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# The Influences of Social Capital on College Enrollment for First- Generation College Students

Sarah Behrens

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**The Influences of Social Capital on College Enrollment for  
First-Generation College Students**

by

Sarah Behrens

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

St. Cloud State University

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

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in Educational Administration and Leadership

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of the study was to examine the influences of social capital on college enrollment for first-generation college students. The qualitative study allowed the researcher to examine the perspectives of 12 first-generation college students during the first semester of their freshman year at a four-year institution in Minnesota. Through a focus group, the participants identified who was influential and the resources they provided that assisted in the college-going process.

Research indicates that higher education is believed to be one of the main paths to opportunity and economic progress in the United States (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014). While more and more first-generation college students enroll in higher education institutions, their pursuit of college is different than those whose parents have attended college. First-generation college students differ from their non-first-generation college peers in a variety of ways with respect to their socioeconomic status, knowledge of college-going processes, personal commitment, and family support. Social capital, the knowledge, resources, and information achieved within social networks, is important to first-generation college students because it assists them in making decisions related to the college-going process (Soria & Stebleton, 2012).

The findings of the study support that social capital, provided by educators, family, and peers, influences first-generation college student's decision to attend college. The resources provided to first-generation college students through this social capital were encouragement, college and career exploration, and assistance with the college application process. Schools and communities can and should work together to create the necessary social capital for first-generation college students as they work to become the first in their family to attend college.

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## Chapter I: Introduction

### Introduction

A college education is crucial in the current knowledge-driven economy (College Board, 2011). Nearly 60% of students enrolled in undergraduate programs are first-generation college students, which means that their parents have no college experience (Murphy & Hicks, 2006). Numerous challenges are associated with being the first person in a family to navigate the college-going process. Academic preparation and lack of available information about the college process are two of several barriers faced by first-generation college students (Tieken, 2016). All adolescents, especially those first-generation, need social networks to provide access to resources to assist in the college-going process (Avallone, 2018).

Social capital refers to the resources accessed through social relations (Crosnoe, 2004). Social capital acknowledges the supportive roles of those who provide resources in the college-going process. Supportive roles who create social capital for first-generation college students are educators, family members, and peers. Many students find an adult at school – a teacher, coach, or counselor, to provide guidance and or connect them to other supportive adults to assist with the college-going process (Galotti & Mark, 1994).

Parental involvement can be considered a form of social capital because a student's behaviors and actions are influenced by the environment where they are situated (Wohn et al., 2013). Parents without college experience may have limited resources to assist their children in making college decisions beyond encouraging their children to value their education and strive for a college degree (Roderick et al., 2011).

Another factor likely to motivate first-generation college students in the college-going process is having a group of friends, or peers, who plan to attend college (Bedsworth et al., 2006). Peer groups consist of student's close friends, classmates, or teammates and are influential in a student's high school experience. The tighter the network of peers, the more access students have to resources (Center for Higher Education Policy analysis [CHEPA], 2006).

### **Statement of the Problem**

First-generation college students do not have the same support and access to resources for the college-going process when compared to students whose family members attended college. Parents of first-generation college students have not experienced the college-going process (Wohn et al., 2013). Limited access to college information and a lack of knowledge about college is a disadvantage for a significant number of students, which can explain disparities in college enrollment for underrepresented students (Enberg & Wolniak, 2009). Exposure to academic preparation and informational resources can influence college-going decisions for first-generation college students.

Various emotional, financial, and educational resources are available for first-generation college students in applying to and attending a postsecondary school. However, students need the knowledge of their teachers, counselors, and other adults to help with the process (Roderick et al., 2011). Access to these networks provides exposure to various college choices, where limited access to social capital reduces a first-generation college student's postsecondary options.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine the impact of resources provided through social capital on first-generation college students' decision to enroll in college. The

study will use a focus group to examine first-generation college students' perception of the support provided by educators, family members, and peers.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Navigating the complex path to college is a challenge for first-generation college students. It is difficult because their families do not have knowledge of the higher education system (Jehangir, 2010). Social capital can help explain educational outcomes because it provides a framework that considers resources available through an individual's social relationships (Coleman, 1988). The resources available through social capital can be tangible, such as financial aid or information, or more psychological in nature, such as emotional support (Wohn et al., 2013). Social capital is perceived in terms of capacity which are the pool of resources embedded in one's social networks with the expectation, the richer or greater the capacity, the better the return (Lin, 1999).

The theoretical framework of this study is based on two researcher's definition of and interpretation of social capital: Pierre Bourdieu and James Coleman. Bourdieu views social capital in terms of the presence or absence of social relationships or social networks that allow people to access resources. Bourdieu's views also included the characteristics of those networks and the quality of the resources they generate (Bourdieu, 1986). Coleman (1988) defined social capital by its function, where individuals form social relationships to provide them access to resources that facilitate opportunities (Belasco, 2013). Coleman views social capital as a positive social control to collectively help children's life chances (Byun et al., 2012). Both researchers agree that social capital plays an important role in the college-going process. Social capital

provides access to people who can provide valuable information and know-how to students (Robinson & Roksa, 2016).

Thus, social capital incorporates access to various resources within one's network and might provide a useful perspective on academic success and how to encourage it. For this study, the social relationships examined are those with educators, family members, and peers.

### **Research Questions**

Based on the theoretical framework and the relationships that create social capital for first-generation college students, the following research questions were designed to study the impact on first-generation college students.

1. In what ways does the social capital provided by educators influence first-generation college students' decision to enroll in college?
2. In what ways does the social capital provided by family members influence first-generation college students' decision to enroll in college?
3. In what ways does the social capital provided by peers influence first-generation college students' decision to enroll in college?

### **Assumptions**

The following are assumed to be true in the study:

- Participants can identify how educators, family and peers were influential in their decision to attend a state college/university.
- Participants can correctly identify themselves as first-generation college students.

## **Delimitations**

The following are delimitations, variables that are controlled by the researcher (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019).

- Study participants are enrolled in the Student Support Services (SSS) Program at a four-year university in rural Minnesota. This does not include all first-generation college students at the four-year university.
- There are 350 students enrolled in the SSS program, 10-15 will be participating in the focus groups. This sample represents 2% of the students and will not represent all perspectives.

## **Definition of Terms**

*AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination):* A college readiness system that provides middle school and high school students with access to and support for rigorous curricula, opportunities to acquire social skills that aid in the transition from high school to college, and knowledge of financial aid, scholarships, and college entrance requirements (Huerta et al., 2013).

*College:* A two- or four-year institution offering instruction usually in a professional, vocational, or technical field (Merriam-Webster.com, n.d.a).

*College-going culture:* The extent to which adults with the high school create an environment that promotes norms of college attendance and provides the information, resources, and supports students need to effectively navigate college search and application (Roderick et al., 2011).

*College Knowledge:* An understanding of the complex college admission and selection processes, the options available to help pay for postsecondary education, the academic requirements for college-level work, and the cultural differences between secondary and postsecondary education (Hooker & Brand, 2010).

*Counselor:* For the purpose of this study, counselor refers to a high school counselor who advises students as to course selections and post-secondary options.

*COVID-19:* Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is caused by a new coronavirus first identified in Wuhan, China, in December 2019 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, n.d.).

*Educator:* Broadly used to mean a professional in the field of education such as a teacher, principal, administrator, lecturer, professor involved in the theory and practice of teaching and learning (Kanga, 2020).

*Family:* Includes all those in relation to the first-generation college student what could potentially exist in the established direct family unit of support, this can include a guardian, another family member, or older siblings (All Answers Ltd., 2018).

*FAFSA:* Free Application for Federal Student Aid. Is the official form that families must use to apply for federal financial aid to pay for college (Kagan, 2021).

*First-Generation:* Students from a family in which no parent or guardian has earned a baccalaureate degree (Soria & Stebleton, 2012).

*First Year Experience:* A seminar that provides students the foundation to reach their fullest academic potential, while introducing them to the traditions and expectations and welcoming them to the college community (Bemidji State University, n.d.).

*Peers:* One belonging to the same societal group based on age, grade, or status (Merriam-Webster.com, n.d.b).

*Qualitative research:* An inquiry process of understanding based on a distinct methodical tradition of inquiry that explores a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting (Creswell, 2007).

*Social capital:* The sum of resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992).

*Student Support Services (SSS):* TRIO federally funded program awarding funds to institutions of higher education to provide opportunities for academic development, assist students with basic college requirements, and to motivate students toward the successful completion of their postsecondary education (United States Department of Education, 2020a).

*TRIO Programs:* Consist of the following set of educational opportunity programs that serve to increase access and retention in postsecondary among traditionally underrepresented and underserved populations: Upward Bound, Veteran's Upward Bound, Math/Science Upward Bound, Talent Search, Student Support Services, and Ronald McNair Post-baccalaureate Achievement Program (Dansby & Dansby-Giles, 2011).

*Upward Bound:* A program that provides fundamental support to participants in their preparation for college entrance. The program provides opportunities for participants to succeed in their precollege performance and ultimately in their higher education pursuits. Upward Bound serves high school students from low-income families; and high school students from families in

which neither parent holds a bachelor's degree. The goal of Upward Bound is to increase the rate at which participants complete secondary education and enroll in and graduate from institutions of postsecondary education (United States Department of Education, 2020a).

*Zoom:* A platform that provides video services for enterprise, consumer, and educational customers, with a relatively simple set-up. Zoom's aim is to make videoconferencing easy and accessible (Trueman, 2020).

### **Organization of the Study**

The qualitative study is arranged into five chapters. Chapter I is composed of an introduction, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, conceptual framework, research questions, assumptions, delimitations, and definition of terms. The purpose of the study is to examine the ways social capital influences first-generation college students' decision to enroll in college. The researcher will examine first-generation college students' perception of how influential educators, family, and peers were in their decision to matriculate to college.

Chapter II offers a literature review of relevant research pertaining to social capital and how educators, family, and peers influence first generation students in the college-going process.

Chapter III explains the research methodology. It specifies the qualitative measures used in the study. The study population, timeline and procedures involved in the proposed research are identified. Instrumentation as well as data collection and data analysis methods are examined.

Chapter IV provides the findings of the research through analyzing the data. The methods and results used to analyze the data are described.

Chapter V provides the findings and conclusions from the data. The limitations encountered in the study are identified. The chapter concludes with recommendations for further

research and practice on how to support first-generation college students in the college-going process.

## Chapter II: Review of Literature

### Introduction

The purpose of this study is to identify and examine the impact of resources provided through social capital on first-generation college students' decision to enroll in college. Social capital is important in the achievement of desired outcomes and is available when individuals connect with others in meaningful ways (Plagens, 2011). For first-generation college students, higher education is thought to be one of the most important paths to opportunity, social mobility, and economic progress in the United States (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014). Choosing to apply and attend college is one of the first major decisions an adolescent makes. The process takes multiple years for students to develop the knowledge to maneuver through the whole process (Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2008).

The college-going process for students includes having college aspirations early enough to take necessary coursework to be prepared academically, take admissions examinations (SAT or ACT), apply to college, complete FAFSA, gain acceptance, and enroll (Choy et al., 2000). A successful navigation through the complex college process requires students to acquire college knowledge (Knight & Duncheon, 2020). College knowledge refers to a students' awareness of and familiarity with non-academic aspects of college-going, specifically the procedural aspects of college admission and the cultural norms of higher education (Conley, 2012).

Researchers have discovered differences between first-generation and traditional students with respect to their knowledge of higher education, personal commitment, and family support, with first-generation college students being at a disadvantage (Terenzini et al., 1996). Numerous first-generation college students have insufficient college knowledge due to a lack by both

student and family of college experience, so they need to rely on other individuals to help with the college-going process (Engle, 2007).

Social capital, the resources that can be accessed through social relations, enables first-generation college students to engage in relationships which help develop the knowledge and skills needed to successfully pursue a postsecondary education (Israel et al., 2001). Research suggests that one of the key practices through which educational gaps exist between first-generation and non-first-generation youth is through differences in access to social capital (Coleman, 1988). The impact of family members as well as the support from teachers and peers contribute to students' need for social capital in applying to and attending college (Sáenz & Combs, 2015).

The literature review is organized to support the research questions identified in the study:

1. In what ways does the social capital provided by educators influence first-generation college students' decision to enroll in college?
2. In what ways does the social capital provided by family members influence first-generation college students' decision to enroll in college?
3. In what ways does the social capital provided by peers influence first-generation college students' decision to enroll in college?

The literature review is divided into five sections. The first section of this chapter describes first-generation college students. First-generation college students' will be the first in their family to attend college and more likely to be low-income and underserved (Dansby & Dansby-Giles, 2011; Jehangir, 2010).

The second section of this chapter examines the literature of how social capital relates to first-generation college students. “Social capital considers the relationships that individuals form with others in their communities and how those relationships can facilitate action” (Dyce et al., 2013, p. 157).

The likelihood of students enrolling in college after high school can be related to the volume of resources that is accessed through social networks found at school (Perna & Titus, 2005). The third section presents a review of social capital provided by educators. For low-income, first-generation college students, success in school depends on the supportive relationships formed with individuals who can share college knowledge (Stanton-Salazar, 2011).

The fourth section examines the literature on social capital provided by family members in a first-generation college student’s matriculation to an institution of higher education. Parents are often an integral part in their child’s postsecondary aspirations and plans (Wimberly et al., 2004). A student is more likely to academically succeed with parents and other family members actively involved at home (Tierney, 2002).

The fifth section examines the literature on social capital provided by peers. Students with friends interested in learning have better educational outcomes and are more likely to graduate from high school and continue their education after graduating (Chen & MPR Associates, 1997).

### **First-Generation College Students**

A first-generation college student is defined as a student whose parents have not obtained a bachelor’s degree and is wanting to pursue a degree from a higher education institution (Dansby & Dansby-Giles, 2011). First-generation college students are a diverse population. A

significant number come from low-income and/or single parent families, have ethnic minority backgrounds. are nonnative speakers of English, are of nontraditional age, are single parents, and may need extra time to complete their schooling (Engle, 2007; Greenwald, 2012; Unverferth et al., 2012).

First-generation college students differ from their peers thus reducing the likelihood of college attendance (Engle, 2007). The median age for college attendance for first-generation college students was 24 years, compared to 21 years for students whose parents earned a bachelor's degree or higher (Kena et al., 2014). Due to a lack of financial resources, first-generation college students are more likely to live off-campus and work at least part-time (Jehangir, 2010). First-generation college students are more likely to delay college entry and may need remedial coursework upon admission to college (Engle, 2007). Much of what makes first-generation college students diverse creates barriers in the college going process.

### ***Barriers***

Socioeconomic status and other factors may negatively affect first-generation college students, making it more difficult for them to attend college. Lower educational aspirations, less academic preparation, and less encouragement to prepare for and attend college are additional barriers faced by first-generation college students (Engle, 2007). Additionally, when first-generation college students enter college, it is with limited knowledge of the language, traditions, and behavioral norms (Irlbeck et al., 2014).

“Poverty is the primary factor correlated with high school completion rates, as well as college attendance and completion rates” (Grimard & Maddaus, 2004, p. 31). In 2008, 50% of high school graduates came from households that earned less than \$50,000 a year, and 15% came

from households earning less than \$20,000 a year (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014). Low-income parents work to provide necessities such as food and clothing. They might want their child to attend college; however, they have limited financial and social resources and do not have first-hand experience in higher education, which can be viewed as less encouraging (Kutty, 2014). Additionally, first-generation college students are less likely to discuss preparing for college entrance exams or plans for college with their parents (Horn & Nunez, 2000). Research indicates that first-generation college students, receive less encouragement from their parents to attend college than traditional students (Irlbeck et al., 2014).

In the same way that socio-economic status creates a barrier in the college going process, first-generation college students also need study and time management skills important for a successful transition to college (Pascarella et al., 2004) In high school, low-income and first-generation college students are less likely to engage in academic and social experiences such as study groups, and participation in extra-curricular activities, that foster success in college (Engle & Tinto, 2008). First-generation college students spend less time during high school engaging with their instructors outside of class and are less likely to discuss their educational aspirations with teachers or college counselors (Hudley et al., 2009).

First-generation college students differ from non-first-generation college students with regards to preparation for the rigors of higher education (Soria & Stebleton, 2012). College preparation during high school is more important for first-generation college students because their parents are not aware of the importance of taking appropriate courses to prepare them for college (Reid & Moore, 2008).

Enrolling in a rigorous high school curriculum, one with advanced math, improves the likelihood for a student to consider applying for college. However, first-generation college students are less likely to take eighth-grade algebra, considered a “gateway” course to advanced math in high school. One factor affecting whether first-generation college students take algebra is the availability of the course offering. More than 20% of first-generation college students indicated that the absence of algebra in their middle school curriculum (Engle, 2007). While there are barriers for first-generation college students in the college going process, there are efforts to address to these barriers.

### ***Addressing Barriers***

Nationally, 56% of undergraduates are first-generation college students as of the 2015-16 academic year (Center for First-Generation Student Success, n.d.). In response to this data first-generation college students have become the target of efforts to increase college-going and completion rates (Engle et al., 2006). Extracurricular college preparatory activities such as Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) and TRIO programs, such as Upward Bound and Educational Talent Search, target first-generation college participants to support and advise through the college-going process (Royster et al., 2015).

Individuals, institutions, and programs that facilitate postsecondary planning can influence a student’s pursuit of college (Wimberly et al., 2004). As a result, school personnel, precollege outreach programs, parents and peers can positively influence a student’s decision to pursue college. First-generation college students need support with raising college aspirations, navigating the college admissions process, and easing the initial transition to college (Engle et al., 2006). For college to become a reality formation of supportive relationships with individuals

who provide resources and information, such as school programs and college requirements, is crucial (Ashtiani & Feliciano, 2018).

### **Social Capital**

Social capital promotes personal well-being by providing access or bridges to resources outside oneself. This is important for first-generation college students because social capital recognizes the importance of supportive individuals who provide emotional support and validation as well as information (Avallone, 2018). Social capital is contingent on social networks; they are not identical or interchangeable terms. Networks provide the necessary condition for access and use of embedded resources. Without networks, it would be impossible to capture the embedded resources (Lin, 1999). Examples of resources include information, ideas, emotional support, goodwill, and cooperation (Baker, 2000).

Social capital emphasizes how resources reside in networks and their importance. Access to resources depends on the size, quality, and variety of an individual's networks (Sandefur & Laumann, 1998). Social capital, relationships that create social networks, are created and preserved in one of two ways. First, relationships can stem from an ongoing exchange of materials. Second, relationships can be established based on a common name such as a family, a class, a school, or an organization. After the formation and solidification of these relationships, social capital becomes available for use as a resource (Plagens, 2011).

The structure and support needed from these relationships are information, resources, opportunities, norms, and expectations (Bourdieu 1986; Coleman, 1988; Lin 2002). Normative structuring of behaviors can be developed from social interactions with same age peers and friends' families (Harris et al., 2002). Researchers Bourdieu (1986) and Coleman (1988)

recognized that social capital is passed through families to children. Individuals with highly educated parents may have a distinct advantage over first-generation college students in understanding the culture of education and its role in personal development (Pascarella et al., 2004).

### ***Impact of Social Capital on First-Generation College Students***

For this study social capital is conceptualized as beneficial resources flowing through relationships to facilitate action in the college-going process. College going aspirations are seldom created through direct instruction. Instead, they are a series of personal experiences over an extended period. These experiences include college visits, summer programs, and connections with friends and family that are mainly utilized during high school (Bloom, 2008). Low-income, first-generation college students require the social contacts and experiences which impacts their understanding of higher education.

Social capital is productive, making possible the achievement of actions impossible in its absence (Coleman, 1988). According to Coleman's (1988) research, social capital provides students resources in three ways. First is the existence of trust; this allows individuals to form expectations of met obligations. The second was by providing information and the third way by establishing norms that facilitate action. When a norm exists and is effective, it constitutes social capital, which is important during high school. During high school resources offered through social capital assist students with making decisions related to choosing a college as well as what types of academic and social choices to make while in high school that supports college aspirations (Soria & Stebleton, 2012).

Portes (2000) considered two dimensions of social capital: access, which are the potential sources of social capital in a youth's network, and mobilization, the usage of the social tie. One example of access to social capital is the relationship students might engage in with their high school counselor who can provide information about college admissions requirements (Woods & Domina, 2014).

Social capital plays an important role in the college-going process, providing high school students access to people, in the form of relationships, which provide valuable information (Robinson & Roksa, 2016). Relationships can be viewed on a microlevel or macrolevel. For instance, personal relationships with family, counselors or teachers are ties found at the microlevel. Social networks at institutions, such as schools and community organizations are relationships formed at the macrolevel (Bryan et al., 2011). Access to these relationships provide structure and support in the postsecondary planning process (Conchas, 2006). Institutional agents such as teachers and counselors who provide support and encouragement or assistance on college applications or FAFSA applications increase the likelihood of a student attending college (Woods & Domina, 2014).

Social networks help shape college aspirations and provide guidance and information to prepare academically, socially, and financially for college (Cabrera et al., 2006). Socioeconomically disadvantaged students often lack information about the college-going process, thus creating the unequal distribution of social capital (Perna & Titus, 2005). When low-income and first-generation college students lack access to social capital, they are excluded from the benefits provided by these relationships, which can prevent success in school and potential enrollment in college.

For first-generation college students, often with low-income background, social capital will assist with the flow of information and resources needed to facilitate positive educational outcomes and goals (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Coleman, 1988; Portes, 2000). According to Bourdieu's (1986) framework for social capital, characteristics of networks and the quality of the resources generated is just as important as the presence of productive social relationships.

Social capital implies putting one's networks into action (Baker, 2000). Close relationships with family, school personnel and peers each play a potential key role shaping a pro-academic identity and future educational aspirations (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). Relationships with supportive and positive school personnel for first-generation college students suggest the school environment can be a powerful influence on college-going expectations. Feeling supported in school helps students believe that in the future, college will be a positive place as well (Gibbons & Borders, 2010). The next section is a review of the impact of educators as social capital.

### **Social Capital Provided by Educators**

Students' aspirations for attending college are greatly affected by the amount of support and encouragement received from teachers and counselors (Hossler et al., 1999). The absence of access to individuals at home who can provide college information increases the reliance on the high school to provide college knowledge (Belasco, 2013). In school, students who experience inclusiveness and acceptance are more likely to engage in the school community. Positive identification for students will lead to building and maintaining relationships with other students, teachers, and administrators (Plagens, 2011). These relationships create social capital necessary for first-generation college students.

Schools and college preparation programs can foster an academic identity that encourages all students to attend college (Center for Higher Education Policy, 2006). School-based social capital includes social relationships or social networks who seek to improve student's life outcome. Schools and the adults who work in them can exert considerable influence on whether a student attends college (Johnston & Education Partnerships, 2010). Therefore, high schools can be a powerful influence on college-going expectations.

Similarly, schools can be a formidable vehicle for bringing together community members for the benefit of all students (Susmita, 2007). Schools with effective communication between parental groups and teachers have higher relational trust act as social capital (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). Communication between parent and teachers allows schools to provide underserved students necessary information and tools essential for college access. Schools can also assist in facilitating parental social capital especially for families without the benefits of college experience (Susmita, 2007).

Feeling supported in schools through relationships with school personnel helps first-generation college students believe that college can be a positive place as well (Gibbons & Borders, 2010). High schools help prepare and facilitate college-going for students when they surround them with adults and peers who build and support college attendance (Johnston & Education Partnerships, & Education Partnerships, 2010). School climate positively influences adolescent behavior by establishing norms and values. When norms and values are embedded in the school environment students see such attitudes, expectations, and behaviors as socially acceptable (Harris et al., 2002).

When family networks provide limited social capital, school personnel can assist with guidance about school programs and the college admissions process, providing the needed social capital for first-generation college bound students (Bryan et al., 2011). In high school, some of the most influential relationships in a student's postsecondary planning are with teachers, counselors, and school mentors. These institutional agents, as described in the following sections, can provide information and assistance with managing college information, as well as encouragement and support throughout the process (Hill et al., 2015).

### ***Teachers***

A college-going community initiated in the high school classroom is largely based on the students' relationship with teachers (Roderick et al., 2011). For first-generation college students, success in high school is dependent on supportive relationships with those who can provide resources about school programs and college requirements (Stanton-Salazar, 2001).

Teachers have the advantage of having regular access to students. Seeing students four to five hours a week enables teachers to become more than suppliers of content knowledge. Teachers can advise students in their decision to apply and attend college and help them understand and manage all the information gathered at different points in the college decision process (Galotti & Mark, 1994).

A supportive and caring relationship between teachers and students, is unique because of their roles within the context of school (Muller, 2001). A significant number of students view their teachers as an important source of support and guidance. Therefore, teachers are well positioned to support the college application process as well as to develop non-cognitive skills such as growth mindset that support the college-going process (Kolluri et al., 2020).

When teachers know their students well, they can nurture strong relationships and tailor their teaching to students' strengths, needs and interests (Darling-Hammond & Friedlaender, 2008). These relationships help create a positive school climate, which is beneficial for the academic, social, and emotional development of students (Knight & Duncheon, 2020). Productive social capital exists when both teacher and student actions are consistent with progress in school. For example, teachers are interested in having their students learn as much as possible and are willing to invest time in creating that relationship with students who they think will put forth the effort in class. Whereas a student aiming to do well and increase future opportunities is more likely to engage in a relationship with a teacher they believe cares for them (Muller, 1999).

### *Counselors*

The disparities in social capital across families urged researchers to explore schools ability to compensate for such inequalities, characteristic for large numbers of first-generation college students (Belasco 2013; Gonzalez et al. 2003; Stanton-Salazar, 2011). High school counselors are key institutional agents and play a significant role in college application completion for students (Robinson & Roksa, 2016). High school counselors play an important role because they may serve as a significant or sole source of college-related information while providing valuable advice and guidance during a students' time in high school (Bryan et al., 2011).

Developing student aspirations, encouraging rigorous course enrollment, and extracurricular participation are examples of the advice and guidance that counselors offer (Hossler et al., 1999). Counselors can also encourage students to participate in extracurricular

activities and discuss the importance of these activities for students in the college transition (Johnston & Education Partnerships, 2010). Counselors have various roles: educator, academic advisor, intermediary between secondary and postsecondary institutions, which makes them uniquely positioned to guide students through the complex college application process (Bryan et al., 2011).

Counselors' ability to increase social capital to students establishes their capacity to convey information and resources regarding college (McDonough, 2005). Counselors provide academic, psychosocial, and career preparation needed to access higher education. Such preparation exposes students to various occupations beyond the regular communication typical in a high schools' closest communities (Dockery & McKelvey, 2013).

During the development of student's relationship with a school counselor, students gain access to college knowledge, which plays an important role in shaping their future (Woods & Domina, 2014). This relationship can lead to action and is key for underserved students lacking information with regards to the college application process (Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2008). For many students, the high school counselor can mitigate the lack of social capital in families and provide access to higher education for students (Belasco, 2013).

Counselors can also create a pervasive college-going culture, which can increase a students' college knowledge and increase rates of college attendance. For first-generation college students, counselors need to encourage college aspirations, aid in academic preparation, redirect students with unrealistic educational expectations, and assist with the college application process (Belasco, 2013). To do this effectively, counselors need to be consistently involved with students throughout their entire educational career. Given the importance of school personnel in the

educational planning of adolescents, establishing programs that provide these individuals with information and resources regarding the college application process is critical (Hill et al., 2015). While teachers and counselors provide support and encouragement to students in the college going process, other adults within the school are impactful as well. The next sections review the impact of athletic coaches and pre-college outreach programs.

### ***Athletic Coach***

The coach is frequently regarded as the most influential individual in an athlete's sport experience. Additionally, coaches play a significant role in an athletes' cognitive, affective and behavior experience which can have a positive impact on a student's completion of high school (Pope & Hall, 2015). For low socioeconomic student athletes, many of whom are first-generation college, their coach can provide the leadership that can change their life (Hinojosa & Maxwell, 2018).

Coaches can provide students with emotional, social, or tangible rewards such as praise, acknowledgment, and playing time (Cranmer & Goodboy, 2015). A coach can use these rewards to develop relationships with their players that will be beneficial in the overall development of those students (Hinojosa & Maxwell, 2018). The coach-athlete relationship is important with regards to student success. Athletes in positive relationships see their coaches as caring about them and will seek support and advice outside of the sport (Stewart, 2016).

### ***Other Educators Through Pre-College Outreach***

Reports produced by the United States Department of Education conclude that students without college educated parents attend college at a lower rate than students who have college-educated parents (Smith, 2020). To increase college enrollment for first-generation college

students, the United States provides thousands of pre-college outreach programs (Swail & Perna, 2002).

The relationships and trust first-generation college students develop with pre-college program staff allow them to be receptive to the messages and services these programs have to offer (Engle et al., 2006). First-generation college students are a target group for outreach programs that are designed to increase students' college readiness. College preparation activities also relate to college enrollment. Students who participated in any outreach program were twice as likely to apply and enroll in college as students who did not participate (Choy et al., 2000).

**TRIO.** Pre-college programs began in the 1960's with the TRIO programs. These were the first national college access programs to address the social and cultural barriers to education. The TRIO programs, Upward Bound, Educational Opportunity Centers, and Educational Talent Search, are funded with federal dollars and intentionally nurture underrepresented populations towards college matriculation (Royster et al., 2015). Over 11 million students are eligible for TRIO programs, which provide outreach and support services to, "individuals from low-income backgrounds, those with disabilities, and those who are first-generation college-going" (Venezia & Jaeger, 2013, p. 122). TRIO programs offer students support services such as tutoring to assist with the successful completion of high school. These multiyear extracurricular programs also provide mentoring, counseling, and cultural enrichment activities, which will aid in preparing students for their college experience (Cowan Pitre & Pitre, 2009).

Upward Bound seeks to create motivation and other skills necessary for successful completion of high school and higher education. Participants tend to come from low-income families and/or are potential first-generation college students (Cowan Pitre & Pitre, 2009).

Upward Bound has an organizational culture of being a family of college-bound youth. Upward Bound's goal is to enhance students' high school program and prepare students for college.

Upward Bound programs offers participants a residential summer component where students are further familiarized with and prepared for a successful future college experience by living on campus and participating in summer academic courses at the university (Dansby & Dansby-Giles, 2011). Upward Bound programs are supported by Institutions of Higher Education, Local Education Agencies, Nonprofit Organizations, or State Education Agencies (United States Department of Education, 2020b).

**AVID.** Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) is a college readiness program that serves mostly first-generation college-going students. AVID targets students in the academic middle, those students earning B's, C's, and D's with a desire to succeed in more rigorous college preparatory courses. AVID is an in-school academic support program and provides students support for academic preparation and college readiness such as time management, knowledge of college admissions requirements and financial aid. AVID also offers opportunities for students to acquire social skills to help with the transition from high school to college (Huerta et al., 2013). According to student's testimonies, being a part of AVID was like having a second family (Watt et al., 2008).

**GEAR UP.** Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) began in the 1990's as a comprehensive outreach program seeking to increase awareness of and readiness of college among low-income students starting in middle school. The integrated, collaborative, and school-based GEAR UP model focuses on accelerating the academic achievement of entire grade cohorts of students through high school graduation in

partnership with colleges and universities, community organizations, and businesses. Developing systemic relationships between and among students, parents, school staff, and community members to promote college awareness and readiness are some of the activities (Cabrera et al., 2006).

The federal government, colleges and universities, school districts, foundations and private industry have sponsored pre-college programs to generate motivation and skills necessary for underrepresented students to complete high school and pursue higher education (Perna, 2006).

Schools serve as a social resource for many families. Academic help, appropriate guidance for school programs and college provided by the school provides strong networking that compensates for family networks when students' families have limited social resources (Kim & Schneider, 2005). A positive social relationship between parents, their children, and the high school is important in providing resources to secure better educational and occupational opportunities later in life (Bryan et al., 2011).

### **Social Capital Provided by Family**

Social capital of the family is a resource that emerges from the relationship between child and parent. When families include other members, the relationships with those other family members are considered social capital as well. "Family members were most often reported as the main influence for students' thinking about education after high school" (Oymak et al., 2018, p. 3). Social capital within the family can depend on the physical presence of adults in the family and on the attention given to the child by the adults. The absence of adults can be described as a

deficiency in family social capital. Similarly, even when adults are present, there is a deficiency in social capital if there is not a strong relationship between child and adult (Coleman, 1988).

Family social capital consists of relations among family members, with importance placed on the relationship between parents and children (Coleman, 1988). Family structure, number of siblings, frequency of conversations about academic issues, and parental expectations of attending college are indicators to measure family social capital (Byun et al., 2012).

Families are perceived as a primary source of social capital for students, especially in relation to their education (Hetherington, 1998). Parental encouragement for their student's educational ambitions is an important factors impacting a students' decisions to pursue a higher education (Mitchall & Jaeger, 2018). Strong social ties within the family forms standards, norms and expectations that enable young people to become successful adults (Kim & Schneider, 2005).

### ***Parents***

Parental involvement is an important component of a student's educational aspirations (Dyce et al., 2013). First-generation college students describe their parents as a main source of inspiration for their postsecondary plans (Langenkamp & Shifrer, 2018). Therefore, it is important for parents to understand the processes of applying to, enrolling in, and paying for a postsecondary institution (Knight & Duncheon, 2020). For students with college-educated parents, resources such as role modeling and information to aid in college enrollment are provided through the parent -child relationship (Ashtiani & Feliciano, 2018).

While many parents of first-generation college students encourage their children to go to college, they do not have the necessary information and resources to assist with the college-

going process (Engle, 2007; Wimberly et al., 2004). Low-income first-generation families encounter additional challenges. Frequently, parents are unable to take time off from work, secure childcare for younger siblings, or have unreliable transportation, which makes involvement at school a challenge. Some parents from racially or linguistically diverse or low-income communities might not feel welcome in their child's school or understand the language (Mitchall & Jaeger, 2018).

Students' aspirations for attending college are affected by the amount of encouragement from significant people in their lives and parental involvement promotes college enrollment. Social capital communicates the norms, trust, authority, and social controls that are required for educational attainment (Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2008). Parental encouragement may manifest as high expectations for their students' degree attainment, a motivational form of encouragement (Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2008).

Researchers identify the parents as the central node in social networks that influence students' educational outcomes. For students, whose parents are college educated, the parent-child relationship can provide role modeling and knowledge that can assist with college enrollment (Ashtiani & Feliciano, 2018). However, first-generation college students do not receive the same kind of support from their parents around the college-going process when compared to non-first-generation college students (Wohn et al., 2013).

### ***Grandparents***

The current generation of children have more living grandparents than other generations. More than 50% of adults 65 years and older have grandchildren over 18 years of age. Grandparent-grandchild relationships are growing because of the living grandparent to

grandchild ratio (Block, 2002). For many first-generation college students, grandparents are a role model who demonstrate how to deal with the world outside the home. Relationships with grandparents do not diminish as grandchildren move into adulthood. Grandparent-grandchild relationship is most impactful when the grandchildren are between the ages of 2- and 43-years-old. At 43-years-old, the now adult grandchild may not need the guidance provided by the grandparent (Kivett, 1985).

### ***Siblings***

Siblings' life experiences and exposure to college going has additionally been found to serve as a valuable source of knowledge for students (Smith, 2020). Other relatives, including siblings, familiar with college going processes, can provide specific college information and create a college going expectation for younger siblings. These other relationships are important in the college going process for first-generation college students, whose parents' understanding of higher education are limited (Ceja, 2006). Often individuals going through adolescence adopt attitudes, behaviors and tastes like their older siblings. For this reason, college educated individuals may promote their sibling's college attendance by providing information about college (Smith, 2020).

### **Social Capital Provided by Peers**

During adolescence peer relationships increases in importance, while family relationships become less important (Antheunis et al., 2016). Peers offer time and space for growth and self-knowledge, which is less restrictive than interaction with parents (Hetherington & Morris, 1978). As a result, time spent with peers provides entertainment, a sense of belonging and feedback, which creates a foundation of identity (Adler & Adler, 1998).

Many teenagers seek out connections with their peers. Some connections are based on a desire to belong where others are based on common interests. A peer group consists of individuals of the same age and can be defined as, “a collections of individuals with whom an individual identifies and affiliates and from whom an individual seeks acceptance or approval” (Center for Higher Education Policy Analysis, 2006, p. 400). Teenagers can be connected to a variety of networks of friends, classmates, and teammates in various social situations. These groups can be an asset if an individual’s peers aspire to enroll in college. For example, a student is more likely to enroll in college if their friends report they are considering college (Bedsworth et al., 2006; Perna & Titus, 2005). The transition to college can be easier for students when they associate with college-bound peers in high school (Franco & Durdella, 2018).

Classrooms, where students spend large amounts of time, are social places in high school. Students develop social networks through interactions with same age peers in classroom settings (Harris et al., 2002). Peer relations can provide students with a sense of relatedness, which engages students in the various academic and social aspects of a classroom. This engagement creates an exchange of information and reinforcement of peer norms and values (Ryan, 2000).

Socially, these experiences can have a positive and/or negative influence. Positive peers can serve as incentive for adolescents to perform well in school. Negative peer influence can lead to irresponsible behaviors in and out of school (Chen & MPR Associates, 1997). Indeed, when students engage in positive relationships with peers, they are more likely to feel a sense of emotional well-being. This positive sense of self will likely encourage positive engagement in classroom activities thus positively influence their educational outcomes (Wentzel & Watkins, 2002).

Having friends with college plans and value learning is a strong predictor of college enrollment (Choy et al., 2000). Peer interaction can lead to motivation, engagement, information exchange and reinforcement of peer norms and values (Wohn et al., 2013). Therefore, peers can impact academic achievement if peers are motivated to enroll in college. Students are four times more likely to enroll in college if most of their friends also plan to attend (Bedsworth et al., 2006). This embodies social capital because members are focusing on a common goal (Wohn et al., 2013).

### **Summary**

An increasing number of high school students are encouraged by their parents, teachers, and counselors to go to college. Less advantaged groups, such as first-generation college students, often hold high educational expectations equal to those of more advantaged peers (Langenkamp & Shifrer, 2018). For some students, whose parents have no college experience, barriers during application and enrollment in college are more likely to exist compared to their peers with degreed parents (Engle, 2007).

Students' aspirations for attending college are greatly affected by levels of encouragement and support they receive from significant people in their lives, including teachers and counselors. For first-generation college students, it is important to establish a variety of networks to acquire resources, such as multiple individuals who can help with the college application process (Center for Higher Education Policy Analysis, 2006). These social networks that support successful communication and exchange of information are social capital.

The impact of family as well as the support from teachers and peers contribute to the much-needed social capital for first generation students (Sokatch, 2006). Counselors offer

students information and other assistance in college preparation and attendance (Woods & Domina, 2014). A letter of recommendation from a teacher constitutes a form social capital (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). Positive relationships with peers planning to attend college supports college-going aspirations (Johnston & Education Partnerships, 2010).

The review of related literature revealed that there is an abundance of resources for first-generation college students applying to and attending college. Little research identifies consistent patterns about how the influence and access of social capital provided to first-generation college students. Chapter III will outline the methodology used in the qualitative study.

## Chapter III: Methodology

### Introduction

In recent decades, educational expectations have risen among all students in the United States to the point where normative expectations involve postsecondary schooling (Langenkamp & Shifrer, 2018). Students first in their family to attend college must overcome numerous obstacles in their pursuit of a postsecondary education. Many first-generation college students come from families with lower socioeconomic status, have lower levels of engagement in high school, lower SAT scores and grade point averages and less support from their families with regards to college attendance (Soria & Stebleton, 2012). First-generation youth have limited access to information about the college-going process at home and therefore must seek other relationships to acquire needed resources (Snyder, 2007).

The purpose of the qualitative study is to examine the influence of resources provided through social capital on first-generation college students' decision to enroll in college. Coleman defines social capital as social relationships providing individuals access to resources not available otherwise (Susmita, 2007). For low-income first-generation youth, success in high school depends on the formation of supportive relationships that can provide resources such as college admissions requirements (Ashtiani & Feliciano, 2018). Relationships with school personnel, precollege outreach programs, parents, and peers all influence a student's decision to apply and attend college (Choy, 2001).

This chapter describes the methodology of the study including research questions, participants, Human Subjects Approval, research design, instruments for data collection and analysis, treatment of data, and procedures and timelines.

## **Research Questions**

1. In what ways does the social capital provided by educators influence first-generation college students' decision to enroll in college?
2. In what ways does the social capital provided by family members influence first-generation college students' decision to enroll in college?
3. In what ways does the social capital provided by peers influence first-generation college students' decision to enroll in college?

## **Research Design**

A qualitative focus group was selected to allow for an in-depth examination of social capital's influence on first-generation college students with their decision to enroll in college. According to Creswell (2007), "Qualitative research is grounded in the assumption that individuals construct reality in the form of meanings and interpretations" (p. 40).

Group interviews, also known as focus groups, were selected to initiate a discussion where participants can state their views and draw upon experiences of others in the focus group (Gall et al., 2003). Focus groups are advantageous when the interaction among participants will provide the best information when time to collect responses is limited. COVID-19 presented a challenge in scheduling multiple focus groups. There were minimal classes in-person during the fall semester of 2020 which limited options for the researcher. It was determined that there would be one focus group for this study.

## **Instrument**

The study utilized a qualitative methodology. Data were collected through a standardized open-ended focus group interview. This approach involved a sequence of a set of questions

asked of each participant to avoid the possibility of bias (Gall et al., 2003). The questions were piloted for readability, understanding and ability to answer the research questions. The instrument used for this study was developed from a similar study done by Reid and Moore III (2008) titled *College Readiness and Academic Preparation for Postsecondary Education: Oral Histories of First-Generation Urban College Students*.

### **Focus Group Items**

The researcher provided a brief explanation of social capital and an example to the participants. Then the participants were provided a copy of the ten open-ended questions:

1. When did you first decide you were going to college?
2. Who helped you decide to attend college?
3. Who in your high school helped you with your decision to attend college, can be one or more persons?
4. What kind of support did those individuals at the high school provide that helped your decision to attend college?
5. Who in your family helped you with your decision to attend college, can be one or more persons?
6. What kind of support did those family members provide that helped your decision to attend college?
7. Which of your peers helped you with your decision to attend college, can be one or more persons?
8. What kind of support did those peers provide that helped your decision to attend college?

9. Are there any other relationships that were important in your college-going process that you would like to share with me that I did not ask about?
10. Is there anything else you would like to share about the college-going process that I did not ask?

### **Participants**

The study participants, first-generation college students enrolled at a four-year Minnesota State University, were chosen through maximum variation sampling. In using a maximum variation sampling strategy, the researcher selected freshman participants enrolled in Student Support Services (SSS). The researcher worked with an SSS faculty member who teaches First Year Experience (FYE) and sought participation from students enrolled in that course in the fall 2020 semester. According to Gall et al., this strategy documents the range of variation of participant backgrounds and determines whether common themes and patterns exist across variations (Gall et al., 2003).

### **Human Subject Approval – Institutional Review Board (IRB)**

The researcher complied with the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects (45 CFR 46) to ensure the rights and welfare of subjects participating in the study are protected. Approval of the study and the instrument was obtained from the St. Cloud State University IRB.

Informed consent of the participants was documented through a written consent form approved by the IRB and signed by each participant. A copy of the consent form was provided to all participants. The researcher will maintain the security of the responses until the study is completed, and then the data will be destroyed.

**Data Security**

The confidential data and documentation used in this study were stored in a secure location. The audio and transcribed data were stored on an encrypted laptop with password protection, and the laptop was always in the possession of the researcher inside a locked home. All printed documents were stored securely in the locked residence of the researcher. All data and documentation will be destroyed upon completion of the degree.

**Securing Qualitative Research Participation and Consent**

The researcher coordinated the time and date and participation of the focus group with the Director of the SSS program. At the start of the focus group, the researcher communicated with participants their option of participating.

**Treatment of Data**

The data were collected during the focus group using two different devices. The researcher used a laptop to record the focus group using the Zoom application. An iPad also recorded the focus group using the Voice Memos application.

**Focus Group Protocol**

The focus group was conducted on campus in the classroom where the participants attended their FYE seminar. The focus group lasted an hour. After introductions, the researcher started the recording devices. The two devices were placed in different parts of the classroom because of the size of the room and because students were wearing masks. Participants were encouraged to speak freely when responding the questions.

### **Procedures and Timeline**

- An interview instrument was created in January 2020, by the researcher, based on the Reid study.
- The interview instrument was field tested in June 2020, by a small group of first-generation college students who completed their first year at Bemidji State University.
- The researcher identified participants during the fall semester of 2020.
- The focus group interview was conducted in October 2020.
- Study data were transcribed, coded, and organized for reporting during December 2020 and January 2021.
- The oral defense of the dissertation was completed in March 2021.

### **Data Collection**

Data were collected during the focus group interview via recording devices. The main device was an iPad with an internal microphone and the backup device was a laptop with an internal microphone. Two devices were used to protect against loss of data. Focus group interviews were recorded to ensure that the researcher was engaged and focused on the responses of the interviewees. For accuracy, the recordings of the focus group interview were transcribed by hand by the researcher.

### **Summary**

Chapter III described the study methodology, including an introduction and overview of the study, the research design, description of the population, human subject approval process, instrument for data collection and analysis, procedures and timeline, and a summary. Chapter IV

reports the findings of the study and is divided into three main sections based on the research questions. Qualitative data are described and discussed. Chapter V describes the major conclusions of the study, limitations, and recommendations.

## Chapter IV: Results

### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to identify and examine the impact of resources provided through social capital on first-generation college students' decision to enroll in college. The study intended to understand the influence of social capital from a student's perspective through a focus group. Focus groups, according to Creswell (2007), are valuable when participants interacting with each other will produce the best data, when participants are similar, when time to collect data is limited and when participants interviewed one-on-one might be hesitant to provide information.

The research questions that guided the study were:

1. In what ways does the social capital provided by educators influence first-generation college students' decision to enroll in college?
2. In what ways does the social capital provided by family members influence first-generation college students' decision to enroll in college?
3. In what ways does the social capital provided by peers influence first-generation college students' decision to enroll in college?

This chapter reports the findings from the focus group based on the 10 questions posed to the participants. Each participant was given the set of the questions as well as a sheet of notebook paper, in case they preferred to write down their responses. The findings of the study are limited to focus group participants perspectives enrolled in their freshman year of college at a four-year institution and do not represent all perspectives of first-generation college students who are enrolled in college.

## **Description of Participant Sample**

Participants were first-generation college students enrolled in a First Year Experience (FYE) class during the fall semester of their freshman year. The four-year institution attended by the study participants requires all first-year college students to enroll in an FYE class. The group of participants enrolled in this FYE course were also enrolled in the Student Support Services (SSS) program, a federally funded TRIO program. According to the United States Department of Education (2020a), all students in the SSS program are enrolled in postsecondary education, meet at least one of these eligibility criteria (low-income status, first-generation status, or disability status), and exhibit academic need.

Thirteen students were enrolled in the FYE course who participated in the focus group. Eleven of the participants attended in person while two of the participants attended via Zoom. The two participants attending via Zoom were logged on through the instructor's laptop computer. One of the participants who was attending via Zoom never engaged in the focus group so for the purpose of this research the focus group consisted of 12 participants.

## **Analysis**

Focus group responses were transcribed and coded. The researcher coded for two variables, the relationships the participants had that influenced their decision to attend college and the resources provided by those relationships. Frequency counts were also collected for both variables. The focus group questions were created to prompt responses from first-generation college students on their perception of how social capital impacted their decision to attend college. Questions 1 and 2 established conditions for focus group participants, eliciting responses about when they first decided they were going to college and who helped them with

that decision. Questions 3 and 4 were designed to align with the first research question. Questions 5 and 6 were designed to align with the second research question. Questions 7 and 8 of the focus group were designed to align with the third research question. Questions 9 and 10 of the focus group were comprehensive in nature to ensure that the researcher did not miss any information from the participants. Data are reported out by research question. To maintain confidentiality, the researcher will be reporting all participant responses using male pronouns.

### **Research Question One**

In what ways does the social capital provided by educators influence first-generation college students' decision to enroll in college?

Nine of the 12 focus group participants reported an educator influenced their decision to enroll in college. Five participants identified a counselor, three participants identified an athletic coach, two participants identified a teacher, one participant identified a coach working also as a teacher, and one participant identified an Upward Bound advisor.

**Table 1**

#### *Social Capital Provided by Educator Responses*

Educator	Frequency	Resource Provided
Counselor	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>College And Career Exploration</li> <li>College Application Process Assistance</li> </ul>
Athletic Coach	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encouragement</li> <li>College Application Process Assistance</li> </ul>
Teacher	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>College And Career Exploration</li> </ul>
Coach and Teacher	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encouragement</li> </ul>
Other Educators Through Pre-College Outreach	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>College Application Process Assistance</li> </ul>

### ***Counselor***

Five participants identified their counselor as influential in their college-going process. Two participants indicated their counselors assisted through one-on-one career exploration counseling sessions. Participant D explained that his high school counselor sat him down and showed him the requirements for certain jobs and the degrees associated with those jobs. Participant E interacted with his counselor, “through career type basics. They asked what I was interested in and then showed me jobs and what education you need.” Participants F and G shared the help by their counselors in the college application process but provided no specific details. The counselor for participant A provided a list of important dates during his senior year as it related to college applications.

### ***Teacher***

Two participants identified a teacher as influential in their college-going process. Participant J responded that he loved math but did not want to teach math. His math teacher printed out a long list of jobs and the salaries and the required degree associated with careers in mathematics. This helped participant J consider mathematics as a major. For participant B, his anatomy and physiology teacher steered him towards studying nursing. Participant B reported this teacher connected the course content to real life.

### ***Athletic Coach***

Three participants reported that an athletic coach was influential in their college-going process. Participant F’s track coach assisted him with the college application process. Participant H indicated that his football coach showed, “support and encouragement of myself and my family” throughout the college-going process. Participant L reported that, “my football

coach in high school was always there to help me and answer questions when I had them.”

Participant H responded that his football coach, “encouraged me to go to college to better myself and my family.” This coach was also Participant H’s math teacher.

### ***Other Educators Through Pre-College Outreach***

Participant J identified his Upward Bound advisor helped with his college-going process:

When it came to the application process and the FAFSA my parents pretty much had no idea what to do and obviously neither did I so we got to fall back on Upward Bound program who streamlined the process for us, and we would have been in big trouble because it was very confusing.

### ***Identification of Multiple Educators***

Of the nine participants to report that an educator was influential in their decision to attend college, three identified more than one educator as a resource for them. Participant F indicated that his track coach and counselor were both resourceful when it came to filling out college applications and helping with those pieces. Participant J identified a teacher and an Upward Bound Advisor as resources for career exploration as well as for the college application process. Participant L reported that his football coach was always available to answer questions he had about college and his counselor at his high school assisted with the application process.

### **Research Question Two**

In what ways does the social capital provided by family members influence first-generation college students’ decision to enroll in college?

Nine of the 12 focus group participants reported a family member was influential on their decision to enroll in college. Three of the research participants identified more than one family member, therefore a total of 15 reported family members were instrumental in their decision to go to college.

Four participants identified their parents, four participants identified their dad, two participants identified their grandma, two participants identified their mom, one participant identified his sister, one identified his uncle and cousin, and one participant identified his siblings.

**Table 2**

*Social Capital Provided by Family Member Responses*

Family Member	Frequency	Resource Provided
Parents	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encouragement</li> <li>• College and Career Exploration</li> </ul>
Dad	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• College Application Process Assistance</li> <li>• College and Career Exploration</li> <li>• Encouragement</li> </ul>
Grandma	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encouragement</li> <li>• College and Career Exploration</li> </ul>
Mom	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• College and Career Exploration</li> <li>• College Application Process Assistance</li> </ul>
Siblings	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encouragement</li> </ul>
Sister	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• College Application Process Assistance</li> </ul>
Uncle And Cousin	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• College and Career Exploration</li> <li>• Encouragement</li> </ul>

***Parents***

Four of the 12 focus group participants reported the influence of their parents on the college-going process. Participant B's parents spent time driving him around the state of Minnesota visiting various colleges. Participant D's parents were a source of encouragement:

My mom went to a two year and my dad didn't go to college and he knew he had messed up so my dad really wanted me to go, and I wanted to go because we talked about jobs you can get are so much better especially for wages.

Similar to participant D, Participant J received encouragement for his parents. "Since my parents didn't go to college, they wanted me to because they felt it would get me a better life."

Participant L indicated that his parents were always there to help him and answer any questions he had. Participant B responded that his father provided ACT resources:

My junior year I was struggling with the ACT really bad and if you don't have a good ACT score your college choice is limited, so my dad would find resources for me and it helped.

Other participants identified their dad as a source of encouragement. Participant F reported that his dad, "encouraged me and told me I was so smart, and I should go to college." Participant D shared that, "my dad really wanted me to go to college because the jobs you can get are so much better for wages and he'd like me to be in a better position to make some good money down the road." Participant G reported that his dad helped a little with college research but did not give any further details.

Participant D reported that his mom helped him, "research colleges and which places have good programs." Participant B also reported that his mom was a resource, "The person that helped me the most with the application was my mom. My brother and sister both went to a four-year college and I had no what to do but she did."

### ***Additional Family Members***

Participant E reported that his siblings helped with the application process because his brother and sister had both gone to a four-year college. Participant G identified his siblings helped but did not provide any further details.

Participant F reported that his Grandma helped him, “weigh my options between two different colleges.” Participant B’s grandmother supported him in the college-going process by accompanying him on visits to different colleges, “she came with me and it was nice because she wanted to see my future.”

Participant C reported that his uncle and cousin were a resource because, “they both graduated from here and took me on a tour here and encouraged me to come here.”

Participant I’s sister walked him through the college application process because, “she went to a four year and was familiar with the process.”

### ***Identification of Multiple Family Members***

Of the 10 responding that a family member influenced them, three of the participants described more than one family member as being a resource for them in the college-going process. Participant B reported that his parents and grandmother provided encouragement and spent time visiting different colleges in Minnesota. Furthermore, Participant B’s father provided resources as he prepared for the ACT. Participant G identified both his dad and siblings in assisting him in the college application process. Lastly, Participant D identified his parents as a source of support and encouragement. Participant D also provided a specific example of how his mom helped him research colleges that offered programs that aligned with what he wanted study.

### **Research Question Three**

In what ways does the social capital provided by peers influence first-generation college students’ decision to enroll in college?

Only three of the 12 focus group participants reported that peers influenced their decision to enroll in college. Two participants identified their best friend and one participant identified friends and teammates.

**Table 3**

*Social Capital Provided by Peers Responses*

Peer	Frequency	Resource Provided
Best Friend	2	• Encouragement
Teammates/Friends	1	• Encouragement

For participant B, his best friend provided encouragement and helped them with his decision to attend college. His friend said, “you have to go to college, you cannot not go to college.” Participant B kept those conversations with his best friend in the back of his mind.

Friends were an influence for participant K. “All of my friends, we all played sports and that was our leading factor to go to college.”

One participant described more than one peer group being influential. Participant H reported that his teammates and best friend helped with his decision to go to college because, “I surrounded myself with people who wanted the same goals as me.”

**Additional Results from Focus Group Questions 9 and 10**

In concluding the focus group, the researcher inquired if there were other relationships that were important in the college-going process that were not included in the previous questions. Three participants reported that they were self-driven and did much of the research and college applications pieces on their own. Participant G indicated that he did a lot of college research. Participant F reported he was self-driven and, “decided to continue track at the college level here, I kinda did it on my own.” Similarly, participant A, “figured out most of the stuff on my

own.” Although three participants reported that they were self-motivated, they also identified individuals that were resourceful to them. Those individuals who helped the participants in the college going process were their parents for encouragement and their counselors for assistance with the college application process.

The last question the researcher asked to conclude the focus group was if there was anything else that participants wanted to share about the college-going process that was not asked. Participants reported that COVID -19 was a big roadblock. Participant A indicated that it made it so much harder. Participant A shared that they had a buddy that wanted to go to college but with it being online he said he was not interested.

All participants agreed that this is not the college experience that they envisioned because most of their classes are online. Participant B shared that, “If I didn’t have this class in person, I wouldn’t be talking to anybody. There’s only about three students on my floor. So, it’s just weird.” Participant D reported that there are only six students on his floor. Participant K stated, “At the dining hall there are only three students allowed at a table and you can’t reach and pick your food - it’s all pre-packaged. It’s the same thing every day.” Three of the participants are football players and they were not able to play a single game because athletic games were postponed due to the pandemic.

## **Summary**

Chapter IV reported the findings from the questions posed to the focus group and reported out responses by individual research questions. The study was designed to understand how resources provided through social capital influenced first-generation college student’s decision to go to college.

The first research question sought to identify which educators were impactful for first-generation college students and the resources they provided. Research participants reported their counselors were a source for college and career exploration as well as college application process assistance. Furthermore, teachers were impactful in providing college and career exploration and coaches were a source of encouragement.

The second research question asked who in the first-generation college student's family was impactful in their decision to attend college and what resources those family members provided. Participants reported that parents provided encouragement and college application process assistance. In addition, grandmothers, uncles, and cousins were a source of support and encouragement and some siblings assisted in the college application process.

The third research question focused on peers as a resource in the college-going process. Participants described how friends and teammates provided support and encouragement.

Chapter V explores how the findings relate to the literature review. Conclusions, limitations and recommendations for practice and future research are also discussed.

## **Chapter V: Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations**

### **Overview**

This chapter presents a summary of the study and conclusions articulated from the data presented in Chapter IV. The purpose of the chapter is to provide discussion of the conclusions, limitations of the study, and recommendations for practice and future studies from the study results. Access to college is a process that occurs over time and requires skills, resources, and knowledge known as capital. One type of capital, social capital, is a gateway to gaining institutional resources and support (Perna, 2006).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study is to examine how resources provided through social capital influenced first-generation college students' decision to attend college. The study identifies specific relationships that were influential for first-generation college students in the college-going process as well examines the resources that those individuals provided. The researcher organized relationships based on social capital into three categories educators, family, and peers.

The research questions that guided the study were:

1. In what ways does the social capital provided by educators influence first-generation college students' decision to enroll in college?
2. In what ways does the social capital provided by family members influence first-generation college students' decision to enroll in college?
3. In what ways does the social capital provided by peers influence first-generation college students' decision to enroll in college?

To address the research questions, the researcher developed a focus group protocol to examine the perspectives of first-generation college students. The researcher conducted one focus group with 12 participants.

## **Discussion and Conclusions**

This section provides a discussion of the findings and conclusions drawn from the study. The finds and conclusions are organized by research question. Each research question will frame conclusions drawn and pertinent research related to the conclusions.

### ***Research Question One***

In what ways does the social capital provided by educators influence first-generation college students' decision to enroll in college?

The first research question sought to identify which educators were impactful for first-generation college students and what those resources were that they provided in the college-going process. Nine of the 12 participants identified at least one educator that had been impactful in the process.

**Social Capital Influence of Counselors.** High school counselors were reported most frequently by the participants as being resourceful with regards to college and career exploration as well as the college application process. These results are consistent with researchers Robinson and Roksa (2016), high school counselors assist with college access by supplying information and guidance throughout high school (Robinson & Roksa, 2016). This is especially true for underrepresented students.

Advice and guidance can manifest as college and career exploration. According to Dockery and McKelvey (2013), counselors assistance of academic and career exploration is of importance. This can be achieved by counselors exposing students to a variety of occupations.

Participants D and E both reported that their high school counselor worked with them individually in one-on-one career counseling sessions. Participant D shared that his counselor, “actually sat us down and showed us requirements for certain jobs and which four-year degrees are required.” Participant E reported that his counselor, “asked what they were interested in and then showed me jobs and what you need.” According to the interviews, when counselors focus on career exploration, they provided useful knowledge to participants. The alignment of college programs and career choices is important for a first-generation college student who might not even know where to begin with the college going process.

In addition to college and exploration, participants reported that counselors also assisted in the college application process. When a student develops a relationship with a school counselor, they gain access to college knowledge. This is key for underserved students who lack information with regards to the college application process (Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2008). The counselor to student ratio can make it for challenging for students and counselors both to develop this relationship. However, when 50% of the study participants reported that their counselor was a source of social capital for them, it is apparent that schools are finding ways to ensure that there are student-counselor relationships.

**Social Capital Influence of Athletic Coaches.** The relationship between a coach and athlete is one of the most important influences on an athletes’ motivation and performance. Coaches who support their athletes, provide structure, and are involved create an optimal environment for their athletes (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). Four participants identified that an athletic coach was impactful in their decision to attend college. Three of these participants

reported that their football coach was source of encouragement in the college going process. The other participant indicated that their track coach assisted with the college application process.

Since the reviewed literature revealed minimal evidence on the influence of athletic coaches in the college going process, the researcher had not anticipated the focus group responses about the influence of athletic coaches,. The responses from the focus group reveal meaningful relationships of athletes with their high school athletic coaches and such relationships provided encouragement to pursue college.

**Social Capital Influence of Teachers.** Two participants identified a teacher as impactful in their college going process. Students view teachers as an important source of support and guidance (Kolluri et al., 2020). Participant J reported that his math teacher was a source of support and guidance as it related to exploring college and careers. Participant J wanted to study mathematics in college but did not want to be a math teacher. The math teacher, “actually printed a big, long list of jobs, the earnings and what I needed to study in college, and I was like oh, I can do other stuff besides teaching.”

When teachers know their students well, they can tailor their teaching to students’ strengths, needs and interests (Darling-Hammond & Friedlaender, 2008). Participant B’s anatomy and physiology teacher, “steered me to do nursing because the way she taught it I thought, I could do this in real life.” It is apparent from the two participants responses that there was a connection between the content taught by the teachers and an interest to pursue a career in that content area from the students.

**Social Capital Influences of Other Educators Through Pre-College Outreach.** One participant described an Upward Bound advisor who was influential in his college-going process.

Participant J shared that when he and his family started working on FAFSA they had no idea what to do and his Upward Bound advisor streamlined the process for him. (Engle et al., 2006) report that for first-generation college students, it is the relationships and trust they develop with pre-college staff that allow them to be receptive to the services offered.

Resources for first-generation college students as they engage in the college going process are important. Schools need to recognize this need for first-generation college students and have options for students, whether it is an in-school model like AVID or an extra-curricular model such as Upward Bound or GEAR UP.

### ***Research Question Two***

In what ways does the social capital provided by family members influence first-generation college students' decision to enroll in college?

This second research question sought to identify which family members were impactful for first-generation college students and what resources were that they provided in the college-going process. Ten of the 12 participants identified at least one family member who was influential in their decision to attend college.

**Social Capital Influence of Parents.** The most significant factor affecting whether students aspire to and enroll in college is parental encouragement and support. Parental encouragement is defined as how students talk with their parents about going to college (Hossler et al., 1999). Parents can instill college-going values in their children, accompany them on college visits, and assist them in completing college applications (Wimberly et al., 2004).

In this study, five participants reported their parents as influential in their decision to attend college. Participant B reported support by their parents through college visits. Participant

D reported their parents' establishment of college going expectations and encouragement. Similarly, Participant L's parents encouraged and guided them to attend college. Participant J shared, "since my parents didn't go to college, they kinda wanted me to cause they felt it would get me a better life."

Several indicators measure family social capital, including family structure, number of siblings, mother's expectation of the child going to college, and frequency of discussions with parents about academic issues (Byun et al., 2012). Five participants reported specific examples of their mother or father being a resource for them in the college going process. Participant E reported his mother's help with college applications, "I had no idea what to do, but she did." Participant D described his mother's help in researching colleges. Similarly, participant G reported his father's help with the college research process. Participant F was encouraged by his father to apply to and attend college while participant B's dad found resources to help him prepare for the ACT during their junior year of high school.

First-generation college students describe their parents as a main source of inspiration for their postsecondary plans (Langenkamp & Shifrer, 2018). The research on parents as social capital supports the findings from the study. For the focus group participants, their parents inspired and encouraged them in a variety of ways, all supporting their effort in applying to and attending college.

**Social Capital Influence of Additional Family Members.** The results from the focus group indicate the need for schools to take a broader approach when reaching out to families for their students. Social capital from family appears different for each participant, just as the make-up of family is different. For example, four participants reported the impact of other family

members in their decision to attend college. Two participants reported the influence of their grandmother in their decision to attend college. Participant B described the company of his grandmother on college tours with, “she came with me and it was nice because she wanted to see my future.” Participant F recounted that their grandma, “encouraged me and told me I was so smart and should go to college.” According to research grandmothers provide unconditional love and non-critical guidance that college age students need as they encounter new challenges and developmental issues (Block, 2002).

College-educated siblings may promote their siblings’ college attendance by providing social capital (Smith, 2020). Participant I reported his sister helped him with the college application process, “She went to a four year, so she was familiar with the process, so she walked me through it.” The closeness of siblings is perhaps not unexpected considering children spend more time with their siblings than they do with friends, with any other family members, or alone (McHale & Crouter, 1996).

Lastly, families influence first-generation college students to attend college through encouragement and support. An example of this is participant C, who reported that his uncle and cousin were a support in the college going process because, “They both graduated from here and took me on a tour here and just their encouragement to come here.”

### ***Research Question Three***

In what ways does the social capital provided by peers influence first-generation college students’ decision to enroll in college?

The third research question sought to identify how peers were influential for first-generation college students and what those resources were that they provided in the college-

going process. Teenagers can be connected to a variety of networks of friends, classmates, and teammates in various social situations. These groups can be an asset if an individual's peers aspire to enroll in college. For example, a student is more likely to enroll in college if their friends report they are going to college (Perna & Titus, 2005).

**Social Capital Influence of Peers.** Three of the 12 participants identified at least one peer being impactful for them in attending college. Participant B cited his best friends' encouragement to go to college. Participant H described his best friend as well as his teammates encouragement to go to college, "I kinda surrounded myself with people who had the same goals as me." Similarly, Participant K stated, "all my friends we played sports and that was our main leading factor to go to college." The beliefs and goals of peers can be critical in first-generation college students' educational outcomes (Chen & MPR Associates, 1997).

The literature indicated the increase of peer influence during adolescence. However, the findings from the study do not reflect a significant impact of peers in the college going process. Research studies did not identify the influence of athletic teammates as a form of social capital. In contrast, in this study, athletic teammates were identified as the peer group who were most influential.

### **Further Findings**

Students' interest in continuing their education past high school demonstrates their aspiration to continue to learn (Herrington, 2012). One fourth of the participants in this study described themselves as being self-motivated when they were asked if there were any other relationships that were important to you in your college going process. Participant G reported that, "I did a lot of research myself and my dad and siblings helped a little bit, but I was self-

driven.” Participant F stated that he was self-driven, although his grandma and dad encouraged him to go to college, he did it on his own. Participant A shared a similar response, “I figured out most of the stuff on my own and my counselor just gave me a list of dates and stuff like that, and I had to figure the rest on my own.”

Research indicates how parental encouragement for students’ educational ambitions is one of the most important factors impacting students’ decisions to pursue a higher education (Perna & Titus, 2005). While encouragement is vital, many parents from low-income or first-generation communities may not have the knowledge base to assist with college planning (Mitchall & Jaeger, 2018).

### **Limitations of the Study**

Roberts and Hyatt (2019) described limitations as specific elements of a study which might negatively affect the results (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019). Limitations of this study include:

- Only one focus group was conducted. Due to COVID -19 there were very few in person classes; therefore, this limited the option of multiple focus groups.
- The study assumed respondents’ honesty in answering focus group questions thus the researcher assumes that the responses were accurate.
- As current college freshman, the nature of the participants’ perceptions recalling impactful relationships during their time in high school might be subjective.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

Based on the research, study and conclusions resulting from the data, the following recommendations for further research are suggested below:

- Study self-identified first-generation college students’ who are not enrolled in an SSS program to determine if similar findings occur.

- Conduct a comparative study of resources provided by social capital with both first-generation college students and non-first-generation college students to determine similarities and difference in the impact of social capital.
- Conduct a mixed-method study to gather additional data from first-generation college students such as geographical data, courses taken in high school, size of the high school, involvement in extra-curricular activities, involvement in a pre-college outreach program.
- Conduct a similar study of first-generation college students enrolled in various types of postsecondary institutions, e.g., community college, technical college, private university, urban and rural locations.

### **Recommendations for Professional Practice**

The following recommendations are intended to provide insight for school leaders to support their first-generation college student in the pursuit of higher education:

- Schools create and foster long-term relationships between adults and students, given the study finding that counselors were reported as the educator most impactful for first-generation college students. Consider assigning counselors to students for the extent of their high school career.
- Schools create an advisory system to provide students with counseling, academic and college going supports and family connection.
- Schools promote collaboration and social interaction opportunities among peers to provide a sense of belonging that can motivate and engage students academically and

- socially. This might occur through study partners and/or connecting freshman students with a senior peer.
- Schools should regularly assess and address barriers that prevent parental involvement. For many first-generation college students, their parents miss opportunities to engage with their students' school thus limiting their knowledge about postsecondary opportunities. For example, if transportation is a barrier for families to attend parent-teacher conferences then teachers should visit those homes.
  - K-12 Schools create a college-going atmosphere for all students and families. Provide multiple experiences for students so postsecondary education becomes a desirable ticket to a better future. These experiences can include college visits, FAFSA workshops, rigorous college courses, ACT/SAT preparation.
  - Schools deliver training and resources to coaches and other educators to engage with students outside the traditional class time is strongly recommended.

## **Conclusion**

Chapter V examined the results of the study as related to the body of existing literature. The purpose of the study focused on the influence of resources provided through social capital for first-generation college students in the college-going process. The results of the study show demonstrate the importance of social capital. The resources provided to first-generation college students can be classified as either technical or moral support. Time and encouragement are forms of moral support and this was provided by family members and peers. College and career exploration and college application assistance were examples of technical support identified by the focus group participants. The focus group participants identified influential relationships

providing both technical and moral support. The researcher also discovered participants describing themselves as being self-driven in the college-going process.

Findings from the study suggest areas where schools, families, and peers can further influence and support first-generation college students in their pursuit of a postsecondary education. Schools and communities together can create the social capital necessary for first-generation college students when families feel welcome at school and have the support to assist their students with all aspects of college planning.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A IRB Approval



## Institutional Review Board (IRB)

720 4th Avenue South AS 210, St. Cloud, MN 56301-4498

**Name:** Sarah Behrens  
**Email:** sabehrens@stcloudstate.edu

### IRB PROTOCOL DETERMINATION: **Exempt Review**

**Project Title:** The influences of social capital on college enrollement for first-generation students in Minnesota

**Advisor** David Lund

The Institutional Review Board has reviewed your protocol to conduct research involving human subjects. Your project has been: **APPROVED**

Please note the following important information concerning IRB projects:

- The principal investigator assumes the responsibilities for the protection of participants in this project. Any adverse events must be reported to the IRB as soon as possible (ex. research related injuries, harmful outcomes, significant withdrawal of subject population, etc.).

- For expedited or full board review, the principal investigator must submit a Continuing Review/Final Report form in advance of the expiration date indicated on this letter to report conclusion of the research or request an extension.

-Exempt review only requires the submission of a Continuing Review/Final Report form in advance of the expiration date indicated in this letter if an extension of time is needed.

- Approved consent forms display the official IRB stamp which documents approval and expiration dates. If a renewal is requested and approved, new consent forms will be officially stamped and reflect the new approval and expiration dates.

- The principal investigator must seek approval for any changes to the study (ex. research design, consent process, survey/interview instruments, funding source, etc.). The IRB reserves the right to review the research at any time.

If we can be of further assistance, feel free to contact the IRB at 320-308-4932 or email ResearchNow@stcloudstate.edu and please reference the SCSU IRB number when corresponding.

**IRB Chair:**

**IRB Institutional Official:**

*Maria-Claudia Tomany*

Dr. Claudia Tomany  
Associate Provost for Research  
Dean of Graduate Studies

#### OFFICE USE ONLY

SCSU IRB# 1989 - 2580	Type: Exempt Review	Today's Date: 10/12/2020
1st Year Approval Date: 10/12/2020	2nd Year Approval Date:	3rd Year Approval Date:
1st Year Expiration Date:	2nd Year Expiration Date:	3rd Year Expiration Date:

## **Appendix B Informed Consent**

### **The Influences of Social Capital on College Enrollment for First-Generation Students in Minnesota Consent to Participate**

Primary Investigator: Sarah Behrens  
Faculty Advisor: Dr. David Lund

You are invited to participate in a research study about how resources accessed through social capital influenced college enrollment for first-generation college students. This study is designed to understand how relationships with educators, family members and peers provide resources that help influenced your decision to go to college.

If you agree to be part of the research study, you will be asked questions about who helped you decide to attend college and what kind of resources they provided you that was impactful.

#### **Benefits**

Benefits of the research are intended to inform fellow educators of ways that first-generation students can be supported in their college going process.

#### **Confidentiality**

Focus Group responses will be kept strictly confidential, your name will not be disclosed, nor will identifiable direct quotes be used. Data will be reported in aggregate form or with no more than two descriptors present together. During the focus group you may refuse to answer any questions. After the completion of the focus group, you will receive your transcribed responses. At this point, if you wish to expand responses or note omissions to the transcription, you may.

#### **Voluntary Participation**

Participating in this study is completely voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with St. Cloud State University, or the researcher.

If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without penalty. If you have questions about this research study, you may contact Sarah Behrens at [sarah.behrens@ntcmn.edu](mailto:sarah.behrens@ntcmn.edu) or (303)929-2635; or Dr. David Lund at [dlund1@stcloudstate.edu](mailto:dlund1@stcloudstate.edu) or (320)250-3900. Results of the study can be requested from the researcher.

Your signature indicates that you are at least 18 years of age, you have read the information provided above, and you have consent to participate.

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Signature

---

Date

## **Appendix C**

### **Focus Group Questions and Protocol**

1. Welcome and introductions
2. Share information about study and focus group
3. Explain Social Capital

Social Capital are resources that are accessed through relationships. For this study, I am interested in understanding which resources were most impactful for you in your decision to go to college through your relationship with educators, parents, and peers.

Let's go around the room and introduce ourselves. Please tell me your first name, major and what you're enjoying most about this year so far.

Focus Group Questions:

1. When did you first decide you were going to college?
2. Who helped you decide to attend college?
3. Who in your high school helped you with your decision to attend college, can be one or more persons? (Probes if nobody can answer: Teachers? School Counselor? Principal? Other?)
4. What kind of support did those individuals at the high school provide that helped your decision to attend college?
5. Who in your family helped you with your decision to attend college, can be one or more persons?
6. What kind of support did those family members provide that helped your decision to attend college?
7. Which of your peers helped you with your decision to attend college, can be one or more persons?
8. What kind of support did those peers provide that helped your decision to attend college?
9. Are there any other relationships that were important in your college going process that you would like to share with me that I did not ask about?
10. Is there anything else you would like to share about the college going process that I did not ask?