5-2013

Underrepresented Students' Perception of their Second-Year in College: A Phenomenological Study

Dena Kniess
Clemson University, dkniiess@clemson.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/all_dissertations

Part of the Higher Education and Teaching Commons

Recommended Citation
https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/all_dissertations/1092

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Dissertations at TigerPrints. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Dissertations by an authorized administrator of TigerPrints. For more information, please contact kokeefe@clemson.edu.
UNDERREPRESENTED STUDENTS’ PERCEPTION OF THEIR SECOND-YEAR IN COLLEGE: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

A Dissertation
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy
Educational Leadership

by
Dena R. Kniess
May 2013

Presented to:
Dr. Pamela Havice, Committee Chair
Dr. Tony Cawthon
Dr. David Fleming
Dr. Leslie Gonzales
ABSTRACT

The majority of retention efforts have focused on the first-year of college, however just as many students leave college after their second-year (Berkner, He, & Forest, 2002; Lipka, 2006). Experiences of second-year students have been appearing in publications. These studies have identified the broad concerns of the second-year experience, but little is known about how the second-year experience is similar or different for underrepresented students.

This study sought to describe the experiences of underrepresented college students in their second-year of study at a predominantly White institution (PWI). The study was qualitative in nature, and used phenomenological research methods to form an understanding of these experiences. The study was completed in the 2012-2013 academic year. A total of twelve (12) underrepresented students in their second-year of college participated in focus groups for the study. Eleven students self-identified as being of Black/African American descent and one student identified as being of Latino descent.

The findings revealed five themes related to Yosso’s (2005) theory of cultural capital. The five themes were family matters, finding my tribe, the power of commitments, quest for balance, and definition of second-year student success. The five themes culminated into an overarching portrait of the second-year experience for underrepresented college students.

Incorporating structured reflection activities into curricular and co-curricular programs would benefit underrepresented students in that it aids them in making meaning
of their curricular and co-curricular experiences. Additionally, utilizing strengths-based approaches to programming would help underrepresented students in their second-year identify the various sources of cultural wealth they bring with them to the college environment (Yosso, 2005). Future studies should focus on incorporating more longitudinal methods of analyzing student transitions. Additionally, utilizing intersectional approaches to understanding identity and incorporating environmental theory could aid with understanding the various contexts within which students situate their college experiences.
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my maternal grandparents, George, Helen, Merle, and Ruby. Although I never had the opportunity to meet my maternal grandfather, George, he always believed in education and encouraged the educational experience not only for his own children, but also by supporting local activities such as Junior Achievement. My maternal grandmother, Helen, always believed that I was smart and encouraged me to follow my dreams. My paternal grandparents, Merle and Ruby, supported my needs for study at a young age by ensuring I “had my lessons done” in elementary school. Although my grandparents did not attend college, their support and belief in my abilities have sustained me as I pursued my doctorate.
First and foremost I would like to thank my parents, DuWayne and Kay. Mom and Dad, you’ve always believed in me even when there were times I doubted my ability to continue on the path to a doctorate. Your encouragement from afar made my dream of obtaining a doctorate a reality. To my sister, Kelly and my brother, Justin, thank you for offering words of encouragement and also understanding when I needed to arrive later for family functions. The fact that you always said that you were “proud of me” meant much more than you will ever know. To my niece, Olivia, and my nephews, Owen and Jacob, your hugs, kisses, smiles, and telephone calls to Aunt Deenie not only made me laugh, but also brought so much joy to me in this process – you are the best niece and nephews I could have ever asked for!

Now, onto my Clemson family. I am very grateful for my chair, Pam Havice. Pam, I have learned a lot from you throughout this process, including how to balance many competing priorities and to “hang in there.” I consider you a role model and am so grateful for your personal and professional advice. I definitely could not have done this without you. To Tony Cawthon, I am thankful every day that my professional path led me to Clemson not only for a job, but also for the chance to work with you. I have always enjoyed our conversations – thank you for being instrumental in my development as a future faculty member and as a person! Thank you for always encouraging me to “follow the bread crumbs” in qualitative research, David Fleming. I have learned a lot from you in terms of organizing my study that I plan to take with me in future endeavors. To Leslie Gonzales, thank you for enriching not only my research, but also my
worldview. You’ve always encouraged me to think about life and research from a more enriching viewpoint and for that I will be forever thankful.

To the NSFP staff, Jeff, Brian, and Becca – thank you for being my extended family and for always being there for support and encouragement. You’ve been with me on this journey since I started and I could not have done this without your genuine care and concern! To Verna Howell, thank you for encouraging me along the way and also providing much needed conversations over tea or coffee. To my fellow doctorate students, Emily, Chinasa, Edna, Lani, Leasa, James, and Taurean – thank you for believing in me and for serving as a sounding board throughout my dissertation! Thank you all for welcoming me to Clemson! Wherever my future journey takes me, I promise to take a piece of Clemson with me.

Finally, I would like to thank the students who volunteered to be a part of this study – Brian, Cora, Tiffani, Kirsten, Stefano, Sophie, Thea, Monica, Marika, Aubrey, Nadia, and Carla. Thank you for sharing yourselves and your experiences with me! I know that I have been changed for the better and vow to take the knowledge you’ve given me to improve the college experience for underrepresented students.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TITLE PAGE</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEDICATION</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>xi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background of the Study</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of the Problem</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumptions</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of the Study</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Basis</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overview of the Research Site</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition of Terms</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Summary</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second-Year Student Needs</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Development Theory</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second-Year Student Development</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity Development Theories</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Frameworks</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Summary</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table of Contents (Continued)

III. METHODOLOGY ................................................................................. 47

- Introduction ......................................................................................... 47
- Research Design .................................................................................. 47
- Historical and Institutional Context .................................................. 50
- Pilot Study .......................................................................................... 54
- Significance of the Pilot Study ............................................................ 56
- Research Question .............................................................................. 57
- Participant Information and Selection ............................................... 59
- Data Collection Process .................................................................... 62
- Data Analysis ...................................................................................... 64
- Role of the Researcher ........................................................................ 66
- Limitations of the Study ..................................................................... 69
- Chapter Summary ................................................................................. 70

IV. RESULTS ............................................................................................... 71

- Emerging Themes ............................................................................... 71
- Family Matters .................................................................................. 74
- Finding My Community ..................................................................... 76
- The Power of Commitments ............................................................... 80
- Quest for Balance ............................................................................... 84
- Strategizing for Second-Year Student Success .................................. 87
- Portrait of the Second-Year Experience for Underrepresented College Students .................................................. 90
- Chapter Summary ................................................................................. 96

V. DISCUSSION .......................................................................................... 97

- Discussion in Relation to Theoretical Framework ................................ 97
- Implications for Practice ..................................................................... 100
- Implications for Future Research ..................................................... 103
- Limitations of the Study .................................................................... 105
- Chapter Summary ................................................................................. 105

APPENDICES .......................................................................................... 106

A: Focus Group Questions .................................................................... 106
B: Participant Profile Sheet ................................................................... 107
C: Recruitment information/informed consent document .................. 108
D: IRB Approval for Study ................................................................. 109
E: IRB Amendment for Study ............................................................ 110
F: Sample of Coding Process for Themes .......................................... 111

REFERENCES .................................................................................. 120
# LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>Mapping of Conceptual/Theoretical Framework</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>Participant Profile Chart</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>Explanation of Coded Clusters of Meaning and Related Themes from Data</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>Artifacts</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure</td>
<td>Page</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>95</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1.1: Figure of Second-Year Experience for Underrepresented Students Incorporating Yosso's Cultural Capital Model (2005)
CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Chapter One provides an introduction to the research study. The chapter includes background information which provides context for the reader, states the problem, purpose, and significance of the study. The theoretical framework of the study is introduced and an overview of the research site is provided. Finally, a list of definitions is included to provide the reader with terms and concepts found within the study.

Background of the Study

As resources have dwindled for higher education, “there has also been a heightened focus on the part of institutions and states alike on increasing the rate at which students persist and graduate from both two-and four-year colleges and universities” (Tinto, 2006, p.2). The majority of emphasis on student retention and persistence has been placed on improving retention rates between the first and second year (Gohn, Swartz & Donnelly, 2001; Gahagan & Hunter, 2006; Graunke & Woosley, 2005). Berkner, He, and Forrest (2002) found that among students intending to complete a bachelor’s degree, just as many students leave at the end of the second year as in the first-year. A student’s decision to leave the college or university environment after the second year was the most visible manifestation of what is commonly referred to as the “sophomore slump” (Pattengale & Schreiner, 2000).

Although there is a substantial body of literature on the first-year experience and first-year student needs, the needs of second-year students have appeared in publications (Gahagan & Hunter, 2006; Graunke & Woosley, 2005). Through interviews and focus groups with 19 traditionally-aged sophomores at a mid-sized, private, Catholic university
in the Midwest, Schaller (2005) identified four stages that characterize the second-year experience. Schaller’s (2005) four stages were random exploration, focused exploration, tentative choices, and commitment. Prior to Schaller’s work, Lemons and Richmond (1987), identified issues facing second-year college students in terms of Chickering’s (1993) seven vectors of student development. Lemons and Richmond’s analysis, though not empirically based, noted that four of Chickering’s vectors were useful in describing sophomore student development. The four vectors were achieving competence, developing autonomy, establishing identity, and developing purpose.

Along with Schaller’s (2005) study, other researchers were looking at the second-year experience. These researchers studied the second year experience from the perspective of academic success and satisfaction with the overall college experience (Graunke & Woosley, 2005; Jullierat, 2000). While these studies are important for identifying factors which have the ability to improve the second-year experience, little is known about how the second-year experience is similar and different for underrepresented student populations (Schaller, 2010a). By studying underrepresented students’ perceptions of their second year, this study would bring colleges and universities one step closer to achieving Tinto’s (2006) vision of creating enduring programs that contribute to student success and retention over time.

Statement of the Problem

According to Nora, Barlow, and Crisp (2005), there were major gaps in the literature beyond the first year on student persistence. Some researchers and practitioners have focused solely on first to second year student retention to the point where problems with student attrition have shifted to subsequent years in college (Nora, Barlow & Crisp,
In a study by Smith (1995), there were differences in the persistence rates of various underrepresented racial groups between the second to third years. After the second year in college, Smith found the overall retention rate for the majority of ethnic groups was 71%, but only 59% of Blacks, 62% of Latino/as, and 54% of American Indians persisted into their third year (Smith, 1995). Academic performance between the first and second year was a key factor in minority student retention (Nora, Barlow & Crisp, 2005). Although many underrepresented students may perform well academically, earning lower grades than one expected can produce a sense of doubt that may cause underrepresented students to question their role and purpose in college (Nora, Barlow & Crisp, 2005).

Research on underrepresented college students has focused on African American and Latino/a students (Rendón, Jalomo & Nora, 2000). Researchers and practitioners also “…view issues related to the retention of minority students as similar, if not identical, to those of majority students.” (Rendón, Jalomo & Nora, 2000, p.130). The majority of the existing literature on underrepresented college students has outlined a process of transition and integration into the college environment. Typically, this process involved a separation from one’s culture of identification, a transition period, and incorporation into the majority culture (Rendón, Jalomo & Nora, 2000).

With increasing diversity present in colleges and universities, more research is needed to discover the issues impacting student retention at colleges and universities (Rendón, Jalomo & Nora, 2000). The existing literature lacks recent studies on how underrepresented students experience the collegiate environment, especially during the second year when students are at risk for leaving the college or university environment.
The lack of research studies on how underrepresented students experience their second year in college, as the second year is critical for retention, provides the rationale for this study. This study seeks to provide higher education researchers and practitioners with knowledge about the experiences of underrepresented college students during their second year in order to craft more effective programs and policies to help underrepresented students persist to graduation. Ultimately, students will decide to remain at a college or university because the in-and out-of-class teaching and learning environments are structured in ways to promote student success (Rendón, Jalomo & Nora, 2000).

Assumptions

Several assumptions regarding the second-year experience for underrepresented students guided the development of this research study. First, it was assumed that the second-year experience for underrepresented students would be different from majority students. Second, it was assumed that factors important to underrepresented student retention would differ from the factors for majority students. Finally, it was assumed underrepresented students may not experience the same inside-the-classroom and outside-the classroom experiences as majority students.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to build upon the existing base of research pertaining to the second-year experience in college. The goal of the study is to better understand the experiences of underrepresented college students in their second-year of college and to discover ways to improve their in- and out-of-class learning experiences. Qualitative research methods will be utilized to discover the in- and out-of-classroom experiences of
underrepresented college students in their second-year. At the conclusion of this study, the information gathered will be used to help higher education researchers and practitioners to better understand and improve the second-year experience for underrepresented college students. The results of this study also provides further insight into how to engage underrepresented college students in higher education to help them persist to graduation.

A primary research question and two secondary research questions were developed to guide this study exploring the experiences of underrepresented college students in their second-year of study at a predominantly White institution (PWI) in the southeastern United States (U.S.). The primary research question was:

- What are the experiences of underrepresented college students during their second-year at a college or university?

The guiding secondary research questions were:

- How do underrepresented students experience the in-classroom and out-of classroom environments during their second-year?
- What relationships are important for underrepresented students during their second-year?

Theoretical Basis

Tinto’s (1993) model of student attrition and Yosso’s (2005) theory of cultural capital formed the theoretical basis for this study. Tinto (1993) viewed successful academic and social integration of students into the college environment as key indicators of future persistence. As Tinto (1993) revised his model of student attrition, he looked to
the sociological works of Durkheim (1951) and Van Gennep (1960) for further insight into the nature of student departure from higher education.

Durkheim’s (1951) study of suicide and Van Gennep’s (1960) rites of passage helped Tinto (1993) formulate his concepts of social and academic integration. Van Gennep’s (1960) rites of passage consisted of a three-phase process, separation, transition, and incorporation. The separation phase involved the individual separating themselves from past communities in order to adapt and persist in the new environment (Tinto, 1993). The transition stage was marked by a period of negotiation between the values of the old community and the new community (Tinto, 1993). Incorporation into the life of the college and university was identified in terms of students joining various clubs and organizations (Tinto, 1993). While these three phases were useful in forming Tinto’s (1993) concepts of academic and social integration, the phases may not be applicable to different student demographic groups.

Yosso’s (2005) concept of cultural capital provided an expanded lens for viewing the second-year experience of African American and Latino/a college students. Cultural capital “… refers to the informal social skills, habits, linguistic styles, and tastes that a person garners as a result of his or her economic resources” (Allen, 2006, p.421). Yosso (2005) built her theory of cultural capital on the work of Bourdieu (1971, 1973). Bourdieu (1971, 1973) believed that cultural capital, such as one’s education and language, and social capital (resources and networks) could be acquired from one’s family or formal education (Yosso, 2005). Through this lens, those in the White, middle class culture were viewed as the standard and other forms of capital were viewed in relation to the White, middle class standard (Yosso, 2005). Yosso (2005) expanded
cultural capital to include concepts such as aspirational, familial, and navigational capital to describe various forms of capital possessed by different racial and ethnic groups. The concept of cultural capital applied to higher education is relatively new (Berger, 2000). Social capital theory allows for a more comprehensive and non-deficit perspective to studying the experiences of different racial and ethnic groups in higher education (Yosso, 2005).

**Overview of the Research Site**

The research site for this study was classified by the Carnegie Foundation (n.d.) as a primarily residential, large, public, four-year research institution in the Southeast. The undergraduate student population in Fall 2012 was approximately 14,000 undergraduates with 2,700 of these undergraduate students in their second-year of study. The research site was selected for two primary reasons: (a) the researcher’s ability to access the necessary population for this study, and (b) the institution’s classification as a Doctoral/Research University with high research activity. The institution was founded as a land-grant institution in the late nineteenth century. Consistent with the land-grant mission, military, agricultural, and mechanical education were the primary foci of the institution. The institution remained a military institution until it became coeducational in 1955 (Reel, 2011). In 1963, the first African American student was admitted and enrolled in the institution (Reel, 2011).

**Limitations**

This study was limited by the fact that the results of a qualitative research study are not generalizeable. The researcher’s main interest was to gather depth of information as compared to broader types of information. The research study was at one institution
and may not be representative of similar populations at other institutions. Additionally, the researcher’s role as a professional in student affairs may have confused the boundaries to the point where the researcher could have been perceived by participants in the study as both a researcher and college administrator in the study setting. The researcher was relying on the participants to be open and honest about their experiences during the second-year in college. The researcher was also a novice in conducting phenomenological research studies.

**Definitions of Terms**

The following terms were used throughout the study:

*African American/Black* – A person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011).

*Attrition* – The decrease in the number of students being retained in higher education (Hagedorn, 2005).

*Caucasian/White* – A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011).

*Cultural capital* - Cultural capital “… refers to the informal social skills, habits, linguistic styles, and tastes that a person garners as a result of his or her economic resources” (Allen, 2006, p.421).

*Latino/a* – People who identify with the terms “Hispanic” or “Latino” are those who classify themselves in one of the specific Hispanic or Latino categories listed on the decennial census questionnaire and various Census Bureau survey questionnaires – “Mexican, Mexican American, Chicano” or “Puerto Rican” or “Cuban” – as well as those who indicate that they
are “another Hispanic, Latino or Spanish origin.” Origin can be viewed as the heritage, nationality group, lineage, or country of birth of the person or person’s ancestors before their arrival in the United States. People who identify their origin as Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish may be of any race (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011).

Underrepresented student – An underrepresented student or minority student is a student who identifies as African American (Black), Latino/Hispanic, Asian or Pacific Islander, and American Indian or Alaskan Native (Education.com, Retrieved March 25, 2012).

Perception – Perception is the act or faculty of apprehending by means of the senses or of the mind; cognition; understanding (Dictionary.com, Retrieved March 25, 2012).

Persistence – This term refers to a student who decides to continue reenrolling at an institution of higher education. Students’ beliefs about the institutional environment shapes their decisions regarding persistence at an institution of higher education (Hagedorn, 2005).

Phenomenology – A type of research methodology describing the experiences of several participants with respect to a phenomenon, reducing the experiences to the essence of the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994).

Predominantly White institution – A predominantly White institution is a college or university enrolling a majority of students who identify as being of Caucasian descent.
Retention – This term refers to students who remain at an institution of higher education until degree completion (Hagedorn, 2005).

Second-year student – At this research institution, a second-year student is defined as a first-time student who enrolled for a second-year in college (R. Chrestman, personal communication, February 3, 2012).

Sophomore – At this research institution, a sophomore is described as a first-time student who enrolled for a second year in college (R. Chrestman, personal communication, February 3, 2012).

Student development – Student development is defined as “the ways that a student grows, progresses, or increases his or her developmental capabilities as a result of enrollment in an institution of higher education (Rodgers, 1990, p.27).

Chapter Summary

Chapter One introduced this study. Background information on the challenges of the second-year in college was provided. The lack of existing literature concerning underrepresented students’ experiences of their second-year in college provided the need for this study. The purpose of this study, to build upon the existing base of knowledge regarding the second-year experience, was noted. The need to address the experiences of underrepresented college students in their second-year of college offered significance to this study. Tinto’s (1993) model of student attrition and Yosso’s (2005) concept of cultural capital served as the theoretical frameworks for this study. Finally, an overview of the research site, limitations of the study, and definitions of important terms found in the study were discussed.
CHAPTER TWO
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter examines the literature relevant to the conducted study by focusing on: (a) second-year student needs; (b) student development theory; and (c) identity development theories of African American and Latino students. Student development theory and identity development theories provided different dimensions to the understanding the experiences of underrepresented students. Student development theory provided a model for how students move through the college environment according to developmental milestones. While student development theory was important in understanding developmental milestones, the student development theory base was primarily based on students who identified as White/Caucasian. Identity development theories, specifically African American and Latino/a identity development theories, illuminated how the college experience was different for students of African American or Latino/a descent. Tinto’s Model of Student Attrition (1987, 1993) and Yosso’s theory of cultural capital (2005) were utilized as theoretical frameworks for understanding the second-year experience for African American and Latino students. The review of the literature supported the need for the study of the African American and Latino students’ perceptions of their second-year in college at a predominantly White institution (PWI).

Second-Year Student Needs

There were several key themes that emerged through a review of the literature concerning second-year student needs. These themes were finding purpose through career and major decisions, establishing purposeful mentoring relationships, and
participating in organizational activities that contribute to intellectual engagement (Boivin, Fountain & Baylis, 2000; Gardner, 2000; Gardner, Pattengale & Schreiner, 2000).

Career and major decisions

Second-year students are not newcomers to the university environment, but they struggled with issues related to finding their overall purpose during college and in life (Gardner, Pattengale, & Schreiner, 2000). The current literature available on second-year student development explained the second-year as marked by a period of inertia, disorganization, and confusion about one’s role in the world (Pattengale & Schreiner, 2000; Schaller, 2005). One area second-year students significantly struggled with is their choice of major. Gardner (2000) found that second-year students reported spending “dramatically less time discussing personal problems and campus issues, focusing instead on career and major concerns (p.72).” Although second-year students have completed their first year of study, a significant proportion of second-year students have not had the opportunity to take classes in their academic major (Graunke & Woosley, 2005). Uncertainty pertaining to major and resulting career choices can lead to disengagement from the academic environment and “organizations and activities available to them” (Gardner, 2000, p.68). Graunke and Woosley’s (2005) study of 2,259 second-year students at a predominantly residential Midwestern public university found that second-year students who were committed to a major achieved higher grades and were most likely to persist to graduation.
Mentoring relationships

Another area contributing to second-year students’ engagement with their environment was establishing mentoring relationships. Boivin, Fountain, and Baylis (2000) indicated “mentoring and discipleship within a context of service learning, volunteerism, or engagement in an on-campus learning community are so vital if we are to effectively address the challenges of the sophomore year” (p.11). Mentoring relationships for second-year students can include their relationships with peers, faculty and staff members at the institution. Gardner (2000) reported second-year students had the fewest encounters with faculty outside of the classroom. Additionally, most second-year students may not have had the opportunity to participate in campus leadership experiences as compared to juniors or seniors (Gardner, Pattengale & Schreiner, 2000). The lack of campus leadership opportunities led to less programmatic attention for second-year students from academic and student affairs units when sophomores were the most at-risk of leaving the institution (Pattengale & Schreiner, 2000). Sanchez-Leguelinel’s (2008) study found that second-year students involved in a Sophomore Peer Counseling program reported high levels of satisfaction with the individualized attention they received. In Sanchez-Leguelinel’s (2008) study, there was not a direct correlation between participation in the Sophomore Peer Counseling program and persistence.

Intellectual engagement

The final area of consideration regarding second-year student development was participating in organizational activities that stimulate intellectual engagement (Gardner, 2000). The second-year in college was marked by a “slump” which some researchers have attributed to reduced motivation (Anderson & Schreiner, 2000). This reduced
motivation can be attributed to a lack of intellectual engagement in the college environment and decreased participation in campus activities (Anderson & Schreiner, 2000). Schreiner’s (2010a, 2010b) more recent work has focused on engaged learning, which led her to develop a student-thriving quotient or variable. In Schreiner’s (2010b) study on sophomores and other student populations, thriving was described “… the experiences of college students who are fully engaged intellectually, socially, and emotionally” (p.4). The thriving variable had the greatest ability to predict student success, satisfaction, and retention in Schreiner’s (2010a) Sophomore Student Experiences Questionnaire.

Furthermore, Graunke and Woosley’s (2005) study indicated student involvement during the second-year may be more nuanced in terms of academic success and persistence. Involvement, or engagement, within the college environment was more critical to the success of first-year students (Tinto, 2006). Even though involvement matters more during the first-year of college, what is less well known is what types of involvement were likely to stimulate the intellectual curiosity of second-year students.

Student Development Theory

Student development theory, specifically Chickering’s Theory of Identity Development (1993) and Perry’s Theory of Intellectual and Ethical Development (1999), can be used as a framework for understanding second-year student development both psychosocially and cognitively. Second-year students struggle with four of the seven vectors in Chickering’s theory which are developing competence, moving through autonomy toward interdependence, establishing identity, and developing purpose.
During the second-year of college, students may experience a crisis in their perceived level of competence. Difficulties in first-year general education courses, establishing relationships with peers, and decreased skills in the performing arts or music “… can precipitate a crisis of confidence that may come to a head in the sophomore year” (Boivin, Fountain & Baylis, 2000, p.3). As second-year college students struggle with issues of intellectual, physical, or interpersonal competence, it is important to direct them to resources that will help them establish or re-establish their sense of competence. For example, if a second-year student indicates he or she is not doing well in one of their major courses, encouraging participation in campus tutoring services or exploring other major options is appropriate. If a second-year student has difficulty establishing relationships with peers, directing the student to clubs and organizations or mentoring programs can be beneficial.

Second-year students are not expected to be as dependent on their parents as a source of approval (Boivin, Fountain & Baylis, 2000). However, “… the sophomore is perhaps most in need of that support as he or she faces a crisis of confidence in terms of changing standards of competence” (Boivin, Fountain & Baylis, 2000, p.3). Establishing a problem-solving abilities and a sense of self-direction are critical tasks during the sophomore year. Boivin, Fountain, and Baylis (2000) suggested programs that help second-year students become aware of the choices available to them can assist in the development of autonomy.

A second-year student’s success in developing competence and establishing a healthy sense of interdependence determines their progress in establishing identity (Boivin, Fountain & Baylis, 2000). One of the primary questions students attempt to
resolve during their young adult years is, “Who am I?” (Boivin, Fountain & Baylis, 2000). During the college experience, individuals establish identity by experimenting with many different roles before committing to a particular role (Boivin, Fountain & Baylis, 2000). Students typically enter the college environment without having explored their goals and beliefs or with goals and beliefs that have been “borrowed” from others, including parents or other individuals significant in their lives (Boivin, Fountain & Baylis, 2000). College students, particularly in the second-year, struggle with establishing their identity as related to major and career choices, religious beliefs and values, political values, gender roles, and relationships (Boivin, Fountain & Baylis, 2000). Curricular and co-curricular programs that help second-year students explore the options available to them in terms of major, career, and values is critical to establishing identity. The most important aspect for a second-year student is not only exploring the options available to them, but developing a sense of self-acceptance and self-esteem related to the major, career, and values they eventually choose.

The fourth and final vector pertinent to the second-year in college is developing purpose. Developing purpose is the search for direction and commitment in the areas of vocation, personal interests and activities, and interpersonal relationships (Boivin, Fountain & Baylis, 2000; Schreiner, 2010a). The key to developing purpose in these areas is developing goals and a plan of action. Career and major planning workshops can assist sophomores in developing tentative plans in terms of a vocation. Encouraging second-year students to enroll in leisure classes that develop skills and interests outside of one’s major can aid in the establishment of personal interests and activities. As second-year students develop their career and life plans, it is also important for them to consider
lifestyle issues, such as “… whether to go alone or form partnerships, work or seek education, or move away or stay put” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 231). Budgeting skills workshops, networking programs, and other programs can help second-year students develop a realistic self-appraisal of these issues as they develop their future career and life plans.

In terms of cognitive development, the majority of college sophomores are still in the dualistic position in Perry’s Theory of Intellectual and Ethical Development (Boivin, Fountain & Baylis, 2000). For issues, such as major and career choice, second-year students tend to view the world dualistically in terms of a right choice versus a wrong choice. Boivin, Fountain, and Bayliss (2000) asserted, “This sense of transition, of being afloat between the known truths and the unknown future, contributes to the anxiety often felt in the sophomore year, when less support to navigate the transitions and uncertainties is available” (p.4). A key in moving second-year students through Perry’s dualistic position to multiplicity is creating programs and services to help them develop a range of options related to major, career, and life goals. As second-year students develop options in these areas, it is important to emphasize that there is not a right or wrong choice and to choose the option best for them.

**Second-Year Student Development**

Schaller (2005) described a process specific to second-year student development. Through a study of nineteen traditionally-aged second-year college students at a mid-sized, private Catholic-affiliated institution in the Midwest, Schaller (2005) developed a four-stage model of second-year student development. These four stages were (a) random exploration; (b) focused exploration; (c) tentative choices; and (d) commitment.
Second-year students in the random exploration stage seemed to lack direction (Schaller, 2005). The second-year students in random exploration that Schaller (2005) interviewed were aware of the upcoming choices, specifically pertaining to major and career choices, but the second-year students in the study made decisions which permitted them to further delay the decision-making process.

In focused exploration, second-year students in the study were frustrated with elements of their collegiate experience, including their academics, relationships, or themselves (Schaller, 2005). Second-year students in this stage doubted the choices they made in the random exploration stage and worried about their future (Schaller, 2005). The majority of second-year students in Schaller’s (2005) study were in the focused exploration state by the beginning of their second-year with regard to one or more areas of their lives.

Second-year students in the study started to make choices in their second-year that moved them from the focused exploration stage to the tentative choices stage (Schaller, 2005). The second-year students in the tentative choices stage realized they had a new level of responsibility for their choices and aligned their choices with their values (Schaller, 2005). Although there were few second-year students in the final stage, commitment, the commitment stage represented an unwavering commitment to decisions in one or more areas of their lives (Schaller, 2005).

Schaller’s (2005) study was conducted in 2000 at one institution and has not been replicated across other types of institutions. Additionally, out of the nineteen students in Schaller’s (2005) study, only two students were from underrepresented racial/ethnic
groups on-campus (Schaller, 2000; 2005). Further research is needed to determine what factors are salient to underrepresented racial/ethnic students during their sophomore year.

Identity Development Theories

Early identity development theories were not inclusive of diverse student populations. Majority student populations, mainly White males, formed the basis for the majority of the early identity development theories (Torres, Howard-Hamilton, & Cooper, 2003). The identity development of diverse student populations is intertwined with social and cultural issues, which included a history of oppression of living in a dominant culture in the United States (Torres, Howard-Hamilton, & Cooper, 2003).

Hardiman and Jackson (1997) provided a basic overview of social identity development theory where individuals moved through a five-stage process which included naïve (no consciousness), acceptance, resistance, redefinition, and internalization.

In the naïve (no consciousness) stage, individuals were unaware of the differences among people and accepted the roles prescribed by the majority culture in society (Hardiman & Jackson, 1997). Individuals in the acceptance stage internalized the roles placed upon them by society and conformed to societal expectations (Hardiman & Jackson, 1997). In the resistance stage, the individual experienced an event which caused them to reject their old frame of reference (Hardiman & Jackson, 1997). Redefinition occurred when individuals moved through the resistance phase and actively rejected former prejudices and oppressive viewpoints (Hardiman & Jackson, 1997). Those individuals who were in the internalization stage worked toward creating a more inclusive society by moving forward with the ideals of their newly formed identity (Hardiman & Jackson, 1997). The identity development of African American and
Latino/a students is described next since these two student populations will form the basis for this study.

African American Identity Development Theories

Different theorists have described the identity development process for specific underrepresented groups. Black or African American identity development has been explored by Cross (1991, 1995). He developed a model of Nigrescence that has been widely used to describe Black identity development. There are five stages in Cross’s (1991, 1995) model that included pre-encounter, encounter, immersion-emersion, internalization, and internalization - commitment. The stages in Cross’ theory (1991, 1995) described the psychological and behavioral response characteristics of African Americans as they encountered oppression in society.

In the first stage, pre-encounter, race is not a significant part of the individual’s identity (Cross 1991, 1995). Although individuals in the pre-encounter stage do not deny they are Black, they are not seeking out similar race groups for affiliation or participating in race-related causes (Cross 1991, 1995). The second stage, encounter, is characterized by a series of events or crises causing the individual to personalize the event in a manner that evokes a strong emotional response, such as guilt or anger (Cross 1991, 1995). The most pivotal stage in Cross’ (1991, 1995) model is the third stage, immersion-emersion. In the immersion process, feelings of anger and guilt are prevalent due to the internalization of the majority culture’s stereotypes (Cross 1991, 1995). As individuals learned about their race, they experienced a sense of pride in their racial identity which led them to emerge (emersion) into a positive self-concept (Cross 1991, 1995). In the fourth stage, individuals have taken the positive self-concept and wisdom learned in the
third stage forward into a sense of peace with their own identity and were also comfortable with other social identity groups (Cross 1991, 1995). The fifth and final stage, internalization – commitment, was a continuation of the values and lessons in the fourth stage of the model (Cross 1991, 1995).

The stages in Cross’ (1991, 1995) were not linear. Individuals may not move beyond the pre-encounter stage and others may move back-and-forth through the stages as they experience different situations throughout their lifetime (Torres, Howard-Hamilton, & Cooper, 2003). For African American students, their experiences during college helped or hindered their progression through Cross’ (1991, 1995) model (Torres, Howard-Hamilton, & Cooper, 2003).

Jackson (1976, 2001) developed a five-stage model of Black consciousness that also looked at the influence of historical events on African American identity development. The five stages in the model were naïve, acceptance, resistance, redefinition, and internalization (Jackson 1976, 2001). In the naïve stage, individuals were not conscious of their own social identity (Jackson 1976, 2001). Those individuals in the acceptance stage accepted the dominant culture’s view of Black culture and did not question this view (Jackson 1976, 2001). Resistance involved rejecting the majority culture’s views and definitions of Black culture (Jackson 1976, 2001). In redefinition, individuals renamed and reclaimed their own racial identity (Jackson 1976, 2001). The final stage, internalization, similar to other identity development models involved the integration of the new identity into all facets of one’s self-concept (Jackson 1976, 2001).

Baldwin, Duncan, and Bell (1992) and Robinson and Howard-Hamilton (1994) developed components that formed a healthy self-concept for African Americans.

Robinson and Howard-Hamilton’s (1994) seven principles emphasized the psychological health and well-being of African Americans. These seven principles, which were not stage-related, included unity (umoja), self-determination (kujichagulia), collective work and responsibility (ujima), cooperative economics (ujamaa), purpose (nia), creativity (kuumba), and faith (imani) (Torres, Howard-Hamilton, & Cooper, 2003). Individuals can choose to engage in one principle or several principles simultaneously (Torres, Howard-Hamilton, & Cooper, 2003).

Contemporary college students have experienced a world that is more culturally diverse than their predecessors. Strayhorn (2011) noted that African American students in the Millennial generation are more affluent than previous generations, performed better in high school than their same-race Generation X counterparts, and use computers more frequently. In terms African American identity development, Burt and Halpin (1998) noted there were three primary themes that which included the strong influence of
families and community members, the racial and ethnic relationships between Caucasians and other racial and cultural identity groups, and how historical influences have shaped identity development.

Latino/a Identity Development Theories


Keefe and Padilla (1987) utilized a quantitative survey to assess the constructs of cultural awareness, ethnic loyalty, and ethnic social orientation. Keefe and Padilla (1987) found that cultural awareness decreases between first and second generation Mexican Americans in the United States. However, Keefe and Padilla (1987) found that the constructs of ethnic loyalty and ethnic social orientation experienced a slight decrease between first and second generation Mexican Americans in the United States and then remained steady up to the fourth generation. From this study, Keefe and Padilla (1987) developed the Typology of Mexican American Ethnic Orientation. The five typologies in
this model ranged from Type I (unacculturated and identifying as Mexican) to Type V (extremely Anglicized and having little knowledge or identity with Mexican culture).

Torres (2003) conducted a qualitative study of twelve Latino/a students in their first two years of college, utilizing individual interviews. Through these interviews, Torres (2003) created two major categories of Latino/a identity development. These two stages were Situating Identity and Influences on Change in identity development (Torres, 2003). In the Situating Identity phase, three factors influenced the development of Latino/a identity which included the environment where they grew up, family influence and generation in the United States, as well as the self-perception of status in society (Torres, 2003). If students were from an environment where diversity was present, they were more likely to have a strong sense of identity and appreciate the diversity around them (Torres, 2003). Conversely, Latino/as who grew up in environments that had mainly White Europeans as an influence were more likely to define where they were from in terms of geographic location and tended to identify with the majority culture (Torres, 2003).

Families also played a role in how Latino/a students defined themselves (Torres, 2003). The Latino/a students in Torres’ (2003) study identified themselves using the same terms and language used by their parents. Students in Torres’ (2003) study credited their parents with their views on ethnicity and its role in their lives. The students also talked about their Latino/a heritage positively (Torres, 2003). The generational status of students and their parents also affected their identity development. Torres (2003) found that students who were first generation in the United States struggled with the expectations of the college environment which included how to balance the expectations
of college with the expectations of their parents. Students who were second or third generation in the United States, however, assumed the mingling of the two cultures and tended to have less conflict with their parents regarding their identity development (Torres, 2003). An individual’s self-perception of status in society focused on one’s perception of privilege and their reaction to the presence of absence of privilege (Torres, 2003).

There were two influences on the change in identity development, which were cultural dissonance and changes in the relationships in the environment (Torres, 2003). Cultural dissonance occurred as a result of conflicts between the individual’s sense of culture and others’ expectations (Torres, 2003). Latino/a students who were first generation in the United States and experienced conflicting expectations with their parents were more likely to desire an association with the majority culture (Torres, 2003). Latino/a students who lacked identification with their culture, however, were more likely to seek out more information on their own culture and heritage (Torres, 2003). As students progressed through the first to second year in college, changes in personal relationships and involvement in identity-based student organizations influenced personal growth and development (Torres, 2003). Throughout the study, Torres (2003) noted none of the Latino/a students in the study harbored negative attitudes toward their racial/ethnic identity. The negative attitude towards one’s own racial/ethnic identity was present in other identity development models represented one type of deficit thinking (Torres, 2003).

Ferdman and Gallegos (2001) developed six orientations defining one’s orientation to their Latino/a identity. The six orientations were Latino integrated, Latino
identified, subgroup identified, Latino as other, undifferentiated/denial, and White identified (Ferdman & Gallegos, 2001; Torres, Howard-Hamilton, & Cooper, 2003). Each stage in the model has a different lens and preference which focused on how individuals viewed their Latino/a identity (Ferdman & Gallegos, 2001; Torres, Howard-Hamilton, & Cooper, 2003). Although this model focuses on all Latino populations, a major weakness of the six orientations was that Ferdman and Gallegos (2001) did not specify how the lenses were developed (Torres, Howard-Hamilton, & Cooper, 2003).

Since college students could be in any one of the stages of the African American or Latino/a Identity Development models, one’s identity development status can affect how African American and Latino/a college students view their entire collegiate experience. The diversity present in the campus environment is a critical area to study, especially in the second-year of college, when the newness and excitement of the college experience has worn off and disillusionment with higher education may be present in students’ minds.

Theoretical Frameworks

Tinto’s Model of Student Attrition

Tinto’s (1993) theory of academic and social integration is one of the most widely studied theories of student departure. Tinto (1993) wanted to expand on prior research of student departure, including his own, that studied students at various points in their college experience rather than longitudinally. Tinto (1993) further noted that most prior research on student departure viewed it as a problem of an individual’s intentions or ability without taking into account factors in the university environment that facilitated early departure from the institution. In Tinto’s (1993) revised theory of student
departure, he utilized Van Gennep’s (1960) anthropological concept of rites of passage and Durkheim’s (1951) study of suicide to formulate his concepts of academic and social integration.

Van Gennep’s (1960) rites of passage consisted of a three-phase process which included separation, transition, and incorporation. The first stage of passage, separation, involved the individual separating themselves from past communities in order to adapt and persist in the new environment (Tinto, 1993). The transition stage was marked by a period of negotiation between the values of the old community and the new community (Tinto, 1993). During this process, students may choose to withdraw from college not because they have failed to integrate into the academic and social environment of the college, but because of the stress induced by the transition process itself (Tinto, 1993). Incorporation into the college or university is often marked by a formal ceremonial ritual (Tinto, 1993). Students become incorporated into the life of the college or university through involvement in student organizations, attending lectures, and intramural sports (Tinto, 1993).

Tinto (1993) incorporated Durkheim’s (1951) study of the types of suicide to provide additional insights into the nature of student departure. Durkheim, in his explanation of egotistical suicide, noted that intellectual and social integration into a community “… are essential elements of social existence in human society” (Tinto, 1993, p.102). From Van Gennep’s (1960) rites of passage and Durkheim’s (1951) study of suicide, Tinto (1993) developed a model of academic and social integration to describe the nature of student departure from college. In Tinto’s (1993) model, students’ pre-college characteristics and intentions along with their institutional commitment
influenced their experiences in the academic and social realms of the institution. If the student achieved successful academic and social integration into the college or university, this in turn influenced future persistence decisions at the institution (Tinto, 1993).

Although Tinto’s (1993) model of attrition has been one of the most widely cited in the literature, other studies and reviews have questioned the constructs of academic and social integration. Braxton, Sullivan, and Johnson (1997) found only modest support for the academic integration concept in terms of future persistence. Through a review of several studies on academic integration, Braxton and Lein (2000) discovered that the influence of academic integration on institutional commitment and persistence varied between studies conducted on multiple institutions versus single-site studies. Additionally, Nora (2002) reviewed Tinto’s (1993) application of Van Gennep’s rites of passage to study student departure. Nora (2002) found that family and other support structures were important factors in persistence and individual growth. This finding contradicts Tinto’s (1993) assertion that students must separate from their previous environments to achieve successful integration into the college or university environment. Other theorists have also questioned the relevance of Tinto’s (1993) model to diverse student populations. An overview of factors salient to African American and Latino/a student persistence is presented in the next section.

Factors Influencing African American Student Persistence

Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella, and Hagedorn (1999) compared African American and Caucasian students attending four-year institutions in the fall of 1992 concerning the influence of campus racial climate and adjustment to college. Through Cabrera et al. (1999) study, factors that positively influenced African American student
persistence were support and influence from family members, positive interactions with faculty and peers, and prior academic ability. The perception of prejudice or discrimination in the environment did not affect African American students’ decisions to persist (Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella, & Hagedorn, 1999). Even further, the study did not find any support for the proposition of prior academic preparedness in African American students’ decision to persist in college (Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella, & Hagedorn, 1999). Cabrera et. al (1999) noted factors that positively influenced African American students to persist were not different from those factors influencing Caucasian students to persist. One important caveat in Cabrera et. al’s (1999) was that the majority of African Americans in the study were from Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU’s). Attending a HBCU may account for the lack of perceived prejudice and discrimination by African Americans in Cabrera et. al’s (1999) study and the similarities of factors related to persistence.

Rodgers and Summers (2008) reviewed Bean and Eaton’s (2000) model on the psychological processes of retention for its applicability to African American students. Bean and Eaton’s (2000) model viewed students’ entering characteristics, environmental interaction, attitudes, psychological processes and outcomes as variables in a retention model. Rodgers and Summers (2008) noted that HBCU’s retain and graduate African American students at a higher rate than PWI’s, which suggested that HBCU’s may be performing better to retain African American students though a model was not tested in the study. Rodgers and Summers (2008), however, indicated more research needed to be conducted to construct retention models for African American students.
Gloria, Robinson-Kurpius, Hamilton, and Wilson (1999) studied the influence of social support, university comfort, and self-beliefs on decisions to persist among 98 Black students at a predominantly White university. Gloria et. al (1999) found all three constructs significantly predicted persistence, however social support and university comfort were the strongest predictors of persistence among African American students.

Factors Influencing Latino/a Student Persistence

Hurtado and Carter (1997) used four major data sources to examine how Latino/a students’ college transition and perceptions of the campus racial climate influenced their sense of belonging. In the academic realm, Hurtado and Carter (1997) found that discussion of ideas and concepts with other students outside of class increased Latino/a students’ sense of belonging. Grade point averages (GPA) during the second and third years of college were not related to Latino/a students’ sense of belonging (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Contradictory to prior research, working with faculty members on research projects or an independent project did not have an effect on Latino/a students’ sense of belonging (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Within the social realm of the college experience, membership in religious organizations and Greek organizations during the second and third years of college increased Latino/a students’ sense of belonging. Membership in community and social organizations during the third year increased Latino/a students’ sense of belonging to the college environment (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Hurtado and Carter (1997), however, found that perceptions of a hostile campus climate negatively influenced Latino/a students’ sense of belonging from the second to third years of college. Overall, the environment of the college and early transition experiences of Latino/a students’ impact their sense of belonging. Latino/a students’
sense of belonging to the college and university community can influence future decisions of persistence.

Hernandez (2000) conducted a qualitative study of ten Latino/a college students to determine factors influencing subsequent retention and persistence. Hernandez (2000) found eleven categories impacting Latino/a students’ decision to persist. These categories were: (a) I want to do it; (b) The family; (c) Friends and peers; (d) Faculty and staff; (e) Cocurricular involvement; (f) Finding a Latino community; (g) Money matters; (h) I’m going to make it within the environment; (i) Environment equals people; (j) Personal experiences shape the perceptions of the physical environment; and (k) Involvement as a way to break down the environment (Hernandez, 2000). Hernandez’s (2000) findings supported Rendón’s (1994) concept of validation. Rendón (1994) viewed validation as a necessary component to student success in college. Supportive faculty, staff, family, and peers combined with one’s desire to success in college served as validating agents for the Latino/a students in Hernandez’s (2000) study. Participating in student and community organizations also helped Latino/a students navigate the college environment by making it smaller in comparison to the larger university (Hernandez, 2000).

In a recent study, Torres and Hernandez (2009-2010) used longitudinal data to determine the impact having a mentor had on urban Latino/a college students. Mentoring for Latino/a college students has been correlated with increased levels of student persistence and positive views of the college environment (Torres & Hernandez, 2009-2010). Latino/a students with a mentor during their second-year of college in this study had a higher overall mean score on the intent to persist scale compared to Latino/a
students without a mentor (Torres & Hernandez, 2009-2010). The presence of a mentor, for this study, did help Latino/a students’ navigate the college environment, which promoted student success (Torres & Hernandez, 2009-2010).

Yosso’s Theory of Cultural Capital

Berger (2000) stated that the use of Bourdieu’s (1971, 1973) theories of social reproduction and cultural capital to study higher education was a relatively new development. A key concept in Bourdieu’s (1971, 1973) theory is the various types of capital, including economic, social, symbolic and cultural, which form the structures of class in society (Allen, 2006). Cultural capital “… refers to the informal social skills, habits, linguistic styles, and tastes that a person garners as a result of his or her economic resources” (Allen, 2006, p.421). There are also three different types of cultural capital, objectified, institutionalized and embodied (Allen, 2006). Objectified cultural capital refers to material possessions (cars, computers, books); institutionalized cultural capital refers to the degrees and certifications that are valued by society; and embodied cultural capital is expressed through individual taste and encompasses one’s habitus (Allen, 2006).

Bourdieu’s (1971, 1973) concepts of capital mainly refer to the structure of socioeconomic class in society. As students enter colleges and universities, they have various forms of cultural capital that have shaped their understanding of how one should act in college (Bourdieu 1971, 1973). For example, individuals who were raised in a household with many books, economic resources, and access to tutors to prepare them for the SAT’s required at most colleges and universities for admission, would have accumulated the cultural capital universities deemed appropriate for admission and
entrance. Access to tutors, books, and other economic and cultural resources are characteristics of knowledge which privileges White, middle-class and upper-class students. Individuals from different racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds are viewed as having a disadvantage in this dominant paradigm (Bourdieu 1971, 1973).

Yosso built upon Bourdieu’s (1971, 1973) forms of capital to acknowledge the forms of cultural capital from different racial and ethnic groups in society. Utilizing a critical race theory (CRT) framework, Yosso (2005) indicated that many schools and systems take a deficit approach in terms of educating students of color. One assumption in critical race theory (CRT) is that students of color lack the appropriate forms of capital to advance in society, and as a result, this is the basis of many programs in higher education (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Yosso, 2005). One of the ways colleges and universities privilege different forms of capital over another is through student involvement in organizations. Students receive various messages about being involved in student organizations and obtaining leadership positions to place on their resumes. While student organization involvement is a privileged form of capital in higher education environments, working to pay for college is rarely discussed as another form of capital equivalent to student organization involvement and leadership experiences.

Yosso (2005) described six alternative forms of capital that can be used to study the various forms of capital students of color bring to the college environment. These forms of capital were: (a) aspirational capital; (b) linguistic capital; (c) familial capital; (d) social capital; (e) navigational capital; and (f) resistant capital (Yosso, 2005). Aspirational capital referred to individuals’ aspirations for themselves and the future and the ability to move toward these aspirations when facing barriers (Yosso, 2005).
Linguistic capital was the social, intellectual, and linguistic skills students brought to their college environment (Yosso, 2005). Familial capital included the cultural knowledge preserved among members of a specific cultural group (Yosso, 2005). Social capital consisted of the networks of individuals and organizations that provided sources of emotional support to navigate the college environment (Yosso, 2005). Navigational capital concerned one’s ability to progress through institutions not designed with students of color in mind (Yosso, 2005). Finally, resistant capital was the ability to challenge the status quo and stereotypes about one’s culture (Yosso, 2005).

By approaching the study of African American and Latino/a second-year students from a cultural capital approach, one can further understand how the use of various forms of cultural capital helps navigate the college environment. Validating students’ various forms of capital and knowledge they bring to the college environment enabled students learning and growth (Rendón, 1994; Rendón Linares & Muñoz, 2011).

Chapter Summary

This chapter reviewed the relevant literature in the following areas: (a) second-year student needs; (b) student development theory; and (c) identity development theories for African American and Latino/a students. Tinto’s model of student attrition (1975, 1993) and Yosso’s (2005) concept of cultural capital provided the theoretical framework to study the second-year experience for African American and Latino/a college students.

The literature review found career and academic decisions, mentoring relationships, and intellectual engagement as pivotal needs for second-year college students. Academic and social integration described factors related to persistence for traditional college students; however the constructs of academic and social integration
varied in their relevance to persistence for diverse student groups. The literature reviewed in this chapter supported the need for a study of the second-year experience for African American and Latino/a college students as the foundation for this dissertation. This study will explore the salient factors in African American and Latino/a college students’ second-year experience at a predominantly White university (PWI) utilizing Yosso’s (2005) concept of cultural capital.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This study aimed to discover the experiences of second-year underrepresented college students at a large (over 17,000 students), predominantly White, four-year public land-grant institution in the southeastern United States. The purpose of this study was to build upon the existing base of research pertaining to the second-year experience. The secondary purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the second-year experience for underrepresented college students at a predominantly White institution.

This chapter explained and justified the research design, including the research questions, recruitment of participants, and the data collection and analysis procedures. The information gained from a pilot study is presented to add further detail to the rationale behind the research questions and data collection procedures.

Research Design

A qualitative research design was selected for this study. The interpretivist paradigm guided this study because the experience being described is based on another’s viewpoint (Sipe & Constable, 1996). Interpretivists use discourse and dialogue to uncover the lived experiences of those experiencing the phenomenon of interest (Sipe & Constable, 1996). The epistemology underlying the interpretivist framework is that knowledge is gained from lived experiences. Phenomenology is a valuable qualitative methodology under the interpretivist paradigm that can be used to uncover the lived experiences of individuals (Creswell, 2009).
Phenomenology as Methodology

Creswell (2007) described phenomenological research as attempting to describe the experiences of several participants with respect to a specific phenomenon. Through attempting to describe the experiences of several individuals, the researcher “… develops a composite description of the essence of the experience for all of the individuals.” (Creswell, 2007, p.58). In the Husserlian tradition, phenomenology is not only concerned with the discovery of essence and meaning, but also the elimination of prior suppositions in the quest to uncover the meaning of a phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Attempting to control for prior suppositions and impressions of a phenomenon is accomplished through a technique called bracketing, where the researcher attempts to “bracket out” prior research and knowledge of the phenomenon of interest (Gearing, 2004).

Since this study attempted to describe not only the essence of the second-year experience, but also perceptions second-year underrepresented college students have about the college environment, hermeneutic phenomenology was used (Lopez & Willis, 2004; Van Manen, 1990). Hermeneutic (interpretive) phenomenology aims to develop a full interpretive description of an aspect of the lifeworld of the participants with the knowledge that the description may not fully explain the complexities of the lived experience (Lopez & Willis, 2004; Van Manen, 1990). Heidegger (1962), whose concepts are central to the foundation of hermeneutic phenomenology, believed that individuals could not take themselves out of the context of their reality (Lopez & Willis, 2004). The main question hermeneutic (interpretive) phenomenology attempts to answer is, “How does the lifeworld inhabited by any particular individual in this group of
participants contribute to the commonalities in and differences between their subjective experiences?” (Lopez & Willis, 2004, p.729).

One important concept in interpretive phenomenology is situated freedom (Lopez & Willis, 2004). Heidegger (1962) maintained individuals are “… embedded in their world to such an extent that subjective experiences are inextricably linked with social, cultural, and political contexts” (Lopez & Willis, 2004, p.729). While the transcendental phenomenologist aims for a description of the phenomenon of interest, a hermeneutic phenomenologist focuses on how individuals experience the phenomenon of interest in relation to their various contexts (Lopez & Willis, 2004).

Another concept central to hermeneutic phenomenology is the recognition of prior research and researcher presuppositions (Lopez & Willis, 2004). Heidegger noted that the shedding of prior knowledge and research was extremely difficult (Lopez & Willis, 2004). Often the review of prior literature and knowledge of the subject has given the researcher useful insights for further research and study design (Lopez & Willis, 2004).

Lastly, co-constitutionality is a central characteristic of hermeneutic phenomenological research (Lopez & Willis, 2004). Co-constitutionality means that “… the meanings that the researcher arrives at in interpretative research are a blend of the meanings articulated by both participant and researcher within the focus of the study” (Lopez & Willis, 2004, p.730). While the results obtained in a hermeneutic (interpretive) study contains a singular meaning, the results need to be believable and realistic within the context of the study and reflect the realities of the participants’ lives (Annells, 1996).
Historical and Institutional Context

The history of the university provided an important starting point for understanding the context of student life at the research site. The first state college in the state of the research study was founded in 1801 (Reel, 2011). In 1811, the state’s General Assembly passed a free school act that provided the foundation for the state’s public school education (Reel, 2011). While public school attendance was not mandated by the state, the schools were only open to Caucasian children and were poorly funded (Reel, 2011). By 1860, half of the Caucasian population in the state had some formal education compared to African American population who did not have any formal education (Reel, 2011). In 1907, the state’s General Assembly provided funding for high schools and by 1927, there were 279 high schools for Caucasian students and ten for African American students (Reel, 2011).

Military Heritage

The research site, Southeast University, was formally founded in 1889 with a land donation from a prominent state citizen. Under the Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862 and the provisions contained in the benefactor’s will, a curriculum of agriculture, mechanics, and military tactics was offered. The university remained an all-male military institution until 1954 when the institution’s trustees met and voted to allow women to enroll in all programs of the institution (Reel, 2011). By this time, the institution’s curricular offerings had expanded to include education, textiles, engineering, and majors in the arts and sciences. The primary reason for admitting women to the institution at that time were financial. The number of men interested in pursuing a military education had declined and there was a growing interest among women in enrolling at the institution.
(Reel, 2011). In January 1955, the first women enrolled at the institution and walked across the lawn of the main building on campus where a “Welcome Coeds” sign was placed (Reel, 2011). While the male students at the institution welcomed coeducation, it was a long time before women were able to be more fully integrated into the institution in terms of campus housing. The first women’s dormitory on campus was opened in 1963 (Reel, 2011).

Preparing for Integration

In 1963, eight years after women enrolled at the institution, the first African American student enrolled at the institution to major in architecture. The integration of the university was accomplished through a long legal battle. While the legal battle was being fought in the courts, Southeast University was preparing for integration.

The Morrill Land Grant Act of 1890 established separate land grant institutions for Caucasians and African Americans and required both institutions to be funded equally. The first Black land grant institution in this state was founded in 1889, the same year as Southeast University. During the mid-twentieth century, there were two policies happening in the national government that set the stage for integration. In 1948, the President’s Commission on Higher Education recommended that access to higher education must be available to individuals of all races and religions (Reel, 2011). Essentially, “… where federal money went, the Fourteenth Amendment followed” (Reel, 2011, p.495). The Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka (Kansas) in 1955 ruled that separate, but equal education was not equal and unconstitutional and required the integration of the public school system. While some institutions viewed the ruling as applying mainly to elementary and secondary schools, higher education state institutions
during this time period and in the years following began eliminating racial barriers in their institutions.

Three African American male students had inquired about admission to this university prior to the admission of the first African American male student in January 1963. One person did not pursue admission beyond the initial inquiry, but the other two students were denied based on the state’s law to withhold funding from institutions in the state deciding to integrate (Reel, 2011). The withholding of state funds from post-secondary institutions deciding to integrate also included the historically Black institution in the state (Reel, 2011). The historian for the institution noted:

An important item to remember is that the will of the benefactor did not indicate enrollment in the institution only be open to men or specify all White men as other institutions did at the time. Also, unlike other institutions, the administration of the institution did not have to fight the will, but rather the state for integration (J. Reel, personal communication, January 12, 2012).

A fourth African American male applied for transfer to the university. He was denied admission and filed a lawsuit in the Western District court of the state’s Division of the U.S. Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals (Reel, 2011). During the legal battle, the university gained time to prepare for integration. The university noted the difficulties, including the violence that had erupted in other southeastern states, surrounding integration. The foundation was paved for the first African American male student to enter the institution peacefully in January 1963 after the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals found that restricting state money due to integration was unconstitutional (Reel, 2011). The first
African American female student enrolled in the subsequent fall semester. This process paved the way for other non-Caucasian students who desired to apply and enroll in the university.

The Institution Today

According to the United States (U.S.) Census Bureau (2011), approximately 4,679,230 individuals lived in this state. Of the 4,679,230 individuals living in the state, 27.9% identified as African American, 5.1% identified as being of Latino/a origin, and 0.4% identified as American Indian/Alaska Native (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011).

During the year data was collected for this study, 16,562 undergraduate students were enrolled at Southeast University (Fact Book, 2012). Approximately 14% of the undergraduate student population were of racial or ethnic descent. Undergraduate students who identified as Black/African American comprised 6.4% of the undergraduate student body and 2.6% identified as Latino/a (Fact Book, 2012). Out of this percentage, 270 were in their second-year of study (R. Chrestman, personal communication, September 21, 2012). Southeast University had over 400 student organizations and there were 40 fraternities and sororities on campus including 9 National Pan-Hellenic Council organizations (NPHC’s) (university website, February 6, 2012). Approximately, 23% of the undergraduate student body were in a fraternity or sorority and 133 students are in a NPHC organization, which represents approximately 11% of the African American student population (university website, February 6, 2012). NPHC is the coordinating body for the nine historically African American fraternities and sororities on college campuses (www.nphchq.org, Retrieved on March 25, 2012).
Pilot Study

Interviews of three undergraduate African American students were conducted at the same four-year, public institution serving as the setting for this study. The participants were two female undergraduate African American students and one male undergraduate African American student all in their junior year at the university. The pilot study was conducted for two reasons. First, since the researcher was a novice in qualitative research methods, the pilot study served to further develop qualitative interviewing skills. Second, the pilot study served as a way to pilot the proposed questions to determine if the questions were appropriate as well as the usefulness of the interview design method (Seidman, 2006).

Transcript analyses of the audio-taped recordings of the interviews were the primary means of developing themes for the data. The researcher analyzed the transcripts and coded the responses to develop the emerging themes from the text (Seidman, 2006). There were two themes that emerged from the analysis, academic adjustment and relationships. First, participants indicated that their second-year in college was one of adjusting to a more difficult course curriculum. Second, the importance of relationships with peers, faculty, and staff members were evident in the participants’ second-year. The themes are discussed below.

Theme One: Academic Adjustment

Each participant noted the second-year at the university was characterized by an academic adjustment. During their second-year, two of the participants indicated their grades had fallen in comparison to their freshmen year. The third participant noted that
her grades fell during the second-semester of her freshmen year and by her second-year her grades started to recover. Additionally, all three individuals described an element of uncertainty or “gray area” surrounding their second-year in college. Most of the uncertainty surrounded the choice of a major. Two participants described uncertainty of major choice and one described the choice to change a major as a main reason for achieving better grades. The male participant stated the effort needed in terms of academics was increased as indicated in the comment below:

    I mean, freshmen year, is General Ed and kinda you have to put in effort, but not that much effort and sophomore year you had to put in ten times more effort and learning how to actually put forth that effort.

Theme Two: Relationships

A common element in all of the interviews was the importance of relationships during the second-year. During the interviews questions were asked about the participants’ relationships with their peers, faculty, and staff members at the university. One female participant described the relationships with her peers during the second-year in the following comment:

    … that was basically the year that I learned who my friends were and who my friends weren’t ….

The other participants described similar experiences in terms of a narrowing down of who were their real friends and who were merely acquaintances. Two of the participants noted that there were friends from their freshmen year who did not return for their second-year. The fact that their friends did not return made two individuals in the interviews question their own intent to remain at the institution.
Relationships with faculty and staff members at the institution were characterized as helpful. Two of the interview participants noted the importance of building relationships with faculty members in order to help with classes or gain recommendations for jobs. The relationships with staff members at the institution were also helpful in terms of getting involved with the campus. One participant characterized the environment of his student employment experience as:

… the perfect mixture of professionalism, but also that whole, I felt like I could trust people here like with general concerns or anything that bothered me, ….

All three individuals in the interviews were mentors to others or could identify a mentor who significantly helped them during their second-year. Mentoring others gave the participants a sense of fulfillment in knowing they had helped others and having a mentor gave participants a sense of purpose.

Significance of the Pilot Study

The pilot study provided the researcher experience in conducting interviews and helped refine the methods used to study the second-year experience for underrepresented college students. As a result of the pilot study, a change was made in the data collection method. Focus groups were conducted in the final study instead of interviews to provide a better depth of information (Morgan, 1997). Using focus groups may help the individuals in the study be more open with one another about their experiences as an underrepresented second-year college student at Southeast University. Follow-up interviews were conducted with two participants to go into further detail about the concepts expressed during the focus groups. Additionally, the following comment by one of the pilot study participants led the researcher to include sociological theories in the
framework for analyzing the second-year experience, “… nobody really expects for a minority to rise to the occasion …”. The above-listed comment was a primary reason for adding Yosso’s (2005) theory of cultural capital to the theoretical framework for the final study.

Questions used for the interview protocol were reduced to four questions for the focus groups in the fall and spring semesters. Questions concerning the academic and social experiences at the institution, while important, may be leading in terms of the focus of the experience. The focus groups concentrated on the broad aspect of the second-year experience for underrepresented college students. Follow-up questions were asked during the individual interviews.

**Research Question**

A primary guiding research question and two guiding secondary research questions were developed to study the experiences of underrepresented college students in their second-year of study at a predominantly White institution (PWI) in the southeastern United States (U.S.). The primary guiding research question was:

- What are the experiences of underrepresented college students during their second-year at a college or university?

The guiding secondary research questions were:

- How do underrepresented students experience the in-classroom and out-of classroom environments during their second-year?
- What relationships are important for underrepresented students during their second-year?
Tinto’s (1993) theory of student attrition and Yosso’s (2005) concept of cultural capital served as the theoretical basis for the development of focus group and interview questions. The relationship of the theory to the questions is depicted in Table 1.
### Table 1 Mapping of Conceptual/Theoretical Framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What are the experiences of underrepresented college students during their second year at a college or university?</td>
<td>How do underrepresented students experience the in-classroom and out-of classroom environments during their second year?</td>
<td>Academic and social integration into the college or university environment is a key for incorporation and adjustment to the college environment</td>
<td>Cultural capital “… refers to the informal social skills, habits, linguistic styles, and tastes that a person garners as a result of his or her economic resources” (Allen, 2006, p.421).</td>
<td>Tell me about your second year at this institution. What have been some of the challenges during your second year?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The six forms of cultural capital that will be used in this study are aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational and resistant capital defined by Yosso (2005).</td>
<td>What have been some of the successes during your second year?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Who or what helped you the most during your second year?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Participant Information and Selection

The population for the study was second-year underrepresented students at the research site institution. The research site, Southeast University, was classified by the Carnegie Foundation (n.d.) as a primarily residential, large, public, four-year research institution in the Southeast. Currently, the undergraduate student population is
approximately 16,562 undergraduates and 3,798 of these undergraduate students are in their second-year of study. From this population, approximately 12 underrepresented students self-selected to be a part of two focus groups on the second-year experience for underrepresented students and two individuals were selected for follow-up interviews. Participants were full-time students in their second-year of study at the institution and also an underrepresented student at the institution.

Student affairs staff members in the student life department were asked to help identify students matching the desired criteria and send these students invitations to participate in the study. Data and names from the institutional research office were used to verify if these students were in the second-year cohort and to send the recruitment email. After respondents agreed to participate in the study, they completed a profile sheet (see Appendix B) prior to proceeding with the focus groups and interviews. The participants in the study self-identified their gender, race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic class. A chart with the profile of each participant is listed below in Table 2.
### Table 2

**Participant Profile Chart**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Major</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>GPA</th>
<th>Credits Completed</th>
<th>Socioeconomic Class</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>*Cora</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Environmental Engineering</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Middle Class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aubrey</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Middle Class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kirsten</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Political Science</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Upper Lower Class - Lower Middle Class (in between)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brian</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Communication Studies</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>Middle Class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophie</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Environmental Engineering</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Middle Class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nadia</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Upper Middle Class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stefano</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Mexican American</td>
<td>Philosophy with Religious Studies</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Lower Middle Class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Monica</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Chemical Engineering</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Middle Class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Thea</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Bioengineering</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2.87</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Lower Class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiffani</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Biological Science</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2.18</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Lower Class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marika</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Genetics</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Not self-reported</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>Middle Class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carla</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Marketing</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>Middle Class</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Indicates self-identified as first generation student in college*

Ten (10) African American/Black females participated in the study and two (2) males participated in the study, one African American/Black male and one Mexican American male. Participants were given a $10 gift card as an incentive for their participation in the study. The researcher attempted to recruit more males and students.
who identified as Latino/a for the study through personal outreach with key informants. I communicated with student affairs offices and student organization advisors, but no additional students responded to the emails and outreach efforts. The asterisks by three of the participants’ names above indicated that they also identified as a first generation college student.

Data Collection Process

Focus groups and interviews served as the main methods of data collection for this study. Focus groups have been broadly defined as a research method where collecting data is through group interaction on a predetermined topic by the researcher (Morgan, 1997). Interviews were conducted as a follow-up to the focus groups. Interviews provided the researcher to understand the complexities of the lived experiences of the participants in greater depth in order to gain a better perspective of their lifeworld (Patton, 2002 and Van Manen, 1990).

The focus groups were formed by individuals who were in their second-year at Southeast University and identified as Black/African American or Latino based on the institution’s student demographic records. Twelve (12) participants volunteered for one of two focus groups in order to give participants equal time to express their thoughts (Morgan, 1997). Two focus groups were conducted, one in the fall 2012 and spring 2013 semesters. All twelve (12) participants attended the first set of focus groups in the fall 2012 semester. The same twelve (12) participants who attended the fall 2012 focus groups were invited to participate in a second focus group in the spring 2013 semester. Ten (10) out of the twelve (12) participants from the first focus group in the fall 2012 semester returned for the spring 2013 focus groups.
Follow-up interviews were scheduled after the fall 2012 focus groups were conducted. Participants selected for follow-up interviews provided a significant depth of information on their second-year experience during the focus group. Individual interviews allowed the selected participants to further elaborate on their comments during the focus group, which added to the depiction of the second-year experience for underrepresented college students. The focus groups and interviews were conducted on campus to provide ease of access for the participants. An informal setting for the focus groups and interviews was selected to promote active dialogue.

Upon obtaining Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval for the study, the informed consent letter was reviewed prior to the start of the first set of focus groups in fall 2012 (see Appendix C). Students also completed a voluntary demographic profile (see Appendix B) prior to the start of the fall 2012 focus group.

Participants in the focus groups were assigned a pseudonym as a method of identification. Prior to the beginning of the fall 2012 focus group, the researcher welcomed the participants and gave an overview of the format for the study and began asking the pre-determined list of focus group questions found in Appendix A. Each focus group was audio-recorded and transcribed following the focus group. Following transcriptions of the focus groups, interviews were conducted with two select focus group participants to follow-up on the ideas expressed in the focus groups. The two individuals selected for individual interviews were the two male participants in the study to better understand their second-year experience in relation to their student organization involvement.
Through the focus groups and interviews, the researcher engaged in the *lifeworld* of the participants to achieve empathy with their experience (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000). The dialogue was based on an overarching set of four questions with the opportunity for the researcher to ask follow-up questions to open-up further understanding (Haggman-Laitila, 1999). At the conclusion of both the focus groups and interviews, participants were asked if there was anything else they would like to add to make sure everything the participants wanted to share had been shared.

**Data Analysis**

The transcripts of the audio-recorded focus groups and interviews were reviewed and will be the primary means for data analysis. The researcher listened to and reviewed the transcripts first in order to understand the participants’ understandings and meanings of the phenomenon (Hycner, 1985). Although hermeneutic (interpretive) research does not necessarily preclude noting presuppositions, it is important to describe these presuppositions and ensure through peer debriefing that those presuppositions have not misconstrued the analysis of the data (Hycner, 1985). The researcher also documented her personal experiences related to the phenomenon of study prior to data collection (Peshkin, 1988).

After the focus group and interview transcripts were transcribed, the transcripts were reviewed for their essential meaning (Hycner, 1985 and Van Manen, 1990). During the process, the verbal responses of the participants were noted in addition to any non-verbal communication, such as pauses, silence, and gestures (Hycner, 1985). Following this review, the transcripts were analyzed again for general units of meaning that described the essential structures of the experience (Hycner, 1985 and Van Manen,
Each sentence and paragraph was analyzed to determine a general unit of meaning (Hycner, 1985). These general units of meaning were assigned a code and overall relevance to the research questions for the study was determined (Hycner, 1985). The general units of meaning were organized into clusters of meaning to develop overarching themes for the study (Hycner, 1985 and Van Manen, 1990). Participants in the study were given the transcripts of the focus groups and interviews to review for accuracy and for the meaning developed from the transcripts of the audio-recordings. A member of the researcher’s dissertation committee served as an independent evaluator of the meaning and themes derived from the transcribed data (Hycner, 1985).

Trustworthiness, Assurance, and Ethical Considerations

Trustworthiness and credibility of data is a key issue in qualitative research (Patton, 2002). One way to assure trustworthiness in qualitative data is through triangulation of the data through review by the participants, other analysts, and collecting other types of data from different sources (Patton, 2002). As stated previously, participants were asked to review the themes derived from the transcriptions, known as member-checking (Creswell, 2009). The process used to delineate units and clusters of meaning from the transcribed data were discussed and verified with a scholar educated in phenomenological research methods and analysis to improve validity. A peer debriefer also served as an independent reviewer for the research data to ensure the researcher-created meanings were accurate (Creswell, 2009). The researcher also interviewed one underrepresented students who did not return during their second-year at the institution to triangulate the data from the study (Patton, 2002). Key information interviews, observations at campus events, and a review of key artifacts, including websites and
orientation materials, further served to triangulate the data from the focus groups and interviews (Patton, 2002).

Both focus groups and interviews focused on the sharing of personal information, and the confidentiality of this information was an ethical consideration for the researcher (Seidman, 2006). To address this concern, a statement of privacy was included in the recruitment materials for the study and restated prior to the start of the focus groups and interviews. Second, the participants in the study were told that the focus groups and interviews would be recorded and these recordings will not be shared with other parties. Third, as noted previously, each participant was assigned a pseudonym on their demographic profile sheet and the actual names of the participants were not revealed in the study. Lastly, participants were asked to respect the information shared in the focus groups and to refrain from sharing this information outside of the focus group. (See Appendix B for the verbiage to be shared with participants).

To further protect the identity of the participants, the transcripts of the focus groups and interviews were password protected on the researcher’s computer. The tape recorder was locked in a desk drawer and the records will be destroyed after three years according to the research site’s IRB guidelines. The researcher also encouraged the participants to share any concerns about the study with the researcher.

**Role of the Researcher**

The role of the researcher in qualitative research studies was critical to the study. Due to the closeness of the researcher to the research process, the researcher by necessity becomes part of the research process. Creswell (2009) recognized that in qualitative research the researcher, “… is typically involved in a sustained and intensive experience
with the participants” (p.177). It is important for the researcher to acknowledge their values, assumptions, and any potential bias prior to the start of the study (Creswell, 2009). To acknowledge my values, assumptions, and bias pertaining to this research study, my role as related to this research is described below.

When I was an undergraduate English major, I enjoyed reading novels and poems that depicted a different culture or worldview. The ways in which others described similar experiences, such as colonization in underdeveloped countries and the importance of grandparents in the Latin American culture, not only fascinated me, but also suggested that meanings ascribed to similar events or relationships were influenced by one’s racial identity and context-specific. In the hermeneutic method, “… there may be multiple, correct interpretations of a given ‘text’” (Bredo, 2006, p.15). Using the interpretivist epistemology as a framework, reality is subjective and constructed by the individuals who experience it (Sipe & Constable, 1996).

College students have a unique reality particular to each student’s experience. The specific experience I am interested in relates to the experience of underrepresented second-year students at a predominantly White institution. In terms of my own racial and ethnic background, I am a White, middle-class female college graduate. I also identify as a first generation college student. As I am conducting this study, I was mindful of the elements of White privilege (McIntosh, 1989). McIntosh (1989) noted that White privilege is similar to a knapsack of unearned rights and privileges afforded to those belonging to the majority or White culture. During my conversations with students of African American and Latino/a descent, I was mindful of my own assumptions and worldview of higher education and the college environment and put it aside. I needed to
be fully present and attentive to the experiences described to me by the African American and Latino/a students in the study. I also needed to be mindful of this as I am interpreting the transcriptions of their stories.

My interest in second-year college students started a year before I came to this institution in 2008. I worked as a Complex Coordinator for an upperclassmen residence hall complex at a campus in the Northeast. During my two-and-a-half years at this institution, one of the items we were charged with as a department was creating residential curricula for our complexes. As a part of these curricula, resident assistants conducted individual meetings, or one-on-ones, with their residents. As I spoke with the resident assistants for my complex, more than one of the resident assistants described the sophomore students on their floors as directionless, uncertain, and overall lacking a clear sense of direction and purpose for their studies. The general feeling of uncertainty was similar to my own experience during my second-year in college. In fact, by my second-semester of my freshmen year, I had already changed my major from pharmacy to English and transferred to a college in my home state of Pennsylvania. My second-year was characterized with a sense of doubt over these decisions. As I became involved in activities, such as the campus programming board and as an orientation leader, I was more confident in myself and career direction.

When I started to review existing research literature on second-year students, I noted Schaller (2000) had conducted a phenomenological study on traditional-aged second-year students at a private institution in the Midwest. Schaller (2000, 2005) gave four categories for second-year college student development, random exploration, focused exploration, tentative choices, and commitment describing sophomore student
development. Would these themes be similar or different for underrepresented students at a public 4-year institution in the southeastern United States? I assumed that underrepresented students at a predominantly White institution in the Southeast would describe their experiences differently based on their lived realities. As Bredo (2006) noted, in order “To discover its practical consequences, research needs to be considered in context, in the situations in which it originates and is used” (p.21). Situating the study in a specific context, a predominantly White institution (PWI) at Southeast University was one primary goal for my research on underrepresented college students in their second-year of study.

**Limitations of the Study**

This study was limited by the fact that the results of a qualitative research study are not generalizeable. The researcher’s main interest was to gather depth of information as compared to broader types of information. The research site was at one institution and may not be representative of similar populations at other institutions. The researcher was also a novice in conducting phenomenological research studies. Additionally, the researcher’s role as a professional in student affairs may have confused the boundaries to the point where the researcher could have been perceived by participants in the study as both a researcher and administrator in the study setting. The researcher was also relying on the participants to be open and honest about their experiences during their second year in college. Levering (2006) noted one assumption in phenomenological research is that individuals know themselves well. A critical item to understand is that understanding of the self is an incomplete and ongoing process subject to continual evaluation (Levering, 2006).
Chapter Summary

This chapter explained and justified the qualitative approach and the phenomenological research design. The selection of the research site was described and the results gained from a pilot study at the research site were presented. The researcher described the methods that were used to recruit the sample population in addition to the data collection and analysis components of the study. The role of the researcher was described and the researcher’s biases were stated. Lastly, the researcher discussed the limitations of the study.
CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

This chapter presented findings from the data collected from underrepresented students in their second-year at a predominantly White institution (PWI), Southeast University. The primary research question for the study was, “What are the experiences of underrepresented college students during their second-year at a college or university?” Two secondary research questions were, “How do underrepresented students experience the in-classroom and out-of-classroom environments during their second-year?” and “What relationships are important for underrepresented students during their second-year?” Comments from focus groups and interviews were analyzed to identify patterns and develop emerging themes (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). The identification of patterns was accomplished by careful reading and rereading of each focus group and interview transcript and noting the ways in which participants talked about and described their second-year at the research site (Smith, Larkin, & Flowers, 2009). Passages of focus group and interview transcripts that illustrated participant’s experiences and perceptions of their second-year at the research site were coded and clustered into smaller units of meaning that were then grouped into themes. Thirty-one (31) clusters of meaning emerged from this process, leading to five themes.

Emerging Themes

Through the process of this analysis, eighty-six (86) statements were identified as significant; excluding comments of agreement (such as “yes” or “I agree”) and non-related comments (such as when the conversations strayed from the question). The coded clusters of meaning were reviewed within the context of participants entire statement to
confirm participants overall meaning fit within the cluster. The related clusters of meaning were grouped into five themes describing the phenomenon of interest. The five themes that emerged through the focus groups and interviews with twelve (12) participants were: family matters, finding my community, the power of commitments, quest for balance, and strategizing for second-year student success. (See Table 3 for a full list of all coded clusters of meaning and the themes that emerged from grouping related clusters of meaning together.)
Table 3

*Explanation of Coded Clusters of Meaning and Related Themes from Data*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coded Clusters</th>
<th>Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family member attended Recommendations from high school teachers and coaches</td>
<td>Family matters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aspirations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiencing a different environment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forming friendships</td>
<td>Finding my community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of integration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding others like me</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding new systems of doing things</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact/immersion stages in racial identity development literature</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer mentoring programs - organizations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic support services</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willingness to ask for help</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peers</td>
<td>Power of commitments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitments to organizations and a community</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment to family/family member</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aspirations, pride, proof to self</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paying it forward in collectivist cultures</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participating in more activities</td>
<td>Quest for balance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trouble saying “no”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pressure and competitiveness after college</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University pushes involvement – can only give self to so much</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balancing priorities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard work</td>
<td>Strategizing for second-year student success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Determination</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong study habits</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prayer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support system</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning from trial and error</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involvement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time management</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There were three questions asked in each focus group or interview. Through the dialogue in the interviews and focus groups, several significant comments were made that
allowed five themes to emerge from the participants. The first focus group conducted in the fall 2012 semester was designed to elicit thoughts and experiences from participants’ first-year moving into the beginning of the second-year at Southeast University. The second focus group was designed in spring 2013 to follow-up on thoughts from the first focus group in addition to collecting more information on underrepresented students’ experiences during the second semester of their second-year.

Family Matters

In researching the second-year experience, it was important to understand the influence family members had on participants’ college choice. Yosso’s (2005) definition of social capital emphasized the networks of individuals and organizations that provided sources of emotional support to navigate the college environment. These social networks of support were evident in the college choice process for participants.

All participants indicated a family member, teacher, or coach had influenced their decision to attend the research institution. While family, teachers, and coaches provided the initial impetus to choose to attend the research institution, participants in the study also noted aspirations they had for themselves as they evaluated their decisions to attend the research institution, Southeast University. Three comments from the focus groups illustrated this point:

Tiffani, a 19-year-old Biological Sciences major, described how her biology teacher from high school influenced her choice of the research institution.

I decided to go to Southeast … it was actually my biology teacher from my high school, actually, recommended that I come here because I was so in love with biology and science and she thought that this school was the best one … the best
for sciences, that I should go to, so she recommended me here, and I’m glad she did.

Brian, a 19-year-old Communication Studies major, indicated that he originally wanted to attend a Historically Black College or University (HBCU), but changed his mind in favor of Southeast University in order to have a different experience:

I wanted to attend a historically black college or university. That’s kind of what I grew up knowing, but when I got ready to graduate I kind of looked at, like, the overall, like, reality of the situation and the hometown that I come from isn’t really that great of a place and when I realized that Southeast was an option for me, I realized I couldn’t really turn that down. So, I decided to come to Southeast as a way to get away from where I was and experience something that would set me up for life in the real world.

Thea, a 19-year-old Bioengineering major, identified as a first generation college student. Additionally, Thea also listed her socioeconomic class as lower. Family was an important source of support for Thea not only in her initial choice of Southeast University, but also as she moved through her first and second years at Southeast.

My family has been really supportive, even though this is out-of-state tuition for me and my parents can’t help me pay for it. I have loans, but at the end of the day, I know when I come out, I’m going to be, like, on top. So, that’s my whole goal, I’m looking with the end in mind and working toward that. And my family, they’re really supportive.

Cora, a 20-year-old Environmental Engineering major also identified as a first generation college student. Cora described similar aspirations as Thea in terms of future goals.
Cora indicated her socioeconomic status as middle class and noted that attending and graduating from college was a path to a better future.

Well, in my case, my parents…they don’t really make a lot, so I kind of look at the situation and said, like, “I don’t want to grow-up in this environment and I don’t want my kids to go through what I had to go through as a student.”

In addition to family support and encouragement, participants described prior experiences with the campus, either with summer camps or incoming student visit days as positive. Participants used the following adjectives to describe their experience on campus during visit days: welcoming, beautiful campus, a big family, and home. While family, teachers, coaches, and other social networks played a critical role in participants’ choice to attend Southeast University, these networks were also sources of strength for participants when they considered transferring or leaving Southeast University.

Finding My Community

The participants in both focus groups and interviews described their first year at Southeast University as a time of seeking peers who were like them, not only in terms of race, but also values, goals, and aspirations. Participants characterized their experiences during the first semester as a “culture shock.” The main “culture shock” centered on the adjustment to a predominantly White institution (PWI). Brian commented on this aspect of adjusting to a predominantly White institution (PWI), especially in the classroom environment, below:

My first year at Southeast was a culture shock because my high school was almost like 99.999% African-American. And then when I came to Southeast, it was like the exact opposite, so I found myself, like, always seeking out other black people,
like just trying to find other black people, and I realized how hard that was, because I’d be in class and it’d be just me, and I really wouldn’t see, like, other black people until, like, it was time to, I don’t know, party on the weekends or go to different events and stuff like that. But when I learned to…when that wasn’t such a big factor after a while, it wasn’t that big of a culture shock. It’s like normal now.

Stefano, a 19-year-old Philosophy with Religious Studies major, also commented on the size of Southeast University. Although he characterized his first year as “good” and found his niche in campus ministry, he noted the early struggles of finding friends.

My first year here, it was really good. It was a lot of stress, too. Just trying to find friends and everything. It was kind of just a huge shock to be around so many people because the high school I went to had about 200 people. … And so, I really struggled to find friends early on, but I got involved with CRU campus ministry, and I found my best friends through that, so that’s a blessing.

Kirsten, a 19-year-old Political Science major, found her circle of friends in band. While band and her roommate served as sources of support, she indicated it was difficult to find others who were similar to her in terms of interests and values.

Umm, so my experience was good. I didn’t have like a ton of friends, which isn’t like bad, but I had my roommate and some friends in band. I don’t know, like, it was definitely interesting because, I don’t know, a lot of the girls were like different than I was, I guess and I was trying to figure out, where, where to …. I don’t know, umm, because you have to be on the meal plan to eat in the dining halls, so it was like, “Who am I going to eat with today?”
Kirsten characterized two distinct student subcultures at Southeast during her interview. The two subcultures she noted were fraternity and/or sorority-affiliated students or “Greeks” and high-achieving, academically-oriented students, “Geeks” with decreasing variety in between the two subcultures.

As the focus group and interview participants were navigating the first year, specific organizations or programs were mentioned as facilitating the development of community. One of the programs, CONNECTIONS Peer Mentors, mentioned by two of the study participants was a peer mentor program designed specifically for underrepresented students at Southeast University. Brian and Thea participated in the CONNECTIONS Peer Mentor program during their first-year and were now serving as mentors for incoming first-year students during their second-year. Brian referred to the CONNECTIONS Peer Mentor Program as a positive source of support during his first-year:

So, there were CONNECTIONS, and then I know a lot of my friends were in PEER mentoring, so the engineers and science majors and stuff, and even though that didn’t directly benefit me, in seeing them being able to go and take advantage of stuff like that, it kind of made me feel like, “Ok. There are things out here to kind of help us.”

During his second-year, Brian noted the advisor for the CONNECTIONS Peer Mentor program, in addition to the fraternity he joined his second-year were two main sources of support which made his second-year easier. Brian also explained that having “mentees,” other than first-year students to mentor, was a key element in keeping himself accountable to his academics and the CONNECTIONS network:
But having, I’m part of a mentoring program, having mentees, um, just being able to repeat things to them that I can apply to my own life has been helpful, so to see them in the same situation that I was in last year, it just reminds me of things that I’m supposed to do, so when I tell them, “Guys, if you’ve got a test, you need to study.” It reminds me, like, “Oh, I have a test of my own, like I’ve got to study.” It helps me with accountability as well.

Thea described her experience as a peer mentor for the CONNECTIONS program as “a blessing.” Thea was the Secretary for the program and lived in the living learning community for the program. She spoke of this experience in the quote below:

… Getting to know these great people that are trying to do great things with their lives. Not only getting to know all these mentors that are trying to help first-year minority students, but we get to know the mentees themselves and seeing how, like how they’re dealing with issues and how … to watch them go through the same struggle that I went through and try to tell them … . It’s kind of funny because we have a living-learning community for CONNECTIONS … half of Southeast Hall, it’s nothing but minority students. And I’m like, “It’s a blessing, because that’s all you see.”

In my interview with the CONNECTIONS program coordinator, the mentor program was described as structured to provide “… a close-knit family …” in order to help underrepresented students move through the larger campus context (A. Bonilla, personal communication, January 16, 2013). The CONNECTIONS mentors and mentees refer to one another in familial terms, brothers and sisters (A. Bonilla, personal communication, January 16, 2013).
While the CONNECTIONS Peer Mentor program served as one way underrepresented students found support, there were other campus structures that facilitated a sense of belonging. For example, Nadia, a 20-year-old Psychology major, found her niche in the campus club soccer team. Nadia stated: “… it’s nice to kind of get everything out of your mind and just play soccer with a team that you hang out with a lot. I’m hanging out with them and doing what I like to do.” Other avenues of support were student organizations, such as the Southeast Black Student Union, gospel choir, and living-learning communities in the residence halls.

The Power of Commitments

Throughout the focus groups and interviews, nine (9) out of the twelve (12) participants indicated they had seriously thought of not returning for a second-year at the research institution. Three individuals indicated finances were a factor in deciding whether or not to return to Southeast University. Two individuals indicated grades as a factor and one participant noted it was a combination of money and grades. The factors listed by the remaining three participants were family, campus culture, and feeling called to the ministry respectively. The three individuals who stated finances were a consideration in deciding whether to return for the second-year were out-of-state students and/or identified as being from a lower socioeconomic status. When Thea considered leaving Southeast, she thought of the following:

When I got those midterm grades back, I was like, “Whoa.” It was a reality shock, like…it was so bad. I was…with school altogether, “Just forget about it. This isn’t for me. This isn’t…” you know. And then I was like, “Maybe if I switched to in-state and went to somewhere like Central or another one of the
schools I got accepted to,” but I remember applying to schools and deciding where I wanted to go, I knew I wasn’t going to be happy there. So, talking to my mom, I was like, “Alright. Maybe I could do it. Maybe I could finish it.” And, like, finances. Definitely, over the summer, those finances…in looking at it…”Whoa!” Especially with the tuition bill, like, the percentage increased how much you gotta pay.

Sophie, a 20-year-old Environmental Engineering major, and Nadia, both attending Southeast University as out-of-state students, indicated the same concerns over finances. Cora, an in-state student, almost did not return for her second-year due to finances and “… a situation with my financial aid.”

In reviewing the Orientation book provided to incoming students and their families, out-of-state tuition was approximately, $16,000 higher compared to in-state tuition (Orientation Guide, June 2012). Additionally, six (6) students who were eligible to return for the second semester of their second-year at Southeast University chose not to return. After contacting all six (6) participants, one (1) participant responded that finances were the reason she could not return for the second semester of her second-year, however she planned to return to Southeast University in the fall semester of 2013.

Marika and Tiffani indicated their first semester mid-term grades were a consideration in deciding whether or not to return for the second-year. Marika stated: “… My first semester, I was just like, Oh wow, I’ve never seen grades like this before in my life.” Tiffani indicated the grades she received in the first semester caused her overall grade-point-average (GPA) to fall below a 3.0, which triggered a loss in the scholarship money she received to attend Southeast.
Stefano wavered on whether or not he wanted to attend a different university because of a calling to the ministry. Monika, a 19-year-old Chemical Engineering major, noted several issues with her family members, who lived a close distance from campus, as a source of determining whether to return for a second-year at Southeast.

Well, I thought about not returning and it was mainly because of all the stuff, like, on top of schoolwork, it was a lot of issues that I was dealing with, with my family and stuff.

Brian, who originally wanted to attend a Historically Black College and University (HBCU), questioned his initial choice of Southeast when he listened to his friends describe their experience at an HBCU:

By the time second semester came and I had seen just about everybody who potentially was Black and I realized, I saw all my friends who were going to different schools saying, “I’m a part of this, we’re doing this and this happens at my school.” I am just kind of like, “Oh, so maybe I might need to check something else out.”

All nine (9) participants indicated the time when they considered not returning to Southeast for their second-year occurred during the second semester of their first year. Grades, finances, family, a calling to the ministry, and campus culture were different factors in participants’ decisions to remain or leave Southeast University. The nine (9) participants chose to return to Southeast University due to commitments they made to themselves, an organization, or a community. Finding a supportive peer group was a commonality among all nine (9) participants’ decisions to return to Southeast for the
second-year. Sophie, whose parents’ both have doctorate degrees and are Kenyan, described commitment this way:

Commitments. It’s always a commitment to myself, to get through and do what I need to do, if I want to. I had a commitment to my mom. … And then my dad passed away in ’09, and he was a really, really encouraging person and he was really big on education. Like, education, education, education. So, to me, it was like, if I’m going to do this for anybody, I have to do this for him. You know? Like, have to…I have to push myself.

Similar to Sophie, Stefano, Thea, Marika, Tiffani, and Brian mentioned commitments to themselves and other people at Southeast as the main factor in their decision to return to Southeast for the second-year. The following quote from Brian best described the level of commitment to an organization and/or community:

As far as organizations are concerned that made me want to stick around, Southeast Black Student Union was the main one, because I realized that in me leaving Southeast and going to another school, I would not only be giving up on Southeast, but I would be…I felt I would be giving up on the people that I had met here, like, more specifically like the Black community, and then other incoming, like, Black students.

The Executive Director of the Student Life Center at Southeast University echoed this sense of commitment in an informational interview. She stated, “When student of color make a meaningful connection with someone or a group, their level of commitment to the institution increases, which increases their chance of coming back.” (Richardson, personal communication, January 17, 2013). Astin (1993) noted peer relationships and
support were critical in persistence decisions in the college years in addition to growth and development. Palmer, Maramba, and Holmes (2011) also found that peer support was a factor promoting the academic success and retention at a predominantly White institution. Whether the commitment is to oneself, a peer group, or student organization, the power of making a commitment at the end of the first-year at Southeast allowed students to continue to grow and thrive during their second-year at the institution (Schreiner, 2010).

Quest for Balance

All twelve (12) participants in the focus groups and interviews indicated their second-year as “better” or “going better” than their first-year at Southeast University. During the first-year at Southeast, participants struggled with finding friends. In addition, the main source of challenge in the first-year was adjusting to the academic demands of the institution. Similar to students from the pilot study, participants indicated that they could not “… put in the bare minimum effort in high school and expect top notch results ….” At Southeast, participants in the study indicated that “… they needed to come-up with a whole new way of doing things …” in order to adjust to the academic challenges of the classroom at Southeast.

While the first-year at Southeast was characterized as adjusting to the academic expectations and social life, participants in the second-year searched for balance among the many demands on their schedules. Brian described the search for balance during the second-year in the following way:

… once I got comfortable and I got involved, I had a plate that was stacked to the ceiling. At that time, I had to kind of learn how to say “no” to some things and
how to prioritize what was most important was my biggest struggle because I did feel that I needed to be involved in everything.

Carla, a 19-year-old Marketing major, described the difficulties in balancing her academic schedule with her on-campus and off-campus work schedules:

Last semester I took 12 credit hours and this semester I am taking 18 hours to keep my scholarship. So, um, like I go from 10 to 6 everyday, so it’s really stressful. It’s pretty cool. I have an on-campus job in the student center and I don’t work at my off-campus job so much. It’s not too bad. I kind of want a third job, but I don’t know that might be too much for right now.

Carla’s statement illustrated the pressure participants in both the focus groups and interviews were feeling throughout their second-year at Southeast. When asked about the source of the pressure, Nadia, Sophie, and Stefano noted the messages they perceived in the environment at Southeast. Nadia stated:

… everything is so competitive leaving college, so you feel like you have to be a part of every academic type of group and hold leadership positions and then you still want to have fun, so…and get good grades and make yourself competitive, so there’s definitely pressure from yourself and competing with your peers and parents, so…everything.

Sophie followed up on Nadia’s statement and indicated:

Yeah, there’s a lot of pressure and it’s always pushed in your face that you need to be well-rounded, so you try to get in a little bit of everything, but a little bit of everything ends up being so much.
Stefano echoed Nadia’s and Sophie’s comments and indicated the university does “push involvement” and that there was an internal pressure to say “yes” to everything “…because I don’t want to feel left out on anything.”

Involvement in student activities and organizations can be positive in that it facilitates a sense of belonging to an institution, especially underrepresented students (Schaller, 2010). When students are over-committed to different activities, fatigue and burnout may occur. Thea illustrated this concept with the following statement:

I would definitely agree to the saying “no” part because I’m always saying “yes” to everything and then you’re really drained and I…I remember kind of collapsing, so balancing some “me time” and all the things, like, that should be the first thing you should do.

The pressure to be involved in student clubs and organizations as well as the subsequent competition involvement generated for underrepresented students in working class backgrounds was mentioned several times during the second focus group in the spring 2013 semester. The conflict between being involved in a student organization and working part-time to pay for college was echoed in Rendón Linares and Muñoz (2011) work on validation in the college environment.

Participants characterized stresses during their first-year as “transitional stress” in that they were transitioning into a new environment with a need to find friends and determine new study habits. By the second-year, the “transitional stresses” of the first-year had been resolved, and participants sought to find the “happy medium” among academic coursework, extracurricular involvement, and time for themselves.
Strategizing for Second-Year Student Success

At the end of the focus groups and interviews, participants were asked, “What do you think it takes to be a successful student here?” Common words and phrases said during the focus groups and interviews were hard work, determination, motivation, strong study habits, prayer, involvement, time management, a support system, and learning from your mistakes. Cultivating strong study habits, involvement, and creating a support network have been described in previous theme areas and are documented in student involvement and engagement literature (Astin, 1993; Tinto, 1993). While participants listed these traits as necessary for student success at the institution, they spent more time describing the non-cognitive aspects of student success. In my second interview with Carla, she indicated a sense of intrinsic motivation necessary for success at Southeast:

I feel like you do have like, I think it’s called intrinsic motivation instead of extrinsic or something like that. I am thinking of psychology terms or something, but intrinsic motivation because you need like to motivate yourself because your parents’ aren’t here anymore. You have to find it within yourself to find out why you’re here.

Sophie also described the need for self-motivation and utilizing one’s own potential for success:

You have to have your own self-motivation. You have to be organized, responsible, and…prayer, of course. But, there’s something else I was going to say, but I forgot. But…yeah, you just have to realize your own potential and utilize it correctly.
All participants used similar words and statements to describe an overall success mindset needed to persist at Southeast. Additionally, Monica noted:

I can’t be the person that never says anything in class. I have to be the one who goes to my professors just so they can know who I am, so then they know that I’m actually making an effort and I’m working hard and stuff like that.

Through her contributions in the classroom setting, Monica realized the importance of having professors notice her work if she decided to ask for recommendation letters for internships, jobs, or even graduate school. In her field, recommendation letters from professors in her major were necessary. She noted recommendation letters, “… can’t be from just anybody, they have to be from someone in my field.” Other participants also noted the need to make connections with faculty members to learn about the options in their major and career field and to make connections if they wanted to apply to graduate programs.

Two characteristics not frequently mentioned by all participants, but stated by Brian was innovation and “forward-thinking.” Brian believed individuals who did not have a “forward thinking” mindset tended to be confined to the present realities of their situation and may or may not continue as he described below:

… an aspect of being a successful student is being forward-thinking because a lot of students get stuck in thinking of “the now.” So for example, these engineers, they’re taking all these complicated math classes and if you’re not forward-thinking, you’re like, “Why am I taking this, why do I need this, this sucks, I hate this class.” But, if you can think down the line, all this is leading up to a much bigger goal, which is that Southeast degree, and if you can’t keep that Southeast
degree in mind at times, a lot of people just fall to the side sometimes and they don’t return and they kind of give-up on their dream, but if you can just remember and imagine that everything is leading for a greater purpose, you will be a successful student.

Brian’s description of innovation and a future-oriented mindset were also echoed in a panel discussion on the student experience at Southeast beginning with the integration of Southeast’s first African American student until the present. The panel was conducted during the fall semester 2012 as a part of an ongoing series celebrating the fiftieth (50th) anniversary of integration at Southeast University. Members of the panel included underrepresented students who attended Southeast University in 1963, the first year of integration at Southeast University, until the present time. The panelists noted there was a sense of pride in being a “Southeast man or woman” and obtaining a degree from Southeast (Panel discussion, November 2012).

As a follow-up to strategizing for success at Southeast University, participants were asked if they saw themselves on the path to being a successful student at Southeast. All participants did feel they were on the path to being a successful student, however participants noted the path to success was continuous a journey and not an automatic destination. For example, Sophie described the experience as a process of learning and development. Aubrey indicated the following:

I feel like I’m on the right path as well. You learn from trial and error, so freshman year was definitely a trial and error year. I learned a lot and, you know, I’m using what I learned this year to better myself.

Monica also echoed this process of learning and determination:
Because I was determined to get here. I was determined to get, you know, away from home and get here. Then I was determined to stay here and, but, it just slowly went down until it finally picked back up.

Through the ongoing process of learning and developing key support networks, participants were able to find their own sources of cultural capital that allowed them to transition into and navigate the environment at Southeast (Yosso, 2005). The aspirations participants had for themselves in addition to the support networks participants cultivated were prominent in their personal definitions of a successful Southeast student.

Portrait of the Second-Year Experience for Underrepresented College Students

Through focus groups with the twelve (12) participants in the study, in addition to observations at events for the fiftieth (50th) anniversary celebration of integration at the institution, and interviews with key individuals at the institution, a portrait of the second-year experience for underrepresented college students emerged. The observations at the events for the fiftieth (50th) anniversary celebration of integration at Southeast, interviews with key individuals at the institutions, and reviews of orientation materials and websites were used to further triangulate the data gathered from the focus groups and interviews. A table of the artifacts the researcher kept is included in Table 4 below.
Table 4

Artifacts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emergent Theme</th>
<th>Supporting Data Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Family Matters          | Panel discussion on the underrepresented student experience at Southeast University (November 8, 2012)  
                          | Key informant interview with A. Bonilla on mentoring program (January 16, 2013)  
                          | Key informant interview with A. Richardson on underrepresented student life experience at Southeast University (January 17, 2013) |
| Finding My Community    | Panel discussion on the underrepresented student experience at Southeast University (November 8, 2012)  
                          | Key informant interview with A. Bonilla on mentoring program (January 16, 2013)  
                          | Review of mentoring program website (ongoing)  
                          | Key informant interview with A. Richardson on underrepresented student life experience at Southeast University (January 17, 2013)  
                          | Follow-up interview with Brian, participant in study (February 27, 2013) |
| The Power of Commitments| Academic Convocation live stream with first African American student at Southeast University (August 21, 2012)  
                          | Panel discussion on underrepresented student experience at Southeast University (November 8, 2012)  
                          | Key informant interview with A. Bonilla on mentoring program (January 16, 2013)  
                          | Key informant interview with A. Richardson on underrepresented student life experience at Southeast University (January 17, 2013)  
                          | Follow-up interview with Brian, participant in study (February 27, 2013) |
Table 4 (continued)

Artifacts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emergent Theme</th>
<th>Supporting Data Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quest for Balance</td>
<td>Panel discussion on underrepresented student experience at Southeast University (November 8, 2012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Review of Southeast University website (ongoing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Review of Orientation Booklet for Southeast University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategizing for Second-Year Student Success</td>
<td>Academic Convocation live stream with first African American student at Southeast University (August 21, 2012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Panel discussion on underrepresented student experience at Southeast University (November 8, 2012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Key informant interview with A. Bonilla on mentoring program (January 16, 2013)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Review of mentoring program website</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Review of Orientation Booklet for Southeast University</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The participants in the study were purpose-oriented, determined, and cultivated networks of support to navigate not only their first year at Southeast, but also their second-year.

Brian called this network his “power circle.” He described the “power circle” in the following way:

I kind of call it my “power circle.” Because, what I’ve realized is that it takes a very different kind of person to attend Southeast and be really involved in this experience, especially if you’re a minority, I will say. Um, I could have went to any other school and just, um, I guess, it would have felt like things are more designed for me, and I could just go out and everything was for me. Here I had to develop a circle of people I could trust, people who get behind certain causes with me, people that I can depend on to come and support different things and we work
together and what’s happened is I’ve is, these people have started to feel like family.

The relationships cultivated in the first-year at Southeast helped navigate their second-year. The portrait of the second-year experience for underrepresented students at the research institutions was the participants’ strategizing to cultivating communities of support and cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005). Terms such as family, support system, and connections were used frequently in focus groups and interviews about the second-year experience. Southeast University, as an institution, has a concept of the “Southeast Family,” which can seem overwhelming to students and culturally isolating. Participants in this study were able to re-define the concept of the Southeast Family illustrated in the following quote below:

I see my Southeast Family as these people that support me and keep my best interests at heart and in knowing that I’ve developed such a strong relationship with them dealing with all the struggles that are associated with being a minorities at a predominantly White institution. I feel like I can never leave these people because if I left them, then I feel like that would just make the circle that much weaker and I couldn’t imagine what I would do if they left me.

Participants described these networks as small and close-knit groups who shared the same values, beliefs, and aspirations. The positive connotation surrounding smaller support networks were also described in the panel discussion on the student experience at Southeast post integration (November 2012). Academic resources and student organizations were ways individuals found support at Southeast, but the overarching sense through the focus groups and interviews were that these smaller support networks
were keys to thriving at Southeast (Schreiner, 2010b). Figure 1 represents the five themes with Yosso’s (2005) cultural capital framework incorporated.
Figure 1.1

Figure of Second-Year Experience for Underrepresented Students Incorporating Yosso’s Cultural Capital Model (2005)

- Familial Capital
- Social Capital
- Navigational Capital

- Family Matters
- Finding My Tribe
- Power of Commitments
- Quest for Balance
- Strategizing for Second-Year Student
- Aspirational Capital

Pre-college | First-year | Second-year
Chapter Summary

The pilot study outlined in the previous chapter outlined two themes related to the second-year experience for underrepresented students: academic adjustments and relationships. By refining the theoretical framework to include Yosso’s (2005) concepts of cultural capital, these theme areas were refined. Five themes emerged through the focus groups and interviews with twelve (12) participants which were: family matters, finding my community, the power of commitments, quest for balance, and strategizing for second-year student success.

Overall, the participants in this study indicated their second-year was “going better” than their first-year at Southeast. The “sophomore slump” phenomenon, which has been characterized by confusion, reduced motivation and a lack of purpose in the research literature, did not emerge as a salient concept in the focus groups and interviews for this study (Kennedy & Upcraft, 2010 and Pattengale & Schreiner, 2000). Participants indicated suggestions for the second-year experience, including building support structures for underrepresented student populations, which is discussed in the following chapter.
CHAPTER FIVE
DISCUSSION

Examining the second-year experience at colleges and universities has gained interest and support among scholars and practitioners in higher education because just as many, if not more students, leave colleges and universities after their second-year in comparison to their first year (Tobolowsky & Cox, 2007). Several studies, including Shaller’s (2000, 2005) initial qualitative study, examined the experience for second-year students at Catholic-affiliated university in the Midwest region of the United States. While qualitative and quantitative studies have existed for the past fifteen years, little information is known about how the second-year experience is similar or different for various subpopulations at colleges and universities. This study explored the second-year experience for underrepresented students at a predominantly White institution (PWI) in the Southeast region of the United States. The aim of this study was to provide further insight on the second-year experience for underrepresented students at the research site, Southeast University. A discussion of the findings in relation to the theoretical framework, implications for practice and future research, and limitations of the study are discussed below.

Discussion in Relation to Theoretical Framework

The two theoretical frameworks used for this study were Tinto’s (1993) concept of student attrition and Yosso’s (2005) cultural capital. Tinto’s (1993) concept of student attrition had two components, academic integration and social integration. In Tinto’s (1993) concepts of academic and social integration, students who successfully integrated into the academic and social spheres of college were more likely to persist and in turn
graduate from the institution. Tinto’s (1987, 1993) concepts of academic and social integration have been critiqued in terms of their relevance for underrepresented student populations (Tierney, 1992 and Nora, 2002). Second-year students at colleges and universities may still struggle with academically and socially integrating into the college environment (Schaller, 2010a). The participants in this study did comment on the first-year academic adjustment to Southeast University, but they were able to quickly utilize student services such as tutoring, supplemental instruction, and study skills workshops to help with their academic coursework.

Socially, students noted residence hall communities, student organizations and mentor programs, whether sponsored by academic affairs or student affairs units, which aided them in forming networks of support that continued into their second-year. Participants described their second-year at Southeast University as “going better” than their first-year. The main struggle in the second-year was developing a sense of balance between their academic coursework, social groups, and in some cases on-campus or off-campus jobs. Overall, the concepts of academic and social integration as described by Tinto (1993) were not as salient in describing the experiences of underrepresented students at Southeast University.

Three of Yosso’s (2005) six forms of cultural capital were better suited to explain the second-year experience for underrepresented students at Southeast University. The three forms of capital that emerged through the focus groups and interviews were aspirational, social, and navigational capital (Yosso, 2005). Aspirational capital referred to individuals’ aspirations for themselves and the future and the ability to move toward these aspirations when facing barriers (Yosso, 2005). Participants in this study
explained the dreams and future aspirations they had when they decided to attend Southeast. Nine (9) out of twelve (12) of the participants in the study indicated they seriously considered leaving Southeast prior to the beginning of their second-year. Participants still returned to Southeast despite financial, academic, and campus climate issues.

Social capital included of the networks of individuals and organizations that provided sources of emotional support to navigate the college environment (Yosso, 2005). Peer groups, peer mentoring programs, student organizations, and residence hall communities allowed participants in the study to develop support networks that sustained them in their first-year and second-year at Southeast. The nine (9) participants who considered leaving Southeast after the first year indicated the main reason they returned were due to commitments to organizations and the supportive networks they created at Southeast.

Navigational capital concerned one’s ability to progress through institutions not designed with students of color in mind (Yosso, 2005). In a quote from a follow-up interview with a participant in the study, Brian noted “…what I’ve realized is that it takes a very different kind of person to attend Southeast and be really involved in this experience, especially if you’re a minority, I will say.” Other participants described key ways in which they navigated the environment at Southeast including asking others in their peer mentoring programs for assistance with classes, joining NPHC groups, and obtaining leadership positions on-campus. Connecting with others who shared the same interests and values, enabled the participants in the study to create “power circles” that aided them in navigating a predominantly White institution (PWI).
Implications for Practice

During the focus groups and interviews for this study, participants were asked if the institution, Southeast University, could do anything to improve the second-year experience. In the fall semester focus groups, participants were not able to identify areas of improvement and indicated the university had provided several resources and “It’s up to us to take advantage of them.” The spring semester focus groups however yielded some key suggestions. The suggestions participants in the study identified, in addition to the researcher’s, are described below.

Incorporate Structured Reflection into the Curricular and Co-Curricular Activities

Through the process of participating in the research focus groups, participants mentioned that the experience provided them an opportunity to reflect on their experiences at Southeast. They further indicated that this aspect of reflection and meaning-making was lacking during their second-year. Current research studies have indicated that critical and reflective thinking skills in today’s undergraduate students are lacking (Flores, Matkin, Burbach, Quinn & Harding, 2012). There is a great need to develop more opportunities for students to engage in critical and reflective thinking in curricular and co-curricular activities. Further, Schaller (2010b) indicated, “The sophomore year is a prime time for students to evaluate past choices, examine belief systems, acknowledge personal strengths and weaknesses, and begin to identify values.” (p.78). Existing programs and services, such as academic advising, mentoring programs, service learning, and positional and non-positional leadership activities can be key avenues to support structured reflection (Schaller, 2010b).
Utilizing existing structures for reflection activities is critical. After the initial literature was published describing the second-year experience as the “sophomore slump,” colleges and universities created specific programs for second-year students (Pattengale & Schreiner, 2000 and Tetley, Tobolowsky & Chan, 2010). In 2008, 115 institutions responded that they had some type of sophomore initiative based on the National Survey on Sophomore Year Initiatives (Gahagan, Hunter, Keup, Schaller, Schreiner, & Tobolowsky, 2010). In an email conversation with a researcher on transition and retention programs on sophomore-year or second-year initiatives, she stated, “… my impression is that a lot of programs don’t survive. This impression comes from tracking down all four-year colleges and universities that we could identify and trying to determine whether established programs were indeed in place.” (J. Farnham, Ph.D, personal communication, March 4, 2013). Incorporating structured reflection activities into already existing programs is cost-effective and has the potential to reach more second-year students than individual programmatic efforts.

Create First-Year Mentoring Groups

Creating first-year mentoring groups would help students not only navigate the college environment, but also help underrepresented students find a supportive group of peers who would aid them in forming a commitment to the institution. The twelve (12) participants in this study each mentioned the connections made during their first-year at Southeast University were pivotal in their ability to find a community of support. Additionally, for the nine (9) students who considered leaving Southeast University at the end of their first-year, the connections made among their peers were the main reason each decided to return for a second-year at Southeast. The first-year mentoring groups can be
assigned as a part of college orientation activities or welcome week activities that would serve as a source of support during the first-year. The topics between the mentors and mentees in the first-year mentoring groups could focus on finding clubs and organizations to join, time management, and other topics that would help underrepresented students and students from non-traditional backgrounds strategize for success in college.

Utilize Strengths-Based Approaches in Programming

The term “sophomore slump” has been frequently used to describe the second-year experience (Pattengale & Schreiner, 2000). There is not a sufficient amount of research to support the use of the term “sophomore slump” (Kennedy & Upcraft, 2010). In fact the term, “sophomore slump” was used in sports to explain an athletes decline in performance from his or her first to second season (Taris, 2000). While prior studies may or may not have identified indicators of a “sophomore slump,” “… they do not establish the percentage of students who have these experiences” (Kennedy & Upcraft, 2010, p.39). The overuse of the “sophomore slump” phenomenon can be inaccurate for various student subpopulations and stigmatizes the second-year experience. Stigmatizing the second-year experience adds to “cultural deficit thinking” framework (Gonzales, 2012).

Instead of stigmatizing the second-year experience, colleges and universities should develop ways for students, specifically students from underrepresented backgrounds, to articulate their strengths within a culturally responsive framework (Rendón Linares & Muñoz, 2011). Schreiner (2010c) developed a thriving quotient after reviewing the literature on student success and positive psychology. After testing and validating her instrument with 15,000 college students across more than 70 institutions in the United States and Canada, Schreiner developed five factors indicative of student
thriving, which included a positive regard for oneself and the future and healthy relationships (Schreiner, 2010c). Implementing strengths-based approaches in current programs would not only take advantage of the existing forms of cultural capital students have, but also contribute to their ability to thrive during the second-year.

**Implications for Future Research**

This study presented a portrait of the second-year experience for underrepresented students at a predominantly White institution (PWI) in the southeastern United States (U.S.). While the findings from this study were a first-step in describing the second-year experience for underrepresented students in higher education, further research remains to be done. Three main areas of future research resulted from this study. These areas include continued longitudinal studies on college student experiences, using intersectional approaches to understand the second-year experience for underrepresented student populations, and incorporating environmental theory in the study of college students’ experiences.

**More Longitudinal Studies on College Student Experiences**

Although longitudinal studies on the college student experience, such as Astin’s (1993); Pascarella and Terenzini’s (1991, 2005) exist in the literature, these longitudinal studies are dated. Additionally, the participants in these longitudinal studies were traditional-aged, White, students who lived on-campus (Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini 1991, 2005). New longitudinal studies need to be conducted on with diverse student populations to examine the nuances that exist in the college student experience. Developing new longitudinal studies would promote inclusiveness of different voices.
whose voice has typically been excluded from the dominant literature on the college experience (Delgado Bernal, 2002 and Yosso, 2005).

Use of Intersectional Approaches on the Second-Year Experience

The purpose of this study was to examine the second-year experience for underrepresented students. During the course of the study, other characteristics, such as socioeconomic status and first generation student status were discovered. While the purpose of this study was not to examine the intersections of multiple identities, such as race, first generation student status, and socioeconomic status, future studies should incorporate intersectional approaches to examining college student experiences (Jones, Kim & Skendall, 2012). Intersectionality, the examination of multiple social identities on individual experiences, is gaining momentum in the study of students in higher education and would provide a more complete picture of the student experience for underrepresented student populations (Jones, Kim & Skendall, 2012).

Incorporating Environmental Theory

The institutional setting and type can have an effect on the student experience in college. Environmental theory takes into account the physical environment, human aggregate environment, structural and organizational environment, and perceptual environment of the campus in relation to student’s experiences (Strange & Banning, 2001). Participants in the study did not note dissatisfaction with the organizational structures of the university. However, the dominant groups in the environment and perceptions of the campus climate may affect how underrepresented student populations navigate different types of institutions, such as large research institutions, private institutions, and religiously-affiliated institutions (Strange & Banning, 2001).
**Limitations of the Study**

This study was limited by the fact that the results of a qualitative research study are not generalizeable. The researcher’s main interest was to gather depth of information on the second-year experience for underrepresented students at the research site as opposed to broader types of information. Participants in this study described their second-year as better than their first-year at Southeast University. While the invitation to participate in the research study was sent to all African American and Latino/a students in their second-year at the research site, students who may not have had a positive experience at Southeast may have decided not to participate in the study. The research site was one institution, Southeast University, and may not be representative of similar populations at other institutions. The researcher was also a novice in conducting phenomenological research studies.

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter presented the findings of the study in relation to the theoretical frameworks, provided implications for practice and future research, and noted the limitations of the current study on the second-year experience for underrepresented students. There is still much more research that needs to be done to contribute to the understanding of the second-year experience for underrepresented student subpopulations. Future research should utilize longitudinal approaches to place the second-year experience in context with the whole educational experience. Additionally, intersectional approaches to identity development and environmental theory can be used as a framework to provide a deeper understanding the second-year experience from different theoretical perspectives.
Appendix A

Focus Group Questions

First Focus Group – Fall Semester

1. Tell me about your first year at this institution.
2. Why did you decide to return to this institution for a second year?
3. What concerns do you have going into your second year at this institution?

Second Focus Group – Spring Semester

4. Tell me about your second year at this institution.
5. What have been some of the challenges during your second year?
6. What do you consider some of the successes in your second year?
7. Who or what helped you the most during your second year?
Appendix B

Participant Profile Sheet

Name: _________________________

Email Address: __________________________

Gender: _______________

Race/Ethnicity: _________________________

Major: _________________________

Age: ______

GPR: _________________________

How many credit hours have you completed at this time?

What activities are you involved in on campus?

How would you describe your socioeconomic status?
Appendix C

Copy of recruitment information/informed consent

Invitation to Participate in a Research Study at Clemson University

You are invited to participate in a research study of sophomores conducted by Dena R. Kniess, a doctoral candidate, at Clemson University. The purpose of this research is to conduct focus groups with minority college students in their second-year at Clemson University to understand factors that are important during their second-year. If you are 18 or over and are in your second-year of attending college and interested in participating in this study, please contact Dena Kniess. Your responses will be used to help improve the Second Year Experience at Clemson University.

The amount of time required for your participation will be approximately an hour for the focus group and an hour for a follow-up individual interview. The focus groups and interviews will be tape recorded. These taped interviews will be destroyed after three years.

There are no known risks associated with this research.

There are no known benefits to you that would result from your participation in this research.

Students who participate in the focus groups will receive a $10 Visa gift card for their participation.

Your privacy and confidentiality are fully protected as no identifiers will be included in the analysis of the data. Your identity will not be revealed in any publication that might result from this study.

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate and you may withdraw your consent to participate at any time. You will not be penalized in any way should you decide not to participate or to withdraw from this study.

If you have any questions or concerns about this study or if any problems arise, please contact Dena Kniess at 864.656.1136. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Clemson University Office of Research Compliance at 864.656.6460.
Appendix D

IRB Approval for Study

Dear Dr. Havice,

The chair of the Clemson University Institutional Review Board (IRB) validated the protocol identified above using exempt review procedures and a determination was made on **February 16, 2011**, that the proposed activities involving human participants qualify as **Exempt** from continuing review under Category **B2**, based on the Federal Regulations (45 CFR 46). You may not being this study.

Please remember that the IRB will have to review all changes to this research protocol before initiation. You are obligated to report any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects, complications, and/or any adverse events to the ORC immediately. All team members are required to review the Responsibilities of Principal Investigators and the Responsibilities of Research Team Members available at [http://www.clemson.edu/research/compliance/irb/regulations.html](http://www.clemson.edu/research/compliance/irb/regulations.html).

We also ask that you notify the ORC when your study is complete or if terminated. Please let us know if you have any questions and use the IRB number and title in all communications regarding this study. Good luck with your study.

All the best,

Nalinee

_Nalinee D. Patin_
IRB Coordinator
Clemson University
Office of Research Compliance
Institutional Review Board (IRB)
Voice: (864) 656-0636
Fax: (864) 656-4475
E-mail: npatin@clemson.edu
Web site: [http://www.clemson.edu/research/compliance/irb/](http://www.clemson.edu/research/compliance/irb/)
IRB E-mail: irb@clemson.edu

Confidentiality Notice: This message is intended for the use of the individual to which it is addressed and may contain information that is confidential. If the reader of this message is not the intended recipient, you are hereby notified that any dissemination, distribution, or copying of this communication is strictly prohibited. If you receive this communication in error, please notify us by reply mail and delete the original message.
Appendix E

IRB Amendment Approval

Dear Dr. Havice,

Your amendment to add two focus group sessions to the data collection procedures has been approved. You may begin to implement this amendment.

Please remember that no change in this research protocol can be initiated without prior review by the IRB. You must report any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects, complications, and/or any adverse events to the Office of Research Compliance (ORC) immediately.

We also ask that you notify the ORC when your study is completed or terminated. Please let us know if you have any questions and use the IRB number and title in all communications regarding this study.

All the best,
Nalinee

Nalinee D. Patin
IRB Coordinator
Clemson University
Office of Research Compliance
Institutional Review Board (IRB)
Voice: (864) 656-0636
Fax: (864) 656-4475
E-mail: npatin@clemson.edu
Web site: http://www.clemson.edu/research/compliance/irb/
IRB E-mail: irbc@clemson.edu

Confidentiality Notice: This message is intended for the use of the individual to which it is addressed and may contain information that is confidential. If the reader of this message is not the intended recipient, you are hereby notified that any dissemination, distribution, or copying of this communication is strictly prohibited. If you receive this communication in error, please notify us by reply mail and delete the original message.
# Appendix F

**Sample of Coding Process for Themes**

**Developing Emergent Themes**

**Underrepresented Students Experiences During the Second-Year of College**

**Focus Groups and individual interviews**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emergent Themes</th>
<th>Original Transcript</th>
<th>Exploratory Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Finding my tribe</strong>&lt;br&gt;Forming friendships&lt;br&gt;Lack of integration – diverse, but separate&lt;br&gt;Finding others like me&lt;br&gt;Contact/immersion stages in African American Identity Development literature&lt;br&gt;Finding new systems for doing things, specifically academics</td>
<td>TIFFANI: It’s like…that was different. It was like, “You know…” People clustered together in clubs, which I think that is a good thing… I’m kind of used to the integration a little bit more, but I felt like after the semester went on, everyone got to know each other and it was fine.</td>
<td>Lack of integration&lt;br&gt;Forming friendships/contact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CORA, SOPHIE, THEA:</strong>&lt;br&gt;Echoed this in second focus group – making friends;&lt;br&gt;Thea involved in CONNECTIONS mentoring program</td>
<td>KIRSTEN (II): Umm, so my experience was good. I didn’t have like a ton of friends, which isn’t like bad, but I had my roommate and some friends in band. I don’t know, like, it was definitely interesting because, I don’t know, a lot of the girls were like different than I was, I guess and I was trying to figure out, where, where too ….. I don’t know, umm, because you have to be on the meal plan to eat in the dining halls, so it was like, “Who am I going to eat with today?”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>AUBREY (II):</strong> First year good, disciplined with academics, adjusting to living with a roommate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CARLA (II):</strong> Residence hall experience – finding friends on her floor – welcoming culture; adjusting to academics; “out of comfort zone”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BRIAN:</strong> My first year at Southeast was a culture shock because my high school was almost like 99.999% African-American. And then when I came to Southeast, it was like the exact opposite, so I found myself, like, always seeking out other black people, like just trying to find other black people, and I realized how hard that was, because I’d be in class and it’d be just me, and I really wouldn’t see, like, other black people until, like, it was time to, I don’t know, party on the weekends or go to different events and stuff like that. But when I learned to…when that wasn’t such a big factor after a while, it wasn’t that big of a culture shock. It’s like normal now.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Culture shock” to PWI Contact/immersion in culture Seeking out others who look or are like me – collectivist – CRT Different in terms of classroom environment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SOPHIE, CORA, THEA:</strong> Dominated by Caucasians</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MARIKA:</strong> Well, before I came to Southeast, I was like, “You go to orientation and you’ll love purple and orange, and you’ll become, like, this big family.” You</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will I like it? Will my expectations and the information presented match the reality? Finding “tribe” – groups to</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **sit there and think about it.**
| “Am I really going to be that into Southeast? Or is it just going to be school?”
| Once you get here, it’s a matter of you actually do become a part of that Southeast family. And it sounds really cheesy, but it’s reality. |

| **be a part of – sense of belonging** |

| **MONICA:** Plus, there were 89 students that came with me from my high school, and I was used to being the only black person in my classes. I definitely wasn’t the only black person in school; I was just the only one that was in the honors classes and all that stuff. Well, it was me and one other guy who also goes here. But that was different when I got here, because now I’m not the only African-American in my classes. It’s a mixture. Well, except for my chemical engineering class (laughs)…but all the other ones is a mixture of people. |

| **Used to being only Black person in classes – especially Honors courses** |
| **Not the only Black person except for engineering classes** |
| **Laughter – sense of difficulty** |

| **STEFANO:** My first year here, it was really good. It was a lot of stress, too. Just trying to find friends and everything. It was kind of just a huge shock to be around so many people because the high school I went to had about 200 people. … And so, I really struggled to find friends early on, but I got involved with CRU campus ministry, and I found my best friends through that, so that’s a |

| **Stress of first year – adjusting to size and scale of environment** |
| **Finding friends – forming relationships** |
| **Faith – campus ministry** |
| **Residence halls … facilitating friends either** |
NADIA: I lived in Southeast House, so it was a co-ed hall and I basically found all of my best friends there, and I joined the club soccer team, so I found more friends through that. And I never wanted to go home for breaks and would ball my eyes out…everything about last year was just, like, perfect.

Residence halls as facilitating connections and friendships
No mention of RA, just the individuals … interesting

TIFFANI: Academically, last year was a struggle. I don’t know about ya’ll, but last year I was like, “Oh man! I’ve got to come up with a whole new system of how to do things.” Like, “What in the world?” This year, I feel like I know how to handle my stuff now, but last year I felt like I was thrown into the wild.

Whole new system for doing things
Academic adjustment
“Thrown to the wild …”

Initially thought the academic environment would be easy, but it was not – sitting next to others of same race in class – safety in numbers

SOPHIE: lines 127-130

BRIAN: I was not ready for this. (Laughs) Like, I’m not like an engineering major or a science major or anything like that, so my struggle might be different, but in high school, I guess it’s easy to get to a point where it’s just like…I don’t know. Most of us who come to Southeast, we were in the top of our class, like high school was not really a

Not prepared – what worked in high school was not going to work in college – shifting methods and systems – manage environment
Top of class – high school was not challenging
struggle. We could, like, do the…put the bare minimum effort in high school and still get like top-notch results. And so I came to college with that same kind of mindset. Like, “Yeah, I can take this nap. I can sleep all night. Get up and do that later.” But you learn real quick like that that does not work at Southeast at all.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>MARIKA:</strong></th>
<th>Then I got here and thought, “Yeah, I can pull it off.” And then you realize that when you’re at Southeast, there’s other people who are just as smart as you are, that were at the top of their class, and you have to figure out where you fall among the rest of the smart people.</th>
<th>Now in a group of smart people and where am I now in terms of all of the smart people? Finding place … identity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>STEFANO:</strong></td>
<td>It was just…I was not used to it at all, and I couldn’t imagine like, having a tougher major and something that would involve studying all the time, but I struggled first semester, but second semester went a lot smoother. Just having that experience of freshman year, sophomore year is much better academically.</td>
<td>Adjustment in first year, academically, not second year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MONICA:</strong></td>
<td>And I feel like even if there was, it probably wouldn’t help because in S.I. all you do is…if you ask a question, they’ll put the problem on the board, but then they’ll ask somebody else to solve it. I’m like, “No, I asked you to help me. I don’t</td>
<td>Disconfirming nature of S.I. – asking for help and not receiving it from classmates and those who do know, will not help</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Possible clash between
need everybody else’s opinion because they don’t know what they’re doing either. That’s why they’re here.” And so, I just…I couldn’t find any kind of help, and then if you ask your classmates, either they’re in the same boat as you, or if they’re smart, most of the time they’re not willing to help.

| **BRIAN:** For me, at the end of my freshman year, my mind was pretty much made up on leaving and going to an HBCU like I really wanted to. But what made me stay was solely primarily 100% the people that I met. – Not having same experience as other friends – second semester freshmen year |
| **CARLA:** And so, um, she’s just been really supportive in everything. When my best friend wasn’t really completely supportive, she was there. She’s helped a lot this year. It’s cool. With all our roommates our bond has gotten stronger, but at the same time that’s been the strongest one and she’s really supportive. |
| **TIFFANI:** Because I was like…my GPA kind of dropped a little bit, below a 3.0. I kind of lost my scholarship, or whatever, but I was like, “Uhhh….,” I wanted to come back and kick butt, because I had to prove to myself, you know I |

individualistic and collectivist cultures

People/peers – in returning, but also maintenance during the second year

Proving to self – I can do it
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>MARIKA:</strong> It was like, well, I could go somewhere else, but would I be happy with myself at the end of the day if I just gave up? Because to me, it would be a matter of, like, even if I transferred somewhere else, I <em>could</em> have graduated from Southeast, but I chose to come here, and deep down inside I would know that you couldn’t…you gave up. You just couldn’t accept that challenge and gave up, so it was a matter of pride more than anything. (Saw grades in first semester freshmen year and wondered about coming back)</th>
<th>Did I give up? Matter of pride more than anything.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>MONICA:</strong> My second semester, I was honestly thinking about dropping out completely. There was a lot that brought me to that point, but I decided to stay because I didn’t know that if I did drop out, there was nothing else to fall back on. (Family issues, finances, has learned how to handle it better and balance)</td>
<td>What else would I do?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MONICA:</strong> Well, I thought about not returning and it was mainly because of all the stuff, like, on top of schoolwork, it was a lot of issues that I was dealing with, with my family and stuff. And I decided to stay.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>I’m glad I stayed. I don’t think about dropping out now. Um, what else? Actually, my family issues have gotten worse, but I know how to deal with them now. I know when to say “no,” like, when to just completely ignore anything that’s going on and focus on school, so I know how to handle that better.</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BRIAN:</strong> As far as organizations are concerned that made me want to stick around, Southeast Black Student Union was the main one, because I realized that in me leaving Southeast and going to another school, I would not only be giving up on Southeast, but I would be…I felt I would be giving up on the people that I had met here, like, more specifically like the black community, and then other incoming, like, black students. And I felt like if I left because of the reasons why I wanted to leave, without trying to make a difference here first, I was just giving up. (Decreasing the “power circle”) – essence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SOPHIE:</strong> Commitments. It’s always a commitment to myself, to get through and do what I need to do, if I want to. I had a commitment to my mom. My mom was really encouraging., when I couldn’t figure out how to fit in here. And then my</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving up on the Black community and other incoming students – paying it forward</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitments to family members, organizations, etc.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>d</strong>ad passed away in ’09, and he was a really, really encouraging person and he was really big on education. Like, education, education, education. So, to me, it was like, if I’m going to do this for anybody, I have to do this for him. You know? Like, have to…I have to push myself. I have to be better than he was, you know. He was a whole ‘nother level of commitment.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**THEA, CORA**: Mentioned same things
References


Gahagan, J., Hunter, M.S., Keup, J.R., Schaller, M., Schreiner, L., & Tobolowsky, B.F., (2010, April). *Institute on Sophomore Student Success*. Conference conducted as part of the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students In Transition in Savannah, GA.


Haggman-Laitila, A. (1999). The authenticity and ethics of phenomenological research: How to overcome the researcher’s own views. *Nursing Ethics*, 6, 1, 12-22.


Nora, A. (2002). The depiction of significant others in Tinto’s ‘Rites of Passage’: A reconceptualization of the influence of family and community in the persistence process. *Journal of College Student Retention, 3,* (1), 41-56.


*Through the decades: The student experience at Clemson University since integration.* (2012, November). Panel discussion presented at Celebrating the Anniversary of Integration at Clemson. Clemson, SC.


