

St. John's University

St. John's Scholar

Theses and Dissertations

2024

**BACKPACK TO LAPTOP: FIRST-GENERATION STUDENTS'
JOURNEY TO CAREER SELF- EFFICACY AND PROFESSIONAL
REALIZATION**

Thierry Thesatus

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholar.stjohns.edu/theses_dissertations



Part of the [Education Commons](#)

BACKPACK TO LAPTOP: FIRST-GENERATION STUDENTS' JOURNEY TO
CAREER SELF-EFFICACY AND PROFESSIONAL REALIZATION

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

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

to the faculty of the

DEPARTMENT OF ADMINISTRATIVE AND INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

of

THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

at

ST. JOHN'S UNIVERSITY

New York

by

Thierry Thesatus

Date Submitted 4/25/2024

Date Approved 5/17/2024

Thierry Thesatus

Dr. Anthony Annunziato

© Copyright by Thierry Thesatus 2024

All Rights Reserved

ABSTRACT

BACKPACK TO LAPTOP: FIRST-GENERATION STUDENTS' JOURNEY TO CAREER SELF-EFFICACY AND PROFESSIONAL REALIZATION

Thierry Thesatus

The purpose of this qualitative narrative inquiry is to explore how first-generation community college students perceive the selection of an academic major and career choice. The factors that impact career decision-making and the development of key employability skills. It is important to understand how to develop or promote programs that can help expose students to various career paths, broaden their career options, and develop competitive candidates for future employment. Colleges and universities, especially community colleges, in the United States have continued to evolve to include workforce development as central to their mission and vision (O'Banion, 2022). Thus, as institutions continue to explore career and identify resources to help connect students to various internal and external professional skill development opportunities through academic curriculum, internship, experiential learning, and mentorship experiences, the first-generation college students (FGCS), population must not be left behind. Maietta (2016) in an article for the National Association for Colleges and Employers (NACE) described the FGCS as the "hidden minority" due to the different challenges they may face. There needs to be a specifically tailored approach to reach this population effectively. This study will use convenience sampling to identify and select eight participants for a qualitative, narrative study of XYZCC Partner program alumni, currently enrolled at a four-year higher

education institution or presently employed. The study will use three open-ended interviews, as well as the participant's co-curricular transcript and/or college resumes to collect participants' stories. Through multiple rounds of inductive coding, an examination of participants' narratives, community college administrators, faculty, and staff, will allow for deeper insight into creating experiences, resources, and policies that better support FGCS.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my rock, my wife, my love, and the most amazing mother to baby Josiah and baby Sydney, Jedidah Leone Harris. Thank you for always supporting me and picking me up. Your love, faith in me, and encouragement sustained me during all of the challenges and triumphs. Thank you for being the Most Valuable Player for our family. I pray that Josiah and Sydney grow to be as strong as you are and continue to be inspired by you, as I am every day. This is for Josiah Martial Thesatus and Sydney Soleil Thesatus, my beautiful children for you to know that you are able to accomplish great things. Never set limits or allow others to set restrictions on the heights that you can go. Believe in yourselves, even if no one else can see it.

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to ‘mommy’, Micheline Mireille Iscar. Thank you for always being the wind beneath my wings. Thank you for your love, for inspiring me to do more and for all of your hard work and sacrifice for us to have a better life. Most of all thank you for your prayers and always covering me. To my father, Pierre Martial Thesatus, ‘Papi,’ for always pushing me in education and for believing I can accomplish anything. The opportunities you provided me, your belief in me and support consistently pushed me to new levels. To my mom, Kettly Mondesir-Thesatus, thank you for your love, for your encouragement, and conviction in me throughout this process. To my sisters, Stephanie Iscar and Naysa Rose Thesatus, as your big brother, I hope that I have been able to have and continue to have the same impact on your journey through life as you have had on mine. To my niece, Leena Jordyn Iscar, my Goddaughters and Godsons, please know that I have achieved this goal for you/ us to know that we can do all things through faith in Jesus. To my in-laws, mom and dad,

Sharon, and Mark Harris, thank you for your prayers. To my sister, Apphia, thank you for your love, prayers, and for going above and beyond to ensure that this journey would be successful. To my sister Kezia, thank you for your prayers and continuing to check on me throughout this process. To my brother Nate, and his wife, Shadae, their kids Bleu and Stone, my brothers, Matt, Adon, and Andrew, thank you for your thoughts and prayers, always. I am truly blessed to be a part of this family. Your constant motivation throughout this process was invaluable. Thank you to my church family, Pastor Louis Straker Jr. and the Reflections Church in Brooklyn, NY for believing in this journey from day one, thank you for your support and prayers.

I want to thank all of my family, aunts, uncles, cousins, friends, and my brothers, for pouring into me constantly and providing the strength for me to lean on to achieve this goal. Thank you for helping me to see beyond our circumstances and allowing me to become who I am today. To the brothers of Phi Beta Sigma, Inc., and my chapter brothers (MΔ and MΔΣ), thank you for accepting me, pushing me and the brotherhood. To my many mentors, family, and friends from LIU- Brooklyn, BMCC, and Southern Connecticut State University, I could not have done this without you. Thank you for your belief in me and seeing the potential. This dissertation is a testament to my community believing in my potential and leading me to realization. Lastly, this dissertation is dedicated to my dear friend Ernest Antoine, who passed away 9 days after I defended and did not have the chance to experience me walking across the stage. Love you forever big Bro!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I extend my deepest gratitude to Dr. Anthony Annunziato for his guidance and unwavering support throughout my dissertation journey. Dr. Annunziato, as my mentor and dissertation chair, stepped in with remarkable dedication. As a first-generation college student himself, his personal journey and lived experience was valuable throughout this process. I am extremely grateful for his mentorship, encouragement, and belief in the significance of my study. I would also like to express my appreciation to my esteemed committee members, Dr. Richard Bernato and Dr. James Campbell, for their insightful feedback and encouragement during the defense. Their expertise and constructive criticism played a pivotal role in shaping the development and relevance of my research in today's context. Furthermore, I owe a debt of gratitude to Dr. Catherine DiMartino, without whom I would not have reached this milestone. Dr. DiMartino's unwavering support, dedication, and guidance were instrumental in refining the content and structure of my dissertation. Her patience, strength, and tireless efforts in assisting me with the first three chapters laid the foundation for the creation of a final product that I am truly proud of.

To Dr. Annunziato, Dr. Bernato, Dr. Campbell, and Dr. DiMartino, as well as to my Borough of Manhattan Community College fall 2017, spring 2018 doctoral cohort family, and my Hostos Community College doctoral cohort- thank you! Your collective support has been instrumental in my success, and I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to have worked alongside such esteemed colleagues, mentors, and sincere individuals.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
LIST OF TABLES	ix
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION.....	1
Federal Policy and Workplace Development.....	3
Purpose of the Study.....	4
Significance of the Research	5
NACE Competencies and Behaviors.....	8
Vincentian Mission	9
Theoretical Framework.....	10
Design and Methods	11
Research Questions.....	12
Definition of Terms.....	12
CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW	14
Theoretical Framework.....	14
Review of the Literature	17
Career Decision-Making of First-Generation College Students.....	18
Career Services in Higher Education.....	22
Best Practices in Career Services (Exemplar Programs/ Classes).....	25
Role of the Advisor	28
Post College Support	31

Summary	33
CHAPTER 3 METHODS.....	35
Research Design	35
Research Questions.....	36
Methods and Procedures	37
Field Setting.....	37
Participants	40
Data Collection Procedures	41
Individual Interviews	42
Semi-Structured Interviews	43
Document Analyses	43
Trustworthiness of Design.....	44
Research Ethics.....	45
Data Analyses	46
Role of the Researcher.....	48
Conclusion	49
CHAPTER 4 RESULTS	50
Introduction.....	50
Pre-Study Questionnaire Data	51
Research Participants.....	52
Pre-Study Questionnaire Responses	52
Findings	53
Data Analysis Process.....	53

Research Question 1	64
Theme 1: The Importance of the College Experience and Exploration	64
Subtheme 1: Supportive Environment and Emphasis on Exploration	65
Subtheme 2: Early Engagement with Career Development	70
Research Question 2	73
Theme 2: The Value of Mentorship and Access to Resources.....	73
Subtheme 1: Mentorship.....	73
Subtheme 2: Holistic Support.....	75
Theme 3: Career Readiness	78
Subtheme 1: Professional Skill Development	78
Subtheme 2: Career Connections.....	84
Summary.....	88
CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION	90
Summary of Study	90
Theoretical Framework and Methodology	91
Summary of Major Findings.....	93
Implications of Findings.....	93
Relationship to Prior Research	97
The Importance of the College Experience and Exploration.....	97
Value of Mentorship and Access to Resources	98
Career Readiness	100
Limitations of the Study	101
Recommendations for Policy and Practice.....	102

Recommendations for Future Research.....	104
Conclusion	105
APPENDIX A RECRUITMENT LETTER.....	107
APPENDIX B LETTER OF CONSENT	108
APPENDIX C IRB APPROVAL.....	110
APPENDIX D STUDENT PRE-STUDY QUESTIONNAIRE	111
APPENDIX E INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL.....	113
APPENDIX F PROTOCOL FOR INTERVIEW SESSION I	116
APPENDIX G PROTOCOL FOR INTERVIEW SESSION II	117
APPENDIX H PROTOCOL FOR INTERVIEW SESSION III.....	118
APPENDIX I RESEARCH INVITATION FLYER	120
APPENDIX J NACE COMPETENCIES AND BEHAVIORS	121
APPENDIX K SOCIAL COGNITIVE CAREER THEORY MODEL.....	123
APPENDIX L INITIAL CODES.....	124
APPENDIX M INITIAL GROUPING OF THEMATIC CATEGORIES	126
APPENDIX N DOCUMENT EVALUATION.....	132
APPENDIX O INTERPRETIVE THEMES	134
APPENDIX P FINAL THEMES.....	135
REFERENCES.....	138

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 NACE Competencies and Behaviors	8
Table 2 Social Cognitive Career Theory Model	16
Table 3 Initial Codes	55
Table 4 Initial Grouping of Thematic Codes and Categories	57
Table 5 Document Evaluation	62
Table 6 Interpretive Themes	63
Table 7 Final Themes.....	86

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Providing high-quality, responsive workforce training and skills development to help students adjust to new and emerging labor markets has increasingly become a priority and a mission for higher education institutions (Kinash et al., 2016). Many colleges and universities have focused on incorporating the development of employability skills to equip and empower students for high-quality jobs (Kinash et al., 2016). Institutions continue to explore career and identity resources to help connect students to various internal and external professional and skill development opportunities through academic curriculum, internship, experiential learning, and mentorship experiences. Colleges, especially community colleges, in the United States have continued to evolve to include workforce development as central to their mission and vision (O'Banion, 2022).

There are many types of post-secondary education options throughout the world, including, public and private four-year colleges and universities, and two-year colleges. The four-year colleges offer degree programs that lead to a bachelor's degree. These include universities, which offer more majors and degree options, such as bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees. Two-year colleges offer programs that lead to a certificate or an associate degree. These include community colleges, vocational-technical colleges, and career colleges. This study will focus on the community college. Community colleges are two-year schools that provide affordable postsecondary education as a pathway to a four-year degree. Chen (2022) notes, an associate degree from a community college can be a first and reasonably priced step to a bachelor's degree as many credits are transferred to the four-year institution when students are looking to transfer or upon graduation. The associate degree can also prepare and qualify students for immediate and

direct employment opportunities in various industry areas. This path can be appealing for students who are undecided or unsure about an academic major or career path to pursue in college. As businesses, both new and old, require workers to be trained in new ways, community colleges continue to be an option for various student populations (O'Banion., 2022).

Additionally, many specialized student populations, such as first-generation college students (FGCS) see community colleges as an opportunity to help families by providing an affordable education option and the skills that will help students transition into immediate job opportunities. In a 1998 study, The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) defined FGCS as students whose parents may have been enrolled at a higher education institution but did not earn any college credits. In another study, the NCES (2001) defined this group as students with parents who did not earn a bachelor's degree or higher. NACE (2019) defines first-generation students as individuals whose parent(s) do not hold a bachelor's degree. While there are multiple definitions, this study will use the NACE (2019) definition in which parents or legal guardians did not complete a bachelor's degree. For many FGCS, higher education is perceived as the "most certain means of social mobility," however, the rising costs of college education can cause a strain for those from low-income backgrounds (Hirudayaraj & McLean, 2018). This may result in underemployment or a lack of access to "post-bachelor's level employment" in comparison to non-first-generation college students (Hirudayaraj & McLean, 2018). Therefore, this study will focus on FGCS, who have graduated from a community college in NYC to better understand the impacts of their first-generation status and how their

status influenced their academic major and career- decision making, as well as career preparedness for post- graduate employment.

Federal Policy and Workplace Development

Community colleges are working with employer partners to develop flexible, affordable, and relevant training programs that meet business and regional economic needs (O'Banion, 2019). In recent years, the federal government has allocated grant money towards workforce training and development. One example is the Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training grants. In 2008, the two billion dollars in grants was a key investment for community colleges to address the challenges of today's workforce. The grants were intended to help workers eligible for training under the Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) for Worker's program. In recent years, the federal government has also provided community colleges with the Expanding Community College Apprenticeships (ECCA) initiative which launched in 2019 with funding of \$20 million from the U.S. Department of Labor (2022), the Strengthening Community College Training Grant of \$45 million in 2022 (Department of Labor, 2022), and the Career and Technical Education State Grants of \$1.35 billion for 2022 (Department of Education, 2023).

The grants were provided to develop and implement career and technical education programs. The grants also address identified equity gaps and meet competency development needs of local, national, and international employers in in-demand industries and career pathways. As O'Banion (2022) states, the relationship between the federal government, businesses and community colleges can improve workforce development strategies, job training programs, and ultimately, job placement. These

partnerships can put community colleges in a position to improve learning, rates of college completion and transfer, and attainment of jobs with value in the labor market. This can, in turn, help to produce family-sustaining wages for all students, including overlooked populations, such as first-generation college students (FGCS). Maietta (2016) in an article for the National Association for Colleges and Employers (NACE) described the FGCS as the “hidden minority” due to the different challenges they may face. Maietta describes FGCS, as a population that can possess impractical career goals or make career decisions with limited information. FGCS may be faced with several challenges, including being more likely to have lower income levels and be classified in a lower socioeconomic status, which can contribute to financial and familial obligations (Bui, 2002; Chen & Carroll, 2005; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Inman & Mayes, 1999). In addition, the implications can include not having enough opportunities to participate in events and extracurricular activities, which can contribute to a lack of professional networks.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this retrospective narrative study is to explore how FGCS, who have graduated from a community college in New York City, perceive their career goals and preparedness for work. FGCS and their post-graduate transition and outcomes represent a challenge for higher education career services professionals and administrators, making research into perceptions, behaviors, and outcomes critical (NACE, 2016). As the literature review will reflect, the delivery of commonly used career related services, including services, tools and resources may not be as successful or impactful for FGCS. The research suggests that “an increase in on-campus use of services would benefit first-generation students” (NACE, 2016). Empirically reviewed

research has identified that FGCS career decision-making is motivated by a different set of goals and constraints than those whose parents were college educated (Choy, 2001, Garriott et al., 2013, Gibbons & Woodside, 2014). Gibbons & Woodside (2014) write how many FGCS have discussed the impact of graduating from college and what an achievement it can be for them and their families. In retrospect, the college degree really became an obligation and objective for the family.

Significance of the Research

FGCS have described the need to manage various roles in life, including work and family, which may impact career decision making and time for skill development (Tate et al., 2015). Longwell-Grice et al. (2016) address the obstacles FGCS face including lack of college readiness, familial support, and financial stability. Consequently, first-generation college students may have unique experiences in transitioning to a career due to their lack of exposure to the career development process and limited support system. Experiences, including difficulty navigating the job search process, a limited professional network, a lack of understanding of industry expectation, and an insecurity about qualifications may be a reality for many FGCS (Longwell-Grice et al., 2016).

It is important to note that these are general characteristics and not all first-generation college students will have these experiences. However, with this information, higher education institutions can provide better support and resources to connect FGCS students to educational paths and support career readiness. This is especially important in supporting students in discovering various internal and external professional and skill development opportunities through programs, jobs, internships, experiential learning, and mentorship experiences. As such, this research will provide an opportunity to gain

important information from community college alumni, who identify as FGCS, to better understand their experience.

National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE, 2022) notes that career development offices support college students and higher education institutions in a variety of ways. Oftentimes, career development offices are tasked with the responsibility of providing career and professional development related services. This includes developing programs and events to support students in providing resources for academic major and career exploration, as well as obtaining the essential employability skills for successful transition to employment. The programs and events include workshops to provide educational opportunities for students to learn about career readiness skills and topics, academic major and career related exploratory workshops or information sessions, and professional networking events (VanDerziel, 2022). In addition, the career development offices may manage the development and maintenance of relationships with external partners and career professionals across different industry sectors. Through these partnerships, career development provides students with opportunities for personal and professional skill building and experiential learning experiences, which includes, but is not limited to, student employment, cooperative education programs, internships, job placements, research, and volunteer experiences. The partnerships developed through career development oftentimes offer students with direct exposure to industry professionals to increase learning about different careers and career paths, as well as the potential to secure meaningful employment.

Furthermore, career development offices also partner with various departments, including alumni services to establish alumni mentoring programs. The insights and skills

of alumni offer valuable guidance and support to current students as they navigate academic major and career exploration and their decision-making journeys (VanDerziel, 2022). Career Development professionals also provide training and professional development opportunities for key institutional stakeholders, including faculty and staff. By staying updated on emerging career paths, industry trends, and employer expectations, faculty and staff can effectively integrate career development components into the curriculum and students' experiences outside of the classroom. This integration may involve incorporating career exploration activities, internships, and experiential learning opportunities into both academic and non-academic programs to enhance students' employability and support their overall career development journey.

The research in this study will provide Higher Education Administrators, researchers and career development professionals, with insight into the necessary tools and resources needed to support FGCS throughout the academic major exploration, career decision-making process and career readiness. NACE (n.d.) defines career readiness as “a foundation from which to demonstrate requisite core competencies that broadly prepare the college educated for success in the workplace and lifelong career management.” NACE also identified career readiness behaviors as “a set of skills and attributes college students can develop to launch successful professional careers.” A NACE (2021) survey conducted in March 2021 identified three critical skill areas that should be integrated “to position first-generation students for post-graduation career success: relationship management skills, virtual work skills, and leadership skills.”

NACE Competencies and Behaviors

Table 1

NACE Competencies and Behaviors

<u>NACE Career Competencies</u>	<u>NACE Behaviors</u>
<u>Career & Self Development</u>	Self-awareness Set effective priorities and goals Growth mindset Awareness of one’s strengths and weaknesses Navigating career opportunities
<u>Communication</u>	Listens attentively to others and responds appropriately Use of effective grammar and syntax Ability to adapt communication style to the situation Asking questions when necessary
<u>Critical Thinking</u>	Question assumptions Gather and properly analyze relevant information Manage ambiguity Ability to solve problems Open-mindedness
<u>Equity & Inclusion</u>	Challenge biases within oneself and others Understand diversity in the workplace Respect multiple social identities Promotion of civility Promotes a collaborative workplace
<u>Leadership</u>	Achieve organizational goals through personal and team strengths Takes initiative Provides motivation and encouragement Shapes a positive workplace environment Empowers others
<u>Professionalism</u>	Understand your strengths & skills Understand and demonstrate effective work habits Accepts personal accountability

	Demonstrates integrity, honesty, dependability, and ethical responsibility
<u>Teamwork</u>	Focus on solutions Works cooperatively with others Strengthen relationships
<u>Technology</u>	Ethically and effectively uses technology to communicate Leverage technologies to complete tasks and accomplish goals Gain the ability to locate, evaluate, and use information for a variety of purposes

(NACE, 2021)

Vincentian Mission

St. John’s Vincentian mission seeks to provide a great academic experience and education for all students, especially those coming from marginalized backgrounds and communities (St. John's mission and values, 2022). St. John’s understands that collegiate institutions have a heavy hand in helping to shape and build disciplined, mature, knowledgeable societies of the future. Students represent the future, and nothing could be more rewarding than to play an active role in developing an effective school environment to help tomorrow’s leaders and citizens make the choices and set goals for themselves as they continue on their educational path. Higher education institutions have the opportunity to enhance student performance and minimize disparities in student achievement by demonstrating a shared understanding of and commitment to high- level outcomes for all students. FGCS diverse backgrounds can be more prominently considered, and schools can design special curricula, classes, and programs to address these directly to help students develop a more universal outlook of the world (Hawley, 2007). Higher education institutions have the ability to help and encourage diverse students in developing key personal and professional skills, including, self- worth,

knowledge, reasoning, creativity, and increased self-confidence, all critical components of student development.

Theoretical Framework

This study will use Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) to better understand similarities and pinpoint keys to success of FGCS, who have graduated from a community college in NYC. Developed by Robert W. Lent, Steven D. Brown, and Gail Hackett (1994), Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) looks to explain three aspects of career development, including how academic and career interests develop, how academic and career choices decisions are made, and by what means are academic and career success obtained. SCCT is based on Albert Bandura's general social cognitive theory of cognitive and motivational processes (Bandura, 1986). Bandura (1986) social cognitive theory proposes that people have agency to make choices and attain goals based on a constant interaction between self and social influences and achievement outcomes and self-influences. Self-efficacy agency and self-regulated learning are fundamental in Bandura's social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986). Lent et al.'s (1994) SCCT framework contends that interest arises from self-efficacy and outcome expectations. Career self-efficacy is described as a type of self-efficacy that centers on individuals' belief in their ability to do various activities associated with career decision making (Betz & Luzzo, 1996).

Based on SCCT, the three main variables that impact academic and career development are self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and goals (Lent et al., 2000). Research shows that due to the lack of preparedness, some first-generation students are completely overwhelmed with the academic major options in higher education and have

narrowed their choice to a few options based on uninformed data or advice and some may even think college does not offer the best option and opportunities for them to reach their goals (Cuseo, 2005). Many students may not see a clear path to their end goals, become frustrated, and question their academic major decisions, which may cause an increase in first generation students dropping out of college without a degree (Allen et al., 2008). As the study explores the influences and the process for FGCS career decision making and preparedness for work after college, SCCT can be used to study students' diverse backgrounds and academic journeys. Such experiences can help students develop key personal and professional skills, as well as social skills, self-worth, knowledge, reasoning, creativity, and increased self-confidence, all critical components of student development. SCCT offers a useful framework for explaining the connections between individuals, their career related experiences, and how these experiences impact career decision making.

Design and Methods

This study is a retrospective, narrative study of community college alumni who identify as first-generation students. This study will explore what impacts New York City community college alumni, who identify as first-generation students' academic major and career decision making, and workplace readiness. Narrative research is used in studies of educational practice and experience to delve into how students navigate and make sense of their academic journey (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). The qualitative data will be collected in the fall 2023 semester through multiple rounds of semi-structured individual interviews and review of documents, including resume and co-curricular transcript. The

qualitative data collected will create an understanding and viewpoint of the research topic and questions.

Research Questions

The study is guided by two research questions:

1) What were FGCS alumni's perceptions of the resources intended to help them better understand academic major and career options at a community college?

2) What were FGCS alumni's perceptions of the role their community college played in helping them obtain professional skills and a position in the workforce?

Definitions of Terms

Alumni:

A graduate or former student of a particular school, college, or university

Backpack to Briefcase:

Transitioning from student to professional

Career decision-making self-efficacy:

A type of self-efficacy that focuses on individuals' confidence in their ability to do various activities associated with career decision making (Betz & Luzzo, 1996).

Career/ Professional Success:

For the purposes of this study, career/ professional success is a transition from college to a position of interest or promotion, which provides a functional wage to meet personal and family needs.

Community College:

Community colleges are two-year schools that provide affordable postsecondary education as a pathway to a four-year degree.

First generation college student (FGCS):

This study will use the NACE (2019) definition in which parents or legal guardians did not complete a bachelor's degree.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides insight into the research studies that informed the design and interpretation of this study. The chapter begins with a review of Social Cognitive Career Theory, the theoretical framework relevant to the study. The key themes identified in this literature review are the career decision-making self-efficacy of first-generation college students, career services in higher education, the role of the advisor and post-college support. The chapter concludes with a summary of the literature review, which demonstrates the challenges in the process of choosing academic major and career goals, as well as career readiness and competency development, for first-generation college students (FGCS).

Theoretical Framework

This study will apply Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) to better understand how FGCS, who have graduated from a community college, perceive their academic major and career goals and preparedness for work. Developed by Robert W. Lent, Steven D. Brown, and Gail Hackett (1994), Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) explains three aspects of career development, including how academic and career interests develop, how academic and career choices decisions are made, and by what means academic and career success obtained. SCCT is based on Albert Bandura's general social cognitive theory of cognitive and motivational processes (Bandura, 1986). Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory proposes that people have agency to make choices and attain goals based on a constant interaction between self and social influences, achievement outcomes and self-influences. Self-efficacy and self-regulated learning are fundamental in Bandura's social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986). Bandura

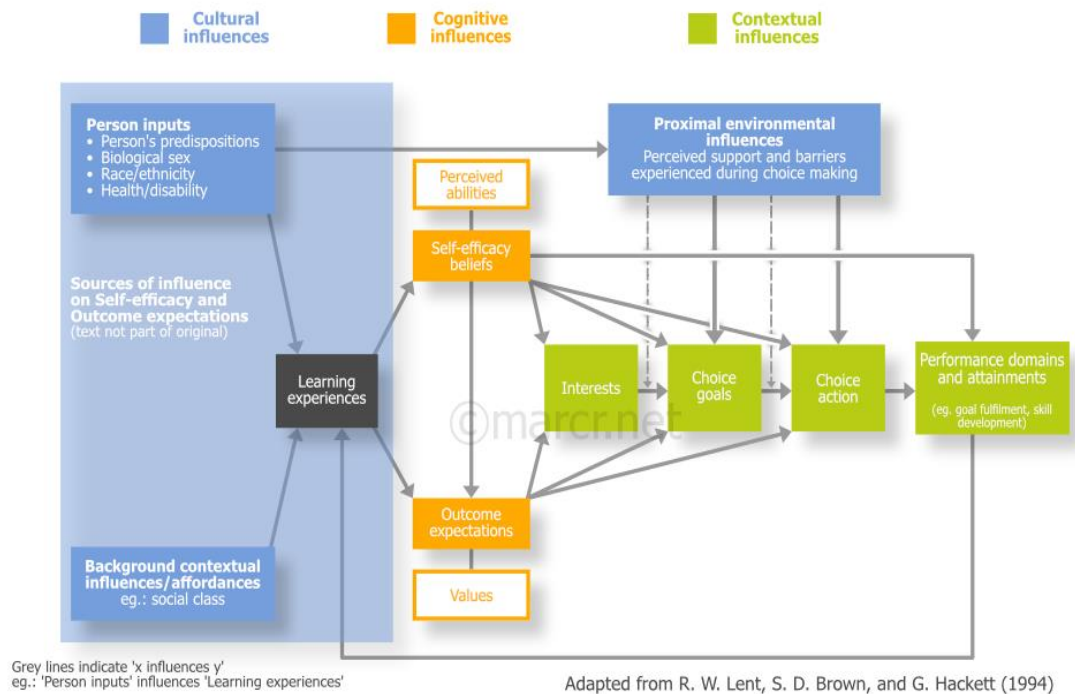
believed self-efficacy is developed through four primary informational sources, which are as follows: personal performance accomplishments, vicarious learning derived from independent sources, social persuasion, and physiological state (Lent and Brown, 2013). Therefore, SCCT attempts to explain how a person's self-efficacy and success is influenced by environmental and personal factors (Lent et al., 1994). For higher education and career development professionals, SCCT provides a comprehensive framework for predicting career outcomes (Lent and Brown, 2019).

SCCT consists of three intersecting and related models aimed at explaining the processes through which people develop career interests (self-efficacy), make career decisions (outcome expectations), and achieve career success (goals) (Lent et al., 1994). Career decision-making self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and goals serve as the foundation for SCCT. Career decision-making self-efficacy refers to a type of self-efficacy that focuses on individuals' confidence in their ability to do various activities associated with career decision making (Betz & Luzzo, 1996). Lent et al. (1994) relates a person's self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations to their experiences, effort, continuation, and accomplishment.

In the model below, activity goals and selection variables represent career and academic choice goals and achievement (Lent, et al., 1994).

Table 2

Social Cognitive Career Theory Model



Person inputs or influences from diverse backgrounds, including class or culture, will influence the social learning experience of an individual (Lent et al., 1994). In addition, external factors, such as social capital, resources or deficits can shape career development (Lent, 2013). Sources of influence on self-efficacy and outcomes expectations are divided up in two different types represented: “background/ contextual influences, such as social class (box bottom left) – is active as an influence on learning experiences and therefore self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations, while close environmental influences (box top right) – comes into play during the active phases of choice making (Lent, 2013). According to SCCT, individual choice is often, but not always linked to interests. After interest, the career choice phase is divided into various components and processes (Lent, et al., 1994). External and personal factors, such as

personal values and environmental influences, including support or challenges experienced during choice making also prompt decisions.

SCCT will be used to study FGCS diverse backgrounds and experiences to help students academic major and career decision making, and in developing key personal and professional skills. SCCT offers a useful framework for explaining educational and employment interest development and decision making. This, in turn, can direct objectives for educational and career programs as achievement or lack of success in reaching goals, can alter or confirm self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations.

Review of the Literature

A review of existing literature and research of factors that have impacted academic major selection and career decision making of first-generation college students, as well as the professional competencies necessary for successful transition into a professional career after college, was performed. The specific literature reviewed in this chapter was sourced from various peer-reviewed articles, research studies, documents, including some obtained from online sources. Online sources utilized included ERIC (EBSCO) research database; JSTOR, a digital library of academic journals, books, primary source; and the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), an American nonprofit professional association designed to support college career services.

In order to understand the factors that impact first-generation college students' academic major and career decision making, the literature review began by identifying what influences the career decision-making of first-generation college students. The literature review also analyzed career services in higher education to better understand the necessary tools and experiences needed to support first generation college students in

the major and career exploration and decision-making process. To better support the FGCS population, an awareness of best practices is required. These best practices include, but are not limited to, incorporating career planning courses, experiential learning opportunities, internships, work, and co-curricular options as part of the review for further understanding.

Career Decision-Making of First-Generation College Students

Empirically reviewed research has identified that career decision-making is motivated by a different set of goals for First Generation College Students (FGCS), a generally more diverse subset of the overall university population. They are limited by constraints that are different from those whose parents were college educated (Choy, 2001; Garriott et al., 2013; Gibbons & Woodside, 2014). Commonly used career development services and resources may not be as successful or impactful for FGCS for their career decision-making. Maietta (2016), in an article for NACE, described the FGCS as the “hidden minority” due to the different challenges they may face. The writer states that FGCS can possess unrealistic career goals or make career decisions without understanding the implications associated with their decision. The unrealistic expectations or lack of understanding around career outcomes, can be due to a number of factors, including lack of understanding around academic major and career options, low participation in events/extracurricular activities, lack of social capital, as well as financial and familial obligations. In relation to the overall population of college students, FGCS have unique demographic compositions. They are more likely to have lower income levels and be classified in a lower socioeconomic status (Bui, 2002; Chen & Carroll, 2005; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Inman & Mayes, 1999).

This is further emphasized by Puliam et al. (2017) in a qualitative case study of initial career choice among low-income pre-college freshman. The authors investigated 106 students participating in a six-week summer bridge program designed to aid in the transition of historically marginalized groups to higher education and determine the predictability of perceived career barriers on career decision self-efficacy. The researchers discuss how the cultural characteristics of gender, race, and college generational status impact the certainty of initial career choice among pre-freshmen low-income, first-generation college-bound students. The data collected by the researcher's identified that family, media influences, interest areas, friends and teaches are among the factors that have helped influence career choices (Puliam et al., 2017). The researchers noted that the most substantial data indicated that being a FGCS and having high perceived career barriers predicted lower levels of certainty of career choice.

Similarly, Tate et al. (2015) used a semi-structured interview protocol in their study of 15 participants selected from at 4-year public institution in the southeastern United States to describe the challenges faced by many FGCS. The researchers found that there are both internal and external influences that impact career development. The data revealed how these influences can be seen as a strength or a resource, but also a barrier in career interests and fulfillment. In the study, FGCS reflected on their exceptional strengths and character including persistence, an appreciation for resources and opportunities, adaptability, and responsibility. Very similar to the findings by Puliam et al. (2017), Tate et al. (2015) also indicated how internal and external influences, such as family influence, family socio-economic status, parental support, previous knowledge, or lack thereof, impacted FGCS. Recommendations, worries, and pressures about career

path also impacted career decision making. In their reflection, they described to the researchers how going to college was a goal “to meet the requirements of the family.” Additionally, participants in the study discussed how “compared to their non-first-generation peers, they lack the support of preparatory programs participated in before and during college, and they lack a professional group or network to support and influence decision making” (Tate et al., 2015).

Likewise, Gibbons and Woodside (2014), in a qualitative study of participants whose parents had no formal education after high school, identified themes that were used to analyze the experiences of FGCS. The 17 participants, comprised of six men and eleven women, who are now working professionals, provided great background information on what impacted their decision to go to college and pursue their chosen career path. In regard to expectations about future career paths, many FGCS cited the belief that working hard and going to school would lead to better job opportunities and “that it was important for others to see them working hard, but they also worked hard for themselves as a source of personal pride” (Gibbons & Woodside, 2014, p. 32). Gibbons and Woodside (2014) state that many FGCS who graduated from college discussed the impact of graduating from college and what an achievement it can be for them and their families, yet the degree did not lead to financial success as anticipated.

Additional studies have focused on the need of FGCS to manage various roles in life, including work and family. Stebleton et al. (2018) used two conceptual frameworks, (a) systems theory framework and (b) life role salience framework, to explore the life and career experiences of the participants. The two frameworks were used to interview 18 students, of which several identified as low-income, first-generation students of color and

foreign-born immigrant women pursuing undergraduate degrees. The FGCS, with an average age of 25, held many responsibilities and were “greatly influenced by factors related to their family members, whose expectations and opinions impacted students’ decisions about work and career–life decision-making.” The authors noted that the participants often felt conflicted because of competing messages and priorities. Participants tended to experience a greater sense of certainty following a defined field of study. Students’ racial and gender identities became significant as they negotiated educational and career-related paths that have been formed by long histories of racial and gendered bias and exclusion (Stebbleton et al., 2018). The researchers noted how micro- and macrosystemic level experiences have influenced career–life decisions for the FGCS.

Further studies have also highlighted the connection between generation and socio-economic status in relation to career self-efficacy with students in two-year and four-year colleges. Harlow and Bowman (2014), in a qualitative study of 268 first-generation bachelor’s and associate degree level students, provide an in-depth analysis of the career development and career decision self-efficacy (CDSE) of FGCSs at community colleges and the four-year college level. The study revealed a noteworthy interaction between generation and college type with four-year college students’ CDSE being lower than those of community college students. The research also uncovered a connection between generation and socio-economic status, with the lowest levels of CDSE being reported by first generation students from higher socio-economic backgrounds. The authors noted that career clarity could have been a factor as four-year college students may not have started thinking about career options in their first few years in comparison to the community college group who would be graduating with an

associate degree in approximately two years and potentially hitting the job market earlier (Harlow & Bowman, 2014).

The research highlights the need for higher education institutions to take students' diverse backgrounds into account by creating varied learning and experiential learning experiences to influence and broaden the understanding of academic major and career options for FGCS. Career Services in higher education can help provide programming and targeted support services to address the specific needs of this population. This will allow career services to support a college's mission and goals to improve learning, rates of college completion and transfer, and attainment of jobs with value in the labor market that produce family-sustaining wages.

Career Services in Higher Education

Career services can offer resources, programs, support services, and varied approaches to help students clarify goals, choose, and enter pathways that will enable them to successfully pursue further education and advance in the labor market (Hughes and Gibbons, 2011; Prescod et al., 2019). Rochelle Parks-Yancy's (2012) qualitative study highlights the importance of students understanding available career options upon graduation. The study examined predominantly low-income, minority students from a mid-sized higher education institution in the southwest United States. The research provided evidence that students who participated and were involved in on-campus activities, such as career services, student activities, on campus employment, federal-work study, internships, and experiential learning were more likely to be informed about and pursue various career options (Parks-Yancy, 2012). Students who developed relationships with school personnel received professional opportunities, including

mentoring, career advice, and graduate school information; all of which helped support students in their transition from college to career.

Similarly, Hirudayaraj and McLean (2018), in a qualitative study, researched the lived experiences of first-generation graduates as they transitioned from higher education into employment in the private sector. The researchers explored this area to gain a better understanding of how FGCS status can impact a graduating students access to professional positions appropriate to their earned qualifications. Hirudayaraj and McLean (2018) write that for many FGCS, higher education is perceived as the “most certain means of social mobility.” However, the researchers also noted there were many challenges that contributed to underemployment or a lack of access to “post-bachelor’s level employment” in comparison to non-first-generation college students. A lack of awareness of the recruitment and hiring process, the absence of a professional network and poor guidance in academic major and career decisions also were identified as challenges.

Hirudayaraj and McLean (2018) found that FGCS were motivated to take advantage of resources, find mentorship, and try hard. However, their first-generation status influenced their experiences during and beyond college. In the study, the participants reflected on what their educational institutions could have done to provide better support transition and were asked to identify the drawbacks in the system. Some participants noted that experiential learning opportunities and internships were optional, and not incorporated into the curriculum. Consequently, their status limited awareness of and access to graduate employment. Furthermore, many of the students worked to pay their college tuition and were unable to participate in unpaid internships. The participants

remembered receiving marketing from their career services offices, but none of them took advantage of the services or resources. Consequently, the researchers suggest that higher education institutions need to make career services more visible to students. They recommended that institutions provide students with an early understanding of how valuable career services can be throughout their academic journey.

Students' choices in academic major and career goals are often shaped by the experience and information shared by their internal network of family and friends. As NACE (2023) notes, FGCS usually have less or no people in their network to help navigate the college journey, including career readiness and development. FGCS can also face other systemic barriers, such as financial obligations and lack of access to resources. Amaro-Jiménez et al. (2020), describe the importance of having an informed network. In a quantitative study, the researchers used a survey questionnaire with 20 Likert scale items to analyze pre- and post-data from parents who participated in a college awareness and outreach program. The program was designed to inform parents of first-generation students about college and career readiness. The study focused on the role families' play in the career and college decision making of students and why this influence should not be underestimated. The parents involved in the program participated in a variety of workshops which covered many topics including the college admissions process, financial aid, and other funding options. Amaro-Jiménez et al. (2020) describe the positive impact that the program had on all parents, regardless of background or educational level. The researchers noted how programs, such as the college outreach program, can provide information to both students and families. These programs are

necessary to ensure all students and their families can have access to the information needed to make knowledgeable decisions about college and career.

The studies above provide evidence of the need for career services to be involved in conversations with campus partners about best practices to better serve first-generation students. There are models that institutions can implement to be more deliberate in addressing and supporting the specific needs of first-generation students.

Best Practices in Career Services (Exemplar Programs/ Classes)

Obtaining jobs, internships, externships, interviews, graduate school admissions, and defining career objectives are critical components in the development and success of students, especially first-generation students (National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2014). Additional aspects crucial to the success of FGCS during college and post-graduation, include providing students with an opportunity to complete a self-assessment, academic major and career exploration/ guidance, career preparation, professional skill development, personal branding, and career transition management (Bates et al., 2017; Garriott et al., 2013; Parks-Yancy, 2012; Prescod et al., 2019). Garriott et al. (2013), in a quantitative study, examined career goals among low-income prospective FGCS. The survey research method included measures developed by Lent et al. (2001), consisting of a demographic questionnaire, Learning Experiences Questionnaire, and Interest Scale. Participants in the study were all members of federal TRIO grant programs. The federal TRIO grant programs provide outreach and student services programs for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds (Department of Education, 2023). The programs are designed to help students to overcome barriers to higher education success, by providing support and create opportunities for student

success. TRIO programs provide a number of services and resources for students, such as individualized advisement for personal, career, and academic information and assistance in completing financial aid applications and exploring scholarship options (Department of Education, 2023). The programs provide mentorship and tutoring services, as well as counseling services, designed to improve financial and economic literacy. The rising costs of college education can cause a strain for those from low-income backgrounds and, thus may result in underemployment or a lack of access to “post-bachelor’s level employment” in comparison to non-first-generation college students (Hirudayaraj & McLean, 2018). In addition, the TRIO programs provide a model that considers the needs of FGCS to increase student self- efficacy and goal setting, as well as create more equitable educational and career attainment rates (Garriott et al., 2013).

Another successful example is provided by Kitchen et al. (2021). The researchers completed a longitudinal mixed-methods study of a comprehensive college transition and success program, called Thompson Scholars, which provides support for “at-promise” college students with a scholarship and two years of programming. The term, “at-promise,” refers to a student who’s potential and commitment is waiting to be tapped with programming and financial resources. In the study, the researchers identified and discussed systemic barriers and a lack of institutional support for students. The Thompson Scholars program facilitated exploration and exposure to multiple resources, and information to help students move forward academically and professionally. As part of the program, students received personalized advisement from staff advisors and mentorship from a peer mentor, which provided guidance in academic major, degree, and career paths. This intentional advisement was not prioritized or part of a degree

requirement for students outside of the program. The personalized advisement played a key role as the students did not have the social capital from their network to navigate postsecondary systems (Kitchen et al., 2021). The students in the Thompson Scholars Program reported being more confident in their future path as a result of their participation in the program. The program provides a successful example of a collaborative, community approach that higher education institutions can consider implementing to support FGCS.

Another model used at many institutions is the use of career readiness courses or programs (Hansen & Pedersen, 2012). Career planning courses are traditionally offered collaboratively with the college's career services department as a one, or two semester elective credit course open to students at all grade levels and academic major areas. The courses are designed to help broaden the scope of exposure and understanding for students to a variety of degree and career options; the courses also introduce students to the support and resources available at the college to help with the transition to the new school and provide the opportunity to create a learning community (Hansen & Pedersen, 2012). Career courses provide direction and provide students with an understanding and awareness of their strengths and weaknesses, as well as the social capital, skills and knowledge that are required to achieve future goals.

Recently, Prescod et al. (2019), using a quasi-experimental design, studied 56 undergraduate students enrolled in career development courses at a four-year college. Forty-five percent of the 56 student participants had not yet declared an academic major and 30% identified as first-generation. The two career development courses, "Effective Career Decision Making" and "Career Planning for Human Development and Family

Studies,” both required enrolled students to research and explore academic majors and careers of interest (Prescod et al., 2019). The courses required students to read various literature, conduct informational interviews with industry professionals, and required an end-of semester career planning project. Results of the study showed that the students in the courses saw increases in career decision making ability, as measured by the Career Decision Scale (CDS), a 19-item assessment that measures career decision-making (Osipow, 1987, 1994). The researchers identified significant differences in career confidence and decisiveness among the students from pre- to post- assessment in both courses.

Participants from these studies noted that various factors, such as learning experiences, perceived supports and barriers, person-cognitive self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and interests impacted career decision making (United States Department of Education, 2022). The studies reveal that a cohort model, advising, available resources, and timing are important.

Role of the Advisor

Another key factor in the career readiness of undergraduate students is the role of college faculty and career advisors. Regular meetings with advisors or faculty during one-to-one sessions help students understand more about different career paths (Land & Ziomek-Daigle, 2013; Parks-Yancy, 2010; Prescod et al., 2019). Therefore, providing the opportunity to connect with college faculty and advisors can affect a student’s career aspirations as these relationships can become social capital resources (Parks-Yancy, 2012). Parks-Yancy (2012) notes that students who identify as African American FGCS and low income usually do not have a network to help navigate higher education, nor

does this population take advantage of the career information and resources that can be shared with them by college faculty and staff. The African American students from low socio-economic backgrounds who obtained prominent professional careers in healthcare, business, and engineering were provided “career-enhancing social capital resources from university contacts, not family members” (Parks-Yancy, 2012). Career-enhancing social capital resources mainly refers to social networks. Social networks provide first-generation college students with an opportunity to connect with professionals for mentorship and general advice, as well as to share ideas, resources, and information. Parks-Yancy (2012) states that FGCS who are connected to career services staff and faculty outside of the classroom are considerably more exposed to knowledge and information about different career paths due to the increase in social capital.

Similarly, Amundson et al. (2010), in a qualitative study, investigated the career decision-making experiences of 17 employed adults. Thematic results from phenomenological interview data analysis were organized into three overarching themes: decisions centered on relational life, decisions centered on personal meaning, and decisions centered on economic realities (Amundson et al., 2010). The study results supported and extended contentions that career decisions are embedded in relational life and have contextual meaning. The participants describe the importance of having a strong community. The researchers describe the sense that a "career decision is guided by people" was a common experience for many and the confidence to pursue challenging academic major and career goals were attributed to the empowerment provided by their social capital of family, friends, members of their immediate community, as well as the faculty and staff at their college. As a result, the participants described the need for an

environment that facilitates the sense of belonging and personal meaning in career decisions (Amundson et al., 2010). The researchers recommend counseling that highlight and supports relational experiences and recognizes the interconnections of relational life and career decisions. An environment where the student feels like their life circumstances, including socio-economic status, race, and culture, are considered, will create the sense of belonging and personal meaning that can greatly impact career decision making.

First generation college students have also been identified as having more difficulty preparing for and succeeding in post-secondary institutions. Land and Ziomek-Daigle (2013) researched how a small group of college counselors promoted college success for first- generation college students. Informed by literature and relevant research, the school counselors presented a small group design for high school students in their junior year to provide support to FGCS and improve college ambitions and preparedness. The small group met for a weeklong program that consisted of six sessions, with topics ranging from career exploration, the college application process, financial aid overview, and college life. This small group's plan for first generation college students addressed issues of access, goal setting, career exploration, the college admissions process, and the financial aid application process. The author notes that counselors must advocate for FGCS to ensure that equal opportunity, access, and resources are available to support the students in pursuing undergraduate degrees.

Colleges can go about creating and curating a major and career ecosystem to support FGCS in their academic major and career success. The above-mentioned literature described the systemic barriers and lack of institutional support for FGCS as it

relates to major and career development. One clear example is the lack of social capital. The studies echo the need for students to receive resources including career information, professional competency development, and experiential learning opportunities to set and complete broad career goals after college. The knowledge gained from the literature can inform higher education staff and faculty to better serve the FGCS population. It also provides knowledge for what colleges can do to help FGCS begin and transition through a guided pathway to develop confidence and opportunities in their academic major and career path.

Post College Support

FGCS need resources to better understand available opportunities, and how those opportunities are connected to educational paths and academic majors to support career readiness. Career Services can help FGCS explore careers and provide resources to help navigate obstacles, identify student and professional organizations that align with professional goals. It can also support students in discovering various internal and external professional and skill development opportunities through co-curricular programs, jobs, internships, experiential learning, and mentorship experiences (Bates et al., 2017, Garriott et al., 2013; Parks-Yancy, 2012; Prescod et al., 2019).

Bates et al. (2017) noted that employability is becoming more of an emphasis for many colleges. The researchers used the Australian Graduate Survey, in a qualitative study, to explore how a professional skills development course at a three-year bachelor program can affect the employability of students. The Australian Graduate Survey is a national survey of graduates from Australian tertiary institutions. The scholars used the results from 403 survey respondents and found that students enrolled in a “career and

professional development course in conjunction with a work-integrated learning course are approximately twice as likely to be engaged in industry relevant employment or further study four months after graduation” (Bates et al., 2017). The study provides the evidence of how intentional career services and resources in higher education can help students develop key professional skills, as well as become more competitive and marketable in the open job market, by adopting a professional development course. The course curriculum would provide an opportunity to partner with industry professionals and incorporate professional skill building activities within the academic major/ degree requirements (Bates et al., 2017).

Similarly, Hirudayaraj and McLean (2018), in a qualitative phenomenological study, researched the lived experiences of first-generation graduates as they transitioned from higher education into employment in the private sector. The authors selected to explore this area to identify themes and better understand if a “structural barrier such as first-generation status influences students’ access to positions appropriate to their qualifications after graduating from college (Hirudayaraj & McLean, 2018).” The first theme identified family as a source of strength, but also a weak link in that lack of college education in the family affects the graduates' career decision-making. The second theme that emerged was the lack of familiarity with corporate culture and expectations. This contributed to the challenges faced during the process of searching for and finding graduate level employment. Lastly, the lack of career transition support participants received from higher education institutions contributed to their lack of preparedness for the corporate sector and restricted access to people with the ability to ease their entry into the sector (Hirudayaraj & McLean, 2018). The participants revealed that they felt there

“was a significant difference between the transition support available within private universities and what was available in public universities (Hirudayaraj & McLean, 2018).” Many also believed there was a lack of awareness that caused students not to take advantage of the transition support that was available at the college. Upon reflection, many questioned how their educational institutions might have done to provide better transition support and identify drawbacks in the system. As a result, Hirudayaraj and McLean (2018) note that higher education institutions need to better understand the background of FGCS to provide the necessary career and professional support.

Lastly, Rasul et al. (2015), explored critical factors influencing the self-concept of community college graduates in the development of their careers. In a qualitative research study using multiple case study methods, the researchers examined 15 community college graduates who have been relatively successful in their respective careers and were able to generate high incomes. The researchers discovered the presence of five critical internal factors influencing self-concept. These five critical factors are: congruence, boldness in facing a challenge, vision, skills, and experience. They noted that individuals with a positive self-concept are often associated with a good career choice and a well-planned career development path. The researchers write that the critical internal factors influencing self-concept should be studied in career development at community colleges to help students develop a career path.

Summary

The studies included in this literature review demonstrate how the process of choosing an academic major and career path, as well as the development of professional skills, are different for FGCS. Research shows a disconnect between first generation

college students and their academic major- career decision making, as well as the challenges faced when transitioning into the real world of work after degree completion. Factors, including, career decision-making, career services in higher education, the role of the advisor, and post college support all play a crucial role in how FGCS make career decisions and achieve career success (Bates et al., 2017; Garriott et al., 2013; Hirudayaraj & McLean, 2018; Parks-Yancy, 2012; Prescod et al., 2019; Rasul et al., 2015). The literature review highlighted several gaps in the research including the lack of institutional strategies from higher education institutions to better support FGCS and prepare them to be competitive and marketable candidates for employment. The present study contributes to the existing research and aims to fill a gap in the literature by providing recommendations for next steps for higher education institutions and career services to better understand and impact the career-related challenges FGCS face using a retrospective narrative. The study will utilize Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), which allows for the opportunity to explore interrelated aspects of career development to acknowledge areas of challenge and potential growth.

CHAPTER 3 METHODS

Chapter 1 provided an introduction and overview of the present study, whose purpose is to explore first-generation students' journey to academic major and career decision-making, skill development and professional success. Chapter 2 provided an extensive review of the literature related the factors and experiences that have influenced the academic major and career decision making of first-generation college students and the professional competencies needed for successful transition into a professional career after college. This chapter provides information about the methods and procedures for data collection and analysis for the study. This study is a qualitative retrospective narrative study to analyze and better understand the career readiness and aspirations of first-generation college students (FGCS). The qualitative data collected through individual interviews and document analysis provided an opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of the research topic. The study's qualitative research approach is detailed in this chapter along with the methods and procedures for data collection, coding, and analysis. The data collection and analysis identified in this chapter provided the basis for the findings and conclusions detailed in chapter 5 of this study.

Research Design

This study is a narrative inquiry of community college alumni who identify as first-generation college students (FGCS). The research study is conducted as a retrospective, narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992, 2000), where story works as both a research method and a form of representation (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990), to build an understanding and viewpoint of the individual FGCS journey to career decision

making and professional success. Clandinin & Connelly (2000) write that the individual process of personal change which people undergo can be taken for granted. They recognize narrative as the best way of representing and understanding experience as it allows research participants to interpret their own experiences through narrative. Narrative inquiry can reveal unique perspectives and provide deeper understanding of lived experiences and is often used in studies of educational practice and experience in order to delve into students “perceptions of their academic experiences” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

Connelly & Clandinin (1990) propose that “thinking about inquiry in narrative terms allows us to conceptualize the inquiry experience as a storied experience.” Since this study was aimed at understanding the lived experience of the FGCS, this design seems to align well. Therefore, inquiry was also chosen due to the depth it affords and close connection with participants through multiple rounds of data collection. Students rarely fit into over simplified paths. People are complex individuals, and everyone’s reality is influenced by racial, social, political, economic, ethnic, and gender-related factors, among others. While the narrative methodology was used to explore the lived experiences of the FGCS, the questions asked by the narrative inquiry helped participants shape the accounts of their experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Research Questions

For the purposes of this study, the academic major and career decision making and career readiness of first-generation college students at a community college were examined using the following research questions:

1) What were FGCS alumni's perceptions of the resources intended to help them better understand academic major and career options at a community college?

2) What were FGCS alumni's perceptions of the role their community college played in helping them obtain professional skills and a position in the workforce?

Methods and Procedures

Field Setting

This study was conducted at XYZ Community College (XYZCC) in New York, New York. XYZCC is one of the largest community colleges in the state of New York, with a total student population of close to 17,000 as of spring 2023 (XYZCC Institutional Research Fact Sheet, n.d.) The college was chosen due to its large number of first-generation college students and its diverse student body. The students at XYZCC are representative of 95 different countries, speak 50 different languages, with an average age of 24 years old, and 54.8% being PELL recipients (XYZCC Institutional Research Fact Sheet, n.d.). As of fall 2019, the college is considered to be a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI), with 44% of the total student population identifying as Hispanic (XYZCC Institutional Research Fact Sheet, n.d.). A Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) is defined as an eligible institution of higher education that has 25 percent or more enrolled undergraduate full-time equivalent students (Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs), n.d.). At XYZCC, 34% percent of the students identify as Black and 12.5% identified as Asian/Pacific Islander (XYZCC Institutional Research Fact Sheet, n.d.)

Using data collected from financial aid applications, the college identified more than 53 percent of enrolled students as the first in their family to attend college (XYZCC

receives National Honor for commitment to first-generation student success, 2020). In 2019, XYZCC was one of 11 colleges throughout the country to receive the designation of being a First gen Forward Advisory Institution by the Center for First-generation Student Success (XYZCC receives National Honor for commitment to first-generation student success, 2020). The designation, comprised of Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education, NASPA, and the Suder Foundation, recognizes that XYZCC has demonstrated a commitment to improving experiences and advancing outcomes of first-generation college students through initiatives, including the XYZCC Partner program (XYZCC receives National Honor for commitment to first-generation student success, 2020). The Partner program aims to support first-generation college students through a mentorship/partnership model with dedicated faculty and staff members.

The program is open to first-year students at XYZCC who identify as first-generation college students and participation in the XYZCC Partner program requires an application. Students are eligible to apply after receiving an outreach email from program administrators upon acceptance to XYZCC. Students can also learn about the Partner program during their initial conversations with an academic advisor or staff member during their orientation experience. The FGCS students who participate in the program are paired with a XYZCC Staff member, faculty, or administrator, who serves as a Partner Coach. The Partner Coach is often also the first in their family to attend college. The program also offers support for FGCS, which includes access to resources, such as workshops in many different subject areas, in-person and virtual events, extra-curricular activities on and off campus, as well as numerous opportunities for community engagement. The mentors provide helpful guidance and support to the diverse student

body at XYZCC and in the Partner program, which encompasses various genders, races, ethnicities, interest areas, degree programs, and career aspirations. This has allowed the Partner program participants to be successful in their academic journey and career aspirations. As of this study, over 400 first-generation students have completed the program at XYZCC.

The XYZCC Partner program collaborates with a number of on-campus and off campus departments. One of the primary partners is the XYZCC Career Development office, which supports students in their career journey by offering guidance, tools, resources, connections to employment, and professional opportunities to foster early career engagement and readiness among the participants. The partnership with the career development office allows students to explore their interest areas by completing the Strong Interest Inventory assessment early in the program. The Strong Interest Inventory assessment is a tool that explores an individual's interests and values, provides information regarding specific academic majors and available career options (Strong Interest Inventory Assessment, n.d.)

Program participants are also required to complete workshops to better understand how to navigate XYZCC educational tools, such as Blackboard and the academic progress report. Students also participate in activities to gain experience and develop key academic, personal, and professional skills that can help build their academic and professional portfolio. In addition, students complete financial literacy and goal setting workshops to help learn how to manage money and approaches to set and meet personal budget and financial goals. Additional incentives are also provided to motivate students to achieve program milestones. Students in the program have the chance to receive a

tuition grant for one summer and/or winter course when program participation guidelines are met. The participants also receive invitations to attend exclusive workshops and events designed specifically to support FGCS.

To extend support to as many FGCS as possible, the XYZCC Partners Program does not accept students enrolled in other cohort programs. This is to ensure that every FGCS has an opportunity to participate in at least one cohort experience/program at XYZCC. Thus, the XYZCC Partner program concentrates on providing support to FGCS, making it an ideal cohort for studying and learning the impact of collegiate support on students' decision-making regarding their academic major and career choices, as well as its effectiveness in developing career readiness skills.

Participants

This study used purposeful, convenience sampling to identify and select eight participants for a qualitative, narrative study of XYZCC Partner program alumni. These individuals are either currently enrolled at a four-year higher education institution or employed. The recruitment of participants occurred through the XYZCC Partner program. Maxwell (2013) states that purposeful selection requires selecting groups or participants with whom you can establish the most productive relationships and who will best enable you to answer your research questions. The XYZCC Partner group allowed for the use of convenience sampling, where participants were easily accessible to the researcher and the researcher's ability to gather data at an early stage in the research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The initial recruitment of the XYZCC Partner program alumni was done through email outreach by the XYZCC Partner program Director, along with a recruitment advertisement and informed consent (see Appendix A and B). A pre-study

questionnaire was also administered to gain demographic information and first-generation status of the participants. This was administered through an Adobe Acrobat PDF form for the participants to complete. The form provided information on each participant that allowed for purposeful sampling. The XYZCC Partner program alumni were able to reflect and speak to the experiences at XYZCC that helped them make academic major and career decisions, develop personally and professionally, as well as achieve career goals. Their feedback will be used develop programs and experiences to help students navigate opportunities for learning and exploration outside of the classroom.

Data Collection Procedures

Upon receiving approval from the St. John's University Institutional Review Board (IRB), approval was obtained from XYZCC's Director of Research to conduct this study. After receiving approval, the XYZCC Partner program Director was asked to invite XYZCC's Partner program alumni to participate in the study with an initial recruitment letter. The email outreach done by the XYZCC Partner program Director included a recruitment advertisement and the informed consent.

The interview questions were focused on understanding how individuals experienced the process and identified the steps in the process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) write that the way the interviewer sets the tone for the interview, the types of questions asked, and the interactions between the interviewer and interviewee shapes the rapport and how participants may react or respond to questions and provide insight into their experience. Through the interviews, the intention was to explore and learn more about what influenced the alumni's career decision making and

ambitions. In addition, the type of support that alumni wished they received was also queried.

Individual Interviews

An interview protocol was utilized for the formation of the study questions. Each interview followed a semi-structured open-ended interview design. The interview protocol included open ended questions, with space in between to write responses to interviewee responses (Creswell and Poth, 2018). This allowed each research participant the room to tell their story and fully convey their personal narrative. A copy of the interview protocols can be found in appendix E-H. Three open-ended interviews were conducted with each participant for approximately 30-60 minutes, to collect the data and allow participants to reflect and share their experience. A research discussion guide was prepared ahead of time to direct the conversation; however, flexibility was permitted for detouring from the guide while being mindful to avoid any leading in the follow-up questions. As Glesne (2016) states, the researcher must be conscious of how the questions will set the stage for a particular type of interaction (p. 126). In other words, how questions are asked, can limit what we are learn. Creswell & Poth (2018) emphasize that, regardless of the interview mode, care must be taken to “create an environment as comfortable as possible” (p. 164). Connelly & Clandinin (2000) write that perspective is essential for making sense. These principles served as the foundation for the interviews and the interview protocols. All interviews were conducted online via Webex, video conferencing platform.

Semi-Structured Interviews

During the first set of open-ended interview sessions (Interview Session I), each participant was asked questions about how their academic major and career interests developed. Each student who pursued a college degree and a subsequent career told a different story about the impact of their college experience and how this experience influenced their professional directions. During the second open-ended interview sessions (Interview Session II), participants were asked to share their experience at XYZCC college and in the XYZCC Partner program. The third open-ended interview sessions (Interview Session III) asked participants to share their viewpoint as to how their college experience helped prepare them for the world of work and their future career. Interview protocols for each of the sessions can be found in Appendices F, G, and H. Creswell & Poth (2018) write that the interview protocol is valuable, as it is able to help the research participant “open up and talk.” After conducting the interviews, the data was coded and analyzed, and themes were identified in the participants experiences. The data was then compiled to identify the perceptions of FGCS alumni about their collegiate experience in career readiness and decision-making.

Document Analyses

Connelly & Clandinin (2000) describe how easy it can be for researchers to overlook documents that can help contextualize the research and can be a rich source for the construction of social narratives. Official documents convey important and useful information that a researcher can effectively use as data (Lune & Berg, 2017). Content analyses provides background and context to the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Thus, the alumni’s XYZCC resume and CCT, a comprehensive record of a student’s

participation and achievements outside of the classroom while enrolled at XYZCC, were reviewed. The CCT provided a holistic representation of the student's complete educational experience both inside and outside of the classroom. Therefore, the activities recorded on the CCT are intended to foster the development of the student, encourage life-long learning, and responsible citizenship.

The document review was also conducted to identify how the experiences and career related skills exposure and development during their time at XYZCC differed from each students' current resume. The participants' CCTs and resumes provided a snapshot of co-curricular activities and experiential learning opportunities that were available at the college and utilized by the student.

Trustworthiness of Design

Clandinin & Connelly (2000) write that all researchers, novice and experienced, come to inquiry with views, attitudes, and ways of thinking about inquiry. Creswell and Poth (2018) note that checking the accuracy of the research is among the many roles a researcher takes on.

There is potential for bias in the research due to this researcher's experience as an FGCS and as a higher education professional who works with this student population. Therefore, several strategies were implemented to reduce bias and its effects on the research. To maintain trustworthiness and credibility, academic, personal, and professional experiences were heavily scrutinized, while also recognizing and addressing any biases that could influence the study. A clear distinction was made between the role of a researcher and the lived experiences of an FGCS and fulltime administrator. Notes were logged during the interviews to record thoughts and interpretations of the stories

told by the participants. Creswell and Poth (2018) describe accuracy in the data as gaining information that comes as close as possible to what the research participant is thinking or experiencing. Recording these thoughts allowed for the setting and the participants to be described in rich detail. The process of data collection, analysis, and report writing is often interrelated and occurs simultaneously throughout the research process (Creswell, 2007). Thus, maintaining a high level of self-awareness allowed for a separation of personal beliefs, values, assumptions, and biases when interpreting the data. To ensure accuracy, a raw transcript of the interview sessions was provided to each participant for review.

Research Ethics

Creswell & Poth (2018) propose that protecting the research participants from harm and disclosure of findings are among the challenges researchers. Researchers must ensure the rights, privacy, and welfare of the people and communities that form the focus of their studies (Berg, 2017). Prior to the recruitment of participants for the study, consent was obtained from the St. Johns' University Institutional Review Board. Protecting the rights of the alumni in this study was a primary focus for this researcher. All participation in this study was voluntary and interview participants signed a written letter of consent, which can be found in Appendix B. The letter of consent was presented to participants to help them understand that their participation in this study is an exercise of their choice. Participants were also be given a pseudonym to maintain confidentiality.

Data Analyses

The data and content collected through the semi-structured interviews was coded utilizing concepts from various researchers (Creswell & Poth 2018; Saldana, 2016). Coding is important in the identification of topics, issues, similarities, and differences that are revealed through the participants' narratives and interpreted by the researcher (Saldana, 2016). Saldana (2016) writes that this "process enables the researcher to begin to understand the world from each participant's perspective." There are several methods for coding narrative data. They include deductive coding, where you start with a list of codes, and inductive coding, where the codes emerge from the data and as a result of coding cycles.

Based on the exploratory nature of the study, an inductive method of analysis was used to analyze data collected through individual interviews and document review. Inductive coding allowed for the transcripts to be broken up by stories. This allowed for the comparison and contrast of narratives to develop core narratives. Thus, coding could be used to group together the narratives spread across the interviews.

Creswell & Poth (2018) write that data analysis in qualitative research consists of preparing and organizing the data for analysis. To focus the coding decision, a table was developed showing the research questions, interview questions, purpose of the study, research concerns and reflective questions. A review of each transcript was conducted to develop codes. Coding allowed for the identification of concepts and categories while re-reading the texts, to confirm concepts and categories already represented in interview responses. This helped to facilitate exploration of the relationships between various concepts and categories. The initial coding phase was completed through the process of

structural coding, in which the initial raw data (taken notes or memos collected by the researcher during the interview process) is labeled to begin to identify patterns.

Huberman and Saldana (2014) refer to this process as heuristic coding, emphasizing the careful consideration of core content and meaning within the data. Additionally, they note the allocation of codes to data segments to identify recurring patterns, to then forming pattern codes. The initial method employed was In Vivo, a widely recognized qualitative coding approach that utilized the participants' own language, including words and short phrases, as codes within the data record (Miles et al., 2014). In Vivo coding allowed for the assigning of a label to a section of data. A word or short phrase was then taken from that section to create the data table. The table allowed for constant review of progress throughout the research process.

Miles et al. (2014), additionally observed that codes are initially allocated to data segments to identify recurring patterns. These patterns are subsequently grouped together to form a reduced set of categories known as pattern codes. This process allowed for the formation of meta-codes to represent the data effectively (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Forming categories or themes represents the “heart of qualitative data analysis” (Creswell and Poth, 2018). Transferring final concepts and categories into a data table proved invaluable for organizing results and discussions in the research. During the second- level coding process, pattern coding, the data was condensed into categories or themes from the first-level coding by grouping the codes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This meta-code was used to represent the data.

By designing a qualitative study around a retrospective, narrative approach, new findings emerged from the analysis of an extensive amount of information obtained

through several rounds of data collection. To establish the “credibility” of the coding, another researcher coded the same transcript and identified similarities and differences in the resulting sets of codes (Saldana, 2016). This resulted in revisions to the codes to help clarify and confirm the research findings.

Role of the Researcher

Successful fieldwork can be based on several strategies. Connelly & Clandinin (2000) note how all researchers come to inquiry with views, attitudes, and ways of approaching questions. They also note that the way an interviewer approaches the interview, the questions asked, and the responses provided during the interview shapes the relationship and in turn, the way participants answer and provide information as to their experience. An advantage in this study, was the opportunity to ask key follow-up questions being that the researcher was once in the very shoes of the student population being interviewed. This allowed the researcher to be an indigenous outsider. According to Banks (1998), an indigenous outsider is described as "a person who has been raised within their indigenous community but has undergone significant cultural assimilation into an outsider or opposing culture." The indigenous outsider is perceived by indigenous people in the community as an individual that endorses the unique values, perspectives, behaviors, beliefs, and knowledge of his or her indigenous community and culture and is perceived by people within the community as a legitimate community member who can speak with authority about it (Banks, 1998).

As the researcher, in reflecting on the experience, not only as a FGCS, but also as a career development professional with over 10 years in higher education, career decision making and career readiness of FGCS are impacted by a number of factors. The factors

include but are not limited to a lack of knowledge of their academic major and career options, time to explore, available resources, and presence of social networks or lack thereof. Being an indigenous outsider is recognized as a strength for research in that it allows the researcher to relate to the everyday lives and to get closer to the participants. While completing qualitative research, it is important for the researcher to identify possible researcher and participant biases that could impact trustworthiness (Creswell, 2013). There are also challenges associated with the insider-outsider status. These include assumptions about what the participants tell us, and participants' expectations about us. To avoid potential biases, questions were kept simple, open-ended without leading words and phrases (Creswell, 2013).

Conclusion

The methods and procedures, trustworthiness of design, research ethics, data analysis approach, and researcher role of the present study were discussed in chapter 3. Using Social Cognitive Career Theory as a framework, a narrative inquiry research study will add valuable insight into the lived experiences of the FGCS at a large, urban community college in regard to academic major and career decision making and career readiness. Chapter 4 will discuss the findings of the study. In chapter 5, there is a discussion of the conclusions, recommendations, and limitations of the study.

CHAPTER 4 RESULTS

Introduction

This study utilized a narrative inquiry approach inspired by Clandinin and Connelly (1992, 2000) to delve into the narratives of alumni of the XYZCC Partner Program at XYZ community college who self-identify as first-generation college students (FGCS). As outlined by Connelly and Clandinin (1990), the study utilized storytelling as both a research method and a means of representation in order, to construct a comprehensive understanding and perspective on the unique journeys of individual FGCS as they navigate career decision-making and achieve professional success. The data collection and analysis were guided by two research questions:

- 1) What were FGCS alumni's perceptions of the resources intended to help them better understand academic major and career options at a community college?
- 2) What were FGCS alumni's perceptions of the role their community college played in helping them obtain professional skills and a position in the workforce?

To answer the questions, a purposeful sample was recruited from an urban community college in New York State, which boasts an expansive student body, nearing a total population of around 17,000 (XYZCC, 2023b), making it one of the largest community colleges in the state. A total of eight students participated in three rounds of individual interviews.

Chapter 4 begins with a brief description of the backgrounds of each male scholar of color in the study, followed by the universal themes uncovered through their individual stories. Following this description, the chapter will align these findings to the research questions guiding the study. Due to COVID-19 pandemic protocols, all interviews took place online using the Webex platform. Information from the individual interviews were first transcribed. Afterwards, the transcriptions along with resumes and the participant's co-curricular transcripts were manually coded and analyzed. During the initial phase of coding, the researcher utilized both Descriptive and In Vivo coding methods. Following this, the data underwent a more involved analysis, incorporating pattern codes to enhance the exploration of themes, which ultimately constitute the principal discoveries of this study. To ensure the confidentiality of participant identities, pseudonyms were assigned, however the language employed by the participants is consistently maintained throughout the analysis to uphold authenticity. Within this chapter, the study's findings are articulated by revealing the themes derived from the comprehensive process of data collection and analysis pertinent to each research question. The chapter concludes with a thorough overview of the identified findings.

Pre-Study Questionnaire Data

For this study, participants completed a pre-study questionnaire (see Appendix C). The pre-study questionnaire consisted of questions which allowed the alumni to share information on gender, race/ethnicity, first generation college student description, XYZCC academic major, minor (if applicable), current college enrollment status, and current enrollment status. The purpose of these questions was to develop a better

understanding of the background of the participants in preparation for their interviews. Descriptive coding was applied to analyze the questions.

Research Participants

Prior to developing themes, it was important to gain insight on the background of the participants in the study. As aforementioned in chapter 3, the present study included eight first-generation college students (FGCS) who all graduated from the XYZCC Partner Program and consider themselves first-generation college students, in which parents or legal guardians did not complete a bachelor's degree, as defined by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (2019). A total of eight alumni completed the Pre-Study Questionnaire, in which demographic information was collected. Details of each participant, from the pre-study questionnaire are presented here:

Pre-Study Questionnaire Responses

Nicole is a female graduate of XYZCC. She identifies as Asian and completed her associate degree in business administration from XYZCC. She is currently employed full-time.

Manny is a male graduate of XYZCC. He identifies as Kurdish and completed his associate degree in computer science from XYZCC. He is currently employed full-time.

Rose is a female graduate of XYZCC. She identifies as African American and completed her associate degree in nursing from XYZCC. She is currently employed full-time.

Mario is a male graduate of XYZCC. He identifies as Black/ Jamaican and completed his associate degree in communication studies, with a minor in English from XYZCC. He is currently a full-time graduate school student.

Stephanie is a female graduate of XYZCC. She identifies as Black and completed her associate degree in nursing from XYZCC. She is currently employed full- time.

Doug is a male graduate of XYZCC. He identifies as South Asian and completed his associate degree in financial economics from XYZCC. His parents did complete postsecondary school in India, but not in the United States. He is currently a full-time student.

Carla is a female graduate of XYZCC. She identifies as Black and completed her associate degree in Small Business Entrepreneurship degree from XYZCC. She is currently a full-time student and employed full- time.

Fiona is a female graduate of XYZCC. She identifies as Latinx Asian and completed her associate degree in Fine Arts from XYZCC. She is currently employed part- time.

Findings

Data Analysis Process

In the course of conducting data analysis, a comprehensive qualitative content analysis for each of the data collection methods was implemented. Prior to embarking on the coding phase, I took measures to ensure the accurate transcription of the participants'

interviews. Utilizing content analysis provided a valuable framework for interpreting qualitative data through systematic coding. Coding involved the identification of commonly used words, phrases, and ideas employed by the participants (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). Throughout the coding process, my focus remained on identifying and categorizing these elements into thematic categories, thereby refining the analysis. The initial codes, exemplifying this intricate process, are presented in Table 3 below.

These codes were generated through inductive coding, emphasizing the identification of commonly used words, key-words-in contexts, phrases, and ideas without any preconceived notions (Chandra et al., 2019). Chandra et al. (2019) maintains that word-based techniques can be a fast and efficient way to start to understand themes and can be particularly useful at early stages of theme identification. The consistency of the words is seen as relevant in the minds of the participants and can be analyzed, both formally and informally. In the informal mode, I read the text and noted words or synonyms that the participants use frequently. For the more formal analysis of the word frequencies, I looked at the list of unique words in the transcriptions and counted the number of times each occurred as well as systematically searched the text to find all instances of the word and or phrases. As I proofread the material and underlined key phrases in the transcriptions, patterns began to emerge this method provided a strong and intuitive feel for the themes and the relationships amongst the themes. The themes developed from various sources, which included review of the literature, characteristics of the experiences being studied, agreed upon professional definitions and common-sense constructs.

Table 3*Initial Codes*

Interview Session #1	Interview Session #2	Interview Session #3
College	Support	Program
Career	Workshops	Experience
Support	Resources	Mentor
Opportunities	Counseling	Projects
Experience	Alumni	Skills
Community	Networking	Communicate
Scholarship	Journey	Interview
Development	Exploration	Companies
Advisors	Confidence	Opportunities
Major	future	Connections
Resources	Mentor	Support
Administration	Activities/ Programs	Volunteer
Guidance	Sessions	Professional
Direction	Classes	Session
Explore	Experience	Partner
Finance	Community	Employers
Faculty	Helpful	Education
Support	Advisement	Coach
Workshops	Development	Curriculum
Resources	Instrumental	Engagement
Counseling	Involved	Workplace
Networking	Internships	Faculty
Journey	Opportunities	Technology
Alumni	Connections	Environment
Exploration	Information	Development
Confidence	Guide	Finance
Future	Professionals	Teamwork
Mentor	Mentee	Network
Experience	Participate	Collaborative
Community	Readiness	Participate
Connections	Working	Leadership
	Financial	Mentorship
	Research	Challenges
		Different
		Meaningful
		Information
		Culture
		Helpful
		Exposure
		Advisors

Focused
Personality
Resources
Process
Growth
Impact
Assistance
Guidance
Prepared
Different
Workshops
Documents
Mindset
Options
Preparedness
Application
Mental health
Prepare
Readiness
Transition
Services
Decision
Advantage
Diverse
Tools
Database
Access
Improvement
Exploring

After identifying the initial codes, I began the process of breaking them down into thematic categories, as depicted in Table 4 below.

Table 4

Initial Grouping of Thematic Codes and Categories

Codes	Frequency
Interview Session I	
Experience	31
Community	18
Scholarship	3
Center for Career Development	4
Advisors	4
Major	55
Guidance	10
Explore	6
Faculty	5
Career	30
Interview Session II	
Support	36
Workshops	13
Resources	8
Alumni Event/ Connections	2
Networking	7
Journey	5
Exploration	1
Confidence	0
Future	14
Mentor	28
Activities/ Programs	14
Sessions	15
Classes	17
Experience	3
Community	6
Helpful	19
Advisement	7
Career Development	5
Instrumental	7
Involved	4
Internships	3

Opportunities	8
Connections	6
Information	7
Guide	2
Professionals	6
Mentee	5
Readiness	1
Working	2
Financial	6
Research	4
Interview Session III	
Program	113
Experience	62
Mentor	28
Projects	8
Skills	31
Communicate	9
Interview	17
Companies	6
Opportunities	10
Connections	10
Support	18
Volunteer	10
Professional	32
Curriculum	2
Engagement	5
Workplace	3
Faculty	2
Technology	1
Environment	9
Finance	8
Development	6
Teamwork	4
Network	13
Leadership	5
Mentorship	1
Different	38
Challenges	2
Meaningful	4
Information	6
Culture	7
Exposure	3
Focused	2
Personality	8

Resources	14
Process	12
Impact	6
Assistance	3
Guidance	4
Prepared	17
Options	7
Workshops	3
Documents	2
Application	2
Mental Health	3
Transition	2
Readiness	1
Services	19
Decision	2
Diverse	12
Database	7
Access	8
Improvement	3

Codes	Frequency	Initial Thematic Category
Interview Session I		The Importance of Community and Career Development
Support	36	
Experience	31	
Community	18	
Guidance	10	
Explore	6	
Faculty	5	
Center for Career Development	4	
Advisors	4	
Interview Session II		Mentorship and Resources
Career Guidance & Mentorship		
Support	36	
Mentor	28	
Helpful	19	
Classes	17	
Sessions	15	

Future	14	
Activities/ Programs	14	
Workshops	13	
Resources	8	
Opportunities	8	
Networking	7	
Advisement	7	
Information	7	
Instrumental	7- career development & mentor	
Community	6	
Connections	6	
Professionals	6	
Financial	6	
Journey	5	
Career Development	5	
Mentee	5	
Involved	4	
Research	4- 2 with professors/ 2 research career	
Experience	3	
Internships	3	
Alumni Event/ Connections	2	
Guide	2	
Working	2	
Exploration	1	
Readiness	1	
Confidence	0	
Interview Session III		Experience & Skill Development- “creating varied learning and experiential learning experiences to influence and broaden the understanding of academic major and career options for FGCS”
Program	113- mix between Panther program and involvement in other programs	
Experience	62	
Different	38	

Professional	32- people/ skills	
Skills	31	
Mentor	28 (Mentor + mentoring programs)	
Services	19	
Support	18	
Interview	17	
Prepared	17	
Resources	14	
Network	13	
Process	12	
Diverse	12	
Opportunities	10	
Connections	10	
Volunteer	10	
Communicate/ communication	9	
Environment	9	
Finance/ Financial	8	
Personality	8	
Access	8	
Projects	8- research, co-curricular	
Culture	7	
Options	7	
Database	7	
Companies	6	
Skill Development	6	
Information	6	
Impact	6	
Engagement	5	
Leadership	5	
Teamwork	4	
Meaningful	4	
Guidance	4	
Exposure	3	
Assistance	3	
Workshops	3	
Mental Health	3	
Improvement	3	
Workplace	3 workplace environments	
Curriculum	2	
Faculty	2	
Challenges	2	
Focused	2	
Documents	2	

Application	2	
Transition	2	
Decision	2	
Technology	1	
Mentorship	1	
Readiness	1	

Table 5

Document Evaluation

Name of Document	Goals indicated or Noted Achievements	Written/ Provided by
Resume	Leadership Experiences, co-curricular activities at XYZCC, outlines professional skills developed, including teamwork, communication, leadership, technology, diversity & inclusion, critical thinking, career and self-development, and professionalism	Doug Fiona Manny Mario Nicole Rose Stephanie
XYZCC Co-curricular Transcript	Programs/ activities involved in and completed while at XYZCC, expected competencies exposed to and developed: self-awareness, leadership, communication, assessment, evaluation and research, social and civic responsibility, collaboration, diversity and inclusiveness, technology, responsibility, project management, conflict management, critical thinking, problem solving, career	Fiona Manny Mario Nicole Rose Stephanie

	management and professionalism	
--	--------------------------------	--

Table 6

Interpretive Themes

Research Question	Theme	Subthemes	Data Source	Trust-worthiness
1) What were FGCS alumni's perceptions of the resources intended to help them better understand academic major and career options at a community college?	The importance of the College Experience and an emphasis on Exploration	Supportive Environment Career Development	Individual Interviews	Thick Description Member Checking
	The value of Mentorship and Access to Resources	Mentoring Holistic Support	Individual Interviews	Thick Description Member Checking
2) What were FGCS alumni's perceptions of the role their community college played in helping them obtain professional skills and a position in the workforce?	Career Readiness	Professional Skill Development Career Connections	Individual Interviews Document Review	Thick Description Member Checking

As highlighted in Appendix J (Initial Themes) above, three themes acted as the findings: (a) the importance of the College Experience and Exploration; (b) the value of Mentorship and Access to Resources; and (c) Career Readiness.

The next section will discuss each theme and highlight direct participant quotations.

Research Question 1

What were FGCS alumni's perceptions of the resources intended to help them better understand academic major and career options at a community college?

Theme 1: The Importance of the College Experience and Exploration

During the data analysis, one prominent theme that surfaced for all of the participants, was the importance of the College Experience and Exploration. Consensus was evident among all participants regarding the components of the college experience and the factors that were helpful in making academic major and career decisions. During the individual interviews, each of the participants shared their views on the impact that the XYZCC college experience had on their decision as to which major to pursue or reinforced their preexisting decision. Within the theme of College Experience and Career Exploration, two sub-themes emerged from the collected data. The first sub-theme that emerged was the value of a supportive environment. The second subtheme to emerge was the early, introductory impact of career development. Together, these sub-themes describe the importance of the College Environment and Career Exploration on the FGCS alumni's perceptions of the resources intended to help them better understand academic major and career options at XYZCC.

Subtheme 1: Supportive Environment and Emphasis on Exploration

In response to the first question of the interview protocol, “As a First-Generation College Student (FGCS), what guidance were you provided in selecting your academic major and defining your future career goals at XYZ Community College,” the first sub-theme to emerge from the collected data, described how important a supportive environment and community was to the College and Career Exploration experience of the participants. Participants expressed the value community support as they made their academic major and career decisions. There was consensus among the participants that a supportive environment and an emphasis on exploration, that provided key resources and information early, was an essential part of their college experience as a FGCS. Manny describes his journey in discovering computer science began at XYZCC, where he enrolled in a course that provided him with exposure to various fields within the discipline. This initial exploration eventually led to opportunities to engage in robotics research with a professor and serve as an assistant for a computer science course, where he assisted fellow students in acquiring essential skills. In addition, attending events such as hackathons, where people came together to create a product or idea using programming languages, further broadened his understanding of the field and inspired him to bring similar opportunities to XYZCC. Through involvement in research and mentoring roles, he also talked about the valuable experience and knowledge gained, ultimately refining his career aspirations within the realm of computer science. Manny states that he was able to apply to become a Supplemental Instructor (SI) leader for a course, which “meant that I was available outside of his course time to support students. I got to help students who are getting into computer science fields. I guess to me that in

itself was valuable because even though yes, I was maybe a year ahead of those students, there were so many questions that were coming on my way that I have never seen it. I have never heard of it. So, it gave me the option to research more, learn more. I had some other people who are dependent on me when they ask me question, I have to be the person to answer them. And that kind of pushed me to learn more about computer science and that itself narrowed down what I really want to do.”

The participants agreed that among the many challenges they faced, perhaps none was as pivotal as the decisions surrounding their choice of academic major and career path. For these students, who discussed the lack of familial guidance based on prior experiences, the college atmosphere played a profound role in shaping their trajectory. Nicole also shared her views regarding the importance of a supportive environment and welcoming community in her college experience, specifically pertaining to academic major and career decision making.

I was part of the Panther Partner program at XYZCC and as well as that, I mean I definitely was part of the career center as a college assistant and so forth, and so all of those parts and having career advisors and having my academic advisors, having the advisor within the Panther Partner program, those really did come into play with helping me determine what my major was and what my goals were, and fine tuning the two year goals, the four year goals, and then beyond that.

The participants described how a nurturing environment not only provided essential resources and guidance but also instilled the confidence and sense of belonging necessary to explore, experiment, and ultimately make informed decisions about their academic and professional futures. Mario expressed how indispensable supportive

communities are in the college experiences of first-generation students, “My mission was to come to school, get a degree in leave, going to work, but it opened up the door for me to interact with other leaders on campus, interact with other students. I'm like, this is good. I actually enjoyed this. I actually enjoyed the community that I found here, and as the program ended that, by then it was like one semester, the program was, I'm just like, I need to have this community, and that's when I started pursuing other opportunities.”

Mario goes on to emphasize how much of an impact the school advisors and faculty had in his major and career decision-making processes. His journey at XYZCC began with a push from his mother to pursue a business major, driven by aspirations for financial stability and a better life. However, he quickly realized that his strengths lay elsewhere, particularly in language and writing, rather than mathematics or business. Inspired by an African American studies class, he discovered a passion for exploring social issues and civil rights movements. Midway through his first semester, he made the decision to switch majors to communications, attracted by the diverse career paths it offered and the opportunity to continue writing. Encouragement from professors, along with informative sessions and career pamphlets provided by the communications department, affirmed his choice. With the support of programs and the guidance of a helpful counselor, he successfully transitioned into his new major, confident in his decision to pursue a path aligned with his intellectual interests and strengths.

So, I will tell you a story because I started XYZCC as a business major, it wasn't my decision. A guy can't do math to save his life, but coming to America, my mom, and I think I told you this already, my mom, at least by then, she was a CNA when I just came here, but for years she cleaned hotel rooms, she walked

people dogs and she take care of old people. So, coming in, she wanted better for me and in her head that better mean Mario should have his own business because if he has his own business, then maybe he could afford some of the things that I can ask because I'm here struggling. So, she actually encouraged me to do business. I started it and I realized that, not even for my mom, I can't do math. And I'm just like, I've always been good with words and good with writing, and I'm like in doing business management as a business major, I cannot pursue, there's not much creativity I could do with words in that sense, and it wasn't intellectually stimulating for me. Midway semester, I switched my major and I switched to communications because I'm just thinking communications. It would offer me a bunch of different career paths and I'll also be able to get to write. The communication studies department always have those almost like info sessions for students who are interested. And I went to one of those before, just before I changed my major and I'm just like, wow, this is actually for me. So, professors were very, very helpful with that. There was also a pamphlet of what students who were in the communications program, where they went to school after and what they're actually doing now. So, I'm just like, this is just a bunch of different career areas that I could, it's not something that's going to pigeonhole me.

Mario also reflected on the impactful sense of community fostered by student services

programs at XYZCC, which played a pivotal role in his college experience. Through participation in various excursions and events, such as Habitat for Humanity trips and attending Broadway plays with free tickets from student activities, he found a sense of

belonging and affirmation in his new environment. The strong immigrant population at XYZCC further contributed to this sense of camaraderie, as he formed bonds and lifelong friendships with fellow newcomers on similar journeys. Additionally, he also developed meaningful relationships with faculty members, who provided support and guidance, including recommendations for law school applications. This tight-knit community not only provided a supportive network but also served as a source of motivation and encouragement, fostering personal and academic growth throughout their college years.

So those experiences were meaningful for me. I felt a community at XYZCC. I felt affirmed for perhaps one of my first time in America because I just came in, but I felt like I belong. I felt a sense of belonging. It also helps that XYZCC has a strong immigrant population. So just about all my friends, almost all my friends, we had just come in almost the same time to the United States, and I phoned them there. I phoned people who were on the same trajectory as me, new immigrants coming in, and we just form a bond around that. I developed strong relationships with like-minded students, students who I still call friends today. I had my birthday recently and half of the table was from XYZCC the year before. The majority of the table was from XYZCC. They're still my friends to this. They have lifelong friendships, and it was one of those friendships where we push each other, we push each other. I could brag about them a little because I knew they were high achieving students, but we constantly just to push each other and constantly to encourage each other.

Subtheme 2: Early Engagement with Career Development

Early connection to career development resources can significantly influence one's collegiate journey, as highlighted by the study participant's experience. Many described how their early interactions with the Center for Career Development proved instrumental in their successful transition into their decided major. Stephanie, for example, stated that she received guidance from professors, Student Activities, and Career Development in selecting major and defining career goals. “Through informative sessions featuring nursing faculty, students, and programs beyond the institution, invaluable insights were gained, underscoring the pivotal role of proactive career exploration in academic pursuits.”

Mario shares that the America Needs You (ANY) program, a career development initiative for first-generation college students that allows students to become a fellow. Through this fellowship, he explained that FGCS were able to attend, career development workshops, receive one-on-one mentorship, earn grants, obtain internship, transfer support, and become a part of a network of students, professionals, and alumni. Mario reflected on his personal experiences of how the ANY program helped him with his resume and interview skills.

Nicole shared that, “XYZCC prepared them for professional life through courses on resume writing, interviewing, and teamwork.” As a college assistant with Career Development, she indicated that the experience “opened me up to how to be professional, how to speak to employers, how to create and draft a resume, how to interview, how to do cover letters. I mean knowledge of things that you so much need in and when you're going into your work and your industry and your professional life and your career life.

And so being exposed to that as a college assistant and to the team that we had and having that industry knowledge and those insights, and again, it was just all about professionalism and about how to communicate, how to be a team player, how to just those necessary skills, those basic skills that you need.”

Mario went on to say that he felt as if he won the lottery when he was paired with a mentor from career services.

I got the lottery that I was paired with my mentor who worked in career services, and as I think about how I am going to be what I want to be, how am I going to get out of target, my mentor was very instrumental in that aspect. Career Services was very, very instrumental in that aspect. One, it showed me different employers. I learned about employers that I wouldn't have otherwise known about. It helped me when it come on to interviewing skills, professional branding, and also reviewing my resume. It was first, very, very first time that I ever had my resume being reviewed by someone that was not me. First time I've ever had my cover letter reviewed by someone who was not me. So, it was very, very instrumental in that aspect. And from then my mentor was very instrumental. She pointed me to different offices, different programs that were around, so it was very, very good. It really connected me to campus.

Rose described her early engagement with career development really helped her. The profound impact of such support is captured in the sentiments expressed by this student, who also reflected on the invaluable assistance provided by the college's Learning Resource Center (LRC) and other vital resources. From fundamental tasks like

crafting a resume to navigating the intricacies of academic systems, the college took deliberate steps to ensure that no student felt left behind. Through access to essential tools, personalized guidance, and immersive experiences such as mock interviews and field trips, the college fostered an environment conducive to holistic growth and career exploration. Rose delved deeper into the significance of such comprehensive support systems in empowering first-generation students to navigate the complexities of higher education and beyond.

It provided me with everything that I need. They didn't take it for granted that I might know how to do some things. That's a given, like even doing a resume, even navigating the computer, I'm a first-generation student and so they took time out. They showed me how to access my school email. They showed me how to log onto their system, these baby steps, those things helped me to navigate the whole college process. Having the LRC room, the library access to information and the different resources they had, which was very helpful. Like open houses where different schools will come in and you could go there and find out information. We had mocked interviews preparing you for the world of work, preparing you for the actual interview, so to say, where we had, and they provided apparels where you could dress modestly like you were going to an actual interview. And that was really good. And there were many resources out in two. I remember that program. We went out on field trips; we'd visit different companies. We were able to ask professionals questions about their field and to see if it was a good fit for us.

Research Question 2

What resources were available for alumni, who identify as FGCS, and what were the perceptions of the resources to help first-generation college students better understand and explore major and career options at a community college?

Theme 2: The Value of Mentorship and Access to Resources

Subtheme 1: Mentorship

The research participants all discussed how much value mentoring played in their journey as FGCS. The participants shared that they lacked the family and social networks to help them understand how to navigate higher education. Therefore, for the students, the mentors became a valuable support and resource, not only in navigating their academic journey, but also for their personal and professional development. The mentors enabled FGCS to explore majors and career paths by providing advice, resources, and motivating the students to be successful.

Manny explained how much he valued the relationship he was able to develop with his mentor. He expressed how important it was for him to communicate his major and career goals and receive guidance. He would not have been able to receive this guidance from family members, who lacked knowledge of the academic system. Therefore, his mentor provided support tailored to their needs. During meetings, his mentor took the time to understand his interests and concerns, demonstrating a commitment to offering support beyond academic assistance, and even providing book recommendations.

There were lots of stuff that he supported me, but just having someone who's there all the time that I can reach out to if I have any questions to was itself a huge

support for me. And the main reason of it is that I would never call my family, my brothers, my mom, my dad, for any academical support or crashes. The main reason is they don't know it. They have never gone through it, even in my country and how here we have a whole new economic system, even though there are similarities, still a bit different, but overall, they wouldn't have any knowledge about it, but they would like to help, but there is not much support they would have given to me. So having someone from the program specifically assigned to me that I could reach out to anytime via email and via phone number, it itself a huge sport for me.

Mario emphasizes the importance of support and mentorship in a program for underrepresented groups and credits the Partner program with providing valuable career guidance and support, including reviewing his resume and serving as a reference for his second internship. He also credits the program for helping him to expand his network and for fostering involvement on campus by connecting him to campus resources and community. He states that

So, in that way, serving as reference, people who could speak for the quality of my work on my readiness for you know, an opportunity that was very helpful as a first-generation student as a first-generation immigrant, most importantly, without a lot of networks, definitely not in the United States. I didn't have a lot of people to speak for me, but I found those people through the Partner program.

Fiona describes her pursuit of becoming an Arts major. She made the decision to pursue a fine arts major at XYZCC, was based on the helpful resources and support from the college. I had a coach, and she was in our department, which

was very helpful to get connected to different classes and know more about what they do in the classes. I was like, oh, before taking even the class, it would be interesting to know if that was actually interesting for me. And that saved a lot of time and money of frustration of taking something that I wouldn't like. And in the sense, he reassured me of my major because our meetings were very major focused. Coaches had different approaches. Sometimes they were even talking about personal life or other struggles or their questions. Mine was more art related because of my major and I think she was the only coach in arts, I believe. So, there are not many around and I was very thankful to have that help.

Subtheme 2: Holistic Support

Moreover, the second sub-theme that emerged was Holistic Support. Participants shared that the mentors served as connectors, facilitating access to valuable networks and resources that may otherwise be inaccessible. Through mentorship, the participants felt empowered to get involved with experiences outside of the classroom, build meaningful connections, navigate challenges, and forge pathways towards fulfilling their academic and professional aspirations.

Stephanie highlights the importance of workshops and sessions provided by the university, including one-on-one sessions, group workshops, and relaxation sessions, which helped alleviate stress and provide support during their nursing program. She also mentioned that the college provided helpful perks, such as free MetroCard, which is used for fare payment on transportation. This helped to alleviate financial stress and allowed her to focus more on her studies.

Fiona also mentioned various programs and resources at the college, including the

Partners Program and others, which helped her navigate her first semester as a foreigner and stay on track with her goals. She also made mention of the MetroCard, “But also, I am not going to lie that the Metro Card was also very helpful thing, like financial help. Because first generation college students, I realized that I, depending on where you come from, your parents were in the US and they didn't go to college, probably there's a reason for that that may be financially related or if you're from a different country, it doesn't mean that always you have a lot of money just to go to the country.” In addition, Fiona reflects.

I think I registered that during one of the international meetings with international students. I don't remember fully, but I think that was kind of my first connection with more social environment because we had a welcoming session for all international students, and I think in that time they introduced some programs that was very good for first semester students. And that's how I signed up. And eventually they matched me with another student, and it helped me throughout the entire semester with goals and setting. There were these smart goals with which I take this until nowadays I always think sustainable and those things. And it was very helpful to have someone to, sometimes I would ask about scholarships, so that's how I got to know about the National of Leadership Success and Phi Theta Kappa because my mentor was part of those and I was like, oh, how can I do that? And what else?

Rose also agreed and discussed the many programs that were available to students to help with tuition and textbook assistance. Rose notes that “those things really help students, especially when you're not financially able to adequately meet those needs and those

demands that college put on you. So that was very helpful. I remember when Covid hit my computer started acting up and XYZCC provided me with a Chromebook so that I could at no cost so that I could continue my studies because we bridged to online study and that was very, very helpful.”

Mario continues to underscore the profound impact that outside-of-the-classroom experiences and community involvement can have on a student's journey to success. He highlights the potential benefits of such comprehensive support, including improved graduation and retention rates, highlighting the importance of a kind and supportive staff who actively engage with students along their educational path. Furthermore, Mario emphasizes the correlation between involvement in student life and academic achievement, advocating for increased opportunities for students to participate in extracurricular activities. In the following discussion, he delved into the transformative potential of outside-of-the-classroom experiences and community engagement in fostering academic success and holistic student development.

And I think if we could get all students who are coming into the school into one of these programs, then that would be great. Would've improved our graduation rates and the retention rates would've been improved if everybody could have that kind of supportive staff following them along the journey, I think would've been more and more meaningful. I would also say all the students I know from XYZCC, and they have all gone on to do good things. They were also involved in student life. And I think if there's a way for students to get more involved in student life, then it would help them academically and it would also help them to meet the academic milestones.

Theme 3: Career Readiness

The FGCS reflected on the robust support in career readiness and preparedness they received. This included an assortment of opportunities to develop personal and professional skills both inside and outside the classroom. This was clear through tailored programs and resources provided by XYZCC to provide students with the necessary tools for future career success and challenges. Career Readiness can be presented into two sub-themes, Professional Skill Development and Career Connections. Inside and outside of the classroom, faculty and staff members integrated career-related content into their curriculum and programming. This provided practical insights and experiences related to various fields. The college, many times in collaboration with the career development department, also offered workshops, seminars, and networking events facilitated by career professionals, fostering connections, and exposing students to the current world of work. Internships, cooperative education experiences, and volunteer opportunities also contributed greatly to the students' skill development by offering experiential learning experiences. Through these and other tailored initiatives, the FGCS felt that the college ensured that the first-generation college students, are well-equipped to thrive and be successful in their chosen career paths.

Subtheme 1: Professional Skill Development

The participants also emphasized the profound impact of professional skill development during their journey at XYZCC. Carla noted how her coursework, which emphasized practical applications such as Excel proficiency and targeted activities geared towards real-world scenarios. She feels that her major and her participation in a year-long apprenticeship at JP Morgan Chase, which was facilitated by a pipeline program for

community college students at XYZCC, provided real-world exposure and allowed her to apply knowledge learned in the classroom. She notes how this allowed her to be prepared for the demands of the future workforce, as well as an opportunity to connect with valuable networks and opportunities. She attributes much of her success to this combination of theoretical learning and practical experiences.

So I think those kind of partnership where you can have, while you're still in school, you have an exposure to real world experiences, it develops you into ways, it helps to bring the theory into practice for you and it gives you the actual experience and it also helps with your connecting to a network of people that you wouldn't have had if you were just in the classroom. So, for me, the theory was there, but I think what really was instrumental was those drop training, the resume training, someone to look over for my resume and the fact that I was exposed to opportunities for apprenticeship program really, I think was really beneficial for me.

Doug also agrees with the impact of the outside of the classroom experiences, including internships and experiential learning opportunities. He explains that those experiences helped him develop not just academically, but also as a professional. "I was connected with all the programs that I was part of, mentioning previous interviews as well, like Moody Corporation and Goldman Sachs, Microsoft, and that all led me to apply to a bunch of companies. And then I think last summer I interned with Lyft, which is technology, I mean technology company. It provides car services to other people same as Uber. So that was really good experience and I practically use all the skills that I developed at XYZCC and all the activities that I was part of in that internship. So

definitely XYZCC played a huge role in getting me equipped with all the skills that I needed to have to be driving in a work environment.” He goes on to describe the skills he was able to develop through his time at the college as fundamental.

The communication skills and teamwork skills, leadership skills, these three skills I think I use on a day-to-day basis, even in professional environment or in academic environment because I guess these skills are always evolving and I think I've way far to go ahead. Basically, I'm at 10% of what I need to achieve. So, I think all the skills that I already had from XYZCC and right now after coming to Columbia as well, I'm practically using and developing myself as well. So I mean the main three is that I would say is communication, teamwork, and leadership because as I mentioned in Goldman Sachs or all the programs that I was part of, the ability to communicate to a layman or a person who doesn't understand the work you do and explain it really well, I think that matters a lot in the new kind of workplace environment you are in.

Manny also shares that the college helped him to develop key employability skills, and an understanding of the workplace of the 21st century. He states “they gave me with the right skill sets and experiences that allow me to learn a job. And these was mainly through a couple of opportunities that XYZCC provided.” He notes that it allowed him “to improve my communication skills by communicating with people from diverse cultures and getting to understand them and have to clearly communicate with them in a way that it helped both ways. And this is specifically important because when you are landing a job, the first thing you do is an interview. You get to sit down with the person and answer their questions and they would definitely observe the way that you

communicate. That was important. Open-mindedness. Again, this goes with the communication as well as communicating with multicultural people.” Lastly, he discusses how his experiences at XYZCC also allowed him to develop an understanding of equity and inclusion and how to best work with a diverse population.

Manny noted that “most of the programs at XYZCC and XYZCC itself has a diverse population in terms of race, culture, ethnicity, and that helped most of the companies in the world right now, especially in the United States, they care about that, and they tend to hire more diverse people, diverse culture, ethnically diverse, race, diverse people, and also leadership.”

He goes on to highlight the significance of hands-on programs and close connections with professors in facilitating career readiness for students at XYZCC. Specifically, the collaborative program, which provided a practical platform for students to tackle real-world challenges alongside industry mentors, offering valuable insights into post-graduation expectations. Additionally, within XYZCC's computer science department, small classroom settings fostered intimate connections between students and professors, enabling opportunities for research projects and leadership roles such as tutoring and Supplemental Instructor leadership. These experiences not only enriched academic learning but also cultivated valuable skills and networks crucial for career advancement in the computer science field.

These are valuable because as I was applying jobs on my resumes, I would list this, I would say, hey, one of the programs I was part of was the college collaborative program and it would be work experience. Work experience would be peer mentoring. I would mention leader for c plus programming language. And

that was a huge thing for most of the companies who are looking for a software engineer because they know that if you're able to teach people coding, that must mean that you would be able to fit into working environments and you would be easy to teach as well because not everything that you learn at college is going to be applicable to your job. And as a matter of fact, right now I'm using a really old programming language that not many, I'm pretty sure none of the colleges out there teach and yet the company knew that I would learn just because I have gone through this at my school

Fiona writes that because of the various programs and workshops at XYZCC, "I felt like I was more prepared to write a cover letter or prepare a resume or have a pitch about what I do. And I felt prepared for those things because of the workshops at XYZCC." However, she also mentioned that more could have been done to support students in exploring various career paths, especially for those in the liberal arts. Fiona states that.

I didn't feel like they had the much, how do I say, didn't give much attention maybe to the art field, which was my major. And I always felt there that was more like a, and I had to come down to try to learn to eventually graduate but on my own. So, I feel like there was a lot of things that I had to do take action on. It was not just, oh, I have a panel with these people who went to work in arts. It was not like that. It was more about criminal justice or the medical field and health measures or STEM majors.

Manny is grateful for his experience, especially with his mentor, but also

addresses this. “I always had a mentor in the program that I could always reach out to if I had any questions. And again, that itself was a huge support for me as a first-generation college student, learning my ways around as of what they could do specifically for my major. They could have done more specific programs that are tailored to computer science field as well as a mentor who has a similar interest or have background in the computer science field. And I think these two would have been maybe not the mentor, but honestly, I really, really enjoyed having conversation with my mentor. I learned a lot from him. He was always providing books for me to read, and I have never had that in my family. I might have, many people don't usually read books in my family. Most of my family, they don't really read books. So having someone like JG who would give me book ideas was beneficial. So maybe not the mentor, but that could have been more people for computer science background who have computer science background available to me so that I could always reach out.”

The content analysis of resumes and the XYZCC co-curricular transcript provided valuable insights into the career readiness and professional skill development of the participants. It became evident that the multitude of experiences and programs offered by XYZCC contributed significantly to students' exposure to and development in various competency areas. These experiences encompassed a wide range of activities, including participation in career development workshops, engagement in clubs and organizations, pursuit of professional certifications relevant to their major or career path, volunteer work, internships, involvement in case study projects, and apprenticeships. Each of these opportunities afforded the chance to cultivate and refine essential competencies such as self-awareness, leadership, communication, assessment, evaluation and research, social

and civic responsibility, collaboration, diversity and inclusiveness, technology proficiency, responsibility, project management, conflict management, critical thinking, problem-solving, career management, and professionalism. The participants agreed that by engaging in these diverse experiences, students were not only equipped with practical skills but were also nurtured in the holistic development necessary for success in both their academic pursuits and future careers.

Subtheme 2: Career Connections

The research participants also highlighted the importance of post-college support for FGCS. Many confirmed they lacked the guidance and confidence to successfully navigate the challenges of post-graduation life and to transition to the professional world of work. Many stated that they did not have the previous experiences or the familial networks that their peers did. They emphasized the significance for key support services played in helping them to bridge the gap between college and employment. The support they received at XYZCC and through the Partner program, provided help in securing job opportunities, enhancing professional skills, and navigating the job market. The guest speakers, who were oftentimes career and industry professionals, provided them with guidance, real-world perspectives, and experiences needed for career decision-making. Moreover, the participants also highlighted the value that ongoing mentorship and access to resources beyond graduation would have on FGCS to help ensure a successful transition to the challenges of life after college and establishing them for long-term success. The alumni stated that, very similar to the supportive community and tailored assistance they received, post-college support could empower first-generation graduates to navigate their professional journeys.

Doug notes that “it has been more helpful for students to get access to the center for development. And also having guest speakers. They did have speakers from previous semesters, but they were just kind of students, so they didn't know what career path they were going to choose, but they were not the industry professionals. So, I guess bringing in guest speakers from the career path that we wanted to choose.”

The study participants also discussed the need for programs at XYZCC to connect students and professionals in their desired fields of interest, especially for those who lack personal networks in their chosen industry areas. Mario suggests organizing excursions to various workplaces to provide firsthand insight into different career paths, citing their own experience of not knowing any lawyers until encountering one during an internship. While many sessions focused on personal development, he feels that more emphasis on career preparation would have been beneficial, as securing employment is a primary goal for many students. He acknowledges that he was able to gain some career-related experiences through other campus organizations and offices, such as career services and participating in activities. Overall, he recognizes the value of the programs but suggest enhancements to better prepare students for the workforce.

I think it'd be great if I could be paired with a professional outside the school that is in the area that I was interested in welcoming to XYZCC. I thought of going to law school, but while at XYZCC. I didn't know any lawyers at all, and it took me a time before I, I actually met my first lawyer through one of my internships that I did. So, I think pairing students with people in their professions, preferably people who are just like them, first generation students, students of color, I think that would be great. I think also if we could have done excursions to different places

to see, okay, I want to be, I don't know. I want to work in a political office. What does that look like? I want to work in a tech company. What does that look like? I think that would've been helpful because personally, I did not know any lawyers, and neither did I know what a law firm actually looks like. I've never shadowed someone in a law firm or anything.

The themes identified in this study served as the main discoveries. Following their initial categorization into themes, I further examined the interview transcripts and reflections to refine the definitions of the codes, particularly in relation to the direct quotations provided by the participants. This process is illustrated in Table 3 below.

Table 7

Final Themes

Initial Thematic Category Theme	Definition of Code	Final
The importance of community and career development	XYZCC and program advisors helped first-generation college student determine passion and goals, leading to a business major and leadership aspirations. Panther partner program helped student network with Career Center staff and land job opportunity. XYZCC provided support in resources and opportunities in choosing and once they chose their major. Student credits their mother and an elective course for their decision to pursue communications,	The importance of the College Experience and Exploration

<p>Mentorship and Resources</p>	<p>Participant credits coach with helping them explore career options and gain valuable insights through conversations and workshops.</p> <p>First-generation student gained confidence in career development through mentorship and financial support.</p> <p>Student highlights the importance of resources such as counseling and financial support for students.</p> <p>Mentee appreciated having a dedicated mentor for academic and personal support.</p> <p>Participant discussed their future career aspirations with mentor.</p> <p>Student highlights the importance of workshops and sessions provided by the university, including one-on-one sessions, group workshops, and relaxation sessions, which helped alleviate stress and provide support during their nursing program.</p> <p>The college provided helpful perks, such as free MetroCard, which alleviated financial stress and allowed students to focus better on their studies.</p> <p>Student believes the program provided necessary tools for career success.</p>	<p>The value of Mentorship and Access to Resources</p>
<p>Experience & Skill Development</p>	<p>Student took advantage of many opportunities,</p>	<p>Career Readiness</p>

	<p>including one to become an apprentice at JP Morgan Chase in prime records. The company partnerships provided exposure to real world experiences and helped to bring the theory from the classroom into practice. Student utilized skills developed at XYZCC and through internships in future work. Student believes XYXCC provided the right skill sets and experiences to be able to continue learning. XYZCC helped improve communication skills through interactions with people from diverse cultures and getting to understand them.</p>	
--	---	--

Summary

In conclusion, this chapter delved into the perceptions of first-generation college student (FGCS) alumni regarding resources aimed at facilitating their understanding of academic major and career options at a community college, as well as the role played by their institution in obtaining professional skills and workforce placement. Through data collection and analysis guided by two research questions, it became evident that FGCS alumni identified three overarching themes: the significance of the college experience and exploration, the value of mentorship and access to resources, and the importance of career readiness. Within these themes, sub-themes such as a supportive environment, career development, mentoring, holistic support, professional skill development, and career connections emerged, shedding light on the multifaceted factors influencing FGCS

alumni's perceptions and experiences. The pre-study questionnaire provided essential background information, laying the groundwork for insightful interviews that yielded rich data. Moving forward, these findings will serve as valuable insights for enhancing support mechanisms and programming aimed at better serving FGCS within community college settings. The findings have identified viable outcomes as well as recommendations for future practice and research which will be discussed in chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This dissertation presented a retrospective, narrative study of community college alumni who identify as first-generation college students. The study explored the selection of an academic major and career decision making process and career readiness of the FGCS. The analysis of the data collected from interviews, resumes, and co-curricular transcripts revealed three key themes. First, the importance of the College Experience and Exploration; second, the value of Mentorship and Access to Resources; and third, (c) Career Readiness. This chapter will discuss the major findings of the data, with regard to each research question along with the discussion of the findings in the context of existing literature reviewed in chapter 2. This chapter closes with recommendations for future practice and research.

Summary of Study

The objective of this retrospective narrative study is to delve into the perceptions of first-generation college students (FGCS) who have graduated from a community college in New York City regarding their career goals and preparedness for the workforce. Understanding the experiences, post-graduate transitions and outcomes of FGCS is crucial for higher education professionals, namely for career services professionals and administrators, as research suggests that traditional career-related services may not fully meet the needs of this demographic (Hirudayaraj and McLean, 2018). NACE (2023) posits that FGCS approach career decision-making differently due to distinct goals and constraints compared to those with college-educated parents. Many FGCS view attaining a college degree as a significant accomplishment, not just for themselves, but also for their families because of the familial expectations (Gibbons &

Woodside, 2014). Many often times experience a number of challenges, including familial responsibility, lack of support, lack of understanding in relation to college majors and career paths, and financial instability, which can impact their academic major and career decision-making. Not all FGCS may share these experiences, higher education institutions can tailor support and resources to aid FGCS in their academic major and career decision making, in developing key career readiness skills and experiences, and in successfully transitioning to a career. Higher Education Career Development offices can play a fundamental role in offering comprehensive programs and events to equip students with key employability skills and resources. These initiatives include but are not limited to establishing partnerships with employers, developing mentoring programs with alumni, faculty, staff, or industry professionals, and facilitating training sessions for faculty and staff, institution wide. The objective of this research is to offer valuable insights into the tools and resources required to assist FGCS in navigating academic major exploration, career decision-making, and achieving career readiness. This endeavor aligns with NACE's definition of career readiness and identifies critical skill areas essential for professional success.

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

To examine the factors influencing FGCS career decision-making and career readiness this narrative inquiry study focused on the experiences of community college alumni who self-identify as first-generation college students (FGCS) as they navigated their academic journeys at XYZCC. The qualitative data was gathered during the fall 2023/ winter 2024 semesters through several rounds of semi-structured individual

interviews and document reviews, including analysis of resumes and co-curricular transcripts.

The study employed Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) as a theoretical framework to examine the similarities and determinants of success among first-generation college students (FGCS) who have graduated from a community college in NYC. SCCT, developed by Robert W. Lent, Steven D. Brown, and Gail Hackett (1994), aims to explain three dimensions of career development: the development of academic and career interests, the process of making academic and career decisions, and the methods by which academic and career success are achieved. Rooted in Albert Bandura's broader social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986), SCCT theorizes that individuals possess agency to make choices and attain goals through the interplay of self and social influences, alongside achievement outcomes and self-influences. The SCCT model suggests that interests are cultivated through self-efficacy and outcome expectations, with career self-efficacy focusing on individuals' beliefs in their ability to navigate career decision-making processes (Betz & Luzzo, 1996).

Within the SCCT framework, the primary variables influencing academic and career development include self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and goals (Lent et al., 2000). Research indicates that due to a lack of preparedness, some first-generation students may feel overwhelmed by the myriad of academic major options in higher education, leading them to narrow their choices based on limited information or advice, or even question the suitability of college for achieving their goals (Cuseo, 2005). This uncertainty can lead to frustration and doubts about academic major decisions, potentially resulting in increased dropout rates among first-generation students (Allen & Robbins,

2008). By exploring the influences and processes underlying FGCS career decision-making and preparedness for post-college employment, SCCT provides a lens through which to account for students' diverse backgrounds and academic trajectories. These experiences can contribute to the development of essential personal and professional skills, social skills, self-worth, knowledge, reasoning, creativity, and enhanced self-confidence – all integral aspects of student development. Thus, SCCT offers a valuable framework for understanding the interplay between individuals, their career-related experiences, and their career decision-making processes.

Summary of Major Findings

Three themes were extracted as the major findings: (a) the importance of the College Experience and Exploration; (b) the value of Mentorship and Access to Resources; and (c) Career Readiness.

Implications of Findings

The results of this study offer insights directly from alumni of XYZCC that identify as FGCS. The analysis of the data revealed three themes in accordance with the research questions. The study's findings hold theoretical implications discussed below.

Research question one looked to understand how FGCS understand the role their community college played in helping them obtain professional skills and a position in the workforce. In analyzing the data, two main themes emerged through the interviews. The first theme to emerge, the importance of the College Experience and Exploration, directly aligns with the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) framework. Lent (2013) explains how various external factors including social capital resources or deficits can shape

career development. SCCT emphasizes the importance of social factors to shaping career development.

For the study participants, the XYZCC college experience was pivotal. They noted that the experiences at XYZCC allowed them to develop and expand their social networks. It also provided an environment to build meaningful relationships with peers, faculty, staff, and administrators, many who would also become mentors and role models. The interactions with the community, as well as the opportunities for engagement inside and beyond the classroom, allowed the FGCS to gain valuable insight and guidance regarding academic major and career exploration and decision making. The individuals explained that the XYZCC environment provided the support and resources to be successful. It fostered the self-assurance and feelings of inclusion needed to explore, try out, and ultimately make well-informed choices about their academic and career paths.

SCCT highlights the role of self-efficacy beliefs and outcomes expectations, which focuses on the individual's confidence in their ability to perform specific tasks and to be successful. For the participants, the college experience and the community provided the opportunities for academic and non-academic achievement, personal and professional skill development, and exploration, which impacted self- efficacy and future career expectations. SCCT focuses on the importance of goal setting and planning, which are crucial aspects of career development. XYZCC provided a structured environment to learn and clarify career goals, identify potential career paths, and develop a strategic plan to achieve goals. Specialized cohort programs, such as the Partner program, provided the students with an early opportunity to engage with different departments at the college to help students become more aware of the range of resources and services available to

support personal, academic, and professional goals. The programs also provided students with access to resources in which they received personalized support tailored to their needs, and opportunities for academic and professional skill development or upskilling. Involvement in these programs provided the participants with opportunities to network and develop strong relationships, which included connecting with peers, administrators, faculty members, staff, and alumni to support setting and achieving realistic goals navigating career options and overcoming challenges.

SCCT can explain the importance of College Experience and Exploration. Through the lens of social influences, outcome expectations, self-efficacy beliefs, and goal-setting processes, SCCT helps to answer the question of how FGCS understand the role their community college played in helping them obtain professional skills and a position in the workforce, along with what resources were available and what were the perceptions of the resources available to help students better understand and explore academic major and career options.

The second theme, the Value of Mentorship and Access to Resources, is also related to SCCT. SCCT highlights the interconnectedness of mentorship, access to resources, and academic major and career exploration and development. The opportunity to develop and expand one's network and acquire mentorship proved to be a difference maker for the participants. The mentorship provided the students with academic, personal, professional, and emotional support throughout their academic journey. The guidance, encouragement, advice, and feedback they received from mentors provided clarity and confidence to pursue academic major and career goals. The participants expressed that mentors offer comprehensive assistance and acted as bridges, enabling

access to valuable connections and resources that might otherwise be out of reach. They also emphasized the significance of workshops and individual meetings with their mentors played a crucial role in reducing stress and offering support throughout their nursing program. Additionally, many noted the beneficial offerings provided by the college, including the MetroCard for transportation fare payment, helped tremendously. As many FGCS come from low-income backgrounds, making college affordable continues to be a significant challenge. Thus, the financial incentives helped alleviate the financial burden. Additionally, the access to other resources that XYZCC provided, including personal and professional development workshops, community and professional networks, early exposure to career development, academic support, and co-curricular experiences provided the students with the chances to develop skills that translated to their future careers.

The third theme, Career Readiness, emerged in accordance with research question two, what resources were available for alumni, who identify as FGCS, and what were the perceptions of the resources to help first-generation college students better understand and explore academic major and career options at a community college? The participants identified career readiness, highlighting professional skill development and career connections as critical aspects of their growth as students and professionals. The alumni noted that developing employability skills enhanced their employability, competitiveness, and confidence in the job market, increasing their chances successfully transitioning into a professional occupation and advancing in their careers. The students noted that their participation in targeted programs, personal and professional development workshops, experiential learning experiences, and career-related activities, allowed them to gain

practical experience and enhance their professional skills, increasing their ability and readiness for the workforce.

Relationship to Prior Research

In this section the connection between each theme and its contribution to previous literature, as well as the emphasis on this research's alignment or lack of alignment with previous findings, will be discussed.

The Importance of the College Experience and Exploration

The first theme to emerge from the findings is the importance of the College Experience and Exploration. This aligns with and extends previous literature examining the role of community and a supportive environment for FGCS. Studies by Garriott et al. (2013) and Parks-Yancy (2012) both highlighted the need to foster a sense of belonging for FGCS. Both discuss various programs designed to support students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The right environment can have a range of positive impacts in dismantling barriers for FGCS. The participants discussed the lack of a network, guidance, and resources that many of their peers had. This could continue to be a great barrier to belonging, as well as decision-making. Consequently, students emphasized the importance of an environment that promotes a sense of belonging in shaping career decisions (Amundson et al., 2010). Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) also makes the connection between an individuals' career choices and their interactions with different social factors, including community. The social support, mentoring, access to resources, opportunities to network and meet people outside of their circle of family and friends all play a key role in shaping individuals' career development experiences and outcomes.

The findings of the present study are also consistent with prior research that has found that first generation students tended to “experience a greater sense of certainty following a defined field of study” (Stebbleton et al., 2018). Having the opportunity to explore is another critical factor in the FGGS college experience, as many FGCS see college as an opportunity to engage in an ongoing process of self/career exploration. Colleges and universities are looked to provide the environment for students to learn more about themselves, their academic/professional interests, and their goals for life after college. In an article for NACE, Maietta (2016) characterized FGCS as the "hidden minority" due to the distinctive challenges they often face. The author notes that FGCS may form unrealistic career aspirations or set career goals without fully understanding the implications of their choices. These unrealistic expectations or lack of insight into career outcomes may stem from various factors, such as limited understanding of available academic majors and career paths, minimal involvement in events or extracurricular activities, insufficient social networks, and financial or familial responsibilities.

Value of Mentorship and Access to Resources

Another key factor identified by the present study, is the Value of Mentorship and Access to Resources, which aligns with prior research. Prior studies have noted that regular meetings with advisors or faculty during one-to-one sessions help students understand more about different career paths (Land & Ziomek-Daigle, 2013; Parks-Yancy, 2010; Prescod et al., 2019). Therefore, providing the opportunity to connect with college faculty, staff, and advisors, especially those who understand the FGCS experience, can affect a student’s career aspirations as these relationships can become social capital resources (Parks-Yancy, 2012). The participants in the current study

describe the value of the mentor relationships as important to communicate academic major and career goals and receive guidance. Many noted that they would not have been able to receive this guidance from family members, who lacked knowledge of the academic system. As NACE (2023) notes, FGCS usually have less or no people in their network to help navigate the college journey, including career readiness and development. Tate et al. (2015) highlighted the significance of both internal and external factors, including family dynamics, socioeconomic status, parental support, and prior knowledge, in shaping the experiences of first-generation college students (FGCS). These influences affect FGCS' career decision-making processes, encompassing their recommendations, concerns, and external pressures regarding their chosen career paths. Additionally, Gibbons and Woodside (2014) observed that while many FGCS celebrate the milestone of graduating from college, they often face disappointment when their degrees fail to translate into the anticipated financial success for themselves and their families. Thus, intentionality of the programs for FGCS is key. Land and Ziomek-Daigle (2013) researched a select group of college counselors looking to enhance college achievement among first-generation college students and found that the biggest difference was in providing intentional support to address challenges.

This research in the study is consistent with the experiences of the FGCS in previous studies, who have attributed the ability to pursue academic and career goals with the support of social networks, which included family, friends, as well as college faculty and staff. Prior research has found that FGCS who are connected to career services staff and faculty outside of the classroom are considerably more exposed to knowledge and

information about different career paths, in part due to the opportunity to increase their social capital (Parks-Yancy, 2012).

Career Readiness

The findings of this study were also consistent with previous research centered on the value of Career Readiness. In previous studies, FGCS have noted how “compared to their non-first-generation peers, they lack the support of preparatory programs participated in before and during college, and they lack a professional group or network to support and influence decision making” (Tate et al., 2015). Thus, this study reinforced that FGCS require support, resources, and experiences to explore educational pathways and academic majors, as well as advance their career readiness.

Bates et al. (2017) remarked that employability is becoming more of an emphasis for many colleges. Thus, Career Services has been identified to support students in providing various internal and external professional and skill development opportunities through co-curricular programs, jobs, internships, experiential learning, and mentorship experiences (Bates et al., 2017, Garriott et al., 2013; Parks-Yancy, 2012; Prescod et al., 2019). According to Bates et al. (2017), students who participated in a combination of a "career and professional development course" alongside a work-integrated learning course demonstrated double the engagement in industry-relevant employment or further study four months post-graduation. Hirudayaraj and McLean (2018) found that a FGCS status affected their current experiences and beyond college. In the study, participants contemplated how their educational institutions could have better supported their transition and were prompted to pinpoint shortcomings within the system. Thus, the current study reinforces the need for career and skill development for FGCS to be

competitive in the 21st century job market, but also underscores the importance of deliberate career services and resources in higher education. The participants clearly identified the need for colleges and universities to aid FGCS in cultivating essential professional skills and enhancing their competitiveness and marketability, while in school for the future job market.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations to the study included the number of participants who were interviewed, the experiences of FGCS not involved in the Partners Program at XYZCC to capture the experience of a first-generation college student outside of a cohort program, as well as personal biases as a first-generation college student and college administrator who works with the FGCS population. The small sample size could limit the external validity of the findings. Though, when informed of the size and the setting of the interview participants being studied, a reasonable hypothesis can be made as to the extent of how the findings can be applied more broadly. Additionally, the sample chosen for this study was purposeful as all participants were alumni who identify as first-generation college students and have completed the XYZCC Partner program.

A few of the participants identified how social emotional factors impacted their academic and professional journeys at XYZCC. There were a number of participants who mentioned external stress factors having a role in their experience. They were happy that XYZCC provided not just a focus on academic and professional support, but also addressed personal, social, and emotional needs. The participants also mentioned that they wish the college and the programs that they were involved in played much more of a role and support them with their mental health. In understanding that first generation

college students often face challenges that are quite unique related to their social and emotional well-being is important to develop the right support to ensure their success.

The experiences of FGCS not involved in cohort programs such as the XYZCC Partner Program may be different compared to those who are in such programs and could impact the student's feelings of being connected to the campus community and building a sense of belonging within the students. The Partner program provided FGCS with a sense of community. The support received through the Partner program allowed for the participants to have early exposure and access to various resources, a structured mentorship program, and intentional programming and experiences to help students develop the essential skills and network. The variations in experience between FGCS involved in cohort programs and those who are not, highlight the importance of providing comprehensive support services for all FGCS.

Lastly, my own identity as a first-generation college student, who became the first in my family to graduate from college with a bachelor's and master's degree here in the United States, as well as my position as a previous professional staff member at XYZCC could allow for potential biases in my interpretations of the study participants' responses. In addition, my current role as a university administrator, I work often with FGCS and am involved in creating the opportunities for academic major and career exploration, as well as the personal and professional skill development of FGCS, could also allow for potential additional bias.

Recommendations for Policy and Practice

All of the alumni shared that the XYZCC experience was important to them because it acknowledged and validated their experience as FGCS. Further understanding

of the potential social emotional challenges, which includes imposter syndrome, fear of failure, and mental health could help provide targeted interventions and support services to address the FGCS specific needs, as well as help foster a sense of belonging, resilience, and self-efficacy. Students who have anxiety or self-doubt during the exploration and decision-making process of academic and career can hinder their ability to make an informed decision based on their best interests, values, and goals. The stress anxiety and feelings of isolation could also undermine the student's ability to show up, to focus, to retain information, to develop key interpersonal personal and professional skills, as well as perform academically. “First-generation students are breaking cycles of poverty, breaking cycles of lack of educational attainment—breaking cycles and creating legacies. There’s so much pressure around that” (Inside Higher Ed, 2022). This could also impact professional success as it can limit the student’s ability to develop the confidence, resilience, and key skills necessary to navigate the job market, network effectively, and advance professionally.

Another recommendation for future practice would include providing more opportunities for students to build community with each other. Opportunities to develop relationships with their peers was identified by many participants as one of the initial and lasting benefits of being involved in targeted FGCS programs, such as the Partner program. The peer-to-peer relationships can create additional paths for improving the FGCS transition to higher education and impact academic major and career exploration and decision making. This can also create another opportunity for the expansion of their networks and connect to higher education resources. It will also provide current FGCS with another experiential learning and professional skill building opportunity.

Furthermore, the expansion of the support and services for FGCS and providing FGCS with embedded touchpoints with resources and information throughout their collegiate journey would impact a greater majority of students. By integrating resources and information directly into the collegiate journey of FGCS, colleges can create a more accessible environment for all students. This could be of great benefit to many students who may face similar challenges and could benefit from additional support. In addition, implementing such embedded touchpoints would signal a cultural shift within the institution towards inclusivity and support for all students. This shift in mindset can create a more supportive and nurturing campus environment for everyone, fostering a sense of belonging and community, where students feel supported and equipped to succeed. Increased support for FGCS could impact overall academic outcomes and lead to higher retention and graduation rates for this student population. The strategies and resources developed to support FGCS may also benefit other students, further contributing to improved retention and graduation rates across the board.

Recommendations for Future Research

The findings of this research suggest that there are opportunities to further the research. One recommendation is to conduct efficacy studies on the support programs and resources that FGCS connect with, to identify which ones are most helpful and useful for this specific population. Conducting qualitative and quantitative assessments, including pre and posttests for different aspects of the programs would assess each programs effectiveness and value for this specific group. Due to the structures of different programs and funding, flexibility may not always be possible to tailor programs to the needs of specific populations at all times. However, the data collected can inform

institutions and provide the evidence to incorporate the necessary changes into a strategic plan and invest into creating a formal plan for this growing student population. Another recommendation would be to study which types of marketing would be best to utilize in reaching out to the FGCS to help connect them to college resources and programs.

Community outreach and pre-college connections may provide the opportunity for FGCS to learn about the support and resources available to them in higher education.

Additionally, peer-to-peer marketing, tailored messages, and digital marketing may be useful in meeting FGCS where they are, based on their distinctive needs, challenges, and goals.

Conclusion

After multiple rounds of interviews and listening to the stories of the alumni of the XYZCC Partner program, transcribing all interviews and completing a document analysis of the students resumes and their XYZCC co-curricular transcript, several conclusions were identified. (a) the environment is critical in helping FGCS become ingrained in the community, feel a sense of belonging and develop confidence to explore and decision-making around academic majors and careers; (b) the value of having a guide and essential resources throughout the college experience; (c) the developing critical personal and professional skills can translate to academic and professional success.

Based on the findings, I recommend that higher education administrators look to build an environment that includes supportive resources for students that fosters their ability to explore, learn, develop confidence, progress, grow, and acquire key skills for future success. The need identified for early engagement with career development and exploration directly impacts academic major and career decision making and overall

success. Creating opportunities for involvement inside and outside of the classroom through programs and experiences would allow the FGCS student population to gain key personal, academic, and professional skills, as well as knowledge, and experiences that empower the students to pursue paths that align with their interests, strengths, and goals. Access to support services and resources, including financial resources, academic advising, career counseling, mentorship programs, and peer support networks allows students to overcome challenges, thrive, and reach their full potential personally, academically, and professionally.

Conclusively, colleges have significant influence over FGCS' lives and play a pivotal role in actively building and contributing to the development of effective educational settings that empower FGCS to make informed choices and set goals for themselves. In the present study, several factors have been identified to support the need to scale up FGCS support programs, ensuring that all students have access to essential resources, experiences, as well as knowledge, concepts, and skills for current and future success. Many FGCS lack the networks, resources, and knowledge when entering college, leading to disparities in student achievement. Recognizing that students come from diverse backgrounds, colleges and universities must prepare for students' diverse backgrounds and create a welcoming, stimulating and school environment. One which nurtures a sense of belonging, confidence, exploration, and holistic development where all students feel confident to explore and achieve academic and professional success.

APPENDIX A RECRUITMENT LETTER



THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

St. John's University
Jamaica, New York 11439
The School of Education

Dear,

You are being invited to participate in a research study to investigate how and why first-generation college students (FGCS) come to make a college academic major and career choice and perceive their preparedness for the world of work. This study will help higher education faculty, staff, and administrators, as well as researchers and career development professionals better understand the necessary tools and resources needed to support first generation college students throughout the career readiness and career decision-making process.

I will be conducting this study as part of my doctoral dissertation for St. John's University, Department of Administration, and Instructional Leadership. The research study will consist of three semi-structured virtual interviews and an analysis of supporting documents, such as the XYZ college co-curricular transcript and professional resume.

Participation in this study is voluntary and at any point during the study you have the right to end your participation.

All responses and feedback will be confidential throughout the entire research study. This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board of St. John's University.

If interested in participating in the study, please email me at Thierry.thesatus18@my.stjohns.edu. If you agree to participate in the study, you will be asked complete a brief questionnaire (attached).

Thank you for your time and consideration. If you have any questions or concerns, please email me at Thierry.thesatus18@my.stjohns.edu. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at (646) 789-1628 or may contact my faculty advisor Dr. Anthony Annunziato at annunzia@stjohns.edu or call 718-990-2585.

Respectfully,
Thierry Thesatus

APPENDIX B LETTER OF CONSENT



THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

St. John's University
Jamaica, New York 11439
The School of Education

April 22, 2023

Researcher: Thierry Thesatus, St. John's University Doctoral Candidate

Dear Participant,

You are being invited to participate in a research study to investigate how and why first-generation college students (FGCS) come to make a college academic major and career choice and perceive their preparedness for the world of work. This study will help higher education faculty, staff, and administrators, as well as researchers and career development professionals better understand the necessary tools and resources needed to support first generation college students throughout the career readiness and career decision-making process.

Procedure

This research will require about 2-4 hours of your time. During this time, you will be interviewed virtually using Zoom or Webex about your experience in choosing a career path and why.

Risks

There are no anticipated risks or discomforts related to this research.

Confidentiality

Several steps will be taken to protect your anonymity and identity. While the interviews will be recorded and destroyed once transcribed, the transcriptions will NOT contain any mention of your name, and any identifying information from the interview will be removed. Participants will be informed that they may review video recordings and request that all or any portion of the recordings be destroyed. The collected stored data will be stored securely, with password protection, in Dedoose, computer program and only the main researcher will have access to the interviews. All information will be destroyed after five years.

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. However, you may withdraw from the study at any time for any reason. If you do this, all information from you will be destroyed.

If you require any information about this study, or would like to speak to the researcher, please email Thierry Thesatus at thierry.thesatus18@stjohns.edu. If you have any other questions regarding your rights as a participant in this research, you may also contact Dr. Anthony Annunziato at annunzia@stjohns.edu.

I have read (or have been read) the above information regarding this research study and consent to participate in this study.

_____ (Printed Name of Participant)
_____ (Signature of Participant)
_____ (Date)

_____ (Printed Name of Researcher)
_____ (Signature of Researcher)
_____ (Date)

APPENDIX C IRB APPROVAL



APPENDIX D STUDENT PRE-STUDY QUESTIONNAIRE

Introduction: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study exploring students' experiences in a developmental education requirement course. The study will provide an understanding of the factors that promote or impede the academic success of students enrolled in a corequisite model.

Instructions:

Please take a few minutes to complete the following information and return with your consent form.

1. Name: _____

2. Gender: _____

3. Race/Ethnicity: _____

4. Do you consider yourself to be a first-generation college student, in which parents or legal guardians did not complete a bachelor's degree, as defined by the National Association of Colleges and Employers, (2019):

5. XYZCC Academic Major: _____

6. Minor (if applicable): _____

7. Current college enrollment status: (Fulltime/part-time) _____ Not in School

8. Current Employment status: (Fulltime/part-time) _____ Unemployed _____

Thank you for taking the time to complete this information. Please submit along with your consent form.

APPENDIX E INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Introduction: Thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview regarding how and why first-generation college students (FGCS) come to make a college major and career choice, as well as perceive their preparedness for the world of work, after college. This study will help higher education faculty, staff, and administrators, as well as researchers and career development professionals better understand the necessary tools and resources needed to support first generation college students throughout the career readiness and career decision-making process. If you decide at any time during the interview that you would no longer like to participate, please let me know.

Overview: During your interview, I will take handwritten notes as well as use an audio recording to accurately capture what takes place. The discussion and transcript from the interview are completely confidential and your name will not be shared in the findings reported. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Purpose Statement:

My specific research question focuses on the why, and how a first-generation college student makes a career choice. This can help provide the necessary tools and environment to support students in all things outside of the classroom and career related, such as individual tutoring programs to support students academically or counseling sessions to discuss career exploration and decision making, experiential learning, internships, as well as work and study abroad opportunities to continue helping students explore.

Central Questions:

- How do alumni, who identify as FGCS, understand the role their community college played in helping them obtain professional skills and a position in the workforce?
- What resources were available for alumni, who identify as FGCS, and what were the perceptions of the resources to help first-generation college students better understand and explore major and career options at a community college?

Interview questions:

1. As a First-Generation College Student (FGCS), what guidance were you provided in selecting your major and defining your future career goals at XYZ Community College?
2. How did you feel supported by the XYZCC Partners program in selecting a major and future career?
3. What steps could the program have taken to support you in your career path?
4. Do you feel that XYZ Community College equipped you, as an FGCS, with the professional skills that helped you land a specific job or propel your career?
5. What could have been done by the XYZCC partner program to help support you in exploring career options that are not currently being done?
6. What do you want the institution to know about this experience?
7. What experiences made a difference for you?
8. How would you make it better for future students?

Closing: Thank you for taking the time to share your experience with me. The thoughts and experiences you shared will be of great value in helping me understand how your experience as an FGCS as it relates to career decision making and professional skill development.

APPENDIX F PROTOCOL FOR INTERVIEW SESSION I

Session	Interview Questions	Related Theoretical Framework
Interview Session I	<p>1. As a First-Generation College Student (FGCS), what guidance were you provided in selecting your major and defining your future career goals at XYZ Community College?</p>	<p>Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) (Lent et al., 1994).</p>

APPENDIX G PROTOCOL FOR INTERVIEW SESSION II

Session	Interview Questions	Related Theoretical Framework
Interview Session II	<p>2. How did you feel supported by the XYZCC Partners program in selecting a major and future career?</p> <p>3. What steps could the XYZCC Partners program have taken to support you in your career path?</p>	<p>Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) (Lent et al., 1994).</p>

APPENDIX H PROTOCOL FOR INTERVIEW SESSION III

Session	Interview Questions	Related Theoretical Framework
Interview Session III	<p>4. Do you feel that XYZ Community College equipped you, as an FGCS, with the professional skills that helped you land a specific job or propel your career?</p> <p>5. What could have been done by the XYZCC Partner program to help support you in exploring career options that are not currently being done?</p> <p>6. What particular experiences at XYZCC or through the XYZCC Partners program made a difference for you in helping you to become more career ready?</p>	Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) (Lent et al., 1994).

	<p>7. What do you want the institution to know about your experience?</p> <p>8. How would you make your college experience, as is pertains to career decision making and professional skill development, better for future students?</p>	
--	--	--

APPENDIX I RESEARCH INVITATION FLYER

This research invitation flyer was sent via email from XYZCC's Partner program Director to the XYZCC program alumni. The flyer was sent along with the recruitment letter and asked students to email Thierry.Thesatus18@my.stjohns.edu, if interested to sign up.

**WE
WANT
YOU** !

RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS NEEDED

I am a doctoral student looking to interview a few students for my study on the intersection of first generation college students and career choices.

QUALIFICATIONS

- FIRST GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENT
- GRADUATED FROM XYZCC PARTNER PROGRAM
- CURRENTLY EMPLOYED OR ENROLLED IN 4-YEAR COLLEGE

FOR QUESTIONS OR TO SIGN UP
Thierry.Thesatus18@my.stjohns.edu

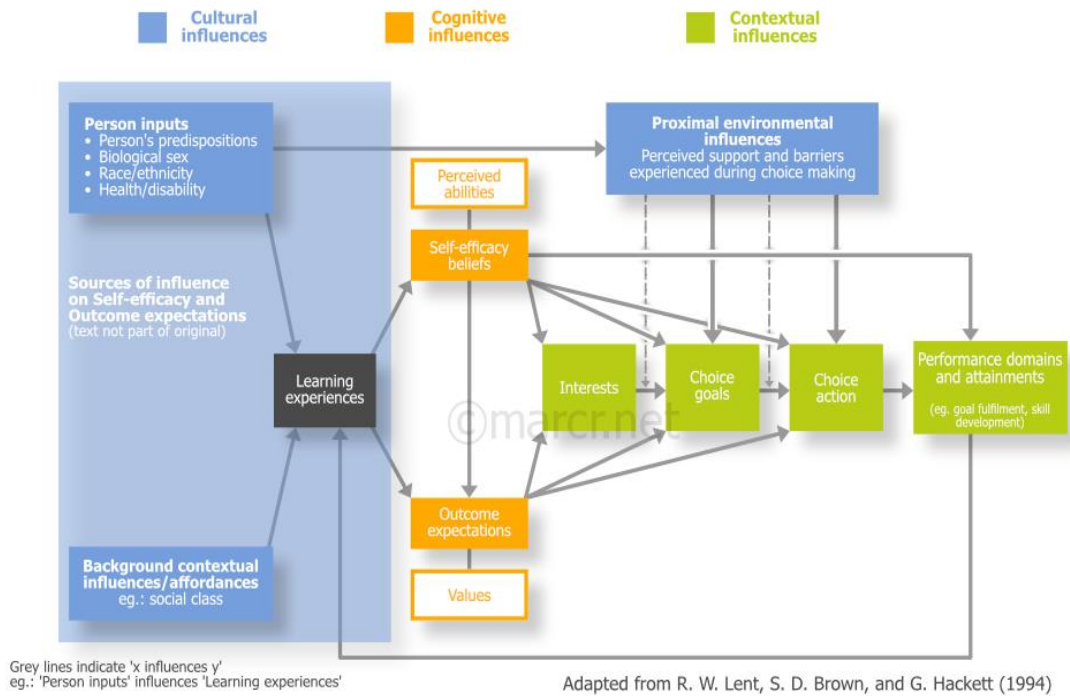
APPENDIX J NACE COMPETENCIES AND BEHAVIORS

<u>NACE Career Competencies</u>	<u>NACE Behaviors</u>
<u>Career & Self Development</u>	Self-awareness Set effective priorities and goals Growth mindset Awareness of one’s strengths and weaknesses Navigating career opportunities
<u>Communication</u>	Listens attentively to others and responds appropriately Use of effective grammar and syntax Ability to adapt communication style to the situation Asking questions when necessary
<u>Critical Thinking</u>	Question assumptions Gather and properly analyze relevant information Manage ambiguity Ability to solve problems Open-mindedness
<u>Equity & Inclusion</u>	Challenge biases within oneself and others Understand diversity in the workplace Respect multiple social identities Promotion of civility Promotes a collaborative workplace
<u>Leadership</u>	Achieve organizational goals through personal and team strengths Takes initiative Provides motivation and encouragement Shapes a positive workplace environment Empowers others
<u>Professionalism</u>	Understand your strengths & skills Understand and demonstrate effective work habits Accepts personal accountability Demonstrates integrity, honesty, dependability, and ethical responsibility

<p><u>Teamwork</u></p>	<p>Focus on solutions Works cooperatively with others Strengthen relationships</p>
<p><u>Technology</u></p>	<p>Ethically and effectively uses technology to communicate Leverage technologies to complete tasks and accomplish goals Gain the ability to locate, evaluate, and use information for a variety of purposes</p>

(NACE, 2021)

APPENDIX K SOCIAL COGNITIVE CAREER THEORY MODEL



APPENDIX L INITIAL CODES

Interview Session #1	Interview Session #2	Interview Session #3
College	Support	Program
Career	Workshops	Experience
Support	Resources	Mentor
Opportunities	Counseling	Projects
Experience	Alumni	Skills
Community	Networking	Communicate
Scholarship	Journey	Interview
Development	Exploration	Companies
Advisors	Confidence	Opportunities
Major	future	Connections
Resources	Mentor	Support
Administration	Activities/ Programs	Volunteer
Guidance	Sessions	Professional
Direction	Classes	Session
Explore	Experience	Partner
Finance	Community	Employers
Faculty	Helpful	Education
Support	Advisement	Coach
Workshops	Development	Curriculum
Resources	Instrumental	Engagement
Counseling	Involved	Workplace
Networking	Internships	Faculty
Journey	Opportunities	Technology
Alumni	Connections	Environment
Exploration	Information	Development
Confidence	Guide	Finance
Future	Professionals	Teamwork
Mentor	Mentee	Network
Experience	Participate	Collaborative
Community	Readiness	Participate
Connections	Working	Leadership
	Financial	Mentorship
	Research	Challenges
		Different
		Meaningful
		Information
		Culture
		Helpful
		Exposure
		Advisors
		Focused
		Personality
		Resources

Process
Growth
Impact
Assistance
Guidance
Prepared
Different
Workshops
Documents
Mindset
Options
Preparedness
Application
Mental health
Prepare
Readiness
Transition
Services
Decision
Advantage
Diverse
Tools
Database
Access
Improvement
Exploring

APPENDIX M INITIAL GROUPING OF THEMATIC CATEGORIES

Codes	Frequency
Interview Session I	
Experience	31
Community	18
Scholarship	3
Center for Career Development	4
Advisors	4
Major	55
Guidance	10
Explore	6
Faculty	5
Career	30
Interview Session II	
Support	36
Workshops	13
Resources	8
Alumni Event/ Connections	2
Networking	7
Journey	5
Exploration	1
Confidence	0
Future	14
Mentor	28
Activities/ Programs	14
Sessions	15
Classes	17
Experience	3
Community	6
Helpful	19
Advisement	7
Career Development	5
Instrumental	7
Involved	4
Internships	3
Opportunities	8
Connections	6
Information	7
Guide	2
Professionals	6
Mentee	5

Readiness	1
Working	2
Financial	6
Research	4
Interview Session III	
Program	113
Experience	62
Mentor	28
Projects	8
Skills	31
Communicate	9
Interview	17
Companies	6
Opportunities	10
Connections	10
Support	18
Volunteer	10
Professional	32
Curriculum	2
Engagement	5
Workplace	3
Faculty	2
Technology	1
Environment	9
Finance	8
Development	6
Teamwork	4
Network	13
Leadership	5
Mentorship	1
Different	38
Challenges	2
Meaningful	4
Information	6
Culture	7
Exposure	3
Focused	2
Personality	8
Resources	14
Process	12
Impact	6
Assistance	3
Guidance	4
Prepared	17

Options	7
Workshops	3
Documents	2
Application	2
Mental Health	3
Transition	2
Readiness	1
Services	19
Decision	2
Diverse	12
Database	7
Access	8
Improvement	3

Codes Category	Frequency	Initial Thematic
Interview Session I		The Importance of Community and Career Development
Support	36	
Experience	31	
Community	18	
Guidance	10	
Explore	6	
Faculty	5	
Center for Career Development	4	
Advisors	4	
Interview Session II		Mentorship and Resources
Career Guidance & Mentorship		
Support	36	
Mentor	28	
Helpful	19	
Classes	17	
Sessions	15	
Future	14	
Activities/ Programs	14	
Workshops	13	
Resources	8	
Opportunities	8	

Networking	7	
Advisement	7	
Information	7	
Instrumental	7- career development & mentor	
Community	6	
Connections	6	
Professionals	6	
Financial	6	
Journey	5	
Career Development	5	
Mentee	5	
Involved	4	
Research	4- 2 with professors/ 2 research career	
Experience	3	
Internships	3	
Alumni Event/ Connections	2	
Guide	2	
Working	2	
Exploration	1	
Readiness	1	
Confidence	0	
Interview Session III		Experience & Skill Development- “creating varied learning and experiential learning experiences to influence and broaden the understanding of major and career options for FGCS”
Program	113- mix between Panther program and involvement in other programs	
Experience	62	
Different	38	
Professional	32- people/ skills	
Skills	31	
Mentor	28 (Mentor + mentoring programs)	
Services	19	

Support	18	
Interview	17	
Prepared	17	
Resources	14	
Network	13	
Process	12	
Diverse	12	
Opportunities	10	
Connections	10	
Volunteer	10	
Communicate/ communication	9	
Environment	9	
Finance/ Financial	8	
Personality	8	
Access	8	
Projects	8- research, co-curricular	
Culture	7	
Options	7	
Database	7	
Companies	6	
Skill Development	6	
Information	6	
Impact	6	
Engagement	5	
Leadership	5	
Teamwork	4	
Meaningful	4	
Guidance	4	
Exposure	3	
Assistance	3	
Workshops	3	
Mental Health	3	
Improvement	3	
Workplace	3 workplace environments	
Curriculum	2	
Faculty	2	
Challenges	2	
Focused	2	
Documents	2	
Application	2	
Transition	2	
Decision	2	

Technology	1	
Mentorship	1	
Readiness	1	

APPENDIX N DOCUMENT EVALUATION

Name of Document	Goals indicated or Noted Achievements	Written/ Provided by
Resume	Leadership Experiences, co-curricular activities at XYZCC, outlines professional skills developed, including teamwork, communication, leadership, technology, diversity & inclusion, critical thinking, career and self-development, and professionalism	Doug Fiona Manny Mario Nicole Rose Stephanie
XYZCC Co-curricular Transcript	Programs/ activities involved in and completed while at XYZCC, expected competencies exposed to and developed: self-awareness, leadership, communication, assessment, evaluation and research, social and civic responsibility, collaboration, diversity and inclusiveness,	Fiona Manny Mario Nicole Rose Stephanie

	technology, responsibility, project management, conflict management, critical thinking, problem solving, career management and professionalism	
--	--	--

APPENDIX O INTERPRETIVE THEMES

Research Question	Theme	Subthemes	Data Source	Trust-worthiness
1) What were FGCS alumni's perceptions of the resources intended to help them better understand academic major and career options at a community college?	The importance of the College Experience and an emphasis on Exploration	Supportive Environment Career Development	Individual Interviews	Thick Description Member Checking
	The value of Mentorship and Access to Resources	Mentoring Holistic Support	Individual Interviews	Thick Description Member Checking
2) What were FGCS alumni's perceptions of the role their community college played in helping them obtain professional skills and a position in the workforce?	Career Readiness	Professional Skill Development Career Connections	Individual Interviews Document Review	Thick Description Member Checking

APPENDIX P FINAL THEMES

Initial Thematic Category	Definition of Code	Final Theme
<p>The importance of community and career development</p>	<p>XYZCC and program advisors helped first-generation college student determine passion and goals, leading to a business major and leadership aspirations. Panther partner program helped student network with Career Center staff and land job opportunity. XYZCC provided support in resources and opportunities in choosing and once they chose their major. Student credits their mother and an elective course for their decision to pursue communications,</p>	<p>The importance of the College Experience and Exploration</p>
<p>Mentorship and Resources</p>	<p>Participant credits coach with helping them explore career options and gain valuable insights through conversations and workshops. First-generation student gained confidence in career development through mentorship and financial support. Student highlights the importance of resources such as counseling and financial support for students. Mentee appreciated having a dedicated mentor for academic and personal support.</p>	<p>The value of Mentorship and Access to Resources</p>

	<p>Participant discussed their future career aspirations with mentor.</p> <p>Student highlights the importance of workshops and sessions provided by the university, including one-on-one sessions, group workshops, and relaxation sessions, which helped alleviate stress and provide support during their nursing program.</p> <p>The college provided helpful perks, such as free MetroCard, which alleviated financial stress and allowed students to focus better on their studies.</p> <p>Student believes the program provided necessary tools for career success.</p>	
<p>Experience & Skill Development</p>	<p>Student took advantage of many opportunities, including one to become an apprentice at JP Morgan Chase in prime records. The company partnerships provided exposure to real world experiences and helped to bring the theory from the classroom into practice.</p> <p>Student utilized skills developed at XYZCC and through internships in future work.</p> <p>Student believes XYXCC provided the right skill sets and experiences to be able to continue learning.</p> <p>XYZCC helped improve communication skills through interactions with</p>	<p>Career Readiness</p>

	people from diverse cultures and getting to understand them.	
--	--	--

REFERENCES

- Allen, J., Robbins, S.B., Casillas, A., & Oh, I. (2008). *Third-Year Retention and Transfer: Effects of Academic Performance, Motivation, and Social Connectedness*. *Research in Higher Education*, 49, 647-664.
- Amaro-Jiménez, C., Hungerford-Kresser, H., Esquivel, S., Doddy, M., & Daniel, B. (2020). Partnering for Change: Lessons from College Access Efforts for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students and Families. *School Community Journal*, 30(2), 105–120. <http://www.adi.org/journal/2020fw/Amaro-JimenezEtAlFW2020.pdf>
- American Association of Junior and Community Colleges. (1988). *Building Communities: A Vision for a New Century. A Report of the Commission on the Future of Community Colleges*. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED293578.pdf>
- Amundson, N. E., Borgen, W. A., Iaquinta, M., Butterfield, L. D., & Koert, E. (2010). Career decisions from the decider's perspective. *The Career Development Quarterly*, 58,336- 351.
- Bailey, T., Jaggars, S.S., and Jenkins, D. (2015). *Redesigning America's Community Colleges: A Clearer Path to Student Success*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Bandura, A. (1986). *Social Foundations of Thought and Action: A Social Cognitive Theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Banks J. A. (1998). The Lives and Values of Researchers: Implications for Educating Citizens in a Multicultural Society. *Educational Researcher*, 27(7), 4–17. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189x027007004>

- Bates, L., Hayes, H., Walker, S., & Marchesi, K. (2017). *From Employability to Employment: A Professional Skills Development Course in a Three-Year Bachelor Program*. Griffith University, Brisbane, Australia
- Betz, N. E., & Luzzo, D. A. (1996). Career Assessment and the Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy Scale. *Journal of Career Assessment*, 4(4), 413–428. <https://doi.org/10.1177/106907279600400405>
- Bui, K. V. T. (2002). First-Generation College Students at a Four-Year University: Background Characteristics, Reasons for Pursuing Higher Education, and First-Year Experience. *College Student Journal*, 36, 3-11.
- Carnevale, A. P., Strohl, J., & Gulish, A. (2015). *College is Just the Beginning: Employers' role in the 1.1 trillion Postsecondary Education and Training System*. Center on Education and the Workforce. <https://cew.georgetown.edu/cew-reports/college-is-just-the-beginning>
- Center for Community College Student Engagement. (2018). *Show Me the Way: The Power of Advising in Community Colleges*. The University of Texas at Austin, College of Education, Department of Educational Leadership and Policy, Program in Higher Education Leadership. https://www.ccsse.org/nr2018/Show_Me_The_Way.pdf
- Chen, G. (2022, July 17). *The Real Dollar Value of an Associate Degree*. Community College Review. Retrieved September 12, 2022, from <https://www.communitycollegereview.com/blog/the-real-dollar-value-of-an-associate-degree>

- Chen, X., & Carroll, C. D. (2005). *First-Generation Students in Postsecondary Education: A Look at Their College Transcripts* (NCES-171). Washington, DC: U.S Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.
- Choy, S. (2001). *Students Whose Parents Did Not Go to College: Postsecondary Access, Persistence, and Attainment* (National Center for Education Statistics Report No. NCES 2001–126). Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Clandinin, D.J. and Connelly, F.M. (2000). *Narrative inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (1992). Teacher as Curriculum Maker. In: P. Jackson (Ed.), *Handbook of curriculum* (pp. 363–461). New York: Macmillan
- Connelly, F. M., & Clandinin, D. J. (1990). Stories of Experience and Narrative Inquiry. *Educational Researcher*, 19(5), 2
14. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03323315.2018.1465839>
- Creswell, J.W. and Poth, C.N. (2018) *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design Choosing Among Five Approaches*. 4th Edition, SAGE Publications, Inc., Thousand Oaks.
- Creswell, J.W. (2013) *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. 4th Edition, SAGE Publications, Inc., London.
- Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications, Inc.
- Creswell, J. W., Plano Clark, V. L., Gutmann, M. L., & Hanson, W. E. (2003). Advanced Mixed Methods Research Designs. In A. Tashakkori, & C. Teddlie (Eds.), *Handbook of Mixed Methods in Social and Behavioral Research* (pp. 209-240). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Cuseo, J. (2005). *“Decided,” Undecided,” and “In Transition”*: Implications for Academic Advisement, Career Counseling, and Student Retention. In R. S. Feldman (Ed.), *Improving the first year of college: Research and practice* (pp. 27-50). New York: Erlbaum.
- Doyle, A. (2020, June 15). *How Often do People Change Jobs During a Lifetime?* <https://www.thebalancecareers.com/how-often-do-people-change-jobs-2060467>
- Iyengar, S. (2011). *The Art of Choosing*. Twelve Books.
- Engle, J., & Tinto, V. (2008). *Moving Beyond Access: College Success for Low-Income, First-Generation Students*. Washington, DC: Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education.
- Fouad, N., Cotter, E. W., & Kantamneni, N. (2009). The Effectiveness of a Career Decision Making Course. *Journal of Career Assessment*, 17 338–347.
doi:10.1177/1069072708330678
- Garriott, P.O.; Flores, L. Y.; Martens, M. P. (2013). Predicting the Math/Science Career Goals of Low-Income Prospective First-Generation College Students. Denver, CO: *Journal of Counseling Psychology*. Vol. 60, Iss. 2, (Apr 2013): 200-209.
DOI:10.1037/a0032074
- Gibbons, M. M., & Woodside, M. (2014). Addressing the Needs of First-Generation College Students: Lessons Learned from Adults from Low-Education.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2161-1882.2014.00045.x>
- Glesne, C. (2016). *Becoming Qualitative Researchers: An Introduction, 5th Edition*. Oxford: Longman.

- Glesne, C. (2013). *Becoming Qualitative Researchers: An Introduction* (4th ed.). Boston: Pearson/Allyn & Bacon.
- Hansen, J.M., & Pedersen, J. (2012). An Examination of the Effects of Career Development Courses on Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy, Adjustment to College, Learning Integration, and Academic Success. *Journal of the First-Year Experience & Students in Transition*, 24(2), 33-61.
- Harlow, A. J., & Bowman, S. L. (2014). Examining the Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy and Career Maturity of Community College and First-Generation Students. *PsycEXTRA Dataset*. doi:10.1037/e562972014-00
- Hawley, W. D. (2007). Designing schools that use student diversity to enhance learning of all students. In E. Frankenberg & G. Orfield (Eds.), *Lessons in integration: Realizing the promise of racial diversity in American schools* (pp. 31-56). Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press.
- Hirudayaraj, M., & McLean, G. N. (2018). First-Generation College Graduates: A Phenomenological Exploration of Their Transition Experiences into the Corporate Sector. *European Journal of Training and Development*, 42(1-2), 91-109.
- Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs). (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://sites.ed.gov/hispanic-initiative/hispanic-serving-institutions-hsis/>
- Hughes, A. N., & Gibbons, M. M. (2018). Understanding the Career Development of Underprepared College Students. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, 19(4), 452-469. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1521025116644262>
- Inman, E. W., & Mayes, L. D. (1999). The Importance of Being First: Unique

Characteristics of First-Generation Community College Students. *Community College Review*, 26, 3-22.

Inside Higher Ed. (2022, July 29). First-Generation Student Supports: What Colleges Could Do More. Inside Higher Ed.

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2022/07/29/first-generation-student-supports-helping-colleges-could-do-more#:~:text=%E2%80%9COur%20first%2Dgeneration%20students%20are,sacrifices%20got%20them%20to%20college.>

Institutional Research Fact Sheet. (n.d.). Retrieved from

<https://bmccprodstroac.blob.core.windows.net/uploads/2024/03/Institutional-Research-Fact-Sheet-Spring-2023-01a.pdf>

Jacobs, J., & Worth, J. (2019). The Evolving Mission of Workforce Development in the Community College. In T. O'Banion (Ed.), *13 ideas that are transforming the community college world* (pp. 167-190). American Association of Community Colleges and Rowman & Littlefield.

Jaschik, S. (2021, April 28). Biden Proposes Free Community College, Pell Expansion. *Inside Higher*

Ed. <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2021/04/28/biden-proposes-free-community-college-18-trillion-plan>

Jenkins, D., Brown, A. E., Fink, J., Lahr, H., & Yanagiura, T. (2018). *Building Guided Pathways to Community College Success: Promising Practices and Early Evidence from Tennessee*. Community College Research

Center. <https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/media/k2/attachments/building-guided-pathways-community-college-student-success.pdf>

- Kinash, S., Crane, L., Judd, M.-M., & Knight, C. (2016). Discrepant Stakeholder Perspectives on Graduate Employability Strategies. *Higher Education Research and Development, 35*(5), 951–967
- Kitchen, J. A., Kezar, A., & Hypolite, L. I. (2021). More than a Pathway: Creating a Major and Career Ecology That Promotes the Success of Low-Income, First-Generation, and Racially Minoritized Students. *About Campus, 25*(6), 4–12.
- Land, C.W., & Ziomek-Daigle, J. (2013). *College 411: Get the Scoop. A Small Group Plan to Promote College Success for First-Generation College Students*. Georgia School Counselors Association Journal, v20 n1 Nov 2013
- Lent, R. W., Brown, S. D., & Hackett, G. (1994). Toward a Unifying Social Cognitive Theory of Career and Academic Interest, Choice, and Performance [Monograph]. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 45*, 79-122.
- Lent, R. W., & Brown, S. D. (2019). Social Cognitive Career Theory at 25: Empirical Status of the Interest, Choice, and Performance Models. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 115*, Article 103316. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2019.06.004>
- Lent, R. W., & Brown, S. D. (2013). Social Cognitive Model of Career Self-Management: Toward a Unifying View of Adaptive Career Behavior Across the Life Span. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 60*(4), 557–568. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0033446>

- Lent, R. W., Brown, S. D., Brenner, B., Chopra, S. B., Davis, T., Talleyrand, R., & Suthakaran, V. (2001). The Role of Contextual Supports and Barriers in the Choice of Math/Science Educational Options: A Test of Social Cognitive Hypotheses. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 48(4), 474–483. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0167.48.4.474>
- Lent, R. W., Brown, S. D., & Hackett, G. (2000). *Contextual Supports and Barriers to Career Choice: A Social Cognitive Analysis*. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 47, 36–49
- Longwell-Grice, R., Adsitt, N.Z., Mullins, K., Serrata, W. (2016). *The First Ones: Three Studies on First-Generation College Students*. *NACADA Journal*, 36(2).
- Lune, H., and Berg, B.L. (2017). *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*. 9th ed. USA: Pearson Education Limited.
- Maietta, H. (2016). Career Development Needs of First-Generation Students. *NACE Journal*. <https://ebiztest.nacweb.org/career-development/special-populations/career-development-needs-of-first-generation-students/>
- Marcus, J. (2012, November 13). Student advising plays key role in college success – just as it’s being cut. *The Hechinger Report*. <https://hechingerreport.org/student-advising-plays-key-role-in-college-success-just-as-its-being-cut>
- Marshall, C. and Rossman, G. (2016) *Designing Qualitative Research. 6th Edition*, SAGE, Thousand Oaks.
- Maxwell, J. A. (2013). *Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.

- National Association of Colleges and Employers. (2023). *The Paper to Prove you Have the Skills*. NACE.
- National Association of Colleges and Employers. (2021). *Career Development for First-Generation Students*. NACE.
- National Association of Colleges and Employers. (2019). *The Impact of Internships and Study Abroad on the Career Readiness of First-Generation Students*. NACE.
- National Association of Colleges and Employers. (2016). *Career Development Needs of First- Generation Students*. NACE.
- National Association of Colleges and Employers. (n.d.). *Career Readiness Defined*. Retrieved from <https://www.nacweb.org/career-readiness/competencies/career-readiness-defined>
- O'Banion, T. (2022, March). *What is the Purpose of the 21st Century Community College? The League for Innovation in the Community College*. What Is the Purpose of the 21st Century Community College? | The League for Innovation in the Community College. Retrieved September 12, 2022, from <https://www.league.org/occasional-paper/what-purpose-21st-century-community-college>
- O'Banion, T. (2019a). *13 Ideas That Are Transforming the Community College World*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- O'Banion, T. (2019b). *A Brief History of Workforce Education in Community Colleges*. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 43(3), 216–223. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10668926.2018.1547668>
- O'Banion, T. (2016). *What is the Purpose of the 21st Century Community College?*

League for Innovation in the Community College and Roueche Graduate Center,
National American University.

O'Banion, T. (1972). An Academic Advising Model. *Junior College Journal*,
42(6). American Association of Junior
Colleges. [https://www.nacada.ksu.edu/portals/0/Clearinghouse/AdvisingIssues/do
cuments/14-2-OBanion-pp10-16.pdf](https://www.nacada.ksu.edu/portals/0/Clearinghouse/AdvisingIssues/documents/14-2-OBanion-pp10-16.pdf)

O'Banion, T., & Miles, C. L. (2022). An innovation that could transform the
community college world [Manuscript in preparation]. *Learning Abstracts*, 25(5).
League for Innovation in the Community College.

Osipow, S.H. (1987). Manual for the Career Decision Scale. Odessa, FL. *Psychological
Assessment Resources*.

Osipow, S.H. (1994). The Career Decision Scale: How Good Does It Have to be?
Journal of Career Assessment, 2, 15-18.

Owens, D., Lacey, K., Rawls, G., & Holbert-Quince, J. (2010). First-Generation African
American Male College Students: Implications for Career Counselors. *Career
Development Quarterly*, 58(4), 291–300.

Parks-Yancy, R. (2012). Interactions Into Opportunities: Career Management for Low-
Income, First-Generation African American College Students. *Journal of College Student
Development* 53(4), 510-523. <https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2012.0052>.

Prescod, D., Gilfillan, B., Belser, C., Orndorff, R., & Ishler, M. (2019). Career Decision-
Making for Undergraduates Enrolled in Career Planning Courses. *College
Quarterly*, 22(2).

Pulliam, N., Ieva, K. P., & Burley, L. (2017). The Relationship Between Perceived

Career Barriers and Career Decision Self-Efficacy on Initial Career Choice
Among Low-Income, First Generation, Pre-Freshman, College-Bound Students.

Journal of College Access, 3, 78- 97.

Rasul, M. S., Nor, A. R. M., Amat, S., & Rauf, R. A. A. (2015). Exploring Critical
Factors of self-concept among high-income community college graduates.

International Education Studies, 8(12), 43–55.

Saldana, J. (2016). *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* (3rd ed.). Sage.

Stebbleton, M. J., Diamond, K. K., & Rost-Banik, C. (2018). Experiences of Foreign-Born
Immigrant, Undergraduate Women at a U.S. Institution, and Influences on
Career–Life Planning. Research Article

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0894845318763924>

Scott-Clayton, J. (2011). *The Shapeless River: Does a Lack of Structure Inhibit Students’
Progress at Community Colleges?* (CCRC Working Paper No. 25). Community
College Research

Center. <http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/media/k2/attachments/shapeless-river.pdf>

Schwartz, B. (2004). *The Paradox of Choice: Why More is Less*. HarperCollins.

St. John's University. (2022). *St. John's Mission and Values*. Retrieved May

1, 2023, from <https://online.stjohns.edu/about-us/mission>

Tate, K. A., Caperton, W., Kaiser, D., Pruitt, N. T., White, H., & Hall, E. (2015). An
Exploration of First-Generation College Students’ Career Development Beliefs
and Experiences. *Journal of Career Development*, 42(4), 294-310.

doi:10.1177/0894845314565025

The Myers-Briggs Company. (n.d.). Strong Interest Inventory assessment. Retrieved October 22, 2023, from <https://www.themyersbriggs.com/en-US/Products-and-Services/Strong#:~:text=The%20Strong%20Interest%20Inventory%20assessment,t o%20using%20the%20acronym%20RIASEC>

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Students Whose Parents Did Not Go to College: Postsecondary Access, Persistence, and Attainment, NCES 2001–126, by Susan Choy. Washington, DC: 2001.

United States Department of Education. (2022). *Trio home page*. Retrieved January 23, 2022, from <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/trio/index.html>

VanDerziel, S. (2022). *The Value of Career Services*. NACE Journal.

<https://www.nacweb.org/career-development/organizational-structure/the-value-of-career-services/>

XYZCC receives National Honor for Commitment to First-Generation Student Success.

XYZCC Start Here. Go Anywhere. (2020, July 8). Retrieved April 30, 2023, from

<https://www.XYZCC.cuny.edu/news/XYZCC-receives-national-honor-for-commitment-to-first-generation-student-success->

[2/#:~:text=At%20XYZCC%2C%20more%20than%2053,gathered%20from%20fi nancial%20aid%20applications.](https://www.XYZCC.cuny.edu/news/XYZCC-receives-national-honor-for-commitment-to-first-generation-student-success-2/#:~:text=At%20XYZCC%2C%20more%20than%2053,gathered%20from%20fi nancial%20aid%20applications.)

Vita

Name	<i>Thierry Thesatus</i>
Baccalaureate Degree	<i>Bachelor of Arts, Stony Brook University State University of New York, Stony Brook Major: History</i>
Date Graduated	<i>December, 2006</i>
Other Degrees and Certificates	<i>Associate of Arts, Kingsborough Community College City University of New York, Brooklyn, Major: Liberal Arts</i>
Date Graduated	<i>June, 2004</i>
	<i>Initial License in Secondary Education, Social Studies (2006)</i>
	<i>Master of Arts, Stony Brook University State University of New York, Stony Brook Major: Liberal Studies</i>
Date Graduated	<i>May, 2009</i>