Identifying College Success Strategies in First-Generation College Students

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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Abstract

Literature regarding first-generation college students has tended to focus on the disadvantages and weaknesses of this group that result in poor collegiate experiences and outcomes. This study served to bridge the gap in research by identifying through focus group discussions, individual interviews, and responses to structured-problem vignettes which problem solving strategies and contributing factors were most effective in achieving success for this population. Nine first-generation juniors and seniors from a Midwestern university were divided into high-performing and average-performing groups based on grade point average. Results suggested high levels of social support, evaluation of greater benefits versus costs associated with long-term perspective goals, and high levels of self-motivation to be the most salient factors regarding high performance for first-generation students. Limitations and recommendations for university initiatives are also discussed.
Identifying College Success Strategies in First-Generation College Students

First-generation college students (those for whom neither parent is a college graduate) represent a key future resource and an important target group in efforts to expand the number of Americans completing college degrees. The challenges that they and other students face may be greater now than in the past, given the steadily increasing costs of college, greater uncertainty about long term career choices due to factors such as globalization, and the more frequent use of creative strategies such as “swirling,” which includes attending two or more institutions, sometimes at the same time, on the way to completing a college degree (Zernike, 2006). Given these challenges it would be useful to identify factors putting first-generation students at risk, and also attitudes and coping strategies associated with academic success in this group.

Precollegiate Variables

As the first in their families to attend college, first-generation students face unique challenges to their collegiate experiences and overall success. Many of these challenges begin before these students ever arrive on campus. First-generation students are more likely to come from low socioeconomic backgrounds, are more likely to be women and minorities, and often enter college without adequate preparation (Chen & Carroll, 2005; Gibbons, 2004; Hahs-Vaughn, 2004; Zalaquett, 1999). Unfamiliarly with institutes of higher education can result in false ideas about college and feelings of intimidation regarding collegiate expectations (Zalaquett, 1999). First-generation students also perceive less family support to attend college and often lack the social and academic support systems necessary for collegiate success (Zalaquett, 1999; Hahs-Vaughn, 2004). Any of these variables, when taken separately, pose a great deal of stress and challenge to
an individual already facing both when it comes to entering the world of higher
education. Coming to college is an ultimate test for many of these individuals who are
doing so without a role model or path with footsteps in which to follow during times of
uncertainty that often arise prior to and throughout the college years.

Collegiate Experiences and Outcomes

The collegiate experiences of first-generation students are often less successful
than non-first-generation students, with first-generation students completing fewer credit
hours in the first year, receiving lower grades, and being less involved in campus
activities (Capriccioso, 2006; Chen & Carroll, 2005; Pike & Kuh, 2005; Pascarella,
Wolniak, Pierson, & Terenzini, 2003). Greater credit hour completion within the first
year has been positively linked to degree attainment (Chen & Carroll, 2005). Thereby,
first-generation students have a somewhat more difficult time completing degree
requirements on time due to taking fewer hours in the first year. First-generation students
often come from low-income families and work more hours per week than non-first­
generation students (Pascarella, et al., 2003). Work commitments can contribute to lower
levels of campus involvement and college engagement, which has been shown to
negatively influence learning outcomes regardless of student status (Pike & Kuh, 2005).

Despite these obstacles, some first-generation students are able to achieve positive
collegiate outcomes, scoring just as well as their non-first-generation peers in areas such
as orientation to learning and educational plans (Pascarella et al., 2003). A study by
Zalaquett (1999) revealed no significant differences in grade point average or retention
between first-generation and non-first-generation students. While these two studies may
be exceptions to an overwhelming negative statistical portrait regarding this population,
they provide some support that some first-generation students are resilient and able to achieve collegiate success.

Current Study

How some first-generation students are able to become high achievers despite such disadvantages remains unknown. This study serves to bridge the gap in research by identifying the strategies and contributing factors that allow some first-generation students to transcend their respective barriers and become high collegiate performers. Research which focuses on the disadvantages of this group provides data that is limited in its ability to effect change, for certain contributing characteristics, such as family support, socioeconomic status, and college preparation cannot be altered through university initiatives. This study provides practical data regarding the strengths and methods that have resulted in success for a portion of this group, which can lead to recommendations for programming and assistance for future first-generation students.

This study uses qualitative methods for data collection and analysis. Focus groups and individual interviews were determined to be the best methods to investigate the variables contributing to high performance in first-generation students, because at this time, there is no questionnaire specifically designed to identify these items. Open-ended questions allow participants to freely discuss their ideas without limitations due to availability of answer choices, not understanding the question being asked, or biases based on question wording, as can be the case in questionnaire or survey research. Structured-problem vignettes were also used to provide participants with a written method for response. If the qualitative material was unclear, these vignettes provided more structured material to which the participants could react.
Participants included different groups of first-generation students to assess whether the factors behind high-performance would be unique to a high-performing group or whether they would also be reported in a group of more typical, or average-performing first-generation students. The generalized hypothesis of this study is the high-performing and average-performing groups of first-generation students will differ in identifiable ways only through these methods.

Method

Participants

Nine participants (4 males, 5 females) attending a Midwestern state university volunteered to participate in this study. Each participant was a first-generation college student, meaning neither parent had graduated from an institute of higher education. Only juniors and seniors were eligible for participation, since they had more college experience to reflect upon in focus group discussion. Five juniors and four seniors participated. Eight out of the nine participants resided off campus.

Materials

Materials used in this study included ten open-ended questions, five structured-problem vignettes, and an eight-item background questionnaire. The ten open-ended questions were intended to foster discussion regarding participant experiences and strategies used throughout college to achieve success. Each vignette was designed to indicate how the two groups might be differentiated in reaching resolutions to various dilemmas involving time management, level of campus engagement, and seeking answers and support. The background questionnaire was created to examine items of potential risk outlined by previous researchers for this population, such as number of hours spent
working per week, living off campus, and level of college engagement. These materials are attached as Appendices A, B, and C. The focus group discussions were recorded onto individual 120-minute cassette tapes using a standard audio recording device.

Procedure

Participants were recruited through the posting of flyers and circulation of information to various campus groups.

The intended method was to conduct four focus groups: two high-performing groups and two average-performing groups. Due to a limited number of participants and complications in coordination of group scheduling, as the study was conducted during a demanding period in the academic year, only one true focus group was conducted and three participants were run as individual interviews. In addition, data for one participant in a group of two was discarded due to class status ineligibility. Therefore, data was acquired from one high-performing focus group (N=5), a second high-performing group (N=2) with only one eligible participant, and three average-performing individual interviews (N=3).

Participants with a grade point average (GPA) of at least 3.2 on a 4.0 scale were assigned to a high-performing group while participants with a GPA of less than 3.2 on a 4.0 scale were assigned to a non-high-performing group. Only one session was run at a time. The GPA criterion used to form the groups was withheld from participants since this knowledge could have contaminated responses.

Upon arrival to the room, each participant was given an informed consent form and instructed to read it carefully and sign if willing to participate (Appendix D). Participants were seated in a circle to better facilitate the discussion. The investigator
read an introductory script aloud to familiarize participants with the study and procedures (Appendix E). Participants were reminded that responses would be audio recorded and remain confidential. Participants were also reminded that all group members' responses were to remain confidential.

The investigator began recording and opened the focus group discussion by asking the group the first of ten open-ended questions designed to ascertain the variables behind high-performance, such as “What has been the most helpful to you in achieving success in college?” and “What has been the greatest challenge to your collegiate success?” The investigator stopped recording after the final question was addressed and distributed a form containing five structured-problem vignettes. Upon completion, the investigator read each scenario aloud and encouraged participants to voluntarily share responses with the group. Participants completed an eight-item background questionnaire. Participants then received a debriefing form and were free to leave (Appendix F). For the full focus groups, the study took an average of 80 minutes to complete, with 60 minutes for discussion, 15 minutes to answer the structured-problem vignettes, and five minutes for the background questionnaire. For the individual interviews, the study took an average of 45 minutes to complete, with 25 minutes for discussion, 15 to answer the structured-problem vignettes, and five minutes for the background questionnaire. Each participant received $10 for participation.

Results

Participants in the high-performing group took a range of 29 to 44 credits in the first year, completing an average of 33.33 credits. Participants in the average-performing groups took a range of 18 to 34 credits in the first year, completing an average of 27.33
Identifying College Success

Credits. High-performing participants reported spending an average of 7.0 hours per week on homework, while average-performing participants reported spending 9.66 hours per week on homework. High-performing participants reported spending an average of 6.16 hours per week in extracurricular activities, while average-performing participants reported spending an average of 4.0 hours per week in extracurricular activities. High-performing participants reported spending an average of 5.8 hours per week at work, while average-performing participants reported spending an average of 11.33 hours per week at work.

The purpose of the focus group discussions and individual interviews was to identify potential differences between high-performing and average-performing first-generation students. All recorded data from the focus group discussions and interviews were transcribed in full. Participants were coded by number to maintain confidentiality. These transcripts are attached as Appendices G, H, I, J, and K. Trends were identified through recording the frequency with which specific ideas were mentioned, such as self-motivation, time management, college engagement, social, academic, and family support, and ideas that related to long-term perspectives and short-term perspectives. Each idea was counted as high or low based upon the content of the idea presented in response to the discussion question. For example, if the idea demonstrated poor time management (e.g. being overwhelmed, putting studies off to the last minute) it would be counted once under “Time Management - Low.” This analysis is attached as Table 1. These results were divided by total number of participants in each group to provide a more accurate representation of ideas per group and to prevent skewing based upon number of participants per group. These means are presented in Table 2. Presentation of trends and
salient factors found in this study will be supported through provision of examples from the discussion responses in order to better illustrate some of the differences found between the two groups.

Focus Groups and Individual Interviews

Based upon the analysis of ideas, the top three salient variables were high levels of social support, emphasis upon long term perspectives, and high levels of self-motivation. The groups did not differ considerably in terms of college engagement, time management, or family support. Overall, the high-performing group reported more ideas than the average-performing group, even when controlling for number of participants per group.

The most important factor was social support, which was reported 26 times in the high-performing groups and seven times by average-performing participants. These ideas represented positive roommate experiences, taking the initiative to meet new people, and friendships formed upon joining campus organizations. This variable correlated somewhat with college engagement, for many participants in both groups reported finding social support through campus organizations. For many participants in the high-performing groups, these friendships were a significant source of support throughout their college career. The following are responses from high-performing participants that illustrate the benefits that come from social networks:

5: Yeah, uh, my main group of friends that’s where, uh, I get my support, and, yeah, it, it gets pretty ridiculous, you keep saying the same jokes over and over and over, keep watching the same movies, over and over and over, pretty old stuff, but, uh, you hold each other up through the whole process.

3: I have one really good friend who has been with me through thick and thin, um, since about halfway through freshman year, and it, we are joined at the hip and
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she's just sort of my motivation to get through the day before we usually hang out at night, so, um, I think that's a lot of it [...] so I think that helps a lot.

4: I started out my freshman year, um, (unintelligible) became really good friends with a girl that was on the same floor as me, and my roommate also, and one of her friends. I had a few really close friends in the dorm, and then, um, my sophomore year I joined a sorority, so that really helped me meet a lot of people and get me involved in other things too, so I met people and, like, other organizations I joined up for that.

Another high-performing participant suggested being proactive in making friends early.

This participant did not know anyone upon arriving to college, as is the case with many incoming students, and this experience of initiating friendships proved to be a positive one:

1: Uh, I'd say even at orientation you need to try to meet a couple people and get a couple phone numbers and meet up with them once you move-in in August. I did that with a few people and I'm still friends with them today. Uh, it just helps if you don't know anybody that you'll have someone and you can call 'em up when you move-in and say "Hey, you know, let's go hang out get a soda," and just hang out with.

While the average-performing participants reported some ideas related to social support, the same levels of positive outcomes, such as motivation and support from those relationships were not necessarily presented in responses. In some cases, social obligations actually interfered with academic work, which could have a negative effect on collegiate performance. The following are responses from two average-performing participants. The first represents a mixed response, being counted low for feeling alienated from forming friendships inside classes, and high for finding social support in extracurricular activities:

1: Um, I don't really get too friendly with too many of the people in my lecture classes. Um, I guess it's just because I don't talk to people. I usually get there right as class is starting and then I take off and I don't really form any relationships with the person standing beside me. [...] Other than that, I've um, I've found that extracurricular activities were a big help for not only being able to take my mind off of whatever was going on in a class or, um, elsewhere in my
life, but also being able to find a group of people who shared similar interests and, um, eventually I was able to talk to about subjects going beyond the group.

The same participant seemed to struggle with the social life, suggesting it was a potential source of strain rather than support at times:

1: Um. *(Pause.*) By no means avoid joining an organization, I think, uh, joining a club, or, um, some sort of on campus group, is um, very important, but you’ve gotta make sure that that doesn’t interfere with, um, going on and doing your studies and making sure you get to class. So, have a social life just don’t let the social life control you.

Another average-performing participant reported low levels of social support largely from work commitments that prevented the participant from engaging in the extracurricular activities that would provide valuable opportunities to meet others and form support networks:

1: I work a lot so I don’t have very many, you know, extracurriculars. And I’m not somebody that I make friends easily when I first meet them, but I’ve gotten to know people in my classes and, and talk with them and be more comfortable.

1: Um. That one’s kind of a tough one. I, I have a friend from high school that I’m still close with, and I’m engaged, so my fiancé. And, and my family, but. Yeah, that’s, that’s probably about it.

The second greatest factor was ability to take a long-term perspective.

Participants in high-performing groups reported more ideas encompassing long term perspectives as opposed to short-term perspectives. Participants in the high-performing groups reported ideas related to long-term perspectives 21 times, while those in the average-performing groups did so five times.

A cost/benefit assessment of the two groups suggests they differ in the level of benefit associated with succeeding in and completing college and the level of costs attributed to foregoing a desired activity in order to study or achieve an academic goal.

Those in the high-performing groups seemed to be more sensitive to those individuals
who had failed before them and around them, and used this as a model to avoid a similar experience. Some, but not all, of the participants in the average-performing groups seemed to evaluate the same failure models in a different way, struggling with the distractions and desires of wanting to have fun instead of focusing on the academic demands of college. Therefore, for high-performing participants, in general, the benefits of completing college and obtaining a degree seemed to outweigh the costs of saying "no" to going to a party or another preferred activity in order to study or complete a paper in order to meet those set goals.

These ideas are illustrated in the following high-performing responses:

1: But, you know, they just obviously think, that, you know without their college degrees you aren't gonna, uh, excel too much in life. You can do decent, but the rate that you get raises, the rate that you move up in anything is very slow, if you don't have the college degree. It's almost frowned upon these days if you don't have one, so.

2: I agree with that, yeah I mean, so many people from my high school have, uh, they started out at college and then they've already quit and everything, most of them within the first year that they were in college. [...] I think, you know, I can do better than this, and everything, I don't want to end up like that, you know. I don't want to have a mediocre job, mediocre life, you know, I want to do better, so.

5: [...] But, um, you know, keeping your eye on the prize, that's, that's the most important thing, that's what got me back.

3: I know, like, I definitely wouldn't be, after, after everything I've gone through here at school if I were to up and quit and go back home now, like this far into it, I would regret it and I would not be happy. Um, and like she said, my, my career choice, like I have to have a degree, I have to have the college education to go through clinicals and all that stuff, so there's really no choice, like, if I want to be happy this is, this is the route I should go.

Some high-performing participants did report short-term perspectives:

2: There's always, even people who are here are always trying to, like, there's something else going on, and, just having more fun, that's probably the biggest challenge for me, to say no to that and study.
For some participants in the average-performing groups, the benefits of completing college were not viewed in the same way, for costs and benefits were viewed in a more short-term manner. For some participants in the average-performing groups, the benefits of staying inside to study did not necessarily outweigh the costs associated with missing out on a preferred activity, since the long-term impact of these choices was not always considered. For example, the benefits of staying in to study was often viewed in the short-term, such as the potential impact it would have upon one exam; thereby, the immediate costs of going out would also be viewed in short-term, such as receiving one poor grade, instead of in terms of overall collegiate success or failure. The following are examples from average-performing groups. Some average-performing participants did report ideas encompassing long-term perspectives, but reported lower levels of this factor overall:

1: [...] Keeping, keeping my eye on the end goal of being, of graduating and this is going to hold me through the rest of my life; I guess is, what truly helps.

The following example illustrates the immediate frustration resulting from the inability to see the long-term goal of difficult course work:

1: Um, there has been a few times when I have strongly contemplated just leaving. *(Laughs.*) Um, some of the reasons would have been, um, having a rough time in a class, um, especially, uh, once I get in to my, some of my higher level, more focused classes. They became much more difficult and sometimes I couldn’t exactly tell why we were doing something and what all this extra work was going for.

The third greatest factor was level of self-motivation. While participants in both groups reported statements containing ideas regarding self-motivation, those participants in the high-performing groups reported more ideas associated with high levels of self-
motivation overall, while those in the average-performing groups were more likely to report ideas associated with lower levels of self-motivation. The following are responses from high-performing participants:

5: Yeah, um, it’s gotta be self-motivation, it has to be. Um, there’s nothing quite like getting through something really tough, or a really tough project or a really tough paper for something for the program you’re in and, uh, feeling that rush of “Ah I did it, I finally did it!” and then, uh, the program turns around and slams a bigger thing right on you, and then “Ohhh…” and you do that and you get through it all and you finish and you can feel great about it and then they slam down something bigger. It’s just; it’s the challenge of it, the motivation that you, you just pull out of yourself somehow to get past all of those tough things.

2: I agree, I, I think it’s a matter of self-responsibility, I think when you come to college you realize your parents aren’t there to, to push you and say hey, “You’ve got to get your homework done now,” you know, and things like that, so, you know, it makes you want to do better, you know, because you’re doing it yourself.

An average-performing participant had the following challenges:

1: Uh, and then like I said, remembering that I had to go to class and nobody was there to tell me that I needed to go to class, or that I should read my book before it got to two o’clock in the morning.

The same participant reported low levels of self-motivation in the initial transition period, and increases in self-motivation were crucial in resolving issues related to academics and remaining in school:

1: Um, there was too much time just goofing off, running around seeing what else there was to do. Um, I think I finally resolved it when I realized that if I kept going the way I was, I wasn’t going to last much longer in college. So I started to work a little bit harder, more self-motivated, more responsible.

Notably, some of the participants in the high-performing groups displayed poorer time management than the average-performing participants, reporting ideas within the "overwhelmed" category from taking on too much and trying to complete it all. A statement by a high-performing participant summed this up best:
3: I always said nothing’s impossible; it just depends on how much sleep you can give up.

In addition, participants in the average-performing groups tended to take greater advantage of on campus academic support resources, such as the Learning Center, tutors, and study groups than participants in the high-performing groups, suggesting first-generation students are not necessarily at a disadvantage when it comes to seeking needed answers and support.

*Structured-Problem Vignettes*

Results from the structured-problem vignettes revealed no considerable differences in the ways high-performing and average-performing first-generation students reach solutions to various dilemmas. Overall, high-performing students were more likely to report ideas related to time management and self-motivation, while average-performing participants were more likely to include statements related to obtaining support, either from the professor or a classmate.

Every participant regardless of group membership placed academics as a top priority for Vignette One, suggesting both groups possessed an understanding of the long-term benefits of college education in comparison to the immediate benefits of employment. For Vignette Two, both groups were similar in identifying the importance of campus engagement and joining organizations within one’s major. Time-management scenarios and alternative methods for participating in the organization due to work commitments were given by participants in both groups. One participant in the high-performing group suggested asking parents for financial assistance, suggesting a high level of family support. The groups did not differentiate considerably in responses to Vignette Three, with most stating the work for the class project must be completed before
going on the family trip, if one is able to go at all. The high-performing groups gave more explicit statements regarding responsibility and self-motivation while the average-performing groups made more statements regarding time management and talking with the family. Professors, classmates, and on campus resources were viewed by both groups as sources of support for the struggling student in Vignette Four. Responses for Vignette Five differed slightly, with high-performing participants reporting ideas related to high self-motivation, time-management, prioritizing course work, and seeking academic support through professors and on campus services. The average-performing groups provided more limited responses to this dilemma, and suggested getting help from peers. One participant suggested on campus resources, such as a tutor, and time management.

Discussion

This study served to identify through focus group discussions, individual interviews, and responses to structured-problem vignettes the variables contributing to success in high-performing first-generation students. The general focus for this study was to determine whether high-performing and average-performing students would differ through these methods. Results of this study found that high-performing and average-performing first-generation students differ in regards to levels of social support, taking a long term perspective, and levels of self-motivation.

Limitations

The sample size used for this study was severely limited (N=9) due to recruitment taking place during a demanding academic period in the spring semester. This also created problems with coordinating schedules to conduct the focus groups. Since many of the participants were unable to meet at the same time, the investigator was forced to
work around the participants' schedules to collect the data, running three individual interviews as a last resort. This digression from the intended procedure could have distorted the results, since those participants in the individual interviews did not have the advantage of other participants to engage discussion, which could have assisted in eliciting a greater number of responses, as in the first high-performing focus group. Replication of the study with a greater sample size utilizing the intended method of full focus groups of four to six participants each will be needed to yield more conclusive results. In addition, the design should be extended to a 2 (high-performing first-generation) X 2 (average-performing first-generation) X 2 (non-first-generation) to assure that these measures are tapping into factors that are attributed only to first-generation status, instead of factors occurring regardless of student status. This could be a confounding issue for the results found in this study. Unfortunately, without this piece of the design, there is no way to be sure.

In addition, the measures developed for this study, including the ten open-ended focus group discussion questions, may not have adequately ascertained the variables behind high performance in first-generation college students as originally intended. Some of the responses given by participants in both groups seemed to have little to do with first-generation status. While the questions were designed at the time to elicit such discussion in order to identify these factors, perhaps a revision of these questions will yield better results in a follow-up study.

The top salient factor found in this study was social support, however, it should be noted that one of the ten open-ended discussion questions asked specifically about this
issue: “How have you formed friendships? Where do you find social support?” This could account for part of the frequency of ideas reported related to this variable.

Recommendations

Results from this study suggest that social support can be a contributing factor for high-performance in first-generation students. This finding makes sense, for those individuals who already find themselves in a new place are going to need to form support networks to prevent isolation and “getting lost in the system.” Forming friendships, either with roommates, through campus organizations, within the community, or in classes helps to “give you those roots,” as one high-performer stated. During times of uncertainty or stress, peer relationships help students through being able to identify with similar struggles and experiences of college life. For those with low levels of social support, it is easier to become isolated or less motivated to succeed. For a first-generation student, who, according to previous research, has typically entered college at a greater disadvantage than the average student, every support system is a valuable resource.

High levels of self-motivation were also reported by high-performing first-generation students. This characteristic influenced the participants’ abilities to attend class regularly, to complete required assignments, and to be proactive in forming friendships and joining campus organizations. Those reporting high levels of self-motivation refused to give up when encountering obstacles and difficult periods in college. For those with low levels of self-motivation, having a role model who possesses high levels of this trait can demonstrate the importance of working hard, going to class, delaying preferred activities, and meeting the ultimate goal of obtaining a college degree.
Role models and mentors are particularly important for this population, especially for those individuals with low levels of family and social support. Having a mentor who has already gone to college is helpful to provide guidance and support to a first-generation student who is attempting to forge a collegiate path on his or her own.

It is recommended that universities make efforts to either identify this population to provide assistance, or provide mandatory sessions to all incoming students to ensure that these students are provided with information about the importance of forming support networks and getting involved on campus; self-motivation, and staying focused on the long-term goals of degree attainment and career objectives. Perhaps attending such a session would also provide an additional opportunity to meet others and serve as a starting point for forming relationships with peers and mentors that would guide and support these students throughout their college years, promoting higher performance and increases in retention for this group.
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Table 1
Discussion Question Responses: Total Frequency of Ideas

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<th>High-performing (N=6)</th>
<th>Average-performing (N=3)</th>
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<td><strong>Time Management</strong></td>
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<td>High (Prioritizes)</td>
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<td>Low (Poor/Overwhelmed)</td>
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<td><strong>Total College Engagement</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Family Support</strong> (Family/Fiancés)</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Low</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Academic Support</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Use of On Campus Resources (Learning Center, Tutors, Study Groups)</td>
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<tr>
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<td><strong>Short Term Perspective</strong></td>
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Table 2
Discussion Question Responses: Total Frequency of Ideas (Means)

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<th>High-performing (N=6)</th>
<th>Average-performing (N=3)</th>
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<td>High (Prioritizes)</td>
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<td>1.33</td>
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<tr>
<td>Low (Poor/Overwhelmed)</td>
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<td>0.66</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total College Engagement</strong></td>
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<td>Low</td>
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Appendix A: Focus Group Discussion Questions

1. What did you think college would be like?
2. How would you describe your transition to college?
3. What were the best and worst factors regarding academics in your first year?
4. How did you resolve issues regarding academics?
5. Have you ever felt like ending your college education early? If so, what influenced your decision to stay and continue?
6. How have you formed friendships? Where do you find social support?
7. What has been the most helpful to you in achieving success in college?
8. What has been the greatest challenge to your collegiate success?
9. What are some things you have learned over the years that would be helpful to incoming first-generation students?
10. Is there anything else you would like to add that has not yet been covered in this discussion?
Appendix B: Structured-Problem Vignettes

Do not write your name on this form. Please read the following brief scenarios and provide a written response in the space provided based on how you would resolve each dilemma.

Vignette 1

Mary is an undergraduate at a four-year university and is enrolled in 15 credit hours for the semester. She also works part time 10 hours per week. Mary has a critical upcoming exam in a required course. Although Mary has scored well on assigned work, she was dissatisfied with her previous exam score and would like to do better on this next exam. At work today, Mary’s boss, being pleased with her work and requiring the extra help, has asked her to work five extra hours per week starting immediately. How should Mary handle this situation?

Vignette 2

Jane is an undergraduate at a four-year university. Although she receives some financial aid, she also works part time 10 to 15 hours per week to help cover her expenses. Jane has been invited to join an extracurricular campus organization associated with her major. The organizational meetings are held during a time when Jane is required to work. How should Jane handle this situation?

Vignette 3

Mark is an undergraduate at a four-year university. He has been assigned to work on a final group project as part of one of his course requirements. He has met twice with his group members to develop the project, assign individual parts to group members, and to work on the project, which will be presented in class on Monday. On Friday, while working on his individual portion of the project, Mark received a call from his family
reminding him he was invited on a family trip this weekend. How should Mark handle the situation?

Vignette 4

Tom is an undergraduate at a four-year university. At the conclusion of one of his class periods, he was unclear about some of the concepts that were discussed. After reviewing the syllabus for the course, Tom saw that a paper over the discussed material was due the following class period. How should Tom handle this situation?

Vignette 5

Sue is an undergraduate at a four-year university. Despite studying, Sue was not pleased with her midterm exam grades in two of her four courses, and is beginning to feel behind her peers in her grasp of covered material in those courses. Sue knows the final exams will be comprehensive. One of the courses is required for her major. The other course is an elective. How should Sue handle the situation?
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Appendix C: Questionnaire

Do not put your name on this form. Please check the appropriate boxes and fill in the blanks with the appropriate information.

1. Class Ranking: □ Junior □ Senior

2. Credit Hours Completed in First Year: ______

3. Where do you live? □ On Campus □ Off Campus

4. Do you commute? □ Yes □ No

   If yes, approximately how far do you travel? ______

5. Where do you most often study?

   □ Home (off campus) □ Home (on campus) □ Library □ Computer Lab

   □ Study Lounge/Campus Study Area □ Coffee Shop □ Other ______

6. How many hours per week do you spend on homework?

   □ 0-2 □ 3-5 □ 6-8 □ 9-11 □ 12-14 □ 15 +

7. How many hours per week do you spend on extracurricular campus/volunteer activities?

   □ 0-2 □ 3-5 □ 6-8 □ 9-11 □ 12-14 □ 15 +

8. How many hours per week do you spend at work?

   □ 0-2 □ 3-5 □ 6-8 □ 9-11 □ 12-14 □ 15 +
Appendix D: Informed Consent

Identifying College Success Strategies in First-Generation College Students

The purpose of this research project is to examine different groups of first-generation college students' experiences and use of various coping strategies in order to determine which methods are most effective in achieving success for this population. For this project, you will be asked to contribute to a focus group discussion answering ten questions. The discussion will take you approximately 60 minutes to complete. Next, you will be asked to read five brief scenarios featuring various dilemmas and give written responses based on how you would resolve the situation. This will take approximately 20 minutes to complete. You will then be asked to complete a brief questionnaire to provide background information regarding your class level, credit hours, and level of campus engagement. The questionnaire will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. You will receive $10 for your participation.

Your responses will be audio recorded for accuracy and later transcribed without names. After transcription, the tapes will be destroyed. Only the Principal Investigator and Faculty Advisor will have access to the data, which will remain strictly confidential. All data will be stored in a research office maintained by the project's Faculty Advisor that is always locked. Upon completion of a written thesis in May 2006, the transcript and data forms will be destroyed. All signed informed consent forms will be stored for a minimum of three years. By agreeing to participate in this study, you agree to keep all participants' group responses confidential.

The foreseeable risks or ill effects from participating in this study are minimal. There is a small possibility that responding to some of the questions in the focus-group discussion and on the scenario form may evoke some feelings of anxiety or discomfort. Counseling services are available to you through the Counseling Center at Ball State University (765-285-1736) if you develop uncomfortable feelings during your participation in this research project. You will be responsible for the costs of any care that is provided [note: Ball State students, faculty, and staff may have some or all of these services provided to them at no cost.] It is understood that in the unlikely event of an injury or illness of any kind as a result of your participation in this research project that Ball State University, its agents and employees will assume whatever responsibility is required by law. If any injury or illness occurs in the course of your participation in this research project, please notify the Principal Investigator.

One benefit you may gain from your participation in this study may be from being able to openly share your experiences and coping strategies with other first-generation students from Ball State University.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at anytime for any reason without penalty or prejudice from the investigator or anyone else. Please feel free to ask any questions of the investigator before signing the Informed Consent form and beginning the study, and at any time during or after the study.

For one’s rights as a research subject, the following person may be contacted: Coordinator of Research Compliance, Office of Academic Research and Sponsored Programs, Ball State University, Muncie, IN 47306, (765) 285-5070.

**********

I, __________________________, agree to participate in this research project entitled, “Identifying College Success Strategies in First-Generation College Students.” I have read the explanation of the study and any questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I have read the description of this project and give my consent to participate. I understand that my responses will be audio recorded for accuracy. I understand that by agreeing to participate I will keep all responses given by participants in the group discussion strictly confidential. I understand that I will receive a copy of this informed consent form to keep for future reference.

__________________________________________
Participant’s Signature

________________________
Date

Principal Investigator:
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Faculty Advisor:
Dr. David V. Perkins
Psychological Science
Ball State University
Muncie, IN 47306
Telephone: (765) 285-1715
Email: dperkins@bsu.edu
I am here today to examine your experiences and use of various coping strategies as first-generation college students in order to determine which methods are most effective in achieving success for this population. First you will be given an informed consent form outlining this study and your rights as a research participant. Please review this form carefully before signing it and consenting to participation. Please feel free to ask questions at any time, including before, during, and after the study is over. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may stop at any time for any reason without penalty from me or anyone else. For this study, you will be asked to contribute to a focus group discussion answering ten questions. The discussion will take you approximately 60 minutes to complete. This discussion will be audio recorded, but I will transcribe the tapes without using your names to maintain confidentiality. The tapes will be destroyed after transcription is completed. Only my faculty advisor and I will have access to the tapes and data from this study. Please do not hesitate to contribute to the focus group discussion, as your thoughts and input is essential for this project. I would like to remind you that by consenting to participate in this study, you agree to keep everyone’s responses confidential – please do not repeat what is said here once you leave this room. After the discussion has concluded, you will be given a form asking you to read five brief scenarios featuring various dilemmas. Please give written responses based on how you would resolve the situation. Please do not put your name or any other identifiable information on this form. This will take approximately 20 minutes to complete. When you are finished, turn the form over and that will let me know that you are finished. After everyone has completed this form, I will read each scenario aloud and you may share your responses with the group. You will then be asked to complete a brief questionnaire to provide background information regarding your class level, credit hours, and level of campus engagement. The questionnaire will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. Please do not put your name on this form. When you are finished with this questionnaire, raise your hand and I will collect it. You will receive $10 for your participation. Are there any questions before we begin?
Appendix F: Debriefing Statement

Debriefing Statement

You have just participated in a research study examining the factors that contribute to collegiate success in various groups of first-generation students. Much of the research examining this population has focused on the disadvantages and weaknesses of this group (Chen & Carroll, 2005; Pike & Kuh, 2005; Pascarella, Wolniak, Pierson, & Terenzini, 2003). This study served to bridge the gap in research by identifying the strengths that allow some first-generation students to transcend their respective barriers and become high collegiate performers. Results from this study will provide practical data regarding the effectiveness of various strategies and methods that have resulted in success for a portion of this population, which can lead to recommendations for programming and assistance for future first-generation students. Results of this study will also contribute to current university research regarding retention.

Counseling services are available to you through the Counseling Center at Ball State University (765-285-1736) if you developed any uncomfortable feelings during your participation in this research project. You will be responsible for the costs of any care that is provided [note: Ball State students, faculty, and staff may have some or all of these services provided to them at no cost.] It is understood that in the unlikely event of an injury or illness of any kind as a result of your participation in this research project that Ball State University, its agents and employees will assume whatever responsibility is required by law. If any injury or illness occurred in the course of your participation in this research project, please notify the Principal Investigator.

Thank you for your participation in this research study. For more information about your rights as a research participant, you may contact: Coordinator of Research Compliance, Office of Academic Research and Sponsored Programs, Ball State University, Muncie, IN 47306, 765-285-5070. For more information regarding this research study, do not hesitate to use the contact information below.

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Appendix G: Transcript: High-Performing Group #1

PI: I just wanted to start out with your initial impressions of college, so the first question is, what did you think college would be like?

1: Scary, just cuz, um, I had friends that were older than me, uh, before I went to college and I knew a bunch of them that dropped out because they, they were out there partying a lot, so I didn’t know, uh, if I was going to be able to manage my time very well.

2: I thought that it would be really overwhelming, and I come from a high school with less than four hundred students so, (softer, to others) basically what twenty thousand students, that might be a little bit off, (louder) but uh, I’m not going to find my classes, but uh, I was just basically just gonna be, you know, just a better student, you know, and not have these kind of problems.

3: I’m kind of focusing where I came from a small high school, and there is actually more people here at Ball State than there is in my entire town, so. It was more of a, um, I don’t know, like a population thing, rather than “am I going to be able to pass my classes” and stuff like that. Coming from a small town, coming to Muncie was huge to me. Still is huge, to me. I’m used to wide open cornfields and stuff like that.

4: I was kind of excited, um, my high school was about two thousand people, so it wasn’t that small but it wasn’t really, I mean it was bigger, but, it’s not, it wasn’t really that type of an adjustment size wise, I didn’t want to go to, like, IU or something because that was too big, but um, I wasn’t too worried about that.

5: Just uh, I came from, uh, uh, a school, of gee, I don’t know, I don’t know, somewhere in the vicinity of five to seven hundred, um, and it was a pretty close knit community, so the only thing I was really worried about, was uh, not knowing anyone when I got here. But, uh, you know, the academics, uh, the work, that was, uh, kinda scary, but I say, the, uh, the biggest fear was just coming and meeting so many people that I didn’t know.

PI: So (unintelligible) how would you describe your transition to college?

3: I think it went pretty smooth for me, despite the fact that, uh, fall semester my freshman year I had a horrible, horrible roommate and (laughter from group) we didn’t get along at all. We had gone to high school together and – bad idea, don’t ever do it, I won’t ever do it again – but, um, I think it was pretty smooth considering I was an only child and I went from living in a, a room by myself to living with somebody. I eventually got a roommate that I could deal with and we actually became very good friends. But, um, as far as the class work goes, I think the freshman classes were a little harder than what I had in high school, but it wasn’t to the point where I was stressed. Freshman year was about the easiest
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...year and things have progressively gotten harder, so the tran, transition’s been a little easier than I originally thought.

1: Yeah, it was, was pretty easy for me, uh, at first I was worried, but I, I, happened to get a roommate that was, like, perfect for me, because he, uh, always acted, was uh, the complete opposite and we managed to get along perfectly, so it worked out good and, uh, it was good to have someone like that, uh, because I didn’t know anyone here at all, because I’m from near Chicago, so, uh, having a roommate that I got along with well made everything easier, and then, uh, academically it wasn’t, wasn’t too hard because I was always pretty successful in classes, so, imagine the time and it only took a week to do that and then I got used to it so, I, uh, just, I got used to that fast so, I got used to classes.

4: I was really lucky because I had a roommate that was really easy to get along with and, um, living in the dorms I really got to know some of the girls on my floor really well so it was really helpful to just jump right in and make some friends really early on that I still am still friends with today, so, I think that helped me.

2: I had a horrible roommate too, (laughter from group), I mean like, wow. (Laughs.) Um, but as far as, like, academically and everything, uh, the transition was really easy, um, I mean, great and everything more the same as it was in high school, and really the only difference was, um, freshman year when I was first exposed to the large lecture classes and that was kind of an adjustment for me, you know, being from a small school I’m used to small classrooms that, you know, encourage discussion and everything, and not having, you know, the professor up there lecturing (laughs as speaks) for the entire hour and, you know, you raise your hand, and ask, you, you know, and um, plan on asking a question and they don’t even acknowledge you, you know, um, so that part was difficult, but other than that I thought my transition went easily.

5: Yeah, I, uh, thought it was a pretty smooth transition. By some sort of divine grace I was, uh, put in with a roommate my freshman year who was just fantastic, great guy and uh, somehow he managed to bring like five other guys from his hometown and they all ended up on the same floor in the same dorm, so it was, was pretty crazy, but uh, since then we’ve all been good friends. Um, academically, uh, it really didn’t get too tough until sophomore, junior year, that’s when it really got hellacious, but the freshman year wasn’t too bad, wasn’t too bad.

PI: Okay, what were the best and worst factors regarding academics in your first year?

4: I don’t think, personally, academics was the worst, um, I took a lot of Honors classes in high school, so when I came to college it almost seemed like I was expecting my classes to be harder, and to be in class for less time than you are,
(change in voice tone) “that’s cool”, and my classes weren’t as challenging as like “oh, I thought this was easy” so the academics part really was a little bit easier.

1: I would say the uh, probably the hardest part was that, uh, in college you only get a couple chances to take tests. To get a good grade, if you don’t study well, then you, uh, it’s real tough to come back if you get a bad grade, whereas in high school we always had homework that was, like, I dunno, forty percent of your grade and things like that, um, when I was, I mean, I always did well in studying so that wasn’t a big deal but, also um, (Pause.) (Under breath.) What was I gonna say? (Pause.)

(Laughter from group.)

2: I would say the best thing for me was, um, some of the initial Honors classes that I took my first year, because they, you know, encouraged discussion and there was, like, projects and stuff like that, and I agree with him, that, you know, coming to college where, you know, your grade is mostly based on exams, and while I do find, you know, I study and everything the anxiety is just always there, (laughs) regardless of how I do, so, that is always real hard for me, still is actually, (laughs) the anxiety.

3: I think only having, like, class, like, two to three days a week was great because I remembered high school where we would have the same classes every single day, I got really burned out and didn’t really want to do the work and my grades probably suffered a little bit from that, from boredom. But um, I think also that having class, like, Monday, Wednesday, Friday forces you to remember it a lot better, because if there’s a day between lectures then you have to remember what, what exactly was said and you know, what are you gonna cover the next lecture, and especially if you have a lecture on Monday and a you have a test on Wednesday, I mean, that gives you a day in between to really study hard, whereas in high school you had the same classes every single day and if you have a test that next day you had to study really hard that night, so, I liked that a lot better.

5: I uh, I got put into the Honors College, uh, so, I absolutely loved Honors classes. I still try to take them when I can to take places of other things, but they won’t let me do that anymore. Um, the toughest thing was probably, uh, the big, the big, big lecture halls, I, I hated it. I got in there, and it was just a room full of people, most of them didn’t want to be there, um, uh, I had this one professor over in sociology who spent more time screaming at us than anything else. It was just, I didn’t like it, I like the much smaller, smaller classes, and to put it like somebody else said, I didn’t like the fact that three grades made up your whole grade, that was tough to get used to.

2: I think another difference between the lecture classes is to me, like, to me the professors of the big lecture classes are a lot like, you know, the high school teachers in that you don’t really get to see the human side of ‘em, you know, it’s
all business and screaming, and you know, that kind of thing, whereas, like, with my Honors classes, like, we actually got to know the professor and they got to know us, and so, you know, I mean, they encourage, you know, us stopping by during office hours or, you know, just chatting with them after class and everything, so I, uh, I really think that it’s opened up a lot (unintelligible... unidentified group members: “oh my gosh” “sexy ribbon”) and they’re cool, you know (laughs) they, they like to have fun and talk about other things besides, you know, the class that they teach.

3: I agree with that a lot too, because, I was like, in high school, like, I knew all my teachers very, very well and they all knew me very, very well so coming and having to go through those large lectures and not having that one on one, um, relationship with the professors was really kind of weird for me because I was used to asking a lot of questions and doing a lot of discussions and stuff.

PI: So how did you guys resolve issues regarding academics?

5: You just had to get used to it, you just had to get used to the concept of, uh, spending hours, upon hours, upon hours, upon hours, writing a paper and or studying for a test. Um, there’s no real way to prepare yourself for it, you just have to get, get used to it.

1: It’s, uh, it’s just, uh, basically the same kind of study habits from home, from being in high school, but different times of the day, you know, because whereas you’re not there from seven-fifteen, until you know, til like, four o’clock in the afternoon cause you’re in sports from six to seven o’clock, and then not if you really don’t have to go to class until noon some days, so you have the rest of the day to do whatever, so I just figured out when I would have time to set aside an hour or two to study and it’s just all about forming habits and, um, uh, yeah basically just managing your time.

2: I agree, it’s a matter of like finding out the study techniques and also, um, I’ve always looked for things, like extracurricular things, on campus that I enjoy doing and that way, that kind of, you know, I, I kind of try to balance it, because, you know, then that way, because, you know, academics just aren’t fun, you know, because we have to basically, and, um, so, it’s nice to, you know, take a break from that and go and do something you enjoy.

4: I think when I looked at, like, the class schedule and everything, um, it was an adjustment not to have class everyday and that makes it a little bit harder to stay focused on your classes when you are in them for so much less time, so it was kind of an adjustment for me, because, like, being involved in all those other things didn’t make academics a priority, so, because it was just so easy to let them fall to the background and spend more time in outside activities than you do in classes.
I, I have to agree with that. Um, I especially in the, the warm summer months which we don’t have very often in Indiana, um, I’m one of those people that if it comes between, you know, going outside and doing something, like, recreational as opposed to sitting inside and studying, I, I would rather be outside, and I would usually push my studies off to the side, “Oh, I’ll do it later, oh, I’ll do it later.” And then I tried to study outside and that didn’t work. So, trying, trying to manage time, and, um, trying to figure out what’s more important at the time, like if you’ve got a five-page paper due and you have another one-page paper due, of course you are going to do the five-page paper first, you want to get it done and out of the way, so.

You don’t really notice it at the time but you do a lot of growing up and maturings, because even though there is a lot more going on here than in high school and you have a lot more freedom, because in high school it’s like you’re in a prison all day and then they release you at the end and you go back the next day, (laughter from group; “4:30”) and then here you do whatever you want whenever you want, they don’t have a set lunch schedule annoying you, um, it just comes down to motivating yourself to, to do, focusing to do whatever you have to just to make sure you’re getting by.

I agree, I, I think it’s a matter of self-responsibility, I think when you come to college you realize your parents aren’t there to, to push you and say hey, “You’ve got to get your homework done now,” you know, and things like that, so, you know, it makes you want to do better, you know, because you’re doing it yourself.

Have you ever felt like ending your college education early?

(Laughter.) Many times, um, I actually have a fiancé back home, and so, trying to focus on work and doing my studies when I know, like, he has his own business and, you know, he might need my help back home, like, it’s really hard for me to focus sometimes, and, sometimes it’s just burn out on school and it has nothing to do with that, and you know, just I don’t want to be here. So yeah, I’ve thought about it, but I don’t think it would go over well with him, or my parents, or any of my friends. (Laughter.)

The second part of the question was if so, what influenced your decision to stay and continue?

I’ve thought about it, but it’s the same kind of thinking that everyone’s done if they’re, you know, too stressed out or like overwhelmed, you know, through tests or meetings, things like that, but everyone says that, “I don’t want to do this, I want to quit,” but, I mean I was never actually serious about it, but you just say that when you’re stressed out. But, you know, they just obviously think, that, you know without their college degrees you aren’t gonna, uh, excel too much in life. You can do decent, but the rate that you get raises, the rate that you move up in
anything is very slow, if you don’t have the college degree. It’s almost frowned upon these days if you don’t have one, so.

2: I agree, I was the same way, I mean, you know, sometimes it’d just be out of anger or frustration, you know, because I’ll have a professor that I hate, or because I’m worried about a grade, or just stressed out, and then I’ll be like, ugh, “I just wish I could quit!” you know, but that’s as far as it goes, because, you know, I know I want more out of life, you know, I know that I want to go to better myself academically and I want other experiences down the road, so.

4: (unintelligible) thought about it in the sense of “Oh I’m so busy, I’m stressed out it’d be nice to go quit school,” but never actually made kind of a serious thought in putting any consideration into it at all, especially since if I want to do what I want to do, I have, I’d have to have a degree and probably go to two more years of school, so, it’s going to be a lot of time, but it should be a good idea to stay in school.

5: Yeah, uh, (Pause) uh, I’ve thought about it a couple times, uh, but, I have some sort of strange disease where I keep adding classes (laughter from group) and, like, take up another minor or something like that, um, and usually, I, I’ve added like my fifth minor in my brain and I’m going, “Well, maybe I oughta just quit, get out of here as soon as possible,” but then you think about, “Okay, I’ve gone this far, and I’ve been here for so many years, if I leave now I’ve got a degree, how am I going to pay all these loans back?” Um, so, you pretty much in the end, you always come back to “Well, I’m here for a reason and I’ve gotta stick it out. Why quit now?”

3: I know, like, I definitely wouldn’t be, after, after everything I’ve gone through here at school if I were to up and quit and go back home now, like this far into it, I would regret it and I would not be happy. Um, and like she said, my, my career choice, like I have to have a degree, I have to have the college education to go through clinicals and all that stuff, so there’s really no choice, like, if I want to be happy this is, this is the route I should go.

5: Yeah, and ignorance is truly not bliss, as if any one of us who have gone home sometimes and seen some of the people living everyday life. You go “Yeah, I gotta have the college degree.”

2: I agree with that, yeah I mean, so many people from my high school have, uh, they started out at college and then they’ve already quit and everything, most of them within the first year that they were in college. And, you know, I think, you know, a lot of dropouts kind of you, know, work in the past, and everything, you know, I think, you know, I can do better than this, and everything, I don’t want to end up like that, you know. I don’t want to have a mediocre job, mediocre life, you know, I want to do better, so.
I think college is fun, too, like I wouldn't want to quit, like, I have the stressful days and stuff, but I really do, like, have fun here and I enjoy my friends and the activities, so, thinking about the alternatives like going home and living with my parents sounds completely horrible compared to that.

So how have you formed friendships?

Well, my freshman year, when I had, um, my horrible experience with my roommate, my neighbor actually had the same horrible experience with her roommate, so her roommate and I just kind of switched places and, um, she's still my friend today. We still go out and do stuff together, um, we lived together for about a year and I decided to get a single, but that didn't really change our friendship much at all. Um, I think it's easier to make friends in a place where everyone is going through the same kind of experiences that you are, and um, like in the classes that you have for your major or, um, your minor, like, if you're taking, keep taking classes with the same people, um it's a lot easier then to make friends, than it would be in high school whereas you've got your little cliques. I don't really see as many cliques here at Ball State as I did back in my high school so I think, I think that wall is gone.

(unintelligible) especially who knows all the freshman in the dorms so everyone gets really friendly just because everyone is trying to make friends and everyone is trying to be nice to people and, you know, everyone is holding the doors for everybody else and it's just, you know, just nice things, like, you see like that I didn't see it that often back in high school, but, um, you know, like she said, there's not many cliques here and so everybody was pretty willing to be friends with everybody. You make friends with a couple other people, then you meet some of their friends, and then you become friends with them, it just spreads like that, so, it's uh, goes pretty fast, just meeting a lot of people and then becoming friends with them.

I started out my freshman year, um, (unintelligible) became really good friends with a girl that was on the same floor as me, and my roommate also, and one of her friends. I had a few really close friends in the dorm, and then, um, my sophomore year I joined a sorority, so that really helped me meet a lot of people and get me involved in other things too, so I met people and, like, other organizations I joined up for that. So getting involved on campus.

I agree, basically the same thing, residence halls, student organizations that I'm a part of, um, once you get into like the less general classes for your major, um people, that's definitely a good opportunity to meet friends there (Laughs as talks...unintelligible)

Yeah, I, uh, the roommate I got stuck with that first year, he uh, he really helped me out, I was a big time introvert, I uh, I didn't like going out and meeting people and he dragged me along all the time, so I got to meet people. And yeah, when I
got into my department, that’s, that’s when I really met people, got to know the people that were doing the same thing I was doing and uh, seeing them on a daily basis uh, (unintelligible) get to know people better.

PI: Where do you find social support?

3: I would say, um, because of my role in the residence halls like I, um, I was actually on my residence hall exec board and the people that I was on the exec board with, like, we’re still friends today and, um, two of them are, are very good social support for me so I, I think that as far as finding support and issues it’s, it’s the people you see the most, it’s the people that are in your organizations, it’s the people that are in your classes everyday.

1: I would probably say mainly my roommate, because I’ve actually, I’ve lived with the same roommate since freshman year because we got along that well, and you know, with all the rest of my friends too, because we all, we all like the same jokes, same music, things like that, so we get a bunch of friends together like that it’s easy to get along and laugh, you know, cause laughing is always a good way of feeling better, you know, if you’re around your friends like that it’s always good times, so, it’s a good, good source of support there.

5: Yeah, uh, my main group of friends that’s where, uh, I get my support, and, yeah, it, it gets pretty ridiculous, you keep saying the same jokes over and over and over, keep watching the same movies, over and over and over, pretty old stuff, but, uh, you hold each other up through the whole process.

4: I think, um, for me, um, my best friend is my roommate that I brought with my freshman year, um, because we lived together last year, but this year we started living together so we are pretty much together 24/7, um, so she is probably my closest social support, and then also, um, a couple of my sorority sisters that I’m also, like, really, really close friends with as well, but, pretty much just the people that you see on a daily basis and you talk to them.

2: Um, I’m from Muncie, so, um, I mean I have some of my family around and, um, some friends and, um, still from high school, and everything, but also, um, like, I’m an officer for a few organizations on campus, so spending a lot of time with the other officers has definitely been and still tends to be supportive.

PI: Um, what has been the most helpful to you in achieving success in college?

4: I think self-motivation, because nobody can really push you to do something you don’t want to do or force you into it, I think everybody here (unintelligible)

3: I think self-motivation, and um, my, I have one really good friend who has been with me through thick and thin, um, since about halfway through freshman year, and it, we are joined at the hip and she’s just sort of my motivation to get through
the day before we usually hang out at night, so, um, I think that’s a lot of it and I
have a lot of support from my family and my fiancé back home, so I think that
helps a lot.

1: That’s what I was gonna say, uh, a lot of it comes from family, parents back home
will call you once a week, or they’ll drop in and tell you they love you and all
that, you know, you know it helps just because sometimes you get bored sitting
there studying, or your roommate’s not around and you’re sitting there by
yourself and it’s just, you start thinking a lot, and then, you know, and then it
comes back to self-motivation, like they said, and it just helps to know that you
got a bunch of your friends around you that are all doing the same thing too, so
you’re not alone out there, so you can’t feel sorry for yourself, you just you gotta
stick it out, and let the support of your friends and your family help out too.

2: I agree, (unintelligible) support you and everything, and self-motivation, like you
said, you know, I’m always wanting that one better grade, or you know, wanting
to be more involved in one more thing, or something like that, and, um, (Pause.)
(Laughs.) oh, and I would also say, like, reach your, just your, reach your goals,
like, for your career and everything, because they strive you to, uh, to, you know,
get through it and get through it well.

5: Yeah, um, it’s gotta be self-motivation, it has to be. Um, there’s nothing quite like
getting through something really tough, or a really tough project or a really tough
paper for something for the program you’re in and, uh, feeling that rush of “Ah I
did it, I finally did it!” and then, uh, the program turns around and slams a bigger
thing right on you, and then “Ohhh...” and you do that and you get through it all
and you finish and you can feel great about it and then they slam down something
bigger. It’s just; it’s the challenge of it, the motivation that you, you just pull out
of yourself somehow to get past all of those tough things.

2: It’s kind of like climbing a mountain, then, you know, you’re always thinking that
you’re right there at the top, you know, you just keep striving for that.

PI: What has been the greatest challenge to your collegiate success?

2: I would say just trying to strike a healthy balance between everything, you know,
academics and extracurricular things, and spending my time between family and
friends, and then giving yourself your own personal time to just calm down and
not have to stress out with one thing or the other.

3: I think my problem has been health, because I would give myself so much to my
studies and so much to my friends and the organizations I was in that I would
forget to take care of myself, and I think that’s a big challenge because we have to
remember that if you don’t take care of yourself you can’t take care of those big
ten-page papers, you can’t take care of, you know, your friend who’s very upset
about something, you can’t take care of the work that has to be done for those
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organizations. So, I think, that’s one of my biggest challenges, and I’m, I’ve been working on that more than I have in the past, and it’s, it’s hard because you have to take time away from your studies, (and if I take time away from that than I’m not going to pass this test and if I’m not studying…) it’s, it’s a big challenge, but you have to figure out how to do it somehow, otherwise you’re just not going to make it.

1: Yeah, I agree with balancing, uh, balancing the, the workload and extracurricular things you want to do at the same time, and partying, is, I’m not gonna lie, *laughter from group* you do that a lot, um, you know, the weekend’s pretty hardcore, but, at the same time, you gotta know, on the weekend, you know, if you gotta study for a couple hours, you know, on Saturday, you know, just do it early in the day and still go out at night. Do whatever you want, but uh, it’s, it’s just, uh, you gotta figure out when you can and can’t do that, because you can’t always go out and stuff like that. You can get away with it sometimes during the week, but not always, and it’s just, you’ve got to find a balance of when you can manage that and so, make sure you go to class and get everything done, because (unintelligible) the rest is just for class (unintelligible.)

(Laughter; #3: “Learn to say no”)

3: I had to learn to say no to going out and going to that party that you really want to go to, or even, you know, saying no to “I’m not going to study this anymore because my brain hurts.” You know, you just have to figure out what to say no to and when.

1: I’m one of those guys that’s somehow it always had a strange way of working out, so even if I do get by by studying all night, I know, somehow it’ll work out. That’s the biggest challenge, is just, you know, consistently doing well. You can always do well on a test, but the hardest part is to keep that up, throughout four years at least.

4: My biggest (unintelligible) is being able to say no. I have a problem with not being able to, like, if it’s something I want to do, like especially, like, being involved in stuff, I can’t say no, so I’ll just load up so much on my plate that I don’t have time for all of it, and then I just don’t sleep or whatever else I neglect and stuff, so I can get everything done that I said I’m gonna do, or whatever, so being able to strike a balance and know what I can do and what I need to say no to.

5: Yeah, um, the biggest challenge for me was, uh, I got involved in something, a big, academic thing, that I was, uh, really pumped about doing. I was preparing for a whole semester to do it, and when it finally came time, uh, the whole thing just crashed, collapsed, it was, it was a nightmare, it was a failure on, on all fronts. And, it took me a long time to pick back up and get going after that, uh, it was kind of tough to get motivated for a lot of the assignments and things I, I had to
do, um, because it involved from switching from that back to regular classes and it’s, it’s tough. But, um, you know, keeping your eye on the prize, that’s, that’s the most important thing, that’s what got me back.

3: I agree with what she said, you know, sometimes you can’t say no, and you just, you give up something else, you give up sleep, or you skip a meal, or something like that or, I, I always said nothing’s impossible, it just depends on how much sleep you can give up.

(Laughter from group; “I like that”)

PI: Um, what are some things you have learned over the years that would be helpful to incoming first-generation students?

3: Get to know your roommate before you move-in, (laughter from group) just because freshman year, your roommate is one of the most important people in your life, whether you hate them or you love them, they are the people who, you, you live with them, you have to deal with that every single day, and if, you know, if you have a conflict you have to know how to figure out, you know, what sort of compromise, and, so, I think I think freshman year your biggest goal is to learn about your roommate, and learn how to deal with, um, roommate issues.

2: It kind of sets the tone for the next four years it seems like.

3: Oh it does, it does.

4: I think getting involved in something early on helps too, because when you’re new and you don’t definitely know that many people, or anyone, by getting involved you at least get to meet people and be at college on a little bit more personal level just because for most people, this is a big step in that you become so lost in a place of eighteen thousand students in it. But, just by getting involved in something you’re at a more personal level with whoever you are in the organization with or your professors or anything, just to make you not get lost.

3: I agree, it gives you that, it gives you the roots to, to start growing in your, in your college career. Um, I went through a period during my freshman year where I just kinda stuck with my five friends and that was all I wanted, and then at the end of the year I had these people drag me into, um, uh, Residence Hall Exec Board, and I didn’t really like the idea, and then I thought well, you know, might as well give it a try, and it was a great experience, and, and making those friends and feeling like I had a purpose here on campus and not getting lost in the system.

1: I agree with get involved with anything you can. Uh, I’d say even at orientation you need to try to meet a couple people and get a couple phone numbers and meet up with them once you move-in in August. I did that with a few people and I’m still friends with them today. Uh, it just helps if you don’t know anybody that
you’ll have someone and you can call ‘em up when you move-in and say “Hey, you know, let’s go hang out get a soda,” and just hang out with. And, also you gotta be, I would encourage them to really get close with their roommate, whether they like it or not, just because you have to at least be on a level where you can talk to each other about anything, because, if they do something that you don’t like you gotta be able to come to them, because, living with them and holding all this stuff in isn’t gonna help. It will just blow up, and it’ll bleed into the rest of your, uh, college career, or, uh, it will stress you out with your classes, or, so. Just open up to everybody, try to meet as many people as you can, and get involved.

5: I’d say put out as, as many feelers as you can, take note of many people in many organizations, you know, in as many departments as you can, but don’t put all of your faith in one, uh, don’t, don’t, don’t completely sell yourself to one or two or three, uh, get to know the system first, get to know everyone, and, uh, once you’ve known people for a while, once you’ve known programs for a while then you can choose what’s right for you.

2: I would say just take an interest in something, like they said, you know, get involved in an organization, or just develop a new hobby of some sort, something that that gets you out there and gets you away from academics. Um, but, I would also say to you, you know, to anyone, to take academics seriously, because, I know that freshman year, you know, I was still getting adjusted and everything, and I didn’t study and, and work as hard as I should have, and while at the time I didn’t think anything of it, you know, now it’s like, you know, I, I see how important it is, you know. Once you see junior or senior, you see, that, you know, you need good grades, you need the, the extra involvement and everything. And um, I would say the other thing is, to always be open to maybe changing your major or something like that. You may do something, you, you may come here for one particular major, you may have had your heart set on that for the past ten years, but you may, you know, get involved with something else and realize that “I, I definitely love this, more than, you know, I ever thought I could,” and then, you know, just definitely be open, to um, the idea that, you know, your, your college education or your future career may not turn out to be, you know, the way you thought it was gonna be.

5: Yeah, give yourself breathing room. Uh, even if you think that, that what you’re doing is exactly what you want to do, and you don’t think that you’re gonna change your mind, always give yourself some extra time, extra credits, extra something, and say, “Okay, uh, I’m still sticking with this, but now I want to pick a little bit of this up too.”

2: And even if you find out at the end that, you know, what you first came here for is still what you want to do, you’ve at least, you know, gained some experience and, you know, um, some exposure in other areas.
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1: Go to class, especially the ones that take attendance. I remember my difference between an A and a B, uh, in just one class - two points, my freshman year, so, uh. That came from going out the night before too, so, that was a mistake there.

5: Get the grades; get the grades early. Cuz it’s, it’s so much easier to get the good grades your freshman year and keep your GPA high because if you wait until your junior, senior year to try and bring up your GPA it’s impossible, you can’t do it.

2: I would say the other thing is to try to get to know your professors, or at least, you know, let them know who you are and everything and try to, you know, put forth a little extra effort because, you know, that can mean a big difference. It could mean that, you know, that they, they try to help you more in your classes, or, you know, when it comes to the end of the semester and, you know, you’re teetering between a low grade and another, you know, that could be the extra push, too.

3: I agree with that a lot, and also get to know your advisors. Your advisors are the people you are going to want to turn to after a while, you know, “I want a reference letter for this” or “Can you help me figure my schedule out?” or, you know, so I would say get to know your advisors and make sure that you make enough contact with them that they can hear your name and say “Oh! I know who that is!” and you’re not just another number, because that happens to a lot of people. They don’t, they go to their, their advisor maybe once or twice a year, and their advisor really doesn’t know them and then they’re asking for a reference letter, and all that advisor can do is, say, “Well, you know, from their transcript, I, I know they go to class, I know their GPA, but I don’t know, you know, personality characteristics, anything like that.”

2: I agree, definitely putting your, putting your face, your name out there, you know, whether it’s advisors, professors, whoever it may be, is definitely one of the most important things, because when it comes time, you know, when you’re getting ready to graduate, or applying for something and you need reference letters, and you need transcripts, and you need, you know, just references in general, things like that, people are, you know, need to know who you are in order to provide that information and to put you in a positive light.

5: And don’t be intimidated by professors. Go, go talk to them. That way you can tell whether or not it’s, it’s all a façade and then the person is a really nice person, or whether they’re a complete jerk. Get to know for yourself. Don’t just take what you see in the classroom.

3: Even if it is just small talk and it’s not something related to class. I mean, last semester I had a biology professor that I still talk to this semester and a lot of times, um, people just kind of forget about the professors they had last, you know, last semester unless they happen to have them again, but um, she actually said that she would be a reference for me for, um, a scholarship. And, I would also suggest
that in class sit as close to the professor as possible. They see you more, they pay attention to you more, and they know more about you, so.

5: I mean it happens, they’re like “Yeah, you’re in class all the time, I know for a fact, I see your face everyday.”

(Laughter from group.)

3: Exactly.

PI: Is there anything else you would like to add?

(No responses.)

[End tape.]
Appendix H: Transcript: High-performing Group #2

PI: Okay, we’re just going to start out with your initial impressions of college, so the first question is what did you think college would be like?

(Pause.)

PI: It’s just anybody, it’s just a discussion, it’s not one at a time, so.

1: (Data omitted due to ineligibility.)

PI: Uh-hmm, so, what did you think college would be like?

2: I would say a lot of the same things. I, uh, had never been to a college, well, I had been to a college campus for, like, little things, but I had never really spent time on a college campus before I came, for I, what do they call it a “Card Day,” like, Cardinal Review and Decision, something like that, Application Review and Decision Day, so like I applied to Ball State and toured the campus and then they told me that I was accepted by the end of the day. And then I came for orientation and for those two things it seemed a lot bigger than it seems since I’ve been here.

PI: How would you describe your transition to college?

1: (Data omitted due to ineligibility.)

2: Yeah, it was kind of, like, the classes, and everything were surprisingly kind of like high school, the ones my freshman year, so the academic part of it wasn’t really a big change. And I, I had gone to, like, summer camps and stuff that were, like, six weeks at a time, so, being away from home wasn’t an issue for me either, so. And I was living with a friend from home that I’ve gone to school with since first grade or third grade in the dorms since my freshman year, so there’s a lot of familiarities in those.

PI: What were the best and worst factors regarding academics in your first year?

1: (Data omitted due to ineligibility.)

2: Yeah, I thought a lot of my freshman, my freshman year classes were really easy, but I did have a couple that were surprisingly difficult, cuz I had taken some easy ones and then I took one, it was called Honors Biotechnology, and I’m not – I’m a TCOM major – so, and I just had to have two sciences, and I still don’t know what was going on for a single day in that class, but, and that, that was a small class and the teacher was, teacher was nice and everything, but it was difficult. That was probably the biggest problem I’ve had.

PI: So how did you resolve issues regarding academics?
2: What kind of issues?

PI: Any issues that you had.

1: (Data omitted due to ineligibility.)

2: I had a lot of the same issues, like, because I didn’t have hardly any homework in high school, and it would be like, go from, go to school for like seven-thirty until two-thirty and then you’re done, but when I got here, I would have like, two hour gaps and I wouldn’t know really what to do with myself. So, yeah, it was really hard for me to get myself to study. Especially in the dorms, because no matter what time it is there is always something else going on that is a lot funner than studying.

PI: Um, have you ever felt like ending you college education early? And if so, what influenced your decision to stay?

1: (Data omitted due to ineligibility.)

2: I’ve kind of had my goals set since, since I’ve got here, I haven’t really changed, I haven’t changed my major or anything like that. I’ve never really thought about dropping out or ending early or anything. Probably because I see, I’ve seen a lot of people I know drop out and I’ve seen people I don’t know that come here and they don’t try and they’re just wasting money. I have the opportunity to come here and finish it, so, it’s just, that’s what I’m planning on doing.

PI: How have you formed friendships? Where do you find social support?

2: Most of my friends are from the dorms. I was here, I was, uh, in the dorms for my first two years. And now we’re living with two guys who have been on my floors for the last two years. I hang out with a lot of the guys on (unintelligible.)

1: (Data omitted due to ineligibility.)

PI: What has been the most helpful to you in achieving success in college?

1: (Data omitted due to ineligibility.)

2: What was the question again?

PI: What has been the most helpful to you in achieving success in college?

2: I figure it was just getting into a, like, good work habit. And, uh, I, I’m kind of forced to focus on my grades more just because I’ve got a scholarship I need to
get a certain GPA for, so that’s probably what’s keeping me trying to get good grades.

PI: Um, what has been the greatest challenge to your collegiate success?

1: (Data omitted due to ineligibility.)

2: I’d probably say it’s the people who, like, I’ve had two close friends that I graduated with from high school and now they’ve both kind of failed out of college, so. I think it’s hard to, like, see that and they always want to, like, do something else and then I’ve got to focus on school and they’re doing, they’re like, they have jobs now and it’s just completely different. There’s always, even people who are here are always trying to, like, there’s something else going on, and, just having more fun, that’s probably the biggest challenge for me, to say no to that and study.

PI: What are some things you have learned over the years that would be helpful to incoming first-generation students?

1: (Data omitted due to ineligibility.)

2: I think, it would also be important to, like, know what you’re gonna do. Because I know a lot of people who are gonna be, like, fifth and sixth year seniors just because they’ve switched their major, like, three or four times. And, there’s nothing wrong with that if they, like, have a change in heart in what they want to end up doing, but, I know for one of my friends that dropped out, he was a first-generation college student, his, his parents wanted him to go to school, but, I think since they didn’t they didn’t really understand it so much. So, they didn’t wanna, all they saw was all their money going to, more and more years, like, more and more years of school that wasn’t really going anywhere.

PI: The last question is, is there anything else you would like to add that has not yet been covered in this discussion?

(Pause.)

2: Well, I think another thing for the last question, like another thing that would be beneficial, would be like, being able to be away from home. Like, I don’t know if there is a way for them to possibly leave home before they come to college, like, for a couple months or something like that, just so they get a feel for it. Because if they’ve been living at their house the whole time it’s going to be a lot more of a shock than it would otherwise.

[End tape.]
Appendix I: Transcript: Average-Performing Interview # 1

PI: Okay, I'd like to open up this discussion starting with just your initial impressions of college, so the first question is, what did you think college would be like?

1: *(In reference to audio recorder.)* The intimidation, um. *(Pause.)* I didn't really know what to expect of college, uh, all through high school, um, I always had teachers, uh, telling me “Oh you guys better study and work real hard because college is going to be so much harder than high school and you’re going to have to do all this work and it’s going to be nothing like this!” Well, that's not a very descriptive thing to go off of for what to expect of college. Um, other people would say it was the best years of their lives. Again, I mean, that's not particularly descriptive. Um, I guess when I went in to college, I was expecting it to be, um, kind of like high school except, harder, um, which for the first couple years it really wasn’t that much different than going to high school, except I could, um, I got out early and I could go in late – and, well, except for the days I had the eight o'clock classes, but, um. It was pretty much go to class, listen to the professor, take notes, read your book, and then take a test. And for the first several years it was just that simple. It was as just as easy as going to high school; the hardest part of it, I guess, was, um, remembering to do my homework – I don’t know, am I going off topic right now, or?

PI: Oh, you’re fine, you’re fine. I’ll just go on. So how would you – we’ve hit on some of these, um, questions, um, how would you describe your transition to college?

1: Uh, the biggest, uh, thing to get used to was dorm life, I think, uh, having to share a room with somebody else. Uh, I’m used to having other people around, but never having to share a cubicle with them *(Laughs.)* Uh, and then like I said, remembering that I had to go to class and nobody was there to tell me that I needed to go to class, or that I should read my book before it got to two o’clock in the morning.

PI: Okay, um, what were the best and worst factors regarding academics in your first year?

1: Um, are you referring to what my experience was? Or?

PI: Uh-hmm, just anything.

1: Okay. Um, I think the worst thing was, um, as far as being different from high school, I um, couldn’t just breeze through the classes like I did on my high school courses. If I sat there and paid attention to class, that didn’t necessarily mean I was going to get an A. *(Laughs.* If I read the book but didn’t go to class the same thing. I mean, it was, I kind of had to do both for most cases.
PI: So how did you resolve issues regarding academics?

1: Um, well my first year I really didn’t. *(Laughs.)* Um, there was too much time just goofing off, running around seeing what else there was to do. Um, I think I finally resolved it when I realized that if I kept going the way I was, I wasn’t going to last much longer in college. So I started to work a little bit harder, more self-motivated, more responsible.

PI: Have you ever felt like ending your college education early? And if so, what influenced your decision to stay and continue?

1: Um, there has been a few times when I have strongly contemplated just leaving. *(Laughs.)* Um, some of the reasons would have been, um, having a rough time in a class, um, especially, uh, once I get in to my, some of my higher level, more focused classes. They became much more difficult and sometimes I couldn’t exactly tell why we were doing something and what all this extra work was going for. Um, what made me stay was a combination of things. One thing I, uh, not really been one for giving up. Um, another thing er, was, uh, others, other people’s expectations, for example, my parents’. Um, I wasn’t sure how they would react if I just kind of showed up on the doorstep, “Oh, I dropped out of college, um, sorry about the several thousand dollars I, cost you not to do anything.” Um, and then, another thing was a motto I saw posted up in one of the classrooms, uh: “The only reason I am still in this program is to see how many other people drop out.”

PI: Um, how have you formed friendships? Where do you find social support?

1: Um, I don’t really get too friendly with too many of the people in my lecture classes. Um, I guess it’s just because I don’t talk to people. I usually get there right as class is starting and then I take off and I don’t really form any relationships with the person standing beside me. Um, in some of my lab style classes I’ve formed relationships just because it’s necessary to be able get along with the person you’re working with and it helps to be able to talk to somebody who is going through the same things you are. Other than that, I’ve um, I’ve found that extracurricular activities were a big help for not only being able to take my mind off of whatever was going on in a class or, um, elsewhere in my life, but also being able to find a group of people who shared similar interests and, um, eventually I was able to talk to about subjects going beyond the group.

PI: Okay, what has been the most helpful to you in achieving success in college?

1: Most helpful, um. *(Pause.*) I guess sticking it out. Um, having the occasional really good professor that’s almost more as a mentor than a professor in some aspects. Um. *(Pause.*) Keeping, keeping my eye on the end goal of being, of graduating and this is going to hold me through the rest of my life; I guess is, what truly helps.
PI: Okay, what has been the greatest challenge to your collegiate success?

1: Going to class. *(Laughs.*) It’s so easy to, uh, sleep in, or say “Oh, I’ll skip this class,” and then pretty soon, you decide “Oh, I’ll skip this class, again, it’s no big deal.” Um, I guess so, trying not to be lazy, has been my biggest problem.

PI: Okay. What are some things you’ve learned over the years that would be helpful to incoming first-generation students?

1: Um. *(Pause.*) By no means avoid joining an organization, I think, uh, joining a club, or, um, some sort of on campus group, is um, very important, but you’ve gotta make sure that that doesn’t interfere with, um, going on and doing your studies and making sure you get to class. So, have a social life just don’t let the social life control you.

PI: Is there anything else that you would like to add that has not yet been covered?

1: I’m not one of your best subjects, I’m not a big talker, so. *(Laughs.*) I’m, uh, um.

PI: That’s it.

1: Uh, okay.

PI: Thank you.

[End tape.]
Appendix J: Transcript: Average-Performing Interview # 2

PI: Okay, my first question is designed just to sort of get at your initial impressions of college before coming in, so, question number one is what did you think college would be like?

I: I was hoping that it would be better than high school; I was hoping that I would meet a lot of new people. The high school I went to was really small and you knew everybody from kindergarten, so, any type of drama or conflict was carried through years and years and years, and, I was hoping that when I got to college it would be, all that would be behind me. And, just, meet new people. The people at my high school were, there wasn’t any diversity, they were all the same, no one was different, and so, I was hoping to change that coming to college as well.

PI: Um, how would you describe your transition to college?

I: I think it went pretty smoothly compared to other people. I know people that were really nervous and stressed out about coming and they were way uptight about it and I just took it in stride. It didn’t really make me nervous. I was excited – a little bit nervous – but I wasn’t paralyzed by it.

PI: Okay. What were the best and worst factors regarding academics in your first year?

I: Well, the best was the, in my chemistry class when the teacher knew who I was and I had never spoken or did anything to call attention to myself, and he just started talking to me one day and he knew my name, and, and, it was kind of spooky at the time, and then, it was really neat too. It was a large lecture hall and that really impressed me. The worst would be my second semester, I did the freshman, not-go-to-class, type of junk, which I never did in high school, so I got that out of my system. And, I’m glad I didn’t do it the full year, let’s put it that way.

PI: So how did you resolve issues regarding academics?

I: Well, after that semester, that was a real eye-opener, and, I just made myself more organized and I made myself go to class and do absolutely everything, which, I was still working on fixing my GPA from, from that, and I retook some classes, and that’s why I’m glad it was just a semester and not a year.

PI: Have you ever felt like ending your college education early? And if so, what influenced your decision to stay and continue?

I: I haven’t, I haven’t really ever thought about, about leaving. I’ve always known that I would go to college, because it was always, it just seemed expected. I didn’t know that you could not, not go. And so I always planned and going and
finishing, and. And sometimes I’ve been tired of classes and everything, but you just keep on going.

PI: How have you formed friendships?

1: Basically, basically it’s been through my classes. I work a lot so I don’t have very many, you know, extracurriculars. And I’m not somebody that I make friends easily when I first meet them, but I’ve gotten to know people in my classes and, and talk with them and be more comfortable.

PI: So where do you find social, social support?

1: Um. That one’s kind of a tough one. I, I have a friend from high school that I’m still close with, and I’m engaged, so my fiancé. And, and my family, but. Yeah, that’s, that’s probably about it.

PI: What has been the most helpful to you in achieving success in college?

1: I would have to say be organized and keep track of everything that’s due and making, making sure you have all the parts of it, you know, keeping an organizer, and, um, definitely practicing problems, reading your book.

PI: What has been the greatest challenge to your collegiate success?

1: I think it’s because of working and going to school at the same time, because I work at night, and I’ve been at my job for five years, and for the majority of that time I’ve been (unintelligible) doing, doing something, and um, which is in the evening, so there’s no real extracurriculars, there was no, uh, it cut into my study time and everything. But for my major, my job is required; I have to work, because I need it for the experience.

PI: What are some of the things you have learned over the years that would be helpful to incoming first-generation students?

1: Well, go to class, number one. And make sure you do all of your homework. Don’t be so scared that you don’t have any fun, but don’t make it party time either. I’ve had people in classes also that they went out and partied their freshman year and that’s all they did was drink, and. They have what’s called, I forgot what they’re called, “Thirsty Thursday” “Something Friday” and, I’ve never understood any of that, so. Just enjoy it and make sure you prioritize your responsibilities.

PI: Okay. Is there anything else you would like to add that hasn’t been covered?

(No response.) [End tape.]
Appendix K: Transcript: Average-Performing Interview #3

PI: Just starting we just wanted to look at your initial impressions of college, so question number one is what did you think college would be like?

1: Um, I basically thought that college would be basically, like a more intense form of high school (*bad spot in tape*) who actually thought who, um. I figured it would be different from, um, like, you know, we living in the dorms and live on campus and away from home. So in that aspect, I mean, it’s different from high school. But, I figured it’d basically just be more, more intense, but pretty much the same as high school.

PI: Okay. How would you describe your transition to college?

1: Um, actually, mine was pretty smooth. I’ve read a few books that, um, had characters doing basically the same thing, so I kind of knew what to expect, um, for the most part. So, it was pretty smooth.

PI: Okay. What were the best and worst factors regarding academics in your first year?

1: Hmm. The worst would have probably have been, I uh, as a freshman I came in and I took eighteen credit hours – I don’t suggest doing that – and I was an Honors student, so I chose to do one of my, uh, my Honors science class right away, it was pretty tough. Uh, it kind of scared me at first, but uh, other than that the core classes were so easy that it pretty much balanced everything out. Uh, something that was a really positive experience was (unintelligible) living the dorm. Um, being out on my own finally. It was just that sense of freedom was pretty cool, so that was pretty positive.

PI: How did you resolve issues regarding academics?

1: Um, let’s see, freshman year I went to the Learning Center a couple of times before I learned that that really wasn’t worth my time. Um, I got a tutor in calc, um, it was a grad student at the time who helped me quite a bit, not as much as I would have hoped, but enough to get me by. Um, that’s pretty much how I resolved – oh I went to study groups, study groups helped a lot. But that’s pretty much it.

PI: Okay. Have you ever felt like ending your college education early? And if so, what influenced your decision to stay and continue?

1: Um, yes. A couple of times actually. Um, I got so frustrated with being – I’m a science education major – I got so frustrated with the hoops that the Teachers College makes you jump through that not too long ago, actually, I thought about throwing in the towel and just like taking a year or so off and then maybe coming
back and finishing and. I have um, I live with my fiancé right now and he mainly supported me and helped make it through the frustrations of it and the frustrations of a really hard class I’m taking right now, that I’m going to have to retake, unfortunately. But, uh, the support from him helped a lot, pretty much is what kept me going.

PI: How have you formed friendships? Where do you find your social support?

1: Mainly the people I stay in touch with on a regular basis that you know just aren’t “Hi, how are you?” when you run into ’em on the street, uh, mainly I met them through the police department, and um, I’m in a, a club a society of physics students. I’ve met tons of friends there and they’re just great. And they also help, like they just, the sessions’ like not for homework and stuff; so, they’re kind of a support group for each other.

PI: What has been the most helpful to you in achieving success in college?

1: The support of friends and, um, my fiancé helped a lot. Uh, the support of the physics department I would have to say would probably be the most, though. The, uh, faculty there in the physics department is just amazing. Um, because of what I’ve dealt with in the Teachers College they seem to care a lot more and they also they’re smaller so they don’t have to try to reach everyone on campus – makes it easier on them. And the, uh, head of the department there is just amazing. So, I’ve had a good time.

PI: What has been the greatest challenge to your collegiate success?

1: Thermodynamics. (Laughs.) Um, some of the higher required classes they have, uh, for the physics, like for, science education, I mean, physics concentration. Some of the higher level physics courses that they have us take plus all of the education classes and all of the general science classes. There is just so many, that, ugh, it gets rather frustrating when you thought you’d come to college for four maybe five years and I’ll be here for six just to get with that one stupid degree. Which I love the degree, don’t get me wrong, but it’s, it’s a big challenge to get through all of those different classes.

PI: What are some things that you’ve learned over the years that would be helpful to incoming first-generation students?

1: Um, if they’re coming in knowing what department they’re going to – I came in undecided – um, get to know your department, um, your advisors, your, just the faculty and staff, they are great sources of help. And if there are any clubs, um, get involved in those. They are, those, you’ll find tons of support groups everywhere there. Cuz, yeah, as, as a first-generation student your parents don’t really know where you’re coming from. So, I mean I’ve complained to them and I still talk to them a lot, but they’re just like “Geez.” They don’t really know how
to, what to say, I don’t think, so definitely make friends on campus. And, and uh, hopefully they’re in your department, or if, if you’re undecided, just (unintelligible.)

PI: Is there anything else you’d like to add that has not been covered in this discussion?

I: Um, no.

[End tape.]