

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I give thanks to God for giving me strength for this journey. Thanks to my husband and best friend for always listening and calling me Dr. Hill long before I started this journey. Without his support, I could not have remained focused and grounded during this process. Thanks for believing in me.

Thanks to my committee members for their encouraging words, lifting me up when I needed them most. Jackie, as my instructor for my bachelor's degree, it has been such an honor to have you take part in my doctoral studies. Thanks to Dr. Bentley who brought to life, over and over again this quote by Guillaume Apollinaire: “‘Come to the edge.’ ‘We can't. We're afraid.’ ‘Come to the edge.’ ‘We can't. We will fall!’ ‘Come to the edge.’ And they came. And he pushed them. And they flew.”

DEDICATION

To my three children, Trevon, Moriah and Bryson, I took on this journey as an example that education is important. With education, vision, and purpose, you can reach your dreams, change your destiny, and change your part of the world in the process.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	x
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	2
Role of the Community College	3
Community Colleges: The Current State.....	5
The Issue: The Achievement Gap for Underrepresented Students.....	5
Rationale for the Study	7
Purpose of the Study	9
Research Questions	10
Definition of Terms.....	11
Significance of the Study	13
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	14
Underrepresented College Students	14
First-Generation College Students (FGCS)	14
Ethnic Minority Students	16
Low-Income Students	18
College and Career Readiness	19
Developmental Education.....	20
Self-Efficacy and Resiliency.....	23
Coaching	25
Coaching Models	27
Goal, Reality, Opportunity, Willpower Model	27

Coaching and Self-Efficacy	29
Other Potential Remedies for Barriers to College Entry and Persistence.....	34
Concluding Remarks.....	36
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY	37
Qualitative Research Design.....	38
Social Constructivist Perspective.....	39
Phenomenological Qualitative Research Approach.....	39
Positive Psychology Theoretical Framework	40
Assumptions.....	42
Role of the Researcher	42
Selection of Research Subjects	44
Methods of Data Collection	45
Semi-structured Interviews and Appreciative Inquiry	46
Data Analysis	47
Trustworthiness of the Findings.....	50
Ethical Considerations	51
Limitations	52
Concluding Remarks.....	52
CHAPTER FOUR: PROFILES OF PARTICIPANTS.....	54
Introduction of the Participants.....	54
Anne	56
Benny	58
Carmen.....	59

David.....	60
Ethan	61
Frank	62
Genie.....	63
Heidi.....	64
Ike	65
Jenna	67
Kayla.....	68
Concluding Remarks.....	69
CHAPTER FIVE: THEMATIC ANALYSIS	70
Motivations for Attending College	71
Motivation from a Family Member	72
Desire for a Better Life	74
Tuition/Financial Aid Incentives	77
Challenges Faced by Underrepresented Students	80
Lack of Financial Resources and Awareness of Financial Aid	81
Trying to Balance Their School, Work, and Personal Lives	83
Contributing Factors for Overcoming Challenges and their Success	86
Creating Relationships with Career Coach	87
Personal Attributes: Self-Efficacy, Self-Confidence, and Determination as Indicators of Success.....	89
Family and Other Influential People.....	91
Early College and Career Planning.....	94

Career Coach Support While Navigating the College Transition.....	96
Career Coaching Support While in College.....	97
Helped to Select a Major and Get on the Right Path	98
Concluding Remarks.....	102
CHAPTER SIX: SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND	
REFLECTIONS	103
Summary of the Study	103
Discussion of the Findings.....	105
Motivations	105
Challenges.....	107
Contributing Factors to Overcoming Challenges and for Their Success.....	108
Career Coaching Support While Navigating the College Transition.....	111
College and Career Readiness	112
Implications and Recommendations for Educators	113
Appreciative Inquiry Career Coach Model.....	115
Recommendations for Future Study	117
Reflections and Finale.....	119
References.....	122
APPENDIX A.....	142
APPENDIX B	143
APPENDIX C	144

List of Tables

Table 1. Coaching Using the GROW Model 29

Table 2. Universal Virtues of Positive Psychology Theory..... 41

Table 3. Modified van Kaam Method of Analysis 48

Table 4. Participant Demographic Information 56

Table 5. Participants’ Motivations for Attending College..... 72

Table 6. Challenges Faced by Underrepresented Students 82

Table 7. Contributing Factors for Overcoming Challenges and for Their Success 87

Table 8. Career Coach Support While Navigating the College Transition..... 96

Abstract

This study examines the lived experiences of underrepresented college students who participated in a career coaching program while in high school and now attend a local community college in the Southeast. The purpose of this research study is to understand how career coaching and other internal and external factors influenced the beliefs, motivations, academic success, career goals, and self-efficacy of these underrepresented students. This qualitative study used a phenomenological approach, specifically a social constructionism perspective, and semi-structured interview research design. Using an Appreciative Inquiry (AI) interview technique, students who have successfully completed one year of college were chosen as participants for this study. Four themes emerged: Motivations for Attending College, Challenges Faced by Underrepresented Students, Contributing Factors for Overcoming Challenges and Their Success, and Career Coach Support While Navigating the College Transition. The Appreciative Inquiry Career Coach Model, a five-step process, has been developed for underrepresented student populations based upon their specific needs and perspectives. The insights and results of this study can be used by high school and postsecondary administrators, counselors, faculty, and career coaches to re-examine current best practices, assess the influence of career coaching programs on individual students, and launch services specifically designed for underrepresented student populations based upon their specific needs and perspectives.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

In the United States, there is a crisis in the American Higher Education system. Even though the number of underrepresented students has increased, “problems of persistence, access to some fields and disciplines, and related issues continue” (Smith, Altbach, & Lomotey, 2002, p. xvi). As educators, the question must be asked, “What action steps can be taken to propel the United States to its original level of providing the highest quality education to its students?” Also, in an effort to expedite the process, “How can we better serve underrepresented students – or those who are low-income, ethnic minority, and/or first-generation college students?” Ensuring the success of more underrepresented students may be one key element to accomplishing this goal.

Improving graduation rates for underrepresented student populations is one of several weighty issues facing United States Higher Education (USHE) today, particularly since there is an increasing number of underrepresented students entering its doors. The United States is aggressively bidding to regain the top spot as a nation that produces high-quality graduates. A significant market worth focusing on is underrepresented students populations. There have been several decades of research leading to best practices for working with underrepresented student populations. There are many successful programs – from mentoring to the Department of Education’s federally funded TRIO programs – that have documented successes; however, they tend to be small in scale and reach a limited number of students. Kirst, Venezia, and Antonio (2003), in their report *Betraying the College Dream*, suggest creating an awareness that entry into college is much easier

than success in college. The authors make the recommendation to “expand the focus of local, state and federal programs from access to college to include access to success in college – access to the resources and information students need to prepare well for college and to make informed decisions” (p. 3).

Statement of the Problem

Less than one-third of new students entering two-year community colleges nationwide achieve “completion—either through a certificate, an associate degree or transfer to a four-year college—within four years. The success rate was lower, 24 percent, for underrepresented minorities, identified as Blacks, Latinos and Native Americans; it was higher, 38 percent, for other students. Only 7 percent of minority students who entered community colleges received a bachelor’s degree within 10 years” (National Association of System Heads, 2009, p. 11). Furthermore, according to Lam, Doverspike, and Mawasaha (1997), ethnic minorities, especially African Americans, remain underrepresented in a number of occupations, including those which are identified as high-technology areas.

Engineering is one such profession where African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans have been traditionally underrepresented. According to Yelamarth and Mawasha (2008), in the United States only 12.6 percent of all the first professional degrees awarded in 2001 were granted to underrepresented minorities compared to 73 percent for Whites (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010). Also, 17.7 percent of the bachelor’s degrees awarded in science and engineering are to underrepresented minorities compared to approximately 65 percent for Whites (National Science Center, 2012). In addition, “the dropout rates for students from underrepresented minorities in

science, technology, engineering and mathematics or STEM fields are significantly higher than other groups. This demonstrates a need for greater efforts to prepare students in STEM fields” (p. 5). According to Hrabowski (2011), the number of students who start in a natural science major and graduate within five years was 20 percent for Blacks and Hispanics; 32 percent for Whites; and 42 percent for Asians. The National Science Foundation (2012), stated: “In 2009, underrepresented minority students (Blacks, Hispanics, and American Indians/Alaska Natives) made up 12 percent of students enrolled in graduate Science and Engineering programs, with Asian/Pacific Islanders representing 6 percent and Whites 48 percent”. By not assisting this large group of potential students, there is a loss of possible talent and cultural capital to our country.

The Illinois Board of Higher Education established guidelines in Public Act 85-283 that directs public institutions of higher education in Illinois to develop initiatives and implement plans to increase the participation and achievement of minorities, women, and individuals with disabilities who traditionally have been underrepresented in higher education. To increase community college graduation rates among underrepresented students in high demand occupations, the following recommendations have been made by the Illinois Board of Higher Education (2009): (a) increase success of students at each age of the P-20 education pipeline to eliminate achievement gaps by race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status; (b) implement “learn and earn” opportunities for all students pursuing high demand occupations; and (c) increase on-line curriculum and courses.

Role of the Community College: The American Graduation Initiative

The current Obama administration believes providing a high-quality education is key to addressing many of the country’s challenges. To that end, the administration has

developed a plan for higher education that addresses many of the concerns faced by the nation. The Obama Administration believes restoring America's leadership in higher education is the focus. In a speech presented at Macomb Community College in 2009, Obama declared:

Our competitiveness abroad depends on opening the doors of higher education for more of America's students. The U.S. ranks seventh in terms of the percentage of 18-24 year olds enrolled in college, but only 15th in terms of the number of certificates and degrees awarded. A lack of financial resources should never obstruct the promise of college opportunity. And it is America's shared responsibility to ensure that more of our students not only reach the doors of college, but also persist, succeed, and obtain their degree. (Obama, 2009, para. 23)

President Obama's strategy could significantly impact the future of higher education. In his FY 2010 budget, he made "a historic commitment to increasing college access and success by restructuring and dramatically expanding financial aid, while making federal programs simpler, more reliable, and more efficient" (White House, 2009, para. 25). President Obama also has created the *American Graduation Initiative*, which enables:

Community colleges to innovate and expand successful programs that improve educational and employment outcomes. It is designed to get more students to complete a degree, especially one in a high job growth area. It would also fund forward-thinking strategies to increase graduation rates and develop new online, open-source courses as educational pathways for students. (Mellow, 2009, para. 3)

In his remarks at Macomb Community College, President Obama affirmed a commitment to:

An additional 5 million community college degrees and certificates by 2020 and new steps to ensure that those credentials will help graduates get ahead in their careers. Not since the passage of the original GI Bill and the work of President Truman's Commission on Higher Education, which doubled the number of community colleges and increased by sevenfold enrollment in those colleges, have we taken such a historic step on behalf of community colleges in America. (Mellow, 2009, para. 13)

Community Colleges: The Current State

According to the American Association of Community Colleges (2011), community colleges awarded about 932,600 associate degrees and occupational certificates for the year 2007-2008. To meet the president's goal, it is estimated that community colleges will have to increase the number of associate degree and certificate graduates by at least 280,000 per year on average over the next 10 years, an annual increase of 33 percent over the current rate (Bailey & Jenkins, 2009). According to Chen (2008),

Community colleges are a source of economic growth because they provide an educated and skilled workforce that improves the quality of life for individual students, communities, and the nation. Community college students are often the first member of their family to attend college. The community college education and training offers these students economic opportunities. (para. 4)

The Issue: Achievement Gap for Underrepresented Students

Despite the national attention and numerous research studies focused on improving college going rates for underrepresented students, disparities remain. In 2008, about 70 percent of White, 62 percent of Hispanic, and 56 percent of all high school graduates enrolled in college within 12 months of graduation (Baum, Ma, & Payee, 2010). The Illinois Board of Higher Education (2009) contends the nation suffers:

A significant disparity in academic achievement and educational attainment affecting racial and ethnic minority students. This gap shows up early and worsens as students move through or fall out of the education pipeline. Disparities in reading and math scores in the fourth grade worsen or improve marginally by eighth grade for African Americans and Hispanics compared to whites. Fewer low-income students are entering college, and between 1999 and 2006, the participation rate dropped 5 percent for low-income students. (p. 13) Kirwan (2009), chancellor of the Maryland university system, commented on the

achievement gap by calling it “not just a competitiveness issues for our nation, it is also a

civil rights issue of our day” (as cited in de Vise, 2009, para. 9). Underrepresented students experience a gap not only in terms of disparities in academic achievement but also in terms of the educational and income level of their parents. Baum et al. (2010) reported among students entering public flagship universities in 1999 that:

After adjusting for student characteristics and parental education level, the gap in graduation rates between students from the highest-income families and students from the lowest-income families declined from 13 percent to 6 percent. Among students from the highest-income families, 83percent graduated within six years; among those from the lowest-income families, 70 percent graduated within six years. In addition, after considering differences in high school GPA, SAT®, or ACT scores, state residency status, race or ethnicity, gender, university attended, and family income), the gap between students whose parents had a bachelor’s degree and students whose parents had no college declined from 10 percent to 6 percent. (p. 40)

A strategy to eliminate the achievement gap, as recommended in the *Illinois Public Agenda for Career and College Success (2009)*, is to “improve college readiness through curriculum alignment, access to quality preschools, postsecondary and high school partnerships, and links between student financial aid and a demanding high school curriculum” (p. 7). The following actions steps were recommended and are applicable to increasing graduation rates in community colleges among underrepresented populations:

1. Align a rigorous P-12 curriculum with college and workplace competence and expectations through participating in the American Diploma Project (ADP).
2. Improve access to quality preschool education for all students through the creation of a school-readiness assessment tool.
3. Increase the number of high-quality P-12 teachers and school leaders in low-performing schools.
4. Reduce remediation for recent high school graduates through stronger postsecondary/high school partnerships for early identification and corrections of gaps in knowledge and skills.
5. Increase high-quality dual-credit opportunities for all high school students, including implementation of early college high schools.
6. Support secondary/postsecondary program alignment through implementation of Perkins Program of Study, a major federal grant program for career technical education designed to reduce remediation and increase attainment of postsecondary degrees and certificates.

7. Increase the number of summer science, technology, engineering, and mathematics or STEM programs that prepare students for careers in engineering. (IBHE, 2009, p. 15)

Rationale for the Study

Most studies cover underrepresented student populations in the context of best practices; however, there are few studies that examine factors affecting the beliefs of underrepresented student populations that support current best practices. Coaching and career coaching has been studied primarily with executives or working adults rather than as it relates to the success of underrepresented students. Coaching is the process of working with a professional to develop and progress towards meaningful goals, facilitate positive change, and stimulate personal growth (Hudson, 1999). Career coaching, on the other hand, is the process of helping high school students prepare for college and careers.

According to Compton (2005), there is a positive relationship between coaching and achievement. From the theory of positive psychology, where the strengths and virtues that enable individuals and communities to thrive are explored and where coaches “find and nurture genius and talent” (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), it is believed that coaching can be successful in helping underrepresented populations boost academic performance. According to Cavanagh and Palmer (2007), both coaching and positive psychology are “committed to helping people lead more productive and fulfilling lives, and both seek to nurture the development of strengths, and are committed to the development of theory and practice in ways which extend beyond the remediation of deficit” (p. 3).

According to Venezia, Kirst, and Antonio (2003), the majority of middle and high school students intend to enter into some type of postsecondary education after high school graduation. The national average of students enrolling in college for 2000 was

56.7 percent (National Information Center for Higher Education Policymaking and Analysis, 2002). Kirst and Venezia (2003) affirmed that “students have high expectations for college-going, but state policies and practices send them mixed signals and are therefore ill-equipped to superintend the difficult transition that students must undergo to enter into postsecondary education” (p. 4). Often teachers, who are not adequately prepared, rather than counselors, have taken an active role in helping students prepare for higher education.

The Virginia Community College System (VCCS) has taken an innovative approach; it offers career coaching to students in secondary schools. During the 2009-2010 school year, career coaches served in 155 high schools across Virginia reaching over 38,000 students. The purpose of the program is:

Empowering students to make informed decisions about their career and educational plans and to prepare students for success in postsecondary education and training. While the day-to-day functions of a career coach vary according to local needs, major responsibilities include facilitating the development of individual career plans and portfolios, administering and providing interpretation of career assessments, such as the Virginia Education Wizard, relating information on careers, career pathways, and related employment, connecting students to early college programs such as Tech Prep and Dual-enrollment, and easing the transition of students from high school to postsecondary education and the skilled workforce. (Virginia Community College System, 2011, para. 4)

According to Kang, (2010) over 22,842 students were enrolled in community college courses from high schools with career coaches. In addition, 14,037 students were enrolled in dual enrollment courses from the same high schools (26% of 11 – 12th grade population). Thirty-two percent of total graduates from high schools with a career coach graduated and enrolled in a community college.

In an effort to attract and retain underrepresented students in higher education, traditional programs typically focus on negative factors or what is wrong. Underrepresented students have often been labeled as “at risk”. What would happen if federal, local, state, and educational leaders would focus on the positive aspects of this segment and term underrepresented students “an-opportunity”? Clifton and Anderson (2002) have argued that traditional retention programs focusing on remediation and deficits fail because a student’s deficiency is the main focus. Williams and Butler’s (2002) research on hope and first-generation college students found "traditionally based retention programs focus on students’ insufficiencies and often fail because the focus is on remedial issues, defects, and academic shortcomings” (p. 1). Likewise, Clifton and Anderson (2002) believe successful retention programs should focus on strengths rather than deficits.

Positive psychology interventions for college students that focus on hope and well-being can increase measures of hope, life purpose, and vocational calling (Feldman & Dreher, 2012). Additionally, Howell (2010) found using an appreciative advising approach: (a) increased the utilization of one’s strengths, skills, and talents; (b) provided a framework for more effective advising; (c) enabled a stronger advisor/student relationship; and (d) positively affected relationships outside of the advisor/student relationship with co-workers, family, friends and other constituents.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the lived experiences of underrepresented college students who participated in a career coaching program while in high school and now attend a local community college in the Southeast. The researcher

examined, from a social constructionist perspective, how career coaching, life experiences, and personal qualities influenced their motivations, academic success, and self-efficacy. Students who have successfully completed one year of college were chosen as participants for this study. With the enormous amount of the local, national, and state attention given to underrepresented student populations succeeding in higher education, it is necessary to examine the attitudes, beliefs, experiences, and perceptions about higher education attainment from students themselves. This study explored, in the participants' own words, using a strengths perspective, what works best for underrepresented students to help them obtain success in higher education. For the purposes of this study, success was defined as students who successfully transitioned from high school to the community college and completed their first year with at least 24 credit hours and a GPA of 2.0 or higher.

Research Questions

This study explored how career coaching, life experiences, and personal qualities influence underrepresented college students' motivation academic success, and self-efficacy beliefs. The aim in this study was to learn how a small group of underrepresented college students navigated a successful transition into higher education, sustained involvement, and remained focused in their pursuit of college throughout their freshman year. Using a qualitative, phenomenological approach, this study examined the attitudes and perceptions of underrepresented college students and the meaning they attribute to their lived experiences. The study answered the grand tour research question: How have career coaching and other internal and external factors influenced the beliefs, motivations, academic success, career goals, and self-efficacy of underrepresented

college students? Grand tour is a term used by Creswell, (2007) and McCaslin and Scott (2003) to explain the main research question. It blends together “the primary colors of the problem statement and the purpose of the study in a harmonious composition.

(McCaslin & Scott, 2003, p. 452). The following sub-questions include:

- (1) What are their perceptions and beliefs about higher education attainment and academic success?
- (2) From their perspective, what challenges have they faced and how did they overcome these challenges to graduate from high school and enroll and persist through their first year of college?
- (3) From their perspective, what attitudes and personal and college experiences contributed positively to their beliefs, motivations, academic success, and entry into and success in college?
- (4) In what ways has their career coaching experience in high school influenced their beliefs, motivations, academic success, career goals and self-efficacy?

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, I will be defining these terms as such:

1. *Appreciative inquiry*: The “the coevolutionary search for the best in people, their organizations, and the relevant world around them” (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005, p. 3).
2. *Career coaching*: The student-centered process of helping high school students prepare for college and careers using three foundational pillars: administration and marketing, core coaching, and career consulting. (Virginia Community College System, 2009).

3. *Coaching*: The process of working with a professional to develop and progress towards meaningful goals, facilitate positive change and stimulate personal growth (Hudson, 1999).
4. *Ethnic minority students*: A subgroup with social, religious, ethnic, racial, or other characteristics that differ from those of the majority of the population (VandenBos, 2006, as cited in Olive, 2009, p. 6).
5. *First-generation college student (FGCS)*: A student who neither parent has earned a bachelor's degree, which is the definition used by the U.S. Department of Education. Also, the shorter term, first-generation student, will be used in this study.
6. *Low-income students*: A student eligible to receive the federal Pell grant.
7. *Self-efficacy*: People's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives (Bandura, 1994).
8. *Strengths perspective*: Foundation of positive psychology that identifies and emphasizes people's strengths, resiliency, and resources (Resiliency Initiatives, 2011).
9. *Success*: Students who successfully transitioned from high school to the community college and completed their first year with at least 24 credit hours and a GPA of 2.0 or higher.
10. *Underrepresented student populations*: Those enrolled in college who are low-income, ethnic minority, and/or first-generation students. (Spradlin, Rutkowski, Burroughs, & Lang, 2010).

Significance of the Study

Over the years numerous educational commissions have provided recommendations for underrepresented student populations but one might ask: “Are the recommendations made based on the perceptions and beliefs of underrepresented students?” There are many books, articles, and studies on the persistence, retention, and success of underrepresented student populations. The literature discusses the significant struggles of underrepresented students and the need for collaboration and leadership support on college campuses, and at the local and national levels. The literature primarily focuses on helpful support strategies for student success from a deficit perspective. However, there is limited research addressing the best practices for successful student persistence and retention from a strengths perspective. In addition, this study attempted to add to the emerging literature regarding the role of career coaching as a strategy for addressing barriers facing underrepresented students with enrolling and persisting in college. This study explored participants’ experiences with a career coaching program and whether coaching, similar to its application in business, can be used in high schools and colleges as a successful strategy for promoting academic achievement, developing graduates and leaders, and increasing the competitiveness for the nation.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter highlights six major strands of literature related to the subject of this study: (a) underrepresented college students, including first-generation college students (FGCS), ethnic minority students, and low-income students; (b) college and career readiness; (c) developmental education; (d) self-efficacy and resiliency; (e) coaching, including coaching models and coaching and self-efficacy; and (f) other potential remedies for barriers to college entry and persistence for underrepresented college students.

Underrepresented College Students

First-Generation College Students (FGCS)

We are not innately born with the belief that we can conquer the world; parents have the greatest influence in instilling these beliefs in us that we can become high achievers and accomplish our desired tasks (Graye, 2008). First-generation college students whose parents did not attend college, may face a number of challenges related to enrolling and persisting in college, including not receiving familial support for attending college. York-Anderson and Bowman (1991) argued that first-generation students believe they receive less support from their families when attending college. First-generation students are also less likely to have taken college preparatory courses in high school, which may result in students being less prepared and having lower grade point averages their first year in college (Gibbons & Borders, 2010).

Brooks-Terry's (1988) review of the literature documented additional disadvantages for first-generation college students as:

(a) they were overrepresented in students who leave college in their first year, (b) they felt conflicting loyalties between college and off-campus friends and family, (c) higher education was seen as a means to a well-paying job, (d) part-time jobs often restricted on-campus activity, (e) they could be conflicted about values and attitudes of home, peers, and family, (f) they perhaps came from a culture that views developmental stages differently than college-educated families (e.g., starting a family vs. attending college), and (g) they experienced multiple forces that pulled them from the college setting. (as cited in Hertel, 2002, p. 5)
The conflicting values and attitudes many first-generation college students

experience present many interpersonal dilemmas. They often have to study more than other students, fear they will not receive their financial aid monies, and fear failing their courses. In addition, first-generation students often experience inner emotional struggles related to guilt, betrayal, and loss when comparing their new college culture to their home culture (Williams & Butler, 2010).

Piorkowski (1983) studied the mental health issues of first-generation college students by applying the concept of survivor guilt. Survivor guilt is often associated with a physical death; however, in this instance with “low-income, urban, first-generation college students the death is not physical but rather death or stagnation at the emotional level” (p. 620). Piorkowski (1983) thought students may feel guilty for being academically successful and their ability to “make it” and may question “Why should I succeed when they failed?” or “Why should I succeed when I didn’t help them enough so that they could succeed?” (p. 620).

Expanding on Piorkowski’s work, Whitten (1992) researched survivor conflict and discovered it to be “a broader range of emotional reactions to survival such as ambivalence and anxiety that progresses as one advances through college” (as cited in Williams & Butler, 2010, p. 4). Whitten found these feelings of guilt, ambivalence, anxiety, and depression are subconscious and can be debilitating, if not recognized and

addressed. His research insinuates that if survivor conflict is not addressed, it can lead to self-sabotage, procrastination, decreased productivity, and devaluation of one's self-concept, ambitions, and accomplishments.

Conducting an exhaustive review of the literature, Gibbons and Borders (2010) identified several themes that present barriers for first-generation college students: "finances, family issues, racial/ethnic discrimination, a lack of college-educated role models, lack of college-planning guidance, negative educational role models, and lack of preparation and/or desire" (p. 204). As a practitioner who has worked with underserved high school and community college students for almost a decade, I agree with Gibbons and Borders, observing many of the same barriers that impede the success of first-generation, ethnic minority, and low-income college students as a lack of parental involvement, lack of knowledge regarding the financial aid and application process, low self-efficacy (or a limited belief in oneself), and finances.

Ethnic Minority Students

A minority population is a subgroup with "social, religious, ethnic, racial, or other characteristics that differ from those of the majority of the population" (VandenBos, 2006, as cited in Olive, 2009, p. 6). Specifically, African American, Native American, and Hispanic ethnic minority students are the focus of this study. National attention, for several decades, has been given to this underrepresented segment in higher education. However, despite the focus on ethnic minorities in recent decades, these particular ethnic-groups still lag behind Whites and other minorities regarding their enrollment and persistence in college.

American College Testing (ACT) achievement scores serve as benchmarks to demonstrate that college-bound students “have a high probability of success in credit-bearing college courses like English Composition, social sciences courses, College Algebra, or Biology” (ACT, 2010, p. 1). In the 2011 ACT report, *The Condition of College and Career Readiness*, none of the benchmarks were met by at least 50 percent of African American, Native American, or Hispanic students. In three of the four subject areas, benchmarks were met by at least 50 percent of Asian and White students, while one was met by at least 50 percent of Pacific Islander students. According to McDonough (2004), most Whites and Asian-American students are likely to get into their first-choice colleges whereas African Americans and Latinos are less likely to get accepted into their first-choice colleges. McDonough (2004) also maintained that “research has shown that underserved minorities who are primarily first-generation, college-bound students are constrained by a lack of knowledge of the collegiate experience, as well as by a lack of trained professionals to advise them” (para. 10).

The underfunding of legislation like the *No Child Left Behind Act* fails to provide the necessary federal support and protections to prevent racial disparities in education (Parker, n.d.).

McDonough (2004) stated:

While a high school’s culture and the adequacy of its college-preparatory course offerings strongly influence college attendance patterns, very few students of color and low-SES students attend such high schools. Too often, these students are enrolled in high schools that fail to meet the entrance requirements of more competitive colleges because of shortages of qualified teachers and counselors, and inadequate honors and advanced placement classes. (para. 11)

McDonough (2004) further argued that in order for ethnic minority students to begin to have more choices about college, several factors need to be in place: (a) a rigorous high

school curriculum; (b) early notification regarding financial aid options; (c) improved information regarding the cost of college; (d) drastic increases in the number of ethnic minorities on college campuses; and (e) affirming college campus cultures.

Low-Income Students

For the purpose of this study, low-income is defined as having a family income that qualifies for the federal Pell grant. According to Ma (2009), family socioeconomic status (SES) is a strong predictor in determining the transmission of inequalities from one generation to another. Students with a low SES have higher attrition rates due in part to their background characteristics and experiences. According to Berkner (2002),

Academically, low-income students tend to be less prepared for college than their peers. They are less likely to have taken a rigorous high school curriculum, generally have lower college entrance examination scores, and are more likely to need remediation in college. Demographically, low-income students are more likely than their higher-income peers to be female, older, Black or Hispanic, and to be the first in their families to go to college. Low-income students are also more likely to be financially independent, to have dependent children, be married, and be single parents. All of these characteristics are associated with lower rates of college degree attainment. (as cited in Engle & O'Brien, 2007, p. 11)

Due to a lack of resources, low SES students often attend two-year institutions and often delay entering postsecondary education. These factors also contribute to students with low SES possessing higher attrition rates. Berkner (2002) found other enrollment factors to place students with a low SES at risk for dropping out, including living at home with parents and commuting to campus, taking classes part time and working full time, and stopping in and out of college. "Low-income students are also more likely to attend less selective, public institutions than their higher income peers. Such institutions tend to have fewer economic resources, serve students with greater academic and financial need, and have lower overall graduation rates" (Berkner, 2002, as cited in Engle & O'Brien, 2007, p. 11).

According to McDonough (n.d.), “early family support and encouragement, both of which are among the strongest predictors of four-year college attendance, spur students to form educational plans by the eighth grade” (para. 2). Trusty (1998) studied the role of SES in relationship to parental involvement and found that regardless of SES, parental involvement influenced educational expectations of college-age students. According to Trusty’s findings, parents play a vital role in motivating students regardless of their SES. Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper (1999) also found parental encouragement to be more salient than income levels in influencing student educational aspirations. Mowbray’s (2008) exploratory study and literature review on socioeconomic status (SES) and parental involvement revealed low SES is not as strong a predictor of educational attainment as is parental involvement.

College and Career Readiness

In researching barriers faced by underrepresented student populations, taking a look at college readiness is a valuable place to begin. ACT (2011) defines college and career readiness as “the acquisition of the knowledge and skills a student needs to enroll and succeed in credit-bearing first-year courses at a postsecondary institution without the need for remediation” (p. iii). According to Conley (2007), there are four dimensions of college and career readiness: (a) an understanding of the structure of knowledge and big ideas of core academic subjects; (b) the acquisition of cognitive strategies as they develop their understandings of key content; (c) possession of academic behaviors necessary to successfully manage and engage with a college workload; and (d) possession of a contextual understanding of the navigational and cultural elements of gaining admission and being successful in college (as cited in Conley, McGaughy, Kirtner, van der Valk and

Martinez-Wenzl, 2010). Conley and his team of investigators developed the *College Career Ready School Diagnostic*, a web-based tool that provides critical data on a school or district's current college readiness practices and examines annual progress indicators on those practices.

The National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (2010) has developed the *Common Core Standards Initiative (CCSI)* for college and career readiness to “define the rigorous skills and knowledge in English language arts and mathematics that need to be effectively taught and learned for students to be ready to succeed academically in credit-bearing, college-entry courses and workforce training programs” (para. 2). The *Common Core Standards Initiative* has defined these standards as:

(1) aligned with college and work expectations, so that all students are prepared for success upon graduating from high school; (2) clear, understandable and consistent; (3) including rigorous content and applications of knowledge through higher-order skills, so that all students are prepared for the 21st century; (3) informed by other top performing countries, so that all students are prepared to succeed in our global economy and society; (4) build upon strengths and lessons of current state standards; and (5) research and evidence-based. (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, 2010, para. 2)

At the federal level, the Obama administration has committed to changes in college readiness with the reauthorization of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA), which includes “a comprehensive and new vision to help states successfully transition to and implement college and career-ready standards by improving teacher preparation and development, upgrading classroom instruction, and supporting high-quality assessments” (White House, 2009, para. 8).

Developmental Education

According to Boylan (2012), developmental education is designed to promote the success of minorities, low-income, immigrant, and underrepresented students. The

downside to students not being college and career ready is the need for over 60 percent of students entering community colleges to take some form of remedial/developmental education (Bailey, 2009). According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2004), students not ready for college-level work entering their first year of college are placed in remedial classes, increasing the time it takes to complete their degrees (as cited in ACT, 2011). Decreasing the number of students enrolled in remedial education could save the United States some \$3.7 billion dollars per year (Parker, Bustillos & Behringer, 2010). Similarly, it saves students and parents considerable sums of money in tuition dollars.

Because there is a direct and causal relationship between education and economic growth in developed countries, it is imperative that the United States improve the number of college graduates each year. At the U.S. current rate, there will be a shortfall of three million bachelor of science degrees and five million middle skilled workers with an associate degree or certification by 2018 (Boylan, 2012). Our country's greatest untapped resource is the poor. Boylan (2012) has provided evidence that 60 percent of middle and upper class Americans already attend college while only 18 percent of the poor attend. An effective way to meet our country's economic need is to enable more low-income individuals to attend and graduate from college.

In an effort to reduce the amount of time students spend in remedial courses, there is a cultural shift in states like Virginia. Community college administrators, faculty, and staff there recognize they cannot meet their improvement goals unless students are successful in developmental education. The state is shifting its attention to ensuring students are prepared for college-level courses with a developmental education overhaul

that “reduces the number of students who need developmental education, shortens the time spent in developmental education, and increases the college completion rates of those required to take developmental education before starting credit-bearing courses” (Asera, 2011, p.vi).

Virginia’s developmental education overhaul is a part of *Achieving the Dream’s Developmental Education Initiative* consisting of fifteen *Achieving the Dream* community colleges that are building on demonstrated results to scale up developmental education innovations at their institutions. According to the *Achieving the Dream* website, the project is managed by MDC, Inc. with funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and Lumina Foundation; the initiative aims to expand groundbreaking remedial education programs that experts say are key to dramatically boosting the college completion rates of low-income students and students of color.

In addition to *Achieving the Dream’s* developmental education initiative, workforce development is an important piece in helping community college students succeed.

Two billion in workforce development dollars are being made available to community colleges and other eligible institutions of higher education over four fiscal year installments (2011-2014) through the U.S. Department of Labor's *Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training* grant program. (Achieving the Dream, 2011, para. 2).

In Virginia, Tidewater Community College was the recipient of first-round grant monies to further assist community college students. A consortium of all twenty-three Virginia community colleges will work towards the goals of the *Achieve 2015* Strategic Plan to increase the completion rates of students graduating with an associate degree, transferring to a four-year institution, or earning a certificate or workforce credential (VCCS, 2011).

Self-Efficacy and Resiliency

Self-efficacy is defined by Bandura (1994) “as people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives. Self-efficacy beliefs determine how people feel, think, motivate themselves and behave”. According to Bandura (1995), judgment of one’s knowledge, skills, strategies, and stress management affect the formation of efficacy beliefs. Zimmerman and Ringle (1981) discovered that the motivational effects of efficacy beliefs are not limited to specific tasks but can be generalized to other tasks in the same context (as cited in Bandura, 1995). Moreover, Barber (2009) used a mixed-methods design to survey participants to answer the overarching question: “What are the relative effects and the impact of academic self-efficacy and socio-demographic factors on academic achievement, as determined by first-semester GPA, on first-generation community college students?” (p. iii). Barber found that students with a high level of self-efficacy were more likely to achieve academically regardless of their generational status.

Olive (2010) noted two positive factors prevalent throughout the literature pertaining to FGCS: persistence and self-efficacy. Komada (2002), for example, conducted in-depth interviews with sixteen freshman students (eight first-generation students and eight continuing generation students) and “found first-generation students to be self-motivated and intrinsically driven to achieve despite perceived negative early educational experiences” (as cited in Olive, 2010, p. 379). Self-esteem, spirituality, and high expectations of self were other self-factors that were significantly higher for first-generation college students compared to continuing generation college students (Komada, 2002). Graye (2008) claimed performance is interconnected with self-perception and

self-efficacy. Graye went on to claim that self-efficacy can be cultivated in three different ways: “personal beliefs, our environment, and through coaching” (para. 2).

Resiliency is defined by Henderson & Milstein (2003) as "the capacity to spring back, rebound, successfully adapt in the face of adversity, and develop social, academic, and vocational competence despite exposure to severe stress or simply to the stress that is inherent in today's world" (p. 7). Bernard's (2004) resiliency theory takes a look at the strengths of at-risk individuals who succeed in the midst of adversity and adapt to their environment. Bernard identified four components of resilient students as: (a) social competence; (b) problem-solving skill; (c) autonomy; and (d) a sense of purpose.

Sanchez and Thornton's (2010) study of Native American students found resiliency may be a determining factor for their success in schools. They established three key components to the resilient nature of students: (a) intelligence and temperament; (b) family and family support; and (c) external support systems (Garmezy, 1991). “From an applied approach, resiliency is not a fixed characteristic of selected youth, but a form of a protection mechanism that shapes responses to potentially negative situations” (Garmezy, 1991a, 1991b; Rutter, 1987, as cited in Thornton & Sanchez, 2010, p. 456).

Mays (2011) conducted surveys with 263 Latino college students and found there was a reverse effect on resiliency and family practices. Students whose family members were less involved were more resilient. In addition, students within families with less financial resources were more resilient than those growing up with access to greater financial resources. Ceja's (2004) study supported the finding that students whose parents

have struggled financially can serve as a catalyst for their desire for higher education.

For instance, one of the college students in Ceja's (2004) study commented:

I want to have a higher education because my parents don't have one, and I don't want to go through what they went through. My dad is the only one that works and he has to almost kill himself, working hard every day to give us what we have (as cited in Olive, 2009, p. 28).

The educational level of parents has been identified as a protective factor or asset in the development of resiliency (Felner et al., 1995). The multifaceted nature of risks and adversities faced by many youth requires a collaborative effort on the part of the family, school, and community. In an effort to solve the problems faced by families and children, resources from all three sectors must be used to solve today's educational, health, psychological, and social problems, according to Mauricio (2008). In addition, Meyer (2008) pointed out that a resilient attitude must be adopted by students themselves, homes, schools, and work environments involving verbal and non-verbal messages that create protective factors reducing the impact of the challenges faced in life.

Coaching

The Virginia Community College System (2011) offers career coaching to students in secondary schools with the primary purpose of "empowering students to make informed decisions about their career and educational plans and to prepare students for success in postsecondary education and training (para. 4). Career coaches are working in nearly half of the high schools in the state of Virginia. The flexible, mentoring type relationships provides a more relaxed atmosphere and can be more favorable for students versus working with what might be construed as more an authority figure within a counseling relationship. Recent findings from the program include:

(1) 86 percent or more of the students served by career coaches said they were satisfied with the coaches' interest in their career needs, knowledge of career information, and assistance in making career and college plans; (2) Nearly half (47 percent) of the students who lacked any plan to go to college made those plans after working with a career coach; and (3) 95 percent of high schools principals say their career coach met or exceeded overall expectations. It's a win-win partnership with the participating Virginia public schools. (VCCS, 2011, para. 6)

Other states are looking at adopting the program model.

Career coaching is a student-centered process with three foundational pillars: (a) administration and marketing, (b) core coaching, and (c) career consulting. The administration duties of the career coach refer to the daily management of activities including data collection and activity reports used for acquiring program funding and for assessment and evaluation of the program. Marketing includes spreading the word about what a career coach does and how services benefit all stakeholders involved—parents, students, school personnel, college personnel, and the employers from the business community. The core coaching component of the program involves the interaction between the coach and the student with the foundation being the coaching conversation. The coaching conversation leads to “discovering student goals, exploring means of achieving goals, identifying barriers to goal achievement and methods of making decisions consistent with the student’s own goals and values” (Virginia Community College System, 2009).

Coaching is a fairly new profession in higher education and at the high school level—often used by the business world and executives to improve leadership development, retain key employees, and promote self-awareness. A coach is a professional who specializes in helping people to develop and work toward meaningful goals. The central function of a coaching relationship is to facilitate positive change and

stimulate personal growth (Hudson, 1999). Coaching is defined by Grant and Greene (2001) as a “goal oriented, solutions-focused collaborative relationship between coach and coachee that utilizes a systematic process to improve an individual’s performance and well-being” (as cited in Green, 2011, slide 41). Coaching is solution-focused, strengths-based, client-centered, involves Socratic questioning, broadens and builds theory, and is based on an “Ask, do not tell; coachee knows best” philosophy (Fredrickson, 2001, as cited in Green, 2011).

According to Green (2011), coaching is an overlapping of several disciplines: counseling, consulting, mentoring, and training that facilitates the movement of people from awareness to ownership to action and finally their desired outcomes. The coaching conversation is a complex, yet effective, method that involves: (a) “listening and clarifying (microskills); (b) unconditional positive regard (client-centered); (c) remaining curious (not always the expert); (d) powerful questioning (Socratic questioning); (e) possibility thinking (solution-focused coaching); and (f) zest and hope (strengths of the coach)” (Green, 2011, slide 48).

Coaching Models

There are a variety of coaching models and theories to choose from; however, all hold the same central themes of: (a) establishing a relationship built on trust, open and honest communication, and confidentiality; (b) a client contract, written or not, with agreed upon goals; and (c) insight and action learning as a result of feedback from the coach. Examples of coaching models include: (a) executive model, which encompasses systems-oriented, team approach, and leadership development; (b) human development model that houses individual and organizational development principles; (c) integrative

model based on the unconscious mind in group and individual behaviors; and (d) compliance model focusing on dealing with resistance. The model used for coaching students in Virginia schools in preparation for higher education is the human development model with individual developmental principles as the primary focus. The desired outcome of most coaching models, including what is offered in Virginia's schools, is the continued growth and self-initiated change of the coachee (Maynard, 2006).

Goal, Reality, Opportunity, Willpower (GROW) Model. Whitmore's (2002) *Goal, Reality, Opportunity, Willpower (GROW)* model of coaching has been studied in relationship to organizational coaching; however, there are no documented studies using this behavioral approach with coaching first-generation college students. Brouwers, Evers, and Tomic's (2006) study focused on individuals' needs, not on prearranged general objectives, using role playing, disclosure, rational emotive training, brainstorming, and goal formulation and planning. Coaching using the GROW model provides a context that creates awareness and responsibility on the part of the coachee and effective questioning on behalf of the coach to increase its value (Whitmore, 2002). Table 1 represents the GROW model's structure for coach sessions, a model that has been adapted by the researcher in working with students in the career coaching program in Virginia.

Table 1

Coaching Using the GROW Model

Acronym	Description	Example Questions
Goal	Coachee is asked to clarify what they want to achieve from each session (s). Determines the focus of coaching.	What do you want to achieve in this session? How would you like to feel afterwards? What would be the best use of this time?
Reality	Raises awareness of present realities. Examine how current situation is impacting coachee's goals.	How have things gone in the past week? How have you handled problems? What worked? What didn't work?
Options	Identify and assess available options. Encourage solution-focused thinking and brainstorming.	What possible options do you have? What has worked for you in the past? What haven't you tried yet that might work?
Will	Assist the coachee to determine next steps. Develop an action plan and build motivation.	What is the most important thing to do next? What might get in the way? Who might be able to support you? How do you feel when this is done?

(Spence & Grant, 2007, as cited in Rhodes, 2009, p. 6)

Coaching and Self-Efficacy

Lipshitz and Popper (1992) believe self-efficacy is the key psychological variable in coaching. Armstrong, Melser, and Tooth (2007), Brouwers, Evers, and Tomic (2006), Curran (2001), and Dunn (2004) each reported findings concerning the positive effects of

executive coaching on one's self-efficacy beliefs. Brouwers et al., for example, conducted a quasi-experimental study to determine if coaching leads to presupposed goals. In their study, self-efficacy beliefs were linked to three domains of behavior: (a) acting in a balanced way; (b) setting one's own goals; and (c) mindful living and working. This study concluded that, as a result of their coaching experiences, managers were able to articulate their own goals more effectively.

Armstrong, Melsler, and Tooth (2007) further confirmed the influence of coaching on self-efficacy. The authors used a mixed-method design to survey 111 executives in an organizational setting. A questionnaire was developed which measured various ways of rating coaching effectiveness along with using semi-structured interviews. The results suggested that the most salient outcome of coaching lies in the sphere of self-efficacy (Armstrong, Melsler & Tooth, 2007). Baker, Fernandes, Kombarakaran, and Yang's (2008) empirical study found that:

Executive coaching is an effective method of leadership development. One hundred fourteen executives and forty-two coaches were surveyed using instruments designed to gather both qualitative and quantitative data. Results concluded that executive change occurred in five areas: people management, relationships with managers, goal setting and prioritization engagement and productivity, and dialogue and communication. Results also suggested well-designed programs can lead to leadership development and retention of talent. (p. 78)

Hurd (2003) investigated the phenomenon of coaching and found that individuals who have been coached claimed a significant impact on their lives, careers, relationships, and organizations. Hurd reported coaching helps people develop self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship management, and communication skills and to become more effective in the work-place. Coaching was recognized as a highly effective means for developing one's emotional intelligence.

One of the limitations of current research on the relationship between coaching and self-efficacy, reported by MacKie (2007), is that few studies exist; only a handful of controlled studies and fewer uncontrolled studies exist with individual case studies being rare. On the other hand, Armstrong, Mesler and Tooth (2007) pointed out that, although a limited number of studies exist, positive benefits of executive coaching have been identified as “an improvement in coachee’s performance, productivity and interaction with others, an enhanced ability to prioritize and manage time, an overall development of skills and new perspectives, higher levels of self-awareness and personal growth, as well as increased confidence” (p. 2).

Previous studies represent positive benefits of coaching in the areas of self-efficacy, goal attainment, self-awareness, communication, and personal growth. Little literature exists regarding coaching first-generation college students or uncovering their beliefs, values, ambitions, and practice patterns. However, there are a number of studies conducted with college students, which will be discussed next.

Nelson (2009) found self-efficacy to be a “possible mediating factor of instrumentality in future goal possibilities such as becoming a college student” (p. 3). In coaching college students, Steinwedel (2001) reported an increase in self-efficacy and achievement of goals in an experimental study with twelve college students who participated in coaching sessions over sixteen weeks (as cited in Armstrong, 2007). In addition, Lemcool (2007) studied the use of coaching with college nursing students using a mixed-methods experimental design that included twenty-six students. Students were coached in goal setting related to their academic performance while tracking their progress with weekly monitoring. Considerably different from the organizational setting,

the educational setting used self-regulated learning strategies and a social-cognitive approach. Results from the study revealed the coaching process improved the overall self-efficacy of the participants and their ability to set and realize meaningful academic and personal goals.

Bettinger and Baker (2011) examined the effects of college coaching using a randomized experimental design. InsideTrack, the largest provider of student coaching in the country, conducted a total of seventeen different randomized studies in cooperation with participating private, public, and proprietary institutions. Students were assigned to a coach where sessions covered the topics of time management, personal time commitment, primary care-giving responsibilities, financial obligations, self-advocacy, and study skills. Students receiving coaching were more likely to persist during the year-long program. Participants were also more likely to remain in college one year after the coaching ended than those who had not received coaching.

Robinson and Gahagan (2010) studied academic coaching at the University of South Carolina. Academic coaching focuses on three main steps: self-assessment, reflection, and goal setting and is defined as a “one-on-one interaction with a student focusing on strengths, goals, study skills, engagement, academic planning, and performance” (Robinson & Gahagan, 2010, p. 27). Outcomes of academic coaching revealed a 92 percent improvement in the GPAs of academically deficient students over one academic year and 40 percent fewer suspensions than predicted for freshmen who fell below a GPA of 2.0.

At Our Lady of the Lake University, personal student success coaches have been utilized to increase retention and to “help students connect the dots and find the right

services on campus to help them, whether it's the financial-aid office, mental-health services, or academic support” (Farrell, 2007, para. 19). Ninety-three percent of freshman students who participated in coaching for at least seven sessions returned the next year to continue their studies. Overall, there was a five percent increase of returning freshmen over the previous year. Similarly, Central New Mexico Community College provided adult learners with achievement coaches who supported students as they navigate personal challenges and overcome life’s obstacles (Jeffries, 2010). The achievement coach utilized coaching tools and strategies to “acknowledge and build on the strengths of students to foster critical thinking, decision making, goal setting, and action planning that empowers the student as the expert and the one responsible for implementing these tools” (p. 2).

Reaser (2008) conducted a case study involving seven college students, both graduate and undergraduate, with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Participants underwent eight weeks of a coaching intervention, which consisted of a combination of executive coaching and athletic coaching models. The coaching intervention assisted students with “dealing with aspects of their disability that interfere with academic performance and coping with difficulties such as procrastination, lack of concentration, ineffective self-regulation, poor planning, anxiety, social incompetence, or time management” (Reaser, 2008, p. 18). Results revealed coaching was just as successful as, if not more than, traditional psychotherapy or medication.

Life coaching is a process that assists clients with uncovering their natural talents and abilities. In addition, clients gain knowledge in overcoming obstacles and developing solutions to their own challenges. Green, Grant, and Rynsaardt (2007)

documented the impact of an evidence-based life coaching program with female high school seniors and found “life coaching was associated with significant increases in levels of cognitive hardiness and hope, and significant decreases in levels of depression” (p. 24). In an earlier study, Green (2006) concluded “cognitive-behavioral, solution-focused life coaching increases goal striving, well-being and hope with gains maintained up to 30 weeks later on some variables in participants” (p. 143).

Other Potential Remedies for Barriers to College Entry and Persistence

For college students, academic and social integration is significant. Tinto (1993) has argued that having a strong sense of inclusion in both academic and social communities on campus is an important principle of effective practice related to college student success and retention. Brownell and Swaner’s (2008) review of the literature on college student success and persistence discussed five high impact practices that yield positive outcomes for underrepresented student populations, mainly underserved minorities, low-income students, and first-generation college students. Brownell and Swaner found capstone courses and projects, learning communities, first-year seminars, and service learning to be highly effective practices for FGCS.

Karp’s (2011) research provided four “effective non-academic support strategies for improving student outcomes: (a) creating social relationships; (b) clarifying aspirations and enhancing commitment; (c) developing college know-how; and (d) addressing conflicting demands of work, family and college” (p. 1). In addition, Brennan (2008) found students benefit from the acquisition of a set of career and college effectiveness skills, ones that include motivation and emotional effectiveness.

Clifton and Anderson (2002) stated "traditionally based retention programs focus on student's insufficiencies and often fail because the focus is on remedial issues, defects, and academic shortcomings" (as cited in Williams & Butler, 2010, p. 1). Clifton and Anderson have asserted that successful programs should focus on strengths rather than deficits and developed a *StrengthsQuest* program (also known as *StrengthsFinder*) to help people fulfill their destiny by applying their strengths. *StrengthQuest* is often used in many new college student orientation programs, including freshman seminar courses, and with personal growth and leadership development workshops for students and staff. The program is designed to bring awareness to participants that: "(1) you have a group of talents within you; (2) your greatest talents hold the key to high achievement, success, and progress to levels of personal excellence; (3) becoming aware of your talents builds confidence and provides a basis for achievement; (4) learning how to develop and apply strengths will improve your levels of achievement; (5) each of your talents can be applied in many areas, including relationships, learning, academics, leadership, service, and careers; and (6) as you develop and apply strengths, your achievements will increase and you will experience greater and more frequent successes" (Anderson, 2004, p. 2).

StrengthQuest is used widely in business and industry as well as in higher education with over seven million individuals to date having taken the assessment in the United States and abroad, more than 600 schools and universities participating in North America, and based on solid research conducted by Gallup, Inc. for the past 40 years (Gallup, 2010).

Concluding Remarks

After several decades of research and special support programs, underrepresented student populations continue to lag behind in college attainment. The many barriers faced by underrepresented college students range from lack of familial support and finances to lack of trained professionals to help students prepare for college. Several strategies exist to encourage student success; however, practices often are unavailable in the less affluent schools systems disproportionately attended by underrepresented student populations. Although these issues are not being overlooked with increased national, state, and local attention given to this area, the rate of change that has occurred lags behind what is needed.

Coaching is a promising potential remedy for barriers to college entry and persistence for underrepresented college students; however, the practice is not widespread and is fairly new in higher education. Virginia is one of very few states, if not the only state, offering career coaching as a potential remedy to many of the issues facing the preparedness and persistence of underrepresented student populations. A review of the literature shows promise in many arenas of coaching in the business sector. These successes may be transferable to secondary and higher education in an effort to increase the college completion rates of underrepresented college students.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this qualitative study is to describe the lived experiences of underrepresented college students who participated in a career coaching program while in high school and now attend a local community college in Virginia. This study answered the main research question: How have career coaching and other internal and external factors influenced the beliefs, motivations, academic success, career goals, and self-efficacy of underrepresented college students? The following sub-questions were included:

- (1) What are their perceptions and beliefs about higher education attainment and academic success?
- (2) From their perspective, what challenges have they faced and how did they overcome these challenges to graduate from high school and enroll and persist through their first year of college?
- (3) From their perspective, what attitudes and personal and college experiences contributed positively to their beliefs, motivations, academic success, and entry into and success in college?
- (4) In what ways has their career coaching experience in high school influenced their beliefs, motivations, academic success, career goals and self-efficacy?

This qualitative study used a phenomenological approach, specifically a social constructionist perspective and semi-structured interview research design. This chapter outlines these research methods in detail, discussing the phenomenological, social constructionist, and positive psychology approaches to inquiry and offering a rationale

for their usage with this particular study. Additionally, this chapter discusses the following methodological issues: (a) role of the researcher, (b) selection of research subjects, (c) methods of data collection, (d) data analysis procedures, (e) trustworthiness of the findings, (f) ethical considerations, and (g) limitations.

Qualitative Research Design

Qualitative research is an “approach that begins with assumptions, worldviews, possibly a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems exploring the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (Creswell, 2007, p. 51). According to Creswell (2003), there are several characteristics present to support conducting a qualitative study: (a) the researcher is an instrument for data collection with an evolving design; (b) there are rigorous data collection procedures from multiple sources of data; (c) the researcher focuses on participants’ lived experiences; (d) there is a particular theoretical lens through which the study is viewed; (e) researchers make interpretations from an unusual angle; and (f) a holistic view representing multiple realities is created.

A qualitative research design was chosen for this study because it allows the researcher to be the key instrument in the collection of data. The use of the researcher’s open-ended questions are important because the design of the instrument allows for the “participants’ voices to speak and carry the story” (Creswell, 2007, p. 43). The qualitative design is emergent and flexible rather than being a tightly, prefigured design. The qualitative research design for this study allowed the researcher to make interpretations about what is seen, heard, and understood. This information cannot be

separated from the researcher's own background, history, and understandings (Creswell, 2007).

Social Constructivist Perspective

A social constructivist perspective seeks to understand the world in which people live and work, and from there, a theory can be generated (Creswell, 2007). From the social constructivist perspective, researchers recognize their own experiences shape their interpretation and they “position themselves” (Creswell, 2007, p. 21) in their research to acknowledge how it flows from their own experiences. Researchers listen to subjects to hear how their subjects make sense of reality and interpret what they find, understanding it is shaped by their own experiences and background. This interpretive research allows the researcher “to make sense (or interpret) the meanings others have about the world” (p. 21). This study utilized a social constructionism perspective as enunciated through an appreciative inquiry approach where reality is created by people through relationships and language. In essence, reality is the story we tell in our heads and through our words (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2004; Gergen, 1999; Kelm, B. 2005; Quinn, 2004; Stavors & Torres, 2005, as cited in Alloro, 2009). According to Gergen (2001), social constructionism “emphasizes dialogue, co-construction, collaboration, community building, narrative, and positive visioning” (p. 3).

Phenomenological Qualitative Research Approach

The underlying purpose of phenomenology is to “reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence” (Creswell, 2007 p. 58). From there, “a composite description of the essence of the experience for all individuals is developed” (p. 58). According to DeMarrais and Lapan (2004),

“phenomenology enables researchers to examine every day human experience in close, detailed ways” (p. 56) and answers, “What is the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of this phenomenon for this person or group of people?” (Patton, 2002, p. 102). For the purposes of this study, a psychological phenomenological orientation was used because it focuses on the “descriptions of the experiences of participants” (Creswell, 2007, p. 59).

Positive Psychology Theoretical Framework

This study utilized a social constructionist perspective as enunciated through positive psychology theory. Positive psychology theory views the social environment as a dynamic venue full of challenges, ones we cannot change; however, how we respond to the challenges in our social environment is within our control and determines our level of happiness. Seligman (2002) defined positive psychology as a “science that seeks to understand positive emotion, build strength and virtue, and provide guideposts for finding what Aristotle called the ‘good life’” (p. xi). Peterson and Seligman (2004) classified six virtues and 24 character strengths that can provide a framework for this study. Table 2 illustrates the characteristics and virtues of positive psychology that create a life of pleasure, engagement, and meaning.

Table 2

Universal Virtues of Positive Psychology Theory

Universal Virtues							
		Wisdom & Knowledge	Courage	Humanity	Justice	Temperance	Transcendence
S T R E N G T H S	Creativity	Bravery	Love	Citizenship	Forgiveness and Mercy	Appreciation of Beauty and Excellence	
	Curiosity	Persistence	Kindness	Fairness	Humility and Modesty	Gratitude	
	Open-Mindedness	Integrity	Social Intelligence	Leadership	Prudence	Hope	
	Love of Learning	Vitality			Self-Regulation	Humour	
	Perspective					Spirituality	

(Yanez, n.d., para. 2)

Relative to education, “greater well-being enhances learning; a positive mood produces broader attention, more creative thinking, and more holistic thinking” (Seligman, n.d., p. 10). Positive education is the combination of skills of achievement and skills of well-being. Identifying character strengths such as honesty, loyalty, perseverance, creativity, kindness, wisdom, courage, and fairness and using them in abundance, as much as possible in school, hobbies and with family and friends and to overcome challenges, can create more satisfaction in life (Seligman, n.d.). The Appreciative Inquiry (AI) approach, based on positive psychology, enabled the researcher to capture stories of participants’ transformative learning experiences to:

create a renewed sense of purpose and the development of shared understandings as to the nature and purpose of education in the future, create stories of best practice that reflect moments when the educational practice is in accord with the values that underpin the practice and that provide a groundedness to the dialogue about future educational experiences. (Giles & Anderson, 2008, p. 469)

AI is a constructive inquiry process that searches for everything that gives life to organizations, communities, and larger human systems when they are most alive, effective, creative, and healthy in their interconnected ecology or relationships.

- To appreciate means to value and to recognize that which has value – *it is a way of knowing*.
- To appreciate also means to be grateful or thankful for – *it is a way of being* and maintaining a positive stance along the path of life’s journey.
- And to appreciate is to *increase in value*, too.
- Combining the three—appreciation is a way of knowing, a way of being and as an increase in value—suggests that AI is simultaneously a life-centric form of study and a constructive mode of practice. (Cooperrider, 2004, p. xii)

Assumptions

The researcher was guided by the following assumptions: (a) students who participate in the interview process can recall past events dealing with the career coaching program and influential life experiences; (b) students will be honest in their responses; (c) it is relevant for educational, local, and national leaders to explore the use of career coaching as a strategy for addressing barriers facing underrepresented students to assist them with enrolling and persisting in college; and (d) coaching, similar to its application in business, can be used in high schools and colleges as a successful strategy for promoting academic achievement, developing graduates and leaders, and increasing the competitiveness for the nation.

Role of the Researcher

As a research practitioner, I have had the honor to work in several different types of institutions and organizations with underrepresented student populations. I have worked with a non-profit family services organization as a teen outreach and domestic violence counselor; at a private, liberal arts, four-year institution as an academic and

career coordinator; at a two-year public, community college as a career coach; and with a statewide community college division as a regional career coach. Each position has awarded me the opportunity to gain a wider understanding into the multifaceted approach for effectively assisting underrepresented students.

This study is of particular interest because of my previous work in a federal TRIO program serving disadvantaged students and my current work with underrepresented students. In the last few years, I have observed, first-hand, the barriers to higher education while working closely with students and their families. The main obstacles I have observed is the lack of knowledge and confidence parents and students possess about access to higher education. Most students I have worked with have been first-generation college students and Pell grant eligible, but have the notion that college is unaffordable for them. A critical component of my duties has been trying to educate students of low cost college options, like community colleges, emphasizing that the federal government wants an educated society and will assist them monetarily.

As I reflect on my reasons for conducting this research, my writings are positioned within the stance of a previous underrepresented college student (an ethnic minority, first-generation student) and now as a leader to other first-generation students. This autobiographical context brings self-awareness and reflexivity within this study. My counseling background provides me with important skills and experiences that help withhold value judgments, have empathy for others, and hone strong interpersonal and interviewing skills.

As I begin this study, what sticks out most in my mind is the legendary quote by St. Francis as referred to by Ryan (2009) in *Accelerating Performance*: “Preach the

Gospel at all times. Use words if necessary.” As a research practitioner and leader, all eyes are always on you; and as the old saying goes “action speaks louder than words” is paramount in leadership. I’m using my doctoral studies and research as an example to those I am leading in their pursuit for higher education.

In order to release the potential in followers, leading from the servant leadership framework that encourages collaboration, awareness, empathy, persuasion, commitment, trust, foresight, listening, and the ethical use of power and empowerment, is my goal as I lead others. I am also a proponent of the saying: “As a person thinks, so is he” (KJV, 2007, Proverbs 23:7). What do underrepresented students think about their ability to be successful in higher education? Self-efficacy is defined by Bandura (1994) “as people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives. Self-efficacy beliefs determine how people feel, think, motivate themselves and behave” (para. 1). If this definition is applicable to underrepresented students, which I believe it is, each student holds the power to achieve and to determine his or her own success and destiny. If it starts with a thought, followed by feelings which propel one into action, then success through self-efficacy is possible for underrepresented student populations. It is through this research that I hoped to learn what influence career coaching and other factors have had on the development of self-efficacy and the enrollment and persistence of this small group of underrepresented community college students.

Selection of Research Subjects

For this study, participants were purposively sampled. The researcher “selects individuals and sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of

the research problem and central phenomenon in the study” (Creswell, 2007, p. 125). As the researcher, I selected three categories of study participants: (a) first-generation college students; (b) low-income Pell grant recipients, and/or; (c) ethnic minority students including African American and Native American, which allowed for maximum variation of data from underrepresented students who were impacted by the participation in a career coaching program. It was the intention of the researcher to include Hispanic students; however, no participants could be located. Of these three areas, equal proportional representations were represented in the final group, with some students representing more than one area.

Participants in this study were past participants in a career coaching program in a Virginia public high school. Second, students who are currently attending a particular community college in Virginia and have completed one year of college with at least 24 credit hours and a 2.0 GPA or higher were chosen for the study because these are the students the researcher and team of career coaches have previously coached and have demonstrated success with their transition into college and persistence through the first year of college. Lastly, participants were equally divided by gender.

To determine if participants met all of the research criteria, they completed a demographic survey (see Appendix B). One hundred and thirty students were contacted, and 21 students completed the survey. Eleven participants eventually were interviewed for the study.

Methods of Data Collection

I solicited participants in this phenomenological study by asking for volunteers who were attending a particular community college in Virginia. In an effort to recruit

participants for the study, I met with appropriate college student support personnel who could identify participants meeting the criteria for the study. In addition, the purpose of the study was explained to career coaches and Community College Access Program (CCAP) advisors. CCAP is a two-year, tuition-free scholarship program for recent high school graduates. The CCAP students who agreed to participate in this research study were identified by the CCAP advisor as meeting the GPA and credit requirements.

After participants were identified, they were contacted by me to discuss the purpose of the study and the interview process and to set a date and time for the interview. Interviews were conducted on campus and lasted sixty to ninety minutes. I remained flexible conducting interviews at locations convenient for the participants in the study. The participants were sent a copy of the preliminary interview guide in advance so they had time to prepare and reflect on their past experiences ahead of time.

Prior to the start of the interviews, each participant was given an informed consent form stating the purpose of the study and that participation in the study is on a voluntary basis. Each participant was advised that the information obtained in the study was confidential and his or her identity would not be revealed. Also, a pseudonym was assigned for each participant. The participants were advised that the data would be kept in a secure file for ten years and then shredded.

Semi-structured Interviews and Appreciative Inquiry

Semi-structured, in-depth interviews using an Appreciative Inquiry (AI) interview technique were used to gather information from participants. The semi-structured interview allowed for guided, open-ended questions that encourage in-depth conversations to fully understand participant's attitudes, perceptions, and viewpoints on

the topic (Patton, 2002). According to Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest, and Namey (2005), “in-depth interviews are optimal for collecting data on individuals’ personal histories, perspectives, and experiences, particularly when sensitive topics are being explored” (p. 2).

The questions in the semi-structured, in-depth interview were framed from a positive psychology perspective using an AI interviewing technique. According to Cooperrider and Whitney (2005), AI is used to gain a “systematic discovery of what gives “life” to a living system when it is most alive, most effective, and most constructively capable in economic, ecological, and human terms” (p. 3). AI is “about the coevolutionary search for the best in people, their organizations, and the relevant world around them” (p. 3). AI is an approach that encourages dialogue that is restorative, generative and hope-filled, one that emphasizes the positive aspects of human systems (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). According to Giles and Anderson (2008), AI seeks to facilitate change based on participants’ experiences of best practices. AI gives evidence to best practices rather than giving “priority to the problems in our current practice” (p. 466). In working with underrepresented students, focusing on what works best and their successes may foster even greater success. Ancient philosophers believed whatever you give your attention, energy, and focus to will grow. AI is based on this principle.

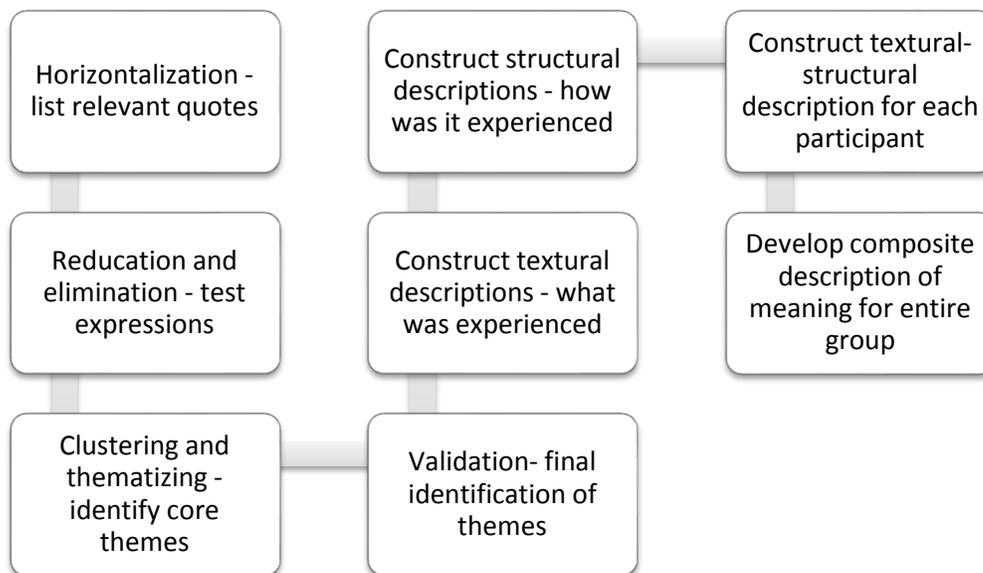
Data Analysis

In this study, I use a modified van Kaam method of analysis of phenomenological data with semi-structured, taped, and transcribed interviews with underrepresented college students who formally participated in a career coaching program while in high school. Based on the data from the interview questions, I went through the interview

transcripts and highlighted significant statements, sentences, or quotes that gave an explanation to the phenomenon experienced by the participants (Creswell, 2007). The van Kaam method is comprised of developing individual textural (what participants experienced) and structural descriptions (how or in what context participants experienced it), a composite of textural and composite structural descriptions, and a synthesis of textural and structural meanings or the overall essence of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). Table 3 illustrates the steps followed in the van Kaam method.

Table 3

Modified Van Kaam Method of Analysis



Once data was collected it was be analyzed manually in addition to using a software program, Nvivo 10. Both methods were used to develop a conceptual model for data collected and to identify recurring themes, patterns, and concepts. This software assisted with the clarification of participants’ views and has the ability to graphically

display codes and categories. In addition, “it provides security by storing the database and files together in a single file” (Creswell, 2007, p. 167).

Thematic analysis, the method of identifying, analyzing, and reporting recurring themes, was used as a constructionist paradigm where the “development of themes involves interpretative work, and the analysis that is produced is not just description, but is already theorized” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 13). A theme is considered relevant if it captures pertinent information in relation to the research question. It is important to use multiple participants’ views because “from a constructionist perspective, meaning and experience are socially produced and reproduced, rather than inherent within individuals” (p. 14).

To answer the main research question and sub-questions, I followed Moustakas’ (1994) method. These steps include: (1) identifying the phenomena of what it means to be underrepresented, participate in a career coaching program while in high school, and successful in higher education; (2) collection of data from participants who have experienced the phenomenon; and (3) asking two broad questions: “What have you experienced in the phenomenon?” and “What situations influenced your experiences of the phenomenon?”

For the purposes of this study, bracketing was not used, as described in Moustakas’ (1994) original method. Suspending bracketing gives the researcher the ability to use “intuition, imagination and universal structures to obtain a picture” (Creswell, 1998, p. 52) of the phenomenon under investigation. I have experienced the phenomenon; therefore, obtaining authentic bracketing may be difficult for me as the researcher (Bednall, 2006). However, LeVasseur (2003) points out that bracketing can

be accomplished when the researcher suspends preconceived notions temporarily to cultivate a “persistent curiosity” (p. 418) in order to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon being studied. I did take care in the distinction between participants’ perspectives and my own. Therefore, reflexivity along with a persistent curiosity was employed throughout the study to hear the participants’ voices and perspectives rather than using my own interpretation.

Trustworthiness of the Findings

For this study, I have followed Creswell’s (2007) standards for assessing the quality of phenomenology, which are: (a) the author conveys an understanding of the core facets of phenomenology; (b) the researcher clearly articulates the phenomenon in a concise way; (c) the researcher follows specific procedures, for example, those recommended by Moustakas (1994); (d) the researcher conveys the overall essence of the experience and the situations in which it occurred; and (e) the researcher reflects on oneself throughout the study.

Multiple validation strategies exist to document the trustworthiness of a qualitative study. Creswell (2007) described validation in qualitative research as the process which attempts to account for accuracy of the findings. Creswell (2007) recommended several strategies: (a) prolonged and persistent engagement in the field to gain the trust of participants and learn their culture, particularly useful in ethnographic studies; (b) the use of triangulation to corroborate different data sources to shed light on themes; (c) peer review or debriefing; (d) clarifying research bias; (e) member checking; (f) providing rich, thick descriptions of data for the allowance of transferability; and (g) external audits. In this particular study, the validation strategies included two specific

strategies: the use of rich, thick descriptions of data and member checking. According to Denzin (1989), thick descriptions means the narrative “presents detail, context, emotion, and the webs of social relationships... [and] evokes emotionality and self-feelings. The voices, feelings, actions, and meanings of interacting individuals are heard” (as cited in Creswell, 2007, p. 194). To validate participants’ experiences, the researcher verified the intended meaning in the procedure of member checking, where participants reviewed the findings from the individual interview transcripts to correct, clarify, and elaborate upon the information that was shared during the interview. In an effort to validate the results of this study, self-reflection also played an important role in my validation strategies.

Ethical Considerations

Allmark et al. (2009) have stressed that conducting in-depth interviews in qualitative studies gives rise to ethical issues and concerns. Privacy and confidentiality are two issues that need to be addressed. Informed consent was the method used to address these concerns in this study. Participants were given detailed information regarding the study as well as informed that their participation is voluntary and can be withdrawn at any time. A copy of the consent form can be found in Appendix A. Strategies to ensure confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed to all participants. Each participant was given a pseudonym to mask his or her identity. As previously mentioned, reflexivity was employed throughout the study to hear the participants’ voices and perspectives rather than using my own interpretation. Careful attention to how data was analyzed and collected was also employed.

Limitations

Each research study has its limitations. In this study, the parameters were limited to students who participated in a career coaching program in various high schools in Virginia and who matriculated to a particular, local community college. In addition, the career coaching program was part of a formal, statewide initiative in Virginia public schools. This study was not designed to define career coaching or judge the effectiveness of the career coaching program. The aim of the study was to gather the collective, lived experiences of student participants to inform and awaken (Sparkes, 2002) educators to the struggles of underrepresented student populations, motivate students for successful completion of higher education degrees, enlighten mentors and parents by bringing awareness to processes they may not be consciously aware of by their involvement or lack of involvement, and promote change through awareness. This study was designed to focus on *what is* and *what could be* instead of *what is not*. As the researcher, I view my role to inspire, motivate, listen, collect, analyze, describe, and display the voices of the students (Metzger, 2007). Finally, there was a positive predisposition embedded in the AI interviewing process and the positive psychology theoretical framework used for this study.

Concluding Remarks

The success and retention of underrepresented students involves campus-wide collaboration along with attention from national and local leaders, and needs to be looked at as a complex and many-faceted phenomenon. The methodology for this study, a qualitative phenomenological research design, was employed to identify factors that contribute to the successful retention and completion of underrepresented student

populations in community college settings as they face personal, familial, economic, and academic challenges. This study brought together data regarding underrepresented student populations and the voices of the participants involved in a career coaching program at a community college in Virginia.

CHAPTER FOUR

PROFILES OF PARTICIPANTS

This qualitative study was conducted to explore the lived experiences and perceptions of underrepresented community college students who participated in career coaching while in high school. The main goal of this study was to identify life events, experiences, and people who contributed to their motivation, their self-efficacy, and the reality they created through their relationships in their quest to obtain an associate degree. This chapter includes demographic information and a profile of each of the eleven participants.

Introduction of the Participants

The eleven participants were identified as students who received career coaching while in high school. Selection criteria included students who had completed one year of college with at least 24 credit hours and a 2.0 GPA or higher. The participants of this research study were representative of the cultural makeup of the community college that they attended. The ethnic makeup of the student body is 86% White, 9% Black or African American, and 5% from other ethnicities/races. Out of the eleven participants, seven were White, three were African-American, and one was Native American. The participants consisted of six females and five males. All eleven participants were first-generation college students and most were the first in their families to attend college. Seven students were low-income and Pell financial aid grant recipients. Six participants were both low-income and first-generation. Ten out of the eleven participants in this study received some type of financial aid. Four of the participants were part of the Community College Access Program (CCAP), a two-year, tuition-free scholarship

program for recent high school graduates with a 2.5 GPA or higher and reside within the community college district. Two of the participants were enrolled in the Regional Academy, a pre-college program that serves selected 11th and 12th grade students and allowed qualified high school students who meet the general admissions requirements for the college to enroll in college courses while in high school. In all, six of the eleven participants were dual enrolled in both high school and college coursework while attending high school. Nine participants were enrolled in their second semester of their freshman year and two were planning to graduate at the end of the semester (May 2013). All participants in this study earned their high school diplomas and started college right after high school graduation. Of the eleven participants, seven worked part time while attending college; none of the participants worked full-time jobs. All of the participants were enrolled in college on a full-time basis. Table 4 illustrates the demographic profiles of the participants.

Table 4

Participant Demographic Information

Name	Age	Gender	Level in college	Level of involvement in career coaching program	First Generation College Student	Ethnicity	Dual enrolled	Financial incentive
Anne	20	Female	Sophomore	Senior year, one visit	Yes	African-American	Yes	Pell grant and CCAP scholarship
Benny	19	Male	Sophomore	Senior year, weekly visits	Yes	Caucasian	Yes	Pell grant
Carmen	19	Female	Freshman	Senior year	Yes	African-American	No	CCAP scholarship
David	19	Male	Sophomore	Junior and senior years	Yes	Caucasian	Yes	CCAP scholarship
Ethan	19	Male	Freshman	Sophomore through senior year	Yes	Native American	No	Unknown
Frank	19	Male	Freshman	Junior and senior years	Yes	Caucasian	Yes	Pell grant and CCAP scholarship
Genie	19	Female	Freshman	Junior and senior years	Yes	Caucasian	No	Pell grant
Heidi	19	Female	Freshman	Senior year	Yes	Caucasian	No	Pell grant
Ike	19	Male	Sophomore	Freshman and sophomore years	Yes	Caucasian	Yes	Pell grant
Jenna	19	Female	Freshman	Senior year	Yes	African-American	No	Pell grant
Kayla	19	Female	Freshman	Junior and Senior years through English class	Yes	Caucasian	Yes	CCAP scholarship

To protect the participants’ identity, pseudonyms have been used instead of their actual names. In the following participant profiles, I provide the opportunity to meet the participants as individuals and to see their unique differences, their career coaching experience while in high school, their motivations for pursuing college, the challenges they faced along the way, and the contributing factors which assisted in their journey to succeed while enrolled at the community college.

Anne

Anne is a 20-year-old, African American female business major. She is in her second year of college on track to graduate in the next few months. Anne shared that she

has always wanted to go to college and major in business; however, paying for college was an obstacle. While enrolled as a full-time college student, she also works part time.

Anne is the first in her family to attend college, is low-income, receives the Pell financial aid grant, and is a part of the Community College Access Program. Her previous career coaching experience while in high school was limited, having only one or two visits with a coach, focused essentially on the discussion of a scholarship opportunity at the local community college. Anne considers herself a hard worker and attributes her success to “doing what I am supposed to do and listening to my Momma.”

Anne recalled growing up in a single parent family, emphasizing, “All my life it has just been me and my mom. That is one person I know I can count on.” Anne has a cousin who is a professor at a university in Tennessee who she considers a role model and a motivation for her attending college. About her cousin, Anne remarked: “She went through a lot when she was like really young and she is still able to be a success. . . . She is now trying to get her M.D.”

Even though Anne has a diagnosis of ADHD, she graduated from high school with honors. Initially, her goal was planning to attend a four-year college immediately after high school but she connected with her career coach and decided that the local community college and CCAP would be a better fit financially.

Anne’s goal is to obtain her associate degree at the community college and then transfer to a local four-year university to obtain a bachelor’s degree in business. Because she is a CCAP participant, she will qualify for a tuition discount of fifty percent at two, local, four-year colleges in her town.

Benny

Benny is a 19-year-old, Caucasian male with a major in mechatronics. At the time of our interview, Benny was enrolled in his second semester at the community college; however he was in his sophomore year of college because he had accumulated many dual enrollment credits while still in high school. Having so many college credits before graduating from high school was one of Benny's motivations for continuing on at the community college. He stated: "I was going to be accepted into the college because I had already started taking credits. . . . I had 24 to 30 credits before I even left high school."

Benny is the first in his family to attend college, low-income, and a Pell grant recipient. His coaching experience in high school was vast as he worked closely with the guidance department and had almost unlimited access to his career coach. He recalled his relationship with his career coach as one that set him on the correct path, stating:

I knew I wanted to go to college. I knew I wanted to be an engineer, but I didn't have a real set course on how to go. . . . She explained that one of the best things I could do would be to transfer into a university and that is what I am doing now. Benny works a part-time job as a flower delivery man alongside his mother. Our initial interview had to be rescheduled because it was the day after Valentine's Day. His legs were giving him trouble because he had worked so hard the previous day. In addition to working with his mom, he helps his dad in the family business. Seeing his dad work long hours and experiencing success from hard work has contributed to Benny's work-ready attitude. He recalled: "My dad worked long hours to get where he is and he's pretty successful in his line of work. . . . And after seeing that, I know I am going to have to do the same thing."

Growing up in a single family home, spending limited time with his dad, and moving from place to place while in middle school were challenges in the back of Benny's mind as he transitioned to college. He relayed his childhood experiences and resulting life lessons to me in this way:

Since I was in middle school, I lived with my mom. I still got to hang out with my dad on certain days, but it's not that I completely lived there. I grew up not having much of anything to go off of. . . . I know she spent her money on me to be able to be happy in life but moving from being together with the family, to moving to an apartment and then to another house and then having problems with inflation, then moving in with my grandmother . . . I had to keep in mind, I have to get everything done while life is still going on.

Benny's goal is to obtain his associate degree and then transfer to a four-year university to obtain his bachelor's degree in engineering.

Carmen

Carmen is a 19-year-old, African American female with a major in accounting. She is a second semester freshman. Because several people in her family are in the field of accounting, she has always known she wanted to go to college and major in accounting. Carmen stated: "My aunt is an accountant in Georgia, and my grandma was in it for a little bit and my Momma took two years of accounting. So it is running through the family". However, her family's inability to pay for a four-year college education was a major barrier, according to Carmen.

She is low-income, a Pell grant recipient, and also is a part of the Community College Access Program. Even though her mother obtained an associate degree, she is still classified as a first-generation college student, according to the DOE definition. Her coaching experience in high school was moderate; she worked with her coach on several occasions to discuss job salary information, job opportunities in specific geographic

areas, and scholarship opportunities. As a result of researching salary information for different geographic areas with her career coach, she determined that she eventually would like to move to Atlanta, because she was excited about the economic prospects for her chosen career field in the area.

Carmen is an exceptionally hard working, goal-oriented, outgoing student who desires to please her parents. She often receives instruction from her parents that keeps her on track, saying:

My mom and my dad lecture me over and over again . . . Since they're going to keep lecturing me, I'm going to actually do this. . . . I set my mind on what I'm going to do and what I have to do and what I need to do to make myself happy and to satisfy me and my parents.

Getting to this point was somewhat difficult in her senior year in high school because Carmen doubted her ability to study accounting: “I didn’t know if I could do it. Accounting would be hard. . . . I wasn’t sure of what it all entailed. . . . Once I figured out what it was—math with bigger words, it’s been easier.” Her goal is to obtain her associate degree and after graduation enter the workforce in the accounting field.

David

David is a 19-year-old, Caucasian male with a major in science. He is a second semester freshman. In his spare time, David works several hours at his part-time job. This balancing act is not new to him since he was a student-athlete taking college courses while in high school. He stated: “I feel I have distractions outside of the classroom. . . . Having to devote time to school takes away from your social life, so I have to be disciplined.”

David is dedicated and confident about the goals that he has set for himself and this motivates him to continue to work hard. Regarding his achievement motivation, he stated:

Personal dedication and aspirations in life and my dreams—where I want to go and what I want to do. I want a job that I can enjoy. . . . Personally I'm very motivated; I'm very determined and willing to learn. After I experienced success, really with sports, I craved it. I craved success and achievement. The feeling of achievement is one of the best for me, and that's probably where my self-confidence comes from.

During his senior year in high school, David experienced some injuries that changed his life. "I started down the chiropractic path and now that's where I'm setting my dreams." In addition to his injuries that lead him down a new career path into the health field, working as a stonemason had a little something to do with it as well. He recalled: "I believed that's what motivated me to go to college . . . working as a stonemason for three summers, working out in the heat, laboring, not earning very much money."

David is the first in his family to attend college and is a part of the Community College Access Program, too. Since he comes from a large family, paying for college was an obstacle for his parents who have six children. His career coaching experience began when he was a sophomore in high school and continued until he graduated. About this experience, David commented that it "had a big impact on me coming to the community college." His goal is to complete his associate degree and then transfer to a four-year university. His long-term goal is to obtain a Doctor of Chiropractic degree.

Ethan

Ethan is a 19-year-old, Native American male currently majoring in general studies. He is a second semester freshman. Even though his mother obtained an associate

degree, he is still classified as a first-generation college student, according to the DOE definition. His father also attended college prior to enlisting in the armed forces; however, he did not obtain a degree. Ethan attributes his parents attending college as his primary motivating factor for obtaining a college degree, explaining it this way:

Because my mom went to college and my father went to college, I wanted to go to college so that I can do what I really wanted to do and have a safe source by having money. This gives me leeway if something was to happen. I want to be prepared. I want to be cautious about what happens. I want to have a decent job to where I can have breathing room, if something was to pop up.

Ethan considers himself to be level-headed which helped him overcome the stresses associated with high school. He stated he was able to “keep stress free and cool”. Ethan attributes his levelheadedness to allowing him to prioritize “and always think about what needs to come first”.

Ethan’s career coaching experience began in his sophomore year and continued throughout his senior year in high school. According to Ethan, having a lasting relationship with his career coach helped him “expand my knowledge about what choices . . . I really have compared to the choices I thought I would have, which was narrow in my opinion. Once I talked to him, it widened my options.” His goal is to obtain his associate degree in general studies, which leaves his options open when transferring to a four-year university.

Frank

Frank is a 19-year-old, Caucasian male with a major in culinary arts. He is the first in his family to attend college, is low-income, receives the Pell grant, and is a participant in the Community College Access Program. Frank stated he received much of his motivation to attend college from his grandfather.

I look up to my grandfather a lot because from an early age he said he wanted to do everything, see everything, and advised me to do everything that I can in my life. I think that's exactly the same drive I have.

In addition to receiving support and motivation from his family, Frank's drive and determination keeps him focused. In his words:

Having that will and having that drive to go to college and to finish and get that degree—I think that's really the motivation and the quality that I have that really makes me successful. It's like you want it so bad and you know you can obtain it and you know it won't be long until you do it.

Frank has struggled with being a procrastinator; he realizes this doesn't serve him well in college.

When I finished high school, I got out of the habit of being a procrastinator. That's definitely one of the biggest things, especially attending here. Procrastinating is not one of those things that you can get away. Once you get rid of that habit and start turning in things on time that plays a really important role in success in college.

Frank's coaching experience began in his junior year and continued throughout his senior year in high school. He attributes his career coach to giving him "information about different programs, and enrolling into college was the biggest part—being able to get into college." His goal is to obtain his associate degree and enter the workforce in the culinary field.

Genie

Genie is a 19-year-old, Caucasian female with a major in health sciences. She is a second semester freshman. Genie works a part-time job as an office assistant while attending college. Having this part-time job helps her balance her studies because she is able to study while working. She is the first in her family to attend college. Genie has

always known she wanted to go to college; however, choosing a major was somewhat of a challenge for Genie.

Genie recalls many pleasant experiences while transitioning from high school to college. She speaks of receiving a great deal of support from her parents. Genie stated:

I knew I was going to go to college. Financially, my parents helped me. They paid for as much as they could for me. They want me to experience everything that they never had the opportunity when they were growing [up]. They gave me every opportunity they could give me to be the best I can.

In addition to her familial support, Genie is motivated to succeed and desires a college degree so that she can have more career opportunities. She remarked:

I am a very motivated person; I don't like quitting. I like to successfully finish what I start. I am pretty committed to doing that. . . . You get better job opportunities if you are here, make more money, and can be more successful and have more of a stable job if you go to college.

Genie's coaching experience began in her junior year in high school and continued until graduation. She attributes a job shadow experience that was arranged by her career coach as the deciding factor in helping her choose a major, asserting: "It really opened my eyes to what I wanted to do." Her goal is to complete one year at the community college and then transfer to a four-year university to obtain her bachelor's degree in respiratory therapy.

Heidi

Heidi is a 19-year-old, Caucasian female who is majoring in dental hygiene. She is the first in her family to attend college, low-income, and is a Pell grant recipient. She is a second semester freshman. Heidi works part time in the fast food industry where she holds a management position. Most of her life has been dedicated to dancing in her spare

time—performing as well as teaching. She combined her love for teaching and her skills together in deciding on a college major.

All throughout my life I've been a dancer and, in the past two years, I have been a student teacher and absolutely loved it. . . . I was sitting in a dentist chair getting my teeth cleaned, and I was thinking of my skills and thought 'I can do this?' I liked what they did, and I loved being able to teach people. With me being a teacher and everything, I thought this is really something that I could do.

Heidi is the first in her family to attend college. She experienced a lack of guidance from her parents as she navigated her college course, recalling it this way:

I'm very proud of my parents; they didn't go. But, I wish to goodness they would have put more into guiding me and helping me. I wanted them to be more a part of it because afterwards I talked to my mom and asked, 'Did you just think I had all of it?' She was like, 'Yeah, I figured you did.' Because she knew I was going to counselors. It helped with everything but, still, I needed that. My mom is one of my best friends; I needed that.

Heidi's coaching experience did not begin until in her senior year and continued through high school graduation. She attributes her career coach experience to helping her feel more confident. About her career coach, Heidi stated: "She was such a good source of inspiration. . . . It made me feel so much more confident and secure about my decisions." Her goal is to obtain her associate degree in dental hygiene and enter the workforce as a hygienist after graduation.

Ike

Ike is 19-year-old Caucasian male with a major in the STEM career of mechatronics. He is the first in his family to attend college, is low-income, receives the Pell grant, and was a participant in the Regional Academy. He is a second semester freshman. Because his dad served 22 years in the military, he wants to follow in his footsteps to become a weapons engineer. He received his motivation to attend college

from his father by seeing how dedicated his father has been to his life's goals. He recalls:

My dad—because without him, going to college would be a lot harder; He spent 22 years of his life in the U.S. military for me to go to college one day. That's why I'm going. So without dad I wouldn't be able to be going to college. They're paying me to go to classes so I think that's an interesting thing and I think without dad I probably wouldn't be as dedicated.

His career coaching experience began in his freshman year and continued until he graduated from high school. Ike found high school to be boring, so working with his career coach early in high school set him on path to pursue college opportunities early through the Regional Academy. He began taking college courses in the 11th grade. He states:

I started out my freshman year of high school and started talking to him, then as the years went on or year went on typically started my sophomore year, they brought this program to my attention. I said let's go for it.

Staying focused and engaged has been a challenge for Ike, in high school as well as in college. Therefore pursuing college opportunities early was a strategy used to keep Ike engaged in learning. He recalls:

I'd say my personal challenge is that I found school to be very boring, just sitting on the desk whole day is not fun to me, I'm a hands-on guy. Educational challenges I don't know, I just - again I think it's because I was just bored, couldn't really pay attention.

Ike is dedicated to his goals and therefore remains focused on the future: "It's that hope of the future that keeps me going. . . . it's my search for knowledge, I'm always looking for knowledge." His goal is to obtain his associate degree in advanced technology in mechatronics and then enter the military to become a weapons engineer.

Jenna

Jenna is a 19 year-old, African American female with a major in human services. She is a second semester freshman, low-income, and a Pell grant recipient. Jenna works a part-time job at the middle school she attended in addition to being a full-time student. She enjoys working with children and finds her part-time job and college major as an excellent fit.

Jenna is the first in her family to attend college; her mother did not attend college nor did others in her immediate family. She has always seen her mom work two jobs to make ends meet. Jenna was prepared to do the same before being introduced to her career coach, recalling:

I wouldn't have been here. I would have just worked because that's what she wanted. She is not as well off as she wants to be, but I could have dealt with that—working two jobs and then just coming home, sleeping, working and doing it again.

Jenna's family struggles with finances for everyday necessities so she thought attending college was not within her reach. Working with her career coach during her senior year in high school opened her up to new possibilities. She acknowledged:

I was thinking about out of pocket. 'This is not going to happen' and I told her that. I was like, 'There is no way financially, I am going to be able to go to college.' She was like 'Yes there is.'

Jenna is determined to succeed and make her family proud, asserting: "I am determined; I just want to make my family proud. That's just the main thing. I worry about disappointing them, so I make sure I am on top of what I needed to do." Jenna's goal is to obtain her associate degree in human services and then transfer to a four-year university to obtain her bachelor's in social work and, eventually, a master's degree in

social work. Her long term goal is to obtain her Ph.D. and one day operate her own practice as a licensed clinical social worker.

Kayla

Kayla is a 19-year-old, Caucasian female majoring in general studies and is a participant in the Community College Access Program. She has always had the desire to attend college, emphasizing that her goal is “to earn a degree to get a better job, because you have more options if you have a degree.”

However, Kayla shared that having the financial support needed for college was a barrier to attaining her educational goals. She is the first in her family to attend college and much of her motivation originates from her parents. Kayla expressed that “My parents, they told me from a young age, ‘You go to high school and you go to college. There is no real question about it; it’s just what you do.’”

Kayla attributes her college success to being a hard worker—one who is confident in her abilities and gives 100 percent when performing a task. She stated, “It’s my persistence. I’ve been really a hard worker. When I want to do something, I don’t just kind of do it.”

Kayla’s coaching experience began in her 11th grade English class and continued through her 12th grade English class. At the time of her initial contact with her career coach, she thought: “I am only in the 11th grade. I am not really thinking about college too much yet.” Prior to working with her career coach, she always thought you had to pay out-of-pocket to attend college but soon discovered there were many scholarship opportunities available to students. Through her relationship with her career coach, she learned of the two-year, free scholarship at the local community college. Her eventual

goal is to transfer to a four-year university to complete a degree in biology. Kayla desires to one day become a botanist.

Concluding Remarks

This chapter has provided demographic information of the 11 participants as well as detailed profiles of the individual participants in this study. The participant profiles were created as a result of one-on-one, face-to-face, in-depth interviews. The commonalities and differences among the participants in this study will be explored further in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

THEMATIC ANALYSIS

The last chapter focused on the individual experiences of the participants of this study whereas this chapter focuses on the commonalities across their experiences. The data analysis process used for this phenomenological study also is presented. The data were collected and then processed in response to the research questions outlined in the first chapter. An exploration of the major themes and subthemes for the eleven underrepresented college students interviewed for this study is presented in this chapter.

The process of thematic analysis began by first reading over the transcripts without looking for anything in particular. Next, a list of codes was created based on the research question and sub-questions pertaining to participants' perceptions and beliefs about higher education, their motivations for attending college, the challenges they faced and how they overcame these challenges, contributing factors to their success, and their significant career coaching experiences. Then, the data was reread while highlighting recurring ideas. After that, Nvivo 10 computer software was used to once again highlight recurring ideas and place them into themes. The development of themes emerged from the modified van Kaam method of phenomenological data analysis (Moustakas, 1994). The themes were placed in their own folder, keeping track of the number of times the theme was referenced and by which participant. The van Kaam method is comprised of developing individual textural (what participants experienced) and structural descriptions (how or in what context participants experienced it), a composite of the textural and structural descriptions, and a synthesis of textural and structural meanings to convey the overall essence of the experience (Moustakas, 1994).

Their responses to the interview questions were assessed on an overall basis. From their responses to the interview questions, four major themes and eight subthemes related to the research questions were identified, which are: Theme 1—Motivations for Attending College with three subthemes: (a) Received Motivation from a Family Member, (b) Desired a Better Life, and (c) Tuition/Financial Aid Incentives; Theme 2—Challenges Faced by Underrepresented Students with two subthemes (a) Lack of Financial Resources and Lack of Awareness of Financial Aid and (b) Trying to Balance Their School, Work, and Personal Lives; Theme 3—Contributing Factors for Overcoming Challenges and for Their Success with four subthemes: (a) Creating Relationships with Career Coach, (b) Personal Attributes: Self-confidence, Self-efficacy, and Determination as Indicators of Success, (c) Family and Other Influential People, and (d) Early College and Career Planning; and Theme 4—Career Coach Support While Navigating the College Transition with two subthemes: (a) Career Coaching Support While in College and (b) Helped to Select a Major and Get on the Right Path. Supporting excerpts and thick descriptions were used to illustrate the identified themes and subthemes from the analysis of the individual interviews of eleven underrepresented college students attending a community college in Virginia and had participated in a career coaching program while in high school.

Motivations for Attending College

The first major theme to emerge from the data was “Motivations for Attending College” with three subthemes regarding their perceptions and beliefs about higher education and their motivations for going on to college: (a) received motivation from a family member, (b) desire for a better life, and (c) tuition/financial aid incentives. When

asking participants about their perceptions and beliefs about higher education, most of the discussion centered on what motivated them to attend college. Eleven of the twelve participants stated they received motivation from a family member. Eight participants said they were motivated to attend college because of their desire for a better life. Tuition and financial aid incentives also motivated eight participants to pursue a college degree. See Table 5. Tables will be used to graphically depict my findings and themes/subthemes throughout this chapter.

Table 5

Participants' Motivations for Attending College

Participants' Responses	Number of Participants
Motivation from a family member	11
Desire for a better life	8
Tuition/financial aid incentives	8

Motivation from a Family Member

All of the participants explained their beliefs about attaining a college education and the motivation that they received from a family member in their own way and in their own terms. They all stated someone in their family motivated them to succeed academically and attend college. The motivation the study participants received came from their parents, grandparents, siblings, aunts, uncles, and cousins. Eight participants acknowledged that the motivation they received from their parents became the primary source of motivation for them. For instance, Genie stated: “Well, my parents, they didn’t go to college. They graduated from high school and they kept telling me: ‘You’ve got to pass. You’ve got to stay motivated. You’ve got to go to college and succeed and have a

good career.” Moreover, Benny recalled hearing his mother’s unfortunate high school experiences and received constant reminders from her not to follow in her footsteps, sharing that:

[My mom] always pushed me to do good in school because she’d always either skipped or dropped out. I think she dropped out in her junior year. When she realized how important it was, she made sure that I wasn’t going to do the same thing by following in her footsteps.

Another motivating factor participants identified was that their parents set the expectation and belief that college was their only option after high school. From an early age, many parents instilled in their children that college was the only option. For example, Anne communicated, “My mom told me: ‘Well, you are going to college. You don’t have any choice.’ I was in the first grade when she told me this. ‘You have no choice. You are going to college.’” Similarly, David who has five siblings, all of whom were expected to attend college, received his initial motivation from his mother, asserting: “It started with my – really my mom kicking me in the butt, to be honest.”

The belief about the importance of attending college, which was instilled in many of the participants by their parents and/or other family members, appeared to be the guiding factor in their decision to immediately attend college after high school. To the participants, it became the next natural step in the progression of their education, as Frank explained:

It’s almost the same thing as when parents say: ‘You’re going to elementary school, you’re going to middle school, and you’re going to high school.’ It feels like it’s just another one of those things; it’s not as a choice that you are given. It’s more like—you kind of have to go to high school so I’m going to go to college—for that kind of same reason.

In addition to gaining motivation from his parents, Frank noted how his grandparents were a major factor in motivating him to attend college. He stated:

Ever since I was little, my parents and grandparents instilled it in me . . . When I was just born, my grandparents were already saving up for my college tuition—right from the get go. As soon as they heard that my mom was pregnant with me, they started an account and started saving up, so it was from my understanding when I was younger that college was always a necessity. So, I've always been motivated ever since I was really young.

As a practitioner, I have been charged with helping students find the motivation to attend college, if not for themselves, to do it for their-younger siblings or cousins who are watching. I advise students that their life speaks even if they are not using words.

“Entering college and not completing college gives those coming up after you permission to do the same”, I often tell students. This example seemed to ring true for Benny, as he shared with me: “One of my cousins went to Tech and another one of his brothers went to Tech; this was a contributing factor for me.” When asking Anne about the people in her life who influenced her, she stated: “I don't think of a particular person. It was basically my mother and one of my cousins.”

For many of the participants, the initial motivation stemmed from a loved one. However, as these underrepresented students progressed in college, it was clear that they used their own qualities and attributes, like determination and a strong work ethic, as motivating factors to continue with their education.

Desire for a Better Life

Underrepresented college students often lack having a family member to provide guidance or act as a role model in matters pertaining to college attendance, especially if they are the first in their family to attend college. Students who are the first in their family to attend college and also low-income may have family members who have experienced financial hardships or gainful employment problems due to dropping out of

high school and/or lack of a college education. In this study, it seemed as though the participants' beliefs about the importance of attending college were a driving force that motivated them. One of the motivating factors expressed by eight of the eleven participants to attend college was the belief that a college education would lead to a chance at a better life for them, as Anne explained:

I wanted to be better than my parents. I wanted to be better than my older sister. So that's why I definitely wanted to be in college in the first place. I realized in today's time you've got to have a degree to be or to become successful, at least financially. That's why I did it.

Experiencing the worst economic climate in decades was, in part, a motivating factor for Carmen. When asked her reasons for attending college, she stated:

To better educate myself and to have a degree and to see if I can get a better job because the economy right now is just all over the place. I wanted something to do with my life and to be successful and just always do my best.

For one participant, the experience of working in a job performing manual labor for little pay motivated his decision to pursue a college degree. David noted: "The number one turning point I tell people is I had a job. I was a stonemason for three summers, working out in the heat, laboring, not earning very much money." What kept David motivated is his desire "to have a job that I can enjoy and contribute to others well-being as well as my own, eventually, and to do something positive for society rather than negative or stale."

Many participants spoke of their parents having to work hard in positions they did not care for and advised them to attend college "or else you'll be stuck in a job that you don't like, like they are now", as Genie expressed to me. Likewise, David used his parents' level of education as a goal above which he set for himself when he shared he wanted to "rise above the level of education my parents received . . . and be comfortable

in life.” Looking ahead to the future, Ike, too, proclaimed that one of his motivations for attending college was to “make a better life for my future family and a better life for me in general.”

Not only did these underrepresented students receive motivation from seeing their parents struggle, they worked hard and learned early in life that education pays off. They had seen people in the community become disabled, unemployed, or even involved in criminal behavior, often feeling a sense of helplessness and hopelessness; they sought to do better and carve a better life for themselves. Carmen, for example, stated:

I don't want to be like some of these other people who just get a disability check and depend on it, especially if they don't need it. I don't want to be out on the streets like all these other people. I just want to have a good life.

Seeing extended family members, like aunts and uncles, attempt college and not successfully complete their goal of a college degree helped motivate participants like Benny. He recalled:

Only two other people in my family besides me—my uncle and aunt—have attended college. Neither of them have actually completed college; one went for about two years and the other one went for three. They both dropped out, so I am hoping to be the first to actually complete it successfully.

Having both successful and unsuccessful role models seemed to motivate the participants in this study—to either want to repeat history or stay as far away from it as possible. The notion of having a college degree seemed to give participants the hope of a better future; one better than they observed previously in some of their family and community members. For the participants in this study, a college degree seemed to equal success in life.

Tuition/Financial Aid Incentives

For many underrepresented students who fall within the middle majority or Middle Class America, financing their college education, especially in the current economic environment, can be difficult. On the federal level, the Department of Education recently made changes to reduce monthly student loan payments by tying them to income level, called the income-based student loan repayment (IBR) program. At the local level, in 2008, the community college used in this particular study created a two-year, tuition-free program (CCAP) that a number of participants of this study viewed as a major motivating factor for their enrollment. The CCAP program impacted the perceptions and matriculation of five students who began to view the community college more favorably and re-think their college plans. Anne, one of the CCAP recipients, summed up what others participants expressed by stating: “I wanted to go to a four-year college right after high school . . . but two years tuition-free. It would be good.”

For these students and their parents, receiving the two-year, tuition-free scholarship reduced the stress and financial burden of paying for higher education. Parents were onboard with saving money for meeting the educational goals of their children. Carmen stated: “My mom—she told me to get here because she's happy with the feedback and because it's two years free.” Even though Carmen's initial plan was to attend a four-year college, her final decision to attend the community college hinged upon the fact that she received a tuition-free scholarship.

Participants in this study felt a strong sense of relief and deep appreciation for the fact that their college tuition was of no cost to them. David explained: “The CCAP program, which is paying for my tuition, it reduced the stress level and increased my

appreciation for the College massively.” Evan also spoke of the importance of reducing his college expenses by stating: “This was pretty much another benefit that I have going here—being a cheaper solution, very cheap solution, compared to everywhere else.”

With the removal of the stress associated with paying for college, reality set in for Frank that a college education actually would be achievable when he received his CCAP scholarship. He explained a highpoint in his transitioning to college, stating: “When I got the CCAP award, I finally started realizing, ‘Hey I’m going to be going to college.’ So, I think that was probably the biggest point when I found that out.”

All students participating in CCAP have a 2.5 GPA requirement they must maintain in order to keep their scholarship. In addition, students are required to perform community service hours, attend student development workshops, and provide advisors with academic progress reports. Ideally, this type of accountability produces students who are more likely to be actively engaged in the learning process. According to David, “It holds you accountable and you’re not freelancing so much. It’s a little bit more structured.”

Receiving a Pell grant was also a significant motivating factor for students; seven of the eleven participants qualified for Pell grant awards, federal aid offered to low-income college students. Jenna, one such participant receiving the Pell grant, discussed her motivation to pursue a college degree because she learned about financial aid from her career coach and considered it a highpoint. Jenna stated:

I wouldn’t have been here, I wouldn’t have come, and I would have just worked because that’s what my momma did. She is not as well off as she wants to be, but I could have dealt with that. Working two jobs and then just coming home, sleeping, waking up, and doing it again. But when we talked about more choices and about coming here and what type of money was offered and what was going

on, it looked better than going to a four-year college. I really felt like I would be paying out-of-pocket. I didn't know that there was a program. I didn't know that.

Understanding how to apply for the Pell grant can be an arduous task for many students, especially if their parents have never gone to college nor completed the fairly complex federal financial aid form. Benny spoke of his initial difficulty, which later turned to excitement with his Pell grant experience, by stating:

I didn't quite know how to read the financial aid forms. We went into a computer lab one day and we pulled it up. And she showed me where I was going to be able to have my full tuition for the year paid for through financial aid. So, it was kind of very exciting to know that I would be going to college. There's nothing that's holding me back now!

As a practitioner, I have worked in various high school and college settings and found it refreshing to work with students who are cognizant of the current financial climate and plan accordingly, like one of the participants, Frank, who began working with his career coach in his junior year in high school. He stated that his career coach "gave me some websites, and I looked on there for different grants to plan ahead because it's never too early." Ten out of the eleven participants in this study received some type of financial aid. Five of the participants were part of CCAP and seven students were low-income and qualified as Pell grant recipients. Receiving financial aid removed the heavy burden of paying for college, therefore, motivating the participants to pursue their college degrees.

The motivation and belief system received from family members initially led these participants to pursue their college dreams. Receiving financial aid solidified their decisions to attend college and made a college education financially viable for these underrepresented college students while the desire for a better life seemed to fuel them

daily to keep going. The internal and external motivators discussed here and will be expanded upon later under other themes have aided in the participants' success thus far.

Challenges Faced by Underrepresented Students

Two subthemes emerged related to the second major theme “Challenges Faced by Students”: (a) trying to balance their school, work, and personal lives; and (b) lack of financial resources and lack of awareness of financial aid. Surprisingly, most students in this study, unlike many underrepresented students and the majority of community college students, were academically prepared with only one participant in this study discussing the need to take remedial courses. This anomaly may have occurred because many participants in this study were enrolled in dual enrollment coursework in high school and recipients of the CCAP scholarship with its 2.5 GPA requirements for eligibility and renewal of the program.

Each participant explained the challenges they faced in their own words and in their own terms. And, even though none of the interview questions specifically addressed finances, ten of the eleven participants discussed either how they paid for their tuition, struggles related to having enough resources to pay for their college education, and/or their lack of knowledge about financial aid programs. Additionally, being able to obtain school-life balance was another challenge discussed by eight participants. See Table 6.

Table 6

Challenges Faced by Underrepresented Students

Participants' Responses	Number of Participants
Lack of financial resources and lack of awareness of financial aid	10
Trying to balance their school, work, and personal lives	8

Lack of Financial Resources and Lack of Awareness of Financial Aid

Many underrepresented students, particularly low-income students, see their parents struggle financially; they wonder how they can go to college when it is hard for their family to make ends meet. They often inwardly wrestle with not wanting to be a financial burden to their families. Many students, especially Pell grant recipients, were unaware of federal monies that would fully cover the cost of attending the local community college. According to ten participants, the lack of knowledge about financial aid and scholarships and their family's inability to afford a college education served as a potential barrier to their entry into college. According to Jenna:

Financially, that was my thing; I didn't want to go school because it was going to be a financial burden. When she [the career coach] talked to me, she told me it wasn't going to be a financial burden. I would be able to have Pell grant money and, then, 'This is what's going to happen.'
 I never knew about it; I never knew that there was money that you could use for school. I thought you always had to pay out of your pocket. That's what I thought, 'We don't have money for this, this, and this. How am I going to get money for going to college four, five, six years?'

Oftentimes, participants said that they requested assistance from a career coach to learn how to finance their college dreams. Likewise, the Community College Access Program (CCAP) connected high school students to the local community college as did the career coaches who were affiliated with the community college. For example, Anne

specifically worked with the career coach, not to determine a certain career path, but to figure out how to find scholarships. She talked about her inquiry into various scholarship opportunities and CCAP, stating: “I did hear something about CCAP. I asked a question about the college at the time when I was at [the high school].” According to Carmen, “my Momma was not able to pay for a 4-year college” so connecting with her career coach opened up financial aid options through the CCAP scholarship.

As a practitioner, I have had the privilege of conducting financial aid workshops, educating students and parents about various types of aid available. Like some of the participants in this study articulated, I often hear complaints from those in attendance regarding the amount of information and work required to obtain financial aid. Kayla, for instance, remarked: “I was just always kind of stressed thinking about how I would pay for it. There’s a lot of paperwork for trying to get financial help.” Even though completing financial aid forms can be a daunting task, personally it has been rewarding to work with families through the process—from beginning to end. When a family discovers college is possible, it can be joyful. Benny, for example, disclosed: “I didn’t quite know how to read the financial aid forms.” He went on to describe what he thought when receiving his Expected Family Contribution (EFC) of zero by stating: “At first I thought it meant I wasn’t getting anything.” Also, David recalled the convenience of having knowledgeable professionals on his high school campus. He stated: “If I had any questions regarding deadlines or scholarships—financial aid questions, they were there to go and talk to instead of me having to come all the way over to [the college].”

Lack of financial aid knowledge in particular seemed to impact the participants early on in terms of not thinking they could go on to college due to their parents’ lower

SES and lack of ability to support them financially. However, when students learned about financial aid, it made a huge difference for many of them—and more often than not it was the career coach that told them about opportunities for aid and special programs to meet their needs. Heidi’s situation was similar to many other participants who relied on a career coach for information and assistance about applying for financial aid. Heidi described her feelings as being “scared going into it. I just didn’t know where to start. . . . She helped me so much—it’s been a blessing.”

Trying to Balance Their School, Work, and Personal Lives

Seven participants in this study were employed part time while attending college on a full-time basis. Some participants spoke of their family’s financial hardships which required them to take on a job themselves. Having to balance school, work, and social activities was a challenge for nearly all of the students.

For many participants, viewing college as an extension of high school proved to be a rude awakening. During high school, for example, Benny was a strong student academically, taking Advanced Placement (AP) and dual enrollment coursework as part of his high school course load. During the end of his senior year, he found it challenging to “balance everything out because towards the end of the year, a lot of major tests came up in AP classes.” Realizing that college courses were more difficult than high school courses was a lesson learned by many of the participants, including Benny. When asked about his transition to college, Benny acknowledged that he had to shift his thinking. He stated:

I wasn’t big into homework in high school. . . . I graduated and went through summer and came to college. I learned that college is mainly—you come to class for a little bit but it’s mainly all about doing homework and studying. So, it was a complete kind of reversal for me.

When comparing high school rigor to college, Kayla, too, confirmed that “it’s a lot more out-of-school work to do. There is a lot more writing and a lot more work.”

Benny agreed with Kayla that there was an increased workload, explaining it in this way:

In English, [while in high school] I only had to write maybe three papers. They were only a page long but now I am getting into papers that are 500 and up to 700 words. Last semester I wrote one that was 1300 words. It was kind of like: ‘Wow! Here is college. Get ready.’

Jenna continued to work the same job she had worked while in high school but increasingly found that balancing the two became more and more difficult. Keeping up with a high school schedule was a simple task for Jenna; however, enrolling in college courses was different and made her realize “what I really need to do is follow a calendar, which was a big thing for me. That first year it was right out of my head. I never scheduled anything.” Jenna elaborated further on her challenges, sharing the following scenario:

When you first get here, you talk about: ‘This is what’s going on. These are the classes I am taking, but this, this, and this are going on.’ So I had one of the advisors tell me that maybe I should lower my course loads because I do have a lot of stuff going on, plus work.

In addition to school work, the participants continued to enjoy social activities.

Benny and David liked to work on cars and motorcycles in their spare time, Heidi danced, and Carmen explained her fascination with the opposite sex, pointing out, “Boys! I am distracted by boys because I’m so boy psycho.” Carmen admitted that she realized that she must strike a balance and “set aside the fun and actually do my work.” Benny, too, discussed his desires and need for balance by stating:

One of the main things I like to do is to be social and go out and have fun with friends. I still hang out, but with the rigorous task of keeping up with college, you

kind of lose that a little bit during your semesters. I know that at the beginning of the semester it's hard to get back into the swing of things.

In my daily work with students transitioning from high school to college, I have found a vast difference in the maturity level of students. Having even one semester of college under their belts, I noticed as I spoke to the participants of this study that there was an increased level of maturity compared to high school students. Most high school students do not quite understand the reality of what is going to take place as they enter the real world of college life. For example, about her transition to college, Anne stated: “Personally, my head was not in the right way. I still wanted to go party. I wanted to go party, explore, and try out different things. Things that I am not supposed to do yet.” Anne is now in her last semester of college and remarked thoughtfully: “I'm graduating. I'm ready to make those right decisions and ready to sacrifice—something I wasn't able to do when I graduated high school.”

To summarize, the challenges faced by the participants in this study often are barriers for many underrepresented students. Lacking knowledge about financial aid and not having the resources to finance higher education was a challenge for eight of these participants. In addition, nearly all of these underrepresented students displayed considerable misconceptions about the workload to expect in college in comparison to their high school experience. For the participants in this study, creating balance continues to be a constant struggle as they navigate their college journeys. Just like most successful college students, employing effective strategies has assisted them in overcoming many of their challenges, and I got a sense that the participants remain open to employing new methods to assist in their successful pursuit of a college degree.

Contributing Factors for Overcoming Challenges and for their Success

The three subthemes that emerged related to the third major theme “Contributing Factors in Overcoming Challenges and for Their Success” were: (a) creating relationships with career coaches; (b) personal attributes— self-efficacy, self-confidence, and determination; (c) family and other influential people; and (d) early college and career exploration.. Ten participants discussed how creating a relationship with their career coach was an effective strategy to overcoming their challenges and being successful. Developing self-efficacy, self-confidence, and determination was evident among ten participants as a strategy for success and to overcome their challenges as they were growing up, while transitioning into college, and during college. Nine participants felt that family and others contributed to their success. For six participants, early college and career planning played a key role in helping them to be successful. When asked how they overcame their challenges to graduate from high school and to enroll and persist through their first year of college, they most often attributed it to receiving assistance from others and relying on their belief in themselves. See Table 7.

Table 7

Contributing Factors for Overcoming Challenges and for Their Success

Participants' Responses	Number of Participants
Creating relationships with career coach	10
Personal attributes: self-efficacy, self-confidence, and determination as indicators of success	10
Family and other influential people	9
Early college and career planning	6

Creating Relationships with Career Coach

For many of the participants, having someone to talk to about their college aspirations was a confidence booster. Working alongside a career coach, someone knowledgeable about the college-going experience, financial aid, and college costs and who would provide a listening ear, was valuable for participants who took advantage of the career coaching services. Jenna, who worked with her career coach during her senior year, stated:

I saw her for the first year all of the time. It wasn't like you go to somebody and talking to them and then they disappear or you never see them. Through the hallways, I would see her, and she always spoke to me. It made me feel better about the whole situation because it's not like you're one out of so many students and they are not going to remember you. But she actually remembered me. She was like, 'How are you doing and how is the semester going?' So I think them keeping in contact, and when they see you, acknowledging you. . . . I think that's one of the best things because you don't want to feel like: 'Oh, she just talks to me to get me to go here like any other type of recruiter. You're trying to get me to come here.' But, when they actually see you and speak to you and ask how you are doing, it makes you feel better. I just thought I was just going in there to talk about school, but I wined up going in there changing my mindset about school.

Similarly, Benny spent a lot of time with his career coach during his senior year and explained their relationship in this way:

The relationship thing was a bit more because it was one of those where you can have a counselor that you can just talk to once a month or maybe even only twice a year during your high school. Being able to go there and talk to [the career coach] every time that she was there or whenever she was there, every day, to say, 'Hi. How are you doing?' It became more of a friendship.

Having a college career coach on a high school campus is somewhat of a unique experience, one that saved Frank a lot of frustration. He stated: "It simply helped me know where I needed to be and not send me in the wrong direction as far as talking to other people. I needed to talk to somebody that actually knew what they were talking about." Equally, David described the relationship by stating:

It was great to have sort of a bridge there. I felt like there was a bridge between [the county] and [the college] where I just had somebody to talk to and get information from that I couldn't get elsewhere. So, just a presence was just a huge element for me.

Many of the participants were impacted by having a supportive relationship with their career coach. Each participant felt it created a positive experience and often relieved the stress associated with enrolling in college. Only one participant felt that working with the career coach had neither a positive nor negative effect on their college decision-making process.

Having awareness that there are challenges to overcome in life and then developing effective strategies to help overcome these challenges and new life transitions was made possible by participants having developed a confidence in their ability to succeed in school and in life. Their level of confidence developed over time and a number of participants discussed the influence the career coach had on strengthening

their confidence level. By working with the career coach, participants were prepared and knowledgeable about the steps to take for a successful college transition and arrived at a clear direction to achieve their academic and career goals. According to Kayla, establishing a relationship with her coach helped her to build “more confidence”. “I don’t have to do this on my own,” she went on to say. Similarly, when Genie talked about her coaching relationship, she recalled “that it gives you that confidence boost when somebody else tells you that they know that you can do it.” Ike, too, stated: “It helped build my confidence level while I was in high school.”

Personal Attributes: Self-Efficacy, Self-Confidence, and Determination as Indicators of Success

When participants were asked about their level of confidence as a student and in completing their personal, academic, and career goals, three personal attributes were revealed as contributing to their success: self-efficacy, self-confidence, and determination. Participants recognized developing self-efficacy, the belief in their ability to succeed with specific tasks, was influential in their academic success and entry into and success in college. Anne recognized it and said:

Well, certainly, I've got a good confidence level for me personally. I understand that you're going to struggle in some kind of class in college. I think I have a good confidence level. I'm like 'I know I'm going to pass this class.'

The level of confidence seemed to have varied as students transitioned into their college roles. Evan said his confidence stemmed from his ongoing support from his family and his comfort level with his current coursework. He stated:

I have to say I feel pretty confident. When it came to the college courses that I'm taking, I thought, college is going to be a lot harder. Honestly, they break it down easier for you and make it so to the point that you [actually] like it. It's virtually

impossible to not understand. The main factor being that it's easier here provides positivity to your world and actually helps you do what you need to do.

Another participant, David, felt confident because of his previous success in sports and his desire to achieve based upon past success. He recalled his experiences by stating:

What has contributed to my confidence? I would say the feeling of success. . . . After I was successful, really with sports and just doing things in young life, I craved it. I craved success and achievement. The feeling of achievement is one of the best for me and that's probably where a lot of my self-confidence comes from.

Not only were the participants confident, they were very determined to succeed and work hard, which seemed to feed into and enhance their level of confidence. Frank articulated his determined attitude by stating: "It's very high, like I said, nothing can really stop me from achieving my degrees and/or what I want to go into. So, most definitely, my confidence is very high."

As Genie discussed her studies, she recognized she had to tap something deep within to motivate herself to complete her goals: "I know what kind of student I can be and what student I don't want to be. So, I'm always pushing myself to do better." Jenna relayed how it is important to her to have structure and focus in her life: "I am determined. I can't just sit in my house and do nothing". And, David spoke of his personal attributes in the following manner: "Personally I'm very motivated; I'm very determined and willing to learn".

For Ike, choosing to stay close to home and attend a community college proved to be a confidence booster for him. However, as he thought about his plans to transfer to a four-year university, he expressed some doubt about moving into a new setting and not feeling quite as confident. Ike stated:

“I’d say I am semi-confident. Here I’m like 100% confident. I can do whatever. But once I get into a four-year university, I’m going to be a little down. I believe it’s because it’s a different setting. It’s a different environment. I’ll be away from home most of the time; it’s a harder school to go to.”

Six participants expressed confidence because of their prior experience with college level work as dual enrolled high school students. The importance of being confident in completing their personal, academic, and career goals was identified as critical to the success and persistence of nearly all the participants of the study. There was an overall sense of determination and confidence that accompanied the participants’ belief in their abilities to succeed and persist in college as first-generation college students. It seemed as if the participants gained self-efficacy skills over time through their positive experiences with success, the validation they received, their determination and willingness to work hard, and the self-confidence they developed from these experiences, including the support and significant relationships with their career coach, family members, and other influential people in their lives.

Family and Other Influential People

Participants consistently mentioned family members as contributing factors to their success; whether it was supporting them growing up, motivating them to attend college, or providing support or encouraging words while in college. When participants were asked whether there were particular people that contributed to their academic success and enrollment and success in college, nine of the eleven participants identified at least one or more individuals who contributed to their success, David spoke of the encouragement he received from his football coaches and grandparents as well as the lessons his parents instilled in him since he was a small child. He shared in this way:

Oh, there have been many, many people ever since I was of young age. My grandparents, my parents, almost every one of my football coaches since I was small, especially my high school football coach, Mr. Cones. He is one of my mentors. . . . Many other people have told me college is the way to go. . . . I always believe in myself. I've always been told since I was a young child that whatever you put your mind to, you're going to accomplish. I've seen that proven time and time again with my success throughout my young life.

Many participants felt their success and confidence came from the support of their families. According to Evan,

The number one thing would have been having my mom and stepdad. She always has my back, no matter what the situation. And my stepdad, even though he is recent, he has my back just as much as she does and I really appreciate that.

For Jenna, having her mom support her, even if she made mistakes, was a factor contributing to her success. She stated:

My mom was a very good determining factor with me going to college. She wasn't judgmental if I fail a test. It wasn't like 'Oh, you failed a test. What you're going to do?' She would say things like 'Maybe you can pull your grades up. See if you can get extra credit.' Qualities that have contributed to my success are being determined and having a good support system.

Frank spoke of his grandparents laying a foundation that education was important early in his life. Because his grandparents always expected him to attend college, he was prepared for the next step after high school. He recalls his grandparents' teachings by stating:

My grandparents, they did help me because like I said from an early age they wanted me to be involved in college, to go to college, just like they did. To me, college didn't really seem like a big scary place where you would have all this work or like it's hard to get into college or hard to finish. They instilled it as it's just like middle school or elementary school. You go to school and you get a degree and you are out. . . . With that kind of an approach, especially from an early age, I didn't really think college was really going to be that hard, it's just still school, still basic school. It's nothing to be scared of.

Benny, who is an engineering major, gives credit to his parents for guiding him in the right direction and gifting him with math abilities. Benny spoke often about his love for cars and the connection he and his dad had because of their family business. He explained to me how he made his decision to major in engineering:

Both of my parents were good in math and I inherited that trait from them. So, I decided to go with engineering because engineering is a math related subject. It seemed like it would be something that would be interesting, especially since I have been around cars all my life. My dad has owned nice cars and we have gone to car shows and have participated in different events; so I have always been interested in cars, math and science.

Carmen, a CCAP participant, spoke of her desire to attend a four-year university. Her parents and friends were instrumental in persuading her to attend the community college. When asked about influential people, Carmen acknowledged:

My friends, my parents, and me, of course. My friend motivated me; I didn't want to go here and my friend motivated me because most of my friends that I hung out with in high school go here. So, they wanted me to come here too. . . . Now that I'm here, actually, it's really good. They have a lot of opportunities for you to take advantage of and a lot of activities to get involved in. I have made a lot of new friends from different parts of the county. They're cool so I'm glad I came here.

Getting to college and succeeding in college seemed like a group effort for the participants in this study. No one person made the transition alone; it took family and friends to offer words of encouragement or instill the belief early on that a college education is important. For one participant, listening to her friends paid off because she is now enjoying her time at the community college. She is in her major and plans to enter the world of work upon graduating with her two-year degree in accounting.

Early College and Career Planning

Along with having confidence in their ability to succeed, participants described the importance of having experienced college courses and career exploration through dual enrollment, volunteering, job shadowing, and career planning exercises while still in high school. These early college and career exploration activities added to the confidence level of participants as well as helped them make weighty decisions regarding an academic major. For example, Jenna, who is majoring in human services, spoke of her experience as a volunteer: “I used to volunteer in high school. Where I went to middle school, I volunteered. Shortly after I started working there, once I turned 18, I was offered a job there because I want to work with kids.”

For some participants, being enrolled in dual enrollment coursework while in high school gave them added confidence that they would be accepted into college and successful academically. Benny stated it this way:

I was going to be accepted into [the college] because I had already started credits. I started taking my classes back in 9th grade, so I had been taking credit classes for [college] since 9th grade and actually accumulated up to, I think, 24 to 30 credits before I even left high school.

Students with early college experiences in high school seemed comfortable pursuing college after graduation. David, too, asserted, “I took advantage of every dual enrollment course that I could in [the] county. I enjoyed it. It was more like being in college while still in high school.”

Having a strong career plan with fairly clear career goals seemed to have increased participants’ belief in their ability to succeed. For Ike, beginning his major in a STEM career in the 11th grade through the Regional Academy was exciting. He spoke of his acceptance as a high point:

I think the highest point for me would have been when we started talking about the Academy. I started out my freshman year of high school talking to [the career coach]. Then as the . . . year went, they brought this program to my attention.

Carmen was unsure of her specific major in college but after sitting down with her career coach, she was able to make a number of life and career choices.

What I wanted to do with my life. I got to look at different jobs I was into. I got to look at those jobs and then think about which one I would like better and, then, go for that one.

For two participants, having the opportunity to job shadow was eye opening. For Heidi, the experience helped her make up her mind regarding dental hygiene as the right career path. She stated: “My first time job shadowing with [the career coach], she was talking about everything, and I was just so excited to just start.” For Genie, job shadowing in the x-ray department left her feeling as if she wanted a more hands-on career in the health care field. She stated: “I did the job shadow and just afterwards, I was like: “That was fun and all, but this doesn’t fit me.” As a result of their job shadowing experiences, Heidi has decided to work with disadvantaged patients who lack health insurance while Genie has decided to major in respiratory therapy instead of x-ray technology.

Being successful academically and overcoming various challenges was made possible by the participants: (a) creating relationships with their career coach; (b) using determination, self-efficacy, and self-confidence; and (c) engaging in dual enrollment, job shadowing, and career planning exercises. Reliance upon the knowledge of career coaches to provide support during their college transition became an effective strategy employed by the participants in this study. Early college and career planning activities helped students make life-changing career decisions at an early stage in their lives rather

than later wasting time in college by being undecided or changing majors—or with potentially unsatisfying careers down the road. Most important, students had the will and determination, deep down inside of them, to go after their college aspirations.

Career Coach Support While Navigating the College Transition

Having career coaches in high schools is unique, a ground breaking initiative in the state of Virginia. Working with a career coach is available to students on a voluntary basis and provides benefits to students that guidance counseling may not or can supplement. When asking participants about their career coaching experience, two subthemes emerged from the data related to the fourth major theme “Career Coach Support While Navigating the College Transition”. These are: (a) getting help with selecting a major and getting on the right path; and (b) help understanding financial aid. Nine participants received helped with selecting a major and getting on the right path in high school. Even more participants, ten, agreed that having a career coach while in college would provide a supportive relationship that would aid them in reaching their goals at a more efficient pace and provide a much welcomed listening ear. See Table 8.

Table 8

Career Coach Support While Navigating the College Transition

Participants’ Responses	Number of Participants
Career coaching support while in college	10
Helped to select a major and get on the right path	9

Career Coaching Support While in College

While interviewing the participants for this study, I included a question to learn their perspective on the need for coaching at the college level. First, I explained executive coaching in the corporate world and how executives often advance and have support in their professions with the aid of a professional coach. I then asked how important would career coaching be for them in college and how often would they plan to meet with a coach. Jenna responded, “I think I would have probably graduated next fall if I would have had a career coach to say what I really needed to do because I was taking classes I didn’t need to take”. Even though Jenna worked with a couple of different advisors, she received conflicting information that could have saved her some time if she had a career coach to advise her along the way. Her high school career coach moved from the high school to the college during Jenna’s college transition and she stated: “I didn’t talk to her. I was with somebody else and they told me this, this, this, and this, and then I went to somebody else and then they told me I didn’t have to take that.”

Working with a career coach could bring a sense of comfort as well as provide academic and career assistance to underrepresented students. Benny stated “I know why I’m doing mechanical engineering [but] I’m still kind of afraid. I’m not too sure if I know exactly if I’m on the right track.” Carmen, too, felt having someone to bounce ideas off would be a good fit for her:

That would be great because now that I'm here and I'm in my major, I could talk to a career coach if I decided to change my major and change what I want to do. They could help me figure out what else there is to do, because I'm good at more than one thing. I've been told that I'm a great writer so I could have been a journalist if I wanted to.

About having a career coach in high school, David affirmed “it helped ease the transition from high school to college” and having one now “would help in college”.

When asking Frank about the use of career coaching in college, he stated:

Yes, most definitely. I would even say you need to go weekly. You can go even bi-weekly. Me, personally, I would probably go bi-weekly just to catch up and to stop in to talk to your career coach about further plans beyond this level here. So, I would definitely say that if it was available, I would definitely use it a lot more.

Even though the participants in this study are in college or about to graduate, having needed ongoing support during college seemed to be a service they were lacking. Having the same person to talk to all of the time and working with a designated coach would give the participants a strong supportive relationship in their college journey. The participants in this study are still in the emerging adult stages of their lives and engaging in on-going coaching with a focus on academic, career, and personal development issues would be an effective strategy to aid in their continued success and development.

Helped to Select a Major and Get on the Right Path

For many participants, working with their career coach helped them to focus on developing fairly clear personal, educational, and/or career-related goals. Because participants had fairly clear goals by the end of high school, they were able to select a college major early on, which seemed to assist them with getting on the right path sooner than many college students. Carmen, for example, shared her thought processes as she was working with her career coach, contemplating high school graduation, and considering going on to college:

Well, she makes me believe—opened my eyes and made me realize that I was graduating high school. My life will start soon and I'm on my way to college. So, I have to figure out what I want to do now because I can't go to college, and I don't know what I'm going to do after my first two years.

Most people are taking general studies and, me, I went straight into my major. So I was like, ‘I have to focus on what I’m going to do because it’s almost here. Time—it’s almost here. Time goes by fast.’

Ike, who began his college courses in the 11th grade, recalled trying to determine his career path in the 9th grade and the assistance the career coach provided in setting him on the right path and exploring meaningful opportunities with him. About this, he stated:

When I was in the 9th grade, I was trying to figure out exactly what I wanted to do and which path to take so I started talking to the career coach. Then we started going over some ideas in 10th grade. The career coach came into the math class one day. He was talking about the Regional Academy so I kind of transitioned into that more than anything.

Jenna had planned to go to college on a volleyball scholarship; however, things did not work out as planned. She did not continue with the volleyball team throughout high school; therefore, she needed to work on a second option. Jenna began talking with her career coach about college in her senior year, recalling her feelings when she first met with her coach:

They talk about that in high school. It’s just not a reality until you are right there and trying to go. You see I wasn’t thinking about college until my senior year. I started noticing: ‘Well, what I am going to do afterwards? Am I just going to sit and work all day?’ Then, I remembered she came in class, and we got to go there to talk to the career coach. And, I was like: ‘Maybe I will go today. Yeah, I’ll go today.’ I went and I talked to her. I felt so much better after I left.

In contrast, Benny worked with his father in the family business and was torn between going to college and working in the family business. He disclosed: “[My career coach] really did help me out a lot during high school, and when I finished my senior year I knew I wanted to go to college.” David, too, spoke of his experience with career coaching by stating: “They pushed me at around the beginning of my junior year and even before my junior year. . . . It got me started on the right foot and headed in the

correct direction, down the right path.” Additionally, Ethan recalled his experience with his coach, stating:

[The career coach] steered me in the way that I wanted to go. He knew based on the answers I gave him on a worksheet during my sophomore year in high school. He pretty much said that I was going to require college for this. But he also wanted me to talk to outside sources. It could be as simple as your local workshop of some sort depending on what you’re trying to do.

For first-generation college students, navigating the college admission process can be challenging. Parents who have not attended college often struggle with knowing how to advise their children on the steps to take to get on the right path. Frank, for example, shared how his career coaching experience helped him understand how to go about the college enrollment process:

It gave you more of an insight on what would be going on if I was approaching a college. Now, a lot of people don’t know exactly the details on how to get into college or really how that plays out. But career coaching really let me in. It said: ‘Here are some of the details. Here are some of the things that you can do or that you can try.’

Each career coach has the opportunity to establish his or her own unique coaching practice within the area high schools. One career coach developed a comprehensive job shadow program to assist students in determining their college major. Having the opportunity to experiment with a career through job shadowing helped Genie determine that her first choice of a major was not a good fit for her personally, as she shared with me:

I thought that was what I wanted to do. I really wanted something hands-on. If I could, I would love to be a neonatal surgeon. I really want something hands-on. And, then respiratory, I was like: ‘This sounds really, really cool.’

Heidi attended the same high school as Genie and participated in several job shadow experiences with dental offices, both large and small. She job shadowed with the

largest employer in the local area in addition to private practices. Through her job shadow experience, she decided to work with low-income patients who have limited access to healthcare. About discussing her major with her career coach, Genie communicated:

[She] would help me and she would tell me the best route to take—whether to take or go for dental hygiene in the second year or go for it in the first year. She said you should probably get those prerequisites out of the way. She helped me so much – it’s been a blessing.

Working with a career coach appeared to be an effective strategy for participants in this study as they searched for the right career path. Having a professional to guide the process of selecting a major and reviewing early college options helped participants get on the right path much sooner in their college journeys. Being able to job shadow in real-world work experiences was valuable for those students who engaged in these career planning activities, and they seemed to have a strong sense of purpose about the direction their lives were headed.

Participants were impacted by the relationships they built with their career coach. Nine participants felt that their career coaching relationship had enabled them to make clearer decisions about their college goals and to have a more positive transition into college. Ten participants believed that having a career coach while enrolled in college would be a beneficial service they would use. Most of the underrepresented students in this study have plans to transfer to a four-year university and having extra support during this next college transition could be particularly beneficial to them as they continue on with their bachelor’s degree programs.

Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, the underrepresented students in this study participated in career coaching while in high school and have been successful at the community college. These students have been motivated by family members, ranging from parents to grandparents to siblings to cousins, to attend college. Receiving tuition incentives motivated a majority of the participants to attend college as did a desire for a better life than their parents or others around them. Obtaining a college degree, to them, was the insurance policy for that better life.

Without a doubt, these students have encountered obstacles, including lacking financial resources and awareness of financial aid as well as trying to balance their school, work, and personal life; however, they have persevered and remained focused on their goal of a college degree. These students have used their intrinsic motivation and personal attributes of self-efficacy, self-determination, and self-confidence to meet their educational goals thus far. Their experiences with their career coaches have increased their confidence, cleared the way to receiving financial aid, assisted them with career and college decision-making, and placed students on the path to success.

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND REFLECTIONS

The purpose of conducting this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of a small group of underrepresented students at a community college in Virginia. I sought to understand how career coaching and other internal and external factors influenced their perceptions and beliefs about higher education and their motivations, academic success, career goals, and self-efficacy. Most studies cover underrepresented student populations in the context of best practices; however, there are few studies, such as this one, that examine factors affecting the beliefs and experiences of underrepresented student populations in relationship to best practices. Moreover, coaching and career coaching has been studied primarily with executives or working adults rather than as it relates to the success of underrepresented students in the high school or college setting. A summary of the study and discussion of the results are provided in this chapter. This chapter also will include a section on implications and recommendations for educators and for further study along with reflections on the research.

Summary of the Study

The eleven participants in this study provided in-depth information on the research topic through semi-structured interviews. This phenomenological study employed a social constructivist theoretical framework. In addition, an appreciative inquiry approach was used to encourage dialogue that was restorative, generative, and hope-filled, one that emphasizes the positive aspects of human systems (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). Each participant shared rich-descriptive data describing their lived

experiences with an emphasis on their transition from high school to the community college and college experiences. Most of the current literature focuses on support strategies for student success from a deficit perspective; instead, this study explored the experiences of successful underrepresented community college students. Williams and Butler's (2002) research on hope and first-generation college students found "traditionally based retention programs focus on students' insufficiencies and often fail because the focus is on remedial issues, defects, and academic shortcomings" (p. 1). Clifton and Anderson (2002), on the other hand and similar to my own thinking, believe student success and student retention efforts should focus more on strengths rather than deficits.

The grand tour question for this research study is: How have career coaching and other internal and external factors influenced the beliefs, motivations, academic success, career goals, and self-efficacy of underrepresented college students? In addition, four sub-questions focused on:

- (1) What are their perceptions and beliefs about higher education attainment and academic success?
- (2) From their perspective, what challenges have they faced and how did they overcome these challenges to graduate from high school and enroll and persist through their first year of college?
- (3) From their perspective, what attitudes and personal and college experiences contributed positively to their beliefs, motivations, academic success, and entry into and success in college?

(4) In what ways has their career coaching experience in high school influenced their beliefs, motivations, academic success, career goals and self-efficacy?

Chapter two highlighted six major strands of literature related to the subject of this study: highlights six major strands of literature related to the subject of this study: (a) underrepresented college students, including first-generation college students (FGCS), ethnic minority students, and low-income students; (b) college and career readiness; (c) developmental education; (d) self-efficacy and resiliency; (e) coaching, including coaching models and coaching and self-efficacy; and (f) other potential remedies for barriers to college entry and persistence for underrepresented college students.

The analysis of the data revealed four major themes, which were: (a) Motivations for Attending College; (b) Challenges Faced by Underrepresented Students; (c) Contributing Factors for Overcoming Challenges and for Their Success; and (d) Career Coach Support While Navigating the College Transition. The development of themes emerged from the modified van Kaam method of phenomenological data analysis (Moustakas, 1994).

Discussion of the Findings

Motivations

College choice research suggests a vast array of factors affect a student's decision to enroll in college: academic preparation; educational plans and expectations; knowledge about college options; financial aid availability; and support from family, counselors, teachers, and friends (Perna, 2000). The underrepresented students in this study revealed many reasons for attending college; the most prevalent reason was receiving motivation from a family member. Each participant in this study stated they received motivation

from a family member to attend college. This finding is consistent with research that parental encouragement and support serve as the best predictor for attending college (Pagliarulo, 2004). Also, consistent with the literature is the belief that most parents value higher education and the importance of it for their children—a belief that is held high by most minority parents (Immerwahr & Felono, 2000). Brasier (2008) found a dynamic relationship between a student's college aspirations and parental involvement as students are about to graduate from high school and involved in the college choice process. Even though all of the participants identified the importance of receiving motivation from a family member to attend college, their personal attributes, like self-confidence, determination and strong work ethic, were critical factors for their academic success while in high school and during their entry into and continued success in college, as was their desire for a better life. Seeing their parents struggle to make ends meet, in particular, motivated participants to pursue a college education to attain a better life for themselves. Participants did not want to repeat the same mistakes as their parents, which is consistent with the research by Ceja (2004) that found minority students' awareness of their parents' economic and social struggles served as a source of motivation for them to pursue college.

For many of the participants in this study, having financial incentives was a strong motivator to attend college. For five participants, receiving the two-year, tuition-free CCAP scholarship served as the main motivation for attending the local community college, which offered the scholarship to recent high school graduates who qualified academically with a 2.5 GPA. These students did not qualify for Federal grants and they and their parents were relieved of the pressures of paying for their first two years of

college. A core problem with financial aid incentives has been to qualify for receiving aid; a student has to be from low-income families or have high test scores, which oftentimes leaves out the middle majority student (Long, 2008).

Challenges

For many participants, viewing college as an extension of high school proved to be a rude awakening. Underrepresented students at universities and community colleges often are more vulnerable—they are unaware and unprepared for the college workloads that may be vastly different from their high school experience, especially if they attend schools in poor neighborhoods (Deil-Amen, 2011; McDonough, 2004). Surprisingly, only one participant in the study spoke of taking developmental coursework, which is inconsistent with Bailey's (2009) findings that students are entering college "with academic skills weak enough in at least one major subject area to threaten their ability to succeed in college-level courses" (p. 13). Bailey (2009) reported that over 60 percent of students entering community colleges need to take some form of remedial/developmental education. The anomaly found in my study may have been heavily influenced by two conditions: (1) a significant number of participants in this study were enrolled in dual enrollment coursework in high school (six participants); and/or (2) they were recipients of the CCAP scholarship and needed to meet certain grade point average requirements to receive and maintain the award (five participants). The participants in this study were prepared academically; however, they had major misconceptions that their academic workload would be similar to their high school workload.

Another challenge participants encountered was the lack of financial resources and awareness of financial aid. "The Federal Commission on the Future of Higher

Education (2006) concluded many students don't enter college because of inadequate information and rising costs, combined with a confusing financial aid system" (Bettinger, Long, Oreopoulos, & Sanbonmatsu, 2009, p. 2); however, once students have received adequate information and assistance with filing the FAFSA, the likelihood of attending college is greatly increased (Bettinger, et al., 2009). Moreover, high schools students often overestimate the cost of college and underestimate the amount of aid available to attend college (Bettinger et al., 2009). According to the 2007-2008 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS), of the 12.2 million undergraduates that applied for federal student aid, 5.7 million received the Pell grant. In the same year, 8.4 million students did not apply for federal student aid; 2.3 million of these students would have qualified for the Pell grant with 1.1 million qualifying for the full Pell grant (Kantrowitz, 2009). Overall, research indicates that financial aid incentives help increase persistence and commitment to stay in college for underrepresented students who need and receive tuition incentives (McGhee, 2011). This was the case for the participants in this study. After they were made aware of financial aid opportunities and received assistance with applying for aid through the help of their career coach, their financial stressors were greatly relieved once they qualified for aid. In their minds and the minds of their parents, the way was then paved for them to attend college.

Contributing Factors to Overcoming Challenges and for Their Success

The participants in this study were successful and overcame numerous challenges by applying a number of different strategies. One unique approach employed was developing a relationship with a career coach, someone to offer support and who was knowledgeable about the college admission process, financial aid, and career planning.

Battistich (2004) stresses that schools should take a comprehensive approach and focus on the importance of positive youth development, not just academically but emotionally, ethically, and socially. Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, and Hawkins (2004) conducted an extensive literature review and determined positive youth development programming for those ages six to twenty seeks to achieve one or more of the following objectives: (a) promotes bonding, (b) fosters resiliency, (c) promotes social competence, (d) promotes emotional competence, (e) promotes cognitive competence, (f) promotes behavioral competence, (g) promotes moral competence, (h) fosters self-determination, (i) fosters spirituality, (j) fosters self-efficacy, (k) fosters clear and positive identity, (l) fosters belief in the future, (m) provides recognition for positive behavior, (n) provides opportunities for prosocial involvement; and (o) fosters prosocial norms. The participants in this study received emotional support and college and career planning assistance through the relationships they developed with their career coach. Participants bonded with their career coaches, displayed personal attributes of self-determination and self-efficacy, and believed they were creating better futures for themselves by attending college.

Consistent with Komada's (2002) research, this study found students who were the first to attend college were likely to identify self-factors, personal attributes like self-efficacy and self-belief, as influential to their success and persistence in college. Barber (2009) found that first-generation community college students with a high level of self-efficacy were more likely to achieve academically regardless of their generational status. For the participants in this study, all of whom were first-generation students, I found that

self-confidence, self-efficacy, and self-determination contributed to helping them become successful, meet their goals of attending college, and persist in college.

Terenzini et al. (1994) explain the transition from high school to college as “a highly interrelated, web-like series of family, interpersonal, academic and organizational pulls and pushes” (p. 61). Leonard (2013) studied parental support and college readiness and found parental support, engagement, financial support, and emotional guidance to be indispensable in recruiting and enrolling students. For nine participants in this study, having family support, whether it was by encouraging their children to attend college and/or providing emotional support or financial support, gave them a sense of confidence because they were not on their college journeys alone.

Six participants engaged in early college enrollment experiences while still in high school. Dual enrollment played an important part in the success of these participants. According to Hoffman, Vargas, and Santos (2009), providing dual enrollment opportunities in high school better prepares a wide range of students for college success. A well designed high school curriculum with dual enrollment options has the potential to:

- Increase the pool of students historically underserved who are ready for college;
- Increase the academic rigor of the high school curriculum;
- Help low-achieving students meet high academic standards;
- Reduce high school dropout rates and increase student aspirations;
- Provide more academic opportunities in cash-strapped, small, or rural schools;
- Provide realistic information to students regarding the skills and knowledge they will need to succeed at the college level;
- Improve motivation through high expectations and the promise of free courses;
- Decrease the cost of postsecondary education by decreasing the number of years needed to earn a college degree; and

- Create a feedback loop between k-12 and postsecondary systems around issues of standards, assessments, curriculum, and transitions from high school to college. (Hoffman, Vargas, & Santos, 2009, para. 4).

Additionally, Kosine, Steger, and Duncan (2008) assert that “aiding students in fostering a sense of purpose in their career development may lead to deeper levels of commitment and persistence” (p. 133). Blair (2012) found underrepresented students who were exposed to career exploration prior to enrollment were more likely to persist in college due to having fairly clear academic and career goals. This was true for this study; students who participated in early career planning activities, including volunteering and job shadowing opportunities, developed a clear vision for where they were headed and seemed to be determined and confident about meeting their academic and career goals and persisting in college.

Career Coaching Support While Navigating the College Transition

Very little evidence currently exists confirming the benefits of career coaching programs for high school students and their relationship to students’ entry into and success in postsecondary education. As previously noted, the career coaching program is a unique development in the state of Virginia. The participants in this study benefited from having a supportive relationship with a career coach. They described in depth how they received emotional support, assistance with career and college planning activities, and valuable information and assistance with applying for financial aid.

Furthermore, having students participate in appreciative inquiry-type activities, similar to the interview process used for this study, may support previous research showing students who have early positive academic experiences are more likely to remain in college and perform better academically (Tinto, 1993). Participants repeatedly

thanked me for being able to participate in the study. I believe, in large part, it was because of its affirmative focus. In that vein, participants in this study were grateful for the opportunity to focus on their high points and reflect on experiences and particular individuals who added value to their lives and to their transition and success in college. Human systems grow toward what they are continually asked questions about (Cooperrider & Whitney, 1999).

This research study, I believe, is the first of its kind, documenting the lived experiences of career coaching participants in the Virginia program. In addition, very little research has been done on career coaching at the college level. In coaching ADHD college students, Field, Parker, Sawilowsky, and Rolands (2010) found when using the Edge coaching model, students had increased positive feelings, less stress, greater empowerment, increased confidence, and more balance in their lives. After meeting with a career coach, the participants in this study expressed that they were less stressed about their college transition and paying for college, had fairly clear goals and career plans, and were more confident in their abilities to succeed in college. They were attempting to successfully employ strategies to balance their school, work, and personal lives and had positive outlooks on life. This research study adds to a limited body of research on career coaching at the high school and college level.

College and Career Readiness

Consistent with Blair's (2012) research, this study found underrepresented students who are exposed to career exploration activities are more likely to be successful in higher education due to their goal setting and planning skills. Due to the high counselor-student ratio in both high school and college, extra resources like career

coaching are necessary to fill this need. Extensive research supports executive level coaching to assist professionals in obtaining their goals; similar services and benefits are likely to assist college students with their career development needs and in their pursuit of obtaining their college degrees. When asked, the participants in this study affirmed that having career coaching support while in college would provide some of the same benefits executives receive in their professions, such as “an improvement in coachee’s performance, productivity and interaction with others, an enhanced ability to prioritize and manage time, an overall development of skills and new perspectives, higher levels of self-awareness and personal growth, as well as increased confidence” (Armstrong, Mesler, & Tooth, 2007, p. 2). One participant, Heidi, summed up the benefit of working with her career coach by stating, “She was such a good source of inspiration. . . . It made me feel so much more confident and secure about my decisions.” When asked if career coaching would be beneficial on her college campus, another participant, Carmen, explained:

That would be great because now that I'm here and I'm in my major, I could talk to a career coach if I decided to change my major and change what I want to do. They could help me figure out what else there is to do, because I'm good at more than one thing. I've been told that I'm a great writer so I could have been a journalist if I wanted to.

Implications and Recommendations for Educators

The results of this study illustrate that career coaching has had a positive influence on the lived experiences of the eleven underrepresented college student participants, especially as it relates to their exploration of career and college options and their transition into college. It also suggests that career coaching, along with a number of other contributing factors, can positively impact student satisfaction and persistence

during college. These eleven participants worked with a career coach for various reasons and at various levels of involvement during high school; they walked away with a variety of experiences that helped them in their academic and career pursuits and transition into college. Each participant had something positive to say about their participation in the career coaching program while in high school and its impact on his or her beliefs, motivations, academic success, career goals, and self-efficacy.

A supportive career coach-student relationship was critical to a successful transition to college for all eleven participants in this study. This study revealed that a career coaching program creates an environment that supports nurturing relationships that are a valuable contribution to underrepresented students' development as college students. Moreover, it is possible that by having students reflect on their successes as they progress through college using an appreciative inquiry approach, it may help them build a bridge to future successes and assist with further exploration of their career goals and personal development skills. It is important that we identify ongoing challenges for underrepresented students as they transition into college and attend college. By addressing these challenges early on—during high school and their early college years—we are more likely to improve the academic success and retention for these students.

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are suggested for educators. It is imperative that counselors, career coaches, and student services personnel understand the experiences of underrepresented college students. Every effort should be made to educate personnel about the challenges faced by underrepresented students during their transition to college and struggles while in college. Moreover, every effort should be made to give underrepresented students on-going, individualized

support as they transition to college and while they matriculate through college.

Whenever possible, this individualized attention should be provided by trained career coaches and/or other guidance and student services personnel who continue to work with students throughout their tenure at a particular college or university. Each student should be assigned his or her own coach (or support staff member) to meet on a regular basis to discuss goals, challenges, and student success strategies, and reflect on his or her successes. Meeting on an ongoing basis would allow students the opportunity to revisit their goals with a professional who can guide them in the right direction.

The College Board National Office for School Counselor Advocacy (NOSCA) established “Eight Components of College and Career Readiness Counseling” and believe school counselors are best positioned to take the lead in guiding students towards college readiness. The career coach program in Virginia has positioned itself to assist with this call and provides support in each of these components in its effort to support students in their transition to college. NOSCA suggests college and career readiness counseling occurs as these eight components are addressed:

1. Student aspirations for college;
2. Academic planning for college and career readiness;
3. Enrichment and extracurricular engagement;
4. College and career exploration and selection process;
5. College and career assessment;
6. College affordability planning;
7. College and career admission processes; and
8. Transitioning from high school graduation to college enrollment and through the use of data and culturally competent practice, work for equitable outcomes for all students. (College Board, 2010, p. 3)

Appreciative Inquiry Career Coach Model

This study utilized a social constructionist perspective as enunciated through an appreciative inquiry approach from a positive psychology framework. Based upon

the themes that emerged from this study and my knowledge and experience as a professional career coach, I have developed a new model for coaching underrepresented student populations. The “appreciative inquiry career coach model”, as I have named it, proposes that underrepresented students work with a professional coach during their college transition and again in college using appreciative inquiry principles. These activities will provide underrepresented students with a supportive relationship to work towards attaining meaningful goals, experiencing positive change, and stimulating positive student and personal development. The coaching model that I think supports the needs and experiences of underrepresented students is this “appreciative inquiry career coaching model”, which follows a five-step process:

1. Assess student goals
2. Determine and assess career fit
3. Develop an action plan
4. Implement the action plan
5. Timely revisiting of the plan for revisions and coach support

Step 1: Intake discussing current goals, establish rapport, conduct appreciative inquiry interview to assess past successes.

Step 2: Administer career assessment to determine interests, skills, and abilities. Determine if gaps exist between career goals and current level of education.

Step 3: Develop a plan of action. If discrepancies exist between goals and current level of education, establish strategies to close the gaps. Strategies include taking the needed courses in developmental areas, such as math or English, and/or receiving tutoring or academic support to get up to acceptable levels in a particular subject. If unsure about career choice, set up appointments for job shadowing, volunteer, or internship opportunities.

Step 4: Implement the plan. Take the needed action steps to move goals into realities.

Step 5: Continual monitoring, assessment, revision of plans, and support with career coach. Make it a practice to incorporate appreciative inquiry questions into coaching sessions to have students focus on success.

The participants in this study benefited from working with a trained career coach who offered individualized attention on an on-going basis. Using the appreciative inquiry career coach model can offer underrepresented students a roadmap for creating supportive relationships that foster their development and assist them with achieving their goal of obtaining a college degree. Appreciative inquiry is a change management model used in the business world and I believe it should be piloted as potential model for working with underrepresented student populations.

Recommendations for Future Study

1. Conduct research (both qualitative and quantitative studies) on the impact of the Virginia Career Coach Program on its program participants.

This qualitative study is the first of its kind; it is important to conduct additional studies to investigate the impact of the program on student satisfaction, student engagement, and student success, particularly from the students' perspective. In addition, it is important to investigate whether career coaching is an effective strategy to increase the high school graduation rates and college going rates of underrepresented student populations.

2. Research the implications of using career coaching with underrepresented student populations in college and universities from a student retention perspective.

The participants in this study were involved with career coaching prior to going to college. Studies that investigate the use of career coaching with underrepresented college

students can assist in determining if career coaching can be used as an effective strategy to increase the retention of underrepresented student populations.

3. Research the implications of conducting AI advising sessions with underrepresented student populations at critical milestones in college (i.e., at the end of a student's first year experience, at the end of the first semester, and before drop dates for at-risk students).

Conduct studies that investigate whether using appreciative inquiry advising techniques can improve the retention and graduation rates for underrepresented students. Each participant in this study recalled positive experiences as they discussed their college transition. Having students reflect on their success at critical milestones in college could serve as a strategy to promote student learning and student engagement, provide intentional support interventions and feedback between students and college personnel, and improve retention rates for underrepresented students.

4. Research the implications of using career coaching with underrepresented graduate students in medical school, law school, and/or in STEM majors from a student retention perspective.

Studies that investigate the practice of career coaching with underrepresented graduate students would be helpful in determining whether career coaching can be used as an effective strategy to increase the retention of this particular student subpopulation.

Very little research exist as it relates to underrepresent student populations and career coaching. The field of coaching and higher education is in its infancy stage and there is great promise in merging the two in an effort to increase the persistence and graduation rates of underrepresented student populations. In addition, appreciative

inquiry, a change management model used in organizations, has not been extensively researched in relation to higher education. There, too, is much room for exploring how organizational change models, like appreciative inquiry, can be utilized in higher education to improve persistence and graduation rates.

Reflections and Finale

Career coaching is a relatively new student development intervention strategy for improving college enrollment and retention rates of underrepresented students. While there is evidence that supports the success of coaching in the business world, there is currently very little research on how effective this strategy is with underrepresented students, including their perceptions, their level of satisfaction, their transition into college, and their persistence in college. My goal was to examine this strategy through the lived experiences of a small group of underrepresented students who participated in career coaching while in high school and went on to enroll in a local community college. I wanted to learn about their career coaching experience and its impact on their beliefs, motivations, academic success, career goals, and self-efficacy. My findings confirmed that all of the participants interviewed experienced positive benefits from their career coaching experience in a number of different areas.

This study sought to answer the question “How can we better serve underrepresented students—or those who are low-income, ethnic minority, and/or first-generation college students?” In order to accomplish this goal, educators must understand the experiences of underrepresented students. The aim of the study was to gather the collective, lived experiences of underrepresented college student participants to: (a) inform and awaken (Sparkes, 2002) educators to the struggles of underrepresented

student populations; (b) motivate students toward successful completion of higher education degrees; (c) enlighten mentors and parents by bringing awareness to processes they may not be consciously aware of by their involvement or lack of involvement; and (d) promote change through awareness.

As I researched this study, I learned that if students have the support of a knowledgeable career coach, receive assistance with their college transition and financial aid processes, and have an opportunity to positively reflect on their successes, they are more likely to succeed in higher education. I learned from my participants that they were appreciative of the chance to discuss their successes and hopeful that their experiences would assist other underrepresented students in their pursuit of a college degree. The participants in this study made me feel immense gratitude for the work career coaches perform on a daily basis. In fact, in one interview, I had to hold back tears because her story and relationship with her career coach was so life-changing. This experience has confirmed for me that, as a career coach, the words that come out of my mouth have the potential to greatly change a student's life.

As a result of this study, I am even more committed to supporting underrepresented students towards meeting their goals of obtaining a college degree. I am committed to educating career coaches, student services personnel, and educational administrators to the unique experiences of underrepresented student populations. In addition, it is my desire to introduce the appreciative inquiry career coach model to student services personnel and administrators in an effort to support the growth and development of underrepresented students. The participants in this study have taught me that career coaching, career coach support, and reflecting on these things and people that

give life are important to underrepresented student populations' success in higher education.

References

- ACT. (2010). Issues in college readiness, 2010 *ACT, Inc.*
- ACT. (2011). The condition of college and career readiness, 2011. *ACT, Inc.*
- Achieving the Dream (2011). Workforce Development. Retrieved from <http://www.achievingthedream.org/workforcedevelopment>
- Allmark, P., Boote, J., Chambers, E., Clarke, A., McDonnell, A., Thompson, A., & Tod, A. (2009). Ethical issues in the use of in-depth interviews: literature review and discussion. *Research Ethics Review*, 5(2), 48-54.
- Alloro, L. (2008, October 29). Language and reality through social construction. *Positive Psychology News Daily*, Retrieved from <http://positivepsychologynews.com/news/louis-alloro/200810291113>
- American Association of Community Colleges. (2011). *2011 Fact sheet: Building a nation of learners by advancing America's community colleges*. Retrieved from <http://www.aacc.nche.edu/AboutCC/Documents/FactSheet2011.pdf>
- Armstrong, H., Mesler, P., & Tooth, J. (2007). *Executive coaching effectiveness: A pathway to self-efficacy*. Sydney: Institute of Executive Coaching.
- American Association of Community Colleges. (2011). *2011 community college fast facts*. Retrieved from www.aacc.nche.edu/aboutcc/documents/factsheet2011.pdf
- Anderson, E. (2004). *StrengthQuest: Curriculum outline and learning activities*. Princeton, NJ: The Gallup Organization
- Asera, R. (2011). *Innovation at scale: How Virginia community colleges are collaborating to improve developmental education and increase student success*. Baltimore, MD: Achieving the Dream.

- Asmussen, J., & Fridge, D. (2004) Preliminary report: Higher education services to traditionally underrepresented student populations. St. Paul, MN: MNSCU Audit Committee.
- Bailey, T. (2009). Challenge and opportunity: Rethinking the role and function of developmental education in community college. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 145, 11-30.
- Bailey, T., & Jenkins D. (2009, October 13). How community colleges can reach Obama's goals. *Inside Higher Ed*, Retrieved from <http://www.insidehighered.com/views/2009/10/13/bailey>
- Baker, M., Fernandes, P., Kombarararan, F., & Yang, J. (2008). Executive coaching: It works! *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, 60(1), 78-90.
- Bandura, A. (1994). *Self-efficacy*. Division of Educational Studies, Emory University, Atlanta, GA. Retrieved from Bandura, A. (1994). Self-efficacy. *Encyclopedia of human behavior*. New York: Academic Press. Retrieved from <http://www.des.emory.edu/mfp/BanEncy.html>
- Bandura, A. (1995). *Self-efficacy in changing societies*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Barber, M. (2009) The impact of academic self-efficacy and socio-demographic factors on academic achievement of first-generation community college students. Retrieved from <http://edl.appstate.edu/dissertation-titles/59>
- Battistich, V., & Hom, A. (1997). The relationship between students' sense of their school as a community and their involvement in problem behaviors. *American Journal of Public Health*, 87, 1997–2001.

- Battistich, V. (2004). Character education, prevention, and positive youth development. University of St. Louis, MI. Retrieved from http://www.character.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/White_Paper_Battistich.pdf
- Baum, S., Ma, J., & Payea, K. (2010). *Education pays 2010: The benefits of higher education for Individual and society*. New York: College Board Advocacy and Policy Center. Retrieved from http://trends.collegeboard.org/education_pays/
- Bednall, J. (2006). Epoche and bracketing within the phenomenological paradigm. *Issues in Educational Research*, 16(2), 123-138.
- Bernard, B. (2004). *Resiliency: What we have learned*. San Francisco, CA: West Ed.
- Bettinger, E., Baker, R. (2011). The effects of student coaching in college: An evaluation of a randomized experiment in student mentoring. NBER Working Paper No. 16881. *National Bureau of Economic Research*.
- Bettinger, E., Long, B. T., Oreopoulos, P., & Sanbonmatsu, L. (2009). *The role of simplification and information in college decisions: Results from the H&R Block FAFSA experiment*. Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research. Retrieved from <http://www.nber.org/papers/w15361>
- Bible, 1989. New Revised Standard Version. 528, Proverbs 23:7.
- Blair, E. J. (2012). *The impact of career exploration upon the success of underrepresented students in higher education*. (Order No. 3544552, Capella University). *ProQuestDissertations and Theses*, 113. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1234554700?accountid=40667>.
(prod.academic_MSTAR_1234554700).

- Boylan, H. (2012, May). In Sunil Chand (Chair). What we know about what we do, and what we do about what we know. Benedictine 2012 Spring seminar.
- Brasier, T. G. (2008). *The effects of parental involvement on students' eighth and tenth grade college aspirations: A comparative analysis*. (Order No. 3306555, North Carolina State University). *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses*, 170. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/304535953?accountid=40667>.
<http://prod.academic.MSTAR.304535953>.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101. ISSN: 1478-0887
- Brennan, J. B. (2008). *College and career effectiveness skills and their impact on student success and learning*. (Order No. 3338142, Fielding Graduate University). *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses*, 201-n/a. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/304837429?accountid=40667>. (304837429).
- Brouwers, A., Evers, W., & Tomic, W. (2006). A quasi-experimental study on management coaching effectiveness. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, 58(3), 174-182.
- Brownell, J., & Swaner, L. (2008). *Outcomes of high impact practices for underserved students: A review of the literature*. Association of American Colleges and Universities, Retrieved from http://www.aacu.org/inclusive_excellence/documents/DRAFTProjectUSALiteratureReview.pdf

Catalano, R. F., & Hawkins, J. (2002). Response from authors to comments on 'positive youth development in the United States: Research findings on evaluations of positive youth development programs.' *Prevention & Treatment*, 5(1), 20.

DOI:10.1037/1522-3736.5.1.520r

Cavanagh, M., & Palmer, S. (2007). Special issue: positive psychology. *International Coaching Psychology Review*, 2(1), Retrieved from

[http://www.sgcp.org.uk/sgcp/publications/international-coaching-psychology-review/co-editors-editorial---special-issue-positive-psychology\\$.cfm](http://www.sgcp.org.uk/sgcp/publications/international-coaching-psychology-review/co-editors-editorial---special-issue-positive-psychology$.cfm)

Ceja, M. (2004). Chicana college aspirations and the role of parents: Developing educational resiliency. *Journal Of Hispanic Higher Education*, 3(4), 338-362.

Chen, G. (2008, February 26). Can community colleges cure the economy? *Community College Review*, Retrieved October 12, 2009, from

<http://www.communitycollegereview.com/articles/13>

Clifton, D. O., & Anderson, E. C. (2002). *Strengths Quest: Discover and develop your strengths in academics, career, and beyond*. Washington, DC: The Gallup Organization.

College Board. (2010). *Eight components of college and career readiness counseling*.

Retrieved from

http://media.collegeboard.com/digitalServices/pdf/nosca/11b_4416_8_Components_WEB_111107.pdf

Compton, W. C. (2005). *An Introduction to positive psychology*. Beverly, MA:

Wadsworth Publishing.

- Cooperrider, D. (2004). Introduction. In M. Avital (Ed.), *Constructive discourse and human organization: Advances in appreciative inquiry* San Diego, CA: Elsevier, Inc.
- Cooperrider, D., & Whitney, D. (1999). Appreciative inquiry. In P. Holman & T. Devane (Eds.), *Collaborating for Change*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.
- Cooperrider, D., & Whitney, D. (2005). *Appreciative inquiry: A positive revolution*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.
- Conley, D. T., McGaughy, C. L., Kirtner, J., van der Valk, A., & Martinez-Wenzl, M. (2010). College readiness practices at 38 high schools and the development of the college career ready school diagnostic tool. Retrieved from <http://www.eric.ed.gov.libweb.ben.edu/PDFS/ED509644.pdf>
- Creswell, J. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA.
- Creswell, John W. (2003). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Creswell, John W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* 2nd ed. SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Curran, S. (2001). An evaluation of the effects of an individually tailored coaching intervention used with allied health students at Delaware Technical and Community College. *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses*, DAI-A (61/11), p.4299.

- Deil-Amen, R. (2011, December). The "traditional college student" a smaller and smaller minority and its implications for diversity and access institutions. Stanford conference on mapping broad access higher education, Stanford, CA. Retrieved from http://cepa.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/2011_Deil-Amen_11_11_11.pdf
- DeMarrais, K. & Lapan, S. (2004). *Foundations for research: Methods of inquiry in education and social sciences*. Qualitative interview studies: Learning through experience. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Mahwah, NJ.
- de Vise, D. (2009, December 4). Report reveals wide gap in college achievement. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/story/2009/12/04/ST2009120400305.html?sid=ST2009120400305>
- Dunn, P. (2004). Client's perception of change as result of a professional coaching relationship. *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses*, DAI-B (67/11), AAT 3240967.
- Engle, J., C. O'Brien. (2007). *Demography is not destiny: Increasing the graduation rates of low-income college students at large public universities*. Washington, D.C.: The Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education. Retrieved from http://www.pellinstitute.org/files/files-demography_is_not_destiny.pdf
- Farrell, E. F. (2007). Some colleges provide success coaches for students. *Education Digest: Readings Condensed For Quick Review*, 73(3), 44-47.
- Feldman, D. B. & Dreher, D. E. (2012). Can hope be changed in 90 minutes? Testing the efficacy of a single-session goal-pursuit intervention for college students. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 13, 45-759

- Felner, R. D., Brand, S., DuBois, D. L., Adan, A. M., Mulhall, P. F., & Evans, E. G. (1995). Socioeconomic disadvantaged proximal environmental experience and socio-emotional and academic adjustment in early adolescence: Investigation of mediated effects model. *Child Development, 66*, 774-792.
- Gergen, K. (2001). *Social construction in context*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Gibbons, M., & Borders, L. (2010). Prospective first-generation college students: A social-perspective. *Career Development Quarterly, 58*(3), 194-208.
- Giles, D., & Alderson, S. (2008). An appreciative inquiry into the transformative learning experiences of students in a family literacy project. *Australian Journal of Adult Learning, 48*(3), 466-478.
- Graye, R. (2008). Performance and self-perception: study of self-efficacy. *International Journal of Existential Psychology and Psychotherapy, 2*(2), Retrieved from <http://journal.existentialpsychology.org/index.php?journal=ExPsy&page=article&op=viewArticle&path%5B%5D=123&path%5B%5D=75>
- Green, L. (2006). Cognitive-behavioral, solution-focused life coaching: Enhancing goal striving, well-being, and hope. *The Journal of Positive Psychology, 1*(3): 142-149.
- Green, S. (2011). *Positive psychology appreciative inquiry workshop*. Unpublished manuscript, Positive Psychology Institute, Sydney, Australia.
- Green, S., Grant, A., & Rynsaardt, J. (2007). Evidence-based life coaching for senior high school students: Building hardiness and hope. *International Coaching Psychology Review, 2*(1), 24-32.

- Henderson, N., & Milstein, M. (2003). *Resiliency in school: Making it happen for students and educators*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Hertel, J. B. (2002). College student generational status: Similarities, differences, and factors in college adjustment. *The Psychological Record*, 52, 3-18.
- Hoffman, N., Vargas, J., and Santos, J. (2009). New directions for dual enrollment: Creating stronger pathways from high school through college. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, Spring 2009, 145, 43-58. Retrieved from <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/advanced/search/results>.
- Hossler, D., Schmit, J., & Vesper, N. (1999). *Going to college: How social, economic, and educational factors influence the decisions students make*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Howell, N. G. (2010). *Appreciative advising from the academic advisor's viewpoint: A qualitative study*. (Order No. 3398312, The University of Nebraska - Lincoln). *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses*, 154-n/a. Retrieved from [http://search.proquest.com/docview/220154039?accountid=40667.\(220154039\)](http://search.proquest.com/docview/220154039?accountid=40667.(220154039)).
- Hrabowski, F. (2011, March). Broadening participation of underrepresented groups in science and engineering workforce. ACE's 93rd annual meeting, Washington, DC.
- Hudson, F.M. (1999). *The handbook of coaching: A comprehensive resource guide for managers, executives, consultants, and human resource professionals*. California: Jossey-Bass Books.

- Hurd, J. L. (2002). *Learning for life: A phenomenological investigation into the effect of organizational coaching on individual lives*. (Union Institute and University).
ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, 138 p. Retrieved from
[\(276063245\)](http://search.proquest.com/docview/276063245?accountid=40667).
- Illinois Board of Higher Education. (2009). *Illinois public agenda for college and career success*. Retrieved from
http://www.ibhe.state.il.us/masterPlanning/materials/070109_PublicAgenda.pdf
- Jeffries, K. (2010). Achievement coaches provide adult students with the guidance needed for success. *Techniques: Connecting Education and Careers*, 85(7), 44-47.
- Jenkins, D., & Sung-Woo, C. (2012). *Get with the program: Accelerating community college students' entry into and completion of programs of study*. Manuscript submitted for publication, Community College Research Center, Columbia University, New York, NY. Retrieved from
<http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/Collection.asp?cid=12>
- Kang, W. (2010, April 20). *Virginia's career coach program: Targeting college access for high school students*. Retrieved from
http://old.vccs.edu/Portals/0/ContentAreas/AcademicServices/StudentSuccess/StudentSuccessSnapshot_13PPT-04202010.pdf
- Kantrowitz, M. (2009, April 28). Analysis of why some students do not apply for financial aid Retrieved from
<http://www.finaid.org/educators/20090427CharacteristicsOfNonApplicants.pdf>

- Karp, M. (2011). *Toward a new understanding of non-academic student support: Four mechanisms encouraging positive student outcomes in the community college*. Unpublished manuscript, Community College Research Center, Columbia University, New York, NY. Retrieved from <http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/Publication.asp?UID=860>
- King, J. E. (2004). *Missed opportunities: Students who do not apply for financial aid*. Washington, DC: American Council on Education.
- Kirst, M., & Venezia, A. (2004). *From high school to college: Improving opportunities for success in postsecondary education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Komada, N. M. (2002). First-generation college students and resiliency. *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 63(6-A), 2158. (Pub. No AAT 3057087). Retrieved August 10, 2010, from ProQuest Digital Dissertations Database.
- Kosine, N., Steger, M., & Duncan, S. (2008). Purpose-centered career development: A strengths-based approach to finding meaning and purpose in careers. *Professional School Counseling*, 12(2), 208-218.
- Krauss, S. E., Hamzah, A., Nor, Z. M., Omar, Z., Suandi, T., Ismail, I. A., & Zahari, M. Z. (2009). Preliminary investigation and interview guide development for studying how Malaysian farmers' form their mental models of farming. *The Qualitative Report*, 14(2), 245-260. Retrieved from <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR14-2/krauss.pdf>

- Lam, P. C., Doverspike, D., & Mawasha, P. R. (1997). Increasing diversity in engineering academics (ideas): Developing of a program for improving African-American representation. *Journal of Career Development*, 24(1), 55-70.
- Lemcool, K. E. G. (2007). *Effects of coaching on self-regulated learning strategy use and achievement in an entry-level nursing class*. (Order No. 3290498, University of South Alabama). *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses*, 123. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/304766662?accountid=40667>. (304766662).
- Leonard, J. (2013). Maximizing college readiness for all through parental support. *School Community Journal*, 23(1), 183-202.
- LeVasseur, J. (2003). The problem of bracketing in phenomenology. *Qualitative Health Research*, 13(3), 408-420. DOI: 10.1177/1049732302250337
- Long, B. (2008). *What is known about the impact of financial aid? Implications for Policy. An NCPR Working Paper*. National Center for Postsecondary Research.
- Ma, Y. (2009). Family socioeconomic status, parental involvement, and college major choices—gender, race/ethnic, and nativity patterns. *Sociological Perspectives*, 52(2), 211-234. DOI: 10.1525/sop.2009.52.2.211
- Mack, N., Woodson, C., MacQueen, K., Namey, E., & Guest, G. (2005). *Qualitative research methods: A data collector's field guide*. Research Triangle Park, NC: Family Health International. Retrieved from <http://www.fhi360.org/NR/rdonlyres/emgox4xpcoyrqspsgy5ww6mq7v4e44etd6toiejyxalhbmk5sdnef7fqlr3q6hlwa2ttj5524xbn/datacollectorguideenrh.pdf>

- MacKie, D. (2007). Evaluating the effectiveness of executive coaching: Where are we now and where do we need to be? *Australian Psychologist*, 42(4), 310-318
- Mauricio, D. (2008). *Pathways to success: Developing resiliency in urban students*. (Order No. 3307684, State University of New York at Buffalo). *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses*, 161-n/a. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/193989895?accountid=40667>. (193989895).
- Maynard, S. (2006). *Personal and professional coaching: A literature review*. (Master's thesis) Retrieved from www.sandymaynard.com/Thesis_without_CV.pdf
- Mays, P. J. (2011). *Latino college graduates and the effects of motivation, social and financial capital, family practices, and identity on resiliency*. (Dowling College). *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses*, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/916259992?accountid=40667>
- McCarthy, M., Pretty, G., & Catano, V. (1990). Psychological sense of community and burnout. *Journal of College Student Development*, 31, 211–216.
- McCaslin, M. L., & Scott, K. W. (2003). The five question method for framing a qualitative research study. *The Qualitative Report*, 8(3), 447-461. Retrieved from www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR8-3/mcaslin.pdf
- McDonough, P. (2004). College choice and diversity. *Diversity Digest*, 8(1), Retrieved from <http://www.diversityweb.org/Digest/vol8no1/mcdonough.cfm>

- McGhee, S. C. (2011). *Financial aid, persistence, and the status of the under-represented in higher education: Exploring the relationships between financial aid, persistence, and degree attainment among African-American, Hispanic, and low-income students*. (Order No. 3472235, Mercer University). *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses*, 267. Retrieved <http://search.proquest.com/docview/887981412?accountid=40667>. (887981412)
- Mellow, G. (2009, September 22). The American Graduation Initiative Something Even the Banks Should Bank On! *The Huntington Post*, Retrieved October 12, 2009, from <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/gail-mellow/the-american-graduation-ib295313.html>
- Metzger, M. (2007). *An appreciative inquiry of youth perspective on effective youth leadership programming*. (Doctoral dissertation, Saint Mary's University of Minnesota), Available from DOI: 3320267.
- Meyer, D. K., & Turner, J. C. (2002). Discovering Emotion in Classroom Motivation Research. *Educational Psychologist*, 37(2), 107-114.
- Meyer, K. M. (2008). *Becoming more resilient: Perceptions of resiliency development education in post-secondary students*. (Order No. 3316234, Iowa State University). *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses*, 185-n/a. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/193652525?accountid=40667>. (193652525)
- Mowbray, O. (2008). First generation college students' perception of parental attitudes: An exploratory study. *Masters Theses and Doctoral Dissertations*. Paper 207. Retrieved from <http://www.commons.emich.edu/theses/207>

- National Association of System Heads. (2009). *Charting a necessary path: The baseline report of the access to success initiative*. The Education Trust.
- National Center for Education Statistics, (2010). First-professional degrees conferred by degree-granting institutions, by race/ethnicity and sex of student: Selected years, 1976-77 through 2008-09. Retrieved from http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d10/tables/dt10_305.asp
- National Commission on Accountability in Higher Education. (2005). *Accountability for better results: A national imperative for higher education*. The State of Higher Education Executive Officers.
- National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers. Council of Chief State School Officers. (2010). *Common core state standards*. Retrieved from <http://www.corestandards.org/about-the-standards>
- National Information Center for Higher Education Policymaking and Analysis. (2002). College-going rates of high school graduates, directly from high school. Retrieved from <http://www.higheredinfo.org>
- National Science Foundation. (2012). *Science and engineering indicators 2012*. National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics. Retrieved from <http://www.nsf.gov/statistics/seind12/c2/c2h.htm>
- Nelson, J. (2009). *Impact of parent education on student success*. Informally published manuscript, Utah Valley University, Orem, UT, Retrieved from http://www.evsd.org/documents/parent_education.pdf
- Obama, B. (2009, February 24). [Address to Joint Session of Congress]. *Speech presented at the White House, Washington, DC*.

- Obama, B. (2009, July 14). [Remarks by the President on the American Graduation Initiative]. *Speech presented at Macomb Community College, Warren, Michigan.*
- Olive, T. (2010). Desire for higher education in first-generation Hispanic college students. *The International Journal of Interdisciplinary Social Sciences*, 5(1), DOI: ISSN 1833-1882.
- Pagliarulo, G. M. (2004). *The influence of parental involvement on the educational aspirations of first-generation college students.* (Order No. 1419454, University of Maryland, College Park). *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses*, 124-124 p. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/305176007?accountid=40667>. ([prod.academic MSTAR 305176007](http://prod.academic.MSTAR.305176007)).
- Parker, T. Bustillos, L. & Behringer, L. (2010) Remedial and developmental education policy at a crossroads. Policy Research on Preparation Access and Remedial Education.
- Parker, D., Hoffman, S., Field, S., Sawilowsky, S., & Rolands, L. (2011). An examination of the effects of ADHD coaching on university students' executive functioning. *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability*, 24(2), 115-132.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Perna, L. (1989). The contribution of financial aid to undergraduate persistence. *Journal of Student Financial Aid*, 28(3), 25-40.
- Perna, L. (2000). Differences in the decision to enroll in college among African Americans, Hispanics, and Whites. *Journal of Higher Education*, 71(2), 117-141.

- Peterson, C., & Seligman, M. (2004). *Character strengths and virtues: A handbook and classification*. Washington, DC: APA Press and Oxford University Press.
- Pianta, R. C. (1998). Applying the concept of resilience in schools: Cautions from a developmental systems perspective. *School Psychology Review*, 27, 407–428.
- Piorkowski, G. K. (1983). Survivor guilt in the university setting. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 61(10), 620-622. DOI: 10.1111/j.2164-4918.1983.tb00010.x
- Popper, M., Lipshitz, R. (1992). Coaching on leadership. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*. 13(7), 15-18.
- Reaser, A. L. (2008). *ADHD coaching and college students*. The Florida State University). *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses*, Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/304656404?accountid=40667>. (304656404).
- Resiliency Initiatives. (2011). *Embracing a strength-based perspective and practice in education*. Calgary, Canada. Retrieved from <http://www.resiliencycanada>
- Rhodes, S. (2009). *Can coaching strategies be applied to students so successful behaviors are achieved?* Retrieved from <http://actionresearch.farnborough.ac.uk/files/ARP/file/Final%20Steve%20Rhodes.pdf>
- Robinson, C., & Gahagan, J. (2010). Coaching students to academic success and engagement on campus. *About Campus*, 15(4), 26-29.
- Ryan, J. (Ed.). (2009). *Accelerating performance: Five leadership skills you and your organization can't do without*. Center for Creative Leadership.
- Seligman, M., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2000). Positive psychology: An introduction. *American Psychologist*, 55(1), 5-14.

- Seligman, M. (2002). *Authentic happiness: Using the new positive psychology to realize your potential for lasting fulfillment*. New York: Free Press.
- Seligman, M. (n.d.). Positive psychology theory. Retrieved from <http://www.psychtech.com/admin/ckfinder/userfiles/files/Positive%20Psychology%20PERMA%20in%20detail.pdf>
- Shultz, E., Colton, G., & Colton, C. (2001). The adventor program: Advisement and mentoring for students of color in higher education. *Journal of Humanistic Counseling, Education & Development*, 40(2), 208-218.
- Smith, W. A., Altbach, Philip. G., & Lomotey, K. (Eds.). (2002). *The racial crisis in American higher education: Continuing challenges for the twenty-first century*. (2nd ed.). Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Sparkes, A. C. (2002). Autoethnography: Self-indulgence or something more? In A. Bochner & C. Ellis (Eds.), *Ethnographically speaking: Autoethnography, literature, and aesthetics*. New York: AltaMira.
- Spradlin, T., Rutkowski, D., Burroughs, N., & Lang, J. (2010). *Effective college access, persistence and college completion programs, and strategies for underrepresented student populations: Opportunities for scaling up*. Center for Evaluation & Education Policy, Retrieved from <https://www.iub.edu/~ceep/>
- Steinwedel, S. C. (2001). *An evaluation of the effects of an individually tailored coaching intervention used with allied health students at Delaware technical and community college*. (Order No. 9995012, Wilmington College (Delaware)). *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses*, 150-150 p. Retrieved from [http://search.proquest.com/docview/304782493?accountid=40667.\(304782493\)](http://search.proquest.com/docview/304782493?accountid=40667.(304782493)).

- Terenzini, P., Upcraft, M., Millar, S., Allison, K., Gregg, P., Jalomo, , & Rendon, L. (1994). The transition to college: Diverse students, diverse stories. *Research in Higher Education, 35*, 57-73.
- Thornton, B., & Sanchez, J. E. (2010). Promoting resiliency among Native American students to prevent dropouts. *Education, 131*(2), 455-464.
- Tinto, V. 1993. Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition. Second Edition. 1993. ERIC, EBSCOhost (accessed March 15, 2012).
- Trusty, J. (1998). Family influences on educational expectations of late. *Journal Of Educational Research, 91*(5), 260.
- Venezia, A., Kirst, M., & Antonio, A. (2003). *Betraying the college dream: How disconnected K–12 and postsecondary education systems undermine student aspirations*. Stanford, CA: Stanford Institute for Higher Education Research. Retrieved from <http://www.stanford.edu/group/bridgeproject/betrayingthecollegedream.pdf>
- Virginia Community College System. (2011). \$24 million grant to boost health sciences and job training. Retrieved from <http://www.vahighered.com/24-million-grant-to-boost-health-sciences-and-job-training/>
- Virginia Community College System. (2011). *Career coaches*. Retrieved from <http://www.vccs.edu/WorkforceServices/CareerPathways/CareerCoaches/tabid/258/Default.aspx>
- Whitmore, J. (2002). *Coaching for performance*. (3rd ed.). London, England: Nicholas Brealey Publishing.

- Williams, C. R., & Butler, S. K. (2010). *A new retention variable: Hope and first generation college students*.
http://counselingoutfitters.com/vistas/vistas10/Article_11.pdf
- Willoughby, G., & Tosey, P. (2007). Imagine 'Meadfield': Appreciative inquiry as a process for leading school improvement. *Educational Management Administration and Leadership*, 35(4), 499-520.
- Yanez, J. (n.d.). Integral leadership through self- development. Retrieved from
<http://josephlyanez.hubpages.com/hub/Integral-Leadership-through-Self-Development>
- Yelamarthi, K., & Mawasha, P. R. (2008). A Pre-engineering program for the under-represented, low-income and/or first generation college students to pursue higher education. *Journal of STEM Education*, 9(3-4).
- York-Anderson, D. C., & Bowman, S. L. (1991). Assessing the college knowledge of first-generation and second-generation college students. *Journal of College Students Development*, 32, 116-122.

APPENDIX A
Pre-Interview Letter

Dear _____,

Thank you so much for your willingness to be a part of my study. I look forward to meeting with you and learning more about your higher education journey.

I have included several things for you to review and reflect on prior to our meeting. First, you will find a *Preliminary Interview Guide* that will serve as a basis of our interviews. This way you will have some time to think about what it is that you will be asked regarding certain aspects of your life prior to the interview. The interview will last 1 to 1 ½ hours. Realize that it serves only as a “guide”; therefore, there may be other questions that will be used in place of these or in addition to them. Use of a qualitative research approach provides for the opportunity to make changes that are more meaningful than what was originally outlined.

Additionally, I have included a copy of the *Consent Form* for you to sign. If you have any concerns about what you see outlined in the form, please contact me as soon as possible. This way any issues or concerns you may have will be worked out prior to our first interview session.

Again, I very much look forward to learning more about your successes in college.

Sincerely,

Melinda C. Hill

Appendix B
Letter of Informed Consent

Career Coaching Program Participants: Their Experiences and Persistence as
Underrepresented Community College Students

I, _____, wish to participate in a research project conducted by Melinda Hill, a doctoral candidate at Benedictine University, who has fully explained to me the procedures involved and the purpose of this research; has informed me that I may withdraw from participation at any time without prejudice; has offered to answer any given inquiries which I may make concerning the procedures to be followed; has informed me that there are no known risk to participating in this study; and I will be given a copy of this consent form.

I, _____, understand that the interview session(s) will be audio taped and later transcribed by the researcher. I will be given a copy of the transcription in order to clarify and elaborate upon the information that is shared in the interview(s). At the completion of this project, I understand that all transcripts and audio tapes will be placed in a secure cabinet in The Center for Higher Education and Organizational Change at Benedictine University for at least seven years after the completion of the study. Audio tapes will not be released to another party under any conditions without my direct written consent. Contact with the researcher, for any reason, can be made by contacting her at (540) 819-2231. If you have any concerns or questions before or during participation, you may contact my study supervisor, Dr. Nancy Bentley, at 708-357-6632.

I freely and voluntarily consent to my participation in the research project.

Signature of Researcher

Date

Signature of Subject

Date

APPENDIX C
Preliminary Interview Guide

Central question: How have career coaching and other internal and external factors influenced the beliefs, motivations, academic success, career goals, and self-efficacy beliefs of underrepresented college students?

Background/demographic information:

1. Gender?
2. Current age?
3. Ethnic background?
4. Year graduated from high school?
5. Years involved with career coaching program?
6. Current level in college?
7. Major and degree program?

Research Sub-questions and Related Interview Questions:

1. **What are their perceptions and beliefs about higher education attainment and academic success?**
 - a) What were the motivating factors behind your pursuit of a college degree?
 - b) At what point in time did you feel most excited and motivated about your attending college? At what point did you realize it was a reality?
 - c) What does academic success look like for you? How would you describe the role that career coaching played in your academic success?
2. **From their perspective, what challenges have they faced and how did they overcome these challenges to graduate from high school and enroll and persist through their first year of college?**
 - a) What were your major personal and educational challenges from high school and up until you enrolled in college?
 - b) What were your major challenges while in college?
 - c) How were you able to overcome these challenges and successfully persist through high school and first year of college?
 - d) What, if any, role has career coaching played in overcoming these challenges?
3. **From their perspective, what attitudes and personal and college experiences contributed positively to their beliefs, motivations, academic success, and entry into and success in college?**
 - a) What personal attributes /qualities have contributed to your enrollment and success in college?
 - b) Were there particular people, experiences, or events that contributed to your enrollment and success in college? Who or what were they and how did they help you?
 - c) How would you describe your current level of confidence as a student and in completing your personal, academic, and career goals? What has contributed to your self-confidence? What, if any, role has career coaching played?
 - d) What would be one or two things we at the college could do to make your educational experience better or more enjoyable?

- 4. In what ways has their career coaching experience in high school influenced their beliefs, motivations, academic success, career goals, and self-efficacy?**
- a) *Tell me more about your career coaching experience? How has it helped you in your educational pursuits?*
 - b) *As you reflect on your experience with the career coaching program, tell me about a highpoint. What made it a highpoint? Where were you at in your education? Who helped you? What was in your mind at the time? Which aspects of the program have contributed to your success at that time?*
 - c) *What two or three elements of the career coaching experience were most effective for you and why?*
- 5. How beneficial would it be for you to have a career coach while in college?**
- 6. How often would you feel the need to meet with a career coach, weekly or bi-weekly?**