THE EFFECTIVENESS OF COLLEGE READINESS COLLEGE PREPARATORY PROGRAMS FOR LOW-INCOME TEENAGERS

Leah Heartfield

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THE EFFECTIVENESS OF COLLEGE READINESS COLLEGE PREPARATORY
PROGRAMS FOR LOW-INCOME TEENAGERS

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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of

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at

ST. JOHN'S UNIVERSITY

New York

by

Leah Heartfield

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Leah Heartfield      Ceceilia Parnther, Ph.D.
ABSTRACT

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF COLLEGE READINESS COLLEGE PREPARATORY PROGRAMS FOR LOW-INCOME TEENAGERS

Leah Heartfield

High school students from low-income backgrounds experience academic under-preparedness, financial distress, and socialization challenges when entering college. For these students, challenges may begin in the K-12 setting, where this population is more likely to face limitations in college counseling, lack highly qualified teachers, and have limited access to college programs. First generation college students are less likely to pursue and persist in higher education than their peers with different backgrounds (OECD, 2012). Because of this, low-income students may seek out or be invited to join supplemental programs, including summer bridge and afterschool programs, to help them become college ready. The research explores the main component of transitional academic support within a specific program. The study also describes how various stakeholders in precollege programming promote student persistence to and through college. This qualitative study utilizes a single case study approach using semi-structured interviews and an analysis of the program website. The resultant data illustrates the student supports, delivery methods, and culturally relevant pedagogy used within the program. As seen in the findings of this study, relationships and team collaboration is important to maintain academic preparedness and cultural relevant instruction. This study adds to the growing body of literature on associations between after school college...
preparation programs and collegiate success, specifically from the perspectives of designers and implementers of after school programs (Tichavakunda, 2019).
DEDICATION

First, I would like to dedicate all of the work that went into creating this study to God whose name is Jesus. I praise him for all of the strength he has given me to complete this work even during those times when I seriously thought of quitting.

Second, I want to give honor and dedicate this work to my parents who wholeheartedly supported me. Thank you both for your encouragement and motivation. Most of all, thank you for never giving up on me! Next, this study is dedicated to my Pastor and my church family. Thank you sincerely for all of your nonstop prayers and words of encouragement.

Finally, I want this work to resonate in the hearts of all of the middle and high school students at the Determine To Achieve Success (DTAS), my church and all over the world who may be struggling with the idea of “attending college”. My hope is that you may be able to learn from my study. I wrote for you all to understand that there are many options out there that can contribute your understanding of the college enrollment process. Never give up and think that college isn’t an option for you for you are worth it!
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to give a huge shout-out to my mentor Dr. Cecilia Parnther who has been working alongside me throughout this process! It’s funny that we have never actually met in person nor have I ever been a student in one of her official classes.

A special thank you goes to my dissertation committee, Dr. Fahle and Dr. Aquino. Although we didn’t meet frequently, any guidance, piece of advice and time that you were able to give me was greatly appreciated!

Lastly, I want to acknowledge the support of my unofficial cohort. We met each other through our doctoral journeys. Thank you all for all of your help, advice, texts and phone calls. A special shout-out to Jonathan, Nia, Ambeeka, Claudia and Christina and others! I greatly appreciate your support!
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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Family income is associated with high school graduation rates and college attendance (NCES, 2019). For over 15 years, more than 7,200 students have left American public high schools without a diploma (Engle & Tinto, 2004). Some educators would concur that low high school completion rates can occur due to the lack of resources and funding (Ladson-Billings, 2006) while others would agree on the community surroundings, which may influence students’ ability to achieve (Douglass-Hall & Chou, 2009). These challenges make college preparedness difficult for leaders of schools in low-income communities.

Low-income students are often less likely to complete their college education. Over the last decade, college enrollment data indicates that within 12 months of graduating high school, college attendance varies substantially by socioeconomic status (80% for highest quintile, 61% for middle income, and 55% for lowest quintile; Baum, Ma, & Payea, 2010). Furthermore, research has drawn further attention to low-income students, noting that some students struggle to meet their basic needs, let alone pay for a college education (NCES, 2017).

The consequences of these limitations are evident in postsecondary education, where 12 to 14 percent of low-income, first-generation students who begin in a four-year institution were three times more likely to leave after the first year when compared to their peers (Engle & Tinto, 2004). This student population has also experienced the highest drop-out rates in the public two-year and for-profit sectors. The majority of dropouts are impoverished minorities who attend large, urban schools (Swanson, 2010). This study offers solutions in an effort to combat this ongoing problem of school
dropout rates. School dropout rates can be prevented by the utilization of precollege and afterschool programming. These programs provide opportunities and experiences that assist in motivating the minds of low-income students. Through such programs students are encouraged to pursue their postsecondary education.

In response, state and federal agencies promote precollege and afterschool programming as a solution to lower the school dropout rate, and promote postsecondary education. The programs offer college counseling, mentoring, and academic support programs. Several partner with colleges and universities. These programs provide opportunities and experiences that assist in motivating the minds of low-income students.

**Purpose of Study**

The purpose of the study is to describe college preparation and academic support for low-income teenagers. College exploration was explored through the relationships between and within partnerships (staff & students, staff and administration, alumni and program) through the lens of a single partnership program. This program provided transitional academic support services that were executed in culturally relevant ways. These services provide supports to ensure academic success in high school and preparing students for postsecondary education. The study explores these components using a program designed to address these needs. This, and similar programs aim to support at-risk middle and high school students, specifically, to improve their academic, social, and emotional development. In addition to understanding what activities can be found in college transitional academic support activities within the program, the study seeks to explore how, if at all, these services assist students in college preparation. The study uses
the perspectives of alumni students, administrators, counselors and program directors to describe the programs and processes that support students.

**Community Environment & Afterschool Programs**

These outreach and afterschool programs provide support and resources within the educational system for underserved students and are often federally supported as a pipeline intervention to prevent dropout and provide a pathway to college access. These programs include federally supported and national efforts such as Empire, Gear Up & Upward Bound. Program leaders collaborate with the schools their students attend to maximize students’ readiness for college. They also work directly with individual students and their families to provide information about the preparation process of enrolling in college. (Coles et al., 2004).

College outreach programs and afterschool programs have the potential to advance the postsecondary preparation of low-income students. At-risk youth or low-income students who attend afterschool programs can increase their chances of achieving long-term economic success and making positive contributions to society (Carnegie Corporation, 1992). Afterschool programs can support social, emotional, cognitive, and academic development for students, particularly from 6-12 grade (Coles et al., 2004). Research states that afterschool programs are more likely to promote socio-emotional and physical health, as well as provide a safe and supportive environment for children and youth (Yohalem et al., 2010).

Afterschool programs may include elements of college preparation by providing college counseling and academic transition support services. College counseling can be described as a mentoring strategy that establishes relationships between high school
counselors and students. College counseling has become one of the main needs for improving college access for low-income students (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2020). Transition support programs aim to offer support through transition courses, summer bridge programs, mentoring and student support groups. Additionally, they offer social support programs to help students adjust to college by providing clear pathways to succeeding in college (Kramer et al; 2003). This study highlights these transitional academic programs, namely, tutoring, college and career exploration. Students who enroll into these programs increase their chances of graduating high school and preparing for college.

The Existence of Precollege Programs

Research on college access focused on the academic preparation of students and financial aid policies until the 1990s (Tierney et al; 2005). Over the last three decades, more literature has generated conclusions that many students, especially those from underserved backgrounds, lack accurate information about postsecondary options (Baber, 2018). Some of these students may be confused about expectations for academic work, actual tuition costs, and the content of college entrance and placement tests (Venezia, Kirst, and Antonio, 2003). Therefore, precollege interventions and programming have been created in an effort to educate students on college knowledge. Some other precollege interventions include activities such as transitional academic programs that are explored within this study. The intention for exploring precollege programming is mainly for the available access for students and teachers to prepare for college enrollment. This assists in breaking the stigma of low-income students having limited access to college knowledge.
Gaining Access

Low-income students are at higher risk of drop out. Those struggling to remain engaged in school may lose interest in the possibility of college. To prevent this, academic transition support programs offer remediation and students from low income communities experience higher levels of drop out, and lower levels of college education. Academic support programs are designed to help students overcome these barriers, and promote student success through a variety of holistic approaches. These include offering safe spaces for students outside of the classroom, providing remediation or enrichment opportunities, facilitating peer relationships, and assisting with college admissions and funding. For many students, these programs may be the only way to learn about and consider college as a viable option. Consequently, academic support programs play an important role in ensuring that all students have the opportunity to achieve their academic potential, ideally by attaining a college degree.

Components for College Success

College access begins with an early introduction of the value of a college degree. This can be done through a variety of means, including college fairs, campus visits, and mentoring programs. College access programs provide students with the opportunity to learn about different colleges and universities and explore their educational options. These programs help students navigate the college admissions process and provide them with information about financial aid and scholarships. College access programs also seek to increase the number of underrepresented students who enroll in college. By providing information and assistance to these students, these programs hope to level the playing field and ensure that all students have an equal opportunity to pursue higher education.
Academic support programs play an important role in preparing students for college. These programs provide tutoring and academic counseling, and help students develop study skills and time management strategies.

_Tutoring_

Tutoring has been referenced by educators and students as a service that proves to be effective when preparing for college. Academic preparation can be measured by elements of precollege curriculum. These elements may include advancement placement, college counseling, learning services (Farmer-Hinton & Adams, 2006) and tutoring services such as the extra reading, math and writing preparation for their various classes (Kramer et al, 2003; Goode, 2017). In order to cater to diverse styles of learning tutoring has proven to assist students who are in need of improving academically. Tutoring can be implemented in various forms such peer to peer, one-on-one with a student and teacher and small groups tutoring. These activities provide support for students who striving to improve their academic achievement for graduation and college enrollment.

_Theoretical/Conceptual Framework_

_Student Departure Theory_

Tinto’s (1975) Theory on Student Departure provides a framework to explore whether the college access programs benefit low-income, first generation college students. His work explored the idea that students’ backgrounds and connections to higher education institutions helped influence their decisions to remain in college.
Tinto’s Model of Student Departure


Tinto’s theory of student departure can help teachers to recognize their student's needs for college preparation. If students seem to be withdrawn or refuse to participate in preparing for college, the teachers would need to find an approach that would further motivate and engage the student. Additional academic support courses can assist with sparking students’ interests. In addition, this approach discovers the truth of the societal forces that contribute to a student becoming withdrawn when interacting with college experiences. (Tinto, 1986; 1993).
Tinto’s Student Departure Theory suggests that individual departure from institutions can be viewed as arising out of the process of interactions between an individual with given attributes, skills, financial resources, prior educational experiences, dispositions (intentions and commitments), and integration with other members of the academic and social systems of the institution (Tinto, 1993). These attributes can be seen through pre-school schooling, familiar background, and more to attain high grade performance and academic success. Students who make commitments upon entry can affect the extent of their social and academic interaction within a learning institution. In addition, they can also affect the extent of their integration, which impacts their goals and institutional commitment.

This study proposes that precollege schooling impacts academic grade performance, intellectual development, and college enrollment. This theory can also assist in understanding how stakeholders describe the programs and collaborative efforts of the school and DTAS. Moreover, the student-departure theory can offer a solution to help limit high school drop-out and increase student success through the attributes that are presented within the theory. Attributes associated with precollege schooling are academic support services and college counseling. Tinto provides the foundation for investigating whether these factors can affect student retention and preparation for college. Furthermore, in addition to Tinto’s theory, there is a need for culturally relevant content within these programs to help students become successful.

*Culturally Relevant Pedagogy*
As described earlier, there are various issues that impact a student college going behaviors. Some of them may include unequitable distribution of funding, lack of teachers, lack of student involvement (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Astin, 1999). However, there are several methods in which the formula for preparing students for college can be evaluated. Today, more outreach programs are pushing schools to supply information about financial aid, family support and counseling, and tutoring, among other things (Hossler et al; 1995). This information can assist by addressing some of these concerns and help improve access for students from low-income and first-generation students (Hossler et al; 1995). Although that has improved students’ success, there are still schools that are not receiving hardly any support from federally funded outreach programs. However, there must be a solution to these schools having no access to college preparation.

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) also frames the role of culturally relevant pedagogy in academic success. The theory suggests that many of the disparities found within education occur due to unequal distribution of funding within high-need schools (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). According to Ladson-Billings (2006), the historical, economic, sociopolitical, and moral decisions and policies in America have created an education “deficit” (p. 5) that has produced the current achievement gap between black and white students. This deficit is the product of the unequal distribution of funding within high-need schools. High-need schools consist of low-income students and it requires teachers who are qualified for the position.

Culturally relevant pedagogy is a teaching approach that is based on the idea that students learn best when they can see themselves and their cultures reflected in the
material being taught. This approach has been shown to be valuable in afterschool programs, high school completion, and college-going behavior. Specifically, students who feel that they can be successful in school and who have a positive sense of identity are more likely to stay in school and succeed academically. Additionally, students who feel like they belong in college are more likely to persist and graduate.

**Significance of the Study**

Ultimately, this study offers valuable information to educational leaders as they communicate, design, and collaborate to offer academic support and college programming. This study also adds to the growing body of literature on precollege programming. Furthermore, this research contributes to understanding strategies and programs for low-income student success and their ability to access college.

Low-income students at under resourced schools have limited opportunities to explore postsecondary outcomes, in a society that increasingly requires college degrees for economic mobility. This research will explore how a student support program can help students better prepare for college, improving their matriculation and persistence. Results from the study help to create a heightened understanding what is needed to enhance student’ knowledge of how to prepare for college academically, financially and socially.

**Connection to Social Justice in Education**

Low-income students are less likely to attend college, and those that do are less likely to obtain a college degree. Many students are ill-equipped for college and their future career based upon how they are prepared in middle and high school. The educational achievement gap is a critical social justice issue (Collopy, Bowman &
Taylor, 2012). Universal schooling has improved and is now available for all students regardless of socioeconomic class, race, or ethnicity. However, substantial educational achievement disparities by socioeconomic class and race exist (Collopy, Bowman & Taylor, 2012).

The study seeks to shed light on the lack of college access for low-income students and then strive to find a solution. Considering this data, this study is uniquely aligned with the Vincentian mission of St. Vincent de Paul and his zeal for service, specifically to low-income individuals. This study focuses on the realities of college preparation programs serving as a pipeline for low-income students. Underrepresented and under-resourced students may lack the social capital to pursue and persist in college. This research is a preliminary step toward understanding these programs in their intended design to improve student success.

**Research Questions**

1) How do DTAS practitioner stakeholders (program directors, counselors, and staff) describe the role of precollege programs in preparing low-income high school students for college?

   a. How are DTAS program services, specifically *transitional academic services* used to promote student success and college preparedness?

   b. How, if at all, do school leaders, staff, and alumni students describe the cultural relevance of the DTAS program as it relates to college preparedness?

**Definition of Terms**

*A Low-income student* is the term used to describe students who come from a household below a certain family income. It seems as though most of these students live
within impoverished communities with the potential of becoming first-generation college students (ED.gov, 2019).

*College preparation & career readiness* “affirms that students graduate from high school prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary opportunities whether college or career without need for remediation” (Mishkind, 2014, p.7). Essentially, this means that the students will have graduated with the knowledge and skills needed for college and their career (Mishkind, 2014, p.7).

*College counseling* is described as “an exercise of professional responsibility for determining which students were college material based on their personal assessments of students’ character, maturity, and appearance (Cicourel & Kitsuse, 1963).

*Transitional academic support programs* include transition courses and first-year seminars, learning communities, advising, tutoring, supplemental instruction, peer tutoring, study groups and summer bridge programs, mentoring and student support groups (Burns et al.; 2013).
CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The following review of literature supplies an overview of low-income students and their college access. Chapter One provides context surrounding the issues that low-income students may meet while accessing college preparation. Also, chapter one necessitates the need for intervention and the research on programs designed to mitigate college access barriers. Chapter Two situates the study's constructs first by using a review of the related literature. It also describes the causes of limited access to college for low-income students. Furthermore, Chapter Two explores the disparity in K-12 education that affects student retention, persistence, and college preparedness.

This study explores the intended role of precollege programs in college access from the perspective of stakeholders. The lack of academic under-preparedness for middle and high school students suggests that these students are ill-equipped to attend college. Issues of student academic under preparedness can best be supported by Tinto’s Student departure theory (1993). This theory helps to highlight the reasons behind academic under-preparedness and the benefits of maintaining student retention. Retention research should also consider the role of cultural relevance in pedagogy and practice. The use of Ladson-Billings Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (1995) is applied throughout this review of literature. This theory, designed in response to the systemic lack of resources, funding, and cultural alignment of curriculum, calls for cultural understanding in teacher instruction (Ladson-Billings, 2006).

While seeking innovative approaches in tackling these various problems of academic preparation and cultural relevance; this chapter also highlights academic preparation; measured by elements of precollege curriculum such as advancement
placement, college counseling, and learning services (Farmer-Hinton, & Adams, 2006; Kramer et al, 2003; Goode, 2017). These elements can contribute to whether academic preparation, access to college and integration into college culture impact first-generation, low-income student retention and success. The current body of work explores the impact of the characteristics of a precollege program serving low-income students, and its usefulness for low-income students with a framework integrating the following two theories.

**Theoretical Framework**

**Student Departure Theory**

The work of Vincent Tinto has contributed to current retention theories. It also provided a central framework to explore whether the College Access Programs influences low-income, first-generation college students. Tinto has promoted a theory on student integration. Tinto’s 1975 work explored the initially termed “Theory on Student Departure,” found through the causes of college student drop-out rates. His work explored the idea that students’ backgrounds and their connections to postsecondary education helped to influence their retention or decisions not to leave college. He further theorized that student departure was equivalent to the sociological study by the French sociologist Emile Durkheim. Durkheim’s work on departure connected suicide rates to levels of social interaction (Tinto, 1975).

Tinto (1975) developed the student retention theory and is often referenced through the college student retention research of theorists like Alexander Astin (1987), and Ernest Pascarella and Patrick Terenzini (1991). Tinto acknowledged the continued progression of student retention by noting the following shifts: (1) The diverse
backgrounds of college students and related social and cultural forces are now understood
to inform and transform interpretations related to student persistence; (2) Institutional
differences such as two-year versus four-year schools, residential versus commuter
campuses, and geographical locations reshape the definition of involvement and expand
the forums where meaningful student engagement takes place; (3) The complexities of
student success have led to the development of an array of economic, psychological and
sociological models on student retention (Tinto, 2005, p. 3.).

Tinto's Student Departure Model and his student integration model (1975, 1993)
recognized that students bring several characteristics, experiences, and commitments to
their college entry. These various elements can be measured by a level of students’
academic preparedness, parent educational achievement in addition to aspirations for
their children, socioeconomic levels, and aspirations for learning and degree attainment
(Thayer, 2000). The study further states that Tinto questioned the attitude towards taking
retention seriously. “What if we were to take twenty years of research on retention
seriously? (Thayer, 2000, p.8). He later concludes that learning communities can be
effective for improving student retention. Tinto describes the characteristics of learning
communities as "shared learning" or "connected learning.” Tinto also outlines the
benefits that these experiences offer students, which may include “more time on task,
blurring of the lines between academic engagement and social engagement, increased
academic performance, and increased persistence toward graduation” (Thayer, 2000,
p.8).

This approach discovers the truth of the societal forces that contribute to a student
becoming withdrawn when interacting with college experiences (Tinto, 1986; 1993).
Tinto’s theory can help teachers to recognize their student's involvement level in their preparation for college. If students seemed to be withdrawn or refused to participate in the process, then it would be up to the teachers to find a way to motivate and engage the student. Using this theoretical perspective to frame this research is justified and appropriate. After-school programs delivered in an accessible format allow students to impact pre-college attributes such as academic preparation (Adelman, 1999). First generation students are likely to enter college with less academic preparation. Pascarella et al. (1995) found that first generation students had lower pre-college critical thinking levels than their non first generation peers. In a single institution sample conducted by Riehl (1994), first generation students had significantly lower SAT scores and high school grade point averages. Academic preparation remains a major obstacle that challenges first generation students.

Similar research supports the use of Tinto’s Student of Departure theory. Milem & Berger’s (1999) study of freshman undergraduate college persistence and student retention uses three data sets distributed three times during the year. This study of 718 participants used Student Information Data (SIF), the Early Collegiate Experience Survey (ECES), and the Freshman Year Survey (FYS). The authors use Tinto’s model to frame the study. Findings indicated that early exposure to academic and co-curricular activities in the fall semester helped predict the spring semester in academic and traditional social activities. In this study, students who had higher levels of involvement with peers and faculty experienced elevated academic integration levels as measured by the data set.

In addition to Tinto’s theory recognizing that students can bring several characteristics, experiences, and commitments to their college entry in education, culture
impacts how students learn and influences how “every brain makes sense of the world” (Hammond, 2015, p.21). More specifically, “Culture defines a group tradition that a particular racial group might share but that is not shared by all individuals in that racial group or among all racial groups” (Kendi, 2019). These two authors describe ways that culture is significant for academic success. One way to better understand the role of culture in the precollege setting is to incorporate Culturally Relevant Pedagogy into the theoretical frame.

**Culturally Relevant Pedagogy**

Ladson-Billings (1995) discusses the importance of culture to avoid certain disparities in education today. She suggests that these "inequalities are a logical and predictable result of a racialized society in which discussions of race and racism continue to be muted and marginalized", (Tate & Ladson-Billings, 1995). Ladson-Billings believes strongly that all students can succeed and that every interaction in the classroom is an opportunity for students to become motivated and be inspired. Ladson-Billings (1995), who developed Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, otherwise known as CRP, defined it as a teaching practice that focuses on students’ cultural backgrounds. These backgrounds are integral when developing instruction in the classroom. Thus, culturally relevant pedagogy can facilitate opportunities for students to maintain their cultural integrity while succeeding academically. According to Ladson-Billings (2006), the historical, economic, sociopolitical, and moral decisions and policies in America have created an education “deficit” (p.5) that has produced the current achievement gap between black and white students (Ladson-Billings, 2006). This deficit is the product of the unequal distribution of funding within high-need schools that disproportionately serve students of color. High
need schools are often under resourced and have challenges in staffing, factor that impact a students’ ability to succeed.

In one example, Ladson-Billings and Tate (2006) offered a comparison between urban Black schools and suburban White schools. This comparison showed obvious differences in the two areas. Specifically, there were significant differences in course offerings, school resources, and qualified teachers. They concluded that schools that serve poor students of color lack access to resources, and cannot meet the mandated educational standards. Without the resources and opportunities afforded to suburban students in predominately white school districts; "how can we ever expect these urban students to fill in the achievement gap?" (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 55).

To improve teacher education, Ladson-Billings took the time to observe teachers of African American students and evaluate their teaching instruction (Ladson-Billings, 1995). These questions surrounding student/teacher interactions helped to bridge culture and teaching. A grounded theory of culturally relevant pedagogy using three conceptual ideas emerged. The first idea was conceptions of self and others held by culturally relevant teachers, second, how the culturally relevant teachers structure social relations, and third, the conceptions of knowledge held by culturally relevant teachers. More studies may offer examples of culturally relevant by involving several factors including race or gender.

In 2016, a study analyzed how Black and Latino students engage culturally relevant peer interactions while preparing for, applying to, and/or enrolling in college (Teachers College Press, New York, 2013). This study utilized a social participatory youth co-researcher (SPYCR) methodology. Ten students participated in the study. After
conducting the study, the research found presentations of youth’s college-going new media literacy practices in addition to new understandings of the nature of youth’s culturally relevant peer interactions. These interactions were primarily seen through the opportunities that were created through the SPYCR methodology (Watson and Marciano 2015). Participants were able to decide on who they wanted to interact with in the context of this study (Watson & Marciano 2015). Furthermore, participants were allotted the opportunity to comment, question and make changes to the data collection tools. By allowing these collaborative perspectives, the study expanded Ladson-Billing's notion of cultural relevance by utilizing youths’ cultural backgrounds as instrumental in sharing knowledge.

These culturally relevant peer interaction practices assist in drawing attention to the culturally relevant role youth play in supporting one another’s college readiness while simultaneously accessing their culturally relevant peer interactions (Marciano, 2016). The study also evaluated, “the ways youth provide academic and emotional support and gain encouragement from their peers in culturally relevant ways while engaging in college-going processes” (Knight and Marciano 2013, p. 216). This theory aligns with the current study due to the need for cultural relevant instruction within the classroom, the lack of academic preparedness and the need for maintaining student retention. Knight and Marciano, (2013), used Culturally Relevant Pedagogy to better understand how youth interact with peers to support one another’s college readiness and access. Similarly, the proposed study will gather perceptions on the importance of culture, community and shared experience to focus on college readiness and access for afterschool programs. Culturally relevant teaching can influence academic experiences for students (Siwatu,
Specific to this study, the goal is to inquire whether the precollege programs include culturally responsive instruction that align with the literature to support academic confidence in students.

These theories frame parameters of practice within a precollege program. Student Retention and success relies on culturally relevant pedagogy and academic supports to strengthen the academic achievement of low-income students in precollege programs. Research on the background of low-income students provides additional understanding of context of these theories in the proposed study.

Review of Related Literature

A review of literature was conducted to understand student retention, the experiences of low income students, and the role of after school programs. The research was organized using student retention and academic under-preparedness, background of low income students, and effectiveness of afterschool programs. Much of the research focused on high school graduation, so the review was expanded to include precollege programs. Within this framing, a review of services including college counselling and academic support services help to contextualize the study.

Student Retention & Academic under-preparedness

Tinto (2006-2007) indicates that "Student retention is one of the most widely studied areas in higher education" (Powell, 2009, para.8). Although the term “retention” can be considered negative, it is important to educators, parents, and policy makers (Powell, 2009). One example of this can be found in a study that was conducted to measure student success and learning effectiveness (Kim, Newton, Downey, & Benton, 2010.) Research indicates that student retention requires an investment of
resources. If students are not retaining the information taught, then there is no progress in academic achievement. If there is no progress made in student's retention it can result in academic-under preparedness (Gabriel, 2018).

Low-income or First-Generation college students may be characterized as underprepared for college, especially in the African American and Latino population (Boden, 2011). Research points to low performance on placement tests. Boden's study on the importance of self-efficacy in academic preparedness is strengthened by Boden’s study on the limited research on first-generation Latino students’ and their beliefs about their academic preparedness for college (Boden, 2011). Boden used a grounded theory approach and collected data from 90 participants through a series of semi-structured interviews coded by listening to the recorded conversations and reading the participants' transcripts (Boden, 2011).

These perceptions include the meaning of academic preparedness and social mobility Students also began to perceive themselves as being prepared for college because of personal characteristics and academic accomplishments (Boden, 2011). The students defined academic preparedness for college as having fulfilled the academic requirements and then acquiring the discipline motivation and drive necessary to accomplish their goal for entering college (Boden, 2011). Overall, the answers that were collected proved how students believed they were academically prepared for college.
Background of Low-income Students

Low-income Students are described in the literature as students from low-income families (ED.gov, 2019). They are usually less likely to attend college or to complete a college degree. It appears most of these students live within impoverished communities with the potential of becoming first-generation college students. The term “first-generation” describes students from families where neither parent had more than a high-school education (Pascarella et al., 2004). According to the National Center for Education Statistics, Choy’s (2001) research states that in 1995–1996, 34% of students entering the nation’s four-year institutions and 53% of students starting at two-year colleges were first-generation students. More recently, in 2016, the annual report of graduation rates, 77.6% of low-income students graduated on time compared to 90 percent of non-low-income students (DePaoli et al., 2018). This is an annual report given by a collection of organizations which included Civic Enterprises and Johns Hopkins University. The same report stated that a total of 36 states graduated less than 80 percent of low-income students, of these, nine states graduated less than 70 percent (DePaoli et al; 2018).

Further investigation of the challenges that block low-income students from attaining high graduation and high college enrollment rates. Some educators would say that this phenomenon occurs due to the lack of resources and funding (Ladson-Billings, 2006). In an earlier study, public data indicated that schools in low-resource communities historically experience low college readiness (Academic Preparation Program Reference and Information System, 2004). These students attend schools within these communities with limited resources or funding, preparing them for college. The 2004 College Access
and Financial Aid Survey conducted a study that found that the main sources of information that may be accessible to students regarding college-going and financial aid. After-school programs such as Upward Bound, Talent Search, and Gear Up often provide these services. These programs may offer academic transition and support programs, and College counseling.

**Effectiveness of Afterschool Programs**

After-school programs play a crucial role in the urban environment and among adolescents (grades 6-12) poses unique challenges (Pelcher & Rajan, 2016). Afterschool programming is a method in which some may offer some assistance with college preparation. In a recent study (Pelcher & Rajan, 2016), a systematic literature review was used to identify evidence-based barriers and facilitators to after-school programming in urban school environments. After conducting the study, the results revealed that there is an increasing demand for Afterschool Programs. Outreach programs and Afterschool programs are part of the educational system for underserved students and are often federally supported as a pipeline intervention leading in increased student retention (Domina, 2009). Some of these After-school programs are also considered Precollege access programs. Some programs such as Upward Bound, Talent Search, and Gear Up are infamously known for focusing on increasing the rate at which students' complete high school, attend college, and succeed in college (Glennie et. al, 2015). Afterschool pre-college programs are often introduced in middle school so that when a student reaches high school, they have some knowledge regarding college enrollment. In relation to the current study, afterschool programs impact low-income students due to the amount of the support provided.
In 2013 17.5 million attended colleges and it has been projected that by 2024 there will be 19.6 million students enrolled (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2015). This data shows that the successful completion rate has not kept pace with enrollment despite the increased numbers of students enrolled in colleges (Kimbark et. al, 2016). Furthermore, colleges have increasingly required placement testing such as Advancement Placement to decide college readiness since the 1980s.

The current study addresses the topic of sources of college-related information. These articles connect to the topic based on the existing data regarding the factors that affect or strengthen high schools reform and understanding of college readiness. Researchers Holland & Farmer-Hinton (2008) conducted a study that shed light on the same matter but utilized district wide survey data to investigate how high school students become involved with college culture within their schools. Several factors (student-staff relationships, classroom experiences, postsecondary opportunities and resources, and familial postsecondary aspirations and plans) help contribute to their college preparation process. These factors as outlined by researchers Holland & Farmer-Hinton (2008), similar factors were also found in the Bell, Rowan-Kenyon & Perna’s body of literature. Although parents may encourage their children to attend college, they may also lack the experience or knowledge that helps their children understand the process of enrolling in college (Rowan-Kenyon, Bell, & Perna, 2008). Therefore, it can be concluded that college-related information is needed for the enrollment process.

Some of the research framing this study include college-related information and innovative methods for career readiness through partnerships. For instance, certain studies have highlighted the importance of improving college access and readiness for
low-income and minority students in urban high schools (Roderick, Nagaoka, & Coca, 2009). Furthermore, these students who live in impoverished communities and low schools have no access to programs that may provide college or career readiness. Similarly, the use of family members has proven to be an unreliable source of information for students when parents were less likely to have attended college. The proposed study fills in the gap within research by exploring the influence of college-related knowledge from practitioner stakeholders. This study helps bring awareness to the challenges and realities of precollege programs from varying perspectives.

The following sections explores platforms such as precollege and academic support programs which further creates opportunities for accessibility, development, and highlights the main component as best practices for low-income students gaining access to college preparation.

**Precollege Programs**

Precollege programs have proven to be instrumental in preparing students for enrollment process; the statistics given for students from low-income backgrounds indicated that the racial gap in college enrollments has narrowed (NCES, 2013). The income gap still exists with 82% of high school graduates from high-income backgrounds enrolling in college in 2013 compared to 52% from low-income families (NCES, 2013). These statistics indicate that something must be done. Throughout literature, pre-college programs have various names including “Early intervention programs” (Swail & Perna, 2002). These Early intervention programs are designed to be effective for college readiness and academic preparation especially for underrepresented groups such as low-income students (Swail & Perna, 2002). The role of precollege or early intervention
programs is to provide academic and social support to those students who may not
students who may not normally receive assistance.

Authors have published works based on the value of pre-college preparation for
high school students. Although this data contributes to conversation concerning access to
college for high schoolers; there needs to be more focus on those students who may not
have those opportunities to partake in these pre-college programs (Louie, 2007). Dyce et
al., 2013, examined college access programs in parents and how students were confident
that these programs would assist in fulfilling their goals. The authors argue that pre-
college preparation programs can benefit from the non-economic forms of capital that
these families may have (Dyce et al., 2013). Drexel University has researched the
effectiveness of summer bridge programs which found that Bridge experience forges
bonds among the students and between the students and the SSS (student support service)
program (Thayer, 2000). The connections held on-campus are especially important since
most of the students are commuters. Research has shown that the retention rate of Bridge
participants is higher than the campus average and the highest for any identified group
other than students in the Honors Program. The current body of literature strives to
propose transitional academic support services as the main components that have the
potential to measure academic achievement, sense of belonging, and academic and social
skills.

Research is need to understand the how schools and districts fine the resources to
deliver these programs, and more specifically if culturally relevant pedagogy is used in
delivery. Student retention and Academic preparedness are results of strong precollege
programs. Precollege programs have proven to be beneficial for students. One useful strategy for college readiness and enrollment is tutoring.

To what extent do schools and districts have the resources to deliver these programs and more specifically deliver them in culturally responsive ways? These can improve student academic experiences and success (Farmer-Hinton, & Adams, 2006; Kramer et al, 2003; Goode, 2017). Through an article, (Goode, 2017) two themes Student Retention & Academic Under Preparedness emerged for further research Student retention and Academic preparedness are results of strong precollege programs. With the current body of work, it provides substantial evidence that precollege programs have proven to be beneficial for students in preparation for college. Another useful strategy for college readiness and enrollment is College counseling.

**College Counseling**

Two decades of research shows that teachers and counselors influence student college preparation. A study exploring the role of Counselors in a college prep school for Black students (Farmer-Hinton, & Adams, 2006). Many high school students rely upon the guidance of their school counselors (Gearns et. al, 2018). School counselors are uniquely positioned to provide a realistic alignment of aspirations and prerequisite courses needed to succeed in a particular field (Gearns et. al, 2018). The study describes an intervention (university-based professional development) for school counselors, where participants engaged academic preparation for engineering study, outreach opportunities, bridge programs, and various engineering disciplines accessible to students (Gearns et. al, 2018). This study focused on engineering bridge programs and admissions. The participants in the workshop improved their knowledge of the importance of specific high
school coursework to improve success and their knowledge on engineering bridge programs and admissions. The Findings indicated that professional development for school counselors is crucial for preparing students for engineering careers. Although, the current body of research doesn’t relate to the career of engineering, professional training and development can still be used to prepare high school counselors for working with high school students and parents.

Although limited to research on engineering bridge programs, this current study acknowledges the importance of counselors and their effect on student success. Researchers Goings & Sewell (2019) conducted a study that included ten males, seven females formally identified as gifted as children in NYC Public schools, and K-12. For students in this study, the college choice process near-peer mentoring for support and inspiration as they decided how they would go about their college choice (Goings & Sewell, 2019). These mentoring activities are also offered in academic support programs. Research shows that school or guidance counselors, provide direct services to students and parents and can positively impact students' aspirations, achievements, and financial aid knowledge (Adelman, 1999; McDonough, 1997 and 2004; Orfield and Paul; 1993; Plank and Jordan, 2001). Through the process of interviewing guidance counselors, the current study will seek to provide supplemental evidence that college counseling offers a positive impact on high school students. The proposed study includes the perspectives of both school guidance counselors and program administrators to verify the importance college counseling for low-income students.
Academic Support Programs

Credit-based transition programs offer a wide variety of course content, locations (at the college or the high school), and instructors (certified high school teachers or full-time or adjunct college professors). These programs can grant college credit to students in addition to a method of earning college credit (Bailey & Karp, 2003). If students do not receive adequate social and academic support during their middle and high-school schooling or even during enrollment in a higher education institution then it could positively or negatively impact their abilities to succeed in college (Astin, 1984; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Nora, 1987; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Academic and social support programs can help students adjust to college by providing clear pathways to college success (Kramer et al; 2003). Some of this support may more of a college one-on-one approach to supporting students. These support systems may include transition courses learning communities, tutoring, supplemental instruction, peer tutoring, study groups and summer bridge programs. Research also implies that mentoring and preparing students for the transition as early as middle school is an effective method for students to transition successfully.

A study examined the transition courses curricula in specific courses such as English. A study was conducted to collect data on the effectiveness of English courses (Griffin, 2018). This study draws on data from four sources: in-depth interviews, research literature, online resources, and information collected from CCRC’s 2017 national scan of transition curricula. The study summarizes findings on the effectiveness
of programs that affect the curriculum design to describe the design, implementation, and effectiveness of English transition curricula.

Another study was conducted to investigate transition programs through the collaboration between liberal arts undergraduates and urban middle school students (Rinke, Arsenie, Bell, 2012). It primarily focuses the developing and outcomes of a partnership between Garret College, a highly selective private liberal arts college and K-8 charter school in Baltimore, Maryland. The data for this study were collected from various sources over the first implementation semester, including surveys, written reflections, naturalistic observations, and ongoing communications.

The study also concludes that there is considerable value in bringing together individuals from disparate backgrounds as co-owners in a meaningful and joint educational endeavor. This program was designed to meet the needs of the students and expanding their knowledge about college. Similar to this article, the selected program that was chosen for the study also meets the needs of middle school and high school students before attending college. College preparation programming can also incorporate more rigorous content such as Advance Placement programs to challenge students and improve the likelihood of attaining better outcomes while in high school (Conger et al., 2012).

Overall, these two possible solutions (College Counseling & Transition academic services) are crucial to maintaining student retention, academic preparedness, and college-related knowledge.

Conclusion

The selected research illustrates the challenges facing low-income students in relation to college preparedness activities including college counseling, transitional
academic programming and coursework. College counseling, academic transition courses such as tutoring are valuable resources which are available for low-income students who have limited access. However, although we acknowledge all of these components as effective; this study features transition courses such as tutoring as the main component.

Aligning with previous research, this topic would address the accessibility of sources for college-related information such as transition & support services, college counseling, understanding how stakeholders make meaning of the content and value of the program. The research provides an overview of the factors that may affect or strengthen high school reform and understanding of college readiness. The review of related research offers evidence of the need to understand how after school academic support programs influence access by providing college-related knowledge and programs.
CHAPTER 3 METHODS

This chapter is a review of the methods and procedures for conducting and analyzing research on this study. This study uses a qualitative single case study (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018) to describe the perceptions and experiences of the stakeholders involved within precollege programming. First, the study explains how teachers and principals collaborate for college success, including college counseling, and transitional academic support programs. Secondly, this body of work seeks to identify the skills that are needed to provide culturally relevant experiences.

Methodology

Qualitative research is well suited to this study as “an invaluable approach to discovery, understanding, and the production of evidence that can serve as the credible basis for the arrangement and conduct of educational practice” (Kozelski, 2017 p. 22), particularly as it relates to illustrating cultural and social validity using the perceptions of individuals in a bounded context (Yin, 2003). For these reasons, a single descriptive case study was chosen by the researcher because it explores a “real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information” (Cresswell, 2013, p. 97). The multiple sources of data are provided by one-on-one semi-structured interview of participants. The participants include the program director and two administrative staff, one counselor, one principal, and three alumni students. A quantitative study is not appropriate for this study, as the research sough to understand the in-depth perceptions of a small sample program stakeholders.
Data collection included semi-structured interviews with administrators and principals and a content analysis of the precollege programming (Yin, 2003). Throughout the study multiple perspectives were explored through the eyes of instructors, school leaders and administration, alumni students and program directors to answer the following research questions.

**Methods and Procedures**

**Research Questions**

1) How do practitioner stakeholders (program directors, program teachers, building leaders, counselors, and staff) describe the role of pre-college programs in preparing low-income high school students for college?

a. How are program services, specifically transitional *academic services*, used to promote student success and college preparedness?

b. How, if at all, do school leaders, DTAS staff, and alumni students describe the cultural relevance of the program as it relates to college preparedness?

**Setting: Determined To Achieve Success (DTAS)**

This study explores the Determine To Achieve Success (DTAS). In 1988, the Determine To Achieve Success (DTAS) was established in order to address the significant dropout rate among New York’s youth, (Determine To Achieve Success, 2021). Its purpose is to support at risk middle and high school students and to improve their academic, social, and emotional development. DTAS included a New York Statewide Plan for Higher Education for the intention of maximizing the successful transition of at–risk middle and high school students of dropping out of school. According to the data from the 2016-2017 program evaluation, over 14,207
middle and high school students in New York State received services through DTAS which is an average of 347 students served per site. Program participant students are categorized as “at-risk” students due to the history of rising dropout rates in high school primarily consists of the underrepresentation of students with low-socioeconomic backgrounds, (DTAS, 2019).

The Determine To Achieve Success offers numerous services which goals aim at improving high school graduation rates in addition to preparing students for workforce entry or postsecondary education. One of the unique attributes of the Determine To Achieve Success is that it partners with colleges and universities. The DTAS collaborates with 46 higher education institutions across New York State. There are many programs that are now in place statewide, including Western New York, Central New York, Mohawk Valley, NYC and Long Island. The NYS legislature and the Governor help to provide funding. These partnerships deliver research-based programming to students who are enrolled in public and non-public schools. Some of these students attend schools that are identified as having a high risk of student dropout rates. This year, the high school partnered with the program has a graduation rate of 85.2%. They provide a safe environment for students, instilling the principle that responsibility is to be shared amongst teachers, parents and students.

**Participants**

This study used purposeful sampling in recruitment to identify participants who have experienced college counseling and transition academic support within the program under investigation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher interviewed a site program director, two current program administrators, one principal, one high school
counselor and three alumni students that partner up with the school. The principal that was selected to participate helps to make the decisions on which programs will be offered at the school in addition to overseeing those programs within the school. Furthermore, it was preferred by the researcher that the administrators and principal work in communities described as low income. The program director was recruited first. Using a snowball sampling method, the researcher was able to recruit two administrators, one principal and counselor and three alumni students. Initially, this study began as a multiple case study with three principals, three counselors and three DTAS instructors. However, this search took place during the height of the pandemic which impacted recruitment for several months. After exhausting avenues of data collection, the study was modified to focus on the program stakeholders within a single high school.

Table 1

Participant Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Rose</td>
<td>30-45</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caribbean</td>
<td>Program Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Sarah</td>
<td>25-35</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Sophia</td>
<td>30-45</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Will</td>
<td>35-35</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Teresa</td>
<td>35-45</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>Counselor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>20</td>
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<td>African-American</td>
<td>Alumni Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katy</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>African</td>
<td>Alumni Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liana</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>Alumni Student</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data Collection Procedures

The current study was submitted to the Institutional Review Board for permission to recruit participants. Emails were sent to individuals identified by the program director, which include a summary of the study and informed consent documentation. In addition, the site director of the program has granted permission and access to program staff. A flyer was created to advertise the importance of the current study in addition to outlining the participants’ role in the study (Appendix B).

Following recruitment, all eligible and interested participants received an informed consent form before they agree to participate. Furthermore, all participants were advised that their identity will be concealed. All participants were given a pseudonym. The consent form explicitly emphasized that no known risks or benefits will occur while participating in the study. Lastly, the consent form reminded participants that the study is voluntary and that they may exercise the option to leave the study at any time.

The researcher made sure that interviews were scheduled at the participant’s convenience. Interviews were held via Zoom, a cloud based video conferencing system. After confirming participation through an electronically signed informed consent, stakeholders were asked questions about their backgrounds, their academic success within their own careers and how they see the future of college preparation for low-income students.

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted for each participant. Each interview took place for 45-60 minutes. The researcher established trust with the participant by
listening carefully to the participants (Wishkoski, 2020). “Careful listening” allowed me to generate probing or following up questions for the interviewee (Wishkoski, 2020).

These recordings were obtained with the permission of the participant. The interview questions provided background information of each participant. This information included the participants age, gender, and education status. This study enlisted information from program directors, instructors and the DTAS websites. Flyers and posters were created to commence the search for participants. The researcher further investigated by contacting all personnel to gain access to participants and program data such as success rates, statistics, demographic, etc. Field notes were written down throughout the process of conducting interviews. The following table illustrates a summary of the research questions in relation to the theoretical framework and participants.

**Table 2**

*Interview Cross Table*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Questions</th>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Theory</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How long have you worked as a Program Director of this program?</td>
<td>Question #1</td>
<td>Theory #1</td>
<td>DTAS Program Director (PD)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


How has services such as college counseling or transitional academic support services helped to academically prepare your students for college?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Theory #1</th>
<th>DTAS PD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#1a</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What do you consider a strength within the program?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Theory #1</th>
<th>DTAS PD, Staff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#1a</td>
<td></td>
<td>and principal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Content Analysis**

The semi-structured interviews were triangulated with content found in Program data reports, DTAS website information (mission and vision statements). The table below illustrates a summary of the content analysis which includes different sources of content.
white-paper documents and websites) as it aligns to the theoretical framework and research questions.

The program overview, mission and vision statements were reviewed in order to gain a general understanding of the program. After reviewing the background of the program, each summarized document was aligned to relevant research, interview questions, and defined codes. The codes were categorized, then compared between content types, audience, and in comparison to the semi-structured interview findings.

The goals that are listed on the website correspond to the impact of the program. The original intent for this particular information was to investigate whether the responses of the participants could be compared to the goals of the program. The major goal of the program was to support students with their transition from middle school to high school and from high-school to college. The participants for the current study were selected in order to give insight on whether the goals of the program were being met. The transitional academic support programs were equivalent to the program goal of providing support for the transition from high school to college.

In addition, the year-end outcomes of students served were reviewed in order to evaluate how many students were promoted, who graduated, transferred to a different school, or even dropped out of school within the time frame of a year. The purpose for reviewing this data was to compare the program's goals and connect them to the participant statements regarding the transitional academic support services.
Table 3

Content Analysis Cross Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content Type</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Alignment to Research</th>
<th>Interview Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White-Paper documents</td>
<td>Youth Leadership programs summer</td>
<td>College Access</td>
<td>Question #1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Report, 2020</td>
<td>Tinto’s Student</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Departure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Theory</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary Data</td>
<td>Graduation rates collection from</td>
<td>College student</td>
<td>Question #1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>academic/Summer retention data</td>
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**Trustworthiness of the Design**

Several techniques were employed by the researcher to ensure the credibility of the study. In order to ensure the trustworthiness of the study the process of triangulation was conducted. The triangulation process included the transcripts of the semi-structured interviews, the mission and vision statement of the DTAS website, and the DTAS manual. Dedoose was a program used in order to assist in refining more definitive coding and thematic concepts.

For the current study, multiple data collection sources strengthened the trustworthiness of the study. This data that was found within the study is collected from interviews, website information, data reports and documents. Participant interviews, a content analysis of websites and field notes were reviewed and transcribed. After the review and transcription process, the data was used to generate codes. These codes were later developed into themes and influenced by the theoretical framework and related literature. The following provides a detailed description of the coding process.

**Data Analysis Approach**

The current study generated rich, thick descriptions. This system of forming themes by presenting as much detail as necessary to convey the findings is a way of interpreting the data. Furthermore, it allows the reader the chance to develop their own understandings of the data. This provided an opportunity for ‘readers to make decisions regarding transferability because the writer describes in detail the participants or setting under study” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 263). After generating the descriptive codes, the researcher utilized a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software program (e.g.,
Dedoose) that assisted in the counting of words or codes (Onwuegbuzie, et al., 2016). This process with further enhance the trustworthiness of the study.

After collecting all data from interviews, and content analysis of websites; the process of describing details, classifying codes, and creating themes will begin. Field notes were written down throughout the process of conducting interviews. Observations of the participants, quotes, or settings were incorporated into the data analysis process. The coding process was enhanced by creating diagrams that will be used to represent the relationships amongst ideas, codes categories and emerging concepts, (Creswell & Poth, 2018). After generating the descriptive codes, the researcher began using Dedoose which assisted in the coding process. This process further enhances the trustworthiness of the study.

**Coding & Themes**

After collecting all data from interviews and content analysis of websites; the process of describing details, classifying codes, and creating themes began. Detailed description gives the opportunity for authors to describe what they see (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Field notes were written down throughout the process of conducting interviews. The coding process was enhanced by creating diagrams that were used to represent the relationships amongst ideas, codes categories and emerging concepts, (Creswell & Poth, 2018). There were three rounds of coding: Descriptive Coding, Pattern coding and Elaborative coding (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The Descriptive coding method was adopted in order to describe emerging themes from the participant interviews. Descriptive Coding can be applied to provide visual data in addition to using descriptive nouns (Saldana, 2008). Pattern coding strengthens the study by “finding patterns or
relationships among previously generated codes by analyzing commonalities and grouping them by similarities,” (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2016). Pattern coding assisted in the identifying commonalities between comments given by program directors, high school principals and staff.

Elaborative Coding can be applied at the “stage of reflecting or evaluating the literature review process or product in order to refine theoretical constructs or themes”, (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2016). This process of coding help strengthened the theoretical framework found in chapter two’s literature review. After generating the three various forms of coding, the researcher utilized a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software program (e.g., Dedoose) that assisted in the counting of words or codes (Onwuegbuzie, et al., 2016). This process with further enhance the trustworthiness of the study. A minimum of three rounds of coding was performed until exhaustion. These three rounds produced seventy codes which later emerged into three themes

**Research Ethics**

The current study provided all participants with an informed consent form that confirmed their participation. Due to the researcher's prior affiliation with the DTAS program, the researcher contacted the director of a DTAS site, directly meeting the study goals to access permission to interview administrators and instructors within the program. The consent forms explicitly emphasized that there are no known risks for volunteering to be interviewed or partaking in any conversations. Likewise, the consent form explicitly emphasized that there are no benefits involved in participating in the study. Lastly, the consent form offered the option for participants to leave the study at any time. The participant’s confidentiality is of the utmost importance.
All recordings of participant commentary are saved in a secure Microsoft's OneDrive folder. Electronic signatures of their informed consent were made available to all participants. Member checking, “is a technique for exploring the credibility of results. Data or results are returned to participants to check for accuracy and resonance with their experiences”, (Scott et.al, 2016). All data and transcripts that are collected are available for participants at any given time. The current study provided data collected from semi-structured interviews, flyers, logos, physical artifacts, and testimonials from student/teachers (Yin, 1994).

**Researcher Role**

The researcher of the current study grew up in a middle-class household. She had worked as a teacher at a private institution for about 9 years. Fortunately, she has had the opportunity of working with middle and high school students of color who come from both low-income and middle-income households. The idea of cultural relevance resonates with the researcher because of her experiences as a middle and high school student. She was given the opportunity to work with African American and Latina teachers who were able to identify with similar cultural ideas and traditions. Through this experience, the researcher was able to connect with her instructors in a way that made her feel comfortable enough to approach them and ask questions concerning my learning. Prior to this study being conducted, there were a few observations of institutions where low-income students weren’t granted such access for college-related knowledge. Of course, this helped spark the motivation for the premise of this study. With this new found motivation, the researcher had been granted the opportunity to work within the Determine To Achieve Success for a short period of time. After closely examining the DTAS
program, the main highlight was how the administrators worked with students and applied many of the cultural relevant principles needed for teacher instruction. As a result of discovering this information, the intention for this research is to open the door and fill in the gap for all low-income middle and high school students. Lastly, this study seeks to assist in creating spaces for them to gain access to college knowledge.

Conclusion

This study employed a descriptive, single case study approach to explore the perceptions of the alumni students and instructors regarding their experiences of pre-college programming as related to college access, cultural relevance and student retention. Its effectiveness of the Determine To Achieve Success and impact of culturally relevant instruction also helped to strengthen the validity of the study. Overall, this chapter discusses the procedures used to gather data through semi-structured interviews and a review of the website and white paper documents. The enhancement of trustworthiness was made apparent through the process of triangulation. Finally, methods for data analysis included generating thick descriptions and multiple rounds of coding. In the following chapter, the results of this data collection are explored by the themes that emerged from the study. All themes that emerged from the study were further synthesized in chapters four and five.
CHAPTER 4 RESULTS

The purpose of the qualitative single case study is to examine the role of precollege programs for low-income students. Specifically, the study focused on the roles of precollege programming that is found within the Determine To Achieve Success (DTAS); how these programs promote student success, and how they prepare students for college preparedness. In addition, this study also explored the cultural relevance of the Determine To Achieve Success while also investigating the contribution of components such as transitional academic services. Chapter four explores a single case study of several participants who have worked within the Determine To Achieve Success (DTAS) in the context of a single program site. This chapter discusses the themes that were discovered after conducting the data analysis. The data analysis process was conducted with the three guiding research questions.

The study also utilized a content analysis of documents and websites. According to the information provided by the Youth Leadership website, this precollege program can be described as “a meaningful program who engage students in their education and are more likely to graduate from high school and continue on to higher education or stable employment” (Determine To Achieve Success, 2022). This information was extracted from the DTAS website in order to provide evidence on the population that attends annually. Through the mission and vision statement, the issue of low-income students and their lack of college knowledge awareness is made clear through the description of the program. Furthermore, the website offers an overview of classes, events, and materials that are used within the program. Additionally, the study utilized a
content analysis of interview transcripts. After coding the data there were three themes that began to emerge. The first major theme was bridging the gap between high school and college access. Within the first theme, three sub-themes emerged: establishing relationships through team collaboration, program planning and college and career exploration.

After conducting the interviews of all of the participants, the researcher sought to analyze all the collected data. The first step of analyzing the data began by transcribing the audio recordings using the software, Otter.ai (2016). Next, the data was uploading through the Dedoose software where the coding process began. After undergoing three rounds of coding (descriptive, pattern and elaborative) themes began to emerge through the coded data. By utilizing Dedoose for the first round of coding, the researcher found that this software was useful in selecting quotes that come directly from the participants that feature their voices (Saldaña, 2016). The second phase of coding for data analysis in this study is pattern coding (Saldaña, 2016). The third phase is elaborative coding. After conducting three rounds of coding, all codes were consolidated which led to similar emerging themes. Overall, three themes were created as a result of the data collected.

**Description of the Case**

As previously stated in chapter 3 of this study, the Determine To Achieve Success (DTAS) comprises 46 higher education institutions who collaborate across New York State. The mission of the program is to support at risk middle and high school students in their academic, social, and emotional development. The stakeholders within the study are identified as the Determine To Achieve Success director, school counselors and administrative staff. The majority of the statements made by the administrators involved
the word “We”. The word, “We” implies that although there is a program director, that leader is open to include other staff members in the decision-making process.

This study explores the Determine To Achieve Success (DTAS) site at an under-resourced diverse high school. DTAS offers resources for transitional academic services such as tutoring and college counseling. The goals of the program include providing services to improve high school graduation rates in addition to preparing students for workforce entry or postsecondary education. This study highlights the Determine To Achieve Success as one of the leading precollege programs providing support and services for low-income students. Each of these participants performed a role within the program. This chapter discovers the specific methods of transitional academic services such as peer-to-peer, one-on one, and student-to-teacher tutoring. Although mentorship and college counseling were mentioned throughout the semi-structured interviews, college and career exploration, tutoring and academic assistance left a greater impact on the alumni students who participated in this study.

The influence of culture and how it relates to the DTAS program is also outlined in this chapter through the lens of our participants. This program provides services such as mentorship, college/career preparedness programs, family support services, personal and social-emotional learning plans. This list is carried out throughout the school year. As recommended by the school counselor and/or principal students apply to the Determine To Achieve Success for their specific reasons. Students may apply for various reasons including improving academically, college campus tours, and field trips. On a daily basis students remain in the school building while DTAS staff travel to the schools to tutor and work with the students. All events or field trips requires students to travel to
DTAS main offices. Team collaboration can be demonstrated through the frequent communication between the DTAS’s program director, staff and the school counselors. Communication is necessary in order to share update on student progress within school or the program itself. Also, counselors and program administrators collaborate to design plans for promoting events such as college tours.

**Determine To Achieve Success Participants**

*Program Director*

While selecting my candidates for interviewing, the researcher began narrowing down my search to DTAS’s program director and staff administrators. 

*Rose* describes herself as a Trinidadian. She first worked as an MSW intern. Afterwards, she began to pursue education and has graduated with a Master’s degree in Social work from the Fordham University Graduate School of Social Service. Later on, she worked as an assistant director for about three years and was promoted to the position of DTAS's program director. She has worked in this position for the last six years. As the DTAS program director, Ms. Rose’s role includes managing program funding and financial reports for planned events, trips and staff. Her role as a program director also includes supervising and hiring staff in addition to overseeing the program’s academic curriculum. As it relates to this case, Ms. Rose’s job is to check-in with staff, counselors, and principals to make sure that they are able to perform their tasks. She is also in charge of overseeing the facilitating roles where she provides aid in making the program run smoothly.
**DTAS Staff**

*Ms. Sarah* describes herself as Latino and has had a goal to become a school counselor who works with middle and high school students. She began working for a NYS service called the American Corps program. Shortly thereafter, she was placed at a site called the Junior Achievement of New York which is a program that assist in providing several ways that you can get involved with being a part of a district or school.

Later on, she moved on to working at DTAS where she worked as a site administrator. Her role within DTAS includes working as liaison to the middle schools and their administrative staff. Ms. Sarah is helps to connect the counselors to the program director and student participants. She specifically worked with middle school students and collaborated with their school counselors, social workers to learn about the needs of the students. Her role also involves promotion by making flyers, and planning for events that would expose middle school students to various aspects of college culture.

*Ms. Sophia* describes herself as a Latino First-Generation college graduate and has worked for DTAS. She also works as a site administrator, where she works the population of high school students. Within the Determine To Achieve Success, she specializes in coordinating programming which involves tutoring, enrichment activities, college campus tours, and managing the program's database.

**Principal’s profile**

*Mr. Will* has worked as a high school principal for almost 13 years. He has partnered with the DTAS program for a few years where he has found the program to be beneficial for his student population. His major task when working with DTAS, includes
collaborating with the counselors and program directors in order to help students achieve their potential.

**Guidance Counselor’s profile**

*Ms. Teresa* shared a little of her upbringing by stating that she was born in the Dominican Republic and moved to the United States when she was 19. After moving to the United States, Ms. Teresa received a BA at The City College of NY and a MSW at Mercy College. She has retained the position as a school guidance counselor for the last fifteen years. Now, as a guidance counselor, her roles include working with ninth graders and preparing them for the college with the DTAS program through many of their resources and activities. Some of the activities include the Summer Programs which grants students the opportunity to have college experience.

**DTAS Alumni**

*John* was born in Harlem, New York and has remained there all of his life. He describes his background as Nigerian-American. During high school, he was afforded the opportunity to attend Fordham’s DTAS program for his junior and senior year. He enjoyed it immensely. He is now a junior attending a college in Long Island as a psychology major and music minor. He was drawn to DTAS’s cultural programming which included trips and college events that highlighted diverse cultures.

*Katy* is a former DTAS alumni student who moved from Africa to America about seven years ago. Around the time of her move she was in middle school and learned the English language. She attending a High School that collaborates with DTAS. Since receiving support and assistance through DTAS, Katy is now a sophomore in NYU.
Liana is a former DTAS Alumni who has lived in New York majority of her life. In high school, she was first introduced to DTAS’s programming and became interested in their extracurricular activities such as trips, performances, and writing etc. Currently, she is a freshman at Hofstra University.

For the purpose of gaining findings throughout my research, a series of 8 semi-structured interviews were conducted. Chapter Four is organized based on themes that emerged from each case. There were four themes throughout the study that became evident. The first major theme was Bridging the gap between high school and college access. Within the first theme, four sub-themes emerged: establishing relationships through team collaboration, student planning and college & career exploration. The findings highlight and define the following themes in the context of the study.

Findings

Theme 1: Bridging the Gap between high school and college access

The theme “Bridging the gap between high school and college access” can be defined in the context of this study as the act of preparing students for college while they are attending high school. This study identifies counselors, program administrators, program directors and a principal as those stakeholders who teach, counsel, provide resources, and plan events for the purpose of motivating students to enroll in college.

The program catches low-income students who are less likely to be motivated to graduate high school and attend college. Therefore, by “Building a bridge”, the Determine To Achieve Success is offering support and providing an environment where relationships are being built between students and the DTAS program director, administrators and instructors. By establishing these relationships, the DTAS program is
making an effort of keeping their students geared towards the path of academic achievement and college enrollment. This bridge also helps students remain in contact with program and it encourages them to come back and encourage other students. Additionally, some students while enrolled in college may come back to participate as volunteers within the program.

When describing the purpose of the program, Ms. Rose states, “Being partnered with public schools, obviously, academic enrichment is our main focus, but we know especially for the students that we serve, that it's not enough to prepare them academically, that being from impoverished areas, they lack a lot of experience a lot of different experiences”.

As Ms. Rose illustrates in her commentary, it isn’t enough to just provide tutoring services and help prepare them academically. By building this bridge, stakeholders are actively providing different experiences through program planning, forming relationships, and exposing students to college and career exploration. Stakeholders may build a bridge through the planning of college campus tours, planning field trips, establishing relationships with higher education institutions, planning sessions where professionals come and share their journeys with students. These examples of “different experiences” provides evidence of guiding students across that bridge towards success. Participants suggests that the experiences also create a sense of belonging, a safe environment to ask questions about college access, and connects students to college and career opportunities for their future.

As stated on the Determine To Achieve Success website, part of the mission of the program is to acts as a liaison by connecting schools and community partners to offer
tutorial services, mentoring, career and college exploration activities, and academic enrichment, as well as support for students and their families. By making these connections, DTAS is taking on the role of bridging the gap between high school students and college enrollment. This action of “bridging the gap” can be seen through the work of the stakeholders within the program. The staff stakeholders within the study are identified as the program director, school counselors and administrative staff.

In an effort to bridge the gap between students and college access, the staff stakeholders have provided resources for students seeking to enroll in college. Resources such as tutoring services, college tours, career exploration have assisted in defining the role of this precollege program for the population of middle and high school students. As this theme emerged, the coded data also highlighted a few sub-themes that also contributed to the role of precollege programs in the process of preparing students for college enrollment. These sub-themes included establishing relationships through collaboration, student planning, college and career exploration.

**Subtheme A: Establishing Relationships through Team collaboration**

The first sub-theme is establishing relationships through team collaboration. Team collaboration can be described as the school and Determine To Achieve Success staff working together to help students maintain academic achievement, and to provide a space for them to prepare for applying to college. The relationship between the schools and the programs are strengthened through communication and through the planning process of the program.

The Determine To Achieve Success director, administrative staff, and school counselors were able to interpret a portion of their role through the process of team
collaboration. Ms. Teresa stated, “In my school, there is a team for everything.” Linking this to the work of the DTAS, Ms. Teresa disclosed that her role involves working on the crisis intervention team while collaborating with other counselors from other schools. Ms. Teresa also expound upon her relationship with the DTAS staff. They collaborate throughout the year especially during the process of recruiting students. Later on she states,

“If they need some recruitment or if students all of a sudden stopped attending and are not responding to the email, or phone calls, we always reach out. We collaborate with them to help them get students involved within the program.”

As the researcher further investigated, Ms. Teresa frequently communicates with the program director to help recruit students. Ms. Teresa also assists with recruiting by advertising within the school and conversing with students. This partnership or collaboration between the counselors and the DTAS administrative staff increases enrollment through recruitment. If students initially sign up to participate within the program and later loose interest; then it becomes the role of the administrators and counselors to collaborate in reaching out to the student. These administrators and counselors take on the responsibility of providing academic support that is needed for their population of students. This is illustrated through Ms. Sarah’s description of collaborating with the counselors:

“Well, I was a site administrator, and my responsibilities were specifically to be a liaison to the middle school students and their administrative staff. So, I primarily partnered with their counselors, the social workers in their school to find out what
students needed. So they would recommend or suggest a student that needed some type of support that we were offering.”

This quote gives an example of how this collaboration helps to establish this working relationship amongst counselors and DTAS administrative staff. While reviewing the responses extracted from the interviews, one highlight was how the Youth Leadership team made an effort to meet with one another to devise plans for running the program.

Ms. Sarah explains the process in which she collaborates with Ms. Sophia and Ms. Rose:
“A lot of what we would do, myself, Ms. Sophia and Ms. Rose would meet talk about the different types of things that we want to implement for the school year.”

By meeting frequently, the DTAS team has developed strong communication skills and have established a strong working relationship. A week later, Ms. Sophia was interviewed and confirmed this system of active team collaboration.

“So anything that we do has to be put in the database. Ms. Sarah and I would work basically together although I'm in charge of the high school students. But we will work together coordinating programming for both high school and middle school students.”

Although part of the assigned role of Ms. Sophia and Ms. Sarah is to exclusively work with high school students, both administrators collaborate to produce stronger programming for each grade level. The process of coordination includes duties such as creating flyers and other materials for recruitment, scheduling tutorial services for students, planning trips or college tours among other activities.

While reviewing the statements made by Ms. Teresa who represents the voice of the school counselors, she began to echo the same statements that were made by the
DTAS administrators. As it relates to her tasks involving DTAS, Ms. Teresa states, “So we work as a team, we help each other whenever each of them has a specific activity related to college, we all pitch in, and we all are part of the presentations.”

As a team, each staff administrator similarly described their role within the program. They never once mentioned themselves solely without mentioning the other team members. Their efforts also highlighted their unique skills of performing multiple tasks while still carrying out their individual duties that were originally assigned to them. After rereading these statements, it also became apparent that the DTAS staff and schools were on the same page when delivering methods of instruction, and program planning, and college and career exploration.

Another example of establishing relationships through team collaboration is benefit of counselors and staff working with students. Katy, an alumni student shared her feelings on being encouraged to apply to multiple schools. She also mentioned how Ms. Sarah, Ms. Sophia and her counselor were able to provide support towards her efforts in applying for college.

“So I had my counselor, and the tools that they provided me with to help me with this application. For example, writing the essay, I thought I wasn't smart enough to be in NYU or applied for them. You know, but those who are courageous like Ms. Sophia, and Ms. Sarah in fact, all of them, they pushed me to apply to this college.”

Katy applied to three colleges and was accepted at NYU. The team effort made by DTAS administrators like Ms. Sophia, and Katy’s school counselors, offered reinforcement, daily reminders, writing help can be useful when preparing to enroll in college. The team
oriented design of the program supplements support that students receive from Program Planning.

**Subtheme B: Program Planning**

Academic support is dependent on careful program planning. The process of planning for a program no matter the size can be strenuous. The DTAS administrators and school counselors describe program planning as a time of coordinating events such as campus tours, tutoring sessions for students, and providing opportunities for alumni and other professionals to present to current students.

A review of DTAS documents offers guidance for program development. DTAS on site programs are required to adhere to a set of program guidelines for content and frequency. These include offering college-level courses, providing academic support and college-readiness resources, reaching out to students at risk of not completing college, and fostering a sense of self-worth among participants. This is all done with the goal of helping students make progress toward personal development, insight, or self-worth. Whether planning a program for college students or partnering with another organization, effective program planning should always target one or more of these overarching themes. Program planning should be supported by assessments and academic tie-ins that align with relevant standards. Ultimately, programs like DTAS are designed to help college access for at-risk students and provide them with the tools they need to succeed in higher education.

The findings indicate that collaborators are necessary to executing effective programs that support college students. These may include college faculty and staff, school district representatives, parents and other community organizations. The
DTAS documents and interviews indicate that planning programs requires collaborators well-defined roles, responsibilities, and expectations. DTAS staff interviews suggest that while there are defined roles, staff should be prepared to assist with various aspects of the program, and be amenable to multitasking.

The guidance document states that clear goals and objectives should be established prior to program implementation. The rationale for this requirement is that extensive planning allows all stakeholders to understand the purpose of the program, as well as its intended outcomes. Finally, both the staff and the guidance documents stress that adequate resources must be allocated in order to ensure successful program development and execution. Overall, effective program planning requires careful collaboration among key stakeholders, a strong understanding of college access for at-risk students, and the ability to allocate necessary resources effectively.

In order to provide resources, the administrative staff and program director must be made aware of all of the academic, and social-emotional needs of every student. By utilizing the relationships that are formed with counselors, the administrative staff should have access to that knowledge.

All participants were asked about their role during the planning process. Ms. Sarah explains the process in which she collaborates with Ms. Sophia and Ms. Rose: “So a lot of my role included creating flyers to send out to our students and our volunteers, to utilize for volunteers to participate in our tutoring services.” Marketing activities, such as flyers are important to family engagement and success. These flyers assist in promoting academic enrichment such as tutorial services; or upcoming events such as college tours. More importantly, flyers are used as a resource of communication.
for both students and parents. Today Flyers can be created and sent digitally to reach a larger number of people.

Program planning consists of documents used throughout the school year. Decisions on program activities throughout the year are largely based on the grants requirements, student assessments, parent surveys, and Personal Learning Plans (PLP’s).

Ms. Sophia described the importance of student goal development using a “personalized learning plans”. A personalized learning plan is a document that each student fills out yearly. A learning plan can be described as activity plans that can be developed at an own-pace method (Aslan, Bakir, & Vis, 2020).

“We have a personalized learning plan, which is a documentation that we have to complete every year, once a year, and it's basically a smart school kind of documentation, where we asking students about their challenges, their strengths and challenges in the sense, and then for them to create like a real action plan on how they're going to meet certain goals.”

These learning plans are given at the beginning of the year so that the team can collaborate on creating a program that is efficient, responsive and effective. The plans help to personalize academic support dependent on student academic goals and to guide students toward college enrollment.

**Subtheme C: College & Career Exploration**

All participants agree that dedicated programming for college preparation is essential. The participants indicate that exposure to higher education is necessary to engage and motivate students to apply to college.
When asked about how the Determine To Achieve Success helped to prepare our students for college enrollment:

Ms. Rose states,

“I think that we try our best as DTAS to expose them to different experiences, even something as simple as taking them on a college campus. So I would just say exposure is really important for us to provide to our students, so they feel comfortable once they leave the environment that they've known for such a long time to either go away to college, or start on their career path.”

As program director, Ms. Rose has described college exposure programming to visiting college campuses and interacting with professionals in various fields. The efforts made on behalf of Ms. Rose and her team are unique in that they provide opportunities for college exposure. By touring colleges, students are exposed to what it feels like to walk on a college campus and navigate through their daily classes.

While not described by the participants, there is a reciprocal relationship between the DTAS, the program site, and the colleges the program is affiliated with. College exposure serves multiple purposes. The guiding DTAS documents describe the relationship in detail, urging programs to cultivate relationships with stakeholders on campus including deans and directors, DTAS programs require relationships with stakeholders on college campuses. The stakeholders are often concerned with building enrollment, and DTAS students represent an enrollment pathway.

College exposure was also seen through the team’s event planning process. Ms. Sarah states:
“Ms. Sophia and I would definitely meet and team up to talk about different types of trips that we think were great for our students in terms of taking them on a college tour or going to a college fair. Then we would try to narrow down what students we thought what would benefit from some of these different types of college trips and college fairs that we were offering to them.”

This exemplifies the act of collaborating and planning to meet the needs of the students. The role of both Ms. Sophia and Ms. Sarah are significant because counselors and administrators work firsthand with the students. They understand how to foster relationships and communicate effectively. Generally, before attending any college-related events, the students would already have been briefed about the importance of the trip. Sometimes these briefings can be as simple as a brief presentation or conversation. This way the staff is guaranteed that their students are learning, retaining the information that is being presented to them and creating meaningful experiences.

Ms. Sophia, who works on various tasks highlighted a significant portion of the program that also expose our youth to Career exploration:

“I didn't realize this is something I enjoyed, through our volunteer program we created or I specifically created this volunteer spotlight, where we would have the volunteers make a presentation about their career exploration. They can discuss something that they did on their own. A good example was one of our volunteers was an RA. He did a whole presentation about being an RA and what it means to be an RA. A lot of our students didn't even know; they hear college, but they don't know all the different things that you know you can do in college.”
As mentioned previously, a Residential Assistant (RA) is just one of the numerous examples of those that came to volunteer. Alumni students, teachers and others from various professions have to come on this volunteer spotlight to converse with students about their current careers and the steps they took towards accomplishing their goals.

One of the alumni student, college freshman Liana states, “I was able to learn about other career opportunities that I didn’t even know existed”. DTAS is unique in the sense that it exposes students to various and diverse careers which helps to foster awareness of the multiple options a student may have when planning for their future careers. The Determine To Achieve Success not only hosts college campus tours but according to the official program manual, DTAS also holds workshops that focus on college readiness, provide opportunities for students to participate in community service projects, volunteering, and participating in leadership/civic activities. Overall, the students are impacted by all of these elements within the program but one of the most effective methods of support is that of academic support services.

**Theme 2: Providing Student Services**

All participants described their role as “providing services and resources for middle and high school students.” Ms. Sarah describes the DTAS program as “A bridge between providing services for all students' resources and services for students that aren't readily available or are very scarce, in their school environment.” Additionally, Sarah also states, that the college process, “involves a lot of talking to students about the significance of college and what the College Opportunities would provide for them”. The DTAS manual and websites highlight numerous opportunities such as workshops, tutoring, academic support, cultural enrichment, and counseling. These specific
opportunities take the place of that bridge that Ms. Sarah described previously. A bridge that both provides services and resources for students that they may not have access to at their own schools.

Ms. Teresa works as a school counselor and provides support for students regarding college applications, financial aid, and scholarships. “We all work in the same office, the other counselors work strictly with college applications, financial aid scholarships, and anything related to college.” Later on, Ms. Teresa goes on to explain that the counselors include data regarding college applications, financial aid, and scholarships and compile all of the information into a presentation for students and parents. The roles of the counselors are similar to the roles of the DTAS administrators and staff. The administrator’s role includes providing tutoring services for the students by finding instructors, online resources, or partnerships that specializes in tutoring.

Ms. Sarah who is an DTAS administrator. A portion of her conversations with the students slowly introduces college as an option for students. These conversations can assist in building relationships with students when preparing them for college. Most students respond better to this approach of introducing college preparation because it seems to be more encouraging.

Principal Will, describes academic programming and support “they're kind of they're a support Avenue. So they're offering homework help, and we have done some college tours with them.”

Similar to Ms. Sarah, Principal Will finds that DTAS’s role in the college preparation process is due to the support that they provide for the students. According to him, college preparation includes academic support such as homework help, and college
knowledge through college tours. Student support can be found in various ways which can involve clear goals, strong motivation, encouragement and self-empowerment (Townsend, Martin, and Valentino, 2014). School leaders such as Mr. Will lead his school with these attributes while collaborating with the Determine To Achieve Success.

**Subtheme A: Peer to Peer Support & Tutoring**

All participants described their role as providing services and resources for middle and high school students. Ms. Sarah describes the DTAS program as “A bridge between providing services for all students' resources and services for students that aren't readily available or are very scarce, in their school environment.” Additionally, Sarah also stated, that the college process, “involves a lot of talking to students about the significance of college and what college opportunity would provide for them”.

After conducting the content analysis for the study, results of the collected data from transcripts, manuals and websites revealed that school counselors and program staff have been instrumental in providing services for student success. There are multiple services that are offered within the program. Specifically, some of these services include college counseling and transitional academic services which will be described as tutoring services”. With that being said, transitional academic services are one of the main aspects of the Determine To Achieve Success that are essential to student success. School counselors have been identified as key players in promoting college access due to their unique skill sets and positions within schools (Paolini, 2019).

Ms. Teresa, who represents school counselors for this study states, “we provide those services within our school.” As a high school counselor, Ms. Teresa is referring to
that of tutorial services which are provided for her students at the Determine To Achieve Success.

As a Determine To Achieve Success administrator, Ms. Sophia also agrees that services such as college counseling and transitional academic services contribute towards student success.

“So, all of those services are so important for now. I think they can even also build confidence as students because when a kid is not doing well academically, they feel some kind of way emotionally, they're not feeling well. So to know that those services are there, and they know that they can get them in college is so important”.

Ms. Sophia notes with her comments that these services provide a foundation for students because they may have opportunities to utilize these services when they attend college.

“Yes, I'd have to say that the peer to peer support is important. The Learning Services was the biggest component of our organization. To have an actual college students come in and help students with schoolwork, or other things like college essays prep, reading, math or just having conversations about college life and exposing them to campus experiences”.

The subject of tutoring has been referenced by the staff and alumni throughout this study. Majority of the alumni participants were grateful for the tutoring services such as the extra reading, math and writing preparation for their various classes. Moreover, DTAS’s alumni students have also proven to be a testament of how efficient the program is. When asked about the program and its effective academic support services, John, a college junior states,
“Well, I think it allows children to get some extra studies and for the subjects that they're going to be taking the following school year. So, I think that this is the biggest aspect of it. In general, the fact that it allows students who need one on one to get ahead in the classroom for next semester is important.”

John recognizes this mindset of “thinking ahead” for the following year. Several leadership strategies are included within the curriculum of the program that focus this same mentality. Therefore, we can conclude that the DTAS program not only, teaches and assists students with their present work but it also allows them to get a head start for the following school year.

One of the alumni student Katy, a college freshman, shared similar thoughts on her experience with tutoring and other academic services. In Katy’s case, her academic preparation was administered remotely within the DTAS program due to the pandemic.

“We were studying from home and it was really challenging because I'm a visual learner. I learned while my teachers were there and was able to see how they explain everything which was more than learning via virtually. So DTAS provided me with a tutor to help me with assignments or anything from class. I would just text her, email her, and then we go over it, we do it over zoom. When you're doing tutoring it is not just because you didn't understand what was taught in class, but because the more you learn, the more you get more knowledge.”

Katy’s comments brought up the topic of leadership. Not only, was she given a tutor during the pandemic to assist her with her studies but she realized something important. Katy was able to utilize this transitional academic program in the form of tutoring and interpret it as a great learning experience. Each time she worked with her tutor it wasn’t
just because she needed help or to catch up on her assignments but it was to absorb all she could about that particular topic or subject. This mentality is what DTAS is producing through its program, strong, responsible and ambitious students heading towards the path of success.

In addition to the tutoring skills that are given throughout the program, Ms. Teresa mentioned how these services can help towards gaining skills for the ACT and SAT exam. In reference to the DTAS program Ms. Teresa states, “they have tutoring available, we have an ACT prep available, depending on the grade level of the student, and they have organized college trips with students.” This statement confirms the appropriateness of content across subjects and all grade levels.

The Youth Leadership take pride in meeting the needs of the students at their particular learning level. This can be found through the goals section on the Determine To Achieve Success website. “To support DTAS students in completing middle school and prepare them for successful transition to high school and college”. Although this goal seems generic it still speaks to the overall intent of the program. The transition from middle school to high school and then from high school to college are significant when planning to enroll in college. Therefore, transitional academic support services such as tutoring has proven to be beneficial for successfully guiding students through this transition. Overall, student services also contributed to the efficiency of the program which has had an immense impact on middle and high school students.

**Theme 3: Impact of Program**

This final overarching theme is significant because it shares the value of the program. The particular theme highlights Youth Leadership Alumni students and
principal Will’s views of the program. They discuss how the program is relevant in their lives. Value can be defined as meaningful experiences that have impact upon the lives of the participants. Each of the participants are between the ages of 18-50. Through their responses we can view how the program impacted their lives and created a sense of belonging. Also the following section focuses on the alumni’s perspective on culture and its presence within the program. The Youth Leadership manual mentions program culture and cultural competency as part of the DTAS program operations and procedures.

When describing the impact of cultural connectedness, principal Will states,

“So I think first it starts with modeling. The staff is very generous with their own experiences and sharing their own cultures. A diverse staff and they are very freely share with the students what their cultural backgrounds and what their cultural experiences means to them. So that creates an environment in which the students feel comfortable to do that as well.”

This statement resonance the truth about the program and its sincerity. By being open and sharing a connection to one’s culture creates a safe space for a sense of belonging. While staff members continue to be open, students will begin to open up as well.

**Subtheme A: Value of Program through experience**

John, who is a junior at Adelphi University in Long Island ironically attended the DTAS as a junior in high school. He described his experience:

“One of the things that I do like about the program is that it had a lot of extra classes that didn't really have to deal with so much school or extracurricular, yes, extracurricular. Things like that is kind of what drew me to psychology.”

Furthermore, he explained why the program was valuable:
“I would describe it in an honest sense, a great opportunity for you to develop yourself because again, coming from my community, where I come from in Harlem, sometimes you may not get the opportunity to see or partake in certain things because of where you come from. So I think being in the program at the time, put me in certain situations where I can see certain things and meet new people that you wouldn't have necessarily met. I think to anybody else I would tell them if you have the opportunity, take the opportunity, just to see it. So you can learn and develop yourself in different aspects that you never thought you would have the time or the resources to do.”

Here John explains from his point of view what he gained through his experiences within the program. He having attending the program for about two years he was able to recognize the valuable opportunity to participate in this program. He learned about different career opportunities through his experience and is now majoring in psychology as a result.

Similarly, another college student and fellow alumni Katy from DTAS also shared a similar sentiment. She valued the program in itself and how the staff encouraged her to make use of every opportunity that was presented to her. As a result, she is currently a student at New York University. Katy states:

“The strength of the program, I would say is the whole environment. Because I feel like in any learning environment, the atmosphere impacts how we learn, like DTAS, the people there are really super amazing. They know how to really speak to their students and control the kids. Sometimes you have kids feeling all these emotions,
but the environment they are used to, can bring a sense of belongingness for everyone, no matter your background.”

Katy valued her sense of belonging and respect given to her by the staff. She spoke passionately about how the staff worked along-side of her while studying and applying for colleges. She is a first-generation college student who migrated from Africa. DTAS assisted Katy throughout her high school experience and she is currently paving the way for her success.

In addition, all of the participants, mainly the three alumni students who have participated in the DTAS program were asked whether they felt that the program acknowledged or incorporated their cultural backgrounds. When asked this question, Katy, discussed how she felt about how her background and she highlighted the fact that her religious background was acknowledged.

“She gave me her office to pray, I had that whole space to pray and then come back and catch up with them later. So it wasn't like, I’m just stepping away, they gave me that time which was very respectful”.

By respecting another’s culture this helps to make strides towards cultural relevancy. Thus, culturally relevant pedagogy can become an outlet for students to maintain their cultural integrity while succeeding academically.

John expresses similar feelings on not only his program experiences but also the intent and thought behind certain trips that were planned. He felt that his cultural background was appreciated when visiting certain museums that offered a variety of cultures in one setting. John states:
“My cultural background was celebrated. We would go on a trip every Friday. We would go to places such as Museums that dealt with African–American history and things of that nature.” Culture Day, a program event, was also another poignant moment that made every student feel included and celebrated. Liana stated, “We would also have a Culture Day where everyone would come in, talk about their culture, listen to each other’s background, things like that. So, my culture and my background was definitely really appreciated.”

As seen in these examples, the acknowledgement of personal backgrounds makes a difference when fostering a community. The program provided college experiences that helped student learn about the cultures of other students. Therefore, it is imperative that the Determine To Achieve Success continues to make their program culturally relevant.

**Conclusion**

This chapter listed three overarching themes that emerged through the analysis of the data. The first overarching theme is team collaboration with the sub-themes of establishing relationships, student planning, and college exposure. In conjunction with the DTAS website, manual and data report which listing their goals for their students and their yearly progress, the next theme that emerged from the data would be student support. The third overarching theme is Student services with the sub-theme of Peer-to-Peer support & tutoring. The final theme was impact of the program with a sub-theme of program experiences. In summation, all of the data utilized in this chapter were significant for the reader to connect with the experiences of the participants. Chapter five will conclude the research and discuss the interpretation of the results and findings, limitations, and implications for future research and practice.
CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION

The purpose of the study is to highlight college preparation and academic support for low-income teenagers through the lens of a selected program entitled the Determine To Achieve Success (DTAS) in New York. The study first explains in Chapter one, how teachers and principals improve pre-entry attributes for college success, including college counseling, and transitional academic support programs. Secondly, to describe how, if at all, the skills are taught or experienced in culturally relevant ways. In an attempt to slow down the high school drop-out rate or developmental education studies have been discovered that supplemental education programs such as afterschool and summer bridge are effective. These programs usually take place on a college campus while simultaneously providing interventions that assist in preparing students for college enrollment. (Kallison & Satfer, 2012). Chapter two, provided the theoretical framework and the literature that supports the idea academic retention and cultural relevance is needed in precollege programming according to Tinto and Ladson-Billings.

As introduced in chapter three, the study uses a qualitative, descriptive single case study (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018) to describe the roles of a program director, a principal, three staff members and three alumni students. All participants were asked to reflect on either their past or current experiences with pre-college preparation within the program. In chapter four, the results indicate that the intentional design of the program is valued and understood as a meaningful step toward increasing high school graduation and the pre-entry attributes necessary for student success in college. Participants shared experiences including creating and coordinating programs, teaching and learning
The central research question of this study explored how directors, counselors, staff, and alumni describe the role of pre-college programs in preparing low-income high school students for college. All participants in this study describe the role of after school, precollege programs as organizations that provide college access to at risk students through academic support, college preparation, and social capital-building. Pre college programs improve college enrollment and persistence rates for at risk students, and also benefit the community by filling gaps in college readiness. Postsecondary institutions can improve organizational structures around pre-college programs and create systems to document and evaluate their impact on participants, the community, and the university.

After school, pre college programs play a critical role in providing college access to at risk students. These programs improve college enrollment and persistence rates for at risk students by providing academic support, college preparation, and social capital-building. Pre college programs also benefit the community by filling gaps in college readiness. In order to maximize the impact of these programs, collaborative efforts of staff, administrators, and community agencies strengthen the programs and enhance participation. The results of the study indicate that this is possible through careful planning and coordination, though there is evidence that staff are often asked to multitask for the programs’ success.

The findings also provide information to answer sub-question 1b. DTAS program services, specifically the transitional academic services include remediation, one on one academic content, presenting and experiencing college and career programs, and developing culturally relevant models of engagement.
and group tutoring, and academic enrichment promote student success and college preparedness.

Surprisingly, participants did not explicitly describe college counseling as a primary function of the program, though it was mentioned briefly by a student and a counselor. The mission of the program, the guiding documents, and participants in this study explained the value of academic support in several ways. To prevent drop out of at risk youth, personalized academic plans, such as the PLP serve to support students and improve college readiness. The DTAS uses that document, coupled with information from the students, their teachers, and counselors to create programming. Ongoing communication between counselors, teachers and students helps to identify areas of improvement and set clear goals for success.

Academically prepared students may have higher confidence levels and may choose to pursue colleges that were once out of reach. Kayla offers on such example of academic preparedness, coupled with social support that allowed her to consider applying to an academically rigorous institution. These programs help to mitigate the disproportionate under-preparedness acting as a bridge for low-income and first-generation college students, who are often at a disadvantage when applying to college.

Pre college programs provide a safety net for students as they transition to college. These programs can help students with time management, study skills, and other important life skills that are necessary for success in college. In addition, pre college programs can connect students with college mentors and support systems, which can make all the difference in whether or not a student persists through to graduation. The DTAS requirements and partnerships have a vested interest in developing programming.
that prepares students with meaningful examples that help to provide additional information.

Research question 1, sub-question b asked How, if at all, do school leaders and staff describe the cultural relevance of the DTAS program as it relates to college preparedness?

The analysis of the data found that the administrative dynamic within the program was centered on team collaboration and communication. These two skills lead to the establishment of authentic relationships. All of the DTAS administrators, Ms. Sarah and Ms. Sophia have an ongoing working relationship with the program director, Ms. Rose. After meeting weekly, each of the ladies also collaborate on the program planning process. This process includes promoting upcoming events for the program, tutoring sessions, and volunteer spotlight and college exposure.

The programs that support student success are both mandated and personalized. Programming is determined by the needs of the students, as the relate to college access, college-readiness and college completion. Programming can be adapted to any audience: students, parents, staff, community partners, etc. Programming is also aligned to the needs of a particular school or school district, and the needs of the university partner. Some key components of effective programming include clear goals and objectives before program implementation so that all stakeholders understand the purpose and intended outcomes of the program. Effective programming also ensures collaboration among key stakeholders, as well as adequate resources for successful implementation. Strong program planning is critical to college access for at-risk students and can help them develop a sense of personal development or self-worth through college success.
Tinto’s student departure theory illustrates the importance of precollege attributes for long term student success and retention. The theory also recognizes that students bring several characteristics, experiences, and commitments to their college entry. The current study describes some of these characteristics and experiences through the themes of student services, student planning and college exposure for all students who enter the program.

The results of the study illustrate a process of “bridging the gap” demonstrated through relationships amongst the alumni and the DTAS staff. Additionally, throughout the study relationships inspired the process of team collaboration between the DTAS staff and schools. Team collaboration is essential when designing the “implementation of teaching and learning” (Newell & Bain, 2018). Throughout the study, team collaboration became a major highlighted theme due to the planning process amongst staff. This program designs their program according to their population of low-income students. One of the goals of the program is to help low-income students who fall into this category of what the DTAS website describes “At Risk”. These students are at risk mainly because during their transition from middle school to high school or from high school to college many students begin to lose interest in graduating or attaining their high school diplomas. The participants in this study are responsible for recruiting students, providing academic support services and planning events for programming. The process of recruitment, curriculum designing, organizing events, partnering with schools all contribute to meeting program goals.
Theme 1: Bridging a Gap

*Forming Relationships through team collaboration*

The act of forming relationships is also critical for administrators, students and principals while working within the program. As a program director, school building leader or principal communication skills are necessary when planning a program. Moreover, each year as the student continues to participate they adapt to the structure. The more comfortable they become the more encouraged they may feel to establish relationships with their teachers and administrators within the program.

*College Exposure*

The Determine To Achieve Success blend academic services, social-emotional support, and college experiences. The program is designed to give incoming freshmen entering college in the fall the tools needed to begin their college careers, and are becoming part of the effort to recruit, retain, and graduate an at-risk student population (Ackermann, 1991).

College exposure was of great importance the DTAS staff. As mentioned in chapter four, the DTAS created a space for students to learn and explore their options for both college and career development. Most options within DTAS for college and career exploration are included in the student planning process. The planning process includes college campus tours for middle and high school students. While collecting data from the DTAS website, there are several campuses that host tours for DTAS including Fordham University, New York University, PACE University, and Columbia University. The Determine To Achieve Success also allows professionals to come into the program to discuss their careers and in check-ins throughout the year.
The school counselors and Youth leadership administrators in this study described their role as “providing services and resources for middle and high school students.” Transitional academic support programs are the predominate strength of the program.

**Theme 2: Student Services**

*Peer to Peer Support & Tutoring*

Tinto's Theory of Student Departure (1975) states that the more students integrate into the life of the college, the more successful they will be and the more likely the student will remain in school until graduation. Part of the success can be acquired through programs providing extra academic preparation that can assist with strengthening academic achievement. Homework assistance, projects, essays, reading and math materials are just a few examples of the tutoring services that are made available to the students. These tutoring services become accessible as a result of the communication between parents, teachers and students. Peer to peer student interaction takes place when small groups are placed together for collectively studying. Some teachers find in their experience that students may be more comfortable studying in a group setting. The Youth Leadership does offer this as an option for students. Opportunities for students to utilize their experiences and knowledge in a meaningful way are created through Peer tutoring (Ali, Anwer, & Abbas, 2015). This also creates a space for tutors to also reinforce their own learning through teaching and reviewing.

More importantly, as stated in chapter four of this study, the Youth Leadership takes pride in meeting the needs of the students at their particular learning level. Therefore, these student services such as tutoring have proven to be beneficial for student success. DTAS’s alumni students have proven to be a testament of how efficient the
program is. Student services has contributed to the efficiency of the program which has had an immense impact on middle and high school students.

**Theme 3: Impact of program**

*Program Experiences*

The Determine To Achieve Success values their alumni students and their success. The three alumni students who were interviewed attend universities such as Adelphi University, Hofstra University and New York University. The students describe the value of their experiences within the program, specifically successfully enrolling in and remaining in college. Experience is key when learning about college culture. There are numerous ways of interacting in a college setting as a high school student. Most of these interactions took place through college tours and trips that are intentionally planned to stimulate the minds of the students. John, a junior at Adelphi University, recalls how he felt when going on a trip. Through John’s experiences in the program, he noticed how his culture was highlighted and appreciated which made him feel a sense of belongingness. The program played an integral role in exposing and showcasing a new world to students. By opening up a brand new world to students who perhaps haven’t traveled outside of their communities this creates a positive impact on the lives of those students.

*The Importance of Cultural Relevant Pedagogy*

As discussed in chapter two, culturally relevant pedagogy provides a framework that allows educators to personalize content that connects students to college. Ladson-Billings believes strongly that all students can succeed and that every interaction in the classroom is an opportunity for students to become motivated and be inspired. For
example, hiring alumni to serve as tutors, and hosting after school programs in the high school building helps students to see examples of college going behavior and experience. All of the participants, mainly the three alumni students who have participated in the DTAS program were asked whether they felt that the program acknowledged or incorporated their cultural backgrounds. When asked this question, one participant Katy, discussed how she felt valued and a sense of respect, in regards to how the administrators acknowledged the fact she was Muslim, and gave her space to pray whenever she needed. Thus, culturally relevant pedagogy can become an outlet for students to maintain their cultural integrity while succeeding academically.

Furthermore, John expresses his feelings on not only his program experiences but also the intent and thought behind certain trips that were planned. He felt that his cultural background was appreciated when visiting certain museums that offered a variety of cultures in one setting. Culture Day was also another poignant moment that made every student feel included and celebrated. John’s experience illustrates aspects of Ladson-Billings culturally relevant pedagogy, specifically in the idea that defined it as a teaching practice that focuses on students’ cultural backgrounds. These backgrounds are integral when developing instruction in the classroom.

**Relationship to Prior Research**

The study highlights the best practices in student precollege programming, the experiences of the stakeholders who participate within the program, it also analyzes the relationship between organization and the institution. Chapter Two situates the study's constructs first by using a review of the related literature. It also describes the causes of limited access to college for low–income students. The current study explores the
disparity in K-12 education that affects student retention, persistence, and college preparedness. Over the last three decades, more literature has been produced about students from underserved backgrounds and their lack of accurate information about postsecondary options. Oftentimes these students may be confused about expectations for academic work, actual tuition costs, and the content of college entrance and placement tests (Venezia, Kirst, and Antonio 2003). The Determine to Achieve Success program offers practices such as academic work, SAT and ACT preparation, college application and college essay writing for low-income students who may struggle with this process. While these aspects are explored throughout the program the stakeholders experience interacting with these practices. School counselors and DTAS administrators plan to supply resources such as tutors, instructors, counselors to assist the students when needed. Simultaneously, the students receive this support in an effort to prepare them for college enrollment and career exploration.

The collaboration aspect within this program is also a strength. The partnerships with DTAS and their affiliate colleges, and the organization and the high school. The stakeholders work as a team in order to provide a support system for each student and their parents. This support can be seen through the academic support but also the sincere social-emotional support through conversations between the students and staff. Special events that were specifically made for high-school students and their families are impactful as well such as culture day.
Revisiting Tinto’s Student Departure Theory

In addition to all of these highlights within the program, the theoretical framework was able to support the evidence that was shown through the commentary of our participants. This theoretical framework in chapter two of this study consists of two major theorists. Vincent Tinto’s Student departure theory (1993) and Gloria Ladson-Billings Cultural Relevance theory (1995). The Student Departure theory identifies academic difficulties, the inability of individuals to resolve their educational and occupational goals as the three major sources of student departure. Although this “inability” has the potential to grown into a large problem there are solutions for combating this issue. The central point of this study is to offer precollege programs as a solution to graduate dropout and declining college enrollment.

In order to encourage college enrollment, it is necessary for programs such as DTAS to bridge a gap by simply teaching and providing information on college enrollment (Stenning et. al, 1997). The Determine To Achieve Success has proven through their successful alumni stories that bridging this gap is necessary to help foster success. Part of the “bridging the gap” process would include establishing relationships through team collaboration, and exposing students to college and career knowledge.

Tinto’s student development theory can be found throughout the experiences of the stakeholders. The literature review found in chapter two, supports the use of Tinto’s Student of Departure theory. Milem & Berger’s (1999) study of freshman undergraduate college persistence and student retention uses three data sets distributed three times during the year. This study of 718 participants used Student Information Data (SIF), the Early Collegiate Experience Survey (ECES), and the Freshman Year Survey (FYS).
authors use Tinto’s model to frame the study. Findings indicated that early exposure to academic and co-curricular activities in the fall semester helped predict the spring semester in academic and traditional social activities.

In this study, students who had higher levels of involvement with peers and faculty experienced elevated academic integration levels as measured by the data set. Again, this study identifies the stakeholders to be the school counselors, Determine to Achieve Success staff, school principal and the Determine To Achieve Success director. Each of these roles are crucial when helping to prevent students from dropping out of high school. Tinto’s theory understands that student backgrounds are diverse in addition to their social and cultural backgrounds. However, this study specifically focuses on a population of low-income high school students who are in danger of not taking retention or academics seriously hence they begin to depart from this idea of graduating college.

**Revisiting Ladson-Billings Cultural Relevance Theory (CRP)**

Culture was mentioned throughout the study especially through the eyes of the alumni participants. John and Liana were two of the alumni participants who really enjoyed the college events and “Culture Day”. Ladson-Billings (1995), who developed Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, otherwise known as CRP, defined it as a teaching practice that focuses on students’ cultural backgrounds. This theory answers questions within this study surrounding student/teacher interactions and how it helps bridge culture and teaching.

These examples are poignant when providing evidence on how incorporating student cultural backgrounds are important when connecting with students. Additionally,
it is powerful if a nationwide can create cultural meaningful experiences for students. As seen in chapter 4, this final overarching theme, impact of program, is significant because it shares the value of the program. The particular theme discusses how the program is relevant in the lives of the students. Value can be defined as meaningful experiences that have impact upon the lives of the participants. Each of the participants are between the ages of 18-50. Through their responses we can view how the program impacted their lives and created a sense of belonging.

Ladson-Billings (1995) discusses the importance of culture in order to avoid certain disparities in education today. Ladson-Billings believes strongly that all students can succeed and that every interaction in the classroom is an opportunity for students to become motivated and be inspired. The theoretical framework of this study provides other examples that highlights culturally relevant peer interactions and its role in supporting college readiness for students (Marciano, 2016). Other studies that have been conducted indicate that Culturally Relevant Pedagogy was used to better understand how youth interact with peers to support one another’s college readiness and access (Knight and Marciano, 2013).

The literature that was discussed within the study, indicates that Ladson-Billings took the time to observe teachers of African American students and evaluate their teaching instruction (Ladson-Billings, 1995). These questions surrounding student/teacher interactions helped to bridge culture and teaching. These interactions also led to a grounded theory of culturally relevant pedagogy utilizing three conceptual ideas. The first idea was conceptions of self and others held by culturally relevant teachers,
second, how the culturally relevant teachers structure social relations, and third, the conceptions of knowledge held by culturally relevant teachers.

As seen in chapter four, these interactions are integral when developing instruction in the classroom. Katy, a participant within the study illustrated a story where her cultural and customs were respected amongst the DTAS staff which her feel a sense of belonging. Through these interactions within the program this creates a safe space between students and program staff. Moreover, when planning for the program, DTAS work as a team to evaluate the demographics within their program to discover how to cater to the population of students. For example, if there is a large Latino population then various events or projects may be conducted in honor of Latino Heritage month. Thus, Cultural relevance pedagogy can become an outlet for students to maintain their cultural integrity while succeeding academically. College counseling, noted in the literature and guiding documents as essential, was not discussed in depth in this study. This may be attributed to the limitations of the small sample size.

These culturally relevant peer interaction practices assist in drawing attention to the culturally relevant role youth play in supporting one another’s college readiness while simultaneously accessing their culturally relevant peer interactions (Marciano, 2016).

A previous study that was found within the literature review evaluated, “the ways youth provide academic and emotional support and gain encouragement from their peers in culturally relevant ways while engaging in college-going processes” (Knight and Marciano 2013, p. 216). This theory aligns with the current study due to the need for cultural relevant instruction within the classroom, the lack of academic preparedness and the need for maintaining student retention. Knight and Marciano, 2013, used Culturally
Relevant Pedagogy to better understand how youth interact with peers to support one another’s college readiness and access. Specific to this study, the goal is to inquire whether the precollege programs include culturally responsive instruction that align with the literature to support academic confidence in students. This goal was accomplished by gathering perceptions of the participants (administrators & alumni students) on importance of community and shared experience to focus on college readiness and access for afterschool programs.

**Limitations of the Study**

The single case study included different levels of participants from the same program. One critique that is quite noticeable is the lack of depth and breadth due to limited number of participants. The study includes the perspectives of one counselor and one principal. Initially, this study began as a multiple case study with three principals, three counselors and three DTAS instructors. However, this search took place during the height of pandemic which played a factor for lack of participation. The lack of participation created a challenge in securing my original intended number of participants. Findings from this study are limited as a result and should take into account the circumstances impacting recruitment. Specifically, there is a need for participants from multiple middle and high schools who collaborate with the Determine To Achieve Success each year. The perspective of those participants would increase the trustworthiness of the study. Another limitation within the cases was the location. The study sought to recruit participants primarily in New York. The Determine To Achieve Success is a nationwide program. Expanding the study beyond New York may provide future opportunities to recruit additional principals, counselors and DTAS administrators.
Lastly, another limitation would be the lack of college counseling as a main component throughout the participant commentary. Therefore, the original purpose of the study to highlight college counseling as a component had to be altered. Also, the research questions had to be modified as well. The limited sample size was not representative of the significant amount of college counseling that takes place within the program. Despite evidence of this resource, counseling was not meaningfully captured in the data. This can be attributed to the focus on program deliverables and should not diminish the importance of college counseling. Participants focused on the academic support programs such as tutoring. There were also limitations in accessing the specific details of the program offerings. This information would be very helpful to align the aspects of the program with meaning attributed to each element.

**Recommendations for Future Practice**

There are several opportunities for future practice. The findings of this study indicate that team building is essential to the success of program delivery. Increased professional development and team oriented approaches to college access efforts may be beneficial for underserved populations. Second, the students in this study were able to identify specific culturally affirming practices that allow them to feel included. Listening to students in focus groups or program settings and learning what can be done to affirm their identity is essential. These practices, as described in the findings, offer comfort and support. Third, academic program development is vital to ensure students receive what they need when they need it. Personalized development should include flexible elements aligned to academic progress and individual goal setting. However, it is essential when
creating after school support programs. Fourth, the value of partnerships between stakeholders is significant. Respecting and understanding the needs of each participant is essential to cultivating and sustaining these relationships. Team building, regular visits, and guidelines that offer support to build partnerships for student success will create a sense of continuity and enhance social capital. Lastly, community and family communications and engagement should be enhanced so that school-community partnerships are strengthened and a college going community can develop.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Conducting a study and teaching during the pandemic made me especially aware of the need for online after school supports, such as those offered in the DTAS. Studying these aspects within the context of an online after school program is understudied and future research may be beneficial for individuals seeking remote opportunities. Another potential study is to develop a case study of principal’s perspectives on the role of supplemental after school programming. Likewise, qualitative studies that focus more broadly on the experience of school counselors offers an additional area of inquiry. A multiple case study that expands on the present study to include middle and high schools, cross district analysis, or a nationwide sample would be a helpful addition to capture the services from the perspective of stakeholders. Quantitative research can add to the study by outlining the DTAS’s percentages of students each year who have academically improved, have access to college preparedness, and those students who actively participate within their community. A longitudinal study on student success and outcomes over a ten-year period would illustrate the program benefits over time. Lastly, a study to assess how DTAS’s team building and collaborative contribute to professional
development amongst instructors, principals, and district leaders would also be a positive contribution to the literature.

**Conclusion**

Chapter five offers context to answer the research questions and interpret of the results and findings, limitations, and implications for future research and practice. Overall, the study first explained how teachers and principals improve pre-entry attributes for college success, including college counseling, and transitional academic support programs. This helped offer evidence of the first research question which described the role of pre-college programs in preparing low-income high school students for college. In an attempt to slow down the high school drop-out rate or developmental education studies have been discovered that supplemental education programs such as afterschool and summer bridge are effective. Program stakeholders, including DTAS and affiliated school staff are passionate about their roles within the program. All staff who currently work within the program; and all alumni students who have previously participated in the program have testified about the immense impact of the Determine To Achieve Success.

Moreover, the study describes some of these characteristics and experiences of these participants within the program. It also illustrated some of the characteristics and reflections through the themes of student services, program planning and college exposure for all students who enter the program. These themes helped to prove that DTAS program services, specifically transitional academic services used to promote student success and college preparedness. Lastly, after discovering these effective services and describing the role of the practitioners, the researcher was able to discover if there were any skills that were taught or experienced in culturally relevant ways. The
elements of culturally relevant pedagogy embedded in the programming making students feel that they belong. Belongingness impacts the student’s experience within the program, adding value to the program as a student success initiative.
APPENDIX A FLYER FOR ADVERTISEMENT

Volunteers needed for Research study on precollege programs impact on low-income students

The study will include participants that work within the Youth Leadership program (YLP).

Location: Interviews will be held virtually in a time and date selected by the participant.
Time: Each interview will take place for 45-60 minutes.
Recordings: Each interview will be recorded using google meets or Zoom meeting. These recordings will ONLY be performed at the permission of the participant.

CONTACT INFO:
Email: leahheartfield7@gmail.com
cell phone number: (646) 853-7884
Social media:
Facebook (Leah Heartifled)
APPENDIX B LETTER OF INFORMED CONSENT

My name is Leah Heartfield and I am a doctoral candidate from St. John’s University. As the researcher of this study, I would like to invite you to participate in a research study. This study will seek to evaluate effectiveness of the Liberty Partnership program and its impact on Low-income students.

As part of this study, I am interviewing DTAS instructors as well as principals and guidance counselors in small groups consisting of a series of short, open-ended questions that should take approximately 45 minutes to 60 minutes. The sessions will be conducted virtually through Zoom or Google Meets with audio and video recorded by using a digital device.

While the researcher will maintain strict confidentiality throughout the duration of the study, the researcher cannot ensure that other participants within the focus group will not share information outside of our time together. While anything shared could potentially be repeated by other participants, the researcher will state that any information shared during this time is strictly confidential and cannot be repeated. While there is no direct benefit for your participation in the study, you will be supporting researchers with the knowledge you provide. Your participation in this study is voluntary and confidential. Your name and the schools name will not be identified in any documents within this study other than this form consenting to be a participant. If at any time you decide not to participate, just let me know.

If you have questions about the purpose of this investigation, you may contact myself, 646-853-7884 or leah.heartfield09@stjohns.edu. If you have questions concerning your rights as a human participant, you may contact the University’s Human Subjects Review Board at St. John’s University, specifically Dr. Raymond DiGiuseppe, 718.990.1955, or adigiuser@stjohns.edu. You may also contact Dr. Cecelia Parnther, Assistant Professor Department of Administrative and Instructional Leadership at 718.990.1467 or parnthee@stjohns.edu.
Your signature acknowledges receipt of a copy of the consent form as well as your willingness to participate.

__________________________________________
Printed Name of Participant

__________________________________________                            ___________
Signature of Participant                                                                                                  Date

Leah Heartfield Researcher

__________________________________________                                      ___________
Signature of Researcher                                                                                                   Date
Good Afternoon [Name],

Hello again and thank you for the information you gave me in our last online conversation. I am interested in highlighting the Liberty Partnership program within my doctoral study. My study will focus on services such as mentorship/college counseling and other college readiness programs that are provided for low-income students. I believe that the Liberty Partnership program has everything I need in order to present this information. Is it possible to interview you and a few of your staff members on your experience within the program and the success of it? These interviews will not take place immediately but before the school year ends.

Hi Leah:

Sure! We would love to help support your doctoral study in any way we can. Let us know when you would like to conduct the interviews so we can prepare in advance.

Best,

[Name]
APPENDIX D CODEBOOK

First Initial Coding Cycle:

Common terms used amongst all participants

1. Students
2. Program
3. Parental support
4. Counselor
5. College
6. Activities
7. School
8. Class
9. Participate
10. Questions
11. Attend
12. Life experiences
13. Middle school/High school
14. Terms
15. Support
16. Tutoring
17. Feel
18. People
19. Tutors
20. Site administrator
21. Organization
22. Leaders
23. Program
24. Administrator
25. Participate
26. Help
27. Utilize
28. Culture
29. Fordham University
30. High school
31. Academic
32. Principal
33. partner/partnerships
34. Collaborate
35. Experience
36. Teachers
Second & Round of coding

Patterns found within participant responses

Theme 1, Theme 2, Theme 3

Theme 1- Bridging a Gap

1. Students
2. Program
3. Parental support
4. Counselor
5. College
6. Activities
7. School
8. Class
9. Participation
10. Questions
11. Academic
12. Principal
13. partner/partnerships
14. Teachers
15. Creativity
16. Resources
17. Liaison
18. Teams
19. Trust
20. Provide
Theme 2- Student Services

21. Attendance
22. Support
23. Tutoring
24. Feel
25. People
26. Tutors
27. Site administrator
28. Organization
29. Leaders

Theme 3- Impact of Programming

30. Program
31. Administrators
32. Life experiences
33. Alumni students
34. Participation
35. Help with enrollment/studies
36. Sense of Belongingness
37. Collaborate
38. Experience
39. Respect
40. Culture
41. Utilize
42. Cultural backgrounds
43. Conversation
44. Communication
45. Support
46. Career
47. Understanding

Third Round of coding

Elaborative Coding

Codes: Definitions (extracted from the participant responses)
<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Students</td>
<td>=Middle and High school students within the Determine To Achieve Success</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Programming</td>
<td>= Determine To Achieve Success activities for students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Counselor/Counseling</td>
<td>= DTAS staff that offer support to each participant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Activities</td>
<td>= College tours, culture day, and peer tutoring</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. School</td>
<td>= Any high schools who collaborate with DTAS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Partner/Partnerships</td>
<td>= All colleges and universities (including Fordham University) who collaborate with DTAS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Resources</td>
<td>= Tutoring materials, personal learning plans, annual manual</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Liaison</td>
<td>= Counselor who become the line between the principal and the director of DTAS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Teams</td>
<td>= Each year small groups are formed amongst the schools to help students integrate in DTAS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Trust DTAS</td>
<td>= Students bond and connection with staff and counselors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Provide Support</td>
<td>= Staff and counselors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Theme 2- Student Services**

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12. Tutoring</td>
<td>= academic services student participants receive in the form of one-on-one, or peer-to-peer tutoring</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

99
13. Site administrator = DTAS Staff (Ms. Sarah & Ms. Sophia)

14. Organization = Determine To Achieve Success

15. Leaders = Program Director (Ms. Rose,), Principal (Mr. Will)

**Theme 3-Impact of Programming**

16. Administrators = School Counselor (Ms. Teresa) and DTAS staff mentioned previously

17. Life experiences = This can be showcased in volunteer spotlight

18. Alumni students = Youth Participants ranging from ages 18-21(John, Katy & Liana)

19. Participation = The active attendance and interaction between student and DTAS Staff

20. Help with enrollment/studies = As described by the alumni participants, “the help” can be considered any resource, activity; or meeting that was given to students to assist with the college enrollment process

21. Sense of Belongingness = This idea of feeling like you belong to a certain community (ex. Academic, culture, grade)

22. Collaborate = The team effort made on behalf of the school principal, counselor, DTAS director and staff

23. Experience = This can be described as How the students were impacted by the program

24. Respect = This was displayed through the actions of the staff. It can be described as the mutual consideration for one’s feelings, ideas, culture or religion
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>25. Culture</th>
<th>= This can be described as a community that practice the same ideas or share similar qualities. In this study, the culture of college academic preparedness while intertwining college culture was highlighted.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>26. Cultural backgrounds</td>
<td>= The diversity with the program. The Participant’s backgrounds included African-American &amp; Latino.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. Conversation</td>
<td>= Any type of meaningful advice or talk between students &amp; staff are important to this study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. Communication</td>
<td>= All phone calls, emails, and any mode of collaborating between the school and DTAS program (School counselor, DTAS director).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. Support</td>
<td>= Counseling, transitional academic support programs such as tutoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. Career</td>
<td>= Volunteer spotlights were seen as opportunities to highlight new career paths</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Mission and Goals

Mission

The Mission of the [Organization Name] is committed to the discovery of wisdom and the transmission of learning, through research and through education of the highest quality, providing all students with the knowledge, skills, and qualities required to be successful in an ever-changing, diverse, technological and multicultural global society.

Goals

1. To support Student [Population] students in completing middle school and prepare them for successful transition to high school
   - Students will decrease their number of days absent from school
   - Students will decrease the number of referrals for disciplinary action
   - Students will develop a positive attitude towards school
   - 100% of students will achieve standard or higher in ELA
   - 100% of students will achieve standard or higher in Math
   - Students will use creative arts to express themselves

7. To involve parents in supporting their children's education and personal development
   - Parents will attend school related meetings
   - Parents will be aware of school resources to help their child succeed
   - Parents will encourage their children to attend school and engage positively in the learning experience

4. To enhance the development of leadership skills in the students
   - Students will learn positive leadership skills
   - Students will engage in leadership activities both within the school and their community

3. To provide professional development opportunities for middle school staff
   - Teachers will learn effective ways of using technology in the classroom
Year End Outcomes of Students Served by [Program] 2017-18

- Promoted: 11,880
- Graduated: 2,057
- Retained: 510
- Transfer to Different School: 425
- Other: 232
- No Longer Interested: 104
- Extra Curricular Activities or Sports Conflicts: 102
- Unknown: 150
- Dropped Out of LPP Program but Stayed in School: 71
- Dropped Out of School: 61

Programs reported that 61 or less than 1% of the total number of [Program] students (15,592) dropped out of school.

During 2017-18 approximately 89.4% of LPP students were either promoted or graduated from the program.
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Name
Leah Heartfield

Baccalaureate Degree
Bachelor of Liberal Arts &
Sciences, St. John’s
University, Queens, NY
Major: English

Date Graduated
May, 2013

Other Degrees and Certificates
Master of Science, St. John’s
University, Queens, NY, Major:
Adolescent Education (7-12)

Date Graduated
May, 2017