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FORM OF SOCIAL CAPITAL**

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AN EXPLORATORY CASE STUDY: WRITING CENTER USAGE AS A FORM OF
SOCIAL CAPITAL

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
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ABSTRACT

AN EXPLORATORY CASE STUDY: WRITING CENTER USAGE AS A FORM OF SOCIAL CAPITAL

Aisha Wilson-Carter

Ensuring success in higher education among underrepresented students is vital to social equity. The current study seeks to discover the relationships between writing center usage, engagement, and social capital acquisition among underrepresented student populations. The current research contextualizes interaction and engagement opportunities for underrepresented students by drawing on multidisciplinary theoretical frameworks to consider the influence of writing center usage in relationship to social capital gains in the context of a large, private suburban university. The related literature and concepts in the fields of interaction, engagement, and social capital ultimately link to writing centers, writing center work, and underrepresented student populations. The purpose of this study is to identify if and how writing centers leverage students' social capital through social and academic engagement. The student experiences described and analyzed in this study speak directly to how writing center work is perceived and utilized among underserved, underrepresented student populations, and how the interactions and engagement that happen during writing center appointments contribute to social capital attainment.

The results of this study found that the writing center and the services and relationships fostered through writing center work are a valuable resource for underrepresented student populations. Writing centers contribute to and leverage existing

social capital through social and academic engagement. Most students developed skills pertinent to their academic and social growth, which increased with usage. Although students only initiated visits to get help with a singular assignment, the activities and resources utilized during appointments were beneficial to students' holistic writing process at the college-level. Students and administrators indicate that faculty and program requirements are essential to students' decision-making process for their initial visit to the writing center and a factor in their decision to make subsequent appointments.

DEDICATION

First, and foremost, this is dedicated to God, he has ordered my steps and gave me the drive and strength to persevere daily. This dissertation is also dedicated to Jemel, my amazingly supportive husband, for being my rock and understanding how important reaching this milestone was even when I grew weary; and to my beautiful children, Kingston and London, for being the light of my life and incredibly resilient throughout the entire process. This work is also dedicated to my mother for her unconditional love and support, and my father for the belief that I can dream big dreams; and to family and friends for lifting me up in prayer, the constant encouragement, and all-around razzle and dazzle. This research was inspired by the wonderful colleagues and friends I've met during my professional journey across multiple institutions, who encouraged and invested in me over the years. I thank you all for reminding me that I belong in this space. Finally, I must thank Dr. Parnter for her incredible mentoring, guidance, and expertise and my dissertation committee for their time and knowledge in and outside of class.

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CHAPTER 1

Offering access to postsecondary education to diverse generations of nontraditional students has been a goal for many of the institutions across the country, and approaching that goal involves addressing multiple needs. However, most professionals in higher education will readily agree that as the landscape of enrollment changes, student retention has increasingly become a major concern for institutions. Where this agreement usually ends, however, is on the question of how to best provide academic support for newly enrolled students with varying skills, knowledge, and backgrounds. A large body of research has demonstrated that a lack of core academic skills, specifically writing, can negatively impact graduation rates, especially among minority and low-income students (Beaufort, 2007; Brickey, 2013; Martinez et al., 2011). Academic success depends on many internal and external factors: one of the most relevant for students is their writing proficiency (Beaufort, 2007; Villalon & Calvo, 2011).

Proficiency in writing is vital to student success because so many disciplines rely on written communication to determine students' analytical, comprehension, and content knowledge capabilities. Hence, writing is a core skill needed to be successful in college as it crosses over most disciplines. On the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) 2011 writing test, 73% of 12th grade students performed at average or below-average, which indicates that students are entering college unprepared for the rigor of academic writing (Sacher, 2016). Moreover, the National Center for Education Statistics has shown that 37% of 12th grade students in the United States are reading and writing at

a fourth- or fifth-grade level (2019). Consequently, most institutions of higher learning rely on writing centers to provide the type of one-on-one assistance students need to develop adequate writing skills; thus, the centers are uniquely positioned to build social capital by assisting students with a core competency needed to be successful throughout their academic career.

The writing center site is an academic support service offering varying types of assistance, such as tutoring, mentoring, and workshops, by trained undergraduate, graduate, and faculty professionals. The What Works in Student Retention (WWISR) survey identifies tutoring as the only measure “with incidence rates of 90% or more across institutional types (public, private, and two-year) and was the only learning assistance program listed in the top three in terms of perceived effectiveness across institutional types” (Habley et al., 2010, p. 270). Nevertheless, it cannot be assumed that all learning centers are meeting students’ needs just by existing. In most support services, measuring effectiveness is usually centered on usage and some form of a student satisfaction survey. Writing center research, specifically, lacks the understanding of why some students choose to frequent the writing center, and some students do not, based on their actual experiences with the writing center. There is not enough focus on discovering the truly effective aspects of writing center work that are most effective for traditionally marginalized student populations (Salem, 2016; Trosset, Evertz, & Fitzpatrick, 2019).

Frankly, writing centers have long struggled to convince their stakeholders, and sometimes even themselves, that what they do with writers is effective because few academic support environments are rigorously involved in assessment and evaluation

efforts. This single case study provides an in-depth examination of under-resourced students' experiences that will help fill this gap in writing center research. Writing center scholars have recognized that their standard assessment techniques (student satisfaction, students' self-reported learning outcomes, writers' confidence levels) do not necessarily establish the role of writing centers in student engagement and overall student success (Trosset et al., 2019). While there is much research that attempts to discover attitudes and existing social and cultural capital that led students to seek out academic support, there is far less on the population of students who visit the writing center only once, and on discovering why they do not return (Salem, 2016; Trosset et al., 2019). This lack of research indicates a need to understand the perceptions of traditionally underserved student populations who have used the writing center, a population likely to benefit from the services if provided as intended.

This study sought to describe traditionally underrepresented students' experiences with the writing center and how they impacted their usage habits. Blake and Moore "identified key features of academic success of underrepresented and underprepared students," and reveals "pre-existing as well as institutional barriers to student academic achievement" (Duranczyk et al., 2004, p. 64). In other words, identifying and mitigating any institutional barrier is crucial to academic success for all students, especially underrepresented student populations. First-generation college students (FGCS), English language learners, and minority students from underserved districts are among the highest population of students who are not retained and do not persist to college graduation. First-generation college students are more likely to come from low-income backgrounds,

with 27% coming from households making \$20,000 or less and 50% from households making between \$20,001 and \$50,000, as compared to 6% and 23% of continuing generation students (Redford & Hoyer, 2017). Socio- economic status, race, and ethnicity can be barriers to equitable access to information and support because customarily, the distribution of resources benefits populations with higher social capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Understanding specific student populations' experiences with the writing center may reveal initiatives, pedagogies, and practices that attribute to social capital and make students want to return and those that dissuade students' engagement with the center. Therefore, this study focused on underrepresented student populations who were introduced, encouraged, and, in some cases, required to utilize writing center services. The links connecting academic and social engagement, student experiences, writing center work, and social capital acquisition in the writing center served as the linchpins of this study.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to identify if and how writing centers increase or leverage social capital through social and academic engagement. The research sought to document and understand the differences in experiences, if any, among student usage based on writing center experiences, specifically students who were underrepresented at Sunrise X University, a large private institution in the Northeast. As previously established, writing center usage increases engagement, and many traditionally underrepresented students, who are formally introduced to the writing center, visit at least once; some decide to come back, while others do not. What needs to be uncovered is

how, if at all, does the engagement that occurs at the writing center contribute to social capital by understanding the factors that impacted students' decisions to return, have multiple appointments, or to never return. By understanding student perceptions, stakeholders will be able to implement effective strategies, initiatives, and resources aimed at increasing social capital in traditionally underrepresented student populations through skill attainment, and social and academic engagement, thus increasing their completion rates.

Theoretical Framework

We can better understand how academic engagement and increased social capital are connected to writing center usage among underrepresented student populations by viewing student experiences through the lens of Vincent Tinto's Interactionalist theory (1993). Tinto's theory on student departure has many adaptations (1975, 1988, 1993), which all work to identify predictive factors of student success related to the level of integration and engagement experienced by students (Braxton & Hirschy, 2004). This study concentrated on the various types of integration and academic engagement that occurred through writing center usage. Tinto (1993) argues that there are four primary conditions needed for integration and engagement to occur: expectations, support, feedback, and involvement (Tinto, 1993).

This study worked on the assumption that writing centers aim to provide the type of integration and engagement as defined by Tinto (1993), which is necessary for students to persist (Eodice et al., 2016; Salem, 2016; Trosset et al., 2019). The study also acknowledged that the four conditions needed for integration and engagement are

elements of social capital in an academic setting (Bourdieu, 1986, Schulz et al., 2017; Tinto, 1993). Equally important is Bourdieu's (1997) theory of social capital to shed light on what students indicate as the forms of capital leveraged during writing center visits. The significance of social support and social capital in student success has been well documented (Hurd et al., 2018). Within higher education, social support are the different types of assistance provided by various sources inside and outside of the educational institution, and social capital are the advantages students have through their social support networks (Bourdieu, 1986, Schulz et al., 2017). The lack of institutional opportunities that contribute to social capital has been branded a contributing factor to lower persistence rates among underserved student populations, who are often under-prepared and belong to traditionally marginalized groups (Brown et al., 2016; Engle & Tinto, 2008).

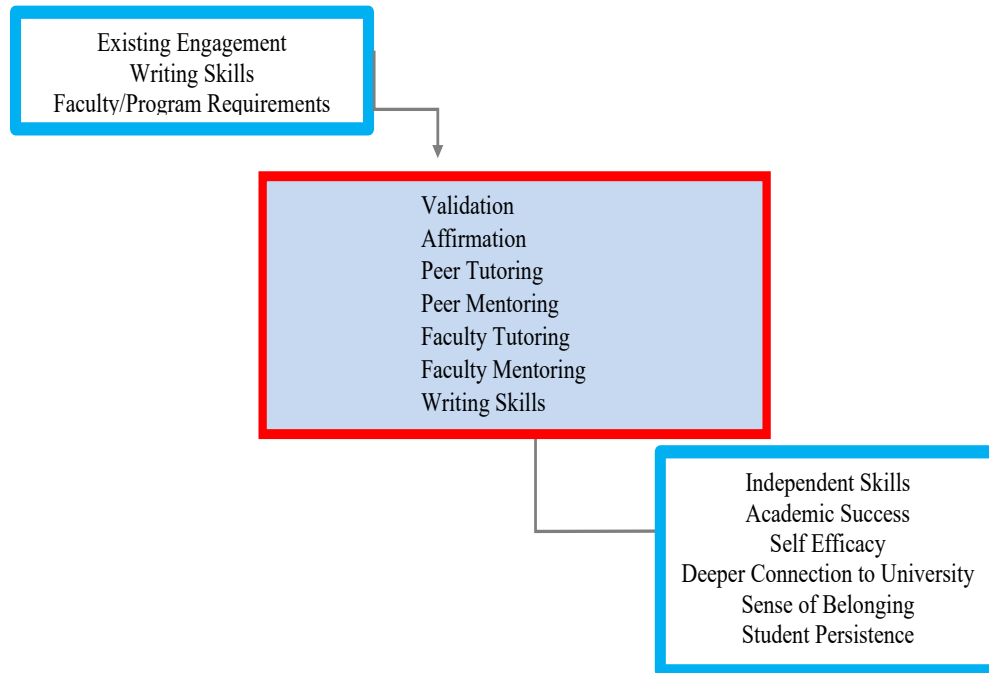
Social class mobility for underrepresented student populations attending college is a phenomenon that researchers commonly link to the availability of social capital at the institution (Perna & Thomas, 2008). Yosso (2005) argued that the academic and social outcomes of lower class and/or people of color are rooted in these groups' is not necessarily the "lack" of capital they enter the institution with that is necessary for social mobility. From this perspective, institutions must have the networks and resources in place to build the type of capital necessary for academic success and beyond. Academic social capital acquisition can be described as the "longitudinal process that occurs because of the meaning's individual students attribute to their interactions with the formal and informal dimensions of a given college or university" (Seidman, 2005, p. 67). The

meanings students attribute to their interaction, in this case, was described by their experiences, specifically uncovering why students who belong to the FGCS affinity learning community or the Elevate scholars academic program chose to visit the writing center, and the factors that attributed to their usage habits thereafter.

Based on the few significant writing center studies in this area, it is apparent that writing center work does not always deliver an equitable level of integration and engagement for traditionally underrepresented student populations, thus impacting their social capital acquisition (Eodice et al., 2016; Salem, 2016; Trosset et al., 2019). With that said, this study sought to contribute to the growing body of research that examines the effectiveness of writing center work for traditionally marginalized student populations by specifically studying how academic engagement happened and was perceived for students interacting at one writing center and, thus, if and how those interactions contributed to social capital acquisition in underrepresented student populations.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework



Documenting and analyzing student perceptions about their interactions with the writing center brought to light more substantial connections among writing center usage, academic engagement, and social capital acquisition. Understanding these connections can lead to better support services and interventions offered by the writing center and provide a framework that writing center stakeholders can use to describe and measure their role within the institution. Together with the theoretical framework, the conceptual framework was used to document students' experiences and the overall impact their interactions with the writing center had on their engagement and social capital acquisition.

Significance of the Study

It has been reported that many academic support tutors and administrators are unfamiliar with how to best support student populations who enter with characteristics aligned with most FGCS and Elevate program participants. Traditionally, underrepresented student populations depend on integration and engagement to be successful and persist (Tinto, 2006). Institutions are also responsible for building networks and providing services that help students build social capital (Bourdieu, 1986, Schulz et al., 2017; Tinto, 1993). The study moves past evaluating the educational decision making of student populations who may enter with non-traditional social capital, and who may be less privileged and more at-risk. Alternatively, this study shifted focus to those students' perceptions of the services provided at a prominent academic support service, the writing center. For writing centers, specifically, more research needs to be done to capture what is being done, how well it is being done, and how can the services be tailored to students' needs (Eodice et al., 2016; Salem, 2016; Trosset et al., 2019). The significance of this study sought to answer pressing questions about the effectiveness of writing center engagement and the impact it had on social capital for underrepresented student populations.

Consequently, this study sought to identify why underrepresented student populations chose to visit the writing center and why some chose to come back, by documenting their experiences. This study can serve as a road map for writing centers that wish to connect their work to the larger goals and mission of their school by implementing effective strategies, techniques, and practices that serve the broader college

community, especially those students at a higher risk of not persisting. More broadly, this study can assist academic support leaders in implementing specific initiatives and strategies that better serve traditionally underrepresented student populations.

Connection to the Social Justice Mission in Education

This study is premised on the mission to provide access and equity to all students seeking a degree. It also addressed issues of institutions' abilities not only to attract traditionally marginalized student populations, but to retain them as well. In essence, "Equal access to and retention in higher education irrespective of socioeconomic status, race, ethnic identity, religion, disability, age, home language, sexual orientation, and gender have not been achieved" (Duranczyk et al., 2004, p. 8). For stake holders, such as academic support directors, tutors, and administrators, breaking down institutional barriers for all students is imperative if we hope to live up to our lofty promises to students. Highlighting student perceptions and narratives about their experiences with the writing center is one such way we can assess, evaluate, and make necessary modifications to pedagogy and practices to better serve students who have been traditionally marginalized on college campuses.

Research Questions

Research Question One:

How do students describe using the services available at the writing center?

- a. How, if at all, do students describe the engagement (expectations, support, feedback, and involvement) that happens in the writing center?

- b. How, if at all, do students describe the skills, resources, and relationships obtained during writing center visits?

Research Question Two:

How do students describe their decision to continue or not to continue using the services available in the writing center?

- a. How, if at all, do students describe the academic and social skills they develop during writing center appointments?
- b. How, if at all, do students describe the resources and support obtained during writing center visits?

Research Question Three:

How, if at all, do administrators describe the role of the writing center as it relates to supporting their student population?

- a. How, if at all, do administrators describe the engagement (expectations, support, feedback, and involvement) that happens in the writing center?
- b. How, if at all, do administrators describe the skills, resources, and relationships students obtain during writing center visits?

Design and Methods

Qualitative methods are used to gain a deeper understanding of the perceptions of people regarding a particular phenomenon, and qualitative research is described as collecting data from a variety of resources, evaluating the data, analyzing evaluations to produce findings, and presenting the findings (Yin, 2014; Creswell, 2015). This research was an exploratory single case study because it sought to understand underrepresented

student populations' perceptions of academic engagement that happened during writing center visits and the factors that influenced their decisions to continue with writing center appointments, which ultimately affects their social capital acquisition. Furthermore, this was an exploratory case study because it studied the aspects of writing center work that contributed to social capital by analyzing student experiences (Yin, 2014; Creswell, 2015; Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

Content analysis and semi-structured interviews were conducted and recorded with FGCS and Elevate program participants and administrators. The data gathered were then coded, analyzed, and triangulated looking for commonalities and themes. The role the writing center plays in the programs was evaluated by analyzing websites and other promotional material, as well as speaking with program administrators. Documenting how academic support is introduced and promoted to underrepresented student populations is important because the institution has committed to helping students leverage and build social capital by offering academic and social support services, one of which is the writing center. Data collected from students informed the researcher of the aspects of writing center work that helped to build social capital and allowed the researcher to uncover both effective and ineffective engagement techniques and strategies. It was also important for the researcher to understand the program administrators' perception of the writing center. The little research that exists indicates that students' writing center usage habits are based on faculty mandates or encouragement, perceived scope of usefulness, stigmatization, nondirective tutoring style, and time management (Eodice et al., 2016; Salem, 2016; Trosset et al., 2019). Students

may be reporting their writing center experiences back to program administrators, which could influence the overall perception of the writing center for both students and administrators. Data collected helped the researcher understand how administrators valued the writing center and its role within their respective programs.

The participants in the study were all students enrolled in Sunrise X University, a large private suburban university in New York state. The selection process was not random. The sampling was purposive; all participants were selected because they belonged to the FGCS affinity group or enrolled in the Elevate program during the Fall 2017 through Fall 2020 academic year. Additionally, participants were also students who had at least one appointment. There was no intervention or treatment needed for the study (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

Definition of Terms

Social Capital. The connections, resources, environment, and social obligations that contribute to educational expectations and attainment that individuals develop over a lifetime (Bourdieu, 1997). Social capital is defined as the information, skills, resources, and support one is able to gain or leverage through the relationships built while attending college (Cardak et al., 2015).

Social and Academic engagement. The four primary conditions needed for engagement to occur: expectations, support, feedback, and involvement (Tinto, 1993).

Usage habits. The frequency in which students visited the writing center for appointments either virtual, in-person, or at a tutoring event.

CHAPTER 2

Chapter One established the need for more research in the area of writing center work and how they serve underrepresented student populations. Thus, a useful way to describe writing center work is to determine how, if at all, does the engagement that occurs at the writing center contribute to social capital by understanding the factors that impacted students' decision to initiate their first visit and their usage habits thereafter. This chapter will review the related literature in the fields of interaction, engagement, and social capital, ultimately linking those concepts to the four major themes that emerged in the literature: writing centers, writing center work and underrepresented student populations, engagement and capital in the writing center, and engagement and capital for underrepresented students. Tinto's theory of interactionist theory (1993) and Bourdieu's (1997) theory of social capital offer the framework in which underrepresented students' usage and experiences at the writing center will be explored.

Theoretical Framework

As outlined in the previous chapter, the current study used Tinto's theory of interactionist theory (1993) and Bourdieu's (1997) theory of social capital. We can better understand how engagement, academic success, and increased social capital are connected to writing center usage among underrepresented student populations by viewing student experiences through the lens of Tinto's interactionist theory (1993). Within the literature on student disengagement in higher education, Tinto's interactionist theory on student departure (Braxton & Hirschy, 2004) emerges as the most prominent. Tinto's theory has many adaptations (1975, 1988, 1993), which all work

to identify predictive factors of student success related to the level of integration and engagement experienced by students and advance the notion that students need to integrate and engage both socially and academically to persist to graduation. He argued that there are four primary conditions needed for engagement to occur: expectations, support, feedback, and involvement (Tinto, 1993). There is quite a bit of research that proves that writing centers are uniquely positioned to meet all four criteria (Barkley, 2010; Carda et al., 2015, Salem, 2016, Tinto, 2006).

First-year, non-traditional students, and the decision to continue to their sophomore year of college has been studied by many researchers. Gilardi & Gugliemetti's (2011) applied interactionist theory in their study of first-year, non-traditional students, and the decision to continue their one-year retention rates. The researchers found that the most influential risk for nontraditional students in higher education were the challenges of integrating non-traditional students into university culture. They concluded that the relationships among engagement, social integration, and persistence were the factors that mattered most for non-traditional students (Gilardi & Gugliemetti, 2011). The challenges of integrating non-traditional underrepresented students into university culture to improve retention is fundamental (Gilardi & Gugliemetti, 2011). Integration and engagement are said to matter most in the critical first year of college (Tinto, 2006). The ongoing question is "how to make involvement matter, which is to say how to make it happen in different settings (e.g., non-residential institutions) and for differing students (e.g., commuting students who work) in ways that enhance retention and graduation" (Tinto, 2006, p. 4).

Tinto's Interactionalist framework posits that students enter college with a variety of characteristics and skills that can be modified as students engage and interact within the institution. Students' commitment to the school, persistence, and academic success increases or decreases based on their interaction and engagement. Tinto theorized that increasing social and academic integration will lead to increased commitment and motivation to persist (Harper & Quaye, 2009). The theoretical framework focuses on the experiences a student has with aspects of the institution, like learning communities and academic support services, and found that the decision to persist was based on these experiences, especially in students first year of college (Harper & Quaye, 2009; Tinto, 1993). Specifically, underrepresented students who are unfamiliar with the college community and expectations, and are from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, have higher grades and are more social if they engage and interact with faculty and peers (Aljohani, 2016; Harper & Quaye, 2009; Tinto, 1993).

Although Tinto's interactionalist theory (1993) is significant in the ongoing conversation about student departure, Tinto (2006) recognizes that it does not do much to identify what is working or how to solve the issues that lead to departure:

Leaving is not the mirror image of staying. Knowing why students leave does not tell us, at least not directly, why students persist. More importantly it does not tell institutions, at least not directly, what they can do to help students stay and succeed. In the world of action, what matters are not our theories per se, but how they help institutions address pressing practical issues of persistence. (Tinto, 2006 p. 4)

Hence, understanding student departure is essential, but in this climate, it may be more important to redirect our attention to understanding how interactions and engagement translate into capital. Stakeholders need to have a grasp on curriculum and pedagogical practices that work well for students and why they work in order to implement a model of institutional action for student success (Tinto, 2006). Assessing initiatives and programs designed to increase retention is detrimental to student success.

Integration and engagement as factors of academic success can be better evaluated and specified when examined under the scope of Bourdieu's (1997) theory of social capital. There are diverging definitions of social capital within academic literature. The value and definition are an evolving framework (Bourdieu, 1997; Putnam, 2000). Bourdieu (1997) defines social capital as the connections and social obligations that individuals develop over a lifetime and any deficits in social capital led to low educational expectations and attainment, specifically for low income, first-generation college students, minority, and other traditionally marginalized student populations (Bourdieu 1997). A qualitative study conducted by Dowd et al. (2013) examined the role of institutional agents in promoting the successful transfer of low-income students, students of color, and/or first-generation students from a community college to selective four-year colleges. The authors found institutional agents, particularly four-year college faculty members, were instrumental in providing a sense of psychological security and validation through their relationship with these students, which in turn supported students' formation of an "elite" academic identity (Dowd et al., 2013).

Writing centers are inhabited by institutional agents at all levels including administrators, faculty, graduate, and undergraduate tutors. Institutional agents can be defined as individuals who have status, authority, and access to resources within institutions, such as teachers, advisors, and tutors; they “transmit directly, or negotiate the transmission of, institutional resources and opportunities” (Stanton-Salazar, 1997, p. 6). Stanton-Salazar (1997) used social and cultural capital theory to conceptualize social networks within educational institutions. They found that these networks and resources converge to impact racial/ethnic minority students’ educational trajectories. They outlined the types of institutional support that institutional agents convey, including specific funds of knowledge, connections to gatekeepers, role modeling, and emotional support. Similarly, Tinto (2012) makes the case for the utilization of writing centers as they “serve as secure, knowable ports of entry” (p. 29). Kuh et al. (2010) proposed requiring and encouraging students to engage in academic support, personal support, experiential activities and outlines the importance of writing.

Writing center work and engagement measures have intersecting qualities, such as high-quality feedback, developing essential writing skills, and empowering students to be active learners, all of which is considered capital (Barkley, 2010; Cardak et al., 2015). For the purpose of this study, social capital is defined as the information, skills, resources, and support one is able to gain or leverage through the relationships built while attending college (Cardak et al., 2015). Bourdieu (1997) attributes any underperformance of the aforementioned student populations in education to low social capital (Karimshah et al., 2013). Many researchers disagree with this assessment, claiming that students from

diverse backgrounds actually bring a wealth of social and cultural capital to the college campus (Yosso, 2005). This study did not attempt to debate this fact, and it also rejected the idea that underrepresented students are ill-equipped to develop the type of relationships and networks that assist them in achieving academic success. In contrast, the framework for this study worked under the assumption that students with high levels of social capital have more favorable educational outcomes and that it is the institution's responsibility to create networks, resources, and environments that work to increase social capital for all students.

Theoretical frameworks are essential and provide insights but exploring student experiences with services like the writing center will help practitioners achieve academic and social integration at their institution (Tinto, 2006). Furthermore, Tinto (2006) acknowledges that although there are studies that investigate practices that increase engagement, more research is needed in this particular area (Tinto, 2006). The current study explored specific learning communities, composed of many traditionally underrepresented student populations' experiences with the writing center, and sought to understand how said experiences leveraged/contributed or did not leverage/contribute to their social capital. Tinto (2006) implores that we need to know more about the nature of their experiences in both two- and four-year institutions and the ways those experiences influence persistence. This study can help develop a framework for writing centers and other student support services in higher education that would contribute to positive educational outcomes for underrepresented student populations. Probing factors that contribute to the postsecondary success of underrepresented college students provide a

useful window into how practitioners, policymakers, and higher education institutions can create equitable opportunities for underserved student populations.

Unfortunately, much of the research that exists does not efficiently offer actions, practices, or pedagogy for schools to harness and build social capital once students become a part of the college community. High school experiences and family influence the type of social capital students enter college with and offer valuable information, but “such knowledge is less useful to institutional officials because they often have little immediate control over student prior experiences or private lives” (Tinto, 2006, p. 4). Institutions have come to rely on a mix of living learning communities that embed pre-freshman summer academies and academic support for building upon existing social capital by providing resources to increase engagement and academic success. However, there is a gap in the research that addresses the connection between engagement and social capital, and ultimately how and what contributes to social capital acquisition for students who belong to living and learning communities where they have participated pre-freshman summer academies and academic support is introduced and promoted (Tinto, 2006).

Examining usage and experiences of one academic support service, the writing center, among these specific student populations through the lens of Tinto’s theory of interactionist theory (1993) and Bourdieu (1997) theory of social capital may shape administrators’ and faculties’ understanding on the subject and ultimately transfer the knowledge into actionable steps. Both constructs intersect with the research presented in the subsequent sections of the literature review to establish the relationships among

writing centers, writing center work, engagement and social capital, and traditionally underrepresented student populations.

Writing Centers

Improving writing skills has been a concern in higher education for decades. Research has found that students are sometimes ill equipped for the job market (Sacher, 2016). Writing is an important aspect of two-thirds of employees' jobs: Sacher (2016) indicates that employees often hire and promote based on writing skills. Students who do not meet writing standards upon graduation from college have a more difficult time in the job market in U.S. businesses and at a global level (Sacher, 2016).

In a 2014 study, Berrett found that an estimated 15% of the 2,200 freshmen student participants at the University of California at Los Angeles anticipated that they might need tutoring in writing. Often, students' perceptions of their own skills do not align with the data; for example, in the aforementioned study, half of the students surveyed rated their writing skills as being above average (Berrett, 2014). On the contrary, the National Center for Education Statistics shows that 37% of 12th -grade students are reading and writing at a fourth- or fifth-grade level (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.). College writing requires organization, comprehension, problem-solving, and acquiring and interpreting new knowledge (Beaufort, 2007). These skills are integrated into the fabric of most disciplines and are recurring throughout a student's academic career. If students enter college without writing strategies or lack the social capital and preparedness to attain these skills, they may not be successful in various types of writing situations (Beaufort, 2007).

Many students fail in college directly because of poor writing skills and reading and writing remain two of the three basic skills required to succeed in college. It is argued that if more adults received writing instruction that responded to their individual needs in their first year of college, they would have been retained at a higher rate (Cleary, 2012). Unfortunately, due to the landscape of higher education, specifically the slashing of full-time tenure positions and the reliance on part-time contingent faculty, especially in English and Writing departments, individualized instruction and one-on-one time a classroom instructor can give a student is severely limited.

Proper instruction, encouragement, and feedback during the writing process is necessary, especially for first-year college students in order to create an environment where they are empowered to continuously build on their writing skills (Beaufort, 2007). Griswold (2003), in a broad analysis of survey data of more than 900 institutions, found that peer tutoring is considered to be one of the most effective retention efforts, especially for traditionally underserved students. Individualized support is perhaps the most obvious benefit of tutoring in any academic setting. Success in college is contingent upon many academic factors; however, writing ability is paramount among those factors (Beaufort, 2007). The ability to write well is vital to acquiring social capital.

If writing is a core skill that many students enter college struggling with and building this skill increases students' desires to persist, then writing centers seem perfectly suited for the task. In higher education, promoting student engagement is paramount in the first year, as students are establishing a connection to their college. Rheinheimer et al. (2010) recommended that faculty promote tutoring to enhance this

connection. They argue that making the most of tutoring programs could lead to significant improvement in retention rates for more colleges and universities (Rheinheimer, et al., 2010).

The environment and support offered at writing centers can be the necessary link between writing skill attainment, providing a connection between instructor expectations, student perceptions, and social and academic engagement (Brickey, 2013). For underrepresented student populations needing to increase their social capital, effective writing centers may alleviate some of the miscommunication about writing that occurs in the classroom (Brickey, 2013). In many institutions, writing centers are an integral resource offered by academic support, regardless of institutional type. Students of all levels and skill ability choose to visit writing centers. Furthermore, frequent use of the writing center has been linked to academic attainment.

In Martinez et al.'s initial study with 344 college students, a correlation was found between increased writing skills and frequent use of the writing center (2011). The results showed that students who visited the writing center four or more times earned grades that were significantly higher than students who did not visit the writing center (Martinez et al., 2011). Conversely, Irvin's (2014) study concluded that out of 123 participants, 100% of students who frequented the writing center with three or more visits earned a grade of C or better in the course where they received tutoring. Of those students who only had one writing center appointment, 80% earned a grade of C or better. In contrast, of those students who had never visited the writing center, 56% earned a passing grade of C or better (Irvin, 2014). Clearly, writing center sessions are improving students' overall skills

and grades, and the centers themselves also increase student social engagement and capital.

Consequently, if institutions can identify why students choose to frequent writing centers or choose not to based on their experiences, writing centers and, more broadly, academic support services will be well positioned to implement effective strategies, specifically for underrepresented student populations, which is the keystone of this current study.

Writing Centers Work and Underrepresented Student Populations

In order to understand how improving writing skills translates to overall higher academic achievement, the following sections will address the work of writing centers as it relates to underrepresented student populations, engagement, and capital. Writing centers are used for various types of writing. Generally, writing centers are open to all students across all writing levels and skill sets, and students can work on any type of writing across all disciplines, including personal statements, reports, essays, and cover letters (Boquet, 1999). The most important aspect of a writing center is that students depending on the institution can work with a combination of undergraduate, graduate, and faculty tutors. The centers are sites of engagement and are ‘relaxed environments’ where students get assistance (Kuh et al., 2010, pp. 185–186; Bergmann, 2010). Research suggests writing centers not only help students with one of the fundamental academic skills essential for success but also provide a social context that increases capital and encourages persistence (Kuh et al., 2010; Bergmann, 2010).

Reinheimer and McKenzie (2011) found that, “a student who requests tutoring is more than 2.7 times as likely to be retained as a student who does not request tutoring” (p. 32). Reinheimer and McKenzie (2011) recommended that faculty promote tutoring. Their research concludes that tutoring enhances the possibility of becoming more academically and socially integrated. Their research illustrates the connection between tutoring and retention and suggests that one reason for this effect is the increased level of student engagement, conceivably resulting from the student’s relationship with a tutor. These relationships, networks, and services work together to increase capital. Reinheimer and McKenzie suggest professors and administrators encourage students to seek tutoring, “thereby assisting students to become more academically and socially integrated into the fabric of higher education” (Reinheimer and McKenzie, 2011, p. 34). Tutoring should be a crucial service utilized to increase retention rates (Reinheimer & McKenzie, 2011).

In their early years, writing centers were misinterpreted as places where tutors merely fix problems and edit assignments. Writing center pedagogy has long tried to move away from being seen as this type of remedial service. From this perspective, the school of thought is that students will not willingly choose to visit the writing center because they think it is an admission of poor writing skills. Leaving the choice to come to the writing center up to the student supports a non-remedial pedagogy (Salem, 2016). This pedagogy is in direct contrast to students who may benefit the most from writing center usage. Data from the “National Study of Developmental Education demonstrate that the presence of well-trained tutors is among the most significant elements related to student success in remedial programs” (Griswold, 2003, p. 279). Nevertheless, a non-directive and non-

evaluative approach was adopted. Non-directive tutoring is a more hands-off approach where the tutor serves as a sociable and knowledgeable guide through the writing process (Salem, 2016; Trosset et al., 2019). In contrast, directive tutoring is more instructive and hands-on, with the tutor explaining concepts and taking a more active role in guiding the discussion (Salem, 2016; Trosset et al., 2019). Amongst most writing center administrators, the goal is to encourage the process-over-product model.

Despite best efforts, many students still see the writing centers as “fix-it” shops. The question then becomes what functions of the writing center help integrate the writer both socially and academically, thus increasing user’s capital. Ultimately, a writing center is not about just producing better writing; it is about producing writers prepared to act on constructive criticism, recognize areas of improvement, and improve their writing skills and, thus, their critical thinking skills (Arbee & Samuel, 2015). Consequently, writing centers have undergone a transformation since their inception. Writing center pedagogy has refocused recently most administrators would say the goal is to improve writing skills through collaboration (Bibb, 2012; Boquet, 1999). It has been proven that writing centers can help students achieve better grades throughout their academic career (Brickey, 2013). However, for a writing center to be effective, the focus for consultations needs to remain on the student because different student populations have different needs.

There are some overlapping characteristics of students who belong to learning supportive communities, such as first-generation, academically unprepared, and from low-socioeconomic backgrounds (Barkley, 2010; Brown, 2008; Cardak et al., 2015). Writing centers are usually formally introduced to students belonging to learning

communities as a place designed to offer learning assistance to all students, and the center's place in the institution is one that promotes academic success and retention for all students (Arendale, 2007). However, using a learning assistance service like the writing center, in a higher education setting, is usually voluntary; therefore, understanding why students choose to take advantage of supplemental instruction is important if administrators wish to make meaningful contributions to students' development. Salem's (2016) quantitative study offers a comparison of the academic, attitudinal, and demographic characteristics of students who use the writing center and students who do not.

Salem (2016) makes the case for such a study based on the literature within sociology of higher education that is aimed at trying to see the "roots" of educational decisions and how those decisions are usually correlated with race, class, gender, ethnicity, and age (McDonough, 1997; Salem, 2016). Students' writing center engagement was tracked over the course of four years for 4204 students who formed the entering class of 2009 at Temple University, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Initially, the researcher collected data about the 2009 incoming freshman cohort that included prior academic performance, financial status, beliefs and preferences, and demographics, the data revealed that 22% of these students visited the writing center at least once, while the remaining 78% did not visit at all. Conclusively, the researcher acknowledges the objective of writing centers to distinguish themselves from remediation and how those objectives may alienate students who desperately need the writing center from ever going

(Salem, 2016). The researcher urges all practitioners to rethink the pedagogy and practices of writing centers.

The preferred stance of writing centers is based on not being a remedial service, but rather a place one chooses to visit. However, students who need more academic guidance are likely to be discouraged because the tutor and session do not meet their needs and expectations. The popular non-directive/non-evaluative approach can cause further alienation for some students (Salem, 2016). If we do not investigate non-users (those students who never visited or visited only once), we will continue to be at a disadvantage in understanding the effectiveness of writing center work (Salem, 2016). Writing centers inadvertently present themselves as a service not inclusive of remediation, which can have serious implications for those students who need the service the most. Salem's (2016) contribution to the field sparked a fire among writing center administrators and consultants as they were forced to rethink the very pedagogy of the discipline in relationship to its value for students.

So much of increasing social capital when it comes to utilizing tutoring services depends on pre-entry attributes of students. Often students' decisions about seeking tutoring were in place before they begin college (Salem, 2016). The non-directive/non-evaluative approach does not necessarily benefit students who need academic services. As Salem (2016) discovered, this hands-off approach benefits already-privileged students with stronger academic backgrounds and language skills. Non-directive methods are more likely to frustrate students because the tutor and session do not meet their needs and expectations. Although this study offers a comparative analysis of users and non-users

based on academic and demographic characteristics, it does not offer any direct student accounts for their experiences in the writing center. The root of effective engagement measures, ones that truly increase capital, must include first-hand accounts from the actual students deciding to interact and engage with the services, resources, programs, and communities if we hope to discover the blind spots.

Trosset et al. (2019) move the conversation further along when they tracked Carleton College's fall 2015 entry cohort of 491 first-time first-year students for two years to determine the effectiveness of frequent writing center visits and whether they help students achieve writing standards set by the institution. Input data derived from background characteristics, namely SAT and ACT English and Writing scores, ESL, low income, first generation, and student skill perception, were used; the results indicate a strong relationship between frequent writing center use and academic achievement regardless of challenge score. Fifty-three percent of the cohort never visited the writing center; 13% visited only once. Twenty percent came between two and seven times, and the remaining 14% visited eight to more than 30 times in their first two years.

Additionally, using a mixed method approach, researchers further explore the educational choice not to visit the writing center or to never return after one appointment. Attaining narrative data from students who had only one appointment but chose not to return solicits rich data that about the effectiveness of writing center pedagogy and approach. Their research also confirms and dispels many of the beliefs that writing center administrators held. Although, like many of the previous studies, their findings show that writing center usage is effective at improving student performance, for those students

who experience several challenges, the writing center is not perceived as useful to them. Trosset et al. (2019) also shed light on the need to measure what single-visit users felt about their appointment because it can help administrators and consultants focus on areas of professional development.

Equally important to note is that many writing centers discourage faculty from making writing center appointments mandatory for their courses, but students report that faculty and staff encouragement is key factor in the students' decisions to visit the writing center, which is in line with the pedagogy behind bridge programs and first-generation student initiatives. Henson and Stephenson (2009) conducted a study in which half of the students in a composition class used the writing center and the other half did not. Students who visited the center showed significant improvement in writing, but because the choice was left up to the students, there are little to no accurate measures of increased social capital through engagement and skill attainment. Conversely, interview data revealed that students choose to come to the writing center based on faculty encouragement, stigmatization, perceived scope of usefulness, nondirective tutoring style, and time management. Thus, if we know that students with more privilege and access to strong networks more readily choose to use the writing center, mandatory appointments may help close the gap when it comes to social capital for underserved student populations (Trosset et al., 2019). The student experiences described in the above studies speak directly to how writing center work is perceived and utilized among underserved, underrepresented student populations, but also how the interactions and engagement that

happen during writing center appointments persuade or dissuade students from utilizing writing center services.

Engagement and Capital in the Writing Center

Much of the literature on writing center work focuses on effective strategies among traditional students, which left a gap in literature related to effective engagement measures for non-traditional students. Writing center researchers have struggled with establishing relationships between usage and social capital gains, while attempting to apply traditional college student findings to non-traditional students. It is with this consideration that Gilardi and Gugliemetti (2011) analyzed what distinguished non-traditional students who had dropped out from those students who continued and then, replicated the same study on traditional students. Their findings revealed that fundamental variables were learning support services where higher levels of social integration were attained when using these services. For non-traditional students, the meaningfulness of the learning experience was much higher.

Comparably, Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) proposed African American students were more successful at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). The authors' research determined that minority students at predominantly white institutions felt disconnected and isolated. The study considered perceived quality of academic experience and attempted to control for differences in race and ethnicity (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Researchers concluded that when support services focused on the presence of peer groups and culture, social and academic integration improved along with persistence and retention. The central aim of all academic support

services is to deepen learning, create a deeper sense of connection among ideas and disciplines, and create a deeper sense of community. More explicitly, academic support programs aim to promote the higher level of student engagement and success that come from deeper intellectual interaction. Writing centers are well positioned to increase capital through social interaction and academic engagement for all students. Writing centers are often named as an invaluable support service that promotes healthy student engagement, especially if the center employees peer tutors (Tinto, 2012).

As previously stated, engagement measures practiced in writing center work have intersecting qualities, such as high-quality feedback, the development of essential writing skills, and the empowering of students to be active learners, which increases social capital for all students, but especially for those students traditionally underrepresented in the college community (Barkley, 2010; Cardak et al., 2015). These services are provided by instructors, academic departments, student affairs, professional and peer tutors, and online resources. Many students rely on this type of assistance, and the profound effects these services have on retention are well documented (Gilardi & Gugliemetti, 2011; Kuh et al., 2005; Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005; Pascarella et al., 2010). Therefore, it is imperative that writing center literature regarding pedagogy, services, their role in social and academic engagement, and utilization be examined to establish writing centers' status in building social capital for students, especially traditionally underrepresented students from underserved districts.

Kuh et al. (2008) contended that student perception of learning environments, institutional characteristics, student demographics, pre-college experiences, and social

and academic integration between peers and faculty were important to student success. The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) study found that schools identified student engagement as one of the primary predictors of whether students persist and achieve academic success (Kuh et al., 2005). NSSE was administered to more than one and a half million students over the past decade. College students provided information about engagement opportunities in the college environment. Students reported on the level of engagement with good practices, such as time spent collaborating with faculty and interacting with students of different racial and ethnic backgrounds (Pascarella, Seifert, & Blaich, 2010). The survey results indicate that engagements levels were determined to be surrogates for student learning (Kuh et al., 2005). Of the institutions surveyed, they considered tutoring and writing centers as among the best resources to address student needs and the institution's goals and objectives (Kuh et al., 2005). Tinto (2012) argues that "Institutions should ensure that all first-year students have the experience of learning in community with others" (p. 123). As the NSSE study illustrates, there is a missed opportunity to help student acquire the skills necessary to be successful by increasing utilization; thus, understanding how these student populations interact with and perceive writing center work in terms of building capital is a valuable endeavor.

In order to persist, students need to learn and master different tasks, experience a "sense of belonging and attachment to other people" and the institution; and finally, in control of their goals (Trevino & DeFreitas, 2014). Johnson et al. (2007) found African American, Latinx, and Asian-American Pacific students reported having a lower sense of belonging than white students. The impact of belonging for college students is

conceptualized in Tinto's (1993) integration model, which posits that the more academically and socially connected students are to the school, the more likely they are to persist. Many of these elements are accomplished through validation and affirmation, which increase overall motivation and students' will to persist (Trevino, & DeFreitas, 2014).

Writing center consultants also offer validation and encouragement through one-on-one tutoring during sessions. Validation is important for student success and a key component of social capital. "Students that are validated in the classroom or in the community, develop confidence in their ability to learn and enhanced self-worth" (Patton, Renn, et al., 2016, p. 41). Students with high levels of affirmation usually have higher self-esteem, achievement, and self-concept (Ellis et al., 2018). Minorities, specifically, can feel comfortable and a sense of belonging. Affirmation helps marginalized groups deal with and respond to discrimination and microaggressions. Overall, affirmation "promotes identity, psychosocial well-being, and fruitful college experiences for students" (Ellis et al., 2018, p. 7).

In September of 1994, Rendon conducted a study titled "Validating culturally diverse students: Toward a new model of learning and student development"; she determines that regardless of their circumstance, nontraditional students can become members of the academic and social community. Together, validation and affirmation increase social capital due to its multifaceted nature. This means that through positive interactions and engagement, validation and affirmation rise, and students who do not see themselves as "college material" can be transformed, able to wield their existing cultural

capital while building their social capital (Rendon, 1994, p. 51). Validation and affirmation cannot be achieved with one encounter, but rather with consistent social and academic engagement throughout students' academic careers (Rendon, 1994; Tinto, 2006). As previously mentioned, the writing center is one branch of academic support that students can utilize throughout their academic careers. Thus, the effectiveness of a writing center can be determined by the initiatives, pedagogy, and resources it provides that promote engagement, help students build skills, and ultimately increase their social capital.

Conversely, writing centers offer “supportive activities, supplementary to the regular curriculum, which promotes understanding, learning, and recall of new knowledge; remediation for prescribed entry and exit levels of academic proficiency; and the development of new academic and learning skills” (Arendale, 2007, p. 22), all of which increase social capital through social and academic engagement. Kuh et al. (2010) and Tinto (2012) have researched the connection between social and academic engagement and academic support services and have found that the support and learning communities that schools create to help to increase student success have a direct impact and that the more a student is engaged in these endeavors, the more likely they are to persist to graduation (Kuh et al., 2010; Tinto, 2012).

Arguably, writing centers are often named as a support service that promotes healthy student engagement, especially if the center employs peer tutors (Tinto, 2012). Tinto (2012) makes the case for the utilization of writing centers as they “serve as secure, knowable ports of entry” (p. 29). More still, Kuh et al. (2010) proposed requiring and

encouraging students to engage in academic support, personal support, and experiential activities, and outlined the importance of writing, which is why the student population is essential to this study. Underrepresented students who are unfamiliar with the college community and expectations, and are from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, have higher grades and are more social if they engage and interact with faculty and peers (Aljohani, 2016). Furthermore, their commitment to the school and academic success fluctuates based on their interaction and engagement (Tinto, 2006). Tinto acknowledges that although there are studies that investigate practices that increase engagement, more research is needed in this particular area (Tinto, 2006). By identifying effective engagement practices that contribute to students' social capital conducted in the writing center, can be uncovered.

Engagement and Capital for Underrepresented Students

Thus far, in this literature review, the importance of writing skills and the significant role of writing centers play in attaining writing skills has been established. Additionally, the literature reviewed engagement and capital as they relate to writing center work and their relationship to underrepresented students, eventually focusing on the role of tutoring and writing center usage. Subsequently, the literature will explore ways in which academic support services and initiatives attempt to increase engagement and capital for traditionally underrepresented student populations,

Academic support encompasses a wide range of services, they are usually programs that offer academic skills help to all students. Recently, they were defined as “supportive activities, supplementary to the regular curriculum, which promotes

...understanding, learning, and recall of new knowledge; remediation for prescribed entry and exit levels of academic proficiency; and the development of new academic and learning skills.” (Arendale, 2007, p. 22). When we look closely at these programs, they are essentially retention endeavors. Gibson and Slate (2010) conducted a survey of 40,000 community college students. The researchers reported statistically significant findings that indicated non-traditional first-year students engaged in more educationally purposeful activities and had higher levels of engagement based on quality of relationships at college than traditional first-year students (Gibson & Slate, 2010). The authors indicated that non-first generation, first-year students displayed significantly higher levels of engagement in educationally purposeful activities than first-generation, first-year students. Yet, when the authors analyzed community colleges in Texas, it was determined that first-generation, first-year students had higher levels of engagement associated with quality of relationships with faculty, administrative personnel, and other students at the institution.

Although the traditionally underserved may not instinctively pursue support, when they do, they take advantage of useful and effective support services and networks that increase their capital within the institution. Most learning assistance services and programs offer academic support primarily in the form of tutoring to all full- and part-time college-credit and developmental students. Tutoring services usually include one-on-one appointment tutoring, walk-ins, study groups, at-a-distance tutoring, computer-aided instruction, and learning strategies development. Student participation in most tutoring environments is voluntary. In learning communities designed for

underrepresented student populations, such as bridge programs and first-generation student programs, tutoring services like the writing center are promoted and encouraged to increase social capital by way of skill building and engagement.

Regarding the current study, the FGCS and Elevate Scholars' learning communities were composed of many traditionally underrepresented students, who had a higher chance of not persisting, and both programs demonstrate that writing was detrimental to student success. Both Elevate Scholars and FGCS were more likely to come from low-income backgrounds and identify as racial or ethnic minorities and were among the highest population of students who were not retained and did not persist. There were several major reasons for this failure to persist; they were not entering college with the academic skills needed to be successful, they never felt a sense of belonging and community, and they were sometimes stigmatized because of assumptions about their socioeconomic status or race (Attewell, 2006; Managan, 2015; Mathews, 2015).

Many non-traditional students share the same challenges and experiences that colleges try to mitigate with learning communities, specifically ones that incorporate summer provisional admission initiatives and educational support entities (Winograd, Verkuilen, Weingarten, & Walker, 2018). For underrepresented student populations, a bridge program or pre-freshman summer program can increase their social capital and engagement before their first semester began. Students in a Bridge to Academic Excellence, a 6-week summer bridge program that targets low-income, academically underprepared, ethnically and culturally diverse students, were studied, using alternative assessment of academic support programs (Bruch, 2011). The study reveals the

importance of early intervention opposed to reactive measures (Bruch, 2011). Because these type of learning communities encompass a large majority of underrepresented students, participants often find themselves unable to perform academically and to acclimate to the college environment due to a lack of social capital. The crux of these programs aims to leverage students' social capital, to improve access and support, social integration, highlight professor expectations, introduce support services, offer guidance, and promote retention among historically underrepresented students (Brown, 2008; Friedlander et al., 2007).

However, this does not always result in students' persistent engagement with support services, specifically the writing center, over a prolonged period, particularly in their first year when these relationships hope to be established. As previously stated, writing proficiency is often a determining factor in students' academic success, thus writing centers are, at the very least, promoted during onboarding of student participants in supportive learning communities. Although this study did not wish to assess the value of either the FGCS or Elevate scholars learning communities, it did seek to learn more about the role of academic support, specifically writing center usage, within these programs. Thus, the following section focuses on the literature in similar communities with comparable populations, programs, and goals.

Loy Lytle and Ralph Gallucci (2015) published two consecutive papers examining the University of California, Santa Barbara's Freshman Summer Start Program. The purpose of their study was to evaluate the impact of a summer bridge program, the Freshman Summer Start Program (FSSP), at the University of California,

Santa Barbara (UCSB), on student participants. The goal of FSSP was to assist incoming, first-time students both academically and socially as they transition to college life. Lytle and Gallucci (2015) point to literature that highlights challenges of similar summer bridge programs. Barefoot et al. (2012) report that 29% of colleges and universities offering summer bridge programs define them as open to all students, but the majority of students who actually enroll in these programs are from historically marginalized populations. Combined, this embedded single case study, magnified the benefits of a financially self-supporting summer bridge program and detailed valuable lessons learned. Lytle and Gallucci (2015) evaluated enrollment data, student surveys, and financial performance data to determine the effectiveness of the FSSP. The researchers prove that academic programs offered to students before their first year of college improved student expectations, built a sense of community, improved college readiness, and overall enhanced retention, graduation, and faculty interactions (Lytle & Gallucci, 2015).

This program funded by student fees aims at helping incoming students make a smooth academic and social transition by exposing students to residence life, credit-bearing courses, academic skills enrichment, workshops and tutoring, and engaging social and recreational activities. The study advanced the understanding that student experiences are critical for first-year students developing academic aptitude and building social capital. Conversely, Cabrera et al. (2013) framed their research according to Waxman et al. (2003) who defines academic resilience as, “students who persevere in school despite adverse circumstance” (as cited in Cabrera et al., 2013, p. 484). This study assessed the impact of the University of Arizona’s New Start Summer Program (NSSP)

on participants' first-year GPA and retention, controlling for incoming student characteristics. To paint a complete picture in their assessment, they further framed the project based on O'Connor (2002), criticism of resilience scholarship for insufficiently accounting for social structures that contextualized resiliency and offered the concepts of constraint and opportunity (Cabrera et al., 2014). Basic descriptive statistics were run to determine how NISSP participants in the sample compared to non-NISSP participants. The variables were low-income, first-generation college students, and racial minority students labeled by the UA as 'at-risk' of dropping out, high school performance, and included measures of student participation in campus activities. NISSP participation was a significant and positive predictor of both first-year retention and GPA after controlling for background characteristics.

Therefore, it was determined that participation in NISSP positively impacted academic performance and persistence above and beyond demographic characteristics and high school preparation predictors of first-year GPA and retention. Hence, their study "analyzes adverse circumstances that can impede student success (constraint/risk), as well as campus structures (opportunity) and perceived self-efficacy (resilience) that can lead to increased academic performance and Persistence" (Cabrera et al., 2014, p. 484). These data helped them effectively compare eligible students who participated in the program to eligible students who did not participant; it is this comparison that the current study sought to further explore by documenting student experiences with the writing center.

The literature suggests that increased persistence, academic achievement, retention, and degree attainment are indirectly connected to tutoring (Beaufort, 2007; Cleary, 2012; Rheinheimer et al., 2010;). Theorists argue that these connections are due to the fact that tutoring increases self-efficacy and social capital by enhancing mastery of subject matter (Beaufort, 2007; Cleary, 2012; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Rheinheimer et al., 2010). Rheinheimer et al. (2010) found that tutoring has a positive impact on persistence, increased retention, and overall academic performance in their longitudinal study. The research was conducted at a public university in Pennsylvania on a sample of 129 at-risk students (economically and academically disadvantaged) enrolled in a state funded program aimed at providing support services. Their purpose was to identify the impact the Act 101 program had on participants receiving tutoring (Rheinheimer, et al., 2010). The researchers found that tutoring has a positive impact on persistence, increased retention, and overall academic performance. It was concluded that at-risk students need to be encouraged and empowered to utilize tutoring early in their academic career (Rheinheimer, et al., 2010).

The foundation of tutoring practices is to meet students where they are and to teach them the techniques and tools essential to becoming independent learners able to apply newly acquired strategies across all disciplines and beyond their academic careers. Moreover, comprehensive bridge programs can be the early intervention needed to draw at-risk students into the college community and help establish connections that promote student persistence, retention, and degree attainment. Besides the standard measures of

academic performance, retention, the study attempted to establish a correlation between frequency of tutoring and academic success (Rheinheimer, et al., 2010).

As demonstrated, the commonality in all of the aforementioned programs and services studied is the prominent role of interaction, engagement, and academic support. The most prevalent theme among the research is proving the effectiveness of academic support programs and how usage is directly connected to retention. Many institutions view retention and persistence as the bottom line, perhaps because so many elements depend on positive retention rates. Often, colleges and universities that can afford to be more selective during enrollment tend to have high graduation rates and students who are more academically prepared. However, this is not always the case, and the question remains: How can we build social capital in students? Initial interactions with underrepresented student populations include programs, communities, and initiatives specifically designed for them.

Writing centers are often seen as the resource to help students understand instructor expectations, student perceptions, and improve writing skills (Brickey, 2013). Students of all levels and skill ability choose to visit writing centers. The decision to seek support is an educational choice, and at-risk student populations often do not enter with the type of social capital and networks that make seeking out academic support intrinsic, nor, as the literature suggests, particularly worthwhile (Salem, 2016; Trosset et al., 2019).

However, for the FGCS and Elevate scholars' learning communities, students are seemingly introduced to services such as the writing center; hence, if they have at least one appointment, but decide not to return, it is worth discovering why. In the same vein,

using a learning assistance service in a higher education setting is usually voluntary; therefore, understanding effective strategies that encourage students to take advantage of supplemental instruction and how writing center usage impacts engagement and social capital acquisition is important.

Conclusion

Much of the relevant research in this review illustrates a relationship among writing center usage, engagement, and social capital. The current study explored the specific role of the writing center in building social capital for underrepresented student populations, and how student experiences in the writing center determined usage. The current study acknowledged the need for a more comprehensive case study that includes qualitative assessment to answer these pressing questions. Examining one-year retention among writing centers was useful, but just like usage reports, numbers alone did not tell the whole story. A student could have come several times a week, without indicating skills they were learning or capital they were building.

The tendency to simply count sessions, combined with institutional anxieties over retention led to a flat narrative of usage (Eodice, Geller, & Lerner, 2016). While this usage description was part of assessment, there was a narrative behind these numbers that writing center administrators can also tell to demonstrate the center's role in student retention through engagement. This study both condoned and extended writing centers' desire to demonstrate their impact in a way that moves beyond "counting beans" (Eodice et al., 2016). The current study also recognized the link between of interaction, engagement, social capital, and writing centers, as key indicators of student achievement.

This study can be replicated by other writing centers and/or academic support centers that want to investigate how their services contribute to social capital attainment. It is important that all students have the same access and support they need to be successful. Therefore, it is up to all academic support programs to render the best services possible by continuously evaluating effectiveness and make meaningful improvements.

CHAPTER 3

In the previous chapters, the rationale for the current study was discussed, framed by a review of the theoretical framework and related literature. The purpose of this study was to identify if and how the social and academic engagement provided by the writing center contributed to FGCS and Elevate program participants' social capital. It sought to understand what factors influenced students' decisions to use writing center services based on their experiences. Chapter Three is an overview of the qualitative, exploratory single case study research approach and design, and the methods, procedures, and ethical considerations for this study's data collection and analysis.

After careful consideration of a variety of methodological approaches for this research, an exploratory single case study design was adopted (Yin, 2009). This study sought to “develop an in-depth understanding of a single case or explore an issue or problem using the case as a specific illustration” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 96). This exploratory single case study interviewed both students and administrators about their experiences with the writing center and sought to understand students' usage habits based on their experience. This study utilized a qualitative case study design, which Yin (2018) called “an empirical method that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the ‘case’) in depth and within its real-world context” (p. 15). According to Creswell and Poth (2018), a single-case study design was appropriate for this study because the researcher explored a real-life case throughout “detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information” (p. 96). This methodology was appropriate because it helped to explain why students' usage habits (Baxter & Jack, 2008). It also explained what students gain

from writing center visits that contributed to their decision to come back for subsequent appointments (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The unit of analysis will be the role of writing center services on FGCS and Elevate program students. Consequently, three research questions enabled the researcher to explore the potential contributions writing center usage had on students' engagement and social capital acquisition.

Research Questions

Research Question One:

How do students describe using the services available at the writing center?

- a. How, if at all, do students describe the engagement (expectations, support, feedback, and involvement) that happens in the writing center?
- b. How, if at all, do students describe the skills, resources, and relationships obtained during writing center visits?

Research Question Two:

How do students describe their decision to continue or not to continue using the services available in the writing center?

- a. How, if at all, do students describe the academic and social skills they develop during writing center appointments?
- b. How, if at all, do students describe the resources and support obtained during writing center visits?

Research Question Three:

How, if at all, do administrators describe the role of the writing center as it relates to supporting their student population?

a. How, if at all, do administrators describe the engagement (expectations, support, feedback, and involvement) that happens in the writing center?

b. How, if at all, do administrators describe the skills, resources, and relationships students obtain during writing center visits?

Setting

Sunrise X University is a large private suburban university in New York state. The university enrolled 10,444 total students, 6,120 of whom were undergraduates as of January 2022 across multiple schools, including liberal arts, business, medical, and law. The university enrolled a total of 1,629 and 1,390 first time, first-year students in the Fall 2019 and 2020 semesters, respectively. Of students enrolled in 2019, 8% were Black, 9% Asian/Non-Hispanic, 14% Hispanic/Latino, 7% Other: in Fall 2020, 41% of students self-reported as students of color. In 2020, the average incoming GPA (the variable Sunrise X University correlates most with student success) is 3.73. Additionally, 32% of the entering first-year class, in schools that ranked, graduated in the top 10% of their class, and 61% were in the top 25% of their high school class. The one-year retention rate for the full-time, first-year entering class of 2019 was 82%. The four-year graduation rate stands at 55%, which increases to 65% by the six-year reporting period.

The researcher belongs to the Sunrise X University community as an adjunct professor and faculty tutor in the writing center. The writing center has a physical space

located in the Writing Studies department, it offers in person and real time virtual appointments. Half of the Spring 2020 semester, and all of Summer 2020, and Fall 2020 semester appointments were online due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The site is considered a peer tutoring center as most tutors are undergraduate students who are required to take a writing center pedagogy course taught by the writing center director, prior to working. The center also employs graduate students and faculty tutors. Although it has in the past, currently, the center does not employ any Elevate scholar or FGCS undergraduate students as peer tutors. The center had 3434 appointments from fall 2019 through spring 2020 and saw 904 clients; 438 of those clients only had 1 appointment, 170 had 2 appointments, and 296 had 3 or more appointments. Out of 3434 appointments, 1322 were with freshman students, a total of 418 clients; 378 appointments with sophomore students, a total of 131 clients, 243 appointments with juniors, a total of 93 clients; and 343 seniors, a total of 88 clients, the remaining appointments were with graduate students and alumni.

Participants

The selection process was not random. The sampling was purposive; all participants were selected because they were students enrolled in the FGCS or Elevate program learning communities between fall 2019 and fall 2021 academic year. Purposeful sampling deliberately attained specific insight from a particular group of students and program directors (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher interviewed 8 students currently enrolled at Sunrise X University who self-selected to participate in this study. Out of those 8 students, 3 were first-generation college students. Another 3

students were Elevate Scholars and the remaining 2 were both Elevate Scholars and FGCS students who did not participate in FGCS learning community and events. Two administrators were interviewed, the assistant director of the Elevate Scholars program, and the committee chair of the FGCS living and learning community. This group was critical to the study because the students represented traditionally underrepresented student populations who were formally introduced to all academic support services during onboarding. In qualitative research, the conventional way of selecting settings and individuals is “purposeful sampling,” when specific settings, participants, and activities are selected deliberately “in order to provide information that cannot be gotten as well from other choices” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 88). Purposeful sampling was utilized to ensure the subset included students with different usage habits. Purposeful sampling was vital to this study as it sought to understand the usage habits of FGCS and Elevate student participants (Creswell, 2015). The sample also included the FGCS program director and the Elevate program director; the administrators’ perspectives were critical to the study as it sought to understand the role of the writing center within their respective programs.

The writing center director, and both the FGCS and Elevate program directors, demonstrated interest in the study and agreed to work with the researcher upon IRB approval. The gathered data supported two units of analysis, administrators, and students (Yin, 2018).

Table 1

Study Participants

Student	Role	Usage	Program
Chanelle	Student	23	First Generation
Helen	Student	14	Elevate scholar
Samantha	Student	2	Elevate scholar
Alyssa	Student	3	First Generation
Jessica	Student	1	Elevate scholar
Lanee	Student	2	First Generation & Elevate
Michele	Student	2	First Generation & Elevate
Isabelle	Student	1	First Generation

Virtual semi-structured interviews were conducted and recorded with students and administrators over a 6-month period. Both faculty and students were asked to volunteer to participate in the study. Interviews lasted 40-60 minutes and took place at participants convenience over zoom. After the interviews were completed, they were run through Otterai., a transcription software. The computer program Dedoose was used to organize and code.

The data gathered from the semi structured interviews was first coded using structural coding (Saldaña, 2015). Structural coding was used to initially categorize the answers given as they relate directly to the research questions (Saldaña, 2015). Once the data was initially coded, it was recoded using pattern coding. Pattern coding was used as a secondary coding process to look for common themes in the data (Saldaña, 2015). The

researcher noticed that pattern coding did not adequately identify themes, and thus another round of coding was conducted. Values coding was used as a third round of coding to examine a participant’s perspectives and values. Out of the 58 codes created; 3 themes emerged.

Table 2

Themes and Subthemes connected to theory and interview and research questions

Theme	Sub Theme	Theory	Interview Question	Research Question
Expectations	Academic Worthiness	Interactionalist Theory Bourdieu Theory of Social Capital	1,2,3,4,5	1, 2, 3
Usefulness of Visits	Just in time support Skill Attainment	Interactionalist Theory Bourdieu Theory of Social Capital	3,5,6,7,8	1, 2, 3
Longevity of Impact	Faculty/Program Requirements Sense of Belonging	Interactionalist Theory Bourdieu Theory of Social Capital	4,5,6,7,8,9	1, 2, 3

Data was gathered during an academic year when the institution, writing center services and modality had been drastically altered by the restrictions in place due to the coronavirus pandemic that began in March of 2020. The researcher recognized and anticipated the challenges of studying the student experiences rooted in interaction and engagement. The present study was limited by the pandemic, as connections to students were difficult to make and maintain, which impacted finding students willing to participate. Despite these challenges, the researcher was able to gain significant insight into the student experiences with the writing center pre pandemic and during the

shutdown. The majority of the data came from interviews; however, content analysis data were valuable because they provided further understanding of the type of support the students received from their respective programs.

Data Collection Procedures

This single-case study sought to understand the factors that influence students' decisions to continue to use writing center services based on their experiences. It also helped identify if and how the social and academic engagement provided by the writing center contributed to FGCS and Elevate program participants social capital acquisition. Yin (2009) asserts that a protocol increases the reliability of a case study and considers it desirable for single case studies. Interviews of the student and program administrators at Sunrise X University, and content, such as program descriptions, mission statements, and goals and objectives found on the websites were used for document analysis in this study (Whitt, 2001; Bowen 2009). The following procedures outline the data collection process for the current study.

Protocols

Students and administrators answered semi-structured interview questions. Both protocols answered the research questions as they are open-ended, allowing both students and administrators to speak open and honestly (Yin, 2009). The protocol asked about the students' writing center appointments and the relationship each program has with the writing center. Protocols were reviewed by faculty and administrators to establish that they met research requirements. Protocol questions were drawn from the literature and theoretical frameworks. A semi-structured interview protocol was used; they were single,

focused, and open-ended, including a few major questions and follow up questions to obtain detailed and in-depth answers (Seidman, 2013). The semi-structured interviews allowed for an open conversation guided by a set of case-specific questions developed by the researcher; interviews lasted approximately 40–60 minutes, which is within the timelines supported by the literature (Yin, 2009).

Semi-Structured Interview Student Protocol

This protocol was used to interview students on the skills, resources, and support they did or did not receive from the writing center and what factors contributed to their decision to continue or not to continue to utilize writing center services. It allowed students to answer candidly to gain their perspective.

In the beginning of the interview, participants received a link to a brief questionnaire that ask what they learned during their writing center visits, including about the skills, if any, they worked on and what, if anything, they learned during their writing center visits. The semi-structured interview consisted of 10 interview questions based on the students' experiences with the writing center and directly related to research questions one and two. Questions three, four, eight, and nine potentially spoke to where students perceive they were as they began their interaction with the writing center and what they perceived they were able to gain after their interactions. Although these questions did not explicitly use the language from the theoretical framework, they were designed to elicit responses that helped in describing the impact the writing center had on students in relation to engagement and social capital. Each question aligned with the literature and aimed to gain the students' perceptions on whether or not their needs were met as it

relates to their expectations, method of tutoring, the skills they attain, and the support, feedback, and resources they received during writing center appointments; and how those factors impacted their decision to continue using the writing center.

Tables 3 and 4 in Appendices D and E illustrate the alignment of the interview questions to the research questions, relevant literature, and the theoretical framework.

Table 3

Relationship of the Research Questions to the Literature Based Student Protocol

Interview Question 1	How did you first learn about the writing center?
Research Question	R2
Subtopic & Literature Engagement and Capital – Writing Center	Barkley, 2010; Cardak et al., 2015; Patton et al., 2016; Pascarella et al., 2010
Engagement and Capital - Underrepresented Students	Arendale, 2007; Attewell, 2006; Brown, 2008; Friedlander et al., 2007; Gibson & Slate, 2010; Managan, 2015; Mathews, 2015
Theory & Literature	Tinto Interactionalist Theory, 1993; Tinto, 2006; Gilardi & Gugliemetti, 2011
Interview Question 2	Think back, what made you decide to make an appointment at the writing
Research Question	R2
Subtopic & Literature Writing Centers	Berrett, 2014; Beaufort, 2007; Griswold, 2003
Engagement and Capital - Underrepresented Students	Arendale, 2007; Attewell, 2006; Brown, 2008; Friedlander et al., 2007; Gibson & Slate, 2010; Managan, 2015; Mathews, 2015
Theory & Literature	Tinto Interactionalist Theory, 1993; Tinto, 2006; Gilardi & Gugliemetti, 2011
Interview Question 3	Think back to your first appointment, can you describe how you felt during your first appointment?
Research Question	R1
Subtopic & Literature Engagement and Capital - Underrepresented Students	Arendale, 2007; Attewell, 2006; Brown, 2008; Friedlander et al., 2007; Gibson & Slate, 2010; Managan, 2015; Mathews, 2015
Theory & Literature	Tinto Interactionalist Theory, 1993; Tinto, 2006; Gilardi & Gugliemetti, 2011; Bourdieu Social Capital, 1997; Dowd et al., 2013; Stanton-Salazar, 1997
Interview Question 3a	Were you comfortable, anxious, excited?
Research Question	R1a
Subtopic & Literature Engagement and Capital – Writing Center	Barkley, 2010; Cardak, Bowden & Bahtsevanoglou, 2015; Patton et al., 2016; Pascarella et al., 2010
Writing Center Work- Underrepresented Students	Griswold, 2003; Martinez et al., 2011; Salem, 2016; Trosset et al., 2019
Theory & Literature	Tinto Interactionalist Theory, 1993; Tinto, 2006; Gilardi & Gugliemetti, 2011

Interview Question 3b	Did the tutor make you feel comfortable, anxious, excited?
Research Question	R1b
Subtopic & Literature Writing Centers	Berrett, 2014; Beaufort, 2007; Griswold, 2003
Writing Center Work Engagement and Capital – Writing Center	Griswold, 2003; Martinez et al., 2011; Salem, 2016; Trosset et al., 2019
Theory & Literature	Bourdieu Social Capital (1997); Dowd et al., 2013; Stanton-Salazar, 1997
Interview Question 4	What were your expectations and were they met? Can you provide an example?
Research Question	R1
Subtopic & Literature Writing Center Work Engagement and Capital – Writing Center Engagement and Capital -Underrepresented Students	Griswold, 2003; Martinez et al., 2011; Salem, 2016; Trosset et al., 2019 Barkley, 2010; Cardak et al., 2015; Patton et al., 2016; Pascarella et al., 2010 Arendale, 2007; Attewell, 2006; Brown, 2008; Friedlander et al., 2007; Gibson & Slate, 2010; Managan, 2015; Mathews, 2015
Theory & Literature	Tinto Interactionalist Theory, 1993; Tinto, 2006; Gilardi & Gugliemetti, 2011; Bourdieu Social Capital, 1997; Dowd et al., 2013; Stanton-Salazar, 1997
Interview Question 5	What type of skills if any have you learned during your interactions with the writing center? Can you provide an example?
Research Question	R2
Subtopic & Literature Writing Center Work Engagement and Capital – Writing Center	Griswold, 2003; Martinez et al., 2011; Salem, 2016; Trosset et al., 2019 Barkley, 2010; Cardak, Bowden & Bahtsevanoglou, 2015; Patton et al., 2016; Pascarella et al., 2010
Theory & Literature	Tinto Interactionalist Theory (1993); Tinto, 2006; Gilardi & Gugliemetti (2011) Bourdieu Social Capital (1997); Dowd et al., 2013; Stanton-Salazar, 1997
Interview Question 5a	Did the tutor help you understand the expectations of your assignment, professor, academic writing?
Research Question	R2a
Subtopic & Literature Writing Center Work Engagement and Capital – Writing Center	Griswold, 2003; Martinez et al., 2011; Salem, 2016; Trosset et al., 2019 Barkley, 2010; Cardak et al., 2015; Patton et al., 2016; Pascarella et al., 2010
Theory & Literature	Tinto Interactionalist Theory, 1993; Tinto, 2006; Gilardi & Gugliemetti, 2011
Interview Question 5b	What was the most useful activity you did with your tutor?
Research Question	R1a
Subtopic & Literature Writing Center Work Engagement and Capital – Writing Center	Griswold, 2003; Martinez et al., 2011; Salem, 2016; Trosset et al., 2019 Barkley, 2010; Cardak et al., 2015; Patton et al., 2016; Pascarella et al., 2010
Theory & Literature	Bourdieu Social Capital (1997); Dowd et al., 2013; Stanton-Salazar, 1997

Interview Question 5c	Did the sessions make you feel more confident in your writing skills?
Research Question	R2b
Subtopic & Literature Writing Center Work Engagement and Capital – Writing Center	Griswold, 2003; Martinez et al., 2011; Salem, 2016; Trosset et al., 2019 Barkley, 2010; Cardak et al., 2015; Patton et al., 2016; Pascarella et al., 2010
Theory & Literature	Tinto Interactionalist Theory, 1993; Tinto, 2006; Gilardi & Gugliemetti, 2011; Bourdieu Social Capital, 1997; Dowd et al., 2013; Stanton-Salazar, 1997
Interview Question 5d	Did the tutor assist you in understanding your professor’s feedback?
Research Question	R2b
Subtopic & Literature Writing Center Work Engagement and Capital – Writing Center	Griswold, 2003; Martinez et al., 2011; Salem, 2016; Trosset et al., 2019 Barkley, 2010; Cardak et al., 2015; Patton et al., 2016; Pascarella et al., 2010
Theory & Literature	Bourdieu Social Capital (1997); Dowd et al., 2013; Stanton-Salazar, 1997
Interview Question 5e	Did they teach you a specific skill, and/or advice/direction?
Research Question	R2a
Subtopic & Literature Writing Center Work Engagement and Capital – Writing Center	Griswold, 2003; Martinez et al., 2011; Salem, 2016; Trosset et al., 2019 Barkley, 2010; Cardak et al., 2015; Patton et al., 2016; Pascarella et al., 2010
Theory & Literature	Bourdieu Social Capital, 1997; Dowd et al., 2013; Stanton-Salazar, 1997
Interview Question 6	What was it about your writing center experience that made you decide to return, or not to return for subsequent appointments?
Research Question	R2
Subtopic & Literature Writing Center Work Engagement and Capital – Writing Center Engagement and Capital -Underrepresented Students	Griswold, 2003; Martinez et al., 2011; Salem, 2016; Trosset et al., 2019 Barkley, 2010; Cardak et al., 2015; Patton et al., 2016; Pascarella et al., 2010 Arendale, 2007; Attewell, 2006; Brown, 2008; Friedlander et al., 2007; Gibson & Slate, 2010; Managan, 2015; Mathews, 2015
Theory & Literature	Bourdieu Social Capital, 1997; Dowd et al., 2013; Stanton-Salazar, 1997
Interview Question 6a	For example, was it the staff, the relationships, the environment, they method of tutoring?
Research Question	R2b
Subtopic & Literature Writing Center Work Engagement and Capital – Writing Center Engagement and Capital -Underrepresented Students	Griswold, 2003; Martinez et al., 2011; Salem, 2016; Trosset et al., 2019 Barkley, 2010; Cardak et al., 2015; Patton et al., 2016; Pascarella et al., 2010 Arendale, 2007; Attewell, 2006; Brown, 2008; Friedlander et al., 2007; Gibson & Slate, 2010; Managan, 2015; Mathews, 2015
Theory & Literature	Bourdieu Social Capital, 1997; Dowd et al., 2013; Stanton-Salazar, 1997

Interview Question 6b	Was there anything you wanted to do or discuss that you didn't?
Research Question	R2b
Subtopic & Literature Writing Center Work Engagement and Capital – Writing Center	Griswold, 2003; Martinez et al., 2011; Salem, 2016; Trosset et al., 2019 Barkley, 2010; Cardak, Bowden & Bahtsevanoglou, 2015; Patton et al., 2016; Pascarella et al., 2010
Engagement and Capital -Underrepresented Students	Arendale, 2007; Attewell, 2006; Brown, 2008; Friedlander et al., 2007; Gibson & Slate, 2010; Managan, 2015; Mathews, 2015
Theory & Literature	Bourdieu Social Capital 1997; Dowd et al., 2013; Stanton-Salazar, 1997
Interview Question 7	Over time, have you developed any academic skills that can be attributed to your interactions with the writing center? Can you provide an example?
Research Question	R1
Subtopic & Literature Engagement and Capital – Writing Center	Barkley, 2010; Cardak et al., 2015; Patton et al., 2016; Pascarella et al., 2010 Arendale, 2007; Attewell, 2006; Brown, 2008; Friedlander et al., 2007; Gibson & Slate, 2010; Managan, 2015; Mathews, 2015
Engagement and Capital -Underrepresented Students	
Theory & Literature	Tinto Interactionalist Theory, 1993; Tinto, 2006; Gilardi & Gugliemetti, 2011
Interview Question 8	Over time, have you learned anything during writing center visits that help you navigate the college experience? Can you provide an example?
Research Question	R2
Subtopic & Literature Writing Center Work Engagement and Capital – Writing Center	Griswold, 2003; Martinez et al., 2011; Salem, 2016; Trosset et al., 2019 Barkley, 2010; Cardak et al., 2015; Patton et al., 2016; Pascarella et al., 2010 Arendale, 2007; Attewell, 2006; Brown, 2008; Friedlander et al., 2007; Gibson & Slate, 2010; Managan, 2015; Mathews, 2015
Engagement and Capital -Underrepresented Students	
Theory & Literature	Bourdieu Social Capital, 1997; Dowd et al., 2013; Stanton-Salazar, 1997
Interview Question 8a	Have you built any relationships?
Research Question	R2b
Subtopic & Literature Writing Center Work Engagement and Capital – Writing Center	Griswold, 2003; Martinez et al., 2011; Salem, 2016; Trosset et al., 2019 Barkley, 2010; Cardak et al., 2015; Patton et al., 2016; Pascarella et al., 2010 Arendale, 2007; Attewell, 2006; Brown, 2008; Friedlander et al., 2007; Gibson & Slate, 2010; Managan, 2015; Mathews, 2015
Engagement and Capital -Underrepresented Students	
Theory & Literature	Tinto Interactionalist Theory, 1993; Tinto, 2006; Gilardi & Gugliemetti, 2011; Bourdieu Social Capital, 1997; Dowd et al., 2013; Stanton-Salazar, 1997
Interview Question 8b	Did your tutors make you feel like you or your work was being validated?
Research Question	R2b
Subtopic & Literature Writing Center Work Engagement and Capital – Writing Center	Griswold, 2003; Martinez et al., 2011; Salem, 2016; Trosset et al., 2019 Barkley, 2010; Cardak et al., 2015; Patton et al., 2016; Pascarella et al., 2010 Arendale, 2007; Attewell, 2006; Brown, 2008; Friedlander et al., 2007; Gibson & Slate, 2010; Managan, 2015; Mathews, 2015
Engagement and Capital -Underrepresented Students	
Theory & Literature	Bourdieu Social Capital, 1997; Dowd et al., 2013; Stanton-Salazar, 1997

Interview Question 8c	Did you learn anything that you applied to other disciplines and situations?
Research Question	R2b
Subtopic & Literature Writing Center Work Engagement and Capital – Writing Center Engagement and Capital -Underrepresented Students	Griswold, 2003; Martinez et al., 2011; Salem, 2016; Trosset et al., 2019 Barkley, 2010; Cardak et al., 2015; Patto et al., 2016; Pascarella et al., 2010 Arendale, 2007; Attewell, 2006; Brown, 2008; Friedlander et al., 2007; Gibson & Slate, 2010; Managan, 2015; Mathews, 2015
Theory & Literature	Bourdieu Social Capital, 1997; Dowd et al., 2013; Stanton-Salazar, 1997
Interview Question 9	Did you see your tutor as an authority figure, expert, peer, mentor, etc.? Explain?
Research Question	R1b
Subtopic & Literature Writing Center Work Engagement and Capital – Writing Center	Griswold, 2003; Martinez et al., 2011; Salem, 2016; Trosset et al., 2019 Barkley, 2010; Cardak et al., 2015; Patton et al., 2016; Pascarella et al., 2010
Theory & Literature	Tinto Interactionalist Theory, 1993; Tinto, 2006; Gilardi & Gugliemetti, 2011; Bourdieu Social Capital, 1997; Dowd, Pak, & Bensimon, 2013; Stanton-Salazar, 1997

Semi-Structured Interview Administrator Protocol

This protocol was used to interview administrators on what they think the role of the writing center was within their programs and how their students reported back about their experiences with the writing center. It allowed administrators to answer candidly to gain their perspective.

The semi-structured interview consisted of five questions. This protocol directly related to all three research questions, aiming to answer them from the administrators' perspective. Each question aligned with the literature and aimed to gain the administrator's perspective on whether or not the writing center met expectations as it related to method of tutoring; the skills attained; the support, feedback, and resources provided; and how those factors impacted the ways in which administrators promoted the writing center to their students.

The following figure is a visual depiction of the relationship of the research questions to the literature and theoretical framework.

Table 4*Relationship of the Research Questions to the Literature Based Administrator Protocol*

Interview Question 1	Tell me about your program.
Research Question	R3
Subtopic & Literature	Barkley, 2010; Cardak et al., 2015; Patton et al., 2016; Pascarella et al., 2010;
Engagement and Capital – Writing Center	
Engagement and Capital - Underrepresented Students	Attewell, 2006; Brown, 2008; Cabrera et al., 2014; Friedlander et al., 2007; Lytle & Gallucci, 2015; Managan, 2015; Mathews, 2015; Winograd et al., 2018
Theory & Literature	Tinto Interactionalist Theory, 1993; Tinto, 2006; Gilardi & Gugliemetti, 2011; Bourdieu Social Capital, 1997; Dowd et al., 2013; Stanton-Salazar, 1997
Interview Question 2	What would you say is the biggest concern for your students?
Research Question	R3a &b
Subtopic & Literature	Attewell, 2006; Brown, 2008; Cabrera et al., 2014; Friedlander et al., 2007; Lytle & Gallucci, 2015; Managan, 2015; Mathews, 2015; Winograd et al., 2018
Engagement and Capital - Underrepresented Students	
Theory & Literature	Tinto Interactionalist Theory, 1993; Tinto, 2006; Gilardi & Gugliemetti, 2011; Bourdieu Social Capital, 1997; Dowd et al., 2013; Stanton-Salazar, 1997
Interview Question 3	What role does the writing center have in supporting the students in your community?
Research Question	R3
Subtopic & Literature	Berrett, 2014; Beaufort, 2007; Griswold, 2003
Writing Centers	Barkley, 2010; Cardak et al., 2015; Patton et al., 2016; Pascarella et al., 2010
Engagement and Capital – Writing Center	
Engagement and Capital - Underrepresented Students	Attewell, 2006; Brown, 2008; Cabrera et al., 2014; Friedlander et al., 2007; Lytle & Gallucci, 2015; Managan, 2015; Mathews, 2015; Winograd et al., 2018
Theory & Literature	Tinto Interactionalist Theory, 1993; Tinto, 2006; Gilardi & Gugliemetti, 2011; Bourdieu Social Capital, 1997; Dowd et al., 2013; Stanton-Salazar, 1997
Interview Question 3a	What do you want your students to gain from writing center appointments?
Research Question	R3a&b
Subtopic & Literature	Berrett, 2014; Beaufort, 2007; Griswold, 2003; Attewell, 2006; Brown, 2008;
Writing Centers	Cabrera et al., 2014; Friedlander et al., 2007; Lytle & Gallucci, 2015; Managan, 2015; Mathews, 2015; Winograd et al., 2018
Engagement and Capital - Underrepresented Students	
Theory & Literature	Tinto Interactionalist Theory, 1993; Tinto, 2006; Gilardi & Gugliemetti, 2011; Bourdieu Social Capital, 1997; Dowd et al., 2013; Stanton-Salazar, 1997

Interview Question 3b	What impact do you think it has on students' engagement (expectations, support, feedback, and involvement) with the college?
Research Question	R3a
Subtopic & Literature	
Engagement and Capital – Writing Center	Barkley, 2010; Cardak et al., 2015; Patton et al., 2016; Pascarella et al. 2010
Engagement and Capital - Underrepresented Students	Attewell, 2006; Brown, 2008; Cabrera et al., 2014; Friedlander et al., 2007; Lytle & Gallucci, 2015; Managan, 2015; Mathews, 2015; Winograd et al., 2018
Theory & Literature	Tinto Interactionalist Theory, 1993; Tinto, 2006; Gilardi & Gugliemetti, 2011
Interview Question 3c	What impact do you think it has on students' academic achievement (skills and resources)?
Research Question	R3b
Subtopic & Literature	
Engagement and Capital – Writing Center	Barkley, 2010; Cardak et al., 2015; Patton et al., 2016; Pascarella et al., 2010
Engagement and Capital - Underrepresented Students	Attewell, 2006; Brown, 2008; Cabrera et al., 2014; Friedlander et al., 2007; Lytle & Gallucci, 2015; Managan, 2015; Mathews, 2015; Winograd et al., 2018
Theory & Literature	Tinto Interactionalist Theory, 1993; Tinto, 2006; Gilardi & Gugliemetti, 2011; Bourdieu Social Capital, 1997; Dowd et al., 2013; Stanton-Salazar, 1997
Interview Question 3d	Would you say your students frequent the writing center?
Research Question	R3
Subtopic & Literature	
Writing Center Work	Griswold, 2003; Martinez et al., 2011; Salem, 2016; Trosset et al., 2019
Engagement and Capital – Writing Center	Barkley, 2010; Cardak et al., 2015; Patton et al., 2016; Pascarella et al., 2010
Engagement and Capital - Underrepresented Students	Attewell, 2006; Brown, 2008; Cabrera et al., 2014; Friedlander et al., 2007; Lytle & Gallucci, 2015; Managan, 2015; Mathews, 2015; Winograd et al., 2018
Theory & Literature	Tinto Interactionalist Theory, 1993; Tinto, 2006; Gilardi & Gugliemetti, 2011; Bourdieu Social Capital, 1997; Dowd et al., 2013; Stanton-Salazar, 1997
Interview Question 4	How does your program promote, require, and/or encourage the utilization of academic support services?
Research Question	R3
Subtopic & Literature	
Writing Center Work	Griswold, 2003; Martinez et al., 2011; Salem, 2016; Trosset et al., 2019;
Engagement and Capital - Underrepresented Students	Attewell, 2006; Brown, 2008; Cabrera et al; 2014; Friedlander et al., 2007; Lytle & Gallucci, 2015; Managan, 2015; Mathews, 2015; Winograd et al., 2018
Theory & Literature	Tinto Interactionalist Theory, 1993; Tinto, 2006; Gilardi & Gugliemetti, 2011
Interview Question 4a	How do you promote use of the writing center to your students?
Research Question	R3
Subtopic & Literature	
Engagement and Capital - Underrepresented Students	Attewell, 2006; Brown, 2008; Cabrera et al., 2014; Friedlander et al., 2007; Lytle & Gallucci, 2015; Managan, 2015; Mathews, 2015; Winograd et al., 2018
Theory & Literature	Tinto Interactionalist Theory, 1993; Tinto, 2006; Gilardi & Gugliemetti, 2011

Interview Question 4b	What, if anything, do you tell your students about the writing center?
Research Question	R3a &b
Subtopic & Literature	
Engagement and Capital – Writing Center	Barkley, 2010; Cardak et al., 2015; Patton et al., 2016; Pascarella et al., 2010
Engagement and Capital - Underrepresented Students	Attewell, 2006; Brown, 2008; Cabrera et al., 2014; Friedlander et al., 2007; Lytle & Gallucci, 2015; Managan, 2015; Mathews, 2015; Winograd et al., 2018
Theory & Literature	Tinto Interactionalist Theory, 1993; Tinto, 2006; Gilardi & Gugliemetti, 2011; Bourdieu Social Capital, 1997; Dowd, Pak, & Bensimon, 2013; Stanton-Salazar, 1997
Interview Question 4c	Do you track utilization of academic support services?
Research Question	R3
Subtopic & Literature	
Engagement and Capital – Writing Center	Barkley, 2010; Cardak et al., 2015; Patton et al., 2016; Pascarella et al., 2010
Engagement and Capital - Underrepresented Students	Attewell, 2006; Brown, 2008; Cabrera et al., 2014; Friedlander et al., 2007; Lytle & Gallucci, 2015; Managan, 2015; Mathews, 2015; Winograd et al., 2018
Theory & Literature	Tinto Interactionalist Theory, 1993; Tinto, 2006; Gilardi & Gugliemetti, 2011
Interview Question 4d	What would you say is the most beneficial aspect of the academic support services offered by the college? Why?
Research Question	R3 a & b
Subtopic & Literature	
Writing Centers	Berrett, 2014; Beaufort, 2007; Griswold, 2003; Barkley, 2010; Cardak et al., 2015; Patton et al., 2016; Pascarella et al., 2010
Engagement and Capital – Writing Center	
Engagement and Capital - Underrepresented Students	Attewell, 2006; Brown, 2008; Cabrera et al., 2014; Friedlander et al., 2007; Lytle & Gallucci, 2015; Managan, 2015; Mathews, 2015; Winograd et al., 2018
Theory & Literature	Tinto Interactionalist Theory, 1993; Tinto, 2006; Gilardi & Gugliemetti, 2011; Bourdieu Social Capital, 1997; Dowd et al., 2013; Stanton-Salazar, 1997
Interview Question 5	What are the perceptions of the writing center among the students in your learning community?
Research Question	R3
Subtopic & Literature	
Engagement and Capital – Writing Center	Barkley, 2010; Cardak et al, 2015; Patton et al., 2016; Pascarella et al., 2010
Engagement and Capital - Underrepresented Students	Attewell, 2006; Brown, 2008; Cabrera et al., 2014; Friedlander et al., 2007; Lytle & Gallucci, 2015; Managan, 2015; Mathews, 2015; Winograd et al., 2018
Theory & Literature	Tinto Interactionalist Theory (1993); Tinto, 2006; Gilardi & Gugliemetti, (2011) Bourdieu Social Capital (1997); Dowd, Pak, & Bensimon, 2013; Stanton-Salazar, 1997
Interview Question 5a	Have you had a student discuss a memorable experience, whether positive or negative?
Research Question	R3a
Subtopic & Literature	Griswold, 2003; Martinez et al., 2011; Salem, 2016; Trosset et al., 2019
Writing Center Work	
Engagement and Capital – Writing Center	Barkley, 2010; Cardak et al., 2015; Patton et al., 2016; Pascarella et al., 2010
Theory & Literature	Tinto Interactionalist Theory, 1993; Tinto, 2006; Gilardi & Gugliemetti, 2011; Bourdieu Social Capital, 1997; Dowd etc., 2013; Stanton-Salazar, 1997

Interview Question 5b	How did you respond?
Research Question	R3a & b
Subtopic & Literature	
Writing Center Work Engagement and Capital – Writing Center	Griswold, 2003; Martinez et al., 2011; Salem, 2016; Trosset et al., 2019 Barkley, 2010; Cardak, Bowden & Bahtsevanoglou, 2015; Patton et al., 2016; Pascarella et al., 2010
Theory & Literature	
Interview Question 5c	Tinto Interactionalist Theory (1993); Tinto, 2006; Gilardi & Gugliemetti, (2011) Bourdieu Social Capital (1997); Dowd et al., 2013; Stanton-Salazar, 1997
Research Question	Has anything a student reported influenced how your program promotes or encourages students to use the writing center?
Research Question	R3a & b
Subtopic & Literature	
Writing Center Work Engagement and Capital – Writing Center	Griswold, 2003; Martinez et al., 2011; Salem, 2016; Trosset et al., 2019 Barkley, 2010; Cardak et al., 2015; Patton et al., 2016; Pascarella et al., 2010
Theory & Literature	
	Tinto Interactionalist Theory, 1993; Tinto, 2006; Gilardi & Gugliemetti, 2011; Bourdieu Social Capital, 1997; Dowd et al. 2013; Stanton-Salazar, 1997

Content Analysis Protocol

An analysis of FGCS and Elevate programs’ website content was collected to confirm and refine the case study, which included but was not limited to a review of program mission statements, orientation documents, and student handbooks. A content analysis provided background information for the study as it related to the goals and mission of the FGCS and Elevate programs (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The findings of this analysis were coded in conjunction with the semi-structured interview data. All data were coded guided by the relevant literature on academic and social integration, writing centers, and underrepresented student populations, as well as Tinto’s interactionalist theory and Bourdieu’s theory of social capital. The content analysis provided the researcher with a method for describing and interpreting the documentation pertaining to the research topic.

Table 5

Relationship of the Documents to the Literature Protocol

Document	Subtopic
Mission Statements	Engagement and Capital-Underrepresented Students
Orientation Documents	Engagement and Capital-Underrepresented Students
Student Handbooks	Engagement and Capital-Underrepresented Students
Program Description	Engagement and Capital-Underrepresented Students

Summary of Protocols

Data gathered from these protocols helped to identify how, if at all, the social and academic engagement provided by the writing center contributed to FGCS and Elevate program participants' social capital acquisition. It also provided insight into how those factors influenced students' decisions to continue to use writing center services based on their experiences.

Data Collection

IRB approval was applied for upon defense of the Dissertation Proposal and granted in April 2021. The researcher collected enrollment data during the spring 2021 semester in order to obtain descriptive statistics. Enrollment data from June 2019 through September 2020 were provided by the department of Institutional Research Academic Assessment (IRAA) at Sunrise X University. The data provided by IRAA included student ID numbers, FGCS and Elevate program participation status, and enrollment status. These data were used to identify FGCS and Elevate participants' ID numbers.

These ID numbers were filtered out, and all other student ID numbers in the common data set were discarded.

Thereafter, the researcher collected data from the writing center online appointment module from June 2019 through December 2020.

The data collected from the writing center online appointment module were cleaned to include only ID numbers and usage from fall 2019 through fall 2020. The researcher matched the selected student ID numbers from IRAA to the writing center appointment data to categorize writing center usage among FGCS and Elevate program participants. Subsequently, the researcher used the data to identify the sample group. All data provided by IRAA and the writing center were secured in a password protected file.

Upon IRB approval, in spring 2021, the researcher reached out to both students and administrators via email asking for them to participate in the study. Administrators were asked to email student orientation material upon agreeing to participate. It was explained that participation was voluntary, and that they could choose to stop participating at any time. All participants were given and asked to sign an informed consent. When students and administrators agreed to participate, the interviews were conducted virtually. Virtual interviews were recorded and conducted on the Zoom video conferencing platform at the participants' convenience. Informed consent, providing pseudonyms, and member checking ensured that participants understood the context, risks, and benefits of the study. The researcher was in a private location where the interview was not overheard by others. Data collection took two to three weeks, depending on participant availability. Data were stored on OneDrive Cloud backup on the

researcher's personal and password protected desktop in order to maintain security and confidentiality.

The researcher recorded and transcribed the interviews. After data collection, the data were run through Otterai transcription software. The researcher used the cloud-based application Dedoose for qualitative data analysis, and to store, code and analyze the data. All transcripts and data were uploaded to Dedoose for coding. The researcher coded the transcriptions based on typologies described by Saldana (2015). Coding is an essential process in data collection and analyzation (Saldana, 2015). Saldana (2015) defines a code as “a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (p. 3). Structural and pattern coding techniques were used to find interrelated themes or categories (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The coding process took three weeks.

Trustworthiness of Design

The data gathered were analyzed for commonalities and themes among students with different writing center usage habits. When using qualitative techniques such as content analysis, the person analyzing the data must allow themes to emerge intuitively, rather than imposing a preconceived set of themes on the data (Yin, 2014). The coding used in the data collection enhanced reliability of the study (Saldana, 2015). Once all data were collected and analyzed, the data were triangulated for trustworthiness (Creswell, 2015). Triangulation allows for the use of multiple sources as corroborating evidence, aligning the data to the theory (Yin, 2009; Creswell & Poth, 2018). This study

triangulated the semi-structured interviews of students and program administrators, and content analysis.

Through triangulation it is suggested that the quality and credibility of a study is enhanced. The researcher felt that gathering data via a mixture of methods facilitated the collection of a more holistic and rich data set than what could be obtained through surveys or questionnaires, as the focus was more on quality and richness of information rather than quantity. The ability to triangulate data by using a mixture of methods is seen to be a main advantage to enhance the credibility of a study (Yin, 2009; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Peer feedback provided by faculty and students who did not participate in the study helped to ensure trustworthiness (Creswell, 2015). Once interview responses were transcribed, participants were given their transcripts for review. Member checking allowed participants to clarify and confirm their responses (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Maxwell (2013) posits that triangulation reduces bias-based conclusions.

Research Ethics

The researcher contacted the sample group requesting they participate in the study; the researcher also contacted the two program administrators requesting their participation. Students and administrators were asked to volunteer for the study without incentive, ensuring participation was not coerced. The researcher provided pseudonyms to all participants, and participants could stop at any time without penalty. Upon agreement to participate, both students and administrators were given an informed consent to sign and date. Participants were given their zoom transcripts for review.

Data Analysis Approach

The data gathered from the semi structured interviews was coded using multiple coding schemes. First, structural coding techniques were defined to organize the case and to categorize the data as related to the research questions and related literature (Saldana, 2015). Next, pattern coding was used as a secondary coding process to confirm the first round of coding and to look for common information or outcomes in the data (Creswell & Poth 2018; Saldana, 2015). This process was cyclical, and, through analysis, codes collapsed into parent and child codes until exhaustion, or when all codes were organized into themes. The researcher created textural descriptions of the data to search for similarities in writing center experiences. Creswell and Poth (2018) state that textural descriptions describe what participants experienced, including verbatim examples. The themes that emerged from the codes were then categorized (Saldana, 2015), aiding in developing a thick, rich description of the case and themes that illustrated the findings and served to answer the research questions after the third round of coding. The codebook was continuously refined to reflect expanded definitions. The themes answered the research questions and described the case.

Researcher Role

The researcher's role is that of a faculty consultant and assessment coordinator at Sunrise X University's Writing Center, which gives the researcher access to all appointment data from 2012 to current day. Prior to the study, the researcher preemptively obtained permission to use the data in this current study from the writing center director. The administrator participants are colleagues of the researcher. The

researcher is aware of potential bias because of her association with the institution and the writing center. The researcher took precautions to carefully formulate questions as not to ask leading questions to solicit positive responses. Additionally, the researcher did not select former students to participant in the study. She did not project her own beliefs about the writing center on the participants in the study, and she remained objective throughout.

As a writing studies professor and writing center consultant, the researcher has first-hand knowledge of the differences in student experiences at the writing center among underrepresented student populations; therefore, the researcher recognized the importance of centering the experience of this population and the individuals who serve them to fully describe the case. As an employee of the institution and the writing center, the researcher understands that the results of the current study could directly impact her. The researcher acknowledged her role at the institution and separated herself from the data.

Conclusion

The chapter provides an overview of the exploratory single case study that identified if and how the social and academic engagement provided by the writing center contributed to FGCS and Elevate program participants' social capital. It sought to understand how those factors influence students' decisions to continue to use writing center services based on their experiences (Yin, 2009).

Through the use of enrollment data, a purposive sample of students and administrators affiliated with the programs was recruited to participate in semi-structured interviews

designed to explore the role of the writing center and student experiences during writing center appointments. These coupled with a content analysis revealed a description of a single case, themes that describe the experiences and perceptions of the students and administrators, and answers to the research questions to explore if and how writing centers increase or leverage social capital through social and academic engagement.

The results of the proposed study provided invaluable feedback as it relates to effective practices and initiatives to increase student success, specifically among traditionally underrepresented student populations. The data collected were useful to the researcher, university, writing center, FGCS, and Elevate program administrators. Presenting and interpreting the results in Chapters 4 and 5 gave the researcher and practitioners insight into how students perceive writing center services, and its role in academic and social integration in college.

CHAPTER 4

As stated in Chapter one, the purpose of this present study was to identify if and how writing centers increase and leverage social capital through social and academic engagement. The research sought to document and understand the differences in experiences, if any, among writing center usage habits, of specific underrepresented student populations at a large private institution in the Northeast. Chapter two provided the rationale for the current study, framed by a review of related literature of interaction, engagement, and social capital and linking those concepts to writing centers, writing center work and underrepresented student populations, engagement and capital in the writing center, and engagement and capital for underrepresented students. As previously established, writing center usage increases social and academic engagement, but many traditionally underrepresented students, who are formally introduced to the writing center, do not utilize writing centers often.

In this study the institution that the writing center is located in has been given a pseudonym, Sunrise X University. One of the underrepresented student population groups have been given a pseudonym, Elevation Scholars (ES), the other student population group are first generation college students (FGCS). The researcher conducted an exploratory single case study of the writing center at a large private institution in the Northeast, Sunrise X university to uncover the aspects of writing center work that contributed to social capital by analyzing students and administrators' expectations and experiences (Yin, 2014; Creswell, 2015; Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Research methods were described in Chapter Three. Chapter four is a review of the results from the

data collected in Chapter three. Qualitative data were gathered through individual semi-structured interviews and content analysis. Both administrator and student interviews were recorded, transcribed, member checked, coded, and analyzed ensuring trustworthiness (Bowen 2009; Whitt, 2001). In addition, artifacts, such as appointment data, program descriptions, and mission and vision statements were also coded and analyzed with the interviews (Bowen 2009; Whitt, 2001). The researcher interviewed 8 students currently enrolled at Sunrise X University who self-selected to participate in this study. Out of those 8 students, 3 were first-generation college students. Another 3 students were Elevate Scholars and the remaining 2 were both Elevate Scholars and FGCS students who did not participate in FGCS learning community and events. Two administrators were interviewed, the assistant director of the Elevate Scholars program, and the committee chair of the FGCS living and learning community.

Sunrise X University is a large private suburban university in New York state. The university enrolled 10,444 total students, 6,120 of whom were undergraduates as of January 2022 across multiple schools, including liberal arts, business, medical, and law. The university enrolled a total of 1,629 and 1,390 first time, first-year students in the Fall 2019 and 2020 semesters, respectively. Of students enrolled in 2019, 8% were Black, 9% Asian/Non-Hispanic, 14% Hispanic/Latino, 7% Other: in Fall 2020, 41% of students self-reported as students of color. In 2020, the average incoming GPA (the variable Sunrise X University correlates most with student success) is 3.73. Additionally, 32% of the entering first-year class, in schools that ranked, graduated in the top 10% of their class, and 61% were in the top 25% of their high school class. The one-year retention rate for

the full-time, first-year entering class of 2019 was 82%. The four-year graduation rate stands at 55%, which increases to 65% by the six-year reporting period.

The researcher belongs to the Sunrise X University community as an adjunct professor and faculty tutor in the writing center. The writing center has a physical space located in the Writing Studies department, it offers in person and real time virtual appointments. Half of the Spring 2020 semester, and all of Summer 2020, and Fall 2020 semester appointments were online due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The site is considered a peer tutoring center as most tutors are undergraduate students who are required to take a writing center pedagogy course taught by the writing center director, prior to working. The center also employs graduate students and faculty tutors. Although it has in the past, currently, the center does not employ any Elevate scholar or FGCS undergraduate students as peer tutors. The center had 3434 appointments from fall 2019 through spring 2020 and saw 904 clients; 438 of those clients only had 1 appointment, 170 had 2 appointments, and 296 had 3 or more appointments. Out of 3434 appointments, 1322 were with freshman students, a total of 418 clients; 378 appointments with sophomore students, a total of 131 clients, 243 appointments with juniors, a total of 93 clients; and 343 seniors, a total of 88 clients, the remaining appointments were with graduate students and alumni. There is a significant drop in usage as students matriculate.

The writing center promotes its services via their website, email announcements to faculty, and during in class informational sessions requested by professors. The work

of the writing center that is most relevant to the present study can be found in sections of the mission statement of the writing center:

work with current [...] undergraduate and graduate student-writers of varying experience, learning styles, and linguistic backgrounds [...]. We support students' growth as writers through one-on-one sessions with tutors trained in collaborative learning practices. Rather than editing writing, tutors help students gain independence by discussing the writing process in its entirety, including genre, audience expectations, and revision strategies. We offer a structured and safe learning environment that helps undergraduate and graduate students excel in college-level writing and helps them develop skills that lead to both academic persistence and success beyond graduation.

Elevate Scholars

The writing center participates in events during general orientation and registration, and they are a stop on the summer orientation tour for the Elevate scholar program. During these tours, incoming students visit the writing center and are given a brief introduction of services by a tutor. The Elevate scholar program hosts a 5-week summer bridge program where students are introduced to the writing center, among several other academic support services. The Elevate administrator described the importance of the summer orientation within the program "what we do is we look for students who are high achieving in high needs areas, so school districts who don't really have the most the most resources and we want to really give those students a chance to come to school here, and when they come here, the first thing they do is they attend the

five-week summer program, which really, is our foundation for the whole time here.” During the summer orientation program and in their first semester, students take a composition course with a writing studies professor. This professor is the former director of the writing center and makes at least one appointment with the writing center and subsequent reflection mandatory. All Elevate scholar participants in the study indicate this mandatory visit as the reason for their first visit to the writing center. Upon interviewing the administrator from the Elevate program, the researcher discovered that the funding structure for the program changed a several years ago. The once federally funded program that offered upwards of 70 scholarships a year, is now privately funded by the university, and only awards 12-17 scholarships a year.

FGCS Affinity Group

The FGCS affinity group has a living and learning community, which is advertised on their page of the institution’s website along with promotional material, first-gen committee descriptions, resources, and events. However, upon interviewing the first-gen committee chair, the researcher discovered that FGCS is not a comprehensive program, rather it is a committee that plans social and educational programming, facilitates mentorship opportunities, pursues funding and scholarship opportunities, and works to educate the campus community about the talents first-generation college students bring to Sunrise X. Everyone on the committee is a volunteer, the chair, who is also the director of residential education, led the effort for the formation of the committee in 2016 and has served in a similar capacity of a program director ever since. His goal is to give FGCS a sense of community, as an uncompensated volunteer committee chair, he

tries to assist students as best as possible with no funding from the institution. As a committee, they reach out to all off-campus and on-campus first-generation college students and highly encourage first gen students who will live on campus to choose the first-generation living and learning community. On the webpage, the living and learning community is defined as “providing an opportunity for additional focused support for students who are first in their family to go to college. Students in this community will learn how to navigate the University together, with the assistance and guidance of Resident Assistants and other residence hall staff who were also the first in their families to go to college, focusing on campus resources, financial literacy, and student involvement.” The committee chair promotes the writing center in resource material provided to students, but without funding, FGCS does not have an orientation initiative, regularly scheduled programming, embedded support, and thus cannot make utilizing academic support mandatory for their student population.

Using three cycles of coding, the researcher separated the data into three themes: Expectations, Usefulness of Visits, Longevity of Impact. Each theme had one to two subthemes. A summary of the thematic units and data sources is found in Table 4.

Table 6*Interpretive Themes*

Theme	Sub Themes	Data Source	Trustworthiness
Expectations	Academic Worthiness	Interviews Content	Checking Coding, Member
Usefulness of Visits	Just in time support Skill Attainment	Interviews	Checking Coding, Member
Longevity of Impact	Faculty/Program Requirements Sense of Belonging	Interviews	Checking Coding, Member

The first theme included the expectations of the type services, attitudes, and culture students would encounter at the center during writing center appointments. This theme includes descriptions of sentiments from both administrators and students prior to appointments. Responses from interviewees captured in this theme allude to value of relaying the message to underrepresented student populations that they are academically worthy to be at the institution and eradicating the stigma associated with using academic support services. The researcher also examined what administrators hoped their students would encounter when visiting the writing center, which included phrases such as “welcomed” and “validated.” Both students and administrators describe the desire to be affirmed and their academic worthiness validated by tutors despite their level of writing. Within this theme, the data suggested that the writing center often exceeded the expectation of both administrators and students.

The second major theme in the present study is Usefulness of Visits. To conceptualize this theme, the researcher analyzed how students reported using the writing

center and the services provided. Included in this theme is a description of just in time support and skill attainment. The researcher examined the value of the skills attained as a result of working with a writing center tutor during appointments. This theme also includes how students and administrators describe the specialize instruction provided by the writing center.

The final theme Longevity of Impact relates to the external factors that students attribute to their decision to come to the writing center initially and the internal and external factors that attributed to their decision to continue to come back. Included in this theme are faculty/program requirements and sense of belonging. The researcher examined how students experienced a sense of belonging at the center. Phrases from interviewees that capture this theme include “comfortable,” and “confidence,” confirming the type of relationships built through the social and academic support provided by the center.

Findings

Theme 1: Expectations

Administrators in the present study demonstrated an expectation for a certain level of services, attitudes, and culture students would encounter at the center during writing center appointments. Administrators describe their hopes for students to be affirmed and their academic worthiness validated by tutors despite their level of writing. This value is central to the writing center’s mission “to work with current [...] undergraduate and graduate student-writers of varying experience, learning styles, and linguistic backgrounds [...]. We offer a structured and safe learning environment that helps

undergraduate and graduate students excel in college-level writing and helps them develop skills that lead to both academic persistence and success beyond graduation.” Students report not knowing what to expect and what they would be asked to do during appointments. Students also describe being intimidated and nervous before their first appointment.

Subtheme A: Academic Worthiness

The students and administrators both express significant value in the desire to have their academic worthiness validated by tutors and how they destigmatized needing assistance. Due to her experiences with the writing professor who teaches specific sections of writing courses for Elevate scholars, who is also the past director of the writing center, the Elevate administrator, Jenny hopes that tutors live up to the standards of the mission statement and writing center directors. Jenny, states:

My main hope is that they feel welcome. And that they are able to just kind of say okay, I need to go to the writing center, and not dread it, because that deters people from seeking help. So, I think more than anything, I hope that that the writing center tutors are talking to them in a way that makes them comfortable and like, they don't feel judged for not being the best writer.

Reducing the stigmata of needing tutoring or other types of support are critical to students' sense of academic worthiness. She further explains that Elevate students are chosen to receive the scholarship and enter the cohort because they have potential for high achievement, so they are often independent and feel like asking for help is confirmation that they are not college material. “My main thing was like, okay, like,

you're not less than, like, you know, like, this is a skill that you can practice, and you will get better. So, I hope that's something that they're relaying”

Similarly, the FGCS committee chair, Jim states “my hope is that when they go to the writing center, they would pretty quickly meet staff members that would make them feel at home, that would make them feel like talented individuals who are there for advice, as opposed to charity cases that need help, because they're not smart enough.” Affirming students is key to both underrepresented student populations, the students enter with all types of social capital, but not always the type of capital necessary to persist in college. Jim goes on to state that “first gen students are very self-reliant; they solve their own problems. They're not used to going to other people for help. And they're used to help costing things and coming with strings. And so, my hope is that when they enter that door, any of those fears are pretty much immediately resolved.” Jim is expressing the type of capital first-generation students often enter college with resilience; however, if students are not encouraged and made aware that services are free, accessible, and useful, then they risk putting themselves at a disadvantage.

Most student participants expressed being unsure they would be accepted among peer and faculty tutors. Helen describes how she felt before her first visit, which was online due to the pandemic, she wanted to make a good impression on her tutor but was unsure how the online system worked. “I saw his little screen pop up. And he's like, turn on your camera and your mic, please. Mind you, I'm looking like a disaster like I just woke up. I'm like, okay, well, this is not a good way to make a first impression.” The unease expressed about being seen as professional, was most prevalent when participants

spoke of faculty tutors. Jessica recalls her first time at the center, “I felt a little anxious because like, I don't know, just walking into an office, like a doctor's office or something, I was so anxious having to interact with professional people.” Interestingly a few participants preferred the online platform specifically because it mitigated the awkwardness of interacting with someone face-to face. Alyssa reflects, “I think actually not being on video, for me, at least made me more comfortable, because then it was kind of just typing back and forth. It's hard to explain the idea I'm trying to get across when I'm talking. But if I like, write it out, like kind of makes more sense to me that way.” Overall, all student participants mentioned some form of anxiousness before their first appointment, due to not knowing what to expect.

Students also expressed hesitation to go to the writing center because they believed they would be admitting a deficit, or they believed themselves to be strong enough writers. Samantha states “I was kind of nervous, I guess because I felt like I was a good writer already. I felt like, I didn't really need the extra assistance. I already have a good command of knowing how I write and like what I need. It was definitely a humbling experience in my writing, there were more areas in which I didn't think I needed help that I really did, like sentence structure.”

Academic Worthiness can also be seen in how students felt during their first appointment. Samantha goes on to explain how the tutor alleviated her fear about not being seen as college material. “She definitely helped me understand that, like, even the best writers out there need help or someone to read their work. So even if I felt like I didn't need the help, it's always good to get a second opinion or second read through

anyways, especially for like the best grade possible.” Chanelle expresses a similar encounter:

I kind of I did exactly what I was assigned. And then I got my paperback, and it was a C. And I wanted to cry. Because, you know, the first class, first semester, and I'm like, is this what college is going to be? Because if it is, I don't know if this is for me. I was really confused, because I thought it was a really good paper, I did what I had to do just right about the person. It just sounds so self-explanatory. So, my first experience was after getting a really bad grade, and then going to the writing center and figuring out what I did wrong, and how I can do better.

Chanelle describes an experience of feeling unworthy due to a grade but going to the writing center helped her understand college-level writing. “What I could have improved on was celebrating the person I was writing about instead of just stating facts on them, like in high school, you just look at a paragraph at put in all the facts. But this was different, this was more thinking than just pulling evidence. “All students reported a similar experience of tutors being kind and nonjudgmental while helping students reach college- level writing. Michelle describes the fear of being judged and how the tutor put her at ease.:

I feel like when I was nervous at the start of the meeting, I saw the tutor as an authority figure and I thought I would be judged because of all the errors I would make due to being in a Spanish household where I would write words how my mom would pronounce them, which were incorrect. I thought they would be like, no, this

is wrong. That's not how you do it. But once they started to sit with me and look over my paper and like in a very calm tone, corrected me. They would tell me why it was wrong and explain the right way. It made me realize, I looked up to them as a mentor because they were helping me better myself.

Responses from interviewees captured in this theme allude to the type of relationships built through the social and academic support provided by the center, which will be examined in-depth in Chapter 5. The data suggested that the writing center lives up to their values to make students feel comfortable coming to the center free from shame or a deficit mindset.

Theme 2: Usefulness of Visits

Usefulness of Visits describes how students reported using the writing center and the services provided. Knowing if students felt they were learning transferable skills is central to understanding how students engage with the writing center. Students generally report gaining valuable knowledge regardless of the number of appointments they had, but this sentiment certainly increased with usage. Students and administrators found value in the expertise tutors have in writing, and specific knowledge about the core writing courses, which help students understand the expectations of their professors. Most students describe specific tutoring styles and activities during appointments as beneficial. Administrators describe the specialize instruction provided by the writing center as a necessary part of integrating students into college life. Jenny, the Elevate administrator discusses the importance of writing for the students in the program.:

When they come in the writing is really, really rough. We try to work on it during the summer, we had an English workshop class specifically for that right now. We are having a like a study skills time this summer, where we'll be going over a lot of those types of writing skills, because it's important for literally all of their classes. It's always a concern to me. We have to literally go over the very, very basics. So whatever assistance we can get in writing, we take it.

Subtheme A: Just in time support

Many students view the center as a just in time support service, meaning a place to come work on improving a singular writing assignment. This contrasts with other tutoring services that they view as support that helps you develop over time. Jessica states “I came out knowing that what to do with my essay. But I wouldn't say that I came out the appointment, remembering everything that I've learned in that appointment, I guess it was great for the temporary use of it.” When asked why she didn't use the writing center again, she states time as the most important factor, along with four other interviewees. Many of the commuter students report the difficulty of getting to campus for an appointment and were unaware that there were real-time online appointments before the center went completely virtual during the pandemic.

However, upon further reflection, Jessica states “there's this new website called Grammarly where instead of going to an office or meeting up with someone, you just put it through an automatic system, and it fixes it. The writing center is competing with Grammarly.” This is a clear indication that students may only see the writing center as a place to go to fix a piece of writing, not to learn writing skills and when viewed in that

manner any editing type of service will do. This illustrates the type of value some students may assign to the writing center, and academic support more broadly. She concludes by confirming this perception. “I think honestly, I just felt like I could have done it on my own. Like, I felt like in order for me to keep going back I had to have like learn something.” There are several reasons for this perception that will be closely examined in chapter 5.

Three sophomore student participants only had 1 traditional real time online appointment, but attended a writing center open tutoring event, where they worked with a tutor for 30 minutes, which was counted as their second appointment. The event doesn't require making an appointment or registration of any kind and provides free coffee and snacks. It's advertised as a study space for students to come work on any assignment, students can choose to see a tutor by putting their name on a sign-up sheet and tutors have an impromptu 30-minute session with the student. Students can sign-up as many times as needed for the duration of the event. They described why they chose to attend this event and not make a traditional appointment. Michelle states “I haven't had any papers that required that much help mostly because like I know how to go about it now and I haven't had any writing composition classes. I'm so overwhelmed so that's why I haven't gone but I came here today just because I did need the space and there were tutors without having to go through the hassle of making a meeting, and figure out who has free time when, so it was easier to just show up.” The space to write in a community of peers and ability to work with a tutor without the formality of making an appointment was very appealing to participants. Interviewees also describes going to the writing center instead

of their professor to get quick feedback they viewed as too minute for office hours.

Alyssa states, “I just go for things you don't want to bother your professor with in the class, or like, during office hours. When you know someone else is able to help you with it, like little annoying stuff.”

Subtheme B: Skill Attainment

Although, most students felt what they learned during the appointments was valuable, they also expressed not retaining specific information after the appointment was over. However, they all reported learning broad skills that assisted them in the writing process, such as reading aloud, outlining, and organizing. Helen describes interactions working on one paper:

So, she kind of helped me with the research process, and with some crafting my arguments, and sometimes even strengthening my arguments, and I really thank her for that, because I ended up getting a good grade on that paper. It was like the hardest paper I had to write this whole like year. I'm like, okay, now what do I do? I felt like that writing center appointment really helped me. I had to make, like three or four of those writing center appointments with that same tutor.

Some participants reflected on the actual learning during the appointments as key to skill attainment. Helen states, “When I discovered the new technique of reading out loud to review my work. I learned so much. I wanted to see like, with other appointments, how much more can I learn apart from like, learning from my composition courses.”

Samantha had a similar reaction to the resources provided. “I didn't really expect them to have like activities set up and stuff like that planned already, they definitely exceeded my

expectations in that aspect. Because I definitely wasn't expecting to actually like, work on writing skills and ended up coming out, finding out what my weaknesses and strengths were and making a plan if I wanted to return to the writing center to work on these things.”

A key component to writing center work is helping students understand assignments and feedback from their professors. All participants pointed to this as a skill they learned from direct interactions with the writing center. Samantha continues “Understanding feedback is number one, they definitely helped me understanding what the feedback I've gotten was also understanding Professor assignments and what it is they're looking for, especially if they asked in a way that I'm not familiar with.” Students enter college at various levels of academic preparedness. Students from underserved school districts often do not have resources that prepare them for college, thus even high achieving students, the ones Elevate recruits, are unaware of assignment terminology and higher order feedback, in which writing tutors help to demystify. Samantha also describes how closing this gap affected her self-efficacy. “They helped with that transition from high school to college, and how to bridge sort of that gap so that I could understand what my assignments were, so I can do better when I'm actually writing them.”

Additionally, students reported grammar, citations, time management and overall gaining confidence in their writing as what they found most valuable about the interactions and services during appointments. Michelle reflects on several aspects of what she found most useful. “I personally struggled with punctuation, so they sat with

me, and they were not judging me. It was like, this is not proper. This is why it's not proper. This is how you can make it better.” In this situation, Michelle describes the type of writing errors students often feel shame about because society has conflated poor grammar with low intelligence, so students dread showing people their writing for fear of being judged. Mitigating this fear is important to the writing center, FGCS and Elevate administrators, and central to students who need to know they have a right to academic support that contributes to their growth without judgment. The tutor in this situation helps Michelle build confidence and self-efficacy. Furthermore, Michelle speaks to the importance of balancing tutoring styles to meet the needs of individual students. “And then the best part about the meeting was how we were bouncing ideas off each other. It wasn't like they were shutting me down. They were like, “Yeah, that's a good idea, but rephrase it this way.” The collaborative nature of the non-directive tutoring style is how Michelle is affirmed and being more directive while offering a suggestion is the core of skill building, the student can now replicate that process with another passage alongside the tutor.

Lanee reports on reflecting on her skills attainment at the end of the semester. “I wouldn't really say I felt more confident. I felt more relieved. But it wasn't until I compared all of my essay grades that I was like, wow, those meetings actually did help.” Lanee describes herself as struggling with confidence, if and when she seeks support, she feels bad about needing assistance. However, she was able to give herself credit after external evaluations. Both students and administrators recognize the writing center as a service that offers expert instruction and the development of skills essential to the writing

process, regardless of usage habits. Yet, it is how these skills are taught and relayed to students that leads to lasting skills attainment.

Theme 3: Longevity of Impact

The final theme Longevity of Impact describes what students attribute to their decision to come to the writing center initially and the factors that attributed to their decision to continue to come back. It also speaks to the perception of the writing center among, students and administrators. Students recognize faculty and program requirements as key to their decision making. They also describe being validated and creating relationships as contributing factors. The relationships and validation speak to the sense of belonging created through writing center interactions. Phrases from interviewees that capture this theme include “comfortable,” and “confidence,” confirming the type of relationships built through the social and academic support provided by the center.

Subtheme A: Faculty/Program Requirements

Faculty often make writing center appointments mandatory in freshman composition courses. The Elevate scholars are required to have a certain number of appointments with Elevate tutors. The writing instructor for the Elevate composition courses require at least one visit to the writing center and a subsequent reflection about their experience. Many other faculty offer incentives to go the writing center, such as revision opportunities and extra credit. All student participants indicated requirements and incentives as the reason they first came to the writing center and most indicated that not having incentives or requirements factored into their decision to continue using the

writing center. Lanee states “I do have a lot of things that required me to come to the writing center. Honestly the reason I probably didn't go is because of the awkward conversations.” She further explains how after her freshman year, when Elevate no longer makes tutoring or mentoring required, faculty encouragement to use academic support services subsided. “It was a mandatory thing to do in my freshman year, and even though it helped me in advance, without that that extra push to go to the writing center I figured I could support myself. Honestly, I need that extra push to make those decisions.”

Six students refer to the role of faculty incentives and required writing center appointments as a major factor in their usage habits. Helen describes the incentive to revise a writing assignment for a higher grade. “She allows us to rewrite our work in order to get a better grade. So, I of course, took that opportunity. And I wanted to understand why the Professor was marking certain things on my paper” Writing a reflection after a writing center appointment is seen as a valuable exercise to get students to reflect on their writing process. Michele states “she made it mandatory, even the reflection. That was honestly the best, and only way to get someone to go to the writing center.” Although writing center pedagogy has long resisted faculty mandates, that force students to work with a tutor, students report it as a value and key to their usage habits. Michelle continues, “I think that if you're a class that requires a lot of writing intensive stuff, teachers should require at least one appointment and reflection on your experience.” The reflection as she described allowed her to record her progress and boosted her confidence and self-efficacy.

Students also described experiences with tutoring styles as a factor in their decision making. Chanelle expresses her frustration with a tutor using a non-directive approach. “There’s just this one girl that likes stays in my mind. She kept asking me questions in a weird way. She kept bombarding me with questions and I wasn't able to think, it was a one-sided conversation. And after I left, I was like she didn't help me at all. What did I just waste these 30 minutes for? I remember going back to for more appointments, but I couldn’t work with her again.” Although training and professional development in the center posits that creating a balance of approaches is best practice, not all tutors do this in practice. Fortunately, it did not deter Chanelle from coming back, but a bad appointment can certainly be a deterrent.

Subtheme B: Sense of Belonging

Student validation and building relationships is core to writing center work and both students and administrators describe this as significant to engagement and usage habits. A sense of belonging contributes to how students build capital within an institution and how they view themselves as students. Students report that interactions with the writing center made them feel validated and that they had a support system. Helen describes how she was able to build a relationship during the pandemic. “The faculty tutor, Professor Bob, always makes me feel so welcome. He’s always my first choice, whenever he sees my name or my camera pop up on screen, he’s like “hey, my friend.” I love building relationships, like that with professors, it makes me feel welcome, even though it's online.” She illustrates the importance of faculty tutors’ presence in the writing center as an opportunity for students to build networks with professors, outside of

the classroom, these relationships are necessary to leveraging social capital. Helen reflects on how this became more important during a time of isolation. “Especially since I don't really have chances to build my relationship with professors as much because we don't really interact.” Building personal relationships with professors is central to the college experience, but COVID impacted how students and professors interact. Three student participants named the writing center as a place where they were able to establish connections to faculty members during the shutdown. They also find relationships with peer tutors equally valuable. the peer relationships.

Samantha describes being validated and building connections.:

They always told me my work was so powerful. They definitely boosted my confidence. To have that type of response, you know. It definitely helped build relationships because a lot of the people in the Writing Center were my peers. It's hard to take a rhetoric class and not be in the class with a writing tutor. It's always good to have a familiar face around the campus that you know from the Writing Center, and to have somebody you want to work with in class because you've already built a relationship working together in the Writing Center. Wherever you go on campus, you have that support system to fall back on, you never feel lonely.

Samantha's experience is contrasted by Isabella who is a first-generation student but did not know about the FGCS affinity group. “I kind of had to learn how to navigate to the campus and in our first year it was kind of difficult” Student experiences like Isabelle are why the FGCS affinity group exists and why they collaborate so closely with the writing center. The FGCS committee chair, Jim, explains, “My hope is that they see something

like visiting the Writing Center as almost a gateway experience for being willing to then go to their advising appointment and willing to seek out Student Access Service.”

Students also reported how important these relationships were in their transition to college and establishing a sense of belonging. Jessica states:

When I first came here, it was a big culture shock, because things are very different from where I'm from. I never sat in a classroom with another white person until literally my freshman year of college. The only people who were white in my community were the teachers. So, I never really had a personal relationship with them. When I got here, they were like, 10 times smarter because they had more resources. Having relationships with peer tutors and the mentorship in Elevate really helped because they were in my same predicament. Sometimes I just felt like, I didn't even belong here. And it was like they were saying “No, you just need to learn and I'm here to help you.

Sense of belonging is achieved through relationship building and validating students, which directly contributes to students’ acquisition of social capital.

Connection to Research Questions

The present study sought to answer three research questions. The first question dealt with how students describe engagement, expectations, and support that happened during writing center interactions. It’s evident by the three themes in this chapter that the writing center staff often exceeded expectations and demonstrated kindness, empathy, and expertise while engaging with students. Working with tutors built student’s confidence by affirming their progress and effort and demystifying the writing process.

The writing center is often used as just in time support, but that in itself is a valuable service. Students preferred more directive tutors, when they encounter a non-directive tutor it did not deter them from future appointments because students choose their tutors when booking appointments.

The second research question addressed the factors that contributed to students' usage habits. Again, all three themes address aspects of writing center work and outside factors that attribute to students' decisions to visit the writing center. The writing center offers different modalities and events that reach students with scheduling restrictions and preferences. Events that offer informal tutoring are particularly appealing to students who view the standard procedures as too restrictive. The writing center creates a welcoming environment where students feel at ease and comfortable. Tutors also assist in creating a sense of belonging with students whether they are faculty or peer tutors.

Research question three concerns administrator's perception of writing center work. Administrators express close relationships with the writing center and their efforts to make students feel academically worthy. The writing center does not focus on deficits but rather identifies how students are already successful and what they can do to enhance their skills. Tutors attend orientations for the Elevate program and the writing center director sits on the FGCS committee. Validating students is core to the writing center's mission and often a topic of conversation in professional development trainings. The writing center provides an entry way to other support services and helps fill in the gap between high school and college level instruction.

Conclusion

This chapter focused on the main thematic elements that resulted from the case study data. The researchers found that students experiences at the writing center are largely similar and valuable to both groups of underrepresented student populations and associated administrators. The following chapter contains an analysis of the connections between social capital, writing center engagement, and students.

CHAPTER 5

The present study was an exploratory single case study of the writing center at a large private institution in the Northeast, Sunrise X university. The purpose of this study was to uncover aspects of writing center work that contributed to social capital by analyzing students and administrators' expectations and experiences (Yin, 2014; Creswell, 2015; Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). The researcher investigated if and how writing centers increase and leverage social capital through social and academic engagement. The research sought to document and understand the differences in experiences, if any, among specific underrepresented student populations at a large private institution in the Northeast. As outlined in Chapter One, the first research question concerned how students describe engagement, expectations, and support that happened during writing center interactions. The second research question addressed the factors that contributed to students' usage habits. Research question three dealt directly with administrator's perception of writing center work and its role in building social capital for their students.

Chapter Two provided a review of related literature of interaction, engagement, and social capital and linking those concepts to writing center work and underrepresented student populations. Prior research suggests that writing center usage increases social and academic engagement; however, many traditionally underrepresented students, who are formally introduced to the writing center, do not utilize writing centers often. Research methods were described in Chapter Three. Qualitative data were gathered through individual semi-structured interviews and content analysis. Artifacts, such as appointment

data, program descriptions, and mission statements were also coded and analyzed with the interviews. The researcher interviewed a total of 10 participants, 8 students and 2 administrators, who self-selected to participate in this study. Student participants belonged to the FGCS affinity group and/or the Elevate scholar program, both populations represent students underrepresented student populations characterized by specific attributes. As discussed in Chapter One, the Elevate program awards scholarships to high achieving students from underserved districts, students belong to a cohort and attend a summer-bridge program and receive embedded support their freshman year. First-generation college students (FGCS), English language learners, and minority students from underserved districts are among the highest population of students who are not retained and do not persist to college graduation. Two administrators were interviewed, the assistant director of the Elevate Scholars program, and the committee chair of the FGCS living and learning community. Analyzing data through three cycles of coding yielded three themes, as discussed in Chapter Four. The first theme included the expectations of the type services, attitudes, and culture students would encounter at the center during writing center appointments. The second theme to emerge involved the ways in which students described the usefulness of writing center work. The final theme concerned the longevity of impact in relationship to the factors that students attribute to their usage habits.

This chapter offers an interpretation of the results described in Chapter Four in relationship to the research questions that guided the case study. It will also link the

findings of this study to the existing body of research detailed in Chapter Two and includes the study's limitations and recommendations for future research and practice.

Implications of Findings

The study found that the writing center and the services and relationships fostered through writing center work are a valuable resource for underrepresented student populations. Writing centers contribute to, and leverage existing social capital through social and academic engagement. Most students developed skills pertinent to their academic and social growth, which increased with usage. Although students only initiated visits to get help with a singular assignment, the activities and resources utilized during appointments were beneficial to students' holistic writing process at the college-level. Students and administrators indicate that faculty and program requirements are essential to students' decision-making process for their initial visit to the writing center and a factor in their decision to make subsequent appointments.

The results of this study have implications for the wider understanding of how writing center work impacts underrepresented student populations and the theoretical and conceptual frameworks laid out in Chapter One. The current study used Tinto's theory of interactionist theory (1993) and Bourdieu's (1997) theory of social capital as the foundational framework. Both the administrators and student participants report that tutors helped them understand the expectations of professors and provided them with a more informal outlet to ask questions and get feedback about college level expectations. It's clear from the results of this study that the writing center meets the four conditions that Tinto argues is needed for engagement to occur: expectations, support, feedback, and

involvement (Tinto, 1993). This study holistically demonstrates that underrepresented students who are unfamiliar with the college community and expectations, and are from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, gain more capital if they engage and interact with faculty and peers (Aljohani, 2016).

This study also examined student experiences to better understand how academic engagement and increased social capital are connected to writing center usage among underrepresented student populations. Based upon those lived experiences the study participants reported that the writing center has been a valuable resource, a place where they built relationships with faculty and peer tutors even during a time of isolation, when the entire campus community was regulated to virtual spaces. The findings also illustrate that writing centers contributes to and leverages existing social capital through social and academic engagement. This is in line with writing centers being a space that can reduce “pre-existing as well as institutional barriers to student academic achievement” (Duranczyk et al., 2004, p. 64).

Research Question One

The first research question asked students to describe how they use the services available at the writing center. More specifically, it sought to uncover how students describe their engagement, expectations, and support that happened during writing center interactions. Student participants describe being nervous, anxious, and hesitant to visit the writing center due to their unfamiliarity with academic support services. Upon data analysis it was found that the writing center staff often exceeded expectations and demonstrated kindness, empathy, and expertise while engaging with students. Students

found these behaviors invaluable and significant to their growth. Together these findings substantiate what Gilardi and Gugliemetti, 2011, identify as the most influential risk for nontraditional students in higher education, integrating non-traditional students into university culture.

Research question one also asked about the type of engagement and relationships developed in the writing center. The students expressed significant value in having their academic worthiness validated by tutors while helping them grow as students. The findings suggest that tutors helped to destigmatized needing assistance. For example, when a student was anxious to come the center because English was her second language, she assumed that the tutor would point out all her mistakes and judge her for not knowing simple grammar. However, she described how the tutor pointed to some key patterns, explained why they were wrong and possible ways to modify, and then gave her the opportunity to revise some sentences in real time for immediate feedback. The student described the patience and resourcefulness of the tutor as significant in building a relationship with that tutor, and the writing center more broadly. The results confirm that the relationships among engagement, social integration, and persistence are the factors that mattered most for non-traditional students (Gilardi & Gugliemetti, 2011).

In this study, students and administrators demonstrated the need for assistance transferring from high school to college. The need to fill in this gap is present in the theoretical framework, which focuses on the experiences a student has with aspects of the institution, like learning communities and academic support services, and found that the decision to persist was based on these experiences, especially in students first year of

college (Harper & Quaye, 2009; Tinto, 1993). The findings support that by being friendly, caring, and affirming students' academic worthiness, positioned the writing center as a support system that can help validate students' presence in the academy. Participants reported that they grew more comfortable with every appointment, often working with the same tutor on a single assignment for several appointments, which deepened their connection to the writing center. The data analyzed confirms that writing centers leverage students' capital through engagement, specifically academic social capital, defined as the "longitudinal process that occurs because of the meaning's individual students attribute to their interactions with the formal and informal dimensions of a given college or university" (Seidman, 2005, p. 67). Students reported that working with tutors helped to build their confidence by affirming their progress and effort and demystifying the writing process.

The findings signify that student learned valuable skills, such as reading aloud, organizing essays and research papers, critical thinking skills as it applies to analysis, citation formatting styles. These skills among others are key to academic writing at the college-level. Administrators report that they highlight the importance of writing to their respective student populations because proficiency in writing is vital to student success because so many disciplines rely on written communication to determine students' analytical, comprehension, and content knowledge capabilities. It's evident that the writing center is a considerable factor in academic success as academic success depends on many internal and external factors: "one of the most relevant for students is their writing proficiency" (Beaufort, 2007; Villalon & Calvo, 2011). The results speak to the

writing center's role in retention and corroborate the What Works in Student Retention (WWISR) survey, which identified tutoring as the only measure “with incidence rates of 90% or more across institutional types (public, private, and two-year) and was the only learning assistance program listed in the top three in terms of perceived effectiveness across institutional types” (Habley et al., 2010, p. 270).

The data analyzed also suggested that students had an overall hesitancy to seek help from their professors due to the formality. Although they often viewed the writing center as a formal support service, they felt more comfortable seeking advice and feedback from tutors regardless of the tutors' positionality in the institution. However, many students preferred faculty tutors based on their expertise. The type of relationships participants built with faculty outside of the classroom is crucial as evidenced in Dowd et al. (2013) examination of the role of institutional agents for low-income students, students of color, and/or first-generation students, where it was determined that institutional agents were instrumental in providing a sense of psychological security and validation through their relationship with students, which in turn supported students' formation of an “elite” academic identity (Dowd et al., 2013). Other students preferred peer tutors because they often had experience and familiarity with the same courses and instructors. Students found this feedback essential as they viewed tutors as experts and mentors. Overall, they appreciated the opportunity to choose tutors based on their preferences. The types of experiences uncovered through analysis were prevalent among all participants and directly address research question one.

Research Question Two

The second question addressed how students describe their usage habits based on their skill development and resources provided. Student's report using the writing center as a one-time support for specific assignments rather than a place to develop and learn over time. For example, some students describe not retaining the knowledge attained during appointments and not being able to apply the strategies to subsequent assignments. However, when the data was analyzed its evident that students were indeed learning transferable skills, but their perception of the writing center as a "fix it" shop didn't allow them to immediately make that connection. Participants' misinterpretation of the writing center being a place where tutors merely fix problems and edit assignments align with why writing center pedagogy has long tried to move away from being seen as remedial service (Griswold, 2003). The writing center in this case, like others encourage the process-over-product model for their tutors, but this message does not always resonate with students. Unlike math, physics, and the like, students do not view writing strategies as concepts to be applied and enhanced over time, even though that is exactly how participants were developing as writers.

The participants' perception was important because it was a major factor in their decision to work with a tutor at the writing center or to use an online service such as Grammarly. The writing center is often used as just in time support, but that in itself is a valuable service. This is supported by data from the National Study of Developmental Education that establishes the presence of well-trained tutors is among the most significant elements related to student success (Griswold, 2003). The data analyzed in

this study likewise confirms the common premise that students will not willingly choose to visit the writing center because they think it is an admission of poor writing skills, this was especially true for the participants who expressed hesitation and fear of being talked down to by tutors. However, the findings also support the revelation made by Salem, 2016, where it was discovered that the objective of writing centers to distinguish themselves from remediation may alienate students who desperately need the writing center from ever going (Salem, 2016). Leaving the choice to come to the writing center up to the student supports a non-remedial pedagogy (Salem, 2016).

Nevertheless, all participants named faculty and program requirements to visit the writing center as the reason they chose to make their first appointment. The Elevate program professors make at least one visit to the writing center mandatory, other professors students encountered offered incentives by way of revision opportunities to encourage students to utilize the services at the writing center. This counters the preferred stance of writing centers based on not being a remedial service, but rather a place one chooses to visit. The writing center in this case does not openly discourage mandatory appointments by faculty, but generally frowns upon them. The center's stance aligns with the vast majority of writing center research, which concludes that writing centers should discourage faculty from making writing center appointments mandatory for their courses, (Henson & Stephenson, 2009). However, students who need more academic guidance, such as the participants in this study are likely to slip under the radar because decisions about seeking tutoring are often in place before students begin college (Salem, 2016). Leveraging social capital when it comes to utilizing tutoring services depends building a

bridge based on pre-entry attributes of students. The findings also indicate that when making the decision to continue to use the writing center, the absence of requirements and incentives was a key factor that impacted their usage habits. As Salem (2016) discovered, this hands-off approach benefits already-privileged students with stronger academic backgrounds and language skills.

Some participants were able to make the connection to their development as writers and attributed that development directly to writing center work. The writing center in this case used to provide tangible handouts that tutors often used to teach specific concepts, skills and writing conventions during appointment; however, in recent years they removed these handouts from the center. Three students with higher usage than the other participants referenced those handouts as incredible resources, which attributed to their perception of the writing center as a place to learn not just a place to fix a piece of writing. In sum, the results indicate that students learned broad skills that assisted them in the writing process, such as reading aloud, outlining, and organizing, even though they may not have recognized those skills as transferable.

Generally, the student population in this study preferred more directive tutors. The preference for directive tutoring among underrepresented student populations, which is more instructive and hands-on, with the tutor explaining concepts and taking a more active role in guiding the discussion, has been documented in other significant studies of writing centers (Salem, 2016; Trosset et al., 2019). Also supported by Salem, 2016, is the frustration participants in the current study reported when encountering an especially non-directive tutoring style, which is a more hands-off approach where the tutor serves as

a sociable and knowledgeable guide through the writing process (Salem, 2016; Trosset et al., 2019). Although, when participants encountered a non-directive tutor it did not deter them from future appointments because students choose their tutors when booking appointments.

Research Question Three

The third research question sought to learn how administrators view the role of the writing center as it relates to supporting their student population? The study found that administrators expected their students would encounter a level of service and climate during writing center appointments that would contribute to student sense of belonging at the institution. Through analysis of the center’s mission, “to work with current [...] undergraduate and graduate student-writers of varying experience, learning styles, and linguistic backgrounds [...]. We offer a structured and safe learning environment that helps undergraduate and graduate students excel in college-level writing and helps them develop skills that lead to both academic persistence and success beyond graduation.” It was clear that the center shares this value as core to their existence and relays this message to the writing center staff. Aligned with the findings from the center’s mission, administrators describe their hopes for students to be affirmed and their academic worthiness validated by tutors despite their level of writing. The study found that the writing center met these expectations and often exceeded them based on the student experiences.

Administrators also verify that the writing was a gateway to other vital aspects of college life that are key to academic success and persistence. The findings line up with

the role writing centers have in institutions more broadly, writing centers are institutional support where institutional agents convey, including specific funds of knowledge, connections to gatekeepers, role modeling, and emotional support (Kuh et al., 2010). Similarly, Tinto (2012) describes writing centers as places that “serve as secure, knowable ports of entry” (p. 29). Administrators report that students found a sense of belonging at the writing center through validation, affirmation, and relationships with peer and faculty tutors. Institutions are also responsible for building networks and providing services that help students build social capital (Bourdieu, 1986, Schulz et al., 2017; Tinto, 1993). This responsibility connects to how administrators described their hopes for students to be affirmed and their academic worthiness validated by tutors despite their level of writing. This finding is also an implication because writing centers are usually formally introduced to students belonging to learning communities as a place designed to offer learning assistance to all students, and the center’s place in the institution is one that promotes academic success and retention for all students (Arendale, 2007). However, using a learning assistance service like the writing center, in a higher education setting, is usually voluntary; therefore, understanding why students choose to take advantage of supplemental instruction is important if administrators wish to make meaningful contributions to students’ development.

Relationship to Prior Research

The present study has a direct relationship with the existing literature presented in Chapter Two. The findings support the claims made by prior researchers when examining usage and experiences at writing centers, among specific student populations. This

current study viewed these experiences through the lens of Tinto's interactionist theory (1993) and Bourdieu (1997) theory of social capital to help shape administrators' and faculties' understanding on the subject and ultimately transfer the knowledge into actionable steps. At the writing center in this case study, students encounter an environment either online or in-person that is welcoming, affirming, and a place where connections and relationships are fostered. This culture created by the center affirms what institutions have come to rely on in their living learning communities, especially those that embed pre-freshman summer academies and academic support to build upon students existing social capital. Writing center work and engagement measures have intersecting qualities, such as high-quality feedback, developing essential writing skills, and empowering students to be active learners, all of which is considered capital (Barkley, 2010; Cardak et al., 2015).

The validation that students experience at this writing center affirms similar research that posits its importance for student success and a key component of social capital. "Students that are validated in the classroom or in the community, develop confidence in their ability to learn and enhanced self-worth" (Patton, Renn, et al., 2016, p. 41). Students with high levels of affirmation usually have higher self-esteem, achievement, and self-concept (Ellis et al., 2018). Minorities, specifically, can feel comfortable and a sense of belonging. Overall, affirmation "promotes identity, psychosocial well-being, and fruitful college experiences for students" (Ellis et al., 2018, p. 7).

This writing center provided resources to increase engagement and academic success. Stanton-Salazar (1997) used social and cultural capital theory to conceptualize social networks within educational institutions. These networks and resources converge to impact racial/ethnic minority students' educational trajectories. Institutional agents are individuals who have status, authority, and access to resources within institutions, such as teachers, advisors, and tutors; they “transmit directly, or negotiate the transmission of, institutional resources and opportunities” (Stanton-Salazar, 1997, p. 6). This writing center is inhabited by institutional agents at all levels including administrators, faculty, graduate, and undergraduate tutors.

Yet, the writing center in this study did not currently employ FGCS and Elevate scholars, or any tutors of color, an aspect that could be particularly beneficial to the student population who participated in this study. This finding reflects a missed opportunity. Kuh et al. (2008), contended that students' perception of learning environments, institutional characteristics, student demographics, pre-college experiences, and social and academic integration between peers and faculty were important to student success. In their study, they found that college students who reported on the level of engagement with good practices, such as time spent collaborating with faculty and interacting with students of different racial and ethnic backgrounds persisted at a higher rate (Pascarella et al., 2010). Students need to learn and master different tasks, experience a sense of belonging and attachment to other people and the institution (Trevino & DeFreitas, 2014). Similarly, Johnson et al. (2007) found African American, Latinx, and Asian-American Pacific students reported having a lower sense of belonging

than white students. The impact of belonging for college students is conceptualized in Tinto's (1993) integration model, which posits that the more academically and socially connected students are to the school, the more likely they are to persist. Although, the findings support that the center accomplished many of these goals through validation and affirmation, it could be enhanced if students could see themselves reflected in the staff population (Trevino, & DeFreitas, 2014). Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005, concluded that when support services focused on the presence of peer groups and culture, social and academic integration improved along with persistence and retention.

Kuh et al. (2010) proposed requiring and encouraging students to engage in academic support, personal support, experiential activities and outlines the importance of writing. In this current study faculty and program mandates to utilize the writing center and other academic support services were crucial to participants decision making regarding usage habits. However, the center does not neither publicly encourage nor discourage making appointments mandatory. Although students who participated in this study only initiated visits to get help with a singular assignment, the activities and resources utilized during appointments were beneficial to students' holistic writing process at the college-level. This connects to the research that recognizes that the lack of preparedness to attain these skills, may result in students not being successful in various types of writing situations (Beaufort, 2007). Many students fail in college directly because of poor writing skills and reading and writing remain two of the three basic skills required to succeed in college. It is argued that if more adults received writing instruction

that responded to their individual needs in their first year of college, they would have been retained at a higher rate (Cleary, 2012).

Both students and administrators recognize the expertise of tutors at the writing center and the importance of writing to their academic success. This recognition aligns to the literature that suggests proper instruction, encouragement, and feedback during the writing process is necessary, especially for first-year college students in order to create an environment where they are empowered to continuously build on their writing skills (Beaufort, 2007). Griswold (2003), in a broad analysis of survey data of more than 900 institutions, found that peer tutoring is one of the most effective retention efforts, especially for traditionally underserved students. Success in college is contingent upon many academic factors; however, writing ability is paramount among those factors (Beaufort, 2007). The ability to write well is vital to acquiring social capital. The environment and support offered at the writing center was a necessary link between writing skill attainment, providing a connection between instructor expectations, student perceptions, and social and academic engagement, which supports existing research (Brickey, 2013).

This study also contributes to the perception many students have about their own writing. Three participants reported that they were under the perception that their writing met college level standards but were surprised to learn that they needed to improve in certain areas. Similarly, often, students' perceptions of their own skills do not align with the data. Berret, 2014 found in half of the students surveyed in their study rated their writing skills as being above average, but the National Center for Education Statistics

shows that 37% of 12th -grade students are reading and writing at a fourth- or fifth-grade level (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.). College writing requires organization, comprehension, problem-solving, and acquiring and interpreting new knowledge (Beaufort, 2007). These skills were among the ones reported by students as attained over time during writing center appointments. For underrepresented student populations needing to increase their social capital, effective writing centers may alleviate some of the miscommunication about writing that occurs in the classroom (Brickey, 2013).

Limitations of the Study

The exploratory single case study is a limitation in that the experience in this writing center may not be indicative and applicable to other writing centers. Writing centers offer a wide spectrum of services, support, and resources, so it is difficult to conclusively apply the results of this study to other centers. However, together with prior research, the writing center as a valuable support system embedded in institutions is entirely relevant. Due to the limited nature of the study, and the specific programs and affinity groups the participants belonged to, the results are not always generalizable. However, the results may inform how institutions can provide the type of support that matters to underrepresented populations to foster engagement and academic success.

The changing nature of the FGCS learning community and Elevate program also limitations of this study. Because the study sought to understand what factors influence students' usage habits. The lack of official programing and funding in the FGCS learning community and embed tutors in the Elevate program reduced the correlations that could

be made directly to work of the writing center, due to the program selection bias. However, students gave in-depth responses about their specific encounters with the writing center, which the researcher was able to discern through analysis. Additionally, the researcher has institutional knowledge and a working relationship with the writing center, so an exact replication of the study cannot be expected.

The data collection for this case took place during the COVID-19 pandemic when student participants, the writing center, and the Elevate summer program had been largely virtual. Understanding usage habits, engagement was significantly harder to measure during isolation. The COVID-19 pandemic also made it harder to find participants as everything was conducted through email, and the researcher was not able to go into the writing center to recruit. Due to limited recruitment because of the pandemic, it was harder to find more students from varying backgrounds.

A final limitation is researcher bias, which the researcher steadily checked by self-reflection. The researcher needed to make sure her affiliation with the writing center did not color her analysis, whereas an unaffiliated researcher would have been more objective. The researcher's affiliation was also a strength, however, in building rapport with all interviewees.

Recommendations for Future Practice

Writing center work and engagement measures have intersecting qualities, such as high-quality feedback, developing essential writing skills, and empowering students to be active learners, all of which is considered capital (Barkley, 2010; Cardak et al., 2015). Bourdieu (1997) attributes any underperformance of underrepresented student

populations in education to low social capital (Karimshah et al., 2013). The researcher disagrees with this assessment, students from diverse backgrounds bring a wealth of social and cultural capital to the college campus (Yosso, 2005). This study rejected the idea that underrepresented students are ill-equipped to develop the type of relationships and networks that assist them in achieving academic success. In contrast, the framework for this study worked under the assumption that students with high levels of social capital have more favorable educational outcomes and that it is the institution's responsibility to create networks, resources, and environments that work to increase social capital for all students. If we do not investigate usage habits, we will continue to be at a disadvantage in understanding and serving all students, especially those entering with lower academic capital (McDonough, 1997; Salem, 2016).

Regarding the current study, the FGCS and Elevate Scholars' learning communities were composed of many traditionally underrepresented students, who had a higher chance of not persisting, and both programs demonstrate that writing was detrimental to student success. Both Elevate Scholars and FGCS were more likely to come from low-income backgrounds and identify as racial or ethnic minorities, prior research suggests that these characteristics are attributed to students who are among the highest population of students who are not retained and did not persist. Prior research designates several major reasons for this failure to persist; they were not entering college with the academic skills needed to be successful, they never felt a sense of belonging and community, and they were sometimes stigmatized because of assumptions about their socioeconomic status or race (Attewell, 2006; Managan, 2015; Mathews, 2015).

Administrators and program directors must offer programming, affinity communities, and academic and social support to mitigate these barriers.

Institutions need to properly fund existing programs proved to be effective, such as FGCS and Elevate scholars and the entities that serve these populations, such as writing centers. For underrepresented student populations, an affinity group and pre-freshman summer program can increase their social capital and engagement before their first semester begins. Institutions are enrolling more diverse student populations with the goal of offering access to postsecondary education to diverse generations of nontraditional students and with that comes addressing different needs they need to create networks to increase their likelihood to persist. This study reveals the importance of early intervention opposed to reactive measures. Because these type of learning communities encompass a large majority of underrepresented students, participants often find themselves unable to perform academically and to acclimate to the college environment due to a lack of social capital. The crux of these programs aims to leverage students' social capital, to improve access and support, social integration, highlight professor expectations, introduce support services, offer guidance, and promote retention among historically underrepresented students (Brown, 2008; Friedlander et al., 2007).

Although the traditionally underserved may not instinctively pursue support, when they do, they take advantage of useful and effective support services and networks that increase their capital within the institution. However, this study found that those endeavors are not adequately funded by the larger institution and may be often overlooked. The lack of funding results in the inability of administrators to make

utilization an official requirement for students. Student participation in most tutoring environments is voluntary. In learning communities designed for underrepresented student populations, such as bridge programs and first-generation student programs, tutoring services like the writing center are promoted and encouraged to increase social capital by way of skill building and engagement.

However, this does not always result in students' persistent engagement with support services, specifically the writing center, over a prolonged period. Writing centers can aid in this engagement. As found in this study, students are more likely to participate in open tutoring events and value tangible resources. The decision to seek support is an educational choice, and at-risk student populations often do not enter with the type of social capital and networks that make seeking out academic support intrinsic, nor, as the literature suggests, particularly worthwhile (Salem, 2016; Trosset et al., 2019). If higher education wants to remain viable by opening their doors to students from all backgrounds and skill levels it has to do better to assure programming, services, and networks are effective and funded.

This study found a major reason that can be attributed to their usage habits is the lack of faculty requirements from professors' college-wide and the continuous encouragement beyond freshman year when it is required. Although the Elevate program mandates their students to receive ongoing tutoring, the researcher discovered that it is only required that they see an Elevate tutor, not tutoring provided by the institution, such as the writing center. Elevate mentors and tutors receive general training and Elevate participants in the study view them as an asset, but they do not help to integrate the

student into the larger campus community, nor do they have the expertise observed at the writing center, which is essential to social capital attainment. For the FGCS learning community, as previously stated, the researcher discovered the affinity group is not funded, students are dependent upon faculty and administrator volunteer to embed support for the group. Outside of the housing cohort, the institution does not provide a summer orientation, scholarships, or embedded support. Thus, students can only be encouraged and directed to the writing center and other support services. This is a failure for the institution to live up to its goal of providing adequate support to the diverse population it actively recruits and hopes to retain. In the same vein, using a learning assistance service in a higher education setting is usually voluntary; therefore, understanding effective strategies that encourage students to take advantage of supplemental instruction and how usage impacts engagement and social capital acquisition is important for writing center professional and faculty of all disciplines.

This study can help develop a framework for writing centers and other student support services in higher education that would contribute to positive educational outcomes for underrepresented student populations. Probing factors that contribute to the postsecondary success underrepresented college students provide a useful window into how practitioners, policymakers, and higher education institutions can create equitable opportunities for underserved student populations.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study was conducted with students and administrators at a private suburban university in the Northeastern area of the United States. A longitudinal study could also

be conducted where students can be followed and tracked throughout their matriculation at the university. By conducting this study over the course of 4-6 years, a better understanding of usage habits according to major and standing could be determined. This study collected data from students in their first two years of schooling, which was essential to this case, but a longitudinal study could reveal in further detail how students' writing, sense of belonging, and social engagement was impacted by writing center usage. It could also help to identify when students need more encouragement, incentives, and mandates to visit the writing center and how the drop of might or might not contribute to their GPA.

Similarly, a mixed method study could be utilized to account for pre-entry attributes, like demographics, home district resources, race, and gender. This will help the researcher determine if these attributes contribute to students' usage habits. Although this study analyzed appointment data, it was only to cross reference the number of appointments students made and attended. Reviewing appointment reports written by tutors could tell the researcher more about students' perception about the skills and strategies they worked on to the actual skills recorded by tutors. Students often do not have the language to name writing strategies accurately. A mixed method study could also investigate other academic support services and centers for academic excellence to get a more holistic picture of how underrepresented student populations engage with support more widely. This could refine the results in this study to have a better depiction of the most effective and utilized support services within an institution.

Finally, a cross institutional study could fill in the gap in the research that addresses the connection between engagement and social capital, and ultimately how and what contributes to social capital acquisition for students who belong to living and learning communities where they have participated pre-freshman summer academies and academic support is introduced and promoted. This study was conducted at a 4-year institution an, which has different type of services, offerings and fundings that public and two-year colleges. Understanding the issue across institutions would uncover broad implications and could lead to more tailored services for students.

Conclusion

The current study explored the specific role of the writing center in building social capital for underrepresented student populations, and how student experiences in the writing center determined usage. Interview data revealed that students choose to come to the writing center based on faculty encouragement, stigmatization, perceived scope of usefulness, nondirective tutoring style, and time management. Thus, if we know that students with more privilege and access to strong networks more readily choose to use the writing center, mandatory appointments may help close the gap when it comes to social capital for underserved student populations. The student experiences described and analyzed in this study speak directly to how writing center work is perceived and utilized among underserved, underrepresented student populations, and how the interactions and engagement that happen during writing center appointments contribute to social capital attainment.

The results of this study found that the writing center and the services and relationships fostered through writing center work are a valuable resource for underrepresented student populations. Writing centers contribute to, and leverage existing social capital through social and academic engagement. Most students developed skills pertinent to their academic and social growth, which increased with usage. Although students only initiated visits to get help with a singular assignment, the activities and resources utilized during appointments were beneficial to students' holistic writing process at the college-level. Students and administrators indicate that faculty and program requirements are essential to students' decision-making process for their initial visit to the writing center and a factor in their decision to make subsequent appointments.

The study also recognized the link between interaction, engagement, social capital, and writing centers, as key indicators of student achievement. This study can be replicated by other writing centers and/or academic support centers that want to investigate how their services contribute to social capital attainment. It is important that all students have the same access and support they need to be successful. Conversely, most higher education institutions have made a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion and offering access is just the starting point of that commitment; intentional investments must be made to provide equitable support in order to retain a diverse student body. Thus, it is up to all academic support programs to render the best services possible by continuously evaluating effectiveness and make meaningful improvements.

Traditionally, underrepresented student populations depend on integration and engagement to be successful and persist. Although this research is in higher education,

the need to prepare and contribute to students' academic capital is important for partners in K-12. Academic preparation and support should begin well before the college entry process, as suggested by the research, having networks in which students learn how to navigate unfamiliar territory while being affirmed greatly increases their aptitude to persist. All educational institutions are responsible for building networks and providing services that help students build social capital (Bourdieu, 1986, Schulz et al., 2017; Tinto, 1993). The study moves past evaluating the educational decision making of student populations who may enter with non-traditional social capital, and who may be less privileged. Alternatively, this study shifted focus to those students' perceptions of the services provided at a prominent academic support service, the writing center. For writing centers, specifically, more research needs to be done to capture what is being done, how well it is being done, and how can the services be tailored to students' needs.

APPENDIX A

RECRUITMENT E-MAIL (STUDENTS)

To Whom it May Concern,

My name is Aisha Wilson-Carter, and I am a doctoral student in the Doctor of Education program at St. John's University in Queens, New York. I am completing my dissertation focused on identifying if and how interactions with writing centers contribute to social capital acquisition.

I am looking for volunteers to participate in my study. Your participation in this study will help academic support services identify effective strategies to improve student success for all students and to understand writing centers best serve students. I'm looking for volunteers willing to meet with me for an hour-long interview over Zoom, at their convenience. The interview will be recorded and transcribed; all participants will be given a pseudonym, and responses will be confidential. Participation is voluntary, and you can stop at any time. You must be at least 18 years old to participate. Please feel free to contact me at [REDACTED] if you are willing to participate in this study or if you have any questions.

Thank you and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Aisha Wilson-Carter

APPENDIX B



INFORMED CONSENT

My name is Aisha Wilson-Carter, and I am a doctoral student in the Doctor of Education program at St. John's University in Queens, New York. I am completing research for at St. John's, which is focused on identifying if and how interactions with writing centers contribute to social capital acquisition among underrepresented student populations. I am requesting that at your convenience, you meet with me for an hour-long interview over Zoom. The data you provide during the interview will be used in my dissertation.

The interview will be recorded and transcribed; you will be given a pseudonym, and your name will not be released. The interview will be recorded and will not be anonymous; your name will not be released, and your answers will be coded. Despite these measures and although your responses will be confidential, I cannot guarantee someone will not be able to identify you, but I will try my best to ensure it. Your participation is important to this study as your responses will help academic support services identify effective strategies to improve student success for all students. This interview is voluntary, and there is minimal risk; you do not have to participate if you do not wish to, and you can stop at any time. You must be at least 18 years old to participate. By signing this form and completing the interview, you are giving consent to be a part of the research. Please feel free to contact me at [REDACTED] if you have any questions about this study.

I _____ agree to participate in the study conducted by Aisha Wilson-Carter. I understand the risks associated with the current study.

Signature and Date

APPENDIX C

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW STUDENT PROTOCOL

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview about your writing center experiences. The goal of this interview is to discuss your experience(s) with Sunrise X University Writing Center.

The interview will consist of approximately 10 open-ended questions about your interactions with the writing center. The interview will be recorded and later transcribed for accuracy. The interview and transcripts are confidential, and your name will not be included in the results. You are free to stop at any time; if you decide not to continue with the interview, please let me know. Can you take a couple of minutes to fill out this brief questionnaire?

[REDACTED]

Do you have any questions before we begin?

1. How did you first learn about the writing center?
2. Think back: What made you decide to make an appointment at the writing center?
3. Think back to your first appointment: Can you describe how you felt during your first appointment?
 - a. *Were you comfortable, anxious, excited?*
 - b. *Did the tutor make you feel comfortable, anxious, excited?*
4. What were your expectations and were they met? Can you provide an example?
5. What type of skills, if any, have you learned during your interactions with the writing center? Can you provide an example?
 - a. *Did the tutor help you understand the expectations of your assignment, professor, academic writing?*
 - b. *What was the most useful activity you did with your tutor?*
 - c. *Did the sessions make you feel more confident in your writing skills?*
 - d. *Did the tutor assist you in understanding your professor's feedback?*
 - e. *Did they teach you a specific skill, and/or advice/direction?*
6. What was it about your writing center experience that made you decide to return or not to return for subsequent appointments?

- a. *For example, was it the staff, the relationships, the environment, the method of tutoring?*
 - b. *Was there anything you wanted to do or discuss that you didn't?*
7. Over time, have you developed any academic skills that can be attributed to your interactions with the writing center? Can you provide an example?
8. Over time, have you learned anything during writing center visits that help you navigate the college experience? Can you provide an example?
 - a. *Have you built any relationships?*
 - b. *Did your tutors make you feel like you or your work was being validated?*
 - c. *Did you learn anything that you applied to other disciplines and situations?*
9. Did you see your tutor as an authority figure, expert, peer, mentor, etc.? Explain.
10. Would you like to add anything else about your experience in the Writing Center?

APPENDIX D

PRE-QUESTIONNAIRE STUDENT PROTOCOL

1. Below is a list of skills that writers often work on when they visit the Writing Center. Please select any skills you focused on during your session (s) in the center:
 - Brainstorming
 - Outlining
 - Drafting/crafting a thesis
 - Drafting coherent paragraphs
 - Logically organizing ideas
 - Using textual evidence (how to properly use quotes and paraphrases)
 - Citing sources using MLA/APA citation method
 - Understanding and interpreting sources
 - Sentence-level assistance (punctuation, word choice, proofreading, run-on sentences, incomplete sentences)
 - Understanding the expectations of my assignment and/or professor
 - Other (please specify)

2. As a result of your interaction(s) with the Writing Center, please indicate if you feel you have improved in any of the following areas: check all that apply
 - Confidence in my writing ability
 - Confidence in expressing my ideas
 - Ability to understand course material in a way that connects to my writing
 - Development of writing skills/habits/techniques I was able to apply on my own
 - Drafting/crafting a thesis
 - Drafting coherent paragraphs
 - Logically organizing ideas
 - Using textual evidence (how to properly use quotes and paraphrases)
 - Citing sources uses MLA/APA citation method
 - Understanding and interpreting sources
 - Sentence level (punctuation, word choice, proofreading, run-on sentences, incomplete sentences)
 - Understanding the expectations of my assignment and/or professor

APPENDIX E

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW ADMINISTRATORS PROTOCOL

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview about students' perceptions of their writing center experiences. Your participation in this interview will help describe how your program defines the writing center's role in the success of your students. The goal of this interview is to discuss your experience with the writing center at Sunrise X University.

The interview will consist of a few questions related to your role as an administrator in relationship to your student population and the use of the writing center. The interview will consist of approximately 10 open-ended questions about your interactions with the writing center. The interview will be recorded and later transcribed for accuracy. The interview and transcripts are confidential, and your name will not be included in the results. You are free to stop at any time; if you decide not to continue with the interview, please let me know.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

1. Tell me about your program.
2. What would you say is the biggest concern for your students?
3. What role does the writing center have in supporting the students in your community?
 - a. *What do you want your students to gain from writing center appointments?*
 - b. *What impact do you think it has on students' engagement (expectations, support, feedback, and involvement) with the college?*
 - c. *What impact do you think it has on students' academic achievement (skills and resources)?*
 - d. *Would you say your students frequent the writing center?*
4. How does your program promote, require, and/or encourage the utilization of academic support services?
 - a. *How do you promote use of the writing center to your students?*
 - b. *What, if anything, do you tell your students about the writing center?*
 - c. *Do you track utilization of academic support services?*
 - d. *What would you say is the most beneficial aspect of the academic support services offered by the college? Why?*

5. What are the perceptions of the writing center among the students in your learning community?
 - a. *Have you had a student discuss a memorable experience, whether positive or negative?*
 - b. *How did you respond?*
 - c. *Has anything a student reported influenced how your program promotes or encourages students to use the writing center?*

6. Would you like to add anything else?

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