanted to go to college for 4 years until I started looking into it more and they started teaching us more about the differences.

College was not a financially stable option for Student F. Being a FGMCS, she was not aware of the many opportunities possible with a higher education. Fortunately, the student was able to receive guidance from her AVID program and teacher. She emphasized the following:

> In high school, I was bouncing between a lot of colleges and wasn't sure where I wanted to go. Thankfully, my AVID teacher was really good at helping me weigh out which ones would be better for me. She told me to focus on the schools that offered the best program for the career paths I was looking at, and making sure the financial aid covered the college I wanted to attend. I feel like she helped me a lot with career path decisions as well. As we got closer towards our senior year, we did a lot more quizzes to see what personality and hobbies would align with our characters and matched that to a career. My

teacher encouraged me to attend college and helped me decide the path I wanted to go into.

The AVID teachers helped their students find more information about colleges and careers outside of the classroom as well. When the high school hosted college fairs, the teacher would encourage students to attend, sometimes walking them to the fairs and asking them to collect as many college brochures as possible. Aside from collecting information, the teacher also made the students do projects about different colleges. The student mentioned that she had several AVID tutors who came in to help with assignments. While she was part of a study group, the student stated that she benefited from the one-on-one mentoring with her AVID teacher. She also mentioned that the teacher would prioritize her students, scheduling meetings periodically to ensure they were on track. AVID helped the student organize her classes and study material, think critically, and be more immersed in a social setting. According to Student F, college would not have been an option for her and her family if it wasn't for the AVID teacher.

Theme 2: Academic Rigor and Learning

Participants were asked if they believed that they would graduate from college because of AVID program participation. Of the six responses, all six study participants (100%) stated that they believe they would graduate college because of AVID program participation.

Student A. During her AVID years in high school, Student A was exposed to Cornell note-taking and binder checks. During the interview, she acknowledged how the AVID program helped her develop their note-taking, critical thinking, and presentation skills, which have been beneficial in college. When asked to elaborate on her experience with study groups, she stated the following:

I guess with the study groups it really does help us with critical thinking and help our peers resolve whatever issue they were having with a specific material. Like not just giving them the actual answer but more help guide them to the answer in a way that did help us in our critical thinking.

When Student A started attending college classes, she stated that her ability to think critically was important to succeed. While it was not an easy transition, she mentioned that she was able to connect with peers and study together. For example, she stated, "Since statistics is such a big course, whenever peers were confused, [she] would use the same technique used in high school for the study groups." She asserted that this technique helped her and peers learn the material rather than looking for answers.

Student B. The student emphasized the role of family, friends, and their AVID teacher in motivating them to continue their education and pursue their goals. Their positive experiences in college, including the support they receive from professors and peers, also contributed to their persistence. As an FGMCS, Student B had less knowledge about various career options available. He mentioned that his parents only hoped for him to learn the basics in school. Therefore, due to his family background, he was not interested in academics:

Even before AVID, I didn't really take my schooling very seriously. I didn't care about my grades. And when I got into AVID, my teacher started talking about pre-AP (Advanced Placement), AP, and dual credit classes. And that's when I realized maybe I should try to get into those more advanced classes to raise my GPA, and before that, I didn't even know what GPA was, I didn't understand the importance of it or the importance of ranking. So my AVID teacher definitely helped me with that. AVID also

taught me Cornell notes, how to take notes and finding a system to take notes that is best for me. It also taught me how to plan my assignments and keep organized with a planner.

Before joining AVID, he was under the impression that he would have to schedule more time for AVID assignments. He was overwhelmed by the idea of Cornell notes, binder checks, and tutorials:

At first, I was scared, I didn't want to be part of this, it sounds a little extreme. But then while in AVID, I liked it. Sometimes, it would be a little draining, like apart from schoolwork with that, obviously that was for our own good. And honestly it wasn't that hard looking back at it, it was just in the moment. That translated well to my college life because I had to learn how to stop procrastinating and how to balance my schoolwork better.

Student C. AVID helped the student with note-taking, organization, critical thinking skills, and study groups for each class. She also learned how to read different articles and break them down for efficient learning:

We did a lot of reading different articles and breaking that down, kind of like speed dating with our different points of views and questions. And when it came to taking notes for classes and organization, we had to have the binders. The binders were really helpful because I'm very much an organized person. I had to print it out and break it down. So just having that technique that I got to do in high school is how I continue to learn at university.

Throughout the conversation, the student demonstrated a high level of academic rigor by stating her organization skills, her learning abilities, and her ability to think critically. Being able to participate in group discussions at AVID enabled her to be an active participant in study

groups at her university. She stated that AVID helped her become more confident with learning and how to be more resourceful. According to the student, she was encouraged to think critically and translate that into her college experience.

    Student D. AVID aided with college and career development, including skills like note-taking and socializing. It included setting up binders and being connected to the right resources to succeed:

> We worked a lot with partners and in group settings, so we had to be considerate and make sure we met deadlines. Note-taking is something that I still use in college. It helps with how I study and prepare for lessons. The way we were taught to break down and process information helped me make connections with learning study material better.

    To fulfill expectations for premedical science majors, college courses require scholastic rigor, analytic thinking, quantitative assessment, and analysis of complex systems. Therefore, as a premedical science major, her teacher helped her set short- and long-term goals and expectations for continued success in college courses. The student stated, "Having those already set in place helped me navigate through the semesters."

    Student E. AVID assisted the student with time management and study habits that translated into her college courses. The student emphasized how these habits have contributed to her academic success. These habits have demonstrated how successful she has been in college. While in her second year of college, she is classified as a senior, eligible to graduate earlier than her peers.

> We learned about Cornell notes in seventh grade and used this throughout high school. Our teacher also encouraged us to work together in groups, so we were able to help each other think outside the box. As peers, we worked on problems together, solving in as

many ways as possible. That process helped me in college because I was able to think more independently.

Though the student was able to work independently and with a group in high school, she stated, "Study groups didn't really contribute as much to college." She stated that the learning style for each professor is different; therefore, she explained that using the same techniques was not effective for the college courses:

> It's a different lifestyle from high school. I feel like there are some similarities, but I think the way that the classrooms are set up and the campus is just different. I feel like it did help me prepare for college at the least. Giving me a general idea of what to do and what to expect. The expectations mentioned were not similar when I started college.

Student F. As an FGCS, the participant had limited family knowledge and support about college. She relied on the AVID program and other resources to navigate the college application process and understand the differences between various degrees offered at higher education institutions.

While a second-year college student, she took advantage of the dual credit program offered by her high school, which classifies her as a junior in college. However, the student mentioned that transitioning to college-level courses was harder than she expected. She stated, "If I had applied more of what I learned in AVID to my first year, I would have done a little bit better. I didn't think it would be as useful my first year, but it became more apparent as the first semester passed that it was useful." Skills such as note-taking and studying proved to be useful for the student throughout college.

Although the first semester of college was hard for Student F, she persisted because of support from her AVID teacher. She explained how her parents were not knowledgeable about

college, therefore, she said her teacher acted like her mother:

> I did talk to her about my struggles and had a conversation about how I wasn't doing very well. She gave me some motivational words and kept checking up on me that year, just to make sure that I was on the right track. She helped me learn how to manage my time. I used a planner a lot, which was a big thing in my AVID courses. I use several different planners for my college courses and social events. As for studying, I am still trying to improve because I feel like we didn't focus as much on retaining the information long-term in AVID. And I wish I learned how to do that. So that might be one of the things that I didn't learn as well when I was in AVID.

Table 2

AVID Strategies That Students Used in College Environments

AVID strategy (WICOR)	*n*	%
Writing/Note-Taking (Cornell Notes)	6	100.0
Inquiry (Aptitude)	4	66.7
Collaboration (Study Groups)	6	100.0
Organization (AVID Binder)	5	83.3
Reading (Curriculum and Class Materials)	5	83.3

Table 2 summarizes the strategies students learned from the AVID program and used effectively at their respective universities. It summarizes the percentage of students that utilized each strategy throughout their time at the university to succeed in their college-level coursework.

Research Question 2

RQ2: What are the perceptions of first-generation minority college students regarding the social factors associated with AVID mentoring programs?

Study participants were asked the importance of belonging in social groups and to elaborate on how they perceived factors such as attitude towards learning, communication skills, cultural values, and lifestyle influenced their goal commitment and expectations in their higher education institution.

All six participants identified the value of connecting with other first-generation students, supportive friendships, and networking in a high school and college environment. One of the students highlighted the importance of the AVID community, which provided a sense of belonging and camaraderie. This peer support helped them stay motivated and focused on their academic goals. Two of the six interviewees stated that they are inspired to graduate from college because of cousins who pursued a college education and have better paying jobs. Students also identified that family support and encouragement to continue education, motivation from personal experiences and growth were important for their academic growth. The role of family, friends, and AVID teachers continue to be a motivating factor for them to persist and graduate with a college degree.

Theme 3: Social Support

All six participants highlighted the value of guidance provided by their AVID teacher and mentor, as well as the support from their peers in the program. The participants mentioned the importance of study groups and the potential benefits of joining clubs or other organizations on campus, despite not having time to participate in these activities due to their course load.

Student A. Being the first one to attend college, she emphasized that her parents were not able to support her like her teachers and peers did. Regarding the student support she received during her involvement in AVID, she said the following:

It has to be the other students that are in the same class as me because we've all been together since we all joined AVID, which most of us were freshman. So I was basically with the same people throughout high school and so we kind of bonded. It was nice to have this little group that you already knew that could support you in a way.

In terms of social coping skills and feeling a sense of belonging among her community, she stated that the AVID program and teachers helped her learn how to present herself to other people. She elaborated that AVID helped her to present herself in a confident way, and that helped her with public speaking.

Student B. The student valued the social aspect of AVID, which allowed him to bond with other first-generation students and form supportive friendships. He also appreciated the opportunities to participate in academic activities and student groups in college, which provide additional support and motivation. He also appreciated the accessibility of academic resources and the support they receive from the institution, faculty, and staff at his university. He also highlighted the benefits of being part of the Honors College and engaging in research opportunities for career development.

As a first-generation student, the student identifies the importance of networking with his peers. During AVID, he engaged with his peers on a regular basis, outside of tutorials. He remembered that during holidays, the AVID teacher would organize a social event so students can socialize outside of academics. The student stated that since they were all first-generation students, it was "nice being part of a group that helped [each other] come together." As a

premedical student, he was able to translate the experiences from tutorials to form study groups at his university.

He demonstrated his passion for belonging in social groups by identifying the study activities he was participating in at his university. However, his ability to participate in these activities has been minimal due to the limited availability between classes. Though he was unable to attend meetings for the organizations he was part of, he felt supported by the Honors College:

> We have a close relationship with our staff [at Honors College]. And right now, I'm also going to do research with my professor. I feel like I'm really supported by the staff at Honors College and professor, because I have a close relationship with them. My professor is expanding my mind on what I can research. Based on my experience with these things, I feel that academically, I am really supported.

The student emphasized that his ability to build and maintain relationships was from his AVID teacher. He informed me that he continues to have a relationship with his AVID teacher, who ensures that he stays motivated and continues to do well. The student emphasized that maintaining the relationship with his AVID teacher helped motivate him. He also emphasized that having friends in the same major and classrooms also helped guide and motivate him to do better.

Student C. While in high school, the student recalls being an active participant and vice president of an organization called League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC). And in college, she joined the Latinx Hispanic Student Union (LHSU) to connect with her Latino community:

While in LHSU, I participated in the Latin Story Experience project hosted by the group. We had to find others who were from similar backgrounds as us but also different. It was nice to hear the similar experiences others have experienced. As Latinos, we go through a lot of the same issues. During these conversations, we realized the importance of building experiences that benefit the group. Some of the initiatives we hosted was teaching people the different Latino dance styles and implementing a Latinx Heritage Month to appreciate the culture.

Though embracing her Latino culture and finding peers of similar backgrounds was important, the student also joined non-Latino groups. She has been an active participant of the Fresh Lifelines for Youth (FLY), a program connecting young people with positive mentors and role models, supporting them to become leaders among their peers and in their communities. She is also a member of the National Residents Honor Society, Sigma Lambda Gamma Sorority, Incorporated., while working a part-time job on-campus. The student mentioned that AVID taught her the social skills necessary to be involved on her college campus. She stated that "being involved paid off because I was referred for the job I currently have." For the student, joining social organizations and being part of student groups meant making an impact in the community for herself and future generations.

Student D. The student did not have any family or friends who were part of the AVID program but relied on cousins for college advice. Although she was connected to peers through study groups in high school, college was a different experience for her. She stated that she struggled with feeling included on campus. During her second year, she found friends in premedical classes but did not participate in many social support activities.

Due to financial constraints, the student was forced to stay with her parents and commute to college as needed. Thus, she has not been able to participate in any extracurricular activities at the university. She attended a few meetings hosted by the premedical science club but has not officially joined the organization. However, the student elaborated on the importance of belonging to a social group:

I think it's important and beneficial because we can help each other and study together. We have TAs for our classes and resources available at the university if we need additional help, but it's not the same as reaching out to a friend who also knows the material. Belonging to a group like the premedical club encourages academic achievement through collaboration, which can improve your understanding of material and boost your performance. It also helps you feel connected and valued.

Student E. For Student E, interacting with different people in social groups helped her develop and refine her communication skills, which were crucial for personal and professional success in high school and at college. Her participation in high school groups such as the National Honor Society (NHS) and Strive High Club, influenced her decision to participate in Honors College, TRIO, and the McNair Scholars Program, which provide resources and opportunities for personal and academic growth. She noted that her AVID teacher helped her plan college and complete financial aid, which helped her attend a college with various opportunities:

I told my AVID teacher that I might have to go to a community college due to financial constraints. So, she told me about the Honors College and getting into the program has supported me a lot. It is because of her I applied and got accepted. Most recently, I got accepted into the McNair Scholar Mentor Program. I feel like the McNair Scholars

Program really helps me unite with other groups of people, who both have a vision of going into graduate school and getting a doctorate. It's nice being able to relate to them.

The student identified emotional support and stress relief as important factors of belonging to student groups on campus. The student stated that since college life can be stressful and challenging, being part of a social group provides emotional support by offering a network of people who can empathize and help you navigate through tough situations. She stated that her AVID teacher influenced her to look for resources outside of the classroom, and "shoot her shot" for any opportunities available.

Student F. The student's involvement in clubs, organizations, and programs like TRIO, Emerald Eagle Scholars, and the forensic science club provided her with networking opportunities, academic support, and social connections. These experiences enriched her college life and helped her adapt to the new environment. Interacting with different people in social groups helped the student develop and refine communication skills, which are crucial for personal and professional success.

In high school, the student was part of Health Occupations Students of America (HOSA), an organization that aims to empower future health professionals to become leaders in the global health community through education, collaboration, and experience. Being part of the organization refined her interests and skills in the premedical degree and made her decision to enroll at a college easier. In college, she is a member of TRIO, Honors College, and an Emerald Eagle Scholar. She stated that due to her conflicting class timings, she has not been able to participate in the group activities; however, these groups have mentors throughout the organizations that assist her as needed. Regarding the importance of joining student social groups, the student mentioned the following:

The main one for me would be building connections with other people. Whether it's

people in the same career field or different, you build different connections that are

helpful. Also, another reason was community, especially when you move far away. It

gets really lonely not knowing people and it feels good to socialize when you get the

chance. It allowed me to connect with like-minded peers and professors in the healthcare

field. They offer valuable advice, mentorship, job opportunities, and inform me about

scholarship opportunities.

Theme 4: Expectations and Goal Commitment

As first-generation minority college students, all six students did not have many

expectations of attending college. However, joining the AVID program in high school and being

connected with an AVID teacher aided these students in learning more about different college

and career opportunities available to them. Students mentioned that their involvement in AVID

improved their confidence, self-advocacy, and their attitude towards learning. They learned to set

high expectations for themselves and developed the skills needed to reach their potential.

Student A. The student noted that the college environment required students to be more

self-reliant and take responsibility for their own learning, as opposed to the more structured

environment in high school. Though the AVID program helped her become more aware of the

several college and career opportunities, she learned how to become more independent. Away

from high school and being a second-year college student, she stated that graduating has become

a personal goal of hers. She reaffirmed that her AVID teachers helped her reinforce her goals and

believe in her own capabilities. In her words, she transformed her thinking from "I have to get

there" to "I will get there" for successfully completing her college degree.

As a first-generation student with no parents or siblings with a college degree, Student A wanted to solely maintain passing grades in high school. However, once she joined the AVID program, she was focused on passing with As and Bs:

> This is going to sound bad. The truth is throughout high school, I was always praised for my grades because I always got all As. And then entering college, I wanted to continue getting all A's. And it just kind of became an expectation for me and for all my family. So, I see, in my way of thinking, that I'm going to be the one that has the PhD. I'm just kind of following through with everyone's expectations.

However, to the student, her expectations of attending college and graduating with a degree changed due to AVID. Though she enrolled in college because of the pressure of keeping up her good grades, she was thankful to her AVID teacher for helping her set goals. According to the student, her abilities to take notes properly, learn study material in an efficient manner, and to write better are some of the important things she took away from high school and into college.

Student B. The student's parents had no expectation of him attending college. The student mentioned that they put him in school to learn the basics. However, the student demonstrated how his attitude towards learning and his academic abilities have improved since joining AVID. He mentioned an increased understanding of the importance of grades, GPA, and rankings, as well as the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

Student B credited his AVID teacher with helping him develop effective study habits, note-taking skills, and time management strategies. These skills have been instrumental in his success in college courses. He stated that the binder checks helped him stay organized. He also noted that his critical thinking abilities sprouted while in AVID. According to the student, it

helped him shift the mindset to thinking outside the box to learn better. He was also encouraged to ask for help and shift his attitude towards learning and problem solving.

Student C. The student has demonstrated a strong commitment to her academic goals, as evidenced by her diligent application of AVID techniques, such as note-taking and forming study groups. Despite initially struggling in the first semester and failing an economics class, she remained determined to succeed.

Her passion further fueled her perseverance. To overcome academic challenges, she strategically utilized resources such as collaborating with fellow business students and enrolling in community college courses. This approach allowed her to grasp difficult concepts, ultimately earning an A in economics. Through this experience, the student learned valuable lessons about adapting to different teaching styles and the importance of seeking support to achieve their academic goals.

Student D. For this student, the decision to attend college was heavily influenced by her immigrant family background and the expectation to follow in the footsteps of her relatives. The student's college journey began in high school, as she started exploring their options, informed by the experiences of cousins. Involvement in volunteering at a local hospital helped the student gain practical experience.

While enrolled in the AVID program in high school, the student looked to family for guidance and was steered towards a career in medicine. As a result, she entered college with a clear focus on the premedical track. Her family's influence, along with the example set by her cousins pursuing science-related fields, shaped her career aspirations and decision-making process. While attending the university, she has primarily focused on academics and consulted with an advisor each semester to ensure her schedule aligns with her goals. Despite the

availability of various groups and resources at her university, she has chosen not to join any additional organizations, staying focused on her chosen path in the medical field.

Student E. This student discovered her passion for science and animals early on in sixth grade. However, she faced uncertainty when choosing a college major during her senior year in high school. With the help of her AVID teacher, she found her path in zoology or wildlife biology, which aligned with her childhood goals and interests. College was always on her mind, partly due to societal expectations and educational milestones. Her older cousin's college experience and journey to becoming a nurse provided inspiration and further motivation for her to pursue higher education.

Her family, particularly her parents, strongly encouraged their children to attend college. While her older brother opted not to pursue higher education, which initially caused some distress for their parents, his current success in his job has helped them accept his decision. The student's parents continue to advocate for their children's college education, and her own passion for science and animals has guided her towards a fulfilling and meaningful academic path in zoology or wildlife biology.

Student F. The student discussed her expectations and goals throughout her educational journey, including the challenges of maintaining high academic performance in college and adjusting her goals as she progressed. She broke new ground in her family by being the first to graduate high school, which was a significant achievement. Her parents and siblings, who did not complete high school, had limited influence on her educational path. Despite their own educational experiences, her family tried to provide motivation and encouragement. She primarily relied on her determination, the support of her AVID teachers, and her college resources to navigate her higher education journey.

The student emphasized that her AVID teachers played a vital role in her academic journey, with one forming a motherly relationship that has persisted beyond high school. Although she found it more difficult to connect with her college professors, she built strong relationships with her work-study supervisor and the staff working in the TRIO program, a resource she compares to a college version of AVID.

Research Question 3

RQ3: What are the perceptions of first-generation minority college students regarding the institutional factors associated with AVID mentoring programs?

Theme 5: Challenges Transitioning to the Postsecondary Institution

Students discussed some challenges they faced, such as balancing their time between schoolwork, extracurricular activities, and their personal life. However, they credited AVID with providing them with the tools to overcome these challenges and achieve success in college.

One student identified that they struggled with adjusting to the college level courses and engaging in lectures. Another student mentioned that their biggest challenge was feeling isolated from family and home. Four of the six student participants stated that the transition from high school to a college environment was stressful and difficult without the appropriate support system. Students spoke about the resilience they gained from AVID and credited the program for teaching them to persevere and stay motivated, even when facing challenges.

Student A. The student discussed her initial struggles with adjusting to the larger class sizes, the more relaxed teaching approach, and the challenge of making friends as an introverted and anxious individual. Throughout her four-years in AVID, her AVID teacher prompted the students to investigate different colleges and universities that had majors they were interested in. Student A was also prompted to make a list of colleges and universities that catered to her major

and take notes of the several student resources and activities the higher education institutions provided. She stated that because of the research, she was able to identify the "right college" for her, especially one that was near her family. However, she mentioned that due to the time constraints on her class schedule, she has been unable to join any social groups on-campus and get connected with a community. She recognized that the campus offered various opportunities and student groups, however, none that was doable for her. She said that her biggest challenge was sense of belonging:

> I guess it would come down to, especially if you're like an anxious kid or a really introverted kid, it's going to be hard to make friends just because everybody is so stuck in their own world, let's say. Especially with such a big class setting, it gets kind of lonesome. Being a shy and introverted kid, it can make you feel like you can't really connect with the environment, but it really just comes down to finding the right people in college. I know I did that with my friends that I have now and then with some of the teachers as well. They have made the environment quite comfortable.

> As mentioned, Student A stated that the larger class sizes made her feel "lonesome":

> When it came to going to lectures, I was not expecting that many students in that kind of classroom setting. I will say I was very scared and anxious. I will admit it was quite kind of lonesome in a way. I also missed that one-on-one teacher interaction. I remember going to lecture on the first day and they were talking really fast. So it was really beneficial to have learned Cornell note-taking and all the other different techniques that AVID taught us. It really saved me from struggling.

The student also struggled with how indifferent professors were about classes. She mentioned that while in high school, her AVID teacher prepared her to work harder for

university-level courses. Her AVID teacher mentioned to the students that "professors are stricter and won't let you do anything outside of the rules." However, once the student started, she realized how differently the courses were structured and how professors do not "babysit" students to complete their assignments.

Student B. The student shared his struggles with adjusting to college life, particularly in terms of studying and learning how to engage in college-level lectures. He also mentioned the challenges of connecting with peers who did not have the AVID background. Transitioning to a college environment was particularly hard for Student B because he did not know people at his college campus. However, as semesters progressed, he was able to connect with peers from college courses, create study groups, and be more involved. He stated that "study groups really helped transitioning into [college]." According to the student, his biggest challenge was learning how to study independently in a larger classroom setting. However, being in AVID helped him think outside of the box and prepare study materials differently:

> I find problems and practice as many times as I can. I read textbooks and learned how to solve the problem in different ways. Going out there and trying new ways of solving problems is probably one of the biggest reasons I overcame [the learning challenge]. I would attend all tutoring sessions, I would ask questions, or they would put any problems up and that would give me another [set] of practice [problems].

His ability to think critically enabled him to work on his learning challenges, rather than give up. He noted that without his AVID teacher, he would not be successful in college or would have thought of attending college.

Student C. The student discussed her experience with academic advising, highlighting the challenges she faced when seeking mentorship at their college campus. She stated, "I actually

had seven mentors in my first semester because I wanted the best of the best out there. All of them failed me, but that's a whole different story." Despite the setbacks, the student took control of her education by creating her own schedules and seeking verification from advisors: "So with the resources I have, I've been able to do my own schedules, and it's worked out so far so good. And I just go to advisors when I want my schedule verified."

She also reflected on the transition from high school to college, expressing the difficulty in adjusting to a new environment: "When I first got [here], a very predominantly White institution, it was very scary just transitioning from being from a very diverse background to just seeing White students, not being able to talk in Spanish." To help ease the transition, she sought out communities that shared her language and cultural background: "So as a Latina student, I wanted to find those communities and just find those communities and people that actually spoke the same language as I, just those little things made me feel much more welcomed on campus."

Student D. She discussed the challenges she faced in adapting to college life, particularly in terms of building relationships and finding support. She mentioned that "in high school, we always had someone to rely on. And in college, my biggest struggle was finding a smaller circle to hang out with." The student also described the difficulty of approaching professors and connecting with them, given their limited availability. Additionally, the student highlighted the challenge of feeling included on campus, which was exacerbated by commuting. However, through mutual connections and seeking out people from her cultural background, she managed to find a sense of belonging by befriending people with mutual connections.

Student E. The student reflected on the differences between high school and college, particularly in terms of communication and relationships with teachers and professors. She

compares her high school experience to taking "baby steps" before entering the more independent environment of college, where it feels like "they let the bird out of the cage."

She observed that in high school, teachers are more likely to reach out and actively engage with students, whereas in college, professors often "see students as just another face in the crowd." She believes that building relationships with college professors requires a more proactive approach on the student's part, such as visiting them during office hours: "I feel like unless . . . you go and visit the professor during office hours, then you don't really have that same connection or relationship with them like you do in high school."

Student F. The participant experienced challenges adapting to the college environment, particularly in terms of study habits and managing coursework. She highlighted the importance of finding different study habits for each course and adjusting to the self-directed nature of college learning. For example, she admitted that one of her challenges was understanding that she couldn't study genetics in the same way as organic chemistry, as each subject demanded unique approaches.

Additionally, the student found the transition from high school to college surprising in terms of teacher involvement. She notes that in high school, teachers tend to guide students more closely, walking them through each step, while in college, students often need to take more responsibility for their own learning: She stated, "Once you get to college, it's more like you kind of teach yourself sometimes." This adjustment to college life and the need for individualized study habits were key aspects of her academic growth.

Summary

In this chapter I shared the findings of the research study regarding how students perceived their AVID mentoring programs. I used a hybrid approach of deductive and inductive

coding to identify themes through descriptive and in vivo data coding and analysis. The five themes that emerged from these participant interviews are presented in this chapter as well as data to substantiate these themes: (a) the importance of AVID and teacher support, (b) academic rigor and learning, (c) social support, (d) expectations and goal commitment, and (e) challenges transitioning to the postsecondary institution. The findings are structured by the research questions and presented through the perceptions of the participants. Chapter 5 of the study provides findings and recommendations framed through Swail's (2004) geometric model of student persistence and achievement, as well as the implications of the study and suggestions for future research.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this narrative qualitative research study was to examine the perceptions of second-year, FGMCSs regarding the influence of AVID on their persistence and academic achievement. Students from ethnic minority backgrounds, impoverished, or FGCSs face greater challenges in college. Framed by Swail's (2004) geometric model of student persistence and achievement, the research addressed the perceptions of FGMCSs regarding the cognitive, social, and institutional factors associated with AVID mentoring programs. I interviewed participants to capture their perceptions. This qualitative study analyzed the data collected through the interviews conducted via an online video platform: Microsoft Teams. I analyzed the data using open coding to determine emerging themes as they occurred throughout the interviews.

Chapter 5 focuses on my interpretation of the research findings in relation to the literature. The chapter is structured around the research questions, ensuring that the data analysis reflects the themes recognized for each research question. This approach facilitates a methodical discussion and comprehensive understanding of the outcomes. The chapter further segments into a detailed review of the findings, an examination of its limitations, and annotates the implications from the results. Recommendations for practical applications and future research are laid out, leading to concluding remarks, which offer a personal account and an overall summary.

Discussion of Findings

Though student retention and persistence has been well-researched over the years, there is a lack of literature focused on second-year FGMCSs who graduated from an AVID mentoring program. According to Swail (2004), the issues of student retention and persistence are as pertinent as they were when the student integration model was published by Tinto. Therefore,

higher education policies have shifted focus from reducing barriers to higher education to affordability and focus.

I chose Swail's (2004) geometric model of persistence and achievement as a theoretical framework to provide a platform for FGMCSs to tell their stories through a qualitative narrative study. As stated by Swail (2004), "The geometric model allows us to discuss the dynamics of cognitive, social, and institutional factors, all of which take place within the student. These forces must be combined to provide a solid foundation for student growth, development, and persistence" (p. xi). Briefly stated, the cognitive factors account for the students' academic ability and rigor; the social factors account for their ability to interact with others; and the institutional factors refer to the practices, strategies, and culture of the higher education institution that impact student persistence and achievement. In their path to persist in a higher education setting, each student made a combination of decisions based on cognitive, social, and institutional factors. The geometric model helps researchers understand the process of student persistence and allows them to move from a theoretical conceptualization to practical application over time.

While higher education institutions place an emphasis on student retention, high school leaders also need to prioritize college and career readiness for underrepresented minority students. Awareness of the cognitive, social, and institutional factors that affect students can help educational leaders increase retention rates for the FGMCS population that may otherwise not have the opportunity to succeed. As an academic institution leader, it is important to focus on the perceptions of minority students because education is associated with increased income, social mobility, and quality of life. Swail (2004) affirmed, "Unfulfilled academic goals often result in

unfulfilled career realities, fewer opportunities, and dreams deferred, if not abandoned" (Swail, 2004, p. 3).

Data analysis of the interviews, reflective journals, and member checks revealed five primary themes that directly relate to the three research questions:

1. Importance of AVID and Teacher Support (RQ1; Ansari et al., 2020).

2. Academic Rigor and Learning (RQ1; Xing & Rojewski, 2022).

3. Social Support (RQ2; Choi et al., 2019).

4. Expectations & Goal Commitment (RQ2; Huerta et al., 2013).

5. Challenges Transitioning to the Postsecondary Institution (RQ3; Covarrubias et al., 2019; Moschetti & Hudley, 2015).

Each theme influenced the findings, conclusions, implications, and recommendations for future research. In the following sections, an emphasis is placed on how the research can contribute to the growing literature on FGMCSs.

Research Question 1

RQ1: What are the perceptions of first-generation minority college students regarding the cognitive factors associated with AVID mentoring programs?

All six students indicated the importance of cognitive factors experienced while in their respective AVID mentoring programs, particularly, the importance of enrolling in an AVID program, support received from their AVID teacher, and the importance of academic rigor and learning. Though the students joined AVID programs for assistance on college and financial applications, they felt like they grew into a better student due to AVID. It played a significant role in their academic journey, serving as a foundation for academic success. Being in AVID

mentoring programs allowed the student to find resources, guidance, and support for college and beyond.

In addition to enrolling in a college, students agreed that relationships with mentors and teachers impacted their level of engagement in the classroom and in social settings. All students held strong convictions that obtaining a college degree would open doors to improved life opportunities. This belief was reinforced by their observations of their parents' experiences, who had migrated to a new environment and faced financial difficulties, partly due to the absence of a college education in their lives. However, participants expressed their gratitude towards family and friends who supported them in their decision to attend college, particularly their AVID teachers. The AVID program provided students with a supportive environment, with dedicated teachers, who played a significant role in guiding and mentoring students throughout their high school years. In times of despair and overwhelmingness, it was the teacher's support that influenced their ability to persist through the first year of college. Students will work to reach goals if educators have high expectations and have built relationships with them (Ladson-Billings & Taylor, 2010). Some students also stated that they continued to receive encouragement and support from their AVID teachers during college, which was a prime motivating factor for persistence.

Ansari et al. (2020) highlighted that students spend in excess of 1,000 hours in high school classrooms, and the relationships they develop with their teachers directly influence their academic performance. Similarly, research by Martinez et al. (2017) showed that guidance programs in schools, particularly those led by counselors, play a significant role in preparing students for college and future career opportunities. These studies underscore the critical impact of educator-student relationships and structured guidance on student success. Therefore, it is

apparent that teachers need to place an emphasis on cultivating relationships with their students. Minority students seek these relationships because they often do not have the necessary support at home. Teachers going out of their way to understand their students on a personal level not only benefits their ability to engage in a classroom environment, but also to engage the students. This helps the student become comfortable, more curious, and build those skills necessary to succeed. Teachers can create an environment that fosters growth and enables students to stay on track with their goals. They can inspire, guide, and support students on their academic journey, helping them achieve their goals and prepare for future success. Not only do teachers play a vital role with college enrollment and financial process, but they can instill valuable skills for the student's future academic endeavors.

Being part of the AVID mentoring program helped students learn organizational skills, time management, and study habits that benefited them in college. Some of the students said that college-level courses are fast paced; therefore, learning how to take notes in an effective manner in their AVID programs enabled them to become more successful in college classrooms. Good note-taking practices can potentially make the difference between efficient study behaviors, better course outcomes, and retention of course material (Friedman, 2014).

According to Rouse et al. (2020), academic achievement is defined as the process of acquiring knowledge and skills through academic endeavors aimed at meeting established proficiency standards and educational objectives. The monetary and social benefits of higher education are associated with successfully earning a college degree and require the attention of administrators at postsecondary institutions (Tinto, 1987; Xing & Rojewski, 2022). Therefore, it is imperative to create a welcoming environment that supports academic growth for all students (Ruiz et al., 2018). Research has continued to prove that connection and interaction between

students and their faculty promotes a satisfying experience and aids in student retention efforts

(Robertson & Mason, 2008). Relationships formed with teachers and high school mentors have

proven to instill hope and inspire students to succeed (Weiss et al., 2019), thus creating a positive

correlation between academic rigor and learning with AVID teacher support. Through daily

interaction, educators influence students' social, emotional, and academic well-being (Wilkins,

2014).

Research Question 2

RQ2: What are the perceptions of first-generation minority college students regarding the

social factors associated with AVID mentoring programs?

The analysis of the data collected from participant interviews and member checks in this

study led to the identification of two key themes within the social spectrum: (1) social support,

and (2) expectations and goal commitment. Participants stated that involvement in AVID

mentoring programs has been highly effective in providing them with rigorous coursework and

essential support, acting as a catalyst for their success. These findings are supported by the work

of Huerta et al. (2013), who noted that prolonged engagement in college preparation activities,

including AVID, significantly enhances a student's preparedness for both high school rigor and

college readiness. The study particularly highlighted that students who participated in an AVID

elective course during middle school and high school years demonstrated superior academic

performance compared to their peers who did not participate in such programs.

The desire to have better opportunities was the motivating factor in continuing to persist

and complete their higher education degree. The participants knew that the way to a better life

started with an education, in which the convictions were solidified watching their parents

struggle with the lack of education. Many of them watched their parents spend years working a

minimum wage job, struggling to make ends meet. While it was challenging for most participants, they acknowledged that adjusting to college life, managing schedules, and finding a balance between academic responsibilities and social engagements required effort and adaptation. Students enter higher education environments with a variety of experiences, so institutions cannot assume they all need the same support (Choi et al., 2019). According to the participants, having determination and being persistent was an expectation they had for themselves and for those around them. Determination and desire for success were closely related to making their parents, AVID teachers, and themselves proud by serving as a role model.

Participants expressed their gratitude towards family and friends who supported them in their decision to attend college, particularly their AVID teachers. In times of despair and overwhelmingness, it was the moral and emotional support from family that influenced their ability to persist through the first year of college. Though parents could not support them financially, parents supported and encouraged the their goals, making it possible for the them to focus on their educational commitments. Participants also learned to collaborate with other students, faculty, and staff on their college campuses. Most participants were socially integrated with peers and found value in forming supportive relationships in their academic setting.

The social aspects of AVID, including the sense of belonging, camaraderie, and peer support, were seen as instrumental in their academic growth and personal development. For participants, family involvement was not only a source of support but an inspiration to stay in college. These findings highlight the importance of fostering a supportive social environment for FGMCSs within educational programs like AVID. Soria and Stebleton (2012) stated that FGCSs are less confident in their academic abilities or preparedness for college and have the least parental support, causing many to leave within their first year of college. Though overall the

results of the study indicated that students believed they were more prepared to tackle academic challenges because of their participation in AVID mentoring programs, higher education administrators and professors should remember that students cannot be perceived as blank slates and assume they all need the same level of support (Choi et al., 2019).

Heimlich (2011) posited that the fundamental aim of education is to equip students for their future, fostering their ability to navigate life effectively. Yet, many higher education institutions fail to adequately serve FGCSs, which often includes a lack of social support (Thelin, 2011). FGCSs experience challenges such as relocation, separation from family and friends, and adjustments to the academic and social expectations of colleges (O'Keefe, 2013). In 2012, 87.9% of college freshmen attending 4-year institutions cited seeking better employment as a primary reason for pursuing higher education, showing a clear expectation and commitment towards a specific goal (Beaver, 2014). However, the misaligned expectations and lack of goal commitment can lead to premature student departure (Braxton et al., 2013). Therefore, all higher education institutions should offer accessible academic, social, and personal support services for all students (Tinto, 2004).

Research Question 3

RQ3: What are the perceptions of first-generation minority college students regarding the institutional factors associated with AVID mentoring programs?

Enrolling in college is a complex multistep process that includes completing college preparation courses in high school and navigating admissions and financial processes (Pew Research Center, 2021). FGCSs experience more challenges persisting at colleges and universities than their counterparts and must be provided with additional support (Ishitani, 2016). They face challenges including but not limited to financial assistance, support networks, and

academic preparation (Rubio et al., 2017). While the perceptions of participants regarding the social factors associated with AVID were generally positive, the students also discussed some challenges they faced during their college experience. As stated by Moschetti and Hudley (2015), FGCSs often feel overwhelmed and do not have any assistance navigating the college environment. Positive experiences help students, especially FGCSs, believe that they are worthy of the college staff's time and efforts. Participants encountered hardships due to minimal knowledge on how to manage the college environment. According to Thelin (2011), FGCSs seek education but lack the social capital provided by parents to navigate the admission process (Pelletier, 2010; Thelin, 2011). However, throughout the interviews, many students reflected that their AVID teachers taught them to never be afraid to ask for help. Institutional resources, such as academic advising, financial aid, student organizations, are some of the resources that student participants felt positively or negatively about.

According to Cataldi et al. (2018), 33% of FGCSs leave school within 3 years, and only 27% finish college within 4 years. Significant challenges were the high expectations and rigorous coursework at the postsecondary level. Lower retention rates have been linked to the likelihood of experiencing disconnect (Covarrubias et al., 2019; Pyne & Means, 2013; Stephens et al., 2012), feeling uncertain about institutional systems and resources available (Eitel & Martin, 2009), and not feeling valued or a part of the institution (Pratt et al., 2017). The transition between high school and college often requires students to develop effective study skills, time management techniques, and critical thinking abilities to succeed in a college environment. Though students were aware of the several resources available on their respective college campuses and were not afraid to ask for help, they did not find academic advising or faculty support to be sufficient. A common theme among the participants was the support they received

from AVID teachers in and out of the classroom, especially after they enrolled in college classes. The students reported that their families, lacking familiarity with college, were unable to provide substantial assistance in this area. Consequently, they often turned to their AVID teachers for guidance and support. Many of these teachers encouraged their students to enroll in the universities where they themselves had studied. The participants specifically highlighted the role of AVID teachers as crucial support figures. They described their teachers as helpful and encouraging, particularly when they faced challenges with academic work in a college setting. However, this level of support and connection was notably absent in their interactions with academic counseling staff and faculty at their respective universities. The students attributed their ability to navigate the complexities of college life and succeed academically to the tools and support provided by their AVID teachers. This suggests that the influence of AVID teachers extends beyond high school classrooms, playing a significant role in the students' transition to and success in higher education settings.

Financial issues played a major role in making the decision to focus on attaining a college degree and concentrating on having a good GPA to keep their financial aid. According to Swail (2004), grants and scholarships, student loans, financial counseling, and work-study programs are important factors in student retention. Five of the participants stated the importance of keeping their financial aid and being able to continuously enroll in college. None of the students were financially capable of paying for college without an internship or a scholarship. Therefore, most of the students were also working part-time jobs outside of classroom hours on a full-time college course schedule. Not only did this not allow students to participate in other activities around campus, but it made it unattainable for some students to see families as often as they wanted to. Extensive evidence continues to prove that support from faculty and higher education

institutions is positively related to academic adjustment, achievement, and institutional

attachment (Credé & Niehorster, 2012).

Review of Findings in Relation to Past Literature

As Tinto (1993) stated, "The consequences of this massive and continuing exodus from

higher education are not trivial, either for the individuals who leave or for the institutions" (p. 1).

Swail (2004) stated the issue of retention is a persistent problem in higher education and "half of

all students entering higher education fail to realize their dreams and aspirations based on

earning a certificate or degree" (p. 3). According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2022), high school

completion rates were 95.1% for the White population, 90.3% for the Black population, 92.9%

for the Asian population; and 74.2% for the Hispanic population. Likewise, the percentages of

adults with a bachelor's degree were 41.9% for the White population, 28.1% for the Black

population, 61.0% for the Asian population; and 20.6% for the Hispanic population (U.S. Census

Bureau, 2022). More than 40% of the U.S. adult population lacks a college education.

I used Swail's (2004) geometric model of student persistence and achievement as the

theoretical framework to discuss the dynamics of the cognitive, social, and institutional factors

that contribute to student growth, development, and persistence. Cognitive factors encompass the

academic abilities of students, including their strengths and weaknesses. Social factors relate to a

student's ability to interact and engage with others, a critical aspect of the college experience.

Institutional factors refer to the strategies, practices, and overall culture of the college

environment, all of which can impact student persistence and achievement, either intentionally or

unintentionally. For students to successfully persist in their academic endeavors, they need to

achieve a balance among these three factors. This equilibrium is critical for navigating the

challenges and opportunities of higher education. I specifically chose the geometric model for

this study to address the complexity and difficulty of the persistence of FGMCSs, providing them with a platform to share their unique experiences. In their decision to persist, each student has navigated a combination of cognitive, social, and institutional factors. Swail (2004) emphasized the importance of collecting data to understand the cognitive and social experiences of students, as this information is vital for institutions to effectively respond to these factors. The model facilitates the transition from theoretical understanding to practical application in both current and future contexts. The following factors were found within the participant interviews and related to each emergent theme.

Cognitive Factors

In this study, I identified several factors within Swail's geometric model as crucial to the participants' academic success. These include academic rigor, critical thinking abilities, time management, quality of learning, technology ability, learning skills, study skills, and aptitude. These factors were closely linked to the students' capacity to understand and successfully complete the academic components of their college curriculum.

Social Factors

Among the social factors, seven of the 14 identified in Swail's geometric model were found to be particularly significant in influencing the participants' academic success. These factors include financial issues, goal commitment, attitude towards learning, expectations, peer influence, communication skills, and maturity.

Institutional Factors

Institutional factors, such as financial aid, student services, recruitment and admissions, and academic services, played an important role in participant lives. As related by participants, the manner in which higher education institutions engage with and respond to its students is

critical for fostering student retention and persistence. This underscored the importance of institutions adopting policies and practices that are supportive and responsive to the needs of their student population, particularly for FGMCSs.

All participants held a strong conviction that attaining a college education was the path to numerous opportunities for a better future. These convictions were solidified by seeing their parents struggle financially and lose opportunities due to lack of a college degree. Though parents were not able to financially support their children's college education, participants expressed gratitude towards family members for their continued support and encouragement to obtain a college degree. They acknowledged that friends and family, along with AVID teachers from high school, significantly influenced their ability to persist through the first year of college. Swail (2004) emphasized the importance of establishing peer relationships and having role models and mentors, noting these as crucial factors in academic and social integration.

Students highlighted their relationships with AVID teachers as pivotal to their educational experience. These teachers provided support that some students felt was lacking from professors and advisors at the college level. AVID teachers' commitment to supporting and connecting with students greatly enhanced their learning experiences. They felt that building relationships with their faculty helped them become more comfortable and helped navigate college admission and financial aid processes. Five students stated AVID teachers went above and beyond and wanted the students to succeed in high school and in college. On a fundamental level, college faculty and counselors were seen as resources for discussing class issues and obtaining academic support. Faculty members, being close to the students, play a key role in retention, with their ability to deliver engaging material being crucial to the quality of education. Counselors are also important for helping students achieve their educational and professional

goals. However, participants reported not feeling the same level of support and effort from their college faculty members and academic counselors as they did from their AVID teachers.

The purpose of this narrative qualitative research study was to examine the perceptions of second-year FGMCSs regarding the influence of AVID on their persistence and academic achievement. Therefore, the study aimed to bring awareness to educational leadership at higher education institutions across the nation. Awareness of student persistence barriers would help leaders increase retention efforts for the FGMCSs who may otherwise not have the same opportunities. It is vitally important to make resources available to help FGMCSs to persist.

Limitations

As defined by Terrell (2016), limitations are constraints that are beyond the researcher's control and are inherent to the study itself, which could affect how broadly the results can be applied. Several limitations warrant consideration in this qualitative study focusing on exploring the perceptions of FGMCSs who were enrolled in the AVID program in high school. The study is constrained by the sample size, population, and location of the study. Those were confined to some higher education institutions in the Southwest region of the United States. Since this study was limited to a specific group of participants from a particular region in Texas and educational background, the findings may not be easily applicable to other populations or settings. The exclusion of freshmen student experiences limits the study's overall scope and overlooks the critical transitional period of FGMCSs as well. Inadvertently, the study relied on self-identified minority students, which excluded perspectives from nonminority students, who also contribute to the college's diversity.

In qualitative research, the researcher's perspective and preconceptions can influence data collection, analysis, and interpretation creating an issue of researcher bias and subjectivity.

To mitigate this limitation, I employed reflexivity, acknowledging my own bias and taking steps to minimize the impact of the study. Additionally, member checking was employed to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings. However, it remains possible that some aspects of the participants' experiences were inadvertently overlooked.

Implications

The findings suggested the following implications for policy and practice for higher education institutions: (a) monitor academic performance (Cuseo, 2003; Tinto, 2006), (b) provide adequate training for AVID teachers (Watt et al., 2010), (c) improve student services (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), and (d) increase financial aid (Dynarski & Scott-Clayton, 2013). Implications suggest how the insights gained might apply to theory, practice, policy, and future research, emphasizing the significance or relevance of the research in a wider context.

Monitoring Academic Performance

Research continues to show that early intervention is crucial to identifying retention problems and correct them before students drop out of college. Atherton (2014) stated that FGCSs' deficiency of information from parents is a unique disadvantage for this population and has significant implications regarding preparedness, retention, and degree completion. With an increase in the diversity of students in higher education, understanding different learning styles, cultural backgrounds, and prior knowledge becomes vital (Cuseo, 2003). Monitoring academic performance is not just about grading, but also understanding a student's learning process and experiences. It serves as a cornerstone for maintaining the quality of education (Tinto, 2006). Tinto (2006) suggested that regularly assessing students' progress can help educators identify and address academic challenges earlier, leading to higher rates of student achievement and graduation. Institutions need to ensure that their academic policies identify students who are not

performing academically well or are experiencing challenges that could interfere with student enrollment.

An important identification tool would be frequent and timely reporting of grades, so students are provided with an opportunity to adjust learning and study skills and for support services to intervene. Early alert systems are useful resources for faculty to identify students who do not attend classes or fail assignments or exams, because it solicits the support of an academic counselor who can help identify resources (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2012). For example, Georgia State University has been able to improve graduation rates by 22% by using data to implement interventions that help students (Quinton, 2013).

Early interventions through formative and summative assessments can help educators tailor instructional methods and promote consistent feedback between students and teachers (Young-Jones et al., 2013). In return, the feedback ensures that students are on the right track to achieve their educational goals and highlights areas of improvement (Tinto, 2006). According to Tinto (2006), this proactive approach reduces student dropout rates and improves institutional outcomes.

Adequate Training for AVID Teachers

AVID is a college-readiness program designed to help students develop skills they need to be successful in higher education. Therefore, AVID's methodology is student-centric and equips students with the tools to navigate academic challenges. Griffin and Allen (2006) suggested that faculty play the most important role in student retention. Faculty members serve as role models and mentors to students, especially FGMCSs. Ensuring that teachers and faculty are provided with the initial training and ongoing development opportunities is pivotal to the

success of the program (Griffin & Allen, 2006). Initial training allows teachers to effectively teach students essential skills like critical thinking, note-taking, and time management.

Ongoing developmental opportunities allow the teachers to be aware of the latest pedagogical strategies and techniques. Thus, creating a collaborative community of AVID teachers can lead to sharing best practices and resources (Griffin & Allen, 2006). Continual investment in AVID teacher training ensures that the curriculum remains relevant, and educators are empowered to guide their students more effectively (Mehan et al., 1996). Focusing on equipping AVID teachers with the necessary tools and knowledge ensures that the program's objectives are met, and students are better prepared for the upcoming challenges of higher education (Watt et al., 2010). Likewise, it is important that policies reflect appropriate training and support for college-level faculty members. Faculty development activities should focus on teaching and assessment strategies and must become a foundation for instructional practices at higher education institutions.

Student Services

Higher education objectives are beyond academic instruction; it is also about creating a holistic experience that supports students in academic, social, emotional, or psychological dimensions. Comprehensive student services, such as mentoring programs, career counseling, and wellness initiatives, are important in enhancing these experiences (Kuh et al., 2010). Tailored interventions smooth the transitions from high school or college environments and mitigate the feelings of isolation and overwhelm. By fostering a culture of care and support, institutions can boost academic outcomes and boost a student's well-being and satisfaction (Schreiner, 2010).

Ward et al. (2012) advocated for a more integrated and collaborative approach among various departments, programs, and divisions within educational institutions. They argued that these entities should work in unison to streamline and simplify the process of disseminating information. This unified approach is important to avoid the confusion that can arise from having disparate processes across different parts of the institution. By coordinating efforts and standardizing procedures, educational institutions can facilitate a more seamless and understandable experience for students, particularly in areas such as information access, administrative processes, and supportive services. The retention and graduation of FGMCSs are not a sole responsibility of one individual or department, but a cross-divisional responsibility. Reviews must take place to identify divisions and services across college campuses to support student goals (Ward et al., 2012). This holistic approach from student-services support assists students in navigating the complexities of college environments, thus promoting student retention and success (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Financial Aid

One of the crucial support services and a game-changer is financial assistance for students, especially for students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. For FGMCSs, finances make or break their academic success. Research has consistently shown that financial barriers are one of the primary reasons students discontinue their education. Beyond tuition fees, FGMCSs face costs related to housing, books, and other personal expenses. By providing robust financial aid packages to students in need, higher education institutions can increase the diversity of their student body, reduce financial strain, and improve overall student retention and graduation rates (Dynarski & Scott-Clayton, 2013). Moreover, financial aid programs should be transparent and actively assist students in navigating the complexities of financial aid applications. Financial aid

services should make applications easily accessible to ensure that eligible students are aware of the opportunities available to them (Dynarski & Scott-Clayton, 2013). Transparent systems that simplify the application process and educate students about their options can have a profound impact on enrollment, diversity, and retention (Avery & Turner, 2012).

Implementing AVID programs at high school has several implications, both positive and potentially challenging. By implementing AVID, high schools can offer additional resources such as tutoring, study skills development, and college application guidance, particularly to underrepresented students. By incorporating AVID, schools can offer targeted curriculum and activities that focus on critical thinking skills, organization, and effective communication. It can also promote equity by ensuring that all students, regardless of background, have equal access to educational opportunities and resources to succeed. School leaders can utilize specific AVID strategies to strengthen their overall academic program, and the information from this study affords them the opportunity to target certain AVID strategies that were identified as most beneficial through the lens of the students who have completed the AVID program. It is important to note that the implications of implementing AVID programs can vary depending on the specific context of each school. Schools should carefully consider their goals and the needs of their student population before implementing an AVID program.

Recommendations

This study suggested that student perceptions of AVID mentoring programs for college and career readiness are overwhelmingly positive. The AVID program successfully assisted with academic preparation by providing students with strategies that increase their potential. Based on the findings of this study, there are several recommendations for additional research. Researchers should expand this study to investigate perceptions of third- and fourth-year college students.

This expansion should include nonminority students to identify opportunities for growth and success among all students across all types of institutions. As educators recognize the obstacles that underrepresented students face in the educational system, hopefully, steps can be taken to eliminate them. Recognizing and addressing these challenges can help students navigate the transition more effectively and seek support when needed. Postsecondary institutions should continue to offer resources, such as orientation programs, academic advising, counseling services, and student organizations, to support students during this transitional period. Tinto's (1975) theories suggested that both academic and social integration are essential for student persistence. Orientation programs serve as the initial integration point for many students (Tinto, 1975). According to Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), academic advising has been found to be crucial for student satisfaction and retention in college. Advising helps students make informed decisions about their academic paths and serves as an early warning system for academic troubles (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Likewise, high school districts need to consider implementing AVID programs to boost their college readiness initiatives. The positive perceptions that FGMCSs who participated in this tudy had on AVID programs concluded that targeted AVID strategies should be implemented for non-AVID student populations as well. In essence, students need the strategies outlined in AVID curriculum to be more successful in college coursework; therefore, those strategies would be essential to students beyond the AVID program. Watt et al. (2004) examined the AVID program and found that it enhanced students' academic preparedness for higher education. By promoting rigorous coursework and providing support, AVID programs can increase college readiness and overall success (Watt et al., 2004). Incorporating these strategies and initiatives can ensure students transition smoothly and thrive in academic endeavors at higher education institutions.

Recommendations for Practice

Leaders in higher education institutions have the power to adopt policies and practices that significantly reduce the likelihood of students, particularly FGMCSs, failing in their academic pursuits. Perna and Thomas (2008) highlighted that student success is largely influenced by the students' own habits, with family, institutional, and broader social, economic, and policy contexts playing important roles. This view of student success metrics allows leaders and researchers to understand the impact of various factors on student retention so they may increase dialogue, research, and cooperation between layers to promote student success (Perna & Thomas, 2008).

For staff in higher education, such as student support services and faculty, I recommend prioritizing initiatives focused on early alerts and interventions. The goal of student support staff on a college campus is to provide the services that develop the student holistically, ensuring student success inside and outside of classrooms. According to Tinto (2012), institutions should thoroughly assess student experiences, track patterns of student progression, and tailor institutional policies and support systems to meet students' needs. Mandatory participation in new student orientation and academic advising throughout their college years can be crucial steps in this direction. Additionally, the establishment of mentoring programs for academically struggling students and FGMCSs can provide much needed support.

Likewise, for high school teachers and leaders, early intervention and mentoring programs should be a mandatory metric for academic recovery. For FGMCSs, nurturing relationships play an integral role in their personal and academic development. It is imperative for students to feel valued, heard, and guided towards previously unknown resources. By

identifying and eliminating barriers to academic success, schools can help students overcome challenges and recover from setbacks.

Both high schools and higher education institutions should engage in data collection to make informed decisions about student support strategies. Discussions among stakeholders of these data can drive decision-making, help allocate resources effectively, and improve student retention initiatives, particularly those aimed at supporting the success of FGMCSs. The careful analysis of student success data is key to identifying the most effective approaches and interventions.

Recommendations for Further Study

The study emphasized the ongoing responsibility of high school and higher education institutional leaders to devise strategies that support FGMCSs in achieving their educational aspirations. The study focused on the perceptions of second-year FGMCSs that were enrolled in an AVID mentoring program in high school. It provided a platform for second-year FGMCSs, and it is imperative that high school administrators and postsecondary educational leaders continue to research and explore how high schools and postsecondary institutions can support retention and persistence of the college students throughout their 4 years. This study gathered and analyzed student narratives that contribute to first-generation, second-year FGMCSs' success, but additional research should take place on the success throughout the college years, until graduation. The usage of Swail's (2004) geometric model of student persistence and achievement allows researchers and leaders to explore the three factors—cognitive, social, and institutional—collectively. Continuing to explore Swail's (2004) theory would allow institutions to design initiatives and interventions that incorporate individual student needs.

Concluding Remarks

The goal of this study was to explore the impact of AVID mentoring programs on student retention at public 4-year colleges in Texas. Utilizing a narrative qualitative approach, the study explored the perceptions of second-year FGMCSs. It provided the opportunity to understand the relationship between mentoring and student retention. The data collected suggested that student retention was impacted by the skills and values attained by students through mentoring. Students value the relationships formed between the AVID teachers and use those relationships as a motivating factor in college. To decrease or eliminate dropout rates across college and universities, high schools must develop strategies to improve mentoring and retention early.

As a FGCS myself, I knew that I wanted to deepen my understanding in this area of research. Throughout my professional career as an academic advisor and institutional coordinator, I have encountered many FGMCSs. Over time, I have had meaningful conversations about the importance of higher education and the value it adds to their lives. I have heard stories of how the economy has not been set up for their success, how the college environments are not as open as they expected, curriculum does not fit the individual needs, and how faculty does not care about their success.

Through this research, it has become clear that higher education institutions must shift their focus towards a holistic model with their students. Colleges and universities can change the campus climate to accommodate the best interests of the student population. I hope this study is used to understand how educators impact student success and develop initiatives to culminate a positive and welcoming college environment for FGMCSs. I feel that my experience as a higher education practitioner and knowledge through research has sharpened my skills set to assist campuses to make this shift.

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Appendix A: Guided Protocol

RQ1: What are the perceptions of first-generation minority college students regarding the cognitive factors associated with AVID mentoring programs?

- In your own words, what propelled you to be part of the AVID program?

- How long were you part of the AVID program at your high school?

- What academic experiences in high school contributed towards your decision to enroll at your higher education institution?

  o Were you part of any mentor-mentee programs? If so, please share more details.

  o What kind of student support did you receive during your involvement in mentoring programs?

  o What kind of resources did teachers and mentors provide?

  o What type of assistance did AVID provide with college and career development?

- How would you describe your academic, technology, and critical-thinking ability? How did AVID help you?

RQ2: What are the perceptions of first-generation minority college students regarding the social factors associated with AVID mentoring programs?

- How has AVID helped you with your attitude towards learning?

  o What were your expectations and goals while in AVID?

  o How did your mentors influence your decision to enroll in college?

- What student social experiences contributed toward persistence while at your postsecondary institution?

  o What social support activities did you participate in and how often did you participate?

- o In your own words and experiences, can you tell me about the benefits of belonging to student groups on your campus?

- o What resources were provided to the student groups you participated in at your postsecondary institution?

RQ3: What are the perceptions of first-generation minority college students regarding the postsecondary institutional factors associated with AVID mentoring programs?

- What student academic experiences contributed towards your enrollment in a postsecondary institution?

  - o What was your perception of academic support while attending?

  - o What academic activities did you participate in at your institution?

  - o How often did you participate in these activities?

  - o Can you tell me about a time you felt academically supported by your institution?

- After your first year, what experiences aided towards persistence?

  - o Did your faculty, parents and peers contribute to this decision?

- What challenges were encountered and overcome?

  - o What was the biggest challenge you encountered as a student?

  - o Can you tell me about how you overcame these obstacles? Be specific.

Appendix B: Consent Form

You may be eligible to take part in this research study. This form will provide the

necessary information about the study, including risks and benefits. Please read this form

carefully and ask any questions that you may have regarding the procedures, involvement, and

any risks you may experience. You may also wish to discuss your participation with other

people, such as friends or family members.

Purpose and Description:

The purpose of this narrative qualitative research study was to examine the perceptions of

second-year, first-generation minority college students regarding the influence of AVID on their

persistence and academic achievement. If you decide to participate, your participation will

involve:

- An in-depth recorded interview, held over video conferencing applications, no longer
  than 2 hours;

- Reviewing the interview transcript for accuracy of information provided; and

- Answering any follow up questions for clarification

Risks & Benefits:

There are risks to taking part in this research study. Please see below for the list of

foreseeable risks, including seriousness of such risks and the likelihood for occurrence:

- Uncomfortable with interview questions – less likely

- Breach in confidentiality – rare

- Confidential information is stolen – less likely

- Fatigue from two-hour long interviews – less likely

Benefits from participating in this research may be indirect to its participants. However, society will gain new information that may be used for educational curriculum development.

Privacy & Confidentiality:

Participant information will be handled in a confidential manner in accordance with law. Identifiable data may have to be shared with individuals outside of the study such as ACU Institutional Review Board. Aside from required disclosures, participant confidentiality will be protected, and any information contained in a safe jump drive and computer will be password protected. Any written information will be stored at the researcher's home in a locked cabinet.

Contacts:

At any time, participants can reach the primary researcher, Nisha Mathews, via email at xxxxxx@acu.edu or phone at xxx-xxx-xxxx. If you have concerns, believe you may have been injured because of the study, or have additional questions about your rights, you may contact ACU's Chair of Institutional Review Board member.

Your involvement and participation in this research study is voluntary. You may decline to participate or withdraw at any time for any reason without penalty or loss of benefits.

<div align="center">

CONSENT SIGNATURE(S)

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Please sign below if you voluntarily agree to participate in this study. You will receive a copy of this signed contract via email.

Printed Name of Participant: _____

Signature of Participant: _____   Date Signed: _____

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent: _____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent: _____   Date Signed: _____

Appendix C: Participant Email

Dear Student,

I am currently seeking participants for my dissertation research that I am completing at Abilene Christian University, in which I will examine the perceptions of AVID students persisting toward graduation in Texas. To be eligible to be participate in this study, you must be:

- first-generation minority college student

- actively enrolled in second, third, or fourth year of college in Texas

- be in good academic standing

This demonstrates persistence towards earning a bachelor's degree. Do you meet the above criteria? Are you willing to reflect on your experiences and participate in a recorded, in-depth interview? Recordings will take place via video conferencing, and will last around 45 minutes on average, not to exceed two hours. Please be aware that there is a possibility for a follow-up, to get clarity on any answers provided, which will last no longer than one hour. Please take some time to consider your participation and the amount of effort on your behalf that this study will entail. If you agree, I want to assure you that you have the right and ability to terminate your role at any point during this process. Do email me at xxxxxxxxx@acu.edu to inform me of your decision to participate, or not, in my study. If you agree to participate, provide a minimum of three possible dates and times we can schedule for the interview. If I have not heard back from you within the next week, I will do a courtesy follow-up. I appreciate you taking the time to consider your participation and look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Nisha Mathews

Appendix D: Coding Matrix

RQ1: What are the perceptions of first-generation minority college students regarding the cognitive factors associated with AVID?

Themes/ Trait	Characteristics	Description	Evidence & Sub-Categories
Academic Experience and Growth	Importance of AVID	AVID as a foundation for academic success, support for college preparation, and goal setting. AVID played a significant role in academic journey, providing resources, guidance, and support for college preparation	"AVID was the foundation for everything I learned" "I feel like AVID just really prepared me and to look at what I wanted in college, what I wanted to do because compared to my other friends who weren't in AVID, they were completely lost on things like the college application process."
	Development of Study Habits	AVID helping with organization, time management, and study habits AVID helped develop effective study habits, note-taking skills, and time management strategies emphasized how AVID taught them valuable study habits and skills that they continue to use in college. These habits have contributed to their academic success.	"I did a lot of reading different articles and breaking them down in AVID." "AVID helped me learn how to study, take notes, and manage my time" "AVID... taught me how to take notes, and how to effectively study for tests" "AVID helped with note-taking, organization, critical thinking skills, and study groups for each class."

	Persistence and Motivation	Growth in confidence, learning strategies, and self-advocacy	"My confidence has grown tremendously... I've learned to self-advocate"
		Improved attitude towards learning, academic abilities, understanding of grades, GPA, and critical thinking development	"Now I understand the importance of my GPA, my class rank, and my grades"
		student mentioned that participating in AVID helped them grow academically and personally. They learned to set high expectations for themselves and developed the skills needed to reach their potential.	"AVID helped me be more confident and resourceful, as well as teach critical thinking skills to others."
		spoke about the resilience they gained from AVID. The program taught them to persevere and stay motivated, even when facing challenges.	
AVID Teacher Influence and support	Supportive Environment	The AVID program provided a supportive environment, with dedicated teachers, who played a significant role in guiding and mentoring students throughout their high school years. Ms. Chapman, the AVID teacher, had a significant impact on student academic	"My AVID teacher, I love her. I really liked the way she had set up her AVID class because it was very like, oh, you know, deadlines by this applied like those many colleges."
			"My teachers have been my mentors, my coaches, my confidants"

| | | success. She created an environment that fostered growth and helped students stay on track with their goals.

Teachers as mentors, providing guidance, support, and encouragement

Positive impact of teachers, who provided academic guidance, emotional support, and encouragement

The teacher influence and support theme highlights the vital role that dedicated and passionate educators play in students' lives, particularly in programs like AVID. They inspire, guide, and support students on their academic journey, helping them achieve their goals and prepare for future success.

The interviewee was partnered with a core content teacher who helped them with short and long term goals for college and researched colleges and universities. AVID provided assistance with | "Teachers... were always there for me, academically and emotionally"

"Ms. Williams, my AVID teacher, was a helpful resource."

"I remember having her and just feeling really encouraged about my education because it was like, she was so passionate about it that it made me want to be passionate about it."

It's like she saw potential in all of us and she knew like, if you just push yourself, you can get there. |
|---|---|---|---|

		college and career development, including skills like note taking and socializing.	
	Influence on College and Career development	The AVID teacher helped the student become better prepared for college by guiding them through the application process and teaching them valuable skills for their future academic endeavors.	"I feel like she just really prepared me and to look at what I wanted in college, what I wanted to do because compared to my other friends who weren't in AVID, they were completely lost on things like the college application process." "I learned the importance of filling out FAFSA for financial aid." "AVID helped me research universities and build a 3D model of the career I wanted. I chose [the university] due to financial situation, environment, and diversity."

RQ2: What are the perceptions of first-generation minority college students regarding the social factors associated with AVID?

Themes/ Trait	Characteristics	Description	Evidence & Sub-Categories
Student Groups	Communication (peer support)	The interviewee was part of the National Honor Society and Student Council and had supportive teachers and advisors in high school.	"Our class would focus on days where we could work on college applications or even recieve help for FAFSA. It was so helpful when teachers dedicated that time

		Value of connecting with other first-generation students, supportive friendships, and networking Valued social aspect of AVID, bonding with other first-generation students, forming supportive friendships The student highlighted the importance of the AVID community, which provided a sense of belonging and camaraderie. This peer support helped them stay motivated and focused on their academic goals.	for us." "Connecting with other first-generation students... really gave me a sense of belonging" "I was able to bond with others who were just like me, other first-generation students" "I joined several student groups at [the university], including LHSU, Sigma Lambda Gamma sorority, and National Residence Honors."
Cultural Values	Educational Legacy	older cousin in pursuing college education	"She is actually becoming a nurse and It was inspiring that she really set her mind to be what she wanted to be."
	Family Influence	The interviewee did not have any family or friends who were part of the AVID program, but relied on cousins for college advice.The interviewee was interested in pre-med since a young age, and their family influenced their decision to enroll in college. AVID helped	"She is actually becoming a nurse and It was inspiring that she really set her mind to be what she wanted to be." "I learned a lot about my college and career options from my cousins who were older and had graduated from college."

		with college preparation and navigating the college environment, including financial aid. Family support and encouragement to continue education, motivation from personal experiences and growth Role of family, friends, and AVID teacher in motivating them to continue education and pursue goals	"My family always told me to keep going and never give up" "My family has always been my biggest support system"
	Expectations		"I did not have much exposure to college and didn't think I would want to go"

RQ3: What are the perceptions of first-generation minority college students regarding the institutional factors associated with AVID?

Themes/ Trait	Characteristics	Description	Evidence & Sub-Categories
College Transition Challenges	Campus Culture	Difficulties adjusting to college life, time management, and finding balance Struggles with adjusting to college life, studying, and engaging in college-level lectures My biggest challenge was being isolated from family and home.	"The biggest challenge was balancing my time, figuring out how to live on my own" "I feel like in high school, the teachers really look out for you and all that... But in college, the professor kind of just sees you as another student." The interviewee

		The student mentioned that AVID helped them feel more prepared for college by teaching them about time management, organization, and study habits. This support made the transition to college smoother and less overwhelming. The interviewee's biggest challenge was feeling included on campus, especially as a commuting student. The student discussed some challenges they faced, such as balancing their time between schoolwork, extracurricular activities, and their personal life. However, they credited AVID with providing them the tools to overcome these challenges and achieve success in college.	struggled with feeling included on campus but found friends in pre-med classes. They did not participate in many social support activities.
	Curriculum and Instruction	Struggles with adjusting to college life, studying, and engaging in college-level lectures	"At first, it was hard to adjust to college-level lectures" "I struggled with a conceptual economics class in college."
	Academic Advising		

| | Importance of resources and support in college | Access to resources, opportunities for growth and success, importance of guidance and support in college

Accessibility of academic resources, support from institution, faculty, and staff, benefits of Honors College and research

The significance of having access to resources and support through AVID, such as tutoring, mentorship, and college counseling. These resources played a crucial role in their academic success and college readiness. | "Student groups provided a sense of belonging and mentorship opportunities."

"I feel at least like the McNair Scholars Program, it really helps me unite with other groups of people who both have a vision of going into graduate school and doctorate school."

"Access to resources and support is crucial for first-generation students"

"There are so many resources available at at the university that help me succeed"

"I used resources such as academic advising and financial aid sessions at the university." |

Appendix E: IRB Approval Letter

IRB #: IRB-2022-25
Title: Outcomes of AVID Mentoring on Retention Rate for Second-Year, First-Generation Minority Students at Public Universities
Creation Date: 9-6-2022
End Date:
Status: Approved
Principal Investigator: Nisha Mathews
Review Board: ACU IRB
Sponsor:

Study History

Submission Type	Review Type	Decision
Initial	Exempt	Exempt