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FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES AT PUBLIC
INSTITUTIONS

by

Raven N. Moore

A Doctoral Project Submitted to,
the College of Education and Human Sciences
and the School of Education
at The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

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ABSTRACT

First-generation college students are students whose parents did not attend or graduate college. Therefore, these students are the first in their family to attend and/or graduate college and are likely to face immense challenges such as lack of academic, financial, and/or social support or guidance. Although previous studies have examined their experiences, many have not given voices to the actual students themselves. This qualitative study aimed to change that and add to the field by interviewing 6 first-generation college students at a four-year, public, predominately white university, on their experiences of college. The findings of this study included answers to the following research questions: What are the needs of first-generation college students? What kind of support do first-generation college students need in order to succeed in college? What is helpful to first-generation students during their time at the university? How could the university improve the experiences of first-generation college students? Three major themes emerged throughout the study, which include: 1) Experiences of feeling pressured and/or anxiety as a first-generation college student, 2) Experiences in overcoming academic, social, and financial challenges, and 3) Experiences with Covid-19 related issues. Students also provided helpful recommendations on how colleges can help improve their overall college experience and success. Ultimately, the findings of this study can: 1) help and motivate future first-generation college students of diverse backgrounds towards success, and 2) equip higher education administrators, faculty, and staff with the tools needed to better support first-generation college students and their success moving forward.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, I would like to thank God for always being with me throughout my educational journey and allowing me to pave the way by being the first in my immediate family to attend and graduate college. I would like to thank my research advisor and mentor, Dr. Jason K. Wallace for his continual guidance, wisdom, excitement, and support throughout my doctoral journey. He was the ultimate demonstration and proof that it is possible for Black, first-generation doctoral students to succeed and thrive, especially in Higher Education. I would like to thank the students who participated in my study for their meaningful conversations and insightful experiences – without them, none of this would have been possible. I would like to thank all of my loved ones and friends for enduring this journey with me. Lastly, I would like to give a special thanks to my mother and father, Twanda & Robert Moore for their daily love, encouragement, and support. They have always reminded me that anything is possible and that the sky is the limit for me so I am forever grateful for them and their words of inspiration.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>USM</i>	The University of Southern Mississippi
<i>FGCS</i>	First-Generation College Students

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

First-generation students encounter immense challenges in college compared to their contemporaries. Although there has been significant discussion on the definition of first-generation students, Woosley & Shepler (2011) typically describe these students as those whose parents had no college or post-secondary experiences. First-generation college students (FGCS) challenges are further exacerbated if the student comes from a minority ethnic community such as Black, Chicano or Mexican origins.

First-generation students' significant challenges include the lack of social and cultural capital in higher education coupled with financial inaccessibility. Further, the students face significant challenges in academic accessibility through the lack of pre-collective academic preparation of learners (McNair, 2015). The students also encounter programmatic accessibility, which is how programs taken fit the student's preferences and backgrounds. Longitudinal studies among 12th graders who had enrolled in a post-secondary education indicated that 46% of them attained a bachelor's degree, with 24% being first-generation college students (Payton, 2020). Similar research presented by Woosley & Shepler (2011) suggests that FGCS do not have the same funding and support sources compared to non-FGCS students. This is typical because parents of the former students do not understand the college experience or recognize that a college student's needs go beyond financial support.

A significant research category points to the difficulties around social and cultural integration for first-generation college students. Shumaker & Wood (2016) indicated that many FGCS felt that their fellow students always appeared to be more informed than them. Such students experienced feelings of exclusion and imposter syndrome. The situation is predicated on

lack of support, collegiality and inclusion, especially for FGCS from minority groups. Findings by Minicozzi & Roda (2020) suggest that it is essential for students to gain an understanding of the colleges' cultural context and social structures.

Woosley & Shepler (2011) suggest that FGCS have focused on motivation and self-efficacy needs to impact the students' academic performance. This is because most students lack support mentors and a system that enables them to achieve better educational outcomes. Having a parent with a degree helps mold a student's perspective towards college. It provides the necessary knowledge and resources and motivates a student to want to achieve just like their parents.

Many first-generation students are low-income (McNair, 2015). Limitation in financing for the students is significant because they do not understand methods of securing alternative finances. Non-FGCS students are better placed to land academic scholarships than their FGCS counterparts because they know how to navigate educational space easily.

Considering the factors that impact FGCS college experiences, it is fundamental to create strategic plans necessary to remedy first-generation students' plight in college. Achieving success for the students require multiple efforts from the college and outside through engaging with other students, faculty, staff, and administrators. Therefore, this study seeks to understand the experiences of first-generation college students at public, predominantly white institutions with high hopes of improving the experiences of future first-generation students enrolled at these specific types of institutions.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this current study is twofold. First, this study will aim to examine first-generation college students' experiences during their enrollment at the University of Southern

Mississippi. Second, this study will aim to improve first-generation students' college experiences and their college success by providing new and effective ways to support them during their enrollment at the university. The setting of the study will be at the University of Southern Mississippi, which is a four-year, public, predominantly white institution located in the Southern part of the United States.

Research Questions

The following research questions will guide the study:

1. What are the needs of first-generation college students?
2. What kind of support do first-generation college students need in order to succeed in college?
3. What is helpful to first-generation students during their time at the university?
4. How could the university improve the experiences of first-generation college students?

Definition of Terms

The key terms used in this study may appear to be common knowledge to readers. However, the definitions will ensure that there are not any misconceptions of the word usage in this research study.

First-generation college students. First-generation students are students whose parents do not have any college or postsecondary education experience (Woosley & Shepler 2011).

Subjectivity Statement

As a Black, female, first-generation, doctoral student within a predominantly white institution, I am interested in studying the experiences of other first-generation students of all races, genders, and backgrounds at predominantly white institutions. Although I am a first-

generation student, I identify as Black and female so my experiences may differ from other first-generation college students' experiences due to their races, genders, and backgrounds. I am passionate about researching first-generation students' college experiences because we are often overlooked and sometimes lack support, which can affect our college success. Therefore, I want to give other first-generation students a voice with the hope of spreading awareness about the needs of first-generation college students to aid in improving their overall college experiences and success.

Implications and Application for Higher Education

Researching this topic will be beneficial to first-generation students, their staff, faculty, and administrators. First-generation students will be able to learn and apply helpful tips from the first-generation students surveyed. Staff, faculty, and administrators will be provided with valuable information on how to better serve this population of students and help promote their college success. This study will promote success for first-generation students and universities overall.

Summary

First-generation college students are presented with significant challenges. They have specific needs and require various support, which this study will aim to identify. While literature exist on the experiences of first-generation college students, scholars have not thoroughly explored the experiences of first-generation students enrolled at public, predominantly white institutions. Therefore, it is necessary to amplify the voices of these students in order to equip higher education administrators, faculty, and staff with the tools needed to better support this population of students in the future.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to provide context and depth to our study on first-generation college students (FGCS) and their college experiences at public universities, I review literature in four major areas; the needs of FGCS, the support that FGCS need to succeed in college, the helpful aspects during their time on campus and improving the experiences of FGCS. Researchers conducted numerous studies seeking the needs and experiences of FGCS, informing the higher institution framework about FGCS, and painting a portrait of FGCS to benefit those who want to have a better understanding of this distinctive population.

Hayes (2016) defines FGCS as the students whose parents lack college or university experiences. In administering programs for FGCS, the United States Department of Education regards a student as 'first generation' where none of the parents holds a college degree even though the parent may have attended college without graduating. Bradley (2017) defined FGCS more narrowly by limiting its definition to those students whose past generations did not attend college at all. FGCS holds an essential place in the current developing and expanding higher education population. Allen (2019) cites data from the National Center of Education Statistics that shows that about 54% of students in two-year colleges are FGCS, while those in four-year colleges and universities are about 35%. The Higher Education Research Institute surveyed data from 2,005 freshmen to gain more information about FGCS who enrolled at private institutions. From this survey, over 60% of FGCS attending private institutions were female, and 69% were Caucasians (Havlik, 2020). The study also reported that FGCS, who enrolled at private colleges were more likely to attain a higher GPA than public school counterparts. These statistics provide evidence that FGCS is a major presence in higher education today. Beyond this data, it is also

important to discuss the helpful aspects and tools that can help us assess students' readiness for college.

College readiness is one of many educational priorities. Research shows that 41% of students enrolling in community colleges and 29% of students enrolling in four-year institutions are less prepared in one or more major risks that are instruments in successful transitioning in college (Hayes, 2016). Although the rise in developmental programs at colleges and universities may show that the issue of unpreparedness is increasing, unpreparedness for college life and the transition is an old phenomenon. Even as college and university education become highly essential for students' social and monetary success, college access is an issue for high-risk students. This is primarily because of problems of academic, social, and financial readiness. Some universities and colleges have maintained an open enrollment policy that enables nontraditional students to fit into the system in recent years. Byrd (2005) proposed two instruments that assesses students' readiness for college life. According to Byrd (2005), college readiness is all about prediction. Standardized measures and placement tests can be used to assess students' readiness for college. The author argues that the predictive value of these placement tests is helpful. In addition, colleges' developmental education courses can help provide underprepared students with the skills to prosper in college. The findings from the literature by Byrd (2005) to assess the effectiveness of these programs were predominantly positive.

Pascarella et al. (2004) reported that FGCS have lower self-confidence than those whose parents attended college. Pascarella et al. (2004) also reported that FGCS had a higher likelihood of perceiving that they would have issues adapting to the stressful environment such as campus

compared to first-generation college peers. Problems with self-esteem and managing stress are two features that surface in Pascarella et al. (2004) and Ventura (2019) studies.

Ventura (2019) evaluated FGCS from different ethnicities on how they handled college stress. They described the minority stress factors that contribute to high feelings of not belonging and issues adjusting to college life. They described the minority stress aspects as the distinctive experiences of the underrepresented students that interfere with students' ability to adjust to college life and the ability to integrate into the university community.

Needs of First-Generation College Students

Rogers (2019) evaluated how FGCS coped in college and asserted that it is 'inherently stressful.' At some point, the study focused on students' needs to disclose to others the forms of nerve-wrecking environments. The researcher reported that FGCS has a lower likelihood of disclosing information regarding their college experiences to other people.

Immigration-related stressors are a major challenge for FGCS students seeking to adapt to college life. The experience of migrating to a new country may be difficult and stressful to cope with during the migration process and in adjusting to a new culture. Such stressors may include separation from families, language acquisition issues, cultural differences, and adverse working conditions. The researcher reported that the undocumented immigrants experienced significant levels of acculturative stress compared with their documented counterparts (Rogers, 2019). Rogers (2019) cited some literature that reported that acculturative stress is associated with mental distress, including anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts. Rogers (2019) also reported that ethnically diverse FGCS coped with stress by pursuing support from their peers and other people around them.

Rogers (2019) applied Chickering's identity development model to evaluate self-esteem and identity development of FGCS. One unique aspect of their research is that authors compared FGCS of American college students with FGCS with college students in other nations. The authors reported that FGCS in America had a higher level of self-esteem than international students. This factor was attributed to challenges experienced in cultural transition.

Motivation plays a key role in the college outcomes of FGCS. In a study by Evans (2020) that involved students from all ethnic backgrounds, each the first in their families in enrolling in college, the research was conducted for two academic years. The researchers found that students who were driven to go to college by rational curiosity, the wish to succeed in their career, and individual academic interests had a positive adjustment to college. On the other hand, the probability of positive adjustment to university for FGCS was poor. Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and the magnitude in which institution changeover was effective were carefully aligned with FGCS (Evans, 2020). For instance, when FGCS are motivated by extrinsic reasons, their GPA tends to be lower. When they are motivated by extrinsic reasons, the GPA tends to be higher.

Another feature associated with FGCS is the level of parental support they receive. Lack of support from parents is largely associated with the challenges that FGCS face in helping students with college-level work and this absence of understanding of anxiety and pressures these students experience in colleges. Bradley (2017) argued that parents' lack of experience with college and university education deprives FGCS of their inter-generational benefits of college information, and in the end, this makes colleges a potential challenge for the students. In addition, Allen (2019) evaluated how parental involvement affected the educational aspirations of FGCS versus other students. They analyzed longitudinal data from the National Educational

Longitudinal Study and found that parental involvement is a predictor of educational aspiration for FCGS.

Support needed by FGCS to Succeed in College

This section will focus on various factors and support strategies that universities need to design to support FGCS. Over the last few years, the number of these strategies has expanded, in significant measure, due to their value in helping students in their educational transition and performance. Boyd (2017) evaluated students' ability to thrive based on various social factors such as social connectedness, engaged learning, academic determination, and positive perspective. The study found a significant difference between (FGCS) thriving in an environment where there are engaged learning, academic determination, and diverse citizenship.

Social Connectedness

Social Connectedness covers the presence of a healthy and positive relationship that makes students feel connected with others (Boyd, 2017). For FGCS to thrive, they need to experience such type of relationships. Ensuring that the students are well connected to the campus community boosts their success. Connections to social and peer networks help the students sharpen their critical and cognitive skills and assume ownership of their academic success.

Involvement

Being involved in various student programs and organizations helps first-generation students build tools for success in the university and have a stronger connection with the school (Boyd, 2017). In Boyd's (2017) study, the participants were connected to a wide range of programs and organizations such as leadership, cultural, and academic based. They exemplified their passion for involvement all through the study. Boyd (2017) reported that the Bridge

program was helpful for at-risk students with their transitioning to college life as it addressed issues such as academic deficiencies, fostering personal esteem and confidence, and showing their commitment to effective transitioning to campus life. Lasting from a minimum of one week with a program designed for a particular student group, bridge programs may be highly essential for FGCS as they offer a comprehensive orientation to university life, the general education needs as well as the prospects of college-level work.

Engaged learning

Engaged learning emphasizes the importance of engaging students to help them learn lessons that can be applied inside and outside of the classrooms. Boyd (2017) states that "the very word thriving that success denotes that success entails more than just surviving a 4-year academic obstacle course" (8). Hundreds of first-year courses have been developed since the 1980s (Boyd, 2017). Today, more than 65% of universities across the country offer freshman courses, primarily in trying to retain college students (Boyd, 2017). Freshman courses improve interactions between students and those between students and the faculty (Boyd, 2017). It also increases the probability of student interaction outside the classroom and offers a room for an ongoing orientation to university life that new students usually require. In addition, freshman seminars play a significant role in helping at-risk students. Boyd (2017) reports that first-year business majors that participated in freshman seminars and those who demonstrated various at risk features upon admission had a higher rate of being retained than students who were not at risk.

Money and finance

FGCS might experience financial barriers that affect their experience. They benefit from job opportunities, scholarships, and financial literacy. In a study by Boyd (2017), there was a

theme that emerged from students where they worked to make cash out of desire and not to burden their family. There was also a pattern amongst the participants as they expressed angst for being a financial burden to their families despite being employed. Socio-economic status differs between first-generation students (Boyd, 2017). Students with a low and high socioeconomic status may have issues in adjusting to a culture where they view themselves to be in a lower class than their peers around them. Even with such feelings, students do not want to be treated unequally or as if they are in need. Even though assisting families is important to FGCS, they are highly motivated by the need to be financially stable. In Evans' (2020) study, 'make more money' and 'being well-off' were reported as essential reasons by the majority of the students. A solid desire to make money and become better in society may arise from experiencing poverty or financial issues. Most studies have reported that first-generation students desire to perform better than their parents do. For instance, one student in Havlik's (2020) study stated, "seeing my mom and dad work at workshops for a large part of my life showed me that I should not make a living in that manner; having minimum wage jobs reinforced why I should advance my place in society" (130). Rogers (2019) also reports that economic adversity may lead to mental distress for minority students who usually experience acute and chronic financial stress. This form of economic pressure can lead to feelings of anger, frustration, and anxiety. These feelings can have a significant impact on the overall satisfaction amongst FGCS. Therefore, universities and colleges must ensure that this is part of the conversation as they promote diversity and inclusion in their institutions.

Peer mentoring

Integrating peer mentoring may serve as a benefit to FGCS. Research by Ricks (2016) found that students who were mentored had lower levels of anxiety and schoolwork than those

who were exposed to other forms of intervention. Ricks associates this difference with the fact that mentors shared their individual and educational understandings, proficiencies, and encounters with the mentees that helped them approach their work and activities at school with high confidence levels.

Improving the Experiences of First-Generation College Students

Garnering a sense of belonging is important to students' success (Hayes, 2016). Hayes (2016) identified various elements that connect to developing a sense of belonging, membership, influence, reintegration, and shared emotional connection. According to Hui (2017), a sense of being is diminished when you force students to assimilate from their culture. These forms of disconnections from supportive relationships translate to psychological problems and dissatisfaction, leading to academic failure. Bradley (2017) states that institutions that focus more on nurturing students' assets and talents as the basis of their success will create programs and policies that build upon each student's strengths rather than remediating their deficiencies.

The previous review of the literature detailed the needs of FGCS, the support that FGCS need to succeed in college, the helpful aspects during their time on campus and recommendations for improving the experiences of FGCS. Understanding these four topics creates a foundation as I explore the experiences of FGCS at public universities.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this current study is twofold. First, this study aimed to examine first-generation college students' experiences during their enrollment at the University of Southern Mississippi. Second, this study aimed to improve first-generation students' college experiences and their college success by providing new and effective ways to support them during their enrollment at the university. The setting of the study will be at the University of Southern Mississippi, which is a four-year predominantly white public institution located in the Southern part of the United States.

Research Questions

The following research questions will guide the study:

1. What are the needs of first-generation college students?
2. What kind of support do first-generation college students need in order to succeed in college?
3. What is helpful to first-generation students during their time at the university?
4. How could the university improve the experiences of first-generation college students?

Research Design

A basic qualitative research methodology aligned with the research questions was used in order to examine the lived experiences of first-generation college students at a public, predominantly white institution in southern Mississippi. Conducting interviews allowed the researcher to identify the views and opinions associated with the research topic (Morris & Cowley, 2017).

Target Population and Sample

Population

The target population consisted of first-generation college students. Permission from University officials was granted for student participation recruitment.

Sample

A purposive sampling strategy was used for this study because the selection of participants supplied the data necessary to respond to the research questions and the purpose of the study. The research study was an examination of first-generation college students' experiences who were currently enrolled at a public, predominantly white institution in southern Mississippi and whose parents do not have any postsecondary education experience. The criteria supplied a base for choosing participants that represent the target population and correspond to the purpose and requirements of this research study. For this research study, a sample size of six participants were selected for interviews.

Procedures

Participant Recruitment & Selection

Participants in this qualitative study were 18-24-year-old males and females first-generation students who live on and off campus. Participants that were excluded from this study were those who identified as the following: continuing-generation students; students who were not currently enrolled in college; part-time students; students on probationary status; and students beyond 18–24 years of age.

Upon approval from the Institutional Review Board at the University of Southern Mississippi, I began the recruitment process via e-mail. I began by e-mailing staff members at

the university who work directly with and around FGCS. I reached out to the director of Inclusion & Multicultural Engagement, coordinator for First-Year Programs, and director of TRIO-Student Support Services Program. I also reached out to the staff at the Office of Institutional Research to gain access to a list of FGCS e-mail addresses so that I could reach out to the students directly which was extremely helpful in the recruitment process. The data provided by the Office of Institutional Research had a list of over 2,000 FGCS e-mail addresses so I filtered the lists out by classification. For example, I made three separate spreadsheets that included a list of email addresses for the following: 1) sophomores, 2) juniors, and 3) seniors.

Upon completion of organizing the e-mail lists, I began sending recruitment e-mails out to all 2,000 FGCS. The e-mail included a flyer and interest letter that contained information about the study and my contact information. As I began to send recruitment e-mails out, 50 plus students responded immediately to express their interest in participating in the study. Once I received a good number of candidates who were willing to participate, I began randomly selecting 15 potential participants to screen to determine if they identified as the following: 1) First-generation students and 2) 18- to 24-year-old, and 3) Currently enrolled as of spring 2022.

During the initial screening process, I contacted the students via e-mail to express my gratitude for their willingness to participate in the study. I provided in-depth information regarding the study and requested that they provide the following information if they were still interested in participating:

- 1) USM Student ID number
- 2) Classification as of spring 2022
- 3) Major
- 4) Race

5) Hometown

6) Availability to meet for an one-hour interview via Zoom

I received 12 responses and after reviewing their eligibility, I made plans to select and interview six participants. Due to me selecting six participants, I wanted to make sure that I invited participants of diverse backgrounds, experiences, and educational levels. Therefore, I intentionally selected and recruited one sophomore, two juniors, and three seniors of diverse ethnicities/races and majors to interview.

Once the screening process was complete, I e-mailed the selected six potential participants who I thought would be a great fit for this study via e-mail to express my gratitude again and to confirm their interview time at the time and date that was suitable for all parties involved. I included the Zoom link for the scheduled interview along with the Online Informed Consent form and requested that they review and sign before our meeting. All six participants willingly signed the form and participated in the interview during their scheduled time. I also e-mailed the other six potential participants who responded to my screening e-mail to express my gratitude and inform them that I would like them to serve as alternates in case I was unable to retain the other six participants I had selected to participate.

The six participants I chose to interview were three females and three males who represented six different areas of study at the University of Southern Mississippi. The females consisted of one junior and two seniors. The three males consisted of one sophomore, one junior, and one senior. Some of them were traditional students at the Hattiesburg or Gulf Park who had taken online courses, face-to-face courses, and hybrid courses, which is defined as a mixture of both online and face-to-face courses. Some of the participants were fully online students. I further detail students' information in table 1.

Table 1: First-Generation College Student’s Profile

Pseudonym	Gender Identity	Ethnicity/Race	Major	Class Year	Home state
Andre	Male	African American	Media & Entertainment Arts (Video Arts)	Sophomore	MS
Kiara	Female	African American	Speech Pathology/Audiology	Junior	MS
Haden	Male	Biracial (African American & White)	Nursing	Junior	MS
Li Ming	Female	Asian	Business Administration	Senior	MS
Selena	Female	Latina	Media & Entertainment Arts (Film)	Senior	Honduras
Scott	Male	White	English Licensure	Senior	MS

Each participant received a payment of \$20 via Cash App or Venmo at the conclusion of data for their time and labor. I advertised the \$20 payment as an incentive on my recruitment flyer, recruitment e-mail, and on the informed consent form.

Protection of Participants

I interviewed each participant individually in a private setting via Zoom Videoconferencing for one hour. I informed the participants that they would remain anonymous and be assigned a pseudonym to protect their identity. I also informed them that they were welcome to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or recourse. The information

shared from participants was stored on my computer hard drive along with the analysis of data and kept confidential.

Data Collection

In this qualitative research study, the data collection process consisted of semi-structured interviews on the Zoom video conferencing application so that I could get a thorough and in-depth understanding of the FGCS experiences. I began each interview session by orally asking each participant for their permission to record the interview session using the Zoom recording option and an iPhone audio recording device. All participants gave me permission to record and I thanked them and assured them that the recordings would be secured in a safe place. Next, I thanked them for attending the interview at the chosen time and date and I formally introduced myself and shared more details about the purpose of the interview and research study. I explained to them that they would be asked a series of questions that would prompt them to talk about their experiences as FGCS and that they should not feel forced to answer any questions that may have been uncomfortable for them to think about or discuss. As I asked the interview questions, each participant responded orally to the interview questions. I wrote down a few important notes quickly so that I could give them my undivided attention, listen carefully, and observe their body language while they talked about their experiences. The notes and recordings allowed me to complete field notes after each interview, which is where I reflected on the interview process.

Data Analysis

The purpose of data analysis is to develop meaning from the data that is collected in a study. To analyze the data, I had to transcribe each interview by using the notes and recordings after the completion of all six interview sessions. The data analysis approach that I employed

was the thematic analysis. Thematic analysis was used in order to generate a conceptual perspective of codes into categories, which was organized into themes. The data that was analyzed included the following steps: (a) preparing and organizing analysis, (b) reading through all collected data, (c) coding of data into categories (d) re-evaluating the data to ensure accuracy of coding and clarifying the organization of data, (e) describing the themes using a narrative explanation of the data, (f) interpreting the data.

Summary

Chapter 3 included the research methodology chosen for this study, which was the qualitative method. The research study focuses on interviews of first-generation college students at public PWIs to examine their college experiences. The purpose of the study and research question was stated followed by an explanation of the research design; target population and sample; procedures; data collection; and data analysis.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Overview of the Participants

This section includes the findings of the data of each participants' responses to the interview questions. Each response was analyzed and this analysis resulted in providing three major themes, which will be discussed further in the next section.

Pseudonym	Gender Identity	Ethnicity/Race	Major	Class Year	Home state
Andre	Male	African American	Media & Entertainment Arts (Video Arts)	Sophomore	MS
Kiara	Female	African American	Speech Pathology/Audiology	Junior	MS
Haden	Male	Biracial (African American & White)	Nursing	Junior	MS
Li Ming	Female	Asian	Business Administration	Senior	MS
Selena	Female	Latina	Media & Entertainment Arts (Film)	Senior	Honduras
Scott	Male	White	English Licensure	Senior	MS

Participant 1 (Andre). Andre identified as an African American male, sophomore, first-generation college student who majored in Media and Entertainment Arts (Video Arts) with a minor in Business Administration at the University of Southern Mississippi – Hattiesburg campus. He informed me that he was from Jackson, Mississippi, had three younger siblings, and that he

lived with his mother and grandmother before coming to college. He described himself as a college student who is consistent, persistent, and always searching for information. When asked “What or who motivated you to attend college?” Andre informed me that his mother and grandmother motivated him because he would always hear them say “They wish they would have...” and he wanted to be the one who actually did. He also mentioned that his A&P high school teacher motivated him as well. When I asked Andre what it meant to be a first-generation student to him, he responded with, “It is an amazing feeling but it does come with struggles and one must learn to enjoy the experiences and connections along the way.” He also shared his favorite mantra, which is “Hustle for success” and this is what has kept him going. I asked Andre “When did you realize that you were considered a first-generation college student? What were your feelings or thoughts towards this identity? Have they changed?” He informed me that he became aware of his FGCS status when he discovered that some of his family had only attended community college, but not a public, 4-year institution, and no male member had attended at all which is when he felt the need to change that. He also felt pressured in the beginning and considered dropping out due to his lack of confidence about his choice to pursue a degree in Video Arts.

I asked Andre to tell me about his initial experiences as a first-generation college student and he shared that it started slow and felt like he was relearning high school. He also mentioned how Covid-19 was a factor of his initial college experience and how he had to take classes online, which he ended up enjoying. He expressed that he liked meeting other students, faculty, and staff via Zoom as it prepared him to be social. He also mentioned that he was heavily involved in on-campus programs such as Eagles F1rst, TRIO, ACES, and Jubilee Scholars, and they were all continual support and needs specific towards his first-generation status and helped him to get adjusted to college. Andre shared that these programs were very helpful with connecting him with

other FGCS. He shared that he also now holds a leadership role in the Eagles First program and has contributed to putting together FGCS community building programs like fashion shows, paint & sips, seminars discussing career preparation, mental health, and more.

Andre was also asked to reflect on the challenges and obstacles he faced as a FGCS and how he overcame them. He shared that the only challenge for him was figuring out if he really wanted to attend college or not and he overcame this challenge by doing research and finding positive information that would steer him in the right direction. He also provided an interesting perspective of “paying attention to the negative information and finding ways to fix it as well.” He also shared that his mother and grandmother have also continued to support him, which has motivated him to persist in college. Andre also shared how his high level of involvement helped him to enjoy college.

To wrap up the interview, I asked Andre if he had any recommendations about how colleges might improve the experiences of FGCS and if he had any other helpful information to share with other FGCS. Andre shared that college personnel should reach out more to FGCS to share useful information with them. The helpful information that he would like shared with other FGCS is to “get involved, do research, take ownership of FGCS status and avoid looking at it like a bad thing.” He also advised that students should figure out what they want to study immediately and review the course catalogs to stay on track to graduating.

Participant 2 (Kiara). Kiara identified as an African American female, junior, first-generation college student who majored in Speech Pathology/Audiology at the University of Southern Mississippi – Hattiesburg campus. She informed me that she was from Laurel, Mississippi, attended Jones Junior College prior to attending the University of Southern Mississippi, and was a product of encouraging parents who held a GED. She chose Speech

Pathology as her major because she loves to help people communicate. She described herself as a college student who is determined, optimistic, and sometimes anxious about classes. When asked “What or who motivated you to attend college?” Kiara informed me that her mother constantly motivates her to become a doctor. When I asked Kiara what it meant to be a first-generation student to her, she shared that it is many expectations, which the first one is “to just simply go to college.” Being a FGCS also means dealing with tons of pressure and setting trends. I asked Kiara “When did you realize that you were considered a first-generation college student? What were your feelings or thoughts towards this identity? Have they changed?” She informed me that she became aware of her FGCS status at the Southern Miss orientation where she saw and visited a First-Generation College Students stand. She expressed that she felt pressured but proud and excited to be the first in her family to attend college and her feelings still remain the same. I asked Kiara to tell me about her initial experiences as a first-generation college student at both Jones Junior College and USM. She informed that she did not have any bad feelings and that she felt proud at Jones. When she came to USM, she found more resources, socialized more, and began to calm down.

Kiara was asked to reflect on the challenges and obstacles she faced as a FGCS and how she overcame them at Jones Junior College and USM. She shared that she wanted to take a break from attending Jones Junior College since she enrolled immediately after high school, but she felt pressured to continue. She did not receive much support as far as events, groups, or programs that were needs specific to her first-generation college student status. However, she was able to persist by ensuring that she went to all of her classes and by making meaningful connections on campus. For example, she became close with her counselors and confided in them strongly. Her parents, family, church family, and friends acted as support systems, and have continued to do so while she

has been furthering her education. When Kiara transferred to USM, she initially faced academic and social challenges. She mentioned that she was still trying to adjust to the complexity of her classes and stay on top of assignments. She also shared that she is a naturally shy person and had speech problems previously, which affected her ability to socialize with others. She has been able to overcome the challenges by attending classes, asking questions, getting more involved in student organizations, making more meaningful connections, and much prayer. She shared that she appreciates the USM connections and support that she has received since she cannot always travel home to be with her family.

To wrap up the interview, I asked Kiara if she had any recommendations about how colleges might improve the experiences of FGCS and if she had any other helpful information to share with other FGCS. She shared that college personnel should advertise student groups/organizations better and express the importance of them, especially groups that cater to FGCS, transfer, and freshman students. The helpful information that she would like shared with other FGCS is to “socialize; participate in events; build meaningful relationships with resident assistants, advisors, and professors. The last piece of advice she wanted to share is that “FGCS should not always run home to attempt to solve problems because most times parents and family just will not understand.”

Participant 3 (Haden). Haden identified as a Biracial (African American and White) male, junior, first-generation college student who majored in Nursing at the University of Southern Mississippi – Hattiesburg campus. He informed me that he was from Olive, Mississippi and that his mother was from Serbia, a country in Southeast Europe. He described himself as a college student who is dedicated and one whose eyes are set on the ultimate goal. When asked “What or who motivated you to attend college?” Haden informed me that his mother motivated him to but

she did not pressure him at all. When I asked Haden what it meant to be a first-generation student to him, he shared that it meant to be educated and have more opportunities. I asked Haden “When did you realize that you were considered a first-generation college student? What were your feelings or thoughts towards this identity? Have they changed?” He informed me that he became aware of his FGCS status while he was applying for college and scholarships, and he felt proud and a sense of accomplishment. He did not feel pressured and his feelings have remained the same towards his status.

I asked Haden to tell me about his initial experiences as a first-generation college student and he shared that he had no clue about college and that he had figure out how to navigate the college system on his own, which ended up being one of his challenges and obstacles he faced. He leaned on his high school friends for support and started thinking about the end goal to help him overcome this specific challenge. Due to Covid-19, he was taking classes online and did not get the chance to join any student organizations right away, but he plans to eventually. However, he did have one lab on campus that allowed him to interact with peers, which is where he met one of his best friends who have also become a support system for him. To help fund his college tuition, he received a scholarship for books and worked part-time on campus. He shared that his family, USM resources, faculty, staff, and other students have all been helpful throughout his educational journey.

To wrap up the interview, I asked Andre if he had any recommendations about how colleges might improve the experiences of FGCS and if he had any other helpful information to share with other FGCS. Haden shared that colleges should have a “How to guide” for FGCS. The helpful information that he would like shared with other FGCS is to “Have an open mind and realize that it does not have to be perfect to be a good experience as we see on television shows.”

Participant 4 (Li Ming). Li Ming identified as an Asian female, senior, first-generation college student who majored in Business Administration at the University of Southern Mississippi – Online/Gulf Park campus. She informed me that she was from Biloxi, Mississippi, comes from a family of five, and has plans to attend graduate school. She also informed me that she had transferred from Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College (MGCCC). She described herself as a college student who is a hard worker because she has managed to achieve a 3.7 GPA all while working a full-time job as an assistant manager. When asked “What or who motivated you to attend college?”, Li Ming shared that both of her parents who are very hard workers motivated her to attend college. When I asked Li Ming what it meant to be a first-generation student to her, she shared that it reminds her how far her family come and how it feels to be an American. I asked Li Ming “When did you realize that you were considered a first-generation college student? What were your feelings or thoughts towards this identity? Have they changed?” She informed me that she became aware of her FGCS status while applying college at the college center. She found her experience to very hard as she only had three main sources such as her teacher, sister, and the college center. At first, she felt nervous, but she is not anymore and she is happy to help her younger sister achieve the same goal(s).

I asked Li Ming to reflect on her initial experiences and challenges as a first-generation college student at both Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College (MGCCC) and USM. She informed me that she chose to start her education at MGCC because it was financially smarter and cheaper. At both institutions, she had issues with figuring out what classes to take and no one held her accountable. She was able to overcome these challenges by seeking out help from advisors and professors, holding herself accountable, and figuring out college systems. She did not receive much support as far as events, groups, or programs that were needs specific to her first-generation

college student status, but she also mentioned how her having a full-time job could have affected that. She shared that she had been invited to join the Student Eagle club but did not find much value in it since she was an online/Gulf Park student. Li Ming mentioned that she has been able to persist by communicating with her high school friends, building relationships with her professors, and networking. She also shared that their parents and family have been supportive and that she has a flexible job that has allowed her to persist throughout her educational journey.

To wrap up the interview, I asked Li Ming if she had any recommendations about how colleges might improve the experiences of FGCS and if she had any other helpful information to share with other FGCS. She shared that professors should be more empathetic and realize that not every student is knowledgeable about certain systems and policies. For example, she shared an experience that she had as an online student and how she did not know anything about how a proctored exam worked. She also shared helpful information for FGCS who may be transferring to a university from a community or junior college by mentioning how junior colleges “baby their students” while universities do not. She also shared information for FGCS who may be on the Gulf Park campus such as visiting the one-stop center where they give quick responses. She also shared a helpful resource called, College Center, which they have a physical office in Ocean Springs, MS. They allow students to set up virtual appointments and it is free. Lastly, she mentioned that she would like to share with other FGCS that “College is full of learning experiences.”

Participant 5 (Selena). Selena identified as a Latina female, senior, first-generation college student who majored in Media & Entertainment Arts (Film) at the University of Southern Mississippi – Online/Gulf Park campus. She informed me that she was born in Honduras and moved to the United States when she was six months old. She also informed me that she had attended and transferred from Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College (MGCCC). She

described herself as a college student who is determined and believes in “Going for what you want.” She was asked “What or who motivated you to attend college?” Selena shared that her family motivated her to attend college. She also wanted better opportunities than they had and wanted to be the first in the family to pursue and complete a degree. When I asked Selena what it meant to be a first-generation student to her, she shared that it means a lot and is one of the biggest accomplishments. I asked Selena “When did you realize that you were considered a first-generation college student? What were your feelings or thoughts towards this identity? Have they changed?” She informed me that she became aware of her FGCS status as a senior in high school when she heard her friends discussing continuing their “family legacy.” She expressed that she felt pressured initially and that she still feels the same but not as much.

I asked Selena to reflect on her initial experiences and challenges as a first-generation college student at both Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College (MGCCC) and USM. She informed me that she chose to start her education at MGCC because it was cost-effective – she did not want to take out student loans or get into debt. She jokingly shared that she termed community colleges as a “higher education high school”. Overall, she had a good experience at MGCC – she felt respected and was involved in three organizations. After attending MGCCC, she received a transfer scholarship to USM. She shared that USM was not her first choice, but she decided to attend anyway since it was also cost-effective. When she transferred to USM, it was during Covid-19 so she was attending classes online from the comfort of her bed. Eventually, she was able to get more connected and land an in-person job on campus, which enhanced her experience.

When asked about the challenges and obstacles faced as a FGCS, Selena shared the apprehension of people thinking she would go off and do “big things.” She had to deal with the community college stigma from her peers. She also had to overcome the typical Covid-19 issues

once she transferred to USM. She was able to overcome these obstacles by being a part of the Honors College, which helped to enhance her experience. She also surrounded herself with friends, built a support system, and got involved to persist throughout her educational journey.

To wrap up the interview, I asked Selena if she had any recommendations about how colleges might improve the experiences of FGCS and if she had any other helpful information to share with other FGCS. She shared that colleges should make students feel more welcomed. She also shared helpful information for other FGCS such as getting involved, finding an on-campus job, and making connections. She also ended her interview with sharing how she has had the honor to be on many flyers and posters at USM due to her being Latina from Honduras, and how better approaches should be taken when editing photos of students to fit certain standards.

Participant 6 (Scott). Scott identified as a White male, senior, first-generation college student who majored in English (Licensure) at the University of Southern Mississippi – Hattiesburg campus. He informed me that he was from a small town called Monticello, Mississippi, he is the oldest of three siblings, and has hard working parents. He described himself as a college student who is studious, determined, and disciplined. When I asked Scott “What or who motivated you to attend college”, Scott informed me that his librarian motivated him because she noticed how much he loved to read. When I asked Scott what it meant to be a first-generation student to him, he shared that it meant “Figuring out a lot by yourself and that it is full of adventures, anxiety, and success.” I asked Scott “When did you realize that you were considered a first-generation college student? What were your feelings or thoughts towards this identity? Have they changed?” He informed me that he became aware of his FGCS status while he was completing college applications and his librarian informed him of his status. She also assisted him with his financial aid and scholarships applications. Initially he felt nervous because education was not a

priority for him but then he started experiencing feelings of excitement. I asked Scott to tell me about his initial experiences as a first-generation college student and he shared that his involvement in the Luckyday Freshman Seminar program made his experience fun and exciting although he was still a bit anxious and felt a sense of pressure. He volunteered for events and tutored. The program also helped him to become more outgoing, socialize, and make friends, as he was initially a shy person.

Scott was asked to share some of his challenges and obstacles as a FGCS. He shared that he mainly struggled with feelings of anxiety, especially when communicating with faculty, which he had to learn to do. Scott's participation in the Luckyday Scholars program has helped him overcome that specific challenge. He mentioned how the program has made him a better conversationalist, empathetic, and understanding. The Luckyday Scholars program has served as continual support and set him up for college success due to the various events, networking opportunities, and different activities that they host. Scott also shared that the support from faculty, staff, and receiving scholarships has enabled him to persist in college.

To wrap up the interview, I asked Scott if he had any recommendations about how colleges might improve the experiences of FGCS and if he had any other helpful information to share with other FGCS. Scott shared that colleges should make their resources known and consider promoting the resources at orientation. The helpful information that he would like shared with other FGCS is to get involved, search for resources, and build relationships. The last piece of advice he wanted to share with other FGCS was, "Embrace the anxiety – it is normal. Change your perspective on anxiety."

General Themes on FGCS and Their Experiences

The data analysis of the participants' responses from the interview provided three major themes.

Theme 1. Experiences of feeling pressured and/or anxiety as a first-generation college student. Five out of the six participants were all first-generation college students who expressed that they felt pressured and/or anxiety when they discovered their FGCS status. They felt this pressure due to various reasons but one of the main reasons was due to the FGCS being the first in their family to accomplish a huge goal of attending and potentially completing college. Because they were the first and their parents did not experience college, the lack of guidance from their parents or guardians also made them feel pressured. They felt that they had to navigate the college system on their own and figure out various college related processes and policies by themselves or outside sources like friends, faculty, and staff. The findings also show that the feelings of pressure and anxiety also remain because the FGCS' parents and/or family are unable to understand the challenges that they face throughout their educational journey.

Theme 2. Experiences in overcoming academic, social, and financial challenges. All 6 participants expressed their academic, social, and/or financial challenges and shared the ways that they overcame them.

Academic challenges consisted of the following:

- Lack of knowledge of how to fill out college applications and financial aid forms
- Lack of awareness of other helpful on-campus resources

Social challenges consisted of the following:

- Lack of on-campus involvement due to imposter syndrome or shyness
- Lack of awareness of different student organizations available to join

Financial challenges consisted of the following:

- Lack of knowledge on how to apply for financial aid and/or scholarships
- Work to support themselves and help fund their education

Theme 3. Experiences with Covid-19 related issues. All participants experienced Covid-19 related issues and were affected academically and/or socially. During the pandemic, all university classes had to be fully online so students had to adjust accordingly to being online students instead of attending classes in person, face-to-face. Since they were not inside of traditional classrooms, they had to put themselves in places where they could actually focus. For example, one participant mentioned that she would attend her classes from bed, but she ended up attending them at a desk eventually so that she could focus better. The pandemic also resulted in students not receiving the ultimate on-campus college experience due to the social distancing and isolation that took place. This meant that students could not interact face-to-face with students, faculty, and staff on-campus. They also could not get involved in organizations or attend on-campus events and programs. However, some participants did mention that their professors designed their online classes where they could interact with peers and build meaningful relationships.

All three significant themes emerged throughout this research and answered the following research questions:

1. What are the needs of first-generation college students?
2. What kind of support do first-generation college students need in order to succeed in college?
3. What is helpful to first-generation students during their time at the university?

4. How could the university improve the experiences of first-generation college students?

The FGCS participants' responses provided in-depth ideas about how colleges can improve their college experience, meet their needs, and support them throughout their educational journey.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This study was twofold. First, this study aimed to examine first-generation college students' experiences during their enrollment at the University of Southern Mississippi. Second, this study aimed to improve first-generation students' college experiences and their college success by providing new and effective ways to support them during their enrollment at the university. Six students at the University of Southern Mississippi shared their experiences and answered open-ended questions about various aspects of their journey as FGCS. Previous literature provided a plethora of information about this population of students but lacked the actual voices of students themselves. From this study, the six FGCS reported the challenges they faced as FGCS and how they overcame them. They also reported that they had received academic, social, and or/ financial support from faculty, staff, and peers at the institution. The results also give innovative strategies for a continuation of institutional growth and development by recommending that college personnel do the following:

- Reach out to FGCS directly and provide intentional & impactful academic, financial, social support.
- Consider implementing an university “How-to” guide to help FGCS navigate the college system(s).
- Motivate and encourage students to get involved by joining organizations, attending events, and volunteering around the community to help overcome their social and potentially academic and financial challenges.
- Promote campus resources, events, and programs better to increase awareness and enhance social experiences – especially those that cater to FGCS.

It is important to note the limitations of this study. First is the limited number of students interviewed during this study. Not only did this study include only six students, but it also only interviewed students who were still enrolled in the school, thus excluding those who have dropped out or left the university for various reasons. It is possible that the excluded students may have felt less supported and could have provided significant suggestions of ways in which the college could improve their ability to assist FGCS. Additionally, the study was only able to recruit from one college in the area, which therefore speaks only to a very limited population of first-generation students. Therefore, it would be important for other studies to include different types of institutions in order to gain a broader perspective.

Concluding Thoughts

As I close this chapter of my doctoral capstone project and experience, I am extremely thankful that I was able to connect with so many other FGCS at the institution and learn from their experiences. As a Black, first-generation doctoral student, I feel that I was able to set an example for them and help inspire them to finish their educational journey strong. This research confirmed that it is not easy to be the first, but with the new and innovative strategies provided, coupled with academic, financial, and social support, first-generation college students can achieve college success. Moving forward, as I become Dr. Raven N. Moore, my number one priority will be to ensure that first-generation college students not only survive college, but thrive – both inside and outside of the classrooms.

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APPENDIX A

IRB APPROVAL LETTER

Office of
Research Integrity



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NOTICE OF INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD ACTION

The project below has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services regulations (45 CFR Part 46), and University Policy to ensure:

- The risks to subjects are minimized and reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered involving risks to subjects must be reported immediately. Problems should be reported to ORI via the Incident submission on InfoEd IRB.
- The period of approval is twelve months. An application for renewal must be submitted for projects exceeding twelve months.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: 21-171
PROJECT TITLE: First-Generation College Students' Experiences at Public Universities
SCHOOL/PROGRAM: School of Education
RESEARCHERS: PI: Raven Moore
Investigators: Moore, Raven-Wallace, Jason K-
IRB COMMITTEE ACTION: Approved
CATEGORY: Expedited Category
PERIOD OF APPROVAL: 24-Jan-2022 to 23-Jan-2023

Donald Sacco, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board Chairperson

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Project Title: First-Generation College Students' Experiences at Public Universities

Principal Investigator: Raven Moore

Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative study is twofold. First, this study will aim to examine first-generation college students' experiences during their enrollment at the University of Southern Mississippi. The study will explore several research questions, including what are the needs of first-generation college students? What kind of support do first-generation college students need in order to succeed in college? What is helpful to first-generation students during their time at the university? How could the university improve the experiences of first-generation college students?

Second, this study will aim to improve first-generation students' college experiences and their college success by providing new and effective ways to support them during their enrollment at the university.

The results will be used to help bring awareness to the needs of first-generation college students to help promote their college success, and to provide public universities with information on how to serve this population better.

This study is being conducted as a capstone/research requirement for my Doctorate of Education degree in Higher Education Administration.

Description of the Study

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following:

-Participate in a semi-structured one-on-one interview with me via Zoom for 45 minutes to an hour. During the interview, you will be asked questions to prompt the discussion about your experiences as a first-generation student. Before the interview begins, I will ask you for permission to audio record and take notes. Participation throughout the study is optional.

Benefits

If you participate in this study, you will be able to share your college experiences and gain some insight into an important aspect of your experience as a first-generation student. You may also be able to inspire other current and future first-generation students. You may find benefit in participating by potentially contributing to the improvement of services offered at universities to support first-generation students.

If you complete the interview, you will receive a \$20 Visa gift card. Participants who do not complete the interview will receive a \$5 Starbucks gift card for their time and efforts.

The benefits to the higher education field: This study will help higher education professionals to better understand the experiences of first-generation students and perhaps identify areas of further research. It could also identify areas of growth or improvements that could be made within first-generation students' support services.

Risks

It is possible that you could experience emotional distress while talking about your experiences as a first-generation student. Although your information will be kept confidential, you will not be forced to discuss experiences you do not feel comfortable discussing. Also, if you feel distressed or any discomfort at any point during the study, I will provide the following counseling resources for you that are free of charge:

1. USM Student Counseling Services

103 Ray Guy Way

Bond Hall South

Hattiesburg, MS, 39406

Business Hours Phone Number: 601-266-4829

After Hours Phone Number: 601-606-4357

E-mail: counseling@usm.edu

Website: <https://www.usm.edu/student-counseling-services>

2. National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

Phone Number: 1-800-273-8255

Website: <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org>

Confidentiality

Your participation will be kept confidential. All research materials including recordings, transcription, analyses and consent documents will be stored in a secure location for three years according to federal regulations. After then, the information will be destroyed. All electronically stored data will be password protected during the storage period. I will not include any information in any report that would make it possible to identify you.

Alternative Procedures

This study is completely voluntary. You may refuse to answer any question or withdraw at anytime without informing me of your reason.

Participant's Assurance

This project and this consent form have been reviewed by the Institutional Review Board, which ensures that research projects involving human subjects follow federal regulations. Any

questions or concerns about rights as a research participant should be directed to the Chair of Institutional Review Board, The University of Southern Mississippi, 118 College Drive #5125, Hattiesburg, MS 39401-0001, 601-266-5997.

Any questions about this research project should be directed to the Principal Investigator using the contact information provided.

Consent to Participate in Research:

By clicking the box below, I give my consent to participate in this research project.

Yes, I consent to participate.

APPENDIX C

RECRUITMENT E-MAIL

Hello First-Generation Students,

I hope you are doing well! My name is Raven Moore, and I am a first-generation college student and doctoral candidate at the University of Southern Mississippi. I am conducting research about first-generation undergraduate students' experiences at public universities. As a first-generation student myself, I have a deeply personal interest in the success of first-generation students and a desire to contribute to the research in this field.

To help fulfill this desire, I am seeking fellow first-generation students who would like to join me in making a research contribution by participating in a virtual, one-on-one interview with me via Zoom to share their college experiences as a first-generation student. If you agree to participate, you will be making an important contribution to this field of research and for future first-generation students that may follow your chosen path. To express my gratitude and appreciation, you will receive a \$20 Visa gift card upon completion of the study.

If you agree to participate in the study, you will be asked to attend a virtual, one-on-one interview with me via Zoom for 45 minutes to an hour. During the interview, you will be asked a series of questions to prompt you to reflect on and discuss your college experiences. If you agree to participate, we will discuss a mutually agreeable date and time for the interview.

If you are interested in participating or have any further questions related to the research project, please feel free to contact me anytime at raven.n.moore@usm.edu.

I look forward to collaborating with you to help make a big impact on our first-generation student community!

Best,

Raven Moore, M.Ed.

Doctoral Candidate

Higher Education Administration

University of Southern Mississippi

APPENDIX D

RECRUITMENT FLYER

**\$20
VISA
GIFTCARD**

SEEKING RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

FOR A QUALITATIVE STUDY EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCES OF FIRST GENERATION STUDENTS AT PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS.

PARTICIPANTS MUST:

- BE THE FIRST IN THEIR IMMEDIATE FAMILY TO ATTEND COLLEGE
- BE A SOPHOMORE, JUNIOR, OR SENIOR
- BE 18-24 YEARS OLD

PARTICIPATION INCLUDES:

- ONE 45-MINUTE TO 1 HOUR INTERVIEW VIA ZOOM DISCUSSING YOUR EXPERIENCES AS A FIRST-GENERATION STUDENT
- \$20 VISA GIFT CARD UPON COMPLETION ON THE STUDY

INTERESTED?
CONTACT RAVEN MOORE, M.ED. AT
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APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Can you tell me a little about yourself?
2. What or who motivated you to attend college?
3. What does it mean to be a first-generation student?
4. When did you realize that you were considered a first-generation student? What were your feelings or thoughts towards this identity? Have they changed?
5. How would you describe yourself as a college student?
6. Tell me about your initial experiences during your first year in college as a first-generation student.
7. What challenges or obstacles did you face during your first year of college as a first-generation student?
8. How did you overcome obstacles during your first year of college as a first-generation student?
9. Was there continual support (events, groups, programs) during your first year in college that were needs specific towards your first-generation status? If so, please describe the support (events, groups, programs) that were needs-specific towards your first-generation status.
10. What other type of support have you received that has enabled you to persist in college?
11. Describe your social experiences during your first year in college. How did your social experiences affect your first year of college?
12. How involved on campus were you during your first year of college?

13. How did your level of involvement affect your experiences during your first year of college?
14. Do you have any recommendations about how colleges might improve the experiences of first-generation college students?
15. What has been helpful for you that you think might be helpful for other first-generation students?
16. Is there anything else you would like to add that was not covered during this interview that would be helpful for this study?