

Spring 5-13-2016

The First Year Transition and Resilience of Precollege Outreach Program Alumni

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The First Year Transition and Resilience of Precollege Outreach Program Alumni

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements of the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
in
Educational Administration

by

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May, 2016

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Abstract

While traditionally underrepresented groups are attaining degrees at a higher rate than ever before, these students still receive bachelor's degrees at significantly lower rates than other groups of students (Avery & Kane, 2004; Wilds, 2000). As a result of the educational attainment gap in the United States, precollege outreach programs have been established to provide resources for underrepresented youth to aid them in completing a post-secondary degree. Current research focuses on these participants' college enrollment and, as a result, minimal information is available to describe these programs and their outcomes concerning students' first year experience and college success (Hooker & Brand, 2009; Orr et al., 2007; Swail & Perna, 2002; Yeung, 2010). Framed around resiliency theory, this phenomenological study exams college access program alumni's acclimation process into a four-year, post-secondary institution. Through the data analysis, four essentials features emerged: 1) Program Connections as External Factors, 2) Connections as External Factors in the College Setting, 3) Determination, Self-Advocacy and Willingness to Try New Things as Internal Protective Factors, and 4) Nurturing College Knowledge. Recommendations are shared to further the program in being a degree attainment intervention, in addition to a college access strategy. These include: providing development to educators in behavior management and inclusion, integrating parent involvement throughout the curriculum, providing continual support to alumni and establishing stronger partnerships with surrounding colleges. As a result of this study, leaders in secondary and post-secondary education as well as policymakers are able to gain insight on how Upward Bound services in Louisiana can nurture external and internal protective factors of resiliency that assist participants in embracing constructive responses to stressors in the first year of college.

Keywords: Upward Bound, Resilience, College Transition, TRIO

Chapter One

Education has been noted to be “The Great Equalizer.” (Aronson, 2001) The opportunity to attend college, for most, if not all citizens, is a testimony to the American dream of a life without need. Education serves as a means for individuals to improve their social and economic status as well as overcome the barriers of poor social conditions, such as unemployment and a lack of healthcare (Swail, 2000). Since the 1980’s, the financial benefits of education have only risen, thus furthering the role that post-secondary education has on economic mobility for youth from low-income communities (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007). For example, in 2011, the median earnings of bachelor’s degree recipients with no advanced degree, working full time was \$56,000, which was \$21,000 more than the median earnings of high school graduates (Baum & Ma, 2013). The four-year degree has become an important ticket to middle class in U.S. society.

In regards to social conditions, education is also associated with improved health and increased civic participation. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) found that the higher a person’s level of education, the more likely he or she was to report in “excellent” or “very good” health,” regardless of income (National Center for Education Statistics, 2004). In regards to civic participation, among adults ages 45 to 64, only 59% of high school graduates, compared to 80% of bachelor’s degree recipients, voted in the 2012 election (Baum & Ma, 2013). While these benefits have been cited, some hold that the current educational system reproduces a cycle of poverty in American society due to inequalities in elementary, secondary and post-secondary schooling (Aronson, 2001). Some high schools do not assist students in obtaining the combination of grades, standardized tests scores, rigorous course taking and

preparation required for success in post-secondary education. Poor students of color, specifically African Americans and Hispanics, are significantly less likely to have the aforementioned precollege attributes needed to advance to a four-year institution and earn a degree (Avery & Kane, 2004; Callan, Finney, Kirst, Usdan, & Venezia, 2006; Wilds, 2000). Traditionally marginalized youth face barriers when persisting in post-secondary education, including disproportionate rates of precollege academic underperformance, a lack of economic and educational resources in their schools and communities, and family backgrounds with limited experiences in higher education (Avery & Kane, 2004; Schneider, 2003; Wilds, 2000). Thus, while traditionally underrepresented groups are pursuing degrees at a higher rate than ever before (Avery & Kane, 2004; NCES, 2002, 2012), an attainment gap still permeates the U.S. educational system.

To compensate for these challenges, disproportionately faced by poor students of color, precollege outreach programs have been established to help these students' access and attain a college degree. These programs provide tutoring, mentoring, study and time-keeping skills seminars, college awareness interventions, financial planning workshops and many other strategies (Cabrera et al., 2006; Villalpando & Solorzano, 2005). In addition to these more technical skills, some precollege outreach programs focus on developing resilience, which will be defined in this study as qualities that nurture the successful development of an individual despite adversity (Bernard, 2004; Masten, 1994). During the college transition, students must cope with additional stressors and their success in doing so has important implications not only for their social-emotional adjustment and well-being, but also for the likelihood of academic success and persistence (Andrews & Wilding, 2004; Pritchard & Wilson, 2003; Zajacova, Lynch, & Espenshade, 2005). By incorporating factors of resilience into curriculum, the underlying

theory-of-action is that academic skills and emotional skills can, in concert, sustain traditionally underrepresented students through to a four-year degree.

In researching post-secondary success, it is important to note that the largest proportion of institutional attrition occurs prior to the second year of college. In the U.S., the retention rate for first time college freshmen returning for their second year is 77.1 (The NCHEMS Information Center for State Higher Education Policymaking and Analysis, 2011). Due to a limited knowledge base, questions remain about the transition and first-year success of outreach program alumni (Yeung, 2010). This lack of information may be a result of outreach programs' extensive focus on college admittance. Swail and Perna's (2002) "Pre-college Outreach Programs: A National Perspective" found that college attendance was the main purpose of 93% of programs. Traditional approaches of these programs have focused too narrowly on the issue of college enrollment, without sufficient attention to the steps required for students to be academically, socially, and psychologically prepared to succeed in college (Swail & Perna, 2002; Yeung, 2010). As a result, much of the research on outreach programs centers on the short-term effectiveness for college going, underrepresented populations and leaves the potential long-term effects relatively unknown (Yeung, 2010). Research, ultimately, is needed to understand what characteristics of precollege outreach programs are successful in boosting first year retention and degree-attainment of underrepresented groups of students.

This study addresses this knowledge gap by exploring the experiences of outreach alumni's transition into the college setting. This study examines how first year students who participated in a precollege outreach program describe their experiences adjusting to college life. Such research is needed as college preparation, transition, and first year experiences are all important predictors of students' overall success in college (Yeung, 2010). This study also

explores outreach program alumni's first year experiences and the role of resiliency factors in their college transition. Precollege outreach programs can serve as a means to close the U.S. attainment gap, however research is needed concerning participants' resilience in overcoming challenges, first year transition and post-secondary success. This study will provide detailed information on how precollege outreach programs have a role and what revisions need to be made to ensure that not only is the *access* gap being closed, but also the *attainment* gap.

Statement of Problem

Between 2000 and 2010, total undergraduate enrollment in the U.S. has increased by 37%, from 15.3 million to 21.0 million (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2013a). However, despite this growth, an educational attainment gap still exists (Avery & Kane, 2004; NCES, 2002, 2012). For example, although the percentage of 25 to 29 year olds who completed a bachelor's degree or higher increased for most racial groups, the gaps between Whites and Blacks and between Whites and Hispanics have widened. From 1990 to 2013, the gap in attainment rate between Whites and Blacks expanded from 13 to 20%, and the gap between Whites and Hispanics grew from 18 to 25% (NCES, 2014).

Furthermore, while half of all individuals from high-income families (top 20% of households) have a bachelor's degree by age of 25, just 1 in 10 people from low-income families do (bottom 20% of households) (Bailey & Dynarski, 2011). In each year between 1990 and 2012, the immediate college enrollment rate for high school completers from high-income families was higher than their peers from low and middle-income families. For example, in 2012, the immediate college enrollment rate for high school completers from high-income families (81 percent) was 29 percentage points higher than those from low-income families (Kena et al., 2014). Many students of color or low-income may also be first-generation college

students. In 2009, first generation college students represented somewhere between one quarter and one half of college enrollments (Bradbury & Mather, 2009). While college enrollment has increased monumentally for these students, degree attainment has not. In 2006, the College Completion study found that the risk of departure during the first year for first generation college students was 71% higher than their counterparts (The Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education, 2006). While these findings illustrates a failure to close the attainment gap, they also result in first generation students being saddled with college loan debt that makes financial stability more difficult.

Precollege outreach programs have been established as an intervention strategy to address this attainment gap by providing targeted resources for traditionally underrepresented youth in attending and persisting in post-secondary institutions. Specifically, the mission of such programs:

is to encourage and assist people who are traditionally under-represented in post-secondary education because of income, family educational background, disability, or other relevant federal, state/provincial, or institutional criteria, in the preparation for, entry to, and completion of a post-secondary degree. (Council for the Advancement of Standards, 2011, p. 5)

Outreach programs pursue this mission by supplementing high school curricula and providing academic assistance, social-cultural affirmation, and access to college information for both students and their parents (Villalpando & Solorzano, 2005). In addition, research has strongly supported resilience as one possible solution in helping at-risk students (Andrews & Wilding,

2004; Pritchard & Wilson, 2003; Zajacova, Lynch, & Espenshade, 2005). This research points to the importance of fostering elements of resiliency, which can nurture protective factors in students in overcoming obstacles. Such protective factors include: caring adults, opportunities for involvement and high expectations (Brentro & Longhurst, 2005; Lugg & Boyd, 1993).

Outreach programs are needed throughout the U.S., but especially in Louisiana, which has the second largest amount of both children in poverty, 26.4%, and families living in poverty, 14.6, in the United States (NCHEMS Information Center for State Higher Education Policymaking and Analysis, 2011). This is compounded with the fact that only 21.4% of individuals in the state have a bachelor's degree, the fifth lowest in the nation, and as a result there is a significant amount of first-generation college students (U.S. Census, 2011). Researchers and practitioners believe that precollege outreach programs are key in addressing the differences in academic and psycho-emotional preparation and for providing information regarding the college-going process to traditionally underrepresented youth (Cabrera et al., 2006; Villalpando & Solorzano, 2005). However, while such programs exist to fill in the gaps where the present educational system fails, the research on such programs is incomplete and the attainment gap continues to exist.

While a study focusing on the college success and degree completion is ideal, it is difficult to study as students typically complete their degree in four to six years. Thus, this study will focus on what is known to be a significant dropout point on the road to a college degree--the transition from high school to the first year of college. Empirical data is needed concerning the impact of outreach programs on students' transition into higher education (Haskins & Rouse, 2013; Hooker & Brand, 2009; Orr et al., 2007). Existing research does not provide sufficient attention to the steps required for program alumni to be academically, socially, and

psychologically successful in college (Yeung, 2010). This study addresses this by revealing precollege outreach alumni's experiences of, not only enrolling, but also transitioning into post-secondary education.

Purpose of Study

Precollege outreach programs have been described disparagingly as the “safety nets” of American educational system (Swail, 2000). As they provide for underserved and underprepared students' academic and social support typically not found in their kindergarten through twelfth grade settings. These programs are important, due to the fact that they attempt to “fill the holes where students flow out of the educational system” (Swail, 2000, p. 88). However, if these programs are to become effective supports for student success, rather than places that simply “catch” those who have been left ill equipped, then scholars must identify the most promising practices that lead to degree attainment and replicate them across this crowded and diverse marketplace. The purpose of this study was to explore the college acclimation of outreach program alumni in the college setting to shed light on areas of success and growth of outreach programs' practices. This study focused on the first year transition experience of students due to the fact the largest proportion of attrition occurs during the first year of college (Callan, Finney, Kirst, Usdan, & Venezia, 2006). A phenomenological approach was utilized to reveal the lived experiences of precollege outreach alumni during their freshman year. This study produced findings that yield an in-depth depiction of alumni's perceptions of interventions as well as participants' acclimation process into a four year, post-secondary institution.

This study utilized resilience theory to gain a greater understanding of participants' first year college experience (Beauvais & Qetting, 1999; Garmezy, 1973; Masten, 1994; Werner,

1984). The term, resilience, describes qualities that nurture the successful adaptation of an individual despite adversity (Masten, 1994). By utilizing the concept of academic resilience, the researcher explored the protective factors that involve relationships, support systems, institutions, and resources that may assist students in overcoming obstacles associated with marginalization (Beauvais & Qetting, 1999). The purpose of this study can be broken down into two main areas:

- To reveal participants' college integration in relation to factors of resilience and their outreach experience.
- To investigate students' perceptions of Upward Bound's ability to nurture factors of resilience that empowers students to embrace constructive responses to stressors in the first year.

Most importantly, this research sheds light on the college acclimation process of alumni of outreach interventions in order to provide post-secondary administrators, secondary educators, and the community insight concerning the perceived impact of such programs from the participants' viewpoint.

Research Question

The current study explored outreach program alumni's experience of college acclimation. The study revealed participants' integration process into the college setting in relation to factors of resilience and their experience in Upward Bound. As a result, the research question under study was:

How do first year college students, who participated in a precollege outreach program,

describe their experiences adjusting to college life?

This study sheds light on the college acclimation process of precollege outreach alumni. Information was gained that will help researchers and practitioners better foster youth resilience as well as prepare and support outreach alumni in their first year experiences. Furthermore, this study provides policymakers with useful information in regards to precollege outreach interventions and the college acclimation of the students these programs serve, the majority of which come from racially, economically or educationally disadvantaged backgrounds.

Definition of Terms

First Year Persistence: First year persistence is the continued matriculation of each entering freshman class from their freshman fall semester to their sophomore fall semester.

Precollege Outreach Programs: Precollege outreach programs are operated by universities and colleges, federal or state agencies, and non-profit organizations. These programs target individual students, rather than classrooms or whole schools. Such support interventions strive to help expand college access and degree completion of certain disenfranchised groups (Kezar, 2000). In this study, programs of interest are those whose intent is to facilitate smooth student transitions to post-secondary education by providing students with the skills needed for success in college.

Resiliency: Resiliency is the capacity of individuals to overcome difficult circumstances and thrive, in spite of barriers such as marginalization, poverty, under-resourced schools, or high-crime neighborhoods. Resilience is comprised of internal and external protective factors (Padrón, Waxman, & Huang, 1999).

Academic Resiliency: Academic Resiliency is a type of resiliency that describes an individual achieving academically in spite of risk factors such as poverty, under-resourced schools, unsafe communities, and discrimination (Morales & Trotman, 2004).

Student Departure: In this study, student departure refers to students who leave their educational pursuits at an institution to attend another institution or to explore other options outside of the college setting.

Transition: Transition refers to a student's passage from one state, place, stage or subject to another. For this study, transition focuses on the acclimation process of students from high school to college.

Underserved: Underserved students may be described as being under-resourced, being without the advantage of fully available financial, personal, and support system resources necessary to well-being (Becker, Krodell, & Tucker, 2009). Underserved students are subject to academic, family, and community attributes with the potential to hinder student gains due to a lack of information, or access to experiences and opportunities (Hamrick & Stage, 2003; Nagda, Gregerman, Jonides, von Hippel, & Lerner, 1998).

Summary

Precollege outreach programs serve as support interventions that seek to expand post-secondary access and college degree completion for disenfranchised groups (Council for the Advancement of Standards, 2011). These programs are intended to serve as a tool in addressing the national educational attainment gap. While current research exists that focuses on these students and their college enrollment process, such as high school grade point averages,

standardized tests scores, and college acceptance rates, longitudinal information is needed that sheds light on alumni's experience post college enrollment. Because these programs aim to play a major role in the American educational system, more research is needed concerning the impact that such programs have on resilience and alumni's transition into the college setting (Yeung, 2010).

This phenomenological research study explored the first year acclimation process of outreach alumni in the hopes to provide theoretical, scholarly and practical findings. With the theoretical framework utilized, this study sheds light on the role of resiliency factors in college transition, specifically in regards to traditionally marginalized youth. In addition, this study has a scholarly impact, yielding data that integrates K-16+ perspectives, rather than staying within the boundaries of K-12 literature or alternatively, higher education (Louie, 2007). Most importantly, this study has implications on current educational practice and policy. Since the majority of current research is quantitative or focuses too narrowly on college enrollment, there is limited information concerning the perceived impact that outreach programs have on alumni's integration into college and their first year experience. As a result, educational leaders' capacity to make prudent programmatic and funding decisions is restricted by a lack of knowledge. This study provides outreach programs and educational leaders with insight concerning alumni's perceptions of the impact of interventions as well as a depiction of participants' first year of college. Such information will be key in enhancing program practices to assist students in not only gaining admittance, but also having a successful first year of college.

Chapter 2

Review of Literature and Theoretical Framework

Precollege outreach programs serve as popular support interventions that strive to expand post-secondary access and college degree completion for disenfranchised groups (Council for the Advancement of Standards, 2011). Because of the use of these programs in addressing the American attainment gap, this literature review will provide data concerning this educational gap as well as an overview of the current policy context for the over 1,100 distinct college-access programs (Swail & Perna, 2002) in the United States. Following this, the history, characteristics and criticisms of outreach programs, specifically Upward Bound, will be reviewed. This chapter will then examine the existing literature dealing with the first year transition experience of college students, particularly for outreach program alumni. The chapter will conclude an examination of resiliency theory, specifically academic resilience, and its connections to this study of the college acclimation process of outreach program alumni.

Policy Context of Study

On February 24, 2009, President Barack Obama delivered his first address to a joint session of Congress. In this speech, President Obama pledged that the United States would have the world's highest college graduation rate by 2020, instead of holding its present position as the country with the highest high school dropout rate in the industrialized world. President Obama (2009) also noted that half of U.S. students who begin college never finish, which he calls a "prescription for economic decline." A 2006 report showed that the United States is ranked after Australia, Japan, Switzerland, Ireland, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, France, Iceland, Denmark, Canada, Czech Republic and Portugal in college completion (Callan & Finney, 2006). This is a persistent challenge: in 2008 the U.S. graduation rate was 37.3%, compared to

Denmark, 46.8, Finland, 62.6, Iceland, 56.6, Ireland, 46.1, Japan, 39.4, Netherlands, 41.4, New Zealand, 48.3, Norway, 41.5, Poland, 50.0, Portugal, 45.3, Slovak Republic, 57.1 and Sweden, 39.9 (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2010).

In 2010, the National Governor's Association (NGA) formed a new initiative to tackle the state of affairs in higher education, called *Complete to Compete*. It's mission was to unite the efforts of all governors to make the United States a global leader in college completion, specifically: raising awareness about the need to increase completion rates and post-secondary efficiency, establishing a common post-secondary efficiency measure that governors can use to monitor their state's progress in comparison to other states, developing a set of best practices, and providing a list of policy actions governors can implement to increase graduation rates (National Governor's Association, 2010).

The 2010-2011 chair of this NGA taskforce, Governor Joe Manchin III of West Virginia, declared that while the United States led globally in increasing access to higher education, the United States is surpassed by a dozen nations in college completion rates, making the U.S. economy "increasingly vulnerable to international competition" (National Governor's Association, 2010, p. 2). Manchin urged states to create policies that improve degree attainment and mandate more efficient use of resources, particularly by implementing performance based funding. The *Complete to Compete* initiative encouraged four-year institutions to eliminate remedial education and raise admission standards. This initiative theorized that students who must enroll in remedial education at the university level are unlikely to graduate (National Governor's Association, 2010). Specifically, less than 50% of remedial students complete their recommended remedial courses (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2014). Furthermore, a U.S. Department of Education study found that 58% of students who do not require

remediation earned a bachelor's degree, compared to only 17% of students enrolled in remedial reading and 27% of students enrolled in remedial math (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2014). This remedial education costs taxpayers \$1 billion a year. The initiative also stated that the average time to graduate has risen substantially for all degrees, thus increasing the costs of higher education to the student, state, and taxpayer. Furthermore, *Complete to Compete* ushered in a number of state higher education policies focused on institutional performance. Historically, many state funding structures reward enrollment, not completion, within post-secondary institutions. Therefore, with the rise of tuition costs and the lack of available public funding, NGA appealed to states to establish policies that promote completion and productivity in higher educational systems (National Governor's Association, 2010).

In response, on June 30, 2010, Governor Bobby Jindal signed the Louisiana Granting Resources and Autonomy for Diplomas Act, or the GRAD Act, into state law (State of Louisiana's Office of the Governor, 2010). Its purpose is as follows:

To support the state's public post-secondary institutions in remaining competitive and increasing their overall effectiveness and efficiency by providing that the institutions achieve specific, measurable performance objectives aimed at improving college needs and by granting the institutions limited operational autonomy and flexibility in exchange for achieving such objectives. (GRAD Act, 2010, p. 1)

The GRAD Act allows state post-secondary institutions the option of increasing tuition up to 10% annually if the institution meets certain performance benchmarks, such as improved graduation rates. Increasing such rates is especially needed in Louisiana in which the 2009 six-year graduation rates of bachelor's students was 40.7%, compared to the 55.5% national

graduation rate (NCHEMS Information Center for State Higher Education Policymaking and Analysis, 2011).

The Louisiana GRAD Act mirrors the state's commitment to post-secondary completion and outreach. Specifically, the GRAD Act reflects state legislators' recognition of the under-preparedness of a large percentage of Louisiana youth and the consequences of this shortfall. Such legislation suggests a need to support initiatives that assist students in performing at grade-level in order to better prepare students for after secondary education. The GRAD Act calls for institutions to support high schools in the preparation for post-secondary education. While the responsibility of GRAD Act lies within post-secondary entities, progress is dependent on students performing at grade-level prior to enrolling in post-secondary education (Becker, Krodel, & Tucker, 2009; Fischer, 2007). Colleges and universities can not be expected to supply their students with the skills necessary for post-secondary success without students' first receiving quality secondary educational opportunities.

Data has shown that many students in Louisiana are not having quality educational experiences prior to post-secondary education. In 2012, only 23% of Louisiana high school graduates met benchmarks for success in college. This scoring system emphasizes high school graduation rates and encourages high schools to offer Advanced Placement (Louisiana Department of Education, 2012). Many hold that this low percentage is a result of failing public schools that produce under-served and low academic achieving students. In Orleans Parish, one of the largest school districts in the state, schools received an average of a "C" School Performance Score (SPS). Among Orleans parish high schools, less than half, only 42% were given an A or a B. As a result, amongst other challenges such as poverty, many students must also face the challenges of under-preparation due to inadequate educational services during the

grade-level years (Becker, Krodel, & Tucker, 2009; Louisiana Department of Education, 2012). Therefore, these students may struggle to acquire the academic and psychosocial skills needed to transition and succeed in college. In Louisiana, the percentage of ninth graders who graduate from high school on time, go directly to college, return for their second year and graduate within 6 years is 14.5%, compared to a national average of 20.5% (NCHEMS Information Center for State Higher Education Policymaking and Analysis, 2011). Within the context of Louisiana, more research concerning effectiveness of outreach program practices and their ability to foster resiliency is essential so that program leaders can fully understand the optimal way to assist in the transition from high school to college and prepare students for overall post-secondary success (Fischer, 2007).

The Educational Attainment Gap

Approximately 30% of students do not graduate from high school in the United States (Snyder & Dillow, 2010). Of those that do graduate, only 70% enroll in some form of higher education. Furthermore, the 2012 graduation rate for first-time, full-time undergraduate students who began their bachelor's degree at a four-year institution in fall 2006 was only 59% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014). While there are many factors relating to student departure, a large proportion of students who do enroll in college struggle because they do not have the skill set needed to succeed in post-secondary education (Callan, Finney, Kirst, Usdan, & Venezia, 2006). Such skills include, but are not limited to: self-advocacy, studying and note-taking, problem-solving or decision-making, and time-management skills. Bound, Lovenheim and Turner (2009) noted that the main explanation for the decrease in graduation rates is changes in student preparation. Over the past twenty years, the percentage of dropouts among 16 to 24 year olds has shown some decreases. However, since 1970, the substantial growth in college

enrollment among high school graduates has not been matched with a comparable expansion in college degree attainment.

In 1970, among twenty-three year olds, 23% of high school graduates had completed a bachelor's degree, while about 51% had enrolled in college for some period after high school. For the same age group in 1999, the amount of high school graduates who had enrolled in college rose substantially to 67%, while the amount receiving a bachelor's degree rose only slightly to 24% of the cohort. Thus, for college participants measured in their early twenties, completion rates fell by more than 25% over this interval (Turner, 2004). In addition, in the U.S., marginalized students, particularly students of color, low socioeconomic status or low-level of familial degree attainment, are considerably less likely to graduate high school, pursue post-secondary education and persist upon entry (College Board, 2010). For example, African-Americans, between the ages of 25 and 29, attain bachelor's degrees at nearly half the rate of their White counterparts. In addition, Latinos earn bachelor's degrees at one-third the rate of Whites (National Center for Education Statistics, 2006). For all ages, in 2009 to 2010, the percentage distribution of degree conferred for Whites was 72.9%, Blacks 10.3%, Hispanics 8.8%, Asian/Pacific Islander 7.3% and Native American .8% (NCES, 2012).

Table 1

Degrees conferred by race in U.S. in 1999-2000 and 2009-2010

<i>Number of degrees conferred to U.S. residents by degree-granting institutions, percentage distribution of degrees conferred, and percentage of degrees conferred by race/ethnicity: Academic years 1999–2000 and 2009–10.</i>				
Level of degree and race/ethnicity	Number		Percentage distribution	
	1999–2000	2009–10	1999–2000	2009–10

(table continued)

Bachelor's	1,198,809	1,602,480	100.0	100.0
White	929,106	1,167,499	77.5	72.9
Black	108,013	164,844	9.0	10.3
Hispanic	75,059	140,316	6.3	8.8
Asian/Pacific Islander	77,912	117,422	6.5	7.3
American Indian/Alaska Native	8,719	12,399	0.7	0.8

Note. Adapted from U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2012). [*The Condition of Education, 2012*](#) (NCES 2012-045), Indicator 47.

The U.S. educational attainment gap refers to the disparity in educational performance measures between groups of students, especially those defined by socioeconomic status, race, and gender. Swail (2000) hypothesizes that America's educational system does not adequately provide the resources, for example grade-level curriculum, psychosocial skill development, as well as college and cultural enrichment that low-income or traditionally underrepresented students require. As a result, students with low socioeconomic status or students of color are significantly less likely to graduate from high school with the skills needed to be successful in higher education (ACT, 2004; NCES, 2003).

Addressing the U.S. Attainment Gap

Researchers hold that differences in college enrollment across groups can be explained, in part, by the variances in levels of academic preparation, such as high school curriculum, ACT and SAT preparation, and development of soft skills—study, note-taking and time-management skills (Cabrera et al., 2006; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Swail and Perna (2002) claim that outreach programs have been created to serve as the “safety nets” of the American educational

system by providing academic enrichment activities, counseling on college enrollment, parental involvement initiatives, mentoring, personal enrichment and social integration activities (Harvill et al., 2012). Research has shown that such programs can foster factors of resilience or qualities that nurture the successful development of an individual despite adversity (Bernard, 2004; Masten, 1994). Outreach programs that holistically incorporate the students' home, school, and community resources to create a wrap-around support system can foster resiliency amongst participants in overcoming the challenges faced in their educational pursuit (Bernard, 2004). Programs achieve this by fostering: relationships with teachers and staff; a caring climate; parents involvement; small classes; mentoring; community partnerships; high expectations; and opportunities for students to participate and contribute in both an academic setting and in their community (Garmezy, 1993). As a result, such safety nets for underserved and underprepared students seek to provide academic and social support, supplementing the often insufficient in quantity and quality resources that are provided in students' kindergarten through twelfth grade settings.

The total undergraduate enrollment rate has increased over the past three and a half decades (NCES, 2006). This is a result of a number of factors including federal, state, and institutional policy changes and improvements in the areas of student aid and enrollment management. However, despite some gains made on the part of low-income, first generation, and students of color in the areas of access, persistence, and academic achievement, the American educational attainment gaps still exists (Avery & Kane, 2004; Horn, Nevill, & Griffith, 2006). Precollege outreach programs can serve as a means to close this attainment gap. These programs often provide tutoring, mentoring, study and time-keeping skills seminars, college awareness interventions, financial planning workshops and many other strategies to help

aid students in attending and persisting in post-secondary institutions (Cabrera et al., 2006; Villalpando & Solorzano, 2005). In addition, programs often focus on developing resilience (Bernard, 2004; Masten, 1994). However, more research is needed concerning if and how these programs assist students in overcoming challenges in college, the perceived effectiveness of program practices from an alumni viewpoint and the first year transition experience of recent participants.

An Overview of Current Precollege Outreach Programs

The past several decades have seen an increase in the number of college outreach programs (Domina, 2009; Gandara & Bial, 2001). Whether funded by the federal government, colleges, universities, or private philanthropies, these programs are typically designed to ease the path to higher education for students who have been traditionally underrepresented. Overall, more than 1,100 college outreach programs currently operate in the United States, each offering a unique mix of educational supports to diverse sets of student populations (Domina, 2009; Gandara & Bial, 2001). According to Harvill et al. (2012), typically, programs consist of the following dimensions:

- Counseling to provide students with information on the college enrollment process
- Enrichment activities that focus on improving academic preparation
- Parent involvement so that guardians are knowledgeable about the enrollment process
- Personal enrichment and social integration activities so that students' understanding of opportunities are broadened
- One-on-one mentoring
- Scholarships that offer financial aid for students in need

Through these services, these programs claim to improve students' academic performance, build students' self-esteem, and foster students' awareness about post-secondary matters (Timar et al., 2004).

Precollege Outreach Program Goals, Size and Participants

Across the nation, precollege outreach programs vary in regards to services and types of support provided. In 2000, in order to gain perspective concerning the various types of outreach programs, the College Board, the Education Resources Institute, and the Council for Opportunity in Education, conducted the *National Survey of Outreach Programs* (Swail & Perna, 2002). This survey provided national data to help practitioners, researchers, policy makers, and philanthropists better understand the programs currently serving students. This survey yielded responses from 1,110 programs nationwide from all 50 states. The findings detail that the majority of precollege intervention programs aim to help disadvantaged students achieve the same scholastic achievement as their more privileged counterparts (Swail & Perna, 2002).

From the data gathered, the most commonly stated goal of programs was to increase college enrollment rates. In total, about 90% of programs had the goals of: promoting college attendance, college awareness and/or college exposure. These programs commonly included academic instruction, role modeling, mentoring, and tutoring services. In addition, most programs included interventions to support students in developing academic skills, such as critical thinking, reading and writing. Interventions also prioritized social development, specifically, “services that may help students acquire noncognitive skills that are important to the successful integration of students into campus life” (Swail & Perna, 2002, p. 24). Such services included social skill development, cultural activities, and leadership enhancement.

As far as the participants, programs generally focused on educationally or economically disadvantaged students. About one-third of all programs reported targeting students with low academic ability or achievement. Programs also focused on serving students from low socioeconomic backgrounds with about 80% of respondents indicated that their program targeted low-income students. In addition, 71% of programs targeted minority and first-generation college students (Swail & Perna, 2002). In regards to logistics, the survey displayed that time and lengths of programs vary: approximately 67% of the programs provide year-round services, 18% operate during the school year, and 15% function during the summer. In reference to location, 57.2% of the responding programs were based at a college or university, 15.6% at a school, and 13.4% within the community and 13.8% had two or more bases (Swail & Perna, 2002).

Ten years after the initial survey, a follow up survey produced statistical data from 374 programs as well as published 10 case studies of successful precollege interventions. While the majority of data remained consistent, some subtle differences appeared. In 2010, two additional goals were significant — increasing the likelihood of completing college, 80% stating this as a goal, and improving academic skills, 79% of respondents indicating as a goal (Swail et al., 2012).

Examples of Precollege Outreach Programs

Overall, programs can be divided broadly into two approaches: nongovernmental and governmental. There are hundreds of examples of nongovernmental programs around the country that provide outreach. Most prominent nongovernmental programs include: the “I Have a Dream” (IHAD), Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID), Mathematics,

Engineering and Science Achievement (MESA) and Puente Programs (Swail & Perna, 2002).

Some of the most popular government funded programs include: Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) and Upward Bound.

Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) may provide some elements that contribute to resilience building, such as: school-community partnerships, relationships with teachers and staff, a caring climate and school based mentoring (Garmezy, 1993). GEAR UP is a discretionary grant program designed to increase the number of low-income students prepared to succeed in higher education. This program provides six-year grants to states and partnerships to serve high poverty middle and high schools. In these schools, GEAR UP provides services to an entire cohort of students beginning no later than the seventh grade and follows this cohort through high school (U.S. Department of Education, 2014a). In doing so, GEAR UP provides early college awareness and support activities, such as tutoring, academic preparation, financial education and college scholarships. Unlike other programs, GEAR UP requires cooperation among K-12 schools, colleges, local and state entities and businesses as they are required to match federal investment dollars. In addition, the legislative reasoning for GEAR UP's educational partnerships includes: maintaining a guarantee of financial assistance to participants seeking a post-secondary degree; providing academic and co-curricular support services to students at risk of dropping out; and giving students and families' information concerning the advantages of higher education (National Council for Community and Education Partnerships, 2014). As a result, GEAR UP serves to support state and local education reform initiatives, fostering sustained systemic change in middle and high schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2014a).

Heisel (2005) conducted a study to determine the effectiveness of GEAR UP. The study

was conducted in 19 schools in New Jersey. The number of participants was 490, year one to 1074, year six. The study included observations, personal visits, and interviews. In the student interviews, participants shared several benefits of the program, including assistance in raising grades, increased interest and learning in different subject areas, and hands-on experience with science classes. Many students spent several terms in the program because of the academic advantage in taking supplemental coursework; opportunities to learn more about college; meet new peers; and participate in recreational and cultural activities. The students had positive perceptions about tutoring, meeting college students and receiving assistance with state testing, college acclimation and goal setting. However, program administrators noted that parent involvement was an area of growth for the program (Heisel, 2005). The data also showed a descriptive connection between GEAR UP participation and college enrollment. Over a five-year period, 235 students completed the GEAR UP program and 192 of them enrolled in college. The participation rate increased for each cohort, but the college enrollment rate decreased. The researcher concluded that a system needed to be developed to monitor all former participants in the program. Overall, the researcher concluded that the GEAR UP Program collaborates well with schools and assists with increasing overall school achievement (Heisel, 2005).

Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) is another in-school academic support program. AVID is a global nonprofit organization, not a federal initiative, dedicated to closing the attainment gap by preparing all students for post-secondary opportunities. The primary goal of the AVID program is to “motivate and prepare underachieving students from underrepresented linguistic and ethnic minority groups or low-income students of any ethnicity to perform well in high school and to seek a college education” (Mehan, Villanueva, Hubbard, & Linitz, 1996, p. 14). AVID brings research-based strategies and curriculum to elementary,

secondary and high schools. AVID hopes to teach skills for academic success, provide intensive support resources, foster strong student/teacher relationships, create positive peer groups amongst students, and develop a sense of hope for personal achievement gained through hard work and determination. To achieve this, AVID attempts to create opportunities for: students to understand how their school functions, become involved in extracurricular activities, interact with individuals from various professional fields, and learn about the college application, financial aid, and enrollment processes. Additionally, schools with AVID models work to foster a sense of community by providing opportunities for students to connect with guidance counselors, career advisors, and other school staff as well as by reaching out to families to encourage involvement (Bernhardt, 2013).

Watt, Huerta, and Lozano (2007) studied 142 high school students enrolled in AVID and GEAR UP programs. In this study, differences in student educational aspirations and expectations, participant's knowledge of college entrance requirements, knowledge of financial aid, and academic achievement in mathematics were all examined. In this study, only the AVID students were significantly better academically prepared than the control group, individuals who were not in either of the programs. AVID students were also more involved with advanced course enrollment. Oswald (2002) also conducted a study to determine the effectiveness of the AVID program. 400 AVID students participated in the study from four middle schools and four high schools. The study consisted of gathering information on AVID and non-AVID students. Student enrollment was based on low socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and average to high-test scores, first generation college-bound students, self-determination, and parent involvement. Interested students submitted an application along with an essay to a selection committee. The final step was an interview with the selection committee. The recruitment rubric consisted of

areas such as grade point average, attendance, scores on reading and mathematics assessments, discipline, oral and written interviews, and special needs. The recruitment rubric was based on a point system to determine acceptance to the program. The results were reported descriptively which showed AVID participants enrolled in two to four advanced courses. First year AVID students attended school on 93.6% of the time and second year AVID students attended on average of 92.9% of the time, compared to non-AVID students who average was 89.8. AVID students passed the reading achievement test at an average rate of 93.3% and mathematics at an average rate of 88.8% compared to non-AVID students whose average rate was 82.5% in reading and 81.5% in mathematics. AVID students took more challenging coursework and 67% of AVID students took 2 or more advanced or honors courses.

Compared to Oswald (2002), Watt, Powerll, and Mendiola (2004) sought to discover if implementing the AVID program as a comprehensive reform model would improve student performance. In 1999, ten Texas school districts were chosen for the study and as result widened the scope of the research and yielded more participants than Oswald's (2002) study. The researchers collected demographic and academic data on 1,291 AVID high school students in 1999 and again in 2002. The study involved 740 ninth graders, 413 tenth graders, 108 eleventh graders, and 30 twelfth graders. As of result of the research design, researchers were able to analyze the school performance data and compare the results to previous data from AVID, school wide and statewide. Test scores for AVID students increased by 21% in algebra, 12% in biology, 9% in reading, and 15% in mathematics on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills. Ninety-two percent were on track to complete high school and 87% were enrolled in at least one college predatory class. In 1999, three of the ten AVID schools were rated as low performing; seven were acceptable and none of the schools were rated as recognized or exemplary. In 2002,

none of the schools were in the category of low performing; six were acceptable; two were recognized and two were exemplary AVID Schools. All ten AVID schools improved their accountability rating (Watt, Powell, & Meniola, 2004).

In addition to the aforementioned programs, in the 2013 fiscal year, more than 800 classic Upward Bound sites operated in the U.S., serving 59,916 students with 73 students on average at each site. The mean amount awarded per program site was \$306,198 or \$4,170 per student, having a higher cost per student compared to other programs like GEAR UP, \$347 federal cost per student (U. S. Department of Education, 2014d). Thus, as one of the largest providers of college access services and as a program that has been noted to potentially build resiliency, Upward Bound is the outreach intervention examined in this study. A separate section detailing the history and impacts of this program follows.

Upward Bound

Brief History

With the commencement of President Lyndon Johnson's *War on Poverty* in the 1960s, many federal, state, community and privately funded initiatives were developed to alleviate some of the barriers to degree completion faced by low-income and first-generation college students as well as students of color (James, Jurich, & Estes 2001). The Educational Opportunity Act of 1964 (EOA) (P.L. 88-452, 78 Stat. 508) established an experimental program known as Upward Bound. In 1964-1965, 18 pilot Upward Bound programs were created and served over 2000 students (James, 1986; McElroy, 1998). In 1965, the Higher Education Act created Talent Search. Finally, Special Services for Disadvantaged Students (later known as Student Support Services), was launched in 1968. Together, this "trio" of federally funded programs were born,

igniting the federal government's tradition of developing policies that impact underrepresented students and higher education. At one point, the original three programs grew to nine, adding Educational Opportunity Centers and Veterans Upward Bound in 1972, Training Program for Federal TRIO programs in 1976, the Ronald E. McNair Post-baccalaureate Achievement Program in 1986, Upward Bound Math/Science in 1990, and the TRIO Dissemination Partnership in 1998 (Council for Opportunity in Education, 2010).

Since their inception, the TRIO programs have undergone changes and have expanded drastically. In 2009, the annual appropriation for TRIO programs was over \$899,423,543 with approximately 2,880 active projects (U.S. Department of Education, 2011a). Today, the TRIO programs consist of: Educational Opportunity Centers, Ronald E. McNair Post Baccalaureate Achievement, Student Support Services, Talent Search, Veterans Upward Bound, Upward Bound Math-Science and classic Upward Bound. In 2013, it was estimated that 59,916 students participated in classic Upward Bound, 9,683 in Math and Science Upward Bound, and 6,397 in Veterans Upward Bound. Furthermore, in 2013, the number of classic Upward Bound sites had increased to 816 nationwide. Of these, 22 operate in the state of Louisiana and receive \$7,258,107 in funding (U.S. Department of Education, 2014d). While the Upward Bound program has seen growth, its original mission remains consistent, to foster the skills necessary for enrollment and success in education beyond high school among students of low-income backgrounds that have inadequate secondary school preparation (U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

Upward Bound Participants

Classic Upward Bound program is monitored by the U.S. Department of Education and is

administered through individual grants, each of which covers a restricted geographic area and provide services to approximately 50 to 100 students annually. To participate in classic Upward Bound, students must be between the ages of 13 and 19, have completed eight years of elementary education, plan to go to college, and need Upward Bound services to fulfill their goals (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). The classic Upward Bound program also requires that two-thirds of the participants at a site be both low-income and potential first-generation college students. The remaining one-third must be either low-income, first-generation college students, or students who have a high risk for academic failure, either: not achieving at the proficient level on state assessments in language arts or math, not completing pre-algebra or algebra by the beginning of the tenth grade or having a grade point average of 2.5 or less for the most recent school year (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Here, low income is defined as an individual whose family taxable income for the preceding year did not exceed 150% of the poverty level amount. Thus, for a family of four to qualify, their income must be \$35,775 or lower (Office of Postsecondary Education, 2014). To help support its participants, classic Upward Bound provides stipends to students who are in the program full-time. In order to receive the stipend, the participant must show evidence of satisfactory participation in activities, for example regular attendance and performance in accordance with standards established by the program site and described in the application. For classic Upward Bound and Upward Bound Math and Science, during the academic year, the stipend cannot exceed \$40.00 per month and \$60 per month during the summer. It is estimated that TRIO programs only serve 10% of the eligible student population. In order to reach more students, an annual expenditure of six billion dollars would be needed (Swail & Perna, 2002). However, currently, classic Upward Bound is the highest funded initiative out of the TRIO programs with a 2013 budget of \$249,857,000

(U.S. Department of Education, 2014d).

Upward Bound Services

Upward Bound prepares high school students for higher education through a subject matter focused program. Upward Bound sites are mandated to provide students with instruction in literature, composition, mathematics, foreign language and laboratory science on college campuses after school, on Saturdays and during the summer. Other Upward Bound services include (U.S. Department of Education, 2014c):

- Academic, financial, or personal counseling
- Exposure to academic programs and cultural events
- Tutoring services
- Mentoring programs
- Information on post-secondary education opportunities
- Assistance in completing college entrance and financial aid applications
- Help in preparing for college entrance exams
- Work-study positions to expose participants to careers requiring a post-secondary degree

Outside the mandated supplemental instruction subject areas, the most common services include: tutoring, counseling and mentoring (Swail et al., 2012). Upward Bound projects also include college and cultural enrichment programs (Swail et al., 2012). In regards to cultural initiatives,

such programs may bring students to attend operas, ballets and classical music programs, as well as tour museums, aquariums and historical sites. Examples of college enrichment activities include: tours of a variety of four-year colleges and universities, workshops on ACT and SAT and intensive summer residential or nonresidential programs designed to mirror the college-going experience. Together, these cultural and educational programs attempt to enhance participant's self-esteem and sense of purpose, academic knowledge, and cultural awareness (Swail et al., 2012).

Evaluations of Upward Bound Programs

While billions of federal, state, and private dollars have been spent to close the educational attainment gap, traditionally marginalized youth are still less likely to persist in higher education than their counterparts (Haskins & Rouse 2013). Under the present economic and policy climate, outreach programs have come under increased scrutiny to link program effectiveness to costs. While an abundance of research exists concerning participants college *enrollment* (Bailis et al., 1995; Gandara, 2001; Gandara & Bial, 2001; Gullat & Jan, 2003; Heyward et al., 1997; Maldonado, Rhoads, & Buenavista, 2005; Oesterreich, 2000; Swail & Perna, 2001; Villapando & Solorzano, 2005; Yeung, 2010), very little is known about the actual impact of precollege outreach programs in assisting students with the college transition and increasing college completion (Haskins & Rouse, 2013; Hooker & Brand, 2009; Orr et al., 2007). Researchers agree that most program evaluation data is unreliable and provides little information about the actual impact of services on students' transition and first year success (Yeung, 2010).

Currently, only six major large-scale reports are available to discuss precollege academic

enrichment programs (Bailis et al., 1995; Gandara, 2001; Hayward et al., 1997; James, Jurich, & Estes, 2001; Osterreich, 2000; Swail & Perna, 2001). These reports show mixed results concerning the impact of programs. One of the first research evaluations of programs was *The Evaluation Study of the Upward Bound Programs* (Burkheimer, Riccobono, & Wisenbaker, 1979). This national study was a comprehensive longitudinal evaluation of Upward Bound programs from 1973 to 1978 and used a matched comparison group. The results of the evaluation found that the program had an impact on educational aspirations, post-secondary progress and persistence. The researchers found that program benefits were positively correlated with attendance and participation levels. Burkheimer and colleagues (1979) found that Upward Bound students were retained in high school at higher rates than comparison groups of 10th and 11th graders. In addition, the longer students remained in the program, the more likely they were to benefit from it and the more likely they were to go on to college. All Upward Bound students were also significantly more likely to enroll in college. This study highlighted the need for tracking participation levels in all Upward Bound programs.

Over 18 years later, Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. found controversial, mixed conclusions about Upward Bound's effectiveness. The *National Evaluation of Upward Bound* was the first large-scale evaluation of Upward Bound since the late 1970s (Myers et al., 1999). Researchers compared 1,500 Upward Bound students from 67 Upward Bound sites with 1,200 randomly selected control students with similar socioeconomic circumstances and who did not have access to the program. The study found that Upward Bound had no impact on students' in-school behavior, participation in extracurricular activities, grade-point average, or credits earned in subjects such as English or science. The study also found that most students participated in the program for an average of only 19 months, often sporadically. Furthermore, the study

reported that, on average, Upward Bound had “no detectable effect” on whether students enrolled in college, the type or selectivity of the institution attended, or the likelihood that they would apply for or receive financial aid. The most controversial finding of the study noted that Upward Bound had no effect on their college persistence. The Mathematica report concluded that the Upward Bound program had no effect on overall enrollment or total credits earned at post-secondary institutions (Myers et al., 2004). This finding is significant due to fact that Upward Bound has been established as a strategy to address the U.S. attainment gap. By noting that Upward Bound had no effect on persistence, this study poses questions concerning the efficiency of resources that Upward Bound has been providing to traditionally underrepresented youth since 1964.

Building upon this study, a recent policy brief from The Future of Children (Haskins & Rouse, 2013), a joint project of The Brookings Institution and Princeton University, called for a complete overhaul of the federal government’s college preparation programs. This brief proclaimed that only one evaluation of federal funded outreach programs, the 1999 Mathematica study, met requirement for the Institute of Education Sciences Standard for top tier evidence and that this study showed that Upward Bound had no major effects on college enrollment or completion. This brief declared that after four decades, such programs have little to show for return on the \$1 billion of annual investment from the U.S. Department of Education. The authors of this policy brief stated, “Half a century and billions of dollars after these federal college-preparation programs began...we are left with mostly failed programs interspersed with modest successes” (2013, p. 4). As a result, the authors called for a consolidation and overhaul of TRIO programs, combining “TRIO programs into a single grant program, require that funded programs be backed by rigorous evidence, and give the Department of Education the authority

and funding to plan a coordinated set of research and demonstration programs to develop and rigorously test several approaches to college preparation (Haskins & Rouse, 2013, p. 1).”

However, while some call for an overhaul of Upward Bound based on the findings of the *National Evaluation of Upward Bound* study (Myers et al., 2004), others are hesitant due to the findings of Burkheimer, Riccobono, and Wisenbaker’s research (1979) and some small-scale studies. In 2004, Grimard and Madaus examined the major obstacles low-income rural youth face in preparing for college and if their participation in the Upward Bound program assisted them in overcoming these obstacles. The study surveyed and interviewed students, guidance counselors, and parents and/or guardians of students. The students perceived that they benefited academically, financially, and socially. Students perceived that the program: helped them get into college (94.3%), improved their high school grades (75.4%) and benefited them by allowing them to be on a college campus (73.5%). According to the Council for Opportunity in Higher Education (2010), in 2005, 77.3% of all active Upward Bound students immediately went to college in the fall following their high school graduations. This rate is even higher for students who participated for multiple years. For example, 91.2% of Upward Bound students who participated in the program for three years or longer and 93% who participated through to high school graduation enrolled in a post-secondary program immediately following high school.

As a result of the mixed findings in research concerning Upward Bound, Congress has debated the program’s continued funding, priorities and evaluation procedures. In 2009, the Council for Opportunity in Education reanalyzed the data from the critical 1999 Mathematica study after addressing study error (Cahalan, 2009; Myers et al., 2004). This re-analysis found that when study error issues were addressed, Upward Bound demonstrated statistically significant and substantive positive impacts on the major goals of the program, post-secondary

entrance and application for financial aid. The researchers also noted that Upward Bound had a significant overall impact on the likelihood of attending post-secondary education (Cahalan, 2009). However, this study confirmed that additional policy emphasis is needed concerning post-secondary retention and completion. Of their population, only about 20% had attained such a degree by six years out of high school (Cahalan, 2009). This finding indicates that while Upward Bound may have been successful in moving under-represented students into college, perhaps it has not been succeeding in moving them all the way to degree completion. Thus, according to this study, Upward Bound has had positive impacts on college enrollment, but less impressive results related to degree attainment. To address this problem, more research is needed detailing the college transition and post-secondary experiences of Upward Bound alumni. Only when researchers and practitioners understand where Upward Bound students are being derailed on their way to a bachelor's degree will they be able to create appropriate interventions on campus or revisions to precollege programming. Without a clearer sense of the "black box" of student retention, the attainment gap will continue to permeate the American educational system.

Many researchers and practitioners believe that intervention programs are key to addressing the differences in students' academic and psychosocial preparation for college and to provide important information regarding the college-going process (Villalpando & Solorzano, 2005). However, little is known about these students' actual transition from high school to college (Yeung, 2010). Few studies provide sufficient attention to the steps required for program alumni to be academically, socially, and psychologically successful in college. Yeung (2010) examined the transition process of high school outreach participants. Using a mixed-methods research design, Yeung (2010) explored the first year experience of alumni of the University of California Early Academic Outreach Program. The study yielded findings that detail lower self-

esteem and confidence of program alumni during the transition process, program alumni being overwhelmed by newly gained independence, and the importance of social integration of students in transition. It identified a clear need for continued support throughout the first year of college. This study is noteworthy as there is limited research that explores the factors that support alumni's first year experience, such as academic preparation, campus resources and climate, as well as social and academic integration. However, while notable, the outreach program researched in Yeung's study (2010) is an intervention overseen by the University of California. Thus, a study is needed that addresses the college acclimation process of participants of Upward Bound, one of the largest and federally funded outreach programs in the United States.

The majority of research on outreach programs has focused on the relative effectiveness of these interventions for getting students into college, yet questions remain about their participants' success in acclimating to post-secondary education. Little attention has been given to the factors that encourage student retention in college, despite internal (i.e., questions of self-confidence) or external (i.e. financial) pressures. Research is needed concerning Upward Bound alumni's perceptions of the program's impact on their transition, students' view of the effectiveness of outreach services in preparing them for college, and participants' perceived ability to overcome the challenges faced in post-secondary education as a result of their program experience. This study sheds light on the resiliency of Upward Bound alumni, their perception of the impact of the program, and their college acclimation process in order to provide knowledge concerning program alumni's first year experience.

First Year Transition

While post-secondary institutions will likely to see greater enrollment, observers have

voiced opinions that recently admitted students are entering colleges and universities not equipped with the skills and knowledge to succeed at the post-secondary level (Becker, Krodel, & Tucker, 2009). The first year of college has been identified as a critical period because it shapes students' chances for later success and their ability to adjust to academic, social, professional, and personal challenges (Upcraft & Gardner, 1989). Unable to overcome the challenges associated with this period, many students withdrawal from post-secondary education. Research has shown that the highest percentage of student departure occurs within the first year of college. In 2010, the national retention rate from freshman to sophomore year was 77.1% for all four-year public colleges. Since 2004, this retention rate has fluctuated between 77.1% and 74.8%. In Louisiana, the 2010 retention rate of students from first to second year was 72.9%. Since 2004, first to second year retention rate in Louisiana has ranged from 72.9% to 65.8% (NCHEMS Information Center for State Higher Education Policymaking and Analysis, 2011).

There are a number of reasons for this high rate of student departure in the first year. The college transition signifies, in many ways the movement from adolescence to young adulthood. During this time, known as “emerging adulthood,” individuals must adapt to increasingly demanding academic, social, and financial pressures (Arnett, 2000). Often, these students may experiment with new roles and relationships, develop future hopes, assume adult responsibilities and challenge their existing beliefs and ideologies (Smith et al., 2006). In addition, students may have anxiety over being able to: navigate a new environment, become productive members of the university community, manage the separation from friends and family, and engage in the process of career decision making (Credé & Niehorster, 2012). These individuals often may struggle with identity exploration, instability, self-focus, and feeling in-between (Bayram & Bilgel, 2008). As a result, first year college students tend to experience greater stress, anxiety, and

psychological distress relative to upperclassmen (Bayram & Bilgel, 2008). As a result, these students have a higher likelihood of withdrawal from college. The study is needed, as it will provide insight on the resiliency of at-risk students and their first year experience in the college setting. The findings of such a study will also have significant implications on educational programs, such as precollege outreach programs, as it will display the perceived effectiveness of their practices in assisting their alumni in the college acclimation process.

Theoretical Framework

To address the present attainment gap, educational leaders must identify and understand the factors that contribute to student retention to degree. In exploring the college transition of outreach alumni, a resiliency framework (Garmezy, 1973) can shed light on the protective factors that promote student development and success in the face of obstacles such as poverty, marginalized status, low level of parental education and life transition (Luthar & Zelazo, 2003). This research study will utilize resilience theory to gain a greater understanding of the perceptions of students who participated in precollege outreach programs. The study can be viewed as an investigation into student perceptions of Upward Bound's ability to nurture factors of resiliency that empower a student to embrace constructive responses to stressors in the first year of college.

Resiliency Theory

Over the last thirty years, resiliency theory has gained popularity as a social science concept and a byproduct of the strengths-based movement in the fields of psychology, counseling, and psychiatry (Padrón, Waxman, & Huang, 1999). The term "resilience" describes qualities that nurture the successful adaptation and development of an individual despite adversity (Masten, 1994). In regards to youth, resilience emphasizes that all youth have

strengths and can be taught to use these to negate, prevent, impede, or moderate the effects of risk factors that can cause psychosocial harm (Civita, 2000). Researchers have noted resilience as a two-dimensional construct that includes: the exposure to adversity and the positive adjustment outcomes that result from it (Luther & Cicchetti, 2000). Thus, the core elements of resiliency are referred to as risks and protective factors. In this two-dimensional construct, it is important to emphasize that resilience does not reside in the avoidance of risk experiences (Rutter, 1993), but results from an individual encountering an adversity, successfully coping, and persisting in the face of the challenges.

Academic Resilience

When applied to education, resilience theory focuses on how interactions between the individual and the environment can contribute to positive educational outcomes (Bronfenbrenner, 1999). The academic resilience framework explains why certain students from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds and communities are successful in school despite exposure to risk factors (including those identified by Tinto, 1975). Academic resilience can be defined as “the process and results that are part of the life story of an individual who has been academically successful, despite obstacles that prevent the majority of others with the same background from succeeding” (Morales & Trotman, 2004, p. 8). Thus, academic resilience is viewed as a process in which factors in the environment impact the individual and vice versa. It is these interactions, as opposed to individual factors within the environment or the individual, which lead to necessary adaptations (Masten et al., 1999).

When academic resilience is viewed as a process, precollege outreach programs can disrupt the link between risk factors and negative outcomes. Bernard’s (1995) identified the

following attributed of resilient people: social competence (ability to elicit positive responses from others, thus establishing positive relationships with adults and peers), problem solving skills (planning that facilitate seeing oneself in control and resourcefulness in seeking help from others), autonomy (a sense of one's own identity and an ability to act independently and exert some control over one's environment), and a sense of purpose and future (goals, educational aspirations, hopefulness, and a sense of a bright future). In Constantine, Bernard, and Diaz's (1999) study, the researchers created a framework for educational resilience and compiled a list of protective factors. The researchers found that there were both internal and external protective factors that can be grouped into six clusters. The three internal protective clusters were: 1) social competence, 2) autonomy and sense of self, and 3) sense of meaning and purpose. The three external protective factors were: 1) caring relationships, 2) meaningful involvement and 3) high expectations. Throughout current research, the most consistent protective factors of resiliency noted include: competence, motivation, self-regulation, and locus of control (Alvord & Grados, 2005; Hines, Merdinger, & Wyatt, 2005; Reis et al., 2005; Wasonga et al., 2003). The current study accessed alumni's perceptions of their Upward Bound experience and analyzed them for evidence that the program offers supports that nurture protective factors that disrupt the link between risk factors and negative outcomes during the first year acclimation process. Through this research, program administrators are able to acknowledge which supports achieve this and emphasize them in their curriculum to further enhance their interventions.

Appropriateness of Framework

Over the last three decades, resilience researchers have sought to describe how people overcome potential barriers to academic success. Resilience research holds that an effective means of addressing the attainment gap is through understanding success (Gardynik &

McDonald, 2005). Resilience is not a personality trait that prevents the negative environment from affecting youth. Instead, resilience is defined in sociocultural terms, taking the perspective that academic resilience can be a function of the learners' relationships. Researchers have stated that educational settings can be powerful environments that provide opportunities to foster factors of resiliency by providing mentors, caring adults, parent participation, and high student expectations (Rydell, Hagekull, & Bohlin, 1997).

Upward Bound programs may provide these sources of resiliency building by offering opportunities for student involvement, like cultural trips and college tours, academic support and community engagement. This study reveals alumni perceptions of the impact of Upward Bound on their transition into a post-secondary institution. The study brings to the forefront alumni's perception of the effectiveness of their Upward Bound program in the context of resiliency theory and their college transition process.

External and Internal Factors of Resilience

External protective factors can be grouped into three main categories: caring relationships, high expectations, and opportunities for participating and contribution (Howard, Dryden, & Johnson, 1999; Rak & Patterson, 1996). In regards to Upward Bound, one of the program's goals is to provide students with access to caring relationships with staff, teachers, and mentors. Through these relationships, it is the hope that caring adults exhibit high expectations for students, specifically that each participant will graduate from college. Upward Bound programs also may provide opportunities for participation and contribution. For example, students having leadership opportunities in a program's student government or community service projects.

External protective factors can also help foster internal protective factors including: social competence, the ability to coordinate resources and build successful relationships, communication, empathy, problem-solving skills, self-awareness, autonomy, a sense of self, purpose in life, self-efficacy, flexibility, tenacity, leadership skills and emotional intelligence (Rak & Patterson, 1996). These factors result in an active approach to problem solving, an optimistic approach to life, an internal locus of control and an ability to be alert and proactive (Rak & Patterson, 1996). Moreover, such factors have a cumulative effect so that students possessing a greater number of protective factors are more likely to adapt positively to challenges and display resilience (Howard, Dryden, & Johnson, 1999).

Resilience and College Transition

Faced with the new demands of college, a student's level of resilience is essential (Masten, 1994). During the college acclimation process, students must cope with additional stressors and their success in doing so has implications on their social-emotional adjustment as well as their likelihood of academic success (Andrews & Wilding, 2004; Pritchard & Wilson, 2003; Zajacova, Lynch, & Espenshade, 2005). Many precollege development programs attempt to build resilience in populations known to possess risk factors for not completing their college education. Such resiliency in participant alumni is essential as it can guide students in overcoming challenges, such as marginalization, life transition, and the demands of the post-secondary environment.

Academic resilience is not a "fixed" attribute of a few students, but it is alterable and can be developed (Padrón, Waxman, & Huang, 1999). As a result, many outreach programs have incorporated the development of external and internal protective factors of resilience in their

curriculum and services. Due to the mission of outreach programs as well as the high rate of student departure during the first year, this qualitative study was needed to obtain an in-depth description of outreach alumni's perceptions of the impact of precollege interventions on first year transition. Resilience theory, specifically academic resiliency, guided this research concerning the transition of outreach alumni during their first year of college. As a result, this study explored the protective factors that involve precollege attributes, attitudes and commitments as well as the academic and social integration that may assist students in overcoming obstacles associated with marginalization. Furthermore, through this framework, the author was able to situate this study within the body of existing resilience research, clarify what participants revealed, and investigate how external and internal protective factors play a role in relation to the research question. Importantly, this line of inquiry, guided by a resilience framework, is essential, as it reveals insight on outreach program alumni, experiences of, not only enrolling, but also transitioning into post-secondary education.

Chapter 3

Methods and Procedures

Research Design

This study utilized a qualitative approach to gain participants' depictions of their first year at an institution of higher education, their perceptions of the Upward Bound program's impact on their transition, as well as their perceived ability to overcome challenges faced in post-secondary education as a result of their program experience. Through this approach, participants shared their experiences, emphasizing their personal meanings and enabling the reader to hear their unique voices. This study's qualitative methodology consisted of a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of program alumni's acclimation process into a four-year institution. Through this approach, the researcher focused on describing, as accurately and precisely as possible, the nature, experience and meaning involved with the phenomena under study. As a result, the researcher " 'borrow(ed)' other people's experiences and their reflections on their experiences in order to better be able to come to an understanding of the deeper meaning or significance of an aspect of human experience" (van Manen, 1990, p. 62).

Rationale for Phenomenology

Phenomenology centers on descriptions of how people experience and how they perceive their experience of the phenomena under study (Glesne, 1999). This study attempted to answer the question: *How do first year students who participated in a precollege outreach program describe their experiences adjusting to college life?* Attention is placed on the individual's lived experiences as alumna of an outreach program-the phenomenology (van Manen, 1997).

Phenomenological approach was optimal for this study as it posits that social phenomena are best understood from the “actors” own perspectives, describing the world as experienced by subjects, and with the assumption that the important reality is what people perceive it to be” (Kvale, 1996, p. 52). Furthermore, phenomenology is “interested in elucidating both that which appears and the manner in which it appears...it studies the subjects’ perspectives on the world; attempts to describe in detail the content and structure of the subjects’ consciousness, to grasp the qualitative diversity of their experience and to explicate their essential meanings” (Kvale, 1996, p. 53). As a result, the researcher constructed deeply layered levels of meaning in regards to outreach alumni’s college transition and resilience.

Site Selection

This study centered on the first year acclimation of precollege outreach program alumni. All participants were alumni of an Upward Bound program in Louisiana and had completed the first year of college at a four-year post-secondary institution. In regards to scope, the first year was chosen as a parameter due to the fact that three fourths of students who withdrawal from college leave during their first year (NCHEMS Information Center for State Higher Education Policymaking and Analysis, 2011). Thus, the experiences of students from this setting are especially instructive because they provide program and post-secondary administrators, secondary educators, and students’ insight on the experiences and skills that can aid participants in successfully adjusting to college.

Participant Selection

This study utilized purposeful and snowball sampling with selection based on the characteristics of interest in the study (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003; Onwuegbuzie, Jiao, & Bostick, 2004). Upward Bound was chosen as the program under study because it is one of the largest,

oldest precollege outreach programs as well as one of the most highly funded initiatives in the United States (U.S. Department of Education, 2014c). While Upward Bound sites may vary slightly, in order to receive funding, all must meet certain requirements in reference to participants and services provided. In regards to participants, students must be between 13 and 19 years of age, with two thirds of participants being low-income and first-generation college students and the remaining one-third being either low-income, first-generation college students, or students who have a high risk for academic failure, either not achieving at the proficient level on state assessments in language arts or math, not completing pre-algebra or algebra by the beginning of the tenth grade or having a grade point average of 2.5 or less (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). In regards to services, Upward Bound sites must prepare high school students for higher education through a subject matter focused program. Sites are mandated to have instruction in literature, composition, mathematics, foreign language and laboratory science. Other Upward Bound services include academic, financial, or personal counseling, exposure to academic and cultural events, tutoring services, and information on post-secondary education opportunities (U.S. Department of Education, 2014b). In order to receive funding, Upward Bound projects must submit an application describing and showing data that national requirements have been achieved. The program sites represented in this study have a history of successfully adhering to these national requirements (U.S. Department of Education, 2014b).

In this study, participants came from four Upward Bound sites in Louisiana. A criterion for participant selection in this study was that the individual had to be a student in an Upward Bound project in the state of Louisiana for at least one year while in high school. This ensured that the participant received and could share their experiences concerning the resources provided during the typical academic year. Participants also had to have attended a post-secondary

institution immediately following high school, completed the first year of college at a four year institution and be eighteen years of age or older. Students who participated in multiple types of outreach programs were not included. These criteria were chosen to negate extraneous factors, such as a break from educational pursuits or participation in multiple programs that could affect the trustworthiness or validity of the study.

A key factor to the success of this study is the researcher's partnerships with post-secondary institutions and outreach sites. Prior to the study, the researcher sent initial and follow up emails to thirty-one TRIO administrators, specifically those serving as Directors, Associate Directors or Assistant Directors of program sites in Louisiana, to request the names and email addresses of potential participants. In addition, the researcher met with three of these outreach administrators to further explain the purpose of this study. In both the emails sent as well as the meetings, the researcher emphasized to the program administrators that the results would be provided to universities and outreach programs in order for them to further understand alumni's experiences. As a result of these emails and meetings, the researcher was able to recruit seven participants. The researcher's goal was to recruit ten participants. Thus, the researcher asked participants to refer friends to the study. As a result, two of the ten participants were gained via snowball sampling. The researcher also contacted Student Affairs administrators at various colleges requesting them to share the opportunity. One of the ten participants was recruited via this means. As a result, the researcher's goal to recruit ten participants was achieved. These ten participants represented four different Upward Bound sites in Louisiana. Thus, enabling the researcher to explore first year transition in detail, seeking out the essence of each student's experiences. As a result, the researcher reduced the individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence (Creswell, 2007).

Background and Demographic Information of Study Participants

The researcher emailed potential participants, describing the study, confirming confidentiality and requesting participation. The researcher also explained that all questions asked would be in relation to the student's experience transitioning into college and their precollege outreach program. As a compensation for participating, students received a ten-dollar gift card for each interview and journal prompt that they completed. Students expressing interest in participating were then contacted to schedule the first one-hour, one-on-one interview. Ten UB alumni participated in the initial interviews. During this initial interview, the researcher emphasized building rapport and trust-worthiness. She explained the research goals, shared background information about herself and answered any questions. Later, respondents were asked to participate in a follow-up interview. Nine participants completed this second interview. During the second interview, many of the participants seemed more relaxed and revealed more personal opinions and experiences. The questions within the initial and follow-up interviews focused on the following areas: Overview of Outreach Program, Outcome of Programs in Relation to Transition, Sources of Support and Overall View of Program, and College Transition Experience. Between the initial and follow-up interview, the researcher accumulated over 230 pages of data to analyze. Lastly, the participants were asked to complete a journal. Three of the original ten participants completed the entry. Table 2 summarizes the participants' race, college attendance, residency, major, college grade point average, employment, campus involvement, high school grade point average, ACT score, UB site and years at the site. A limitation of the study is that only one of the ten students identified as male. Seven identified as black, one as white, one as mixed race (mother being black and father white), and one as black and Caribbean. Seven of the ten students lived on campus. Nine of the ten noted being employed while in

college, one did not disclose. Six of the ten stated that they were involved in campus life, specifically holding active membership in a student organization. The mean high school grade point average was a 3.49 and college was a 2.95. The mean ACT score was a 22.1. Students demonstrated full participation in the program with participants in UB on average for 3.4 years. Pseudonyms are used in regards to program sites as well as the post-secondary institutions in which the participants were enrolled (See Table 2). The participants represented programs in Louisiana, four from the Pelican City University (an urban, public, high research activity, high undergraduate, higher transfer-in, selective, primarily non-residential, midsize institution), whose UB site in 2015 had 228 total participants, two from Gibson University (an urban, private, highest research activity, majority undergraduate with a high graduate coexistence, lower transfer-in, selective, large institution), whose UB site in 2015 had 50 participants, two from Southwestern Louisiana University (a public, very high undergraduate, lower transfer-in, selective, large institution), whose UB site had a total of 256 participants in 2015, one from North University (an urban, public, high undergraduate, higher transfer-in, medium, historically black university), whose UB program in 2015 served 140 students and one student, who did not disclose her site (Council for Opportunity in Education, 2015). Participants were enrolled at five different post-secondary institutions, Mississippi Delta University, Pelican City University, Atlanta Women's College, Magnolia State University, and Washington D.C. University. Mississippi Delta University is categorized as a public, doctoral granting, high research activity, high undergraduate, higher transfer-in, selective, primarily residential, large institution. Pelican City University is an urban, public, doctoral granting, high research activity, high undergraduate, higher transfer-in, selective, primarily nonresidential, midsize institution. Atlanta's Women's College is a private, more selective, exclusively baccalaureate granting with an arts and science

focus, lower transfer-in, highly residential, very small, women's institution. Magnolia State University is a public, doctoral granting, highest research activity, high undergraduate, lower transfer-in, more selective, primarily residential, large institution. Lastly, Washington D.C. University is described as an urban, private, nondoctoral granting, higher research activity, majority undergraduate, lower transfer-in, selective, highly residential, historically black, mid-size institution (The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, 2015).

Table 2
Demographic and Background Information of Participants

Name	Race	College	Residence	Major	Univ gpa	Job	HS gpa	ACT	UB Site	Yrs in UB
Janice	Black	MS Delta	On Campus	Social Work	3.4	Y	3.5	18	Gibson	4
Keydra	Black	Pelican City	Commute	Interdisciplinary	2.5	Y	3.0	19	Pelican City	3
Valerie*	Black	Pelican City	On Campus	Hotel, Restaurant & Tourism	2.9	Y	3.4	23	South-western LA	5
Chantelle*	White	Pelican City	On Campus	Film Studies	3.6	Y	4.0	X	X	3
Alexandra *	Black Caribbean	Atlanta Women	On Campus	Fashion & Art History	2.8	Y	3.8	22	Pelican City	3
Chad*	Black	Pelican City	On Campus	Biology	2.7	Y	3.8	20	North	4
Andy *	Black	Magnolia State	Commute	Economics	3.0	Y	2.8	32	Pelican City	3
Shelby	Black	Magnolia State	On Campus	Nursing	2.6	Y	3.2	20	Gibson	2
Kate	Mixed, Black/White	Magnolia State	Commute	Sports Admin	X	Y	3.9	24	South-western LA	4
Sarafina *	Black	Washington D.C.	On Campus	International Business	X	X	X	21	Pelican City	3

X Denotes that participants did not disclose data.

**Denotes being involved in campus life via student organization*

Data Collection

Reflecting a phenomenological approach, this study explored the lived experiences of a small number of carefully selected participants. In order to further understand the phenomena under study, the researcher collected data from multiple sources. The sources included: 1) a Demographic and Background Questionnaire, 2) initial and follow-up, in depth, one-on-one interviews that ranged in length between 40 to 60 minutes and 3) a participant journal entry. The focus of this study was on the lived experiences of the participants; therefore, an examination of the “life context” of each individual (King, 2000) through interviews and a journal entry was an appropriate platform for exploring the phenomenon. The timeframe for this data collection was 6 months from May to November 2015. As a result, the researcher was able to: create a comprehensive depiction of the experience of participants and clearly understand students’ perceptions and behaviors.

At the beginning of the first interview, the researcher reviewed the letter of consent, emphasized that participation was voluntary and asked approval to audio record (Appendix A). Next, the students completed a “Demographic and Background Questionnaire,” which obtained information concerning students’: age, sex, race, city of birth, residence, college hours completed, major and high school grade point average (See Appendix B). This information helped the researcher provide context to the interviews and the journal entries.

Once this questionnaire was completed, the researcher began the initial one-on-one interview. Interviews fit well into phenomenological approach because the focus of the interview is on the participants’ experiences and meaning of their “lived world” (Kvale, 1996, p. 53) and understanding their perspective and meaning of those experiences. The interview approach in this study was a semi-structured approach, in which questions were conceptualized around resilience theory (Creswell, 2005). This approach was optimal as the researcher had

questions that she wanted to examine with the participant, but was open to asking additional questions that may surface as a result of the participant's responses and stories shared (Glesne, 2011; Kvale, 1996). Reflecting a phenomenological approach, questions asked were classified into two overarching categories (Moustakes, 1994): 1) What have you experienced in terms of the phenomenon? 2) What context or situations have influenced or affected your experiences with the phenomenon? Please see the interview protocol in Appendix C.

The researcher then held follow up one-on-one interviews that typically ranged from 40 to 60 minutes in duration. The interview questions for the follow up one-on-one interviews were abstract in nature, asking the participants to reflect deeper concerning their experiences in Upward Bound and the college acclimation process (see the interview protocol in Appendix D). Once again, the researcher implemented a semi-structured interview approach, where participants were encouraged to tell their experience, emphasizing their personal meanings and enabling the audience to hear their unique voices. All interviews were tape-recorded, with permission, and transcribed to create a written text. Each participant was given a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality.

Data was also collected through participant journal entries. Following the second interview, the researcher emailed the participant a prompt to complete. Three of the ten participants submitted a journal entry. Through this, the participants were able to "enter descriptive information about what is happening in (their) lives, including feelings, beliefs, opinions, and gossip" (Wauchope, 1990, p. 2). Here, the participant also had the opportunity "to write uninterrupted and to be totally focused on the point at hand" (Janesick, 2004, p. 155). The journal prompt was designed to elicit reflective response from the participants about their experiences, both successful and unsuccessful as an Upward Bound alumna in their first year of

college. The journal prompt was also intended to have participants reflect on past and future potential stressors and accomplishments as well as offer advice to future Upward Bound alumni. In this journal entry, participants were asked to describe: their UB participation and its relationship to their college transition; challenges during their first year and if their UB experience assisted with these; successes they had during the first year and if UB assisted in any of these; what they saw as the greatest obstacle facing students like them; their participation in the program and its relationship to any life stressors during their freshman year; and what advice they would give to other Upward Bound students. As a result of this prompt, the activity encouraged reflection concerning the participant's college transition and allowed him or her to be free to make his or her own discoveries. This was also their opportunity to add final thoughts or make comments. Participants sent their journal entries to the researcher via email. If a participant did not submit an entry after a week, the researcher sent them a reminder and asked the participant if any clarification was needed. Please see journal prompt in Appendix E.

Analysis of Data

Miles and Huberman (1994) state that phenomenology is the comprehension of the meaning of text/action, the discerning of themes (commonalities and uniqueness), and the reflection resulting in heuristic research. This study mirrored a typical phenomenological data analysis, which proceeds through a methodology of reduction with the analysis of key statements and themes and a search for all possible meanings (Creswell, 1998). To conduct this analysis, the researcher utilized an inductive approach. First, a thematic analysis, using open coding followed by clustering, was implemented from the data from the interviews and journal entries. This analysis followed systematic procedures that move from narrow units, such as significant statements (words, phrases, and or sentences that have particular meaning to the

participants or have direct relevance to the phenomenon being studied), onto broader units, and then into detailed descriptions that summarized the two elements of the “what” and “how” of the participants’ experiences (Creswell, 2013, p. 79). The researcher utilized the following steps when coding data: 1) Read through the documents to get a sense of the whole picture, jotting notes in the margins; 2) Picked one document and ask —What is this person talking about? Considered underlying meanings and wrote it down in the margin summing it up in two to three words; 3) Began the coding of the document by identifying text segments, placing a bracket around them, and assigning a code word or phrase, which described the meaning of the text; 4) After coding the document, made a list of all code words. Grouped similar codes together, coded until everything is labeled that is significant; 5) Used the list in step four, went back to the data and to see if new codes emerge. Circle quotes from participants that support the codes. 6) Reduced the list of codes to get themes. These themes were established based on recurring ideas, language, and patterns of belief of the participants’ responses (Tesch, 1990). Through this process, the basic purpose of the phenomenological approach, to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of universal essence, was met (van Manen, 1990).

Research Quality

In this study, various verification strategies for reliability and validity were utilized, including standardized, semi-structured, interview questions, thick description and peer debriefing. In regards to the interviews, all questions were predetermined to allow the data to be easily analyzed. Through thick description, a detailed account of field experiences was created so that the researcher could make explicit any patterns and put them into context (Holloway, 1997). Peer debriefing also assisted in enhancing research quality. Here, the researcher’s notes and codes concerning interviews and journal entries were shared with peers for feedback. In

addition, member checking was utilized to ensure that all participants were prompted equally. Lastly, through the various data collection methods, including the demographic questionnaire, one-on-one interviews, journal entries, and the review of documents by participants, triangulation, in which findings are cross verified, was established.

Thick Description

Through thick description, the researcher created a detailed account of the field experiences in order to make explicit any patterns and put them into context (Holloway, 1997). As a result, the reader was placed “figuratively in the setting, to transport them to the actual scene, to make it real (Creswell, 2005, p. 446).” The researcher worked diligently so that one would be able to feel what it was like to actually be in the moment. In order to achieve this, the researcher was aware and described the context, using all senses. This enhanced the quality of the research as the description specified everything “that a reader may need to know in order to understand the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 125).”

Peer Debriefing

In regards to the interviews and journal entries, the researcher implemented peer debriefing. Peer debriefing is the process of “exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner of paralleling an analytical session and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer’s mind” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 308). Once the researcher’s dissertation committee had approved this study’s proposal, the researcher’s peers received a copy of it electronically. Peers were given three weeks to provide feedback. In addition, researcher’s notes and codes concerning interviews and journal entries were shared. This allowed peers to propose questions to the researcher concerning aspects of the study, including methods and data analysis. In addition, these external parties

reviewed the researcher's documents in order to: ask probing questions, play devil's advocate, and provide alternate explanations. Such relationships also allowed the researcher to vent frustrations and emotions that may affect the research (Erlandson et al., 1993). After revisions had been made, the final data analysis was sent to peer reviewers for consideration and to provide additional feedback. Once again, reviewers were given three weeks to provide feedback. This allowed the researcher to check the credibility of the study both before and after data was gathered.

Member Checking

To increase validity and to ensure that all participants were prompted equally, the researcher conducted member checking. Member checking involves asking for feedback from the participants on "the credibility of the findings and interpretations" (Creswell, 2013, p. 210). Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that the member check, where data, analytic categories, interpretations, and conclusions are tested within stake holding groups, is the most crucial technique for establishing credibility. It provides the members with the opportunity to verify that the researcher's constructions are adequate representations. In this study, members were asked to review the transcription of their one-on-one interviews. A copy of the information was emailed to participants to review independently within three weeks. A reminder was emailed to the participants after two weeks. None of the participants made any corrections on the transcripts or the write-up. Additionally, a copy of the final document was given to participants at the conclusion of the study to further validate responses and the analysis. Again, they were asked to review and return it back to the researcher within three weeks. A reminder was sent via email by the researcher to the participants after two weeks. Participants had an opportunity to

correct any serious errors of fact or interpretation in the transcripts and the write-up, and none chose to do so.

Triangulation

The various data collection methods, including the demographic questionnaire, one-on-one interviews, review of documents by participants, and journal entries were used as a means of triangulation, where findings were cross verified (Denzin, 1970). Triangulation is defined as the use of “multiple and different [data] sources, methods, investigators and theories to provide corroborating evidence” (Creswell, 1998, p. 202). This study used triangulation as a mode of improving the probability of findings and interpretations, enhancing credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As a result of this triangulation, the researcher was able to fully co-construct meaning with participants, in which the researcher and participants engaged in an interactive process to reveal the perceptions and experiences of Upward Bound program alumni.

Ethical Considerations

Prior to implementing the study, approval by the university’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) was gained. The researcher followed all research protocols outlined by IRB. In the recruitment letter and at the initial interview, the researcher disclosed the purpose of the study, discussed the letter of consent and requested permission to audio record (Appendix A). The letter of consent: detailed the purpose of study and data collection procedures, described any risks or benefits, and reminded the individual of his or her right not to participate at any time. In addition, the letter confirmed confidentiality through the use of pseudonyms, the secure keeping of data and the private location of the interviews. In the transcriptions and in final write-up, participant names were replaced with pseudonyms. All written notes, recordings, journal entries, and transcriptions were kept in a locked and secured file by the researcher at all times and will be

discarded May 2021 (within five year after the research has been published). Recordings will be erased and hard copies of data will be shredded.

In addition, the researcher upheld ethical considerations, specifically assessing issues that participants may be fearful in disclosing, revealing any biases and continually referring back to the letter of consent (Appendix A). The researcher worked to build trusting relationships with participants to ensure that they felt comfortable sharing. At the beginning of the study, the researcher explained to participants her role, specifically to conduct a study that revealed participants' perceived impact of the Upward Bound program and their college transition experience, making meaning from data by interpreting the experiences shared by participants, engaging in epoche (in which she will set aside her own experience to take a fresh perspective toward the phenomenon) and conducting research to benefit practice (Creswell, 1998, p. 58).

Researcher Identity

I firmly believe that one's experiences, environment and aspirations affect one's approach to inquiry. Thus, it is important as researchers to reflect on the various dimensions of our lives to determine how these facets may affect our research, both positively and negatively. While progressing through my doctoral program, I began to notice a trend in my research interest. I am student centered, an advocate for college students, a fosterer of the pre-kindergarten through 16+ pipeline, and have a passion for first-year students. Thus, it is not surprising that my dissertation research centers on college success as well as the first year transition experience of traditionally marginalized youth.

In 2009, I became extremely involved with a religiously affiliated, live-in, precollege outreach program, serving as a mentor for the participants as well as serving as President of the

young professionals board associated with the nonprofit. Here, I was able to observe the benefits and areas of improvement of this program. Due to the nature of this residential program, there were a limited amount of students that could participate. Thus, I started to research other precollege outreach programs that served a greater number of participants and were not residential and religiously affiliated. During this time, I was employed within the student life office at the University of New Orleans. Here, TRIO programs along with the student life office, career center, counseling services, accountability and advocacy, and disability services all lie within the same department and report to the same Vice President. Thus, I was able to quickly learn more outreach programs, including Upward Bound. In learning more about the ins and outs of the program, I decided to reach out to the Director of Upward Bound to inquire if her students would like to participate in our office's annual High School Leadership Day, a day-long program that teaches leadership styles, teamwork tactics as well as provides information concerning the college going process and college success to students in the surrounding area. The Director of UNO's Upward Bound program was excited to provide an additional opportunity to her students as well as allow her participants to meet other high school students interested in leadership, civic engagement and the college success. From 2010-2012, Upward Bound students participated in my office's annual High School Leadership Day. Unfortunately, due to budget constraints the High School Leadership Day program was discontinued after summer 2012. However, as a result of this program, I was able to make connections with numerous Upward Bound participants, some of whom, decided to enroll at the University of New Orleans.

In 2010, I applied and was accepted into the doctoral program in educational leadership at the University of New Orleans. The program's focus centers on conceptualizing the

kindergarten through sixteen plus pipeline. Thus, often the class discussion focused on of my research interests including: college readiness, college student success, and establishing a college-going culture. As a result, throughout my coursework, I was able to explore how pre-college outreach programs can potentially fill in the holes where the present educational system fails.

During this time, the Louisiana Granting Resources and Autonomy for Diplomas (GRAD) Act was being formed and implemented. The primary goal of the GRAD Act is to increase Louisiana's public post-secondary institutions' overall effectiveness and efficiency. It does this by providing institutions that achieve specific, measurable performance objectives limited operational autonomy and flexibility (GRAD Act, 2010). As a result of the GRAD Act, the University of New Orleans began to focus on increasing first year retention rates. As a result, the student life office in conjunction with the Office of Enrollment Services began to create programming targeting first year college student success. Such programming focused on students' knowledge concerning university resources, time management skills, involvement and leadership, diversity awareness, and wellness. In addition, during this time, I served as an instructor for the university's first year seminar course. In the classroom, I focused on nurturing students' skills in managing their well-being, developing learning strategies' and providing information concerning campus resources. As a result of these initiatives, I was able to view the challenges that students face during the first year in college, what support mechanism can assist in the college acclimation process, as well as the importance of first year success in relation to overall college success.

I include all of this information in my role as a researcher because through my experiences I have learned my biases in regards to first-year students and precollege outreach

programs. When starting my research, I primarily focused on students' coursework and college admittance test scores. At first, I did not realize the importance of mentor or guardian involvement in outreach programs as well as the need of a continued relationship between student and program in college. Throughout my research, I have learned that precollege outreach participants each come with a unique set of strengths and areas of improvement. As a result, a sole solution within outreach programs to address postsecondary success does not exist. I hope that through my research, I can provide more information on various ways to enhance outreach programs and their alumni's college success.

The other bias that I have recognized is my favoritism towards assisting first-year students with their transition into college by providing programs that foster campus involvement. I am aware student engagement on campus is one of the many factors in promoting college retention. For example, other key components of first year success include: faculty/staff relationships, familial support, factors of resiliency and college knowledge (ex. how to withdraw from a class, apply for work study, and identify academic coursework plans). Additionally, I needed to be conscious not to allow previous research to sway the current study.

Throughout this study, the personal experiences of the participants, their challenges and successes as well as their resilience when navigating the kindergarten through sixteen plus pipeline were depicted. Many of the participants in this study faced barriers in their educational journey, including a lack of economic and educational resources in their schools and communities as well as family backgrounds with limited experiences in higher education. During this research process, I was able to become more aware of my privilege, specifically in regards to socio-economic status. Throughout this study, I was able to critically reflect on my privilege and become more aware of the effects and benefits of it on my journey through higher

education. Furthermore, I was able to fully acknowledge that my educational success was not solely a result of my own efforts, but also due to a system filled with societal patterns of discrimination and oppression.

During the one on one interviews, students depicted the challenges that they were facing in the college setting. As a Student Affairs professional, I had to resist the urge to advise the student on resources and strategies he or she could utilize to assist them during their college transition. Now that this study and my role as a researcher has concluded, I will reach out to these students to offer guidance and support to help them in their college persistence. As a result of this study, I have been able to grow as a scholarly practitioner, placing theory and research into practice in my daily profession.

A researcher's experiences, environment, and aspirations all affect their approach to inquiry. Due to this, it is important for researchers to reflect on the various dimensions of their lives to determine how these facets may affect their research. Throughout this research process, I have reflected on my personal biases and how they may positively or negatively affect my study. Furthermore, I have established barriers to help mitigate against any potential research bias.

Chapter 4

Findings

This chapter describes and summarizes the data collected from the one-on-one interviews and participant journal entries. This chapter will provide demographic information about the participants and present the results from the data analysis. As a result of the data analysis, the study answers the research question: How do first year college students, who participated in a precollege outreach program, describe their experiences adjusting to college life? In the analysis, data reduction was utilized to collapse information into specific categories. Once the codes were defined, the transcripts were segmented into clusters of data, which assisted in the identification of themes. In this chapter, the themes are discussed in detail with reference to literature. These themes include: 1) Program Connections as External Factors, 2) Connections as External Factors in the College Setting, 3) Determination, Self-Advocacy and Willingness to Try New Things as Internal Protective Factors, and 4) Nurturing College Knowledge. This chapter will also identify the participants' views with supporting quotes. The findings section concludes with a summary of results.

Emergent Themes and Analysis

The data analysis process depicted in the Methodology chapter resulted in formulating themes surrounding the participants' experience post Upward Bound within their first year of college. These major themes were identified and labeled: 1) Program Connections as External Factors, 2) Connections as External Factors in the College Setting, 3) Determination, Self-Advocacy and Willingness to Try New Things as Internal Protective Factors, and 4) Nurturing College Knowledge. These four essential features of the Upward Bound alumni experience are summarized in Table 3. This section will begin by introducing the importance of connections or

relationships on participants' academic success. Then, this paper will describe key internal factors that participants valued in their college preparation and acclimation process. Lastly, this section will describe Upward Bound strategies that promote academic success in college. Each of the emergent themes is described in the following sections and is illustrated using quotations from participants.

Table 3

Four Essential Features of the First Year Transition Experience of Precollege Outreach Alumni

<p><i>Finding 1: Program Connections as External Factors</i></p> <p><i>The Upward Bound program assisted students in building connections and establishing a support system to include: peers with differing worldviews who were sources of support, peer mentors that provided authentic advice, Upward Bound faculty and staff, who served as additional parent-like figures and parents that gave support during scholastic obstacles. This assisted alumni in overcoming challenges in the college preparation process and during the first year in the collegiate setting by providing resources and a caring and trusting environment.</i></p>
<p><i>Finding 2: Connections as External Factors in the College Setting</i></p> <p><i>A strong collegiate support system—including relationships with university faculty and staff that fostered a sense of belonging and self-advocacy as well as peers who were a source of camaraderie during challenges and success—served as a protective factor in helping alumni persist in the face of the challenges of a new collegiate setting. Participants describe how their experience in Upward Bound did or did not emphasize this as a tool in the transition process.</i></p>
<p><i>Finding 3: Determination, Self-Advocacy and Willingness to Try New Things as Internal Protective Factors</i></p> <p><i>Determination, being a self-advocate and a willingness to try new things were key factors that assisted Upward Bound alumni in overcoming obstacles in the college transition process. Participants describe how Upward Bound either instilled or enhanced these within students.</i></p>
<p><i>Finding 4: Nurturing College Knowledge</i></p> <p><i>Through motivation and by providing resources, Upward Bound engrained in participants that a college degree was a realistic option. The program implemented strategies that focused on college readiness and degree attainment, such as courses concentrating on grade-level success, summer bridge programs and workshops on developing soft skills. Through these methods, alumni gained knowledge concerning college not readily available to them.</i></p>

Program Connections as External Protective Factors

Throughout the interview and journal process, participants described how the Upward Bound program assisted them in building connections and establishing a support system that included peers, peer mentors, and Upward Bound faculty and staff. This system consisted of peers with different worldviews who were sources of support, peer mentors that provided authentic advice, Upward Bound faculty and staff, who served as parent-like figures and provided genuine care as well as parents who offered support during scholastic obstacles. Students in the study consistently emphasized how they valued the community created in Upward Bound. Chantelle reported that:

She [the program director] did really well with selecting faculty members to teach the students as well as selecting the correct students to be a part of the program. Because we were able to learn from the students in different social circles as well as academic experiences. We had really good, amazing teachers. I would also commend her on the management of faculty and how they always, basically, have an open door policy. Although, we did graduate from high school as well as Upward Bound, we were still accessible to them and they were still accessible to us. We can always go to them if we need anything. If someone had done something amazing they would acknowledge them and they always welcome Upward Bound students back.

Due to this open-door policy established during the program, students felt a part of a family-like community and wanted to visit the program post-graduation. Andy states,

I just really miss them. I was actually trying to come down there during the summer to see the new students and stuff. But, I didn't get a chance. I actually want to come back. They're the type of people that just make you want to just keep coming back. Even though I'm not a student anymore, even though I've graduated. If I was still living down

there, I would have been a tutor most likely. I probably will do that next summer. I love the whole family, the feeling of the community, the Upward Bound community.

As a result, of this caring environment created by Upward Bound peers, peer mentors, faculty and staff, alumni had assistance in overcoming challenges in the college preparation process and during the first year in the collegiate setting. Particularly important for a population of many first-generation college students, these staff connections approximated those of a college-experienced family member.

Program Educators as Additional Parental Figures. All participants emphasized the importance of Upward Bound faculty and staff on their journey to and through college. Nine of the ten participants described having a very positive relationship with the Upward Bound educators. Participants reported that these educators went beyond traditional teacher roles by serving as mentors that they could trust. This role that an educator can play in creating a caring learning environment is critical in fostering resilience (Werner & Smith, 1982). Many of the students described a family-like atmosphere created in the program. Andy stated, “They do an awesome job of building that family vibe. That’s so important because when you have that family connection then the students feel more comfortable coming to you with their problems and if they’re feeling inadequate in a certain area, they’ll come to you more...” Students also described that the family-like atmosphere was fostered by the educators being a source of advice and support, similar to having additional “parents.” Andy said the following:

As far as the administrators, they’re like parents. Like even the teachers are real life teachers who actually work in high schools and stuff, but they’re more like family. They give advice and, of course, help us with the work, and they’re really good teachers. As far as the administration, Ms. B and the team really care about our well-being. If we had any

concerns, they'll leave us to sort it out or get anything handled, especially with all our college affairs. They made sure we had everything that we need.

Many of the students described how this familial atmosphere was nurtured by the educators' dedication to the students, supporting them both within the Upward Bound setting and outside of it. Kate describes:

They were always somebody that you could talk to in any situation. They were very understanding...they were always there to support you. Sometimes they would even come to some of our events at school or some of our competitions to support us. They are very great people.

In addition to this familial-like support, participants described how the educators continually challenged and supported students in reaching their goals. Andy described her experience being faced with obstacles and how the staff at Upward Bound offered guidance, motivation and pushed her on her academic journey.

All my life, I've had to overcome and I've had to keep pushing through. I definitely see in my peers, some of them were ready to give up and not go to college. Honestly, if it were up to me, I would have probably said "Well, I don't know, maybe go to the military?" I'm like, "Well maybe college isn't for you." Upward Bound never gave up on the idea of college. College is fundamental. You need to go, have further schooling so you can get further in life. So, even with the most challenged student, they would sit there and really push them to get to it. They don't offer any get out of jail free cards, it's just like, "You're going to do this." Since they're telling you that you can do this, you know, people start to think that they can do it. They start actually achieving it, and then they ended up doing better than they thought they could. They definitely pushed me.

Andy, like other participants, described how the staff and faculty believed in her and continually motivated her to not give up on her goals. These individuals stressed to the participants that college was essential to their success. Participants also noted how Upward Bound faculty and staff helped students to be realistic in their goals. Chantelle describes how they provided “tough love” to participants.

They did a really great job with kind of the tough love thing. They were really honest with us. They sat kids down and told them either, "You know, you don't have the GPA." Because there was one girl who was applying to Harvard and stuff like that and she had a lower class standing than I did. It wasn't my place to tell her that, I was just her friend. I didn't want to be the one to be like, "Madison, you're not going to make it." But, Mr. B was like, "You're really smart, you're going to get into a really great college, but it's not going to be Harvard."

Here, Chantelle notes that educators in the UB program effectively displayed “tough love.” This tough love approach in education attempts to build accountability and responsibility in youth for the decisions that they make. When educators are honest with students about their classroom performance, they practice a tough love strategy and hold students accountable for their learning (Fram & Pearse, 2000). This approach shifts to the students the responsibility for their own growth and it helps them build confidence in their performance. Chantelle’s depiction is also important as research has noted that a tough love approach produces better outcomes for behavior, achievement and engagement (Evans, 2011). Furthermore, instances, like the one Chantelle describes, display how participants felt that Upward Bound faculty and staff genuinely cared for students by offering authentic and honest support, while still motivating them to be steadfast in reaching their goals.

In addition, students described how the staff members of Upward Bound were able to provide support that the students' high school counselors did not. Keydra detailed how her high school counselor promoted students attending historically black colleges and universities. However, Keydra wanted to attend the local community college. This student illustrated how her high school counselor would not assist her, but the Upward Bound staff was able to. Keydra describes this stating,

I'm just really thankful for the Upward Bound program. My high school counselor, she was a little bit bias. She wanted us to go to HBCUs. She had a very closed minded thing. I was like, "I'm not." I didn't get into Clark, but I want to go to Delgado. She was like, "I'm not even going to put in your application at all." That's her job and when I told Upward Bound, they were like, "You don't have to go to her. We will help you with everything." So, instead of me going to my actual school to do the things they were suppose to do, my Upward Bound did that for me. That's why I'm so thankful for the program. They helped me so much for college and still now.

Within the UB classroom, educators applied personalized strategies to help students succeed. For example, Shelby described how her teachers asked about her preferred learning style. The participants explained how program educators would do their best in answering questions and supporting students, and if they could not, finding resources to assist. Participants detailed how even though the educators were full-time employees at high schools in the area; they still went above and beyond for their UB students. Sarafina described how she loved being taught by "renowned teachers from throughout the city." This student's description emphasizes her belief that not only were her UB teachers well respected as experts in the community, but they graciously formed personal relationships with their UB students during the weekends.

All the students spoke about how Upward Bound contacted them as they transitioned into the college setting and some reported communications lasting throughout their first year. A few students described the communication focused on UB programs learning about their college experience. For example, Upward Bound reaching out to ask about alumni's grade point average and co-curricular involvement. One student, Janice, described how a staff member actually came to visit her at her college located in the neighboring state during her first year. However, the amount and duration of communication varied. Chantelle stated the following:

They were all so invested in the overall mission of Upward Bound that I probably talk to Mr. D. on more a regular basis than I do some of my friends back home. Because they just honestly do care and they're not just checking in because it's their job or anything. So, I'm still really connected with all of the staff members I worked with. It's cool because it feels like they're not just checking in because it's their job. I actually feel like I have relationships with them and I can go to them for support.

Such statements reinforce the idea that participants felt that program educators' genuinely cared about them. Teachers fostered this care by: having clear expectations, displaying a commitment to their students, demonstrating trust and support, and creating a safe and secure learning environment. Without such genuine care, youth may not develop into high-functioning individuals. Thus, this idea held by participants is significant as it emphasizes the long-term effects that the teachers play in their students' educational journey and development.

Overall, the majority of students described appreciating the one-on-one attention provided by the Upward Bound staff and faculty. Andy stated, "Just seeing some of my peers in Upward Bound who, you know if it wasn't for the staff at Upward Bound, they probably wouldn't have gotten into college...just because they needed that one-on-one attention. They're

[Upward Bound staff and faculty] so important, so seeing that definitely had an effect.” This is notable as Henderson and Milstein (1996) stated that, “more than any other way, schools build resiliency in students through creating an environment of caring personal relationships” (p. 17). The participants throughout this study described the importance of these genuinely caring educators in Upward Bound, who provide one-on-one attention to support them in the college-going process.

Connections with Peer Guides and Upperclassman Tutors: Providers of Authentic Advice. Youth need supportive parents, peers, educators, and mentors to grow to their optimal development and potential strength (Brendtro & Longhurst, 2005). Participants described the importance of upperclassman who served as tutors both in the program and in college as well as Upward Bound peer guides. Guides, upperclassmen who served as peer mentors during the Upward Bound summer bridge program, and peer tutors were noted by participants to be beneficial in providing authentic advice. Such authentic advice consisted of insight from peers who recently had similar experiences in the collegiate setting. These peer mentors provided practical ways on how to overcome challenges in the first year. Keydra noted how she struggled with math and was able to get tutoring services.

My math tutor, he would sit with me and work out all the problems and show me all the ways to do it. I would find it easy this way. After I started going for tutoring at Upward Bound, I started passing the class.

Later, Keydra continued to receive tutoring services from Upward Bound while in college. She described utilizing the services during her first semester stating:

When I first was struggling in math, I used my tutor. I use to go to Upward Bound office so much last semester. “Is Nate in?” They were like “No. Here, just take his number.” I

just called him, I was like “Nate, are you on campus? Do you have exams this week? It’s midterms, I need help.” He was like “Okay. Keydra, I’ll come meet you.”

Here, Keydra describes how important easy access to such peer tutors was key in facing academic challenges. Such a resource is a direct benefit of the Upward Bound program, specifically for traditionally marginalized youth who face barriers when persisting in post-secondary education, and might especially benefit from subject-specific tutoring that UB provides free of charge.

Upward Bound programs also provide a summer bridge program that students may apply and, if accepted, participate in. Here, the program helps to “bridge” the gap from high school to college for juniors and seniors. These students within the bridge program are treated like college students taking two post-secondary courses, utilizing campus resources and often living within the residence halls. During the summer bridge program, “guides” served in a role similar to university resident assistants. Chantelle describes these guides stating:

The guides make it really easy when you are having hard times and stuff, because they're people who are actually in college who can tell you...because sometimes when the advisors are talking, you're kind of like, “Oh, well I mean, you're old.” But, then when the guides talk to you, they're like, “No, for real, you need to pay attention right now, because I'm taking care of this stuff right now in real life.”

Participants emphasized that because the guides were in college, they had insider knowledge and were approachable. As a result, the students would often take their advice more seriously than the faculty and staff of Upward Bound. These guides served as an asset to Upward Bound alumni in attaining college knowledge from a peer mentor, who had faced similar academic challenges.

Connections Among Participants: Expanding World Views, New Friendships, and Peer Support in the College-Going Process. Not only were relationships with faculty, staff, tutors and guides valued, but also the relationship that participants established with their peers. This is notable as positive relationships with peers can serve as a protective factor for at-risk youth (Bernard, 2004). Clark (1991) found that academically resilient youth developed strong support networks that provided assistance for success both in and out of school. Not only did participants of Upward Bound describe how the program assisted in their social integration and having positive peer influences, but it also expanded students' world-view. Upward Bound participants explained how the program helped them: in developing social skills, in widening their networks, in building deeper friendships and in stepping outside their comfort zones. Participants also depicted how the program assisted them in being well rounded and expanding their mind-set by meeting students from different backgrounds. Shelby states, "Through the program, it helped us to communicate better by interacting with those that didn't attend the same school as us. It helped us become more well-rounded and meet new people." As a result, the program assisted participants in expanding their networks and building deeper connections. Another student portrayed how friendships within Upward Bound helped her step outside of her comfort zone and enlarged her view of the world by meeting peers from different backgrounds. Alexandra explains,

I had straight A's. But, I was socially awkward. I didn't really talk to a lot of people. I was always in my own world. I wasn't really friends with anybody at school... it was like they were just buddies that went to school with me. But, once I got to Upward Bound I made more friends from different places. I started going out and hanging out

and going to the mall and stuff. I started participating in more extra co-curricular activities.

As a result of Upward Bound, Alexandra was able to have new experiences and became involved in her community. Another participant, Valerie, noted that within Upward Bound every single social activity had a purpose. She used the example of when they went bowling as a field trip. At bowling, the staff would pair the students so that they would meet someone from a different school. Thus, as a result of Upward Bound, they were able to connect with others who were on the college-going path. Keydra stated,

I didn't like my high school when I first got there... Socially, I really wasn't talking to anyone at my school. That's one of the reasons why I liked to come to Upward Bound because I met friends there. They weren't the type of people that were at my school. These were different friendships.

Keydra details how through Upward Bound she met students who had similar goals to her. These peers, like her, desired to be on the college-going path. As a result, a sense of camaraderie was fostered that was centered on overcoming academic obstacles to have collegiate success.

Due to this shared goal of attaining a college degree, peer relationships within Upward Bound resulted in participants keeping each other on track to meet their academic goals. Kate described this stating, "We have a good relationship. We see each other all the time. We call... We hang out. We help each other with our homework; make sure each other is studying when we need to be studying. Try to keep each other healthy." As a result of the shared goal of attaining a college degree, students in Upward Bound continually supported and challenged each other in meeting daily goals. Such daily tasks included: studying, completing homework, staying healthy physically and mentally as well as being socially and academically integrated. The

importance of friendships developed in Upward Bound is key as researchers have identified that social support from peers, school, and family members are an important characteristic of resilient students (Bernard, 1991; Werner & Smith, 1982). Through such relationships established in Upward Bound, participants worldview was expanded and peers were able to challenge and support each other in the daily tasks needed to reach their shared goal of attaining a college degree.

Connections and Disconnections with Parents: Need for Engagement in Upward Bound and Providers of Support during Scholastic Obstacles. An education institution plays an important role in determining the levels of parental involvement. Specifically, educational institutions can outline their expectations of parents and regularly communicate with them about what students are learning. Also, they can provide opportunities for parents to talk with personnel about parents' role in their children's education through home visits, family nights, and well-planned parent-teacher conferences and open houses. However, in this study, students described their desire for more opportunities for parental involvement in Upward Bound. Overall, participants explained that parents were invited to two types of activities: the end of the year awards ceremony and informationals before major field trips. Andy states, “The only events they had was... We were about to go on a trip and they explained the rules about what your students are supposed to expect and the things that we're going to be doing on the trip.” Thus, for many participants, guardians were only asked to participate when expectations were set and rules determined for students to follow.

In this study, two students described how their site had a booster program in which the program administration collected money to support Upward Bound's extra-curricular activities. However, participants described that guardians felt discouraged due to a lack of transparency and

activity within the booster program. As a result, parents became disengaged in Upward Bound completely. Alexandra describes,

My mom was really happy that I was going to Upward Bound and she would force me to go every Saturday. There's like a parent booster thing that you had to give money to, but I don't think the parents ever actually did anything. So after that, my mom kind of got like dis-involved from it because it took money out of our checks and then the parent didn't do anything.

Participants described a breach in communication between parents and program administrators. Furthermore, the booster programs often lacked vision, procedures, and descriptions of responsibilities of those involved.

Overall, participants described how continual parental engagement in the Upward Bound was not present. Keydra stated, “There was really nothing to be involved in for the parents...They had the parent booster club, we gave ten dollars and stuff like that. But, nothing really came out of it. We had the ceremonies and awards and they would always come to that, but for the most part that's the only thing that required parents.” Family involvement activities are essential as they welcome parents as volunteers and invite them to act as full partners in making educational decisions that affect their families. Furthermore, Gutman, Sameroff, and Eccles (2002) note that consistent discipline practices in the home and high parental involvement in educational activities had positive effects on a child’s kindergarten through twelfth grade academic performance. However, in this study, participants describe how there were no opportunities for guardian engagement outside of attendance at informational event and awards ceremonies or donating funds to an inactive booster program.

Many of the participants' parents did not attend college. Thus, while participants described a lack of involvement opportunities for parents in the program, they did explain how Upward Bound assisted the student and the parent(s) in receiving technical information about college that their parent(s) or their high school could not provide. Chantelle stated,

My mom didn't go to college, but I've always thought of her as really smart, even though she's technically not educated. She's not somebody, who is uneducated. She's really smart. But, there were things I was going through, where I would turn to her for help and she wouldn't know and I was like, "Oh, that's a first." I thought she knew everything.

As a result, during such instances, participants and their guardians would rely on Upward Bound for the technical information regarding the college going process.

Participants also noted that while sometimes their parents were not able to offer specific knowledge about college they were still key in providing support in times of challenges. While in college, participants described how a strong relationship with their parent(s) was key in building resilience during academic challenges. Participants detailed how often they felt pressure to succeed and their guardians offered support. Keydra describes this stating,

Its pressure, but I tune it out. My mom, she gets it. She's like, "You got to go and you're going to finish." But, she's not going to be like, "Well, you need to make this and you need to do this." She knows that I can't have all that stress on me. She's like, "Okay, if you're struggling, you need to go to tutoring, that's it. You will be fine".

For many Upward Bound students, who may have a lack of economic and educational resources in their communities as well as family backgrounds with limited experiences in higher education, a web of support when facing collegiate challenges is needed. While parents may not be able to

provide technical support, students relied heavily on their opinions, guidance and support during challenging times in the first year. A partnership between Upward Bound and participants' parental figures is essential as without secure, supportive relationships with family members, youth may not have the confidence to meet challenges, cope with adversity, and therefore, easily become overwhelmed by scholastic demands (Crosnoe & Elder, 2004).

Connections as External Factor in the College Setting. Throughout the data collection process, participants described the importance of a strong collegiate support system. This system included: including relationships with university faculty and staff that fostered a sense of belonging and self-advocacy as well as peers who were a source of camaraderie during challenges and success. Keydra describes this support provided through her relationship with her college academic advisor:

I had to get advice and I thank God for Mr. W [College Academic Advisor]. Thank God for him because he was like, "You still don't know what you're doing next semester? It's like too late." He was freaking out for me. He's like "You know what we need to do, we need to get you scheduled for next semester." Thank goodness for him, he helped me figure it all out. I didn't know where I was going, what I was going to do.

These relationships between faculty and staff with students assisted students in staying on track during their academic journey and created a sense of belonging in their new collegiate community. Throughout the interview and journal process, participants described how their experience in Upward Bound did or did not emphasize such relationships with collegiate faculty and staff as well as college peers as tools that can assist in a successful college transition.

Connections with University Faculty and Staff: Upward Bound's Instructions and the Benefits. Participants described relationships with university faculty and staff as key to their

success. Faculty and staff had the ability to serve as additional external protective factors that fostered a sense of belonging (Benard, 1995). External protective factors of resilience include role models outside the family, such as teachers, mentors, coaches, clergy, neighbors, and counselors (Rak & Patterson, 1996). Such mentors in the academic setting can: encourage during challenging times, set high expectations, and provide college knowledge. Participants stated that Upward Bound taught them the importance of fostering relationships with faculty. Andy stated that,

They definitely pushed that heavy (building relationships with faculty). Especially knowing that I'm going to Magnolia State University. They pushed heavy with me trying to talk to my professors and get to know them on a personal level so that it would set me apart from the other students. So, I could have that better relationship with the teachers, so they would be more willing to help me. I wouldn't be just another face.

Students described how as a result of relationships with faculty, they were able to advocate for themselves when faced with challenges in their coursework. Keydra stated,

I use to go into his office every morning right after my English class, "You busy?" He's like "No." He use to go over the test, go over the homework with me and he didn't care. He was like, "I gotta go to class, but if you're here, when I come back, I will help you with the rest of it." He literally sat down and broke down everything and because of him it was easy for me to adapt in that math class...Then my philosophy class that was rocky. Me and my professor sat down and me and him talked and he helped me think like a philosopher.

Students explained how when they were able to establish a healthy relationship with a faculty member, they were able to advocate for themselves and the faculty member would be more

willing to help them during academic challenges. Participants emphasized the importance of attending their professor's office hours in order to attain the one-on-one attention similar to what they received in Upward Bound. The students depicted how during this time often the professor would breakdown concepts so that the student could more readily understand them.

Furthermore, through this one-on-one time, professors would help shift how the student approached the subject area. Specifically, the professor would teach the student not to simply memorize facts, but to approach the subject through applying overarching theories.

Students described how connections with staff members, particularly their academic advisor and financial aid counselor, were also assets. Students depicted how their college advisor helped them determine an academic and career plan. Keydra described this stating,

Mr. W helped me figure out what I wanted to do. I decided I don't want to transfer to Georgia Tech. I want to graduate from Pelican City University. With his guidance, I figured out what I want to do now, career wise and stuff like that. He helped me pick the perfect major for me. He helped me...always supporting me. I know what I want to do now. I know the path and I have it mapped out.

However, some participants could not establish a relationship with their advisor, either saying that he or she was shuffled from advisor to advisor or met with him or her infrequently due to schedules. These students confessed that this disconnection posed challenges in their academic success. Participants emphasized how connections with university faculty and staff helped them in being resilient when faced by academic challenges. Through their participation in Upward Bound they were provided instructions on how to foster such relationships, specifically with faculty members, and the potential benefits.

Connections amongst Peers in College: Supports in Goal Attainment and Nurturers

of Resilience. Participants described how establishing peer support in college assisted them in their transition and facing challenges of a new collegiate setting. Participants described how as a result of the deep and positive friendships with peers established during the Upward Bound program, alumni wanted to re-create this peer support in the college setting. Such support was established through Upward Bound alumni attending the same college, friendships with classmates, or involvement in student life. Some participants depicted how their peers from Upward Bound attended the same college. This helped them in their transition by having a consistent support system. Students also built friendships within majors that assisted them in being academically successful. Chad, a biology major, describes this,

The relationships with my peers during my first year were made up a lot of the people that I took classes with, especially in my major. We developed a close relationship because we studied a lot together. See each other a lot on campus. The campus is really small. It was nice to make it through our first semester together in college.

Not only was developing friendships via classes key, but also through campus involvement. In her journal, Valerie writes

Even though I had a tough first semester class wise, I was fortunate to have better luck outside of class. I got involved in different clubs and organizations. I love helping and leading other students to not make the mistakes I had. I think Upward Bound had a huge part in this because in high school I was a shy, quiet girl most times and by Upward Bound offering clubs to be a part of during the summer like step class, choir, and acting it helped me grow into a person that wanted to get involved and do more in the community.

Participants explained how Upward Bound encouraged them to get involved in campus life in order to become immersed in their new community. Through this involvement, participants were able to: establish a community of peers that supported each other, were able to give peers advice based on lessons learned from past mistakes, and contribute to their campus community. Another student described how she felt like Upward Bound tried to motivate students to become involved as a way for them to make friends, optimize their experience and complete their degree. Chantelle details,

They're also trying to now, because they've been successful in getting people to go to college, but a lot of Upward Bound students are going to college but then not necessarily finishing in time or finishing like they were expecting. So, they're trying to get students more involved on campus to help. They talk to me a lot about sororities and Honors College and stuff like that.

Participants described how through peer friendships established through student organizations they were more dedicated: to studying, completing a college degree and invested in their post-secondary experience. They noted how Upward Bound encouraged creating friendships through student organizations and majors as a means to create a support system and build resilience. The importance of such engagement with peers is reflected in Reis, Colbert, and Hebert (2005), which cited strong support systems at school as a protective factor in helping high achieving students. They specified this to include participation in extra-curriculars, summer enrichment programs, and challenging classes. In response to a question concerning her proudest moment of her first year, Andy described establishing reliable and loyal college friendships. She states,

We would always have each other's backs. Whenever they needed something, like their printer broke. They wasn't able to print out an assignment for their class. One of us, they

would pick and like, "Can you print this out?" We would have to rush over to their class and bring it to them. Just helping each other through the struggle. I just look on that and it makes me pretty happy that we could have each other's back like that.

Such experiences are key as researchers have identified social support from peers, in addition to family members and educators, as an important characteristic of resilient students (Bernard, 1991; Werner & Smith, 1982). Overall, participants described how Upward Bound emphasized the importance of established positive peer relationships in the collegiate setting. The program did this by creating a culture in Upward Bound where peers served as sources of support and encouraging participants to establish similar friendships in the collegiate setting, specifically through involvement with student organizations and connecting with peers in classes in their academic majors.

Determination, Self-Advocacy, and Willingness to Try New Things as Internal Protective Factors

Participants in their journal entries and one-on-one interviews described how their determination, ability to self-advocate and willingness to try new things assisted them in overcoming obstacles in the college transition process. Shelby details how this ability to be determined and self-advocate was key in her first-year success. She states, "You have to stay focused. Don't lose sight of your goals and everything like that. You've always got to work hard for something that you want. I have to make sure I stay focused, motivated, determined about what I want to do." Participants depicted how Upward Bound either instilled or enhanced their determination, ability to self-advocate and willingness to try new things through the secure and safe environment created as well as the resources provided.

Determination. Participants often described that a source of their success was the feeling of determination or the characteristic of being resolved, which was established or strengthened by their participation in Upward Bound. Participants detailed how Upward Bound emphasized the importance of staying focused on one's objectives in the academic setting. For example, one student portrayed her determination to be independent. Janice stated,

I have certain problems with people, just because of my family dynamics...I always just wanted to be independent, and I knew that would come with a lot of responsibility, but since I wanted to be independent so much, it helped me go for it (college). Even though I had a lot of roadblocks, I had to be resilient because I really, really want to be on my own and self-sufficient.

Janice proceeded to describe how Upward Bound encouraged this sense of determination and desire to be independent. While this student was determined to be independent, other students described being steadfast in completing their degree and having a successful career. Shelby described, "I have the drive to complete and become successful in my field. I have people that I look up to that motivate me to do good." The Upward Bound program provided her with a support system that inspired her to live a healthy lifestyle and continue on her college-going path.

Students described how the Upward Bound program fostered a sense of determination by encouraging students to utilize resources to assist in challenging times. Janice stated,

Because I know when I was struggling with a subject or something like that, it was mandatory for us to go to tutoring and make sure we can fix what we're struggling

in. Yes, I'm very determined, but also having someone keeping me determined. I guess that really did help too.

During challenges times, Upward Bound educators would motivate them to be steadfast by revealing personal experiences or instances of previous participants who had to overcome similar obstacles. These educators emphasized for them to not give up even when faced with great challenges. Sarafina says,

I may get discouraged, but I have to look at the big picture and realize that is what I'm doing all this hard work for. They also push me and tell me that you can do it and they give you different examples of hardships they encountered previously. And that helps motivate me to push forward and overcome mine... because there's not always going to be a clean slate.

Kate described how Upward Bound nurtured a combination of determination, self-discipline and hard-work,

I am determined and I know what I have to do. But, also, Upward Bound pushed you into showing you the way of, how to build up yourself, keep striving to be motivated and...it's like, believe in yourself. They basically installed that if you want it, we're right behind you. For example, this semester I had history. It kicked my butt. I was studying, I was, "Wow" and I was "Oh my God," and I heard that history was the hardest and I thought, "I've got it, I'm going to challenge myself to do it." I decided to challenge myself, but the studying part, I did not fulfill completely. We only had 5 grades, the first 2 tests I bombed and 2 essays we had to write, I made B's on it. So, I was really hanging on to the final grade. I studied, it was so much...But, I did. I showed myself and I passed

the test. But, it was hard. But, seeing what I had to do, be more prepared for it, to study more. Something that they [Upward Bound] told us to do.

Participants depicted how the program focused on the importance of self-discipline, hard work and determination. Shelby states,

In Upward Bound, they tell you not to give up a fight even if you're at the lowest low and you're like "Oh, I'm about to give up and not..." And, at the same time, because I know myself, I'm like okay. I'm the only one who went to college... I can't just give up when things get rough. I have to keep going it doesn't matter how bad it gets or what happens. You just gotta keep going.

Alumni described how the program built students up and motivated them to believe in themselves. This, along with the program's constant focus on hard work in the midst of challenges, built academic resilience within alumni while facing collegiate obstacles.

Advocating for Oneself. Another characteristic that students spoke of that Upward Bound instilled or strengthened was participants' ability to advocate for themselves. Valerie said, "I think I was your average seventh grader... Well, not average, I was quiet. I kept to myself a lot. After I joined, I did open up. It helped me open up more and speak up more and things of that nature." In addition, students described how Upward Bound assisted them in building self-esteem and being outspoken. Chad stated, "I began to be more interactive with others, outspoken. My self-esteem level was very high because I began to find people who were similar to me and who had qualities such as I." By fostering participants' self-esteem and being outspoken, the program motivated students to understand their unique skills and be honest and open with their needs. Students detailed how Upward Bound helped them in understanding the importance of asking for help. Kate stated,

It did help me out with the stress of making new friends. I'm more of an introvert. I didn't really like speaking out...It kind of helps you ... If you need something, or you need help, you have to push yourself, and you need to ask somebody. They are always like, "Do you need help? Ask. Don't just sit there and wait, and then the opportunity's gone."

Sarafina further describes the importance of asking for help in academic setting stating, "You know, they say 'a closed mouth don't get fed.' A lot of people would just be silent and suffer in silence and end up not getting into college and not doing what they needed to do just because they didn't ask, or because they didn't know." Participants specifically detailed how Upward Bound taught the importance of advocating for oneself in the classroom. Keydra stated,

Throughout my first year of college, I dealt with difficult teachers, and dealt with information in class that I didn't quite understand. Being a part of the [Upward Bound] program helped me out in college because I was always reminded that when I didn't understand to ask my teacher for help, and if that didn't work find a tutoring outlet.

Upward Bound's focus on encouraging participants to be outspoken and accept help is key as the ability to be proactive and alert are major characteristics of resilience (Rak & Patterson, 1996). This was particularly helpful to participants when they were adjusting to a new academic environment, in which they had to re-evaluate their skills and what was needed for them to overcome academic obstacles. As a result of this focus on being outspoken and asking for help, the program fostered resilience so that when faced with challenges participants were able to self-advocate and problem-solve.

Trying New Things. Participants described how Upward Bound fostered their willingness to try new things. This was a result of participants engaging in college tours, field trips, and elective courses that built a desire to learn about new concepts. Participants stated that

these field trips and college tours were their favorite and most rewarding part of the program.

Valerie in her journal writes,

When I think about it, Upward Bound introduced me to a lot of things. I was able to take the ACTs more times than other people could. I was able to tour different colleges. I was lucky enough to go to different states during the summertime. The end of the year trip they took us to different states like Florida or D.C. I think a lot of it had to do with Upward Bound because they gave me the desire to want to travel and learn more about different things.

Students described how Upward Bound expanded their viewpoint by exposing them to new experiences. For example, Chad described going to see “Lion King” on Broadway and visiting Six Flags in Georgia. However, these field trips were described as optimal only when the students felt like they had learned from them. Alexandra described how she enjoyed the majority of the trips. However, in a few instances, the field trips were not tied to the curriculum.

Alexandra stated, “They’ll have something and then the intent behind it wouldn’t be the right intent. I enjoyed a lot of things we did, but sometimes it felt pointless. I think one of the field trips we had was to a cornfield, or something like a corn maze. I didn’t understand the field trip because we didn’t do anything.” It is important for program administrators to be intentional in incorporating program curriculum into each field trip. The purpose of field trips should not solely be to expose the student to something new, it also must teach the student about a new concept that he or she can later draw upon. This is important to participants’ college transition because it encourages students to reflect on past experiences and apply the skills and knowledge gained to current tasks or obstacles.

Students stated how the college trips that Upward Bound provided allowed them to think about the possibility of moving outside of their hometown. Janice stated, “Upward Bound opened my eyes to different things. When I thought of college, I thought of college in New Orleans. I didn't think about any college outside of New Orleans. When I went to Upward Bound, they showed me different colleges, ‘You can go here, here and here.’” In addition, students noted enjoying the extra-curricular activities and classes. For example, some sites offered step team, student government, yearbook and community service activities. Students described how exposure to such activities allowed them to cope with the feeling of the unknown. Students also detailed how learning a new skill with others helped build camaraderie amongst the students.

However, students noted that during budget constraints the activities were affected. Kate describes this saying,

Things would vary from year to year. There were changes, like certain classes, just weren't available. Like, some of the things that we really enjoyed, like the step team, the yearbook stuff and all of that. When we would do that...it was kind of a relief. How we can relieve artistically...that was good for the students. We were all disappointed when things didn't come back. Even within the program, you felt like those Friday meetings where everybody would perform...the people who was involved in this stuff would perform and everybody would cheer and it was nice. That kind of stopped. So, I think that definitely getting some of those programs back would be a benefit, even though it might be a cost issue.

The participants described the joy that the non-academic activities brought to students and the sense of community that these activities built within the program. Through such activities,

participants were able to learn a new skill, showcase what they had learn, and have this success celebrated within their academic community. Katz (1997) supports the need for such activities and courses as it provides meaningful opportunities for students, which is essential in emboldening resilience. Such experiences allow students to learn new skills in a safe and secure environment. As a result, these opportunities encouraged students to have a willingness to learn a new skill and, when faced with the unknown, utilize their problem-solving abilities to break down a goal into smaller, more manageable tasks.

Nurturing College Knowledge

Through motivation and by providing resources, Upward Bound nurtured participant's college knowledge or their knowledge of and ability to apply for college successfully and navigate the system (Conley, 2008). Upward Bound engrained in participants that a college degree was a realistic option. The program did this through consistent motivation and by establishing a climate of high expectations as well as by implementing strategies and resources that focused on the college-going process and college readiness, such as courses concentrating on grade-level success, summer bridge programs and workshops on developing soft skills. Participants noted how these Upward Bound interventions were the reasons why they were able to gain access to a college education. Valerie explains,

Upward Bound was a great opportunity for me, a great opportunity for a lot of people. I honestly think Upward Bound is a reason why a lot of kids go to college. I feel like they keep the rate of people going to college, I think they keep it up. Upward Bound helps a lot of kids who don't know what college is and don't know how to get there.

Valerie, like other alumni, noted that they lacked knowledge about how to gain access to college. These students did not have the college knowledge or skills needed to access college and move

through the system (Conley, 2008). However, through Upward Bound's resources, alumni gained knowledge concerning college not readily available to them.

A College Degree as an Option. Participants described how the program emphasized a college degree as a realistic option. The program did this through motivation and by providing resources to assist in the enrollment process. Students depicted how the program made college attainable and not a foreign concept. The program's faculty and staff challenged participants to think about the life they wanted post high school. Students described how the program established a climate of high expectations. Such high expectations encouraged and reminded them that they were capable of achieving beyond their own belief. Chad described this process of creating high expectations:

So when they did work with us, they wanted to make it so that school wasn't... this might be hard to understand, but a lot of people where I'm from, kind of thought of college as a weak thing to do, it's not what men do, you know. If you're tough or whatever you take over your family's business, you have a family and you provide for them, and college kind of had a bad reputation. So, they tried a lot to show there's strength in going through the challenges of college rather than just the challenges of trying to make ends meet.

Here, Chad details how in the community in which he was raised, obtaining a post-secondary degree was viewed as weak or less than. In his community, it was more honorable and strong to immediately provide for your family. Chad, like many other participants, described how Upward Bound emphasized the courage needed to face the challenges of a college setting and actually complete a degree as well as the long-term benefits of a post-secondary education. This support to work around a cultural norm may have been crucial in his decision to attend college and may

explain the persistently low rates of college degree completion among African-American men (National Center for Education Statistics, 2008).

Participants also depicted how the program provided resources to help in the college-going process, for example assisting in applying for scholarships, writing college application essays, and paying for application fees. Kate stated,

They paid up to three college applications and they helped us do the applications and stuff. And, if it was required for the college, they helped us with the essays and helped us make sure we filled out everything correctly and did all the paperwork. They were really helpful with it.

Participants spoke about how the program taught them how to apply for financial aid. Students who attended programs that hosted workshops concerning the FASFA and the college application process emphasized these workshops' helpfulness. Alexandra described how her Upward Bound counselor met with her parents and her to discuss how to complete the FASFA. While participants detailed how the program assisted them in applying for scholarships, some students described receiving scholarships, but losing them after their grades dropped or if they became a part-time student. Valerie stated,

I don't remember them talking about ... dropping or appealing things if you lost scholarships. I know they told us a lot about TOPS and how to get the scholarship, but I don't think they teach enough about how to make sure that you're doing what you are supposed to do to keep it, how to look at the guidelines and things of that nature.

Like Valerie, participants described Upward Bound's strong focus on application assistance in order to aid in college enrollment. However, these participants depicted a lack of program support to assist in maintaining their enrollment. For example, participants noted that it would

be helpful if the program reviewed with students the steps needed to keep their awards and if the program followed up with alumni while in college to ensure that they were maintaining their scholarships. Students described a need for the program to not solely focus on college admission, but also steps that the program can take to help students' in persisting.

In addition to assistance in applying for financial aid, Upward Bound provides a stipend for all students who participate in the program on a full-time basis. This stipend is provided as an incentive for participation and to help mitigate any financial cost to participants who attend the program instead of working during that time. Many of the participants described this stipend as useful in making ends meet as well as made college an option by assisting them in paying for the costs of a post-secondary education. However, students noted that more transparency is needed concerning the stipend, specifically the amount and the payment timeline. Alexandra stated,

Transparency is a big thing. A lot of times, we didn't know where our money was going, when we was going to get it. They just weren't clear about it. They're a lot of people who did use that money for school. I was kind of upset because I got my last check in Octoberish, late September early October, and I was already in college and I already had to buy things for school that I was going to spend that money on.

Participants, like Alexandra, depicted a need for transparency within the stipend program as this funding allowed college to be more of a realistic option as it helped in mitigating some of their living costs and assisted students in paying for the costs associated with their degree.

Participants also described the benefits of workshops focusing on ACT and SAT preparation and how these opportunities reinforced college as an option. Valerie described how her program site even paid for her to take the test.

The person who was over us she was very personable, very nice and understanding. She always tried to push us to do more. Also, when ACT's came up, I was able to take my ACT maybe like four or five times. I started taking it my ninth grade year and took it every year. Every year, I got a higher score and I got better and better. She was always there to push us and make sure we had everything we needed and things like that..."

By providing test preparation workshops as well as covering the fees associated with the ACT, the program provided an opportunity for participants to be steadfast in reaching their optimal score. In addition to the ACT, Upward Bound assisted in their application process by helping participants in completing their college essays. Many of the students spoke about how the essays they wrote in Upward Bound they used for their college application.

Students also depicted how the program fostered college as option by exposing them to post-secondary institutions. They did this by the numerous college tours that they provided. Students explained how they enjoyed college trips during the summer. However, some participants noted that their program focused either too heavily on in state or out of state colleges. Shelby stated,

I think what the program could do better, is to maybe expose the students that are part of the program to more in state schools. Because, though it is nice to visit out of state colleges, to get that experience and exposure, and because you never know where you are going to go... Sometimes you're confused to where you want to go, and then when you go tour a college, you may find it isn't the school for you. But, I feel that a lot of students would like to see their TOPs, so it maybe, tell them about more college in Louisiana or having them research more in Louisiana's. Depending on the majors that they are interested in.

Participants explained the importance of programs exposing them to both in and out of state schools equally as well as different types of post-secondary institutions. By providing knowledge concerning the benefits of college and by assisting with the college application process, participants depicted how the program established high expectations and made attaining a college degree a realistic option.

Strategies Focusing on College Readiness. Participants explained how the program assisted them in gaining knowledge and skills not readily available to them. Participants described: Upward Bound courses focused on grade-level success, summer bridge programs, and workshops on developing soft skills. UB students were able to take classes to prepare them for college and ease their transition. Participants spoke about how Upward Bound's literature, composition, mathematics, foreign language and laboratory science classes assisted them in being successful within their high school and college courses. During the school year, Upward Bound classes would help them in staying on track at their high school and over the summer, it would prepare them for the next year. Chad stated,

Academically we did a lot...The summer after my sophomore year we took classes that would prepare us for junior year, and then the next summer we took SAT prep and to practice for college classes. It was always preparing us for the next step. Once a week, our advisors make sure that we were doing all our homework, and seeing what our GPA was and stuff like that, so that we always had to stay on top of our school stuff.

In addition to the Upward Bound course-work preparing students for the next step, many of the participants emphasized the benefits of the summer bridge program in easing the transition into college and helping them "practice being college students." Here, students typically lived in the residence halls, took college courses, and ate in the dining hall. Chad depicted how by

participating in the summer bridge program he was able to get acquainted with the day-to-day routine of living on campus. He said,

I knew how a day in college would look like because of waking up in the Upward Bound bridge program every summer. I was adjusted to how it was living in a dorm. While living in a dorm during the bridge program, I was able to wake up every morning and participate in the daily routine. It wasn't something that was new to me.

Such exposure to the college setting during the summer bridge program assisted in building resilience as the program served as a tool to help students cope with the stress of a new environment. In addition, the bridge program allowed them to take college courses and when faced with challenges in these courses reach out the professor. Chad describes,

The bridge program allowed you to get adjusted to it by taking some college courses. I was basically introduced to college...so whenever I was challenged during the bridge program they told us to go out and seek help from the professors. It's basically what I did to prepare myself for the challenges in my first year of college.

Participants, like Chad, emphasized the benefits of the bridge program as it assisted them in adjusting to college by allowing them to take college courses and develop relationships with faculty members early on. As the bridge program eased them into the collegiate environment, they were coached by Upward Bound staff on how to be successful in college while taking university summer courses. Here, when faced with challenges, the Upward Bound bridge program guided them on how to seek help from professors in real time. This also allowed students to receive college credit free of charge as Upward Bound covered the costs associated with taking college courses in the bridge program. Participants noted how this permitted them to take less credit hours during their first year, further easing their college transition. Valerie stated,

I remember one thing they did was they actually, the summer after high school, somebody paid for us to take two real college courses. It was a good way to transition into college...this is what you're going to do in college and also a recruiting method for college. That was one of the major things they did to help us transition, they paid for our courses. All while they let us stay in the same dorms to make sure we have everything that we need and make sure we know what college is and what it has to take to get to college and things like that.

Participants, like Valerie, noted how the college courses taken during the summer bridge program eased their transition into college. Upward Bound's summer bridge program served as a strategy to enhance college readiness to foster a seamless transition.

Participants discussed how the program helped them develop soft skills that assisted them with their academics. Students mentioned topics relating to life balance or time management and study skills. Janice stated, "Upward Bound gave us study tips and I know we worked on it a lot. I think my junior year, I know we worked on it a lot." Students depicted how their program focused on developing time management skills through various workshops and through the continual motivation by its employees concerning balancing work and school. When asked what advice she would give to a current Upward Bound student, Janice said,

Pretty much stay in the program. Do all your work, but make sure you're having fun at the same time. You have to have that balance. Either while you're in Upward Bound or in school, because it's how they're teaching you. They're teaching you the balance of work and school. Don't give up. Even though it's taking away your Saturdays, it's going to help you out in the long run.

However, many of the participants noted that while they received time management and study information via workshops, they had difficulty sticking to it when in college. Kate explains, “We had seminars, then the summer before freshman year we had a seminar every week and a lot of them were specifically on time management, study skills and all this. I took it in, but I think once you got that little freedom, it went off.” Kate, like many participants, noted learning about soft skills, such as study skills and life balance, however, she struggled with the implementation of this knowledge. Workshops need to focus on practical ways to implement these concepts in the college environment. In addition, in order to be a college success initiative, it would be beneficial for the program to provide continual soft skill development to alumni while in college.

Overall, students noted how Upward Bound assisted them in gaining college knowledge. Valerie stated,

Being in the Upward Bound program really helped me prepare for college. It gave me an upper hand on things other students in my grade did not have and I will always be appreciative for it. It allowed me to take the ACT starting in the 9th grade, take college courses before graduating high school, and take educational trips.

Students consistently depicted the benefits received by their participation that their non-participating peers did not have the advantage of, such as ACT prep, assistance with the postsecondary application process, and college trips. Such initiatives allowed students to believe that a college degree was a realistic option. Participants also described how Upward Bound nurtured college readiness through their summer bridge program as well as fostering their soft skills development. As a result, the program created an environment focused on making college a realistic option and fostering college readiness, thus, enhancing students’ college knowledge by providing information and resources not readily available to them.

Findings Summary

Through the interview and journal process, four essential features of alumni's experience emerged: 1) Program Connections as External Factors, 2) Connections as External Factors in the College Setting, 3) Determination, Self-Advocacy and Willingness to Try New Things as Internal Protective Factors and 4) Nurturing College Knowledge. These themes suggest that multiple factors assist in Upward Bound alumni's successful college acclimation. Such multiple factors include: establishing a social support system, fostering internal traits of determination, extroversion, a willingness to try new experiences, as well as nurturing college knowledge. This is important to note as Masten and Coatsworth (1998) state that in regards to resilience, youth typically have multiple risk factors and multiple resources contributing to their lives and as a result there is no 'magic bullet' for intervention. Intervention models emerging from this realization describe cumulative protection efforts to address cumulative risk processes. Within the current study, students describe how Upward Bound's interventions encouraged multiple protective efforts to assist students in overcoming challenges within the first year.

In regards to "Program Connections as External Factors," participants described the importance of relationships with Upward Bound faculty and staff, their peers, and mentors. Participants reported that Upward Bound educators went beyond the traditional roles of teachers by serving as additional parental-like figures and individuals whom they could trust. In addition, participants noted how guides and tutors served as peer mentors. These guides and tutors were relatable, helpful role models, who provided authentic advice. In regards to friendships, participants explained how the program assisted them in developing social skills, in widening their networks, building friendships with students of different backgrounds and in stepping outside of their comfort zones. While participants noted how the program nurtured relationships

with educators, mentors and their peers, they described a disconnection with the program and their guardian(s). These participants desired more opportunities for continual parental involvement in the program. While in college, strong family relationships assisted participants in adjusting to college life. Participants detailed how often they felt pressure to succeed and their guardians offered support during scholastic obstacles. While many of the participants' parents did not attend college, parents and students were able to receive information through Upward Bound. Next, under the theme of "Connections as External Factors in the College Setting," participants described their collegiate support system, particularly friends as well as college faculty and staff. Students explained how as a result of building connections with faculty and staff, they were able to self-advocate when faced with challenges and feel a sense of belonging. Lastly, participants detailed the necessity of peer support in their acclimation process; either established through other UB alumni attending the same college, friendships with classmates or involvement in student life. These connections with their peers provided a sense of camaraderie through challenges and successes.

Participants noted personal traits that served as internal protective factors against challenges. Participants described their determination, ability to advocate for themselves, and willingness to try new experiences. Students explained how the program taught the importance of determination and advocating for oneself. Participants detailed how Upward Bound fostered their willingness to try new things, which assisted them in transitioning into a new environment. In addition, students described how the program nurtured college knowledge. Participants detailed how the program fostered college readiness and emphasized a degree as a realistic option through motivation, high expectations and by providing resources to guide them in the

enrollment process. The following section concludes the study, provides implications for theory, policy, and practice as well as recommendations for further research.

Chapter 5

Discussion

This research study explored the postsecondary acclimation experiences of alumni of Upward Bound program sites in Louisiana. Precollege outreach programs have been established to help students gain admittance to post-secondary institutions. However, recently, programs have focused on not only college access, but also college degree attainment (Swail et al., 2012). Such programs strive to provide college awareness and success interventions as well as services that may foster resilience. This is key as Banyard and Cantor (2004) determined that first-year students who demonstrated a high level of resiliency were more likely to adapt to the college environment than their less resilient peers. These more resilient students believed that difficult experiences provided opportunities to learn. It is important to understand students' perspectives of the Upward Bound program and their college transition in order to strengthen current practices within outreach programs and higher education. The following chapter answers the research question: How do first year college students, who participated in a precollege outreach program, describe their experiences adjusting to college life? The answers have been formulated by data collected from interviews and journal entries of Upward Bound alumni. In this final chapter, the researcher discusses the findings, implications for practice and limitations of the study. The chapter concludes with recommendations for future research.

Theoretical Framework and Findings

In exploring the college acclimation of Upward Bound alumni, a resiliency framework

(Garmezy, 1973) was implemented as it can reveal protective factors that promote learning and success in the face of obstacles such as poverty, marginalized status, low level of parental education and life transition (Luthar & Zelazo, 2003). Resilience is a strengths-based concept that emphasizes that all youth have strengths and can be taught to use them to negate the effects of risks (Civita, 2000). Interventions, such as outreach programs, can teach strengths to disrupt the link between risk factors and negative outcomes. Such resilience can be key in assisting students in overcoming challenges within the first year. Rutter (1987) identified four main protective methods to foster resilience: 1) Reduce negative outcomes by altering the risk or individual's exposure to the risk; 2) Reduce negative chain reactions following risk exposure; 3) Establish and maintain self-esteem and self-efficacy and 4) Open up opportunities to acquire skills. Educational programs can foster resilience through any combination of these four processes (Bernard, 1991).

This study examined students' academic resilience within the first year at a post-secondary institution and Upward Bound's ability to foster this resilience. The data collected from this study confirms that educational programs, such as Upward Bound, *can* foster resilience within their students. Participants noted that sites reduced negative outcomes by providing supports such as: links to community resources as well as stipends for participation. Sites reduced negative chain reactions by providing courses to assist students in being at grade-level and prepared for college classes, offering tutoring and counseling, and teaching strategies to enhance college readiness and success. Upward Bound fostered self-esteem as well as other internal protective characteristics, such as determination, advocating for oneself, and willingness to try new things, by setting up environments where students can experience success and a sense of control. In addition, Upward Bound teachers, administrators and peer mentors were key in

building self-efficacy and motivating participants to believe that a college degree was an option. Finally, sites can provide opportunities for students to acquire skills — such as study and time management strategies as well as enhanced college knowledge—and engage in prosocial activities by offering a range of extracurricular programs, college tours and field trips.

However, within current resilience research, there are internal and external factors that exist that participants in this study did not describe. Upward Bound sites can further enhance their programs as builders of resilience by incorporating or focusing on such external and internal protective factors in their programs. Internal protective factors that could be focused on in the program are: an internal locus of control, high self-esteem, optimism, self-awareness, autonomy, sense of self, diversity appreciation and emotional intelligence (Rak & Patterson, 1996; Reis, Colbert, & Hebert, 2005). In addition, external protective factors that have potential to enhance resilience of Upward Bound students include: support from a parent, neighborhood engagement, as well as leadership development and community service activities.

In regards to internal protective factors, Rak and Patterson (1996) provide a comprehensive profile of resilient youth. Here, resilient youth exhibit an active, flexible problem-solving approach, the ability to gain positive attention from others, an optimistic view of his/her experiences and of life, the ability to be autonomous, a tendency to seek novel experiences, and a proactive perspective. Students in this study described having: strong, positive social connections, a willingness to try new things, and a sense of determination. In addition, students depicted how as a result of their determination and ability to seek new experiences, they became proactive and able to problem solve. Previous research on resilient youth has also noted that high self-esteem, sense of self, emotional intelligence and an optimistic viewpoint can serve as internal protective factors (Rak & Patterson, 1996; Reis, Colbert, &

Hebert, 2005). In order to enhance the Upward Bound program in fostering resilience, sites can focus on building an optimistic viewpoint within participants. This is key in nurturing college persistence as optimistic thinking is a primary factor in long-term success and in individuals coping with stress. This is especially true for high adversity families where challenges may be more probable. Upward Bound can assist students in utilizing optimism as a mental tool that encourages youth to view setbacks as temporary and encourage them to bounce back (Seligman, 1998).

Studies have also linked high self-esteem or a strong self-concept with resilience (Peng, Lee, Wang, & Wahlberg, 1992). Youth with high self-esteem are able to act independently, assume responsibility, take pride in accomplishments, attempt new tasks, as well as handle positive and negative emotions. In contrast, youth with low self-esteem may: avoid trying new things, feel unloved, blame others for shortcomings, feel emotionally indifferent, be unable to tolerate a normal level of frustration, put down one's own talents, and be easily influenced. Self-esteem has a marked effect on academic performance. Low self-esteem can lessen student's desire to learn, his or her ability to focus and his or her willingness to take risks (Brookover, Thomas, & Patterson, 1985; Holly, 1987; Scheirer & Krant, 1979). Upward Bound can provide opportunities for students to establish a sense of self and build self-esteem. In addition, Upward Bound can provide opportunities for students to learn about and practice emotional intelligence. Within the classroom, UB educators can bolster participants' emotional intelligence by helping them become aware of their emotions and patterns of behavior, known as self-knowledge; assisting them in developing self-management in regards to negative or destructive emotions; and enabling them to share positive experiences with others in a way that enhances learning, known as relationship management (Caprara et al., 2000; Malecki & Elliott, 2002). As a result,

Upward Bound will be assisting in establishing the building blocks for present and future academic success of its participants.

Previous research has also noted that an appreciation for diversity can serve as an internal protective factor (Rak & Patterson, 1996; Reis, Colbert, & Hebert, 2005). Within this study, some participants described a lack of cultural competency displayed by administrators. One student depicted feeling uncomfortable when the program site took participants to a Christian church as a field trip. Another student, who identified as Muslim, described feeling that Christian ideals underlined the program, specifically in regards to the behavior management of students. Program administrators providing opportunities for diversity awareness for both their employees and participants is essential to enhancing Upward Bound. In doing so, Upward Bound can assist program educators in creating a safe and inclusive environment. Furthermore, in fostering cultural competence within participants, Upward Bound will nurture an additional internal protective factor.

Autonomy and an internal locus of control have also been noted to serve as protective internal factors (Reis, Colbert, & Hebert, 2005). In this study, students described that when they were independent and disciplined they were able to overcome obstacles in the first year. However, alumni depicted that while the Upward Bound emphasized the importance of being independent and disciplined, they often had difficulty placing soft skills learned through the program into practice in the collegiate setting. In order to further enhance the program in building resilience and assisting with college persistence, program administrators should focus on developing autonomy and an internal locus of control within students during the program and provide continual development in regards to related soft skills to alumni. Upward Bound will

then be serving as a college success intervention by fostering autonomy as well as discipline, and as a result preparing students for the newfound independence of the college setting.

In regards to external protective factors, researchers have identified: caring relationships, positive and high expectations, and opportunities for meaningful participation (Bernard, 1995; Grotberg, 1995). In regards to caring relationships, Upward Bound alumni desired opportunities for meaningful parental engagement in the program. Research around resilience has noted the importance of a parental figure as an external protective factor. Specifically, high parental expectations (Clark, 1983) and clear rules and behavioral expectations (Bernard, 1991) have been found to contribute to academic resilience. Upward Bound can foster academic resilience by providing opportunities for continual parental engagement in the program and encouraging parents to: have informed parent child conversations about daily events; discuss leisure reading and monitor television viewing; express affection; show an interest in children's academic and personal growth; and emphasize delay of immediate gratification to accomplish long-term goals with their child (Wahlberg, 1984). As a result, of intentionally enhancing parent and child relationships, Upward Bound sites can foster an additional external factor of resilience.

In regards to external protective factors, the community can serve as an important source of alternative support when youths' parents or school are unable (Gorman-Smith & Tolan, 2003). Within the community, students' social organizations in the neighborhood can be particularly important by providing meaningful opportunity (Wilson, 1987). Such opportunities can provide high levels of cohesion, a sense of belonging, and communal supervision by the adults within the community. Upward Bound sites should collaborate with various neighborhood or community organizations in order to further foster resilience in their students. In addition, research has shown that volunteer activities and leadership development programs can serve as meaningful

opportunities that promote resilience in youth (Constantine, Bernard, & Diaz, 1999; Rak & Patterson, 1996). While literature on Upward Bound notes that some sites provide such engagement, the students in this study did not describe these opportunities (Swail et al., 2012). In order to enhance external protective factors of resilience through meaningful opportunities, Upward Bound administrators should coordinate volunteer activities in the community as well as focus on leadership development opportunities for participants within their programs, such as student government and workshops on citizenship.

This study displays alumni's perceptions of their Upward Bound experience and college transition. The data was analyzed and provided evidence that Upward Bound offers some supports that nurture protective factors of resilience that disrupt the link between risk factors and negative outcomes during the first year acclimation process. Through this research, program administrators are able to acknowledge which supports achieve this, specifically key internal characteristics—determination, being a self-advocate and willingness to try new things—resources to enhance college readiness and knowledge as well as strong connections with parent(s), teachers, mentors and peers. Furthermore, this study exhibits additional protective factors, such as community and parental engagement, leadership development, and characteristics of autonomy, discipline, cultural competence, high self-esteem, optimism and emotional intelligence that can be focused on within Upward Bound to facilitate heightened resilience in participants. As a result of this study, Upward Bound programs are able to emphasize the data from the findings in their curriculum to further enhance their interventions. The following findings discussed support this notion.

Findings

Wrap-Around Support

In this study, the data collected suggests that Upward Bound sought to create a wrap-around support system that fostered academic and social integration within participants. This wrap-around support system consisted of the program seeking to incorporate the students' home, school, and community resources to create an encompassing intervention that optimally promotes resilience (Bernard, 2004). All participants emphasized the **importance of Upward Bound faculty and staff on their college-going process as well as their transition into a post-secondary institution**. Participants reported that Upward Bound educators went beyond traditional roles by serving as parental-like figures both in and outside of the classroom. These caring adults gave academic, personal and career counseling and mentoring to guide students in meeting high expectations and in coping with issues at home, school, and in their neighborhoods. The presence of such caring and supportive relationships created the proper foundation for trust. As identified by Erikson (1963), trusting relationships serve as the base for healthy future development. For example, this external protective factor can help foster internal protective factors such as social competence, a sense of self as well as meaning and purpose in life (Rydell, Hagekull, & Bohlin, 1997). Werner and Smith (1992) also remind us of the major role that a teacher can play in creating caring learning environments that foster resilience. This is key as a positive relationship with a teacher can supplement a lack of family support. Furthermore, when students feel integrated in their academic community then their education constitutes an important aspect of their personal experience, and they are more likely to value and pursue academic goals.

Not only did participants describe positive relationships with educators as being key in their support system and in fostering their resilience, but also *peer mentors*. Richman,

Rosenfeld, and Bowen (1998) explained the type of support that mentors can provide: listening support, technical appreciation support (someone who appreciates the student), technical challenge support (someone who encourages the student), and emotional support (someone who comforts the student). Other types of support surveyed were emotional challenge support (someone who motivates the student to think using his feelings and values), reality confirmation support (someone who supports the student's views), and tangible support (someone who provides money and other tangibles). Participants described **the importance of tutors and guides in providing such support during Upward Bound and while in college.** These guides and tutors were providers of authentic advice, emphasized the importance of social and academic integration within participants, and served as a component of participant's wrap-around support system.

Upward Bound participants portrayed how the program assisted them in **developing social skills, in widening their networks, building new and deeper friendships and in stepping outside their comfort zones.** Upward Bound alumni depicted that the program assisted them in being well-rounded and expanding their worldview by being socially integrated with students from different backgrounds. These peers contributed to a wrap-around support system by being sources of accountability and support during the college going process. This is important to note as Alva (1991) found that academically resilient students were more likely to report a greater connection to schools via networks with teachers and peers. As a result, Alva's (1991) study demonstrated that academically resilient students generally reported a more positive view of their intellectual abilities and expressed a greater sense of responsibility for their academic future. In addition, resilient students were more likely to "(a) feel encouraged and prepared to go to college, (b) enjoy coming to school and being involved in activities, (c)

experience fewer conflicts and intergroup relations with other students, and (d) experience fewer family conflicts and difficulties” (Alva, 1991, p. 31). Alva deemed that students who fit these criteria were academically invulnerable. Thus, in fostering deep connections with peers and a wrap-around support system, Upward Bound assisted in nurturing students to be academically invulnerable and academically resilient.

According to Bernard (2004), protective factors of resilience were defined as caring teachers and staff; caring climate; small classes; mentoring; school-community partnerships; high expectations; opportunities for students to participate; and involved parents (Garmezy, 1993). While parents were not provided opportunities for continual engagement in Upward Bound, participants did describe having positive connections with their parent(s) while in college. This is important to note as supportive parents have a positive effect on youth (Maton, Hraboski, & Greif, 1998; Garmezy, 1993). Furthermore, parental involvement in acts of required helpfulness, when difficult acts are performed in response to social requirements to reduce or prevent other people from experiencing serious discomfort, fosters resilience (Werner, 1984). Within this study, participants detailed how often they felt pressure to succeed and how their **guardians offered support during scholastic obstacles**. Many of the participants’ parents did not attend college. Thus, Upward Bound assisted the student and the parent(s) in receiving information about college and, as a result, fostered a wrap-around support system. Overall, participants described feeling supported and encouraged by their parent(s) while in college, even though at times, the parent(s) could not readily provide insight in relation to college knowledge without the assistance of Upward Bound.

Not only did students describe Upward Bound educators and peer mentors as well as parent(s) as key to their success, but also relationships with university faculty and staff. Such

relationships served as an additional external protective factor that re-enforced an all-encompassing support system and fostered self-advocacy skills and a sense of belonging in participants. Researchers have identified that social support from family members, peers, schools, and from the community is an important characteristic of resilient students (Bernard, 1991; Wang et al., 1994; Werner & Smith, 1982). Participants in this study emphasized the importance of building relationships with faculty and staff as well as becoming socially and academically integrated as essential to their success in the first year. **When participants were able to foster positive relationships with faculty and staff, they described that it helped nurture a sense belongingness and assisted students in self-advocating.** This, in turn, provided them with the confidence and skills to overcome stressors in college setting.

Lastly, participants described how establishing peer support assisted them in college in their first year transition. These **connections with peers provided a feeling of camaraderie through challenges and successes.** Previous research has noted that youth need supportive peers, parents, schools, and mentors to grow to their optimal development and potential strength (Brendtro & Longhurst, 2005). The fact that the participants described such deep connections is key as researchers have found that in using grades as an indicator for academic resilience the sole significant predictor of educational resilience was a student's sense of belonging at their educational institution (Gonzalez & Padilla, 1997). Furthermore, Gonzalez and Padilla (1997) found that resilient students reported significantly higher perceptions of family and peer support, teacher feedback, positive connections to school, value placed on school, and peer belonging, all which participants in this study have emphasized as key in their ability to overcome stressors in their acclimation process.

Overall, participants described a sense of community in the program as a result of close

relationships with Upward Bound peers, peer guides or tutors, faculty and staff. This support is particularly important because Finn (1989) argues that a students' sense of a close connection with their educational setting is a critical factor in academic achievement. Participants pointed to connections built or emphasized through Upward Bound as preparing them for their college transition by nurturing external protective factors against risk, specifically by creating a wrap-around support system, consisting of peers, faculty and staff, guides and tutors.

Instilling and Enhancing: Upward Bound and Essential Internal Protective Factors

Participants described that **the feeling of determination, ability to self-advocate and willingness to try new things were main contributors in being resilient when faced by obstacles in college.** Researchers concur that this characteristic of determination assists in the development of resilience, specifically if individuals lack strong family or school supports (Reis, Colbert, & Hebert, 2005; Wang & Gordon, 1994). Students in the present study explained how Upward Bound assisted in fostering a sense of resolve and staying focused on one's objectives to be steadfast in completing their degree and having a successful career. This is noteworthy as Bernard (1995) found that a sense of purpose and future was one of the four attributes that resilient youth had in common. This sense of purpose entailed having goals, education aspirations, persistence, hopefulness, and a sense of a bright future, all which participants of this study described in detailing their feeling of determination.

Another characteristic that participants spoke of was advocating for oneself. Participants explained how Upward Bound encouraged them to speak out and ask for and accept help. Novick (1998) noted that resilient youth view problems and challenges as obstacles that can be worked on, changed, and resolved. Resilient youth are active in problem solving, and develop

flexible strategies and skills to solve problems. By teaching students to advocate and to ask for help, Upward Bound played a role in developing problem-solving skills, and thus elements of resilience, within its participants that was essential during the first year of college.

Participants also described how Upward Bound fostered their willingness to try new things. This was a result of participants engaging in college tours, field trips, and elective courses that allowed them to have new experiences and build a desire to learn about new concepts. Such experiences described by alumni are important as Katz (1997) contended that providing bountiful and meaningful opportunities is essential in building resilience. These opportunities often allow Upward Bound youth to believe and dream in an environment that is both safe and stable. Furthermore, this assisted in easing participant's transition into a new setting, as they had experience being introduced to foreign concepts or environments, and how to make meaning out of the unknown through Upward Bound. Overall, participants in their journal entries and one-on-one interviews, described how their determination, ability to self-advocate and willingness to try new things were key in their academic success. Moreover, Upward Bound instilled or enhanced these internal protective factors in order to build resilience in students in overcoming challenges faced in the college enrollment and persistence process.

Creating a College-Going Culture and Enhancing College Knowledge

Participants described how Upward Bound **created a college-going culture by emphasizing a college degree as a realistic option for each of them.** Students illustrated how the program made college attainable and not a foreign concept. Upward Bound did this through motivation, establishing a climate of high expectations, and by providing resources to assist in the college application process. This is key as schools that create a culture of high expectations for all students experience greater rates of academic success (Barley, Apthrop, & Goodwin,

2007; Levin, 1988; Rutter, 1979). Bernard (1995) emphasizes that caring and supportive relationships, an ethos of high expectations, and opportunities for high expectations serve as critical protective factors in fostering resilience. In addition, the program provided resources to help in the college admittance process and exposed them to different post-secondary institutions. By providing knowledge concerning the benefits of college and by assisting with the college application process, participants depicted how Upward Bound established high expectations and made a college degree a realistic option for each of them.

Participants also explained how the program utilized **strategies that focused on college readiness, specifically by providing participants knowledge concerning post-secondary education not readily available to them.** Participants described: Upward Bound courses, summer bridge programs and workshops on soft skills, and how such resources provided insight concerning the college experience. This is key as Reis, Colbert, and Hebert (2005) cited that participation in extra-curricular activities, summer enrichment programs and challenging classes serve as protective factors of resilience. By implementing strategies to foster a college-going culture and enhance participants' college knowledge, Upward Bound nurtured academic resilience by providing interventions that enhanced students' learning, developed their talents and skills, and protected them against adversity (Wang, Haertel, & Wahlberg, 1994).

Advice for College Success: Formula for Success

When asked what advice the participants would give to current students, overwhelmingly the majority of **participants advised to take advantage of the program.** Janice states, "Definitely take this experience serious. What you put into it is what you'll get out of it.... Take this experience to your advantage." Participant emphasized that students only benefited from the program by the level of commitment they had. The program provided tools, however, it was up

to the participants to be willing to work diligently and implement the skills learned. Participants mentioned that students who were not engaged should remove themselves to allow someone else to take advantage of the opportunity. Chad advises, “They [Upward Bound] were open to everyone and if you weren't taking it seriously your spot should be taken by someone else.” It is important to note that researchers have not found that one particular protective factor is responsible for resilience, thus applying various different strategies is key, even though students may not feel that they need assistance in that area. In addition, a protective factor cannot be viewed in the absence of adversity; therefore, a protective factor is visible only in the presence of risk (Rak & Patterson, 1996). Therefore, Upward Bound students may not necessarily understand the importance of strategies until it is too late. However, all of the participants in this study understood the benefits of Upward Bound services. One student described how it was free support system that she wished was available for everyone. Kate says,

Just the fact that it was pretty much a free system there, it was a free support system and it helped that it doesn't matter who you are, what you are, you still have these people for life that would help you...The fact that you have such a great support system. It is really great because not a lot of people had that help or had the money to get help...like they're in school and not everybody has parents that can help or support them in school. So, it's like it's a really great program, I really wish that this was for everybody.

Since the program focused on assisting students in gaining college access, participants believed that the program too should be accessible. While participants noted that they felt that the program should be available to all, they advised if one was not going to take advantage of it, then someone else should take his or her spot.

In addition to taking advantage of the program, participants also advised the need for participants to **apply the knowledge and skills** from the program while in the collegiate setting. Participants explained that primarily their challenges during the first year was in relation to academics and utilizing soft skills. Often students noted, that they received workshops on soft skills, like time-management and study skills, but it was up to the participants to actually put what they learned into practice. Valerie in her journal writes,

The biggest challenge I can say I faced in my first year of college was time management and procrastination. I rarely studied outside of class during high school and I thought I could do the same in college. Unfortunately, I was terribly wrong. Because of those mistakes, I ended up losing a scholarship after my first year. It was one of the biggest mistakes I made during college, but I learned greatly from it. I think Upward Bound should continuously tell high school students that college is a whole new game and you cannot pass without the proper methods.

Valerie, like many participants, struggled with time management and study skills. Valerie notes that the program should consistently reinforce that the role of college student is different than that of a high school student and that the strategies Upward Bound provides, if implemented, are key to be successful in college. Many participants describe how the rigor of college courses was new, as many of them did not have to study in high school. If students did not adjust to their new environment, they would face additional challenges. Unlike in high school, it was up to the participant to apply their skills, learn from their mistakes and when faced with challenges to be resilient. Andy described this saying,

A lot of, not only programs, but, schools have trouble transitioning students into college because it's a whole different ball field. Whether you like it or not, it's up to the student

to be responsible...I had some issues with being responsible. I was so confident to a point where I was cocky and I wasn't studying as much as I should have. I wasn't being responsible with classes. I was either not going to some classes or going late and that definitely had an effect. Just rushing to try to fix it all at the end. Since then, I've grown. My GPA is up just because I remember all the people with Upward Bound, just the people that are looking to me and asking about me, how I'm doing. I'm going to make sure that I make them proud and do what I know they think I can do... It's up to me, but I definitely don't want to let them down. Upward Bound warned me and they tried to prepare me, but at the end of the day, it was up to me to do it.

When Andy was able to reflect on her challenges, she was able to put into practice what she had learned in Upward Bound. She felt that the individuals from Upward Bound were watching her and she wanted to make them proud by fulfilling the goals that they thought she could achieve. Overall, participants cautioned others that in this new role of a college student, students had to take an active role in his or her learning and was accountable for his or her own academic success. Shelby states, "You have to become more independent and learn how to survive on your own without people having to be on your back all day telling you what to do." Participants advised the importance of implementing strategies learned through Upward Bound in coping with the newfound independence of college life.

All participants continually emphasized how their ability to **overcome challenges in college was a result of both their personal traits or internal protective factors as well as the opportunities and resources—external protective factors—that Upward Bound provided to them.** This reflects Lerner and Benson (2003) research identifying resilience as a combination of inner strengths and external supports. Keydra described how her success was a mixture of her

internal protective factors as well as the resources that the program provided. She stated, “Upward Bound can prepare a person and give you tips, but it all depends on your motivation, what you want to do.” Participants also depicted how the program established or instilled these protective factors. Valerie explained,

Upward Bound built a lot of resilience in people. Without Upward Bound, they wouldn't know the college process. They probably wouldn't know about ACT, about scholarships and things like that. I think by them getting involved in Upward Bound taught them “Hey, you can go to college, you can achieve these goals that you want in life.” I think it built resilience, definitely built resilience in a lot of people.

Here, Valerie, like many participants, explained how Upward Bound instilled or enhanced positive personal factors, such as determination and trying new things, as well as provided resources needed for college access and success. All participants in this study explained how their ability to overcome challenges in their college acclimation was both an effect of their personal characteristics that served as internal strengths as well as Upward Bound services that provided knowledge and nurtured skills, acting as external supports.

Recommendations and Areas of Focus

The current body of research examines the effects of participation in Upward Bound on building resilience and assisting with a successful college acclimation process in the context of the state of Louisiana. As a result of this study, the researcher recommends implementing specific resiliency building interventions and college success strategies in outreach programs. Through these recommendations, program administrators can further support Upward Bound in not solely being a college access intervention, but also a degree attainment strategy.

Recommendations areas of focus resulting from the data collected in this study are detailed below.

Recommendations for Enhancing the Upward Bound Experience

Throughout the interview and journaling process, all participants emphasized the importance of their social support systems within Upward Bound. Students spoke about the family-like atmosphere developed by the caring teachers, motivating peers, as well as approachable tutors and guides. Such a safe and secure environment, specifically in circumstances when home and/or school communities are characterized by risks, is essential in allowing students to experience new concepts and enhance their development. However, some students noted that faculty in the program had difficulty holding students accountable for their homework and behavior. In addition, two participants described a need for faculty training concerning diversity related issues. These participants depicted how educators in Upward Bound often applied traditional gender norms on their students. Some students also described concerns that Christian ideals underlined the program. It is imperative that Upward Bound administrators provide continual professional development to their educators in regards to behavior management and inclusion. In addition, it is key that administrators objectively assess their program to verify that a safe, secure, and inclusive learning environment is fostered where an internal factor of diversity appreciation is encouraged within participants.

Students also spoke about how the UB program exposed them to college campuses by numerous college tours that they facilitated. However, students in this study described the importance of programs bringing students to college trips both in and out of state as well as exposing them to different types of institutions. Administrators, in planning college tours, should be mindful that they are exposing students to various types of institutions, including

community colleges, technical schools, public in-state and out-of-state, private liberal arts, and historically black colleges and universities. This will help foster college persistence as it will expose students to various post-secondary options so that they can choose an institution that mirrors his or her needs.

Despite strong connections between participants and Upward Bound educators, peer mentors and peers, students described a desire for more opportunities for parental engagement. Participants explained that parents were simply invited to come to the end of the year awards ceremony and informationals before major field trips. As a result, continual parental engagement in the program was not available. This is a major area of concern in the program as parental involvement serves a protective factor in resilience (Garmezy, 1993). By addressing this, Upward Bound would be able to further establish a wrap-around support system for their students. Administrators should review their current program to look for ways in which parent involvement can be integrated throughout the curriculum and not simply inviting parents to serve as guests at events.

In addition to social support systems, students described concerns regarding program finances. Students depicted how the Upward Bound stipend assisted them in having the ability to attend program events instead of spending that time at a part-time job. Some students used this stipend for daily life expenses or to further their educational goals, specifically utilizing funds from the program to purchase college textbooks. However, students noted that more transparency is needed concerning the stipend program, specifically the amount and the payment timeline. This would allow students the ability to financially plan for their future and assist in them being independent.

Students also vocalized concerns regarding the decrease in funding for Upward Bound. While, overall, participants expressed appreciating the resources provided, many depicted a concern for the program in regards to budget restraints due to consistent cuts in federal funding. Andy stated,

It's a great program. I don't know why they lost funding, as much funding, and we really could see the difference in certain classes. Stuff just got put out... People who came the last year, it made them not want to continue going even though it's a good thing that they have going and it really has helped a lot of people. Some people that I know would not have been in college if they had not gone to Upward Bound, so I just think it's really important.

Many of the participants, like Andy, noted that throughout their experience in Upward Bound, they noticed more and more budget restraints and that it affected their classes and co-curricular experiences. These students describe how administrators often seemed stressed concerning the future of the program. Sarafina noted,

She [program director] focused more on trying to keep alive the program. She didn't really have the luxury of being able to connect with us like the advisors did, because she was too busy trying to keep the program alive.

As a result of the budget cuts, participants felt like the Upward Bound program, which fosters college access and success to traditionally marginalized youth, was not seen as priority in society. Janice stated,

It's not a priority anymore and I personally feel like it really should be. There are a lot of people from my town who I've grown up with that they never would have gone to college if it wasn't for Upward Bound... There's one kid who he's studying to be an engineer, and

he's doing really great, but if he hadn't gone to Upward Bound, he probably just would be working at his dad's grocery store in town. Because that's just what people from where I'm from do.

In describing budget cuts, students like Janice, confessed a fear of a world where Upward Bound didn't exist, in which students who had potential could not have the resources to assist them in accessing a college degree. The effects of the budget reduction on the faculty and staff were perceived by all of the students in the study. Program administrators and educators need to continue to evaluate the program in order to determine how to optimally provide resources with less funding.

Moving Upward Bound Up: Recommendations for the College Setting

Throughout this study, alumni described a desire for more support from Upward Bound throughout their college career, but especially during the first year. Previous researchers concur that first year students are in need of increased support during their transition (Tinto, 1999; Wilcox, Winn, & Fyvie-Gauld, 2005). All participants spoke about how the UB program contacted them as they transitioned into the college setting. However, the amount of communication and whether it occurred throughout the student's college experience varied. The majority of students described communication being simple, sporadic, electronic contact, for example texts, social media posts or emails, throughout their first semester and filtering off quickly after. While one student described getting contacted monthly, the majority expressed getting contacted once every five months within their first year of college and communication halting after. This was apparent as when the researcher requested assistance from Upward Bound administrators in recruiting participants, many of them did not have strong, continual communication with alumni and as a result a weak relationship post program was evident.

Administrators must determine a means in which to verify that continual, structured communication and encouragement is offered to alumni. This is key to confirm so that the UB program is not only a college preparation strategy, but also an intervention that supports participants to degree completion.

In addition to needing communication and encouragement from Upward Bound educators post program, participants described the importance of establishing relationships with both faculty and staff members while in college. Participants stated that Upward Bound emphasized the importance of fostering relationships with professors. However, participants noted that in addition to faculty relationships, connections with staff members were essential. When participants had not established a relationship with these individuals, specifically with academic advisors and financial aid counselors, this posed challenges in their postsecondary success. By encouraging relationships with both college faculty and staff, along with continued encouragement from program educators, Upward Bound can be transformed into a degree attainment intervention and not solely a college access strategy.

In addition to alumni's desire for continual communication and encouragement from Upward Bound educators as well as university faculty and staff, participants explained the desire for guidance concerning steps needed to persist in college. Participants described how Upward Bound provided resources to help them in the college admittance process, for example assistance in writing college application essays, paying for application fees and applying for financial aid. However, students described needing guidance while in college on the steps needed to progress through and complete their degree. For example, student noted receiving scholarships, but, losing them after their grade point average dropped or if they became a part-time student. UB educators should, in addition to hosting workshops on how to apply for financial aid, work one-

on-one with students and their parents both prior and during college to review financial aid packages so that they understand guidelines. In doing this and similar initiatives, UB programs can implement means in which to address students concerns that UB benefited them as high school students, however did not provide continued support post program while they were in college.

During their first year of college, students illustrated that their major challenges included: time management and study skills as well as understanding the role of a college student. The majority of participants explained the need for more focus on time-management and study skills within the UB program. Valerie said, “More time management skills, make sure you help us not procrastinate. I think just more of just drilling in our heads, college is real. You have to study. You have to work hard.” Participants noted that while they received information concerning these areas via workshops, they had difficulty actually implementing it when in college. To fortify protective factors and to ease the first year transition, programs should provide continual development to their students post program in regards to soft skills. This could be in the form of: one-on-one consultations with a program counselor, electronic newsletters reminding students of best practices, as well as webinars or podcasts made available throughout their college years.

Student also described how they wished Upward Bound prepared them to be independent. Kate stated,

I think they need to prep you a little bit more on the, "You're going to be by yourself," because sometimes I think, “Oh, it’s still Upward Bound.” But, it's kind of a high school program so you still have to have certain rules before you go into freshman year. You have freedom, but you don't have as much as you would if you were actually in college. So, some type of help on that so you really know when it's time to have fun and when it's

not. Because I know that was a problem with me and a lot of my friends. It was that freedom, that sense of "I can do all of this so what's this freedom going to cost me?"

In order to help students understand their role as a college student and assist in their college acclimation, programs must establish partnerships with surrounding colleges and universities, compared to limiting the relationships to college visits or being the site for a program. Chad detailed this stating, "They need to build a better relationship with local colleges and actually go out to each department and see which courses are required...and how they can go about helping us be more prepared for college." This would entail building a relationship with local college faculty and staff, specifically department chairs, academic advisors and admission counselors. Through this relationship, departments at local colleges could share curriculum for specific majors so that educators in Upward Bound could adjust their curriculum to further prepare their students. Also, post-secondary institutions could share information concerning open events occurring on campus that students could attend. This would allow participants to be exposed to college life throughout their Upward Bound experience, not just within the summer bridge program. Furthermore, this would assist students in understanding collegiate expectations and ease the transition into the college setting.

This study explored outreach program alumni's first year experiences and their college transition. The data collected from this study identified current practices in outreach programs and depicted alumni's experience during the first-year of college. Through these findings, recommendations for enhanced practices in building resilience and promoting first year success were provided. Such recommendations will foster Upward Bound in being college degree attainment intervention, and not solely a college access strategy, for marginalized youth.

Implications for Improving College Success for Under-Represented Students

This study has scholarly, theoretical and practical impacts on college access and success for under-represented students. While this study focuses on Upward Bound, the findings highlight lessons on college access interventions for both educational institutions and outreach programs at large. Specifically, this study emphasizes the importance of: institutional partnerships that support the kindergarten through sixteen plus pipeline, interventions that bridge student's multiple worlds, as well as educational organizations having a continued relationship with students in order to gain valuable information concerning post-secondary success and to be able to establish a set of best practices in fostering college degree attainment among under-represented youth.

This study has scholarly impacts by integrating kindergarten through sixteen plus perspectives, rather than staying within the boundaries of K-12 or higher education literature (Louie, 2007). As a result, this study highlights the importance of fostering a kindergarten through sixteen plus pipeline. Outreach programs can contribute to enhancing this pipeline by building stronger relationships with schools, including elementary, secondary and post-secondary institutions. Such a pipeline is key as early engagement of students, as soon as the sixth grade, may improve high school and college completion rates (USDOE, 2000a). Often, outreach programs are offered at the secondary level when it is too late to intervene with students in need of academic support or who are at risk of failure. Partnerships fostering a strong kindergarten through sixteen plus pipeline is key as early integration of academic, social, and personal growth programs in collaboration with elementary and secondary schools can be an effective way to promote positive academic achievement outcomes and foster resilience in youth.

Furthermore, some elementary and secondary institutions have internal college readiness programs. Such interventions are implemented by the school and focus not only on a subpopulation, but serve as a school-wide effort to increase access to higher education. These internal college readiness programs focus on: college academic preparation, assistance from guidance counselors, and a college-going culture within the daily school environment (De La Rosa & Tierney, 2006; Stern, Dayton, & Raby, 2010). However, in the present study, participants described their school and program experiences separately, without a depiction of the two entities being intertwined. This is problematic as external programs, such as outreach interventions, often lack the benefit of being tied to a school's curricula (Holland & Hinton 2009). Not only do outreach programs benefit by a partnerships, but schools, as external programs often offer student-centered work, like small classes and college awareness activities. As a result of a partnership between schools and programs, a cultural change can occur that strengthens the kindergarten through sixteen plus pipeline and optimizes all resources to support students in college success.

In this study, participants described challenges adjusting to their new role of a college student, collegiate expectations, and navigating the post-secondary environment. In order to contribute to the kindergarten through sixteen plus pipeline, outreach programs and schools need to have strong partnerships with post-secondary institutions. Within an integrated system, educators can help students recognize similarities and differences between college and secondary education before they take the next step through the pipeline. As a result, a unified approach will be established in which practitioners from all entities can better track and support youth as they transition along the pipeline.

Participants throughout this study noted the importance of their various areas of support

—parent(s), program educators, peer mentors, university faculty and staff, and peers. In addition, social supports outside of the nuclear family can include individuals from faith-based organizations, recreational activities, work environment as well as neighborhoods. Educational organizations can benefit from bridging students' multiple "worlds." "Worlds" refers to cultural knowledge and behavior seen in families, peer groups, work, community organizations, and other settings (Phelan, Davidson, & Yu, 1996). When educational entities work with youth's various worlds, they can develop positive, reinforcing, and complimentary relationships resulting in a stronger support system that fosters resilience in under-represented youth. Examples of how educational agencies can bridge participants' worlds are: offering workshops to help parents learn how to support their student's school life and sponsor programs for grandparents or other adults to show them how to step in and display support for youth in their community or family unit. By creating a link between students' worlds, educational entities will be able to implement effective services aimed at enhancing the personal and environmental attributes of the student that promote college success for under-represented youth. Furthermore, utilizing an ecological perspective will make these support systems stronger and further assist under-represented youth in gaining access to and having success in post-secondary education (Orr et al., 2007).

In this study, participants described a lack of structured, continual communication and support from their outreach program while in college. In order to promote college degree attainment for under-represented youth, educational entities, such as outreach programs and schools, must communicate with students throughout their collegiate journey in order to learn about their students' challenges and successes, provide support, and gain valuable information on how to better enhance their strategies. In addition, these organizations will be able to focus on performance-based measures centering on college success. For example, through a continued

relationship with alumni, educational entities can gain information concerning students' first to second year retention rate, rate of transfer from two to four year institutions, college grade point average, credits earned and graduation rates (Orr et al., 2007). This, in turn, can assist these educational entities in the creation of best practices, while providing continued support to traditionally under-represented youth.

While this study focused on the Upward Bound program, the findings highlight lessons in regards to college access at large. Specifically, this study emphasizes the importance of creating stronger partnerships with elementary and secondary schools and post-secondary institutions to enhance the kindergarten through sixteen plus pipeline. This study's findings also points to the need of bridging students' multiple worlds in order to enhance personal and environmental attributes that can promote college success for under-represented youth. Lastly, this study points to the need of educational entities having structured, continued communication with alumni in order to obtain valuable data concerning participants' post-secondary experiences and to establish a set of best practices for college access and success interventions.

Limitations and Future Research

While this study provides insight on the first year experience of precollege outreach alumni, limitations do exist. This study included alumni of Upward Bound programs, who through interviews and journals, shared their first year acclimation experience. While the study provides insight as to how Upward Bound contributes to alumni's college transition and resiliency, it is not a reflection of all precollege outreach programs' efforts. The study's sample was limited to students who participated in Upward Bound sites in the state of Louisiana. Through the recruitment process, ten alumni participated from four sites in Louisiana. A

limitation of this study is the amount of sites that were represented. Future research should be conducted with Upward Bound alumni from all sites in Louisiana to illustrate an in-depth analysis of Upward Bound's efforts' in building resilience and promoting a successful college transition.

Another limitation of this study is the sampling method. While purposeful sampling is a common method for choosing participants, a sampling bias may have occurred due to the fact that students were not randomly chosen for inclusion. Thus, a self-selection bias may have existed because alumni chose to participate (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003; Onwuegbuzie, Jiao, & Bostick, 2004). To address this, when contacting the potential participants, the researcher emphasized that the data collected would be utilized to create best practices for college success. While the researcher reached out to over thirty TRIO program administrators to help recruit participation, often these administrators had sporadic and limited contact with alumni post-program. Participants described a desire for continued structured support from Upward Bound in college that was not present. As a result, relying on program administrators to assist in the recruitment of alumni for the study was not optimal. To overcome this issue, the researcher asked participants to refer friends to the study. Two of the ten participants were gained via snowball sampling. The researcher also contacted Student Affairs administrators at various colleges requesting them to share the opportunity. One of the ten participants was recruited via this means. While this was not the initial method of recruiting participant, it was beneficial as it diversified participants. In utilizing means outside of purposeful sampling, the study included students that were not recommended via a program administrator and may have contributed different perspectives of the program, specifically those that were not in line with the viewpoints of his or her program administrator. Another limitation of this study is that only one of the ten

students identified as male. In a 2001 national study, just under two-thirds (64%) of Upward Bound participants were female (Cahalan & Curtin, 2004). Furthermore, in a national study prepared for the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education, and Federal TRIO programs, approximately 79.1 percent of female UB participants had evidence of postsecondary enrollment, while the postsecondary enrollment rate for UB male participants was 73.9 percent (Knapp, Heuer, & Mason, 2008). While there maybe more female participants in Upward Bound as well as more UB female participants attending post-secondary institutions, future research should include more male participation. The researcher also identified that some participants belonged to subpopulations, for example students with disabilities, transfer students, and first generation college students. Future research should be conducted in each of the subpopulations to determine if any additional variables exist. Lastly, in regards to the sample, ten Upward Bound alumni participated in the initial interview, but only three of the original ten students completed the journal activity. Thus, between the initial and follow up interviews as well as the journaling process, participant attrition occurred.

While a longitudinal study of Upward Bound alumni would be optimal, due to the time restriction of the current study this was not possible. As a result, interviews and journals did not focus on the entire collegiate experience, but the year that has been deemed as the most crucial to overall college success: the first year of college. Another limitation is that when being interviewed or journaling, participants may have solely provided socially desirable answers to questions, rather than an accurate depiction of their experience (Creswell, 2005). In the hopes to combat these biases, the researcher verified confidentiality and emphasized to participants the importance of such research in enhancing programs and student success in college. In future research, it would be beneficial to include students who participated in Upward Bound, but did

not complete the program; students who completed the program, but did not attend college; as well as students who were never in Upward Bound. This would provide additional insight concerning Upward Bound's ability to foster resiliency as well as success post-program in the first year at a post-secondary institution.

This current study took a phenomenological approach to reveal insight concerning Upward Bound alumni's first year acclimation process and resilience. Ungar (2003) argues that qualitative methods are especially relevant to resilience research because they are:

Well-suited to the discovery of unnamed processes; they study the phenomenon in very specific contexts, their trustworthiness strengthened by the thickness of the description of that context; they elicit and add power to minority 'voices' which account for unique localized definitions of positive outcomes; they promote tolerance for these localized constructions by avoiding generalization in favor of transferability; and they require the researchers to account for the bias inherent in the social location. (p. 86)

While a qualitative approach was optimal for this study, future research should be conducted concerning Upward Bound alumni's resiliency and the first year of college that combines both a qualitative and quantitative approaches. In regards to studying resiliency, there is a long standing body of research using quantitative and qualitative research methods, however, these methods are commonly implemented independent and in isolation of one another. Future studies using mixed methods approach may reconcile the methodological challenges of both qualitative and quantitative methods. As indicated by Creswell and Clark (2011), "the intent in using this design is to bring together the differing strengths and nonoverlapping weaknesses of quantitative (large samples, size, trends, generalization) with those of qualitative methods (small sample,

details, in depth)” (p. 77). Resilience research, specifically within the context of educational settings, can be furthered through the use of a mixed methods design that contextualizes students’ experiences through the combination of both numbers and voices.

This study focuses on Upward Bound alumni’s experiences of resilience and their first year college acclimation process. Future research should be conducted to study resilience psychologically, biologically, environmentally and socially (Almedom & Glandon, 2007; Kim-Cohen, 2007; Smolka et al., 2007). Due to various systems involved in determining resilience, Kim-Cohen (2007) argued that it is important to study resilience at levels of analysis ranging from the molecular to the behavioral to the cultural and how these levels may intersect. Research on all of these levels is needed to increase educators’ understanding of resilience. Not only is future research needed on various levels, but also in regards to possible cumulative effects of protective factors. Howard et al. (1999) suggest that both risks and protective factors may have cumulative effects on individuals’ lives. Furthermore, the more protective factors that are present in a child’s life, the more likely they are to display resilience” (Howard et al., 1999, p. 310). Future research should be conducted to determine if a certain combination of factors or if specific factors exist that are more optimal in resilience.

It is also important to note that some researchers contend that resilience may not have a positive effect on youth in every situation (Decker & Haase, 2005; Haase, 1997; Higgins, 1994; Valliant, 1993), or if left unchecked, may become an unhealthy state (Hunter, 2001; Hunter & Chandler, 1999). Rigsby (1994) argued the strong individualistic image of success gives the impression that anyone can get ahead and that there is equal opportunity to do so. Furthermore, that one can always “get it together” and that disadvantages are for the individual to overcome. He continues to argue that assumptions about success may lead to linear, simplistic predictions

about risk; therefore, drawing the attention away from the interaction of people, context, and opportunities. Upward Bound programs must be wary of focusing too heavily on this individualistic image of success. Future research should be conducted to shed light on programs ability to foster resilience as well as possible negative effects of this focus on building resilience.

Lastly, to further understanding college access and post-secondary success, there is a need to study this topic from the perspectives of administrators, educators, tutors, guides of Upward Bound as well as parents of participants. All stakeholders' perspectives should be considered when studying the issue of college student access and success. These additional perceptions could potentially reveal strengths, weaknesses and opportunities pertaining outreach programs, resilience building, and the college transition. Understanding all stakeholders' perspectives will aid in implementing changes in practices to enhance participants' college degree completion.

This study has assisted in filling in the gaps in the knowledge base by providing findings concerning the first year experiences of outreach alumni (Burkheimer, Riccobono, & Wisenbaker, 1979; Domina, 2009; Gandara, 2002; Myers et al., 2004; Swail & Perna, 2002). The current study has theoretical implications, shedding light on the role of resilience and the protective factors in alumni's first year experience (Brendtro & Longhurst, 2005; Gardynik & McDonald, 2005; Garmezy & Streitman, 1974; Howard, Dryden, & Johnson, 1999; Lugg & Boyd, 1993; Luthar & Zelazo, 2003; Masten, 1994; Morales & Trotman, 2004; Rutter, 1993). Most importantly, this study has implications on practice and policy. This study provides leaders with insight concerning alumni's first year experiences and their perceptions of the intervention's impact on their transition. Such information, for educational leaders of outreach programs, is key in enhancing program practices and fostering college success. Through this study, post-

secondary administrators can acquire information on how they can fortify retention initiatives to assist students in transitioning into a four-year institution. Overall, this research sheds light on outreach program alumni's first year acclimation process, building upon current theory and research as well as providing educational leaders insight on the experiences that can aid in the successful college transition.

Conclusion

As a result of the educational attainment gap in the United States, precollege outreach programs have been established to provide resources for underrepresented youth to aid them in completing a post-secondary degree. This study provides alumni perceptions of the impact of Upward Bound in assisting them in successfully transitioning into a post-secondary institution. The present study is also an investigation into student perceptions of whether or not Upward Bound nurtures factors of resiliency that empower a student to embrace constructive responses to stressors in the first year of college. A qualitative design was used to gather data and gain in-depth details about students' experiences. From the data collected, the researcher identified four essential features of their experience: 1) Program Connections as External Factors, 2) Connections as External Factors in the College Setting, 3) Determination, Self-Advocacy and Willingness to Try New Things as Internal Protective Factors, and 4) Nurturing College Knowledge. Through the findings, the study sheds light on how Upward Bound services in Louisiana can nurture external and internal protective factors that assist participants in embracing constructive responses to stressors in the first year of college. Through this study, suggested improvements and recommendations for Upward Bound have been shared as well as the potential of educational organizations to create an environment conducive to developing resiliency within students. In addressing these areas, programs can become degree attainment

interventions, and not solely college access strategies. Most importantly, as a result of this study, leaders in secondary and post-secondary education as well as policymakers are able to gain insight concerning multiple protective efforts that can be utilized to better address the college acclimation process of underrepresented first year students.

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Appendix A

LETTER OF CONSENT FOR ADULTS

Dear _____:

I am a Student Affairs administrator and a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership Department at the University of New Orleans. I am conducting a dissertation research study with my professor, Dr. Brian Beabout. The purpose of the research is to discover new information about the experience of Upward Bound Alumni during their first year of college and their perceived impact of the outreach program. Through the data collected, the results might influence educational practices in precollege outreach programs in order better assist alumni during their transition into college.

I am requesting your participation, which will involve two interviews with me that will last about one hour each and two journal entries. Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose to participant, you will receive a ten-dollar gift card for each interview and journal entry. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty and gift cards will not need to be returned. The results of the research study may be published, but your name will not be used.

Although there may be no direct benefit to you, the possible benefit of your participation is that it informs others about Upward Bound alumni's first year college experience and their perceptions of the impact of the program. The research is beneficial because it will shed light on best practices in precollege outreach programs.

The risk associated with partaking in this study is minimal. If you have any questions concerning the research study, please contact me or Dr. Brian Beabout.

Sincerely,

Dale O'Neill
504-813-6865
oneillde@gmail.com

By signing below you are giving consent to participate in the above study.

Signature

Printed NameDate

If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, please contact Dr. Brian Beabout at the University of New Orleans: 504-280-7388 or bbeabout@uno.edu.

Appendix B

“First Year Transition and Resilience of Outreach Alumni”

Preliminary Demographic and Background Questions:

You have the option to decline to answer any of these questions by simply leaving the space blank.

Demographic Information:

1. What year were you born?
2. What is your sex?
3. How do you describe yourself?

Black or African American

White – Caucasian (non-Hispanic)

Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

Latino or Hispanic

Asian or Asian American

Other - _____

College Information:

4. What university do you attend?
5. Are you a commuter or residential student?
6. What is your major?

7. How many academic hours are you currently enrolled in?
8. How many academic hours have you completed in college?
9. If you feel comfortable to share, what is your current cumulative college GPA?
10. Along with attending school full-time, are you also employed? If yes, what type of work do you do?
11. Are you involved with any extra-curricular activities? If so, what are they?

High School Information:

12. If you feel comfortable to share, what is your cumulative high school GPA?
13. What was your highest score on the SAT or ACT test (combine only your math and verbal scores) _____.
14. At what program site did you participate in Upward Bound?
15. How long did you participate in Upward Bound?
16. At what age and academic year did you participate in Upward Bound?

Appendix C

One-on-One Interview Protocol

Introduction

Hi (insert student's name), thank you for volunteering to meet with me today. I am conducting a dissertation research study. The purpose of the research is to discover new information about Upward Bound Alumni's first year college transition and their perceived impact of the Upward Bound program. Today, I will ask you questions concerning your first year college transition, experience in Upward Bound, and your ability to overcome life stressors. Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty. The results of the research study may be published, but your name will not be used. Your responses will be confidential. The risk associated with partaking in this study is minimal. Do you have any questions concerning the study? (pause for response)

Okay, I will be recording today's interview in order to accurately translate your responses. Are you okay with that? (pause for response)

Before we get started, I would like for you to complete this consent form and this demographic questionnaire. I would like to give you some time to read through both forms and if you have any questions please feel free to ask.

(Once student has completed paperwork) Okay, let's get started.

Interview Questions

Overview of Outreach Program

1. Tell me about your upward bound experience. Tell me what a typical day was like attending the outreach program
2. How did the precollege outreach program recruit you for participation?
3. Describe the staff members of the outreach program.
4. How were your parents involved with the program?
5. Describe your relationship with the other participants.

Outcomes of Program in relation to Transition

1. Describe yourself before being a participant of Upward Bound. What kind of high schooler were you?
2. Describe yourself after Upward Bound during your freshman year.
3. What traits or characteristics do you have that helped you with your transition into college?
4. What traits or characteristics do you wish you would have had to help you with your transition?

Sources of Support and Overall View of Program

1. Describe your relationship with the outreach program now?
2. Do you have any last thoughts you would like to add concerning Upward Bound?

College Transition Experience

1. What was your first semester like?
2. What did you do when you are not in class?

Appendix D

Follow-Up Interview Protocol

Introduction

Hi (insert student's name), thank you for volunteering to meet with me again today. I am conducting a dissertation research study. The purpose of the research is to discover new information about Upward Bound Alumni's first year college transition and their perceived impact of the Upward Bound program. Today, I will ask you questions concerning your first year college transition, experience in Upward Bound, and your ability to overcome life stressors. Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty. The results of the research study may be published, but your name will not be used. Your responses will be confidential. The risk associated with partaking in this study is minimal. Do you have any questions concerning the study? (pause for response)

Okay, I will be recording today's interview in order to accurately translate your responses. Are you okay with that? (Pause for response)

Okay, let's get started.

Interview Questions

Overview of Outreach Program

1. Do you have any thoughts you would like to clarify concerning Upward Bound, life stressors or your college transition from the previous interview?
2. Describe your experience, both the academic and social aspect of the program, in this outreach program.

College Transition Experience

Tell me about your first year of college.

1. Describe your relationship with faculty during your freshman year. With staff? With your peers? With your family?
2. Overall, describe your participation in the program and its relationship to your college transition.

Outcomes of Program in relation to Transition

1. What challenges did you face during your first year of college?
2. Did your experience in Upward Bound assist you when faced with these challenges? If so how? If not, why?
3. Describe some of your proudest moments of your freshman year?
4. Describe your participation in the program and its relationship to any stressors that you have had during your freshman year.

Sources of Support and Overall View of Program

1. If I had the director of the program here, what would you tell him or her that the program did really well?
2. What would you tell the director that the program could do better?
3. If you had to give advice to a present participant of the program, what would you tell him or her?
4. Do you have any additional comments that you would like to share concerning Upward Bound, life stressors or your college transition?

Appendix E

Directions for Participant Journal Entries

Hi (insert student's name), thank you for your continued participation in this study on the first year transition of Upward Bound alumni. The purpose of the research is to discover new information about Upward Bound Alumni's first year college transition and their perceived impact of the Upward Bound program. Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty. The results of the research study may be published, but your name will not be used. Your responses will be confidential for both the interviews as well as journal entry. The risk associated with partaking in this study is minimal. Below you will see directions for your entry as well as a prompt for this journal.

- Please write thoughtfully and openly, and do not feel intimidated by any errors you might make.
- Provide examples when possible.
- When describing your feelings and thoughts about your college transition as a past Upward Bound participant, don't be afraid to include both positive and negative experiences.
- Write as much as you please.

Please do not hesitate to contact with me with any questions or concerns! Thank you!

Journal Entry:

- Describe your participation in the Upward Bound program and its relationship to your college transition.
- What challenges have you faced during your first year of college? Did your experience in Upward Bound assist you when faced with these challenges? If so how? If not, why?
- What successes have you had during your first year of college? Did your experience in Upward Bound assist you in any of your success of your first year of college? If so how? If not, why?
- What do you see as the greatest obstacle facing students like yourself?
- Overall, describe your participation in the program and its relationship to any life stressors that you may have faced during your freshman year.
- What advice do you believe would help other Upward Bound alumni who are transitioning into the college setting?

Vita

The author was born in New Orleans, Louisiana. She obtained her Bachelor's degree in Psychology from Saint Louis University in 2006. She completed her Master's of Arts degree in College Student Personnel from Saint Louis University in 2009. She gained employment within Student Affairs at the University of New Orleans in 2009. In 2010, while employed at the university, she joined the University of New Orleans education graduate program to pursue a Ph.D. in Educational Administration.