EXPERIENCES OF UNDERGRADUATE SCHOLARS IN THE UA COCA-COLA FIRST GENERATION SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

by

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A DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences of first-generation students participating in the Coca-Cola First Generation Scholarship (CCS) Program at The University of Alabama, a four-year public institution. The CCS Program was funded by a $1M gift from the Coca-Cola Foundation in 2006. The Program provided $5,000 annual renewable scholarships to 48 students (Scholars) who are Alabama residents and the first in their families to attend college.

A descriptive case study design was selected because it allowed for the most comprehensive investigation of a single site program and it solicited an in-depth understanding of the experiences of the students who benefited from participation in the CCS Program. The data analysis for this qualitative study included one-on-one interviews with 19 Scholars as well as four administrators affiliated with the Program.

This study used student persistence models and retention research as a conceptual framework to gather qualitative descriptive accounts of the impact of social integration, academic integration, and financial support among the first-generation students participating in the CCS Program at The University of Alabama. The following research questions examined the experiences among the recipients and guided this dissertation:

1. What role does academic integration play in the first-generation student experience?
2. What role does social integration play in the first-generation student experience?
3. What role does financial support play in the first-generation student experience?
4. What is the impact of the CCS program on first-generation student retention?
The implications of practice, in addition to the results of this study, support the argument for continued research and analysis that will further examine the unique needs of first-generation students. There were four main elements of the CCS Program that supported the retention of the Scholars. First and foremost was financial support, followed by mentoring and the shared experiences of Alabama Action and BCE 101.
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Deverl and Bonnie Lamon, who have provided unwavering support throughout my academic and professional career. Even when you were unable to understand or advise, you encouraged. Mom, I am confident and independent not only because you taught me, but because you showed me the strength a woman can possess. And “Pops,” there were days you may have wanted this degree for me more than I did. Thank you for always being my cheerleader and always being on my side.
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## CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ......................................................................................................................... ii

DEDICATION ......................................................................................................................... iv

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .......................................................................................................... v

LIST OF TABLES ................................................................................................................... xii

LIST OF FIGURES ................................................................................................................ xiii

1 INTRODUCTION ................................................................................................................. 1

   Statement of the Problem ...................................................................................................... 2

   Research Questions .............................................................................................................. 4

   Coca-Cola First Generation Scholarship .............................................................................. 5

   Freshman Seminar ............................................................................................................ 8

   Learning Communities ...................................................................................................... 9

   Mentoring ........................................................................................................................ 10

   Significance of the Study .................................................................................................. 11

   First-Generation Students Described ................................................................................. 14

   Summary and Organization of the Study ............................................................................. 15

2 REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE ............................................................................. 17

   Research on First-Generation Students ............................................................................ 18

   Categories of Research ..................................................................................................... 18

   Key Studies and Reports ................................................................................................... 19

   Student Departure, Retention, and Persistence Models ..................................................... 22
Participant Selection ..............................................................54
Data Collection ........................................................................56
Data Analysis ........................................................................59
Researcher Positionality .........................................................60
Validity and Trustworthiness ..................................................61
Conclusion ..............................................................................62
4 DATA ANALYSIS ..................................................................63
Introduction ............................................................................63
Themes ..................................................................................63
First-generation Status Examined ...........................................64
Meaning of First-generation Status ...........................................65
Challenges for First-generation Students .................................70
Role of Family for First-generation Students .........................74
Differences between First-generation and Non-first-generation Students ........................................................................79
Summary ..............................................................................83
Role of Academic Integration in the First-generation Student Experience ..................................................83
Interaction with Faculty .........................................................84
Faculty Advising .....................................................................89
Grades and GPA .....................................................................91
Academic Preparedness ........................................................92
Summary ..............................................................................95
Role of Social Integration in the First-generation Student Experience ..................................................95
Development of Friendships and Campus Involvement ..........95
LIST OF TABLES

1. A Selection of Student Retention Models ................................................................. 26
2. Coca-Cola First Generation Scholarship Recipient Research Participants .................. 55
3. Coca-Cola First Generation Scholarship Administrator Research Participants .............. 56
LIST OF FIGURES

1  Tinto’s (1975) student integration model .................................................................24
2  Influence of CCS Program on persistence factors .......................................................134
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Despite institutional retention efforts over the past 3 decades, national persistence to degree rates reported by the American College Testing (ACT, 2008) service indicate that approximately half of the students entering institutions of higher learning fail to obtain a degree. Specifically, public four-year doctoral granting institutions have a 5-year graduation rate of 48.8%, while the 5-year graduation rate for all four-year public institutions is only 43.8% (2008). The National Center for Education Statistics report that an estimated 16% of undergraduates in public four-year institutions leave during their first year and 36% of those never return to postsecondary education (Horn & Carroll, 1998). More students leave than those who stay to earn a degree (Tinto, 1993).

While retention efforts are crucial for ensuring the success of all students, they are particularly important for supporting low-income, first-generation students who demonstrate a greater risk for attrition than their non-first-generation peers (Horn & Nunez, 2000). Since 1995, first-generation students comprise 34% of the students in four-year institutions (Choy, 2001). Because first-generation students represent one of the main groups influencing the increasing demographic diversity of the undergraduate student population (Choy, 2001; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Hottinger & Rose, 2006; Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004), programs, resources, and services targeting their needs are essential to supporting overall student retention efforts.
During their first year of enrollment, as well as their degree attainment, first-generation students are confronted with challenges affecting their persistence (Choy, 2001; Horn & Nunez, 2000; Ishitani, 2003; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Warburton, Bugarin, & Nunez, 2001). Retention research underscores the importance of students integrating socially and academically to increase their potential for persistence and academic success (Astin, 1997; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1975, 1993). For low-income, first-generation students, lack of financial support is often an additional impediment to academic and social integration, making financial resources another significant factor impacting their persistence (Engle & Tinto, 2008).

Statement of the Problem

Approximately 30% of all beginning postsecondary students at four-year institutions are first-generation (Choy, 2001; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998). Before their second year, first-generation students are more than twice as likely as non-first-generation students to leave a four-year institution. Moreover, when first-generation students leave, they are less likely to return to a four-year institution. After 3 years, only 58% of first-generation students who start at a four-year institution persist, compared to 77% of their peers (Choy, 2001). After 6 years at a public four-year institution, the graduation rate for low-income, first-generation students is 34%, compared to the 66% graduation rate among their peers (Engle & Tinto, 2008). The gap in graduation rates between first-generation students and their peers suggests that first-generation students have unique needs that are not met by the institution. First-generation students are more successful at institutions where faculty, administrators, services, and programs are in place to intervene and target their unique needs (York-Anderson & Bowman, 1991). Consequently, it is
important for institutions to designate programs that specifically serve the needs of students in transition and assist them with navigating the institution (Engle & O’Brien, 2007).

Levitz, Noel, and Richter (1999) confirm that institutions need to be involved in guiding students from their entrance until their graduation. They begin by addressing the transitional needs of students when they arrive on campus and assert that “freshmen need a prevention plan. Intrusive, proactive strategies must be used to reach freshmen before the students have an opportunity to experience feelings of failure, disappointment, and confusion” (p. 39). Engle and O’Brien (2007) encourage high levels of student involvement as well as organized and intentional first-year programs. First-year programs demonstrate a positive impact on both student performance and persistence (Lotkowski, Robbins, & Noeth, 2004). A longitudinal study conducted by Schnell, Seashore Louis, and Doetkott (2003) found that students who participate in first-year seminar programs are more likely to persist and graduate than those who do not participate. The students who enter college with lower high school GPAs and ACT scores and participate in first-year programs have better graduation rates than those of their counterparts with higher GPAs and ACT scores who do not participate in first-year programs.

Federal support programs exist that are designed to facilitate the progression of first-generation students to matriculation. The Federal TRIO Programs, which include Upward Bound, Talent Search, and Student Support Services, are outreach programs which support low-income, first-generation students and students with disabilities. While Upward Bound and Talent Search are designed to assist students with preparation and admission to college, Student Support Services (SSS) works to sustain students’ retention and degree attainment (USDE, 2008). SSS provides tutoring, mentoring, and counseling (academic, financial, personal, and
career). The SSS Program began in 1970 serving approximately 30,000 students. By the year 2000, the program served 178,000 students nationally (USDE, 2004).

To better understand their unique needs, the current study investigates the experiences of individuals participating in a scholarship program for first-generation students at a four-year public institution. In 2006, the Coca-Cola First Generation Scholarship (CCS) Program at The University of Alabama was funded by a one million dollar gift from the Coca-Cola Foundation. The Program provided a $5,000 annual renewable scholarship to 48 students (Scholars) who are Alabama residents and the first in their families to attend college. Specifically, this study examines the program’s impact on social and academic integration, as well as significance of financial support for first-generation students. As a result of this study, both researchers and practitioners will better understand the unique needs of first-generation students attending a four-year public institution.

Research Questions

This study seeks to better understand the experiences of first-generation students (Scholars) who participate in the Coca-Cola First Generation Scholarship (CCS) Program at The University of Alabama. The following research questions examine the experiences among the Coca-Cola Scholars and guide this dissertation:

1. What role does academic integration play in the first-generation student experience?
2. What role does social integration play in the first-generation student experience?
3. What role does financial support play in the first-generation student experience?
4. What is the impact of the CCS Program on first-generation student retention?
Coca-Cola First Generation Scholarship

In 2003, during the first year of his presidency, Dr. Robert E. Witt announced his vision for the future of The University of Alabama. The foundation of his vision was a commitment to make The University of Alabama “a university of choice for the best and brightest” students (“Witt Presents Vision,” 2003). Before revealing his aggressive plan for increasing The University of Alabama’s enrollment from approximately 20,000 students to 28,000 by the year 2013 (“UA President,” 2004), President Witt articulated that the University did not provide the financial assistance essential for recruiting and supporting the best and brightest students (“Witt Presents Vision,” 2003).

On April 8, 2006, the University formally announced a $500 million goal for the “Our Students. Our Future.” capital campaign, which included $250 million designated for the primary purpose of improving scholarship opportunities for students (“UA Announces,” 2006). On the same day, the University announced acceptance of a $1 million donation to the capital campaign for student scholarships from The Coca-Cola Foundation to establish the Coca-Cola First Generation Scholarship Program (“UA Announces,” 2006). In addition to being the largest gift designated for undergraduate student scholarships in the University’s history (“Twelve UA Students,” 2006), the establishment of the Coca-Cola First Generation Scholarship Program made the University the first public institution to partner with the Program (“Coca-Cola,” 2006; “Twelve UA Students,” 2006).

Since its creation in 1993, the Coca-Cola First Generation Scholarship Program has supported over 1,000 students and awarded over $14 million to about 400 campuses in the United States (“Educational Initiatives,” 2009). Gary Fayard, chief financial officer for The Coca-Cola Company and a UA alumnus, said,
The Coca-Cola Foundation is pleased to extend The Coca-Cola First Generation Scholarship program to deserving students from Alabama who without this scholarship might otherwise not have the opportunity to attend college. The scholarships together with freshman orientation and mentoring will assist students in making the successful transition to college. (“First Generation Coca-Cola,” 2006, para. 5).

The University’s Coca-Cola Scholarship was designated for a total of 48 first-generation students over the course of 7 years. In the fall of 2006, 12 inaugural Scholars each received a $5,000 scholarship. If they maintained a 2.8 grade point average during their freshman year and a 3.0 GPA thereafter, they received $5,000 each year for the following 3 years. Likewise, 12 additional students were awarded scholarships in 2007, 2008, and 2009 (“Coca-Cola,” 2006; “Twelve UA Students,” 2006). To be eligible for the Coca-Cola First Generation Scholarship, applicants could have no immediate family (parents or siblings) who attended classes or graduated from college (Appendix A). Additional requirements stated that applicants “must be Alabama residents, have a minimum 3.0 cumulative high school grade point average, and be admitted to The University of Alabama as a freshman student.” Preference was shown to those with “demonstrated financial need” (Appendix A). Applicants were also required to submit an essay describing what it meant to be the first in their family to attend college, as well as how the scholarship would help them achieve their goals. A resume was requested and students had the option to provide an additional essay to the scholarship selection committee (Appendix A). Following the application process, a panel of University administrators and Scholars (after the initial year) interviewed the applicants and determined which students to accept for participation in the CCS Program.

Included within The Coca-Cola Foundation donation was $40,000 designated for a freshman orientation class for the Scholars (“Twelve UA Students,” 2006). The University provided academic support for the Scholars through a designated section of BCE 101, a
freshman-level, 2-credit hour pass/fail Counselor Education seminar. The Scholars attended the BCE 101 freshman seminar twice a week during their fall semester. The University of Alabama 2008-2010 online undergraduate catalog describes the BCE 101 freshman seminar:

This course for first-year UA students provides an introduction to the nature of higher education and to the function, resources, and activities of The University of Alabama. This course is designed to help students make the transition to a large comprehensive research university, develop a better understanding of the learning process, and acquire basic academic survival skills. The ultimate goal of the course is to equip each student with the confidence and basic skills necessary for degree attainment. (University of Alabama Undergraduate Catalog, BCE 101 Freshman Seminar section, para.1)

Although some academic colleges within the University elect to teach their own college-specific version of a freshman seminar course, any first-year UA student is eligible for BCE 101. At the request of the assistant vice president for Undergraduate Programs and Services, Dr. Foster was asked to teach an exclusive BCE 101 section for the Scholars. Dr. Foster, who developed the BCE 101 curriculum, explained that enrolling the Scholars in a class together served several purposes: to help support the successful transition of the students, thereby bringing good press to the University, and to provide a venue for distributing useful information to the students collectively (personal communication, November 17, 2006). Essential to the successful transition of students, the BCE 101 freshman seminar for the CCS Program integrated academic and non-academic components to help students develop social networks as well as academic competence.

The following sections provide greater detail about elements of the first-year experience which includes first-year seminars, such as BCE 101. First-year experience programs have grown in the last twenty years with approximately 95% of four-year institutions providing some type of first-year program (Jamelske, 2009). White, Goetz, Hunter, and Barefoot (1995) were among the first who described the first-year experience. They focused both on measuring the
skills and degrees of success of the students and also the elements of the program. White et al, (1995) argued that first-year students should have opportunities to interact socially with their peers and professors as well as learn about the academic resources available to them. They also recognized that first-year experience programs should be adapted to the needs of the institution.

According to Jamelske (2009), while the content of the programs may vary, among them are common elements. Many programs serve as a continued orientation in the form of a first-year seminar, exposing students to university resources and services. Some institutions provide learning communities which guide a small student cohort through a series of shared academic courses during their first semester or year.

The more basic FYE courses generally have a regular class meeting time with a specific instructor or team of instructors and are credit bearing and graded. They usually include activities and resources designed to introduce new students to university life and assist with time management and study skills. (Jamelski, 2009, p. 375)

Thayer (2000) emphasizes that first year seminars and learning communities should address the concerns exposed through retention theory as well as the unique needs of low-income, first-generation students. Specific programs and institutional examples are provided with special attention to first-generation support.

*Freshman Seminar*

Because attrition rates are highest between the first and second years of college, many institutions focus on retention strategies for the first-year student. Freshmen seminars target the challenges that students face during their first year by integrating academic and social components of the college experience. With the introduction of University 101 in the early 1970s, the University of South Carolina provided purposeful support to its freshman class in an effort to encourage academic success as well as ease the transition to college life. Twelve years
of research on the University 101 program reveals that the students who participate in the program who are high risk and least likely to persist, have higher retention rates than the students who are not high risk and do not participate in University 101 (Gardner, 1986). In 2004, over 90% of universities offered some type of first-year seminar (Barefoot, 2004) that included curriculum addressing study skills, time management, and an introduction to campus resources and services.

Because first-generation students are most likely to struggle with time management, understanding and managing a budget or college finances, and the general administration of a university (Thayer, 2000), there is a fundamental need for courses such as freshman seminars. Introducing techniques for improving time management and academic study skills, providing an introduction to campus resources and services, and offering guidance for navigating the institutional bureaucracy helps support students’ academic performance and retention (Barefoot & Gardner, 1993).

**Learning Communities**

Learning communities unite both academic and social elements to encourage improved academic performance and retention (Gabelnick, Macgregor, Matthews, & Smith, 1990). They are composed of small groups of students who engage within a community designed to encourage cohesiveness, shared goals, as well as, integrated in-class and out-of-class experiences (Astin, 1985). Learning communities also provide an opportunity for students to have designated formal social interaction with other students, faculty, and staff (Tinto & Goodsell, 1994).
About 60% of universities offer learning communities that serve small cohorts through several courses (Barefoot, 2004). Courses that incorporate mentoring and support groups increase levels of student involvement, motivation, and academic self-confidence and, in turn, increased levels of institutional commitment and engagement (Mangold, Bean, Adams, Schwab, & Lynch, 2003). Mangold et al. (2003) assessed a freshman block registration and mentoring program at a large state university and determined that persistence and graduation rates were higher for students who participated because they were integrated into a learning community.

Making a deliberate effort to serve first-generation students, the University of Cincinnati created a learning community using an off-campus residence. More than 40% of the 5,000 freshmen at the University of Cincinnati, a public research institution, were first-generation (Jennings, 2009). Fifteen students were invited to participate in the “Gen-1” theme house. Eight ultimately accepted the invitation and signed contracts agreeing to abide by strict guidelines for their social behavior as well as academic performance (Jennings, 2009). The students received in-house tutoring as well as counseling and mentoring from faculty. The “Gen-1” students also participated in a 1-year, three credit-hour course focused on addressing topics such as study skills and time management (Gen-1, 2009). Housing the students together encouraged the development of community and promoted shared institutional goals and persistence.

**Mentoring**

Support from a mentor has a positive impact on a student’s academic performance and retention. According to Redmond (1990),

Effective mentoring involves not only the transfer of academic skills, attitudes, and behaviors but a level of interaction, trust, and communication which results in a psychosocial comfort that empowers a student with the knowledge and confidence to grow academically and socially. (p. 191)
The need for mentors supporting and assisting first-generation students as they attempt to successfully navigate their way through college is strongly emphasized (Hahs-Vaughn, 2004; Ishitani, 2003; Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996) and a few programs address this need. Founded in 2000, Texas State claimed that its First Generation Student Organization (FGSO) was the first of its kind in the nation. The large four-year public institution serves more than 29,000 students and works to empower and retain its first-generation students through “mentoring, fellowship, guidance, and academic and social support” (FGSO, 2009, para. 3). The Academic Advancement Program (AAP) at UCLA has provided services and programs to underserved students for approximately 35 years, including first-generation students, students from low-income families, and minority students. Although AAP offers a variety of academic, collaborative learning workshops, summer bridge programs and scholarships, a key element is mentoring (AAP, 2009).

Significance of the Study

Graduation rates at four-year institutions have varied only slightly over the past 25 years. According to the 2008 ACT annual survey, from 1983-2008, the 5-year graduation rate among four-year institutions ranged from a low of 50.9% to a high of 54.6%. Most recently, the 2008 graduation rate was 52.5% for all four-year institutions (public and private), with 57.5% graduation rates for private four-year institutions and only 43.8% for public four-year institutions (ACT, 2008). More than half of the students beginning their academic careers at public four-year institutions fail to earn their degrees from that same institution.

A Pell Institute report, which relied on three datasets from the U.S. Department of Education, illustrates that students who are both low-income (from a family with an income
below $25,000) and first-generation are at the greatest risk for failing to persist and matriculate (Engle & Tinto, 2008). In any type of institution, the low-income first-generation students are about four times more likely than their peers to leave before their second year. At a public four-year institution, in particular, 12% of first-generation students from low-income families do not re-enroll for their second year compared to 4% of their peers. After 6 years, the graduation rate for the low-income, first-generation students at a public four-year institution is 34% compared to the 66% graduation rate of their peers (Engle & Tinto, 2008).

First-generation students attending private institutions are more likely to persist than those attending public institutions. With a graduation rate of 61%, private institutions produce more first-generation graduates than public institutions, which have a 44% graduation rate (National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities, 2004). Many private institutions have responded to the unique needs of their first-generation student population by implementing programs that encourage social and academic integration and, in some instances, also provide financial assistance.

For example, in 2008, 20 private institutions with a proven commitment to the education of first-generation students received the “Wal-Mart College Success Award” with a $2.266 million grant awarded to the Council of Independent Colleges from the Wal-Mart Foundation. The “Wal-Mart College Success Award” provided $100,000 grants to small and mid-sized independent liberal arts colleges and universities to enhance and build upon the work that they were already doing to support first-generation students (CIC & Wal-Mart, 2008). Among the 20 institutions, a variety of approaches served the needs of first-generation students. Some of the institutions were recognized for addressing the needs of a specific group among their first-generation student population while others received the award to provide summer programs.
preparing their students for the transition to college life and the academic rigor of college courses. A number of the institutions were recognized for offering mentoring, tutoring, and career counseling as well as financial support (CIC & Wal-Mart, 2008). For example, complementing the efforts of the federal TRIO program, Wal-Mart College Success Award Winner Adrian College in Michigan developed a program providing faculty and staff mentors who were also first-generation. The students participated in a series of workshops, and with each successful completion of a semester in the program, they received a book voucher (CIC & Wal-Mart, 2008). Bellarmine University in Louisville, Kentucky, designed their first-generation student support program to resemble their successful athletic advising model. They designated a staff member to work individually with the first-generation students, as well as, 15 peer mentors, to provide academic support and introduce students to co-curricular programs (CIC & Wal-Mart, 2008). The College of Idaho used their award to expand programs emphasizing family involvement for its population of students who were both first-generation and Hispanic. The College provided special orientation and outreach programs for participating students and parents. Field trips and internships, mentoring, tutoring, and financial assistance were also made available for these students (CIC & Wal-Mart, 2008). Taking a different approach by reaching out to local high school students, Manchester College in North Manchester, Indiana, educated students on college preparation, including academic expectations and financial assistance. High school students who successfully completed the program received a scholarship for their first semester of college (CIC & Wal-Mart, 2008).

Although many institutions provide intervention programs to assist in the retention of their students, most fall short when addressing the unique needs of first-generation students. Lower graduation rates for first-generation students at public institutions when compared to
private institutions, as well as the disproportionate number of first-generation students earning
degrees from four-year institutions when compared to their peers, underscores the need for
understanding the unique experiences of first-generation students at a public four-year
institution. Thayer (2000) even suggests that identifying and implementing strategies that serve
the particular characteristics of first-generation students would likely benefit general population
students as well. The unique characteristics of first-generation students are defined and
described in the following section.

First-Generation Students Described

A small inconsistency exists among the definitions used for classifying first-generation
students. Offering a broader definition of first-generation students than is generally cited in
higher education literature in the United States, Thomas and Quinn (2007) identify first-
generation students in their international study as “those for whom the older responsible
generation (not necessarily biological parents) have not had an opportunity for university study
at any time in their lives” (p. 7). The recognition of the “responsible generation” makes their
classification unique.

As part of the Higher Education Act of 1965, the United States Department of
Education’s TRIO programs define first-generation students as those whose parents did not earn
a bachelor’s degree, but allows for one or both of the parents to have completed some
postsecondary work (Higher Education Act, 1965). In most cases, however, students are
recognized as first-generation when neither parent has more than a high school education
(Billson & Terry 1982; Choy, 2001; Horn & Nunez, 2000; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998;
Pascarella et al., 2004; Saenz, Hurtado, Barrera, Wolf, & Yeung, 2007; Terenzini et al., 1996;
Warburton et al., 2001). Although none of the key literature on the definition of first-generation considers siblings in the classification, The University of Alabama Coca-Cola Scholarship limits application to students for whom immediate family members, including siblings, have not attended college (Appendix A).

Even with the small inconsistencies in definition, first-generation students are a demographic who has received increasing attention in academic research (Bui, 2002; Chen 2005; Choy, 2001; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Hahs-Vaughn, 2004; Horn & Nunez, 2000; Hottinger & Rose, 2006; Ishitani, 2006; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Pascarella et al., 2004; Saenz et al., 2007; Terenzini et al., 1996; Warburton et al., 2001). Demographically, academic research found that first-generation students are more likely to be Black or Hispanic and have lower socioeconomic status than their peers (Bui, 2002; Engle & O’Brien, 2007). Poor academic preparation is evidenced by lower test scores. Taking remedial coursework, delaying entry to college, attending college part-time, as well as, gravitating toward two-year institutions are also common behaviors among first-generation students (Chen, 2005; Choy, 2001; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Saenz et al., 2007; Terenzini et al., 1996). According to Saenz et al. (2007), “Parental education is a key predictive measure of both college enrollment and degree completion for students from all racial/ethnic or socioeconomic backgrounds” (p. 3). In essence, first-generation students have characteristics that place them at greater risk for attrition than their peers with college educated parents (Choy, 2001).

Summary and Organization of the Study

The gap in graduation rates between first-generation students and their peers suggests that first-generation students have unique needs that are unmet. Although many institutions provide
intervention programs to assist in the retention of their students, most fall short when addressing the unique needs of first-generation students. First-generation students, especially, are most successful at institutions where faculty, administrators, services, and programs are in place to intervene and target their specific needs (York-Anderson & Bowman, 1991). Thayer (2000) suggests that identifying and implementing strategies that serve the particular characteristics of first-generation students would likely serve those of the general population as well.

This study is organized into five distinct chapters. Chapter 1 provided the context of the problem, research questions, and support for the significance of the dissertation research. The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand the experiences of students participating in the Coca-Cola First Generation Scholarship Program at The University of Alabama, a four-year public institution.

Chapter 2 is a review of the literature on first-generation students and student departure, persistence, and retention. Various student persistence models are examined along with the roles and significance of academic and social integration, and the impact of financial assistance in supporting retention. Chapter 3 presents the methodology and introduces an overview of the research design for the study. Chapters 4 and 5 present the research findings and discussion, recommendations, and conclusion, respectively.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter begins with a review of research on first-generation students followed by a review of literature related to the topic of student departure, retention, and persistence. Psychological, social, economic, and interactional perspectives provide possible explanations for student departure. Although Tinto’s (1975) interactionalist theory greatly impacted the theoretical underpinnings for explaining and understanding student departure, additional theories and perspectives offer support, identify failings, propose revisions, or, in some cases, suggest theory integration. The roles of academic and social integration, as well as the influence of finances on retention, are explored with particular attention given to their impact on first-generation students.

The literature review offers a conceptual framework for the current study, which sought to understand the experiences of first-generation students (Scholars) participating in the Coca-Cola First Generation Scholarship (CCS) Program at The University of Alabama. The following research questions examined the experiences among the Coca-Cola Scholars and guided this dissertation:

1. What role does academic integration play in the first-generation student experience?
2. What role does social integration play in the first-generation student experience?
3. What role does financial support play in the first-generation student experience?
4. What is the impact of the CCS program on first-generation student retention?
Research on First-Generation Students

Categories of Research

Overall, the areas of research regarding first-generation students can generally be classified into one of three main categories. The first category is associated with college readiness where first-generation students are compared to non-first-generation students based on demographic characteristics, level of preparedness entering college, and college expectations. First-generation students tend to be older as a result of delayed enrollment in college. They are also more likely to be female, minority, and less academically prepared (Engle & Tinto, 2008). Even when first-generation students are academically prepared, they are still less likely than their peers to enroll in and earn their degree from a four-year institution (Horn & Nunez, 2000; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998). Because they are less likely to receive financial support from their families, first-generation students often elect to attend a college close to home and live off-campus, sometimes with family. Many work full-time and attend classes only part-time, thereby limiting their social and academic integration into college (Engle & Tinto, 2008). First-generation status is a risk factor even after controlling for other background and enrollment factors (Chen, 2005; Choy, 2001; Horn & Nunez, 2000; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998, Warburton et al., 2001).

The transition from high school to college represents a second research category. In addition to all of the transition issues faced by incoming freshmen, first-generation students have the added challenges of cultural and social adjustments from high school to college. Because first-generation students lack the cultural and social capital of their non-first-generation peers, they are less connected to and have less access to resources and information (Pascarella et al., 2004). College-educated parents often have greater social and cultural capital. They have access
to more information and resources through their social networks (Saenz et al., 2007). Lin (2000) observes that “inequality of social capital occurs when a certain group clusters at relatively disadvantaged socioeconomic positions, and the general tendency is for individuals to associate with those of similar group or socioeconomic characteristics” (p. 786). In other words, those who are among the most disadvantaged do not interact with nor are they exposed to individuals with the resources, networks, or information enjoyed by their more privileged peers.

The final category of research is related to persistence, degree attainment, and career earnings for first-generation students. Based on the collection of research in this area, when compared to students whose parents graduated from college,

first-generation students are more likely to leave a four-year institution at the end of the first year, less likely to remain enrolled in a four-year institution or be on a persistence track to a bachelor’s degree after three years, and are less likely to stay enrolled or attain a bachelor’s degree after five years. (Pascarella et al., 2004, p. 250)

The disparity of degree obtainment between first-generation students and their peers demonstrates an obvious need for retention efforts targeting first-generation students. Only 24% of first-generation students, compared to 68% of students whose parents have a bachelor’s degree, earn a bachelor’s degree from any college or university (Choy & Bobbitt, 2000).

*Key Studies and Reports*

Three nationally representative longitudinal studies conducted by the U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) provide the foundation for many of the reports and data cited regarding first-generation students. The first NCES study, the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS), investigated an eighth grade cohort in 1988 with follow-up every 2 years for 6 years and then again in 2000 (as cited in Chen, 2005; Choy, 2001; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Warburton et al., 2001). The second study, the Beginning
Postsecondary Students (BPS), monitored students’ undergraduate experiences, persistence, transfers among institutions, degree completion, and employment. Students were surveyed during their first year (enrolled for the first time in either 1989-1990 or 1995-1996), with follow up surveys for each group 3 years later (as cited in Chen, 2005; Choy, 2001; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Warburton et al., 2001). The third study, the Baccalaureate and Beyond (B&B), provided a 1994 and 1997 follow-up regarding the undergraduate education and employment experiences of students who earned their bachelor’s degrees in 1992-1993 (as cited in Chen, 2005; Choy, 2001; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Warburton et al., 2001). All of these studies reveal that in addition to postsecondary access, first-generation students face disadvantages regarding persistence and degree attainment.

Data from (NCES) studies inform the Nunez and Cuccaro-Alamin (1998) report, which focuses on first-generation students’ postsecondary experiences compared to their non-first-generation peers. The report includes an overview of the demographic and enrollment characteristics, persistence and degree attainment progress as well as the impact of the labor market and other postsecondary outcomes for both first-generation and non-first-generation students. The non-first-generation students are composed of two groups: students with parents who may have had some college but did not earn a degree and students whose parents attained at least a bachelor’s degree. The first-generation students are identified as students whose parents never enrolled in postsecondary education. In 1989-1990, about 43% of students were identified as first-generation. Additionally, these students are more likely to be minority and female and most likely associated with lower family incomes. First-generation students receive financial aid in the form of grants and loans at a greater percentage than their peers and are more likely to balance working a full-time job while attending school. Furthermore, first-generation students
are more likely to attend a less-than-four-year institution than their peers (Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998).

The Nunez and Cuccaro-Alamin (1998) report also compares how first-generation and non-first-generation students adapted to their institution and the frequency with which they participated in certain academic or social activities and notes that first-generation students exhibit lower levels of academic and social integration. Even when controlling for each of the differences between first-generation and non-first-generation students, a major finding is lower rates of persistence and degree attainment for the first-generation students. In 1994, 5 years after beginning their postsecondary education, 71% of non-first-generation students had attained or were still enrolled compared to 55% of first-generation students. At four-year institutions, approximately one-third (34%) of first-generation students had not earned a degree and were no longer enrolled compared with 23% of their counterparts (Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998).

Choy (2001) summarizes the experiences of first-generation students based on data produced from the (NCES) studies. Choy reports that postsecondary enrollment rates are lower for first-generation students because they are at a disadvantage as a result of several factors, including lower expectations, lack of preparedness, lack of support from parents and schools in college planning, and lower family income. For first-generation students who overcome these challenges, they are still less likely to stay enrolled and matriculate than their non-first-generation counterparts.

Warburton et al. (2001) determine that because first-generation students are less likely than their peers to be academically prepared for college, they are also less likely to attend a four-year institution. However, rigorous high school coursework increases the chances of persistence for both first-generation and non-first-generation students in four-year institutions. The study
suggests that providing opportunities for first-generation students to become more academically prepared in high school greatly increases their likelihood of succeeding in college.

Chen (2005) explores the major fields of study selected and courses taken by first-generation students in college and how they are different than their peers. A subset of data from the Postsecondary Education Transcript Study (PETS) of the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS) of 1988 was used to determine the majors and course schedules for both groups of students. According to the NELS study, 28% of 12th graders were first-generation in 1992. Within 8 years of high school, only 22% of them had enrolled in postsecondary education. Of those who enrolled, 24% had earned a bachelor’s degree by 2000 while 43% left without earning a degree. During this same timeframe, 68% of students whose parents had at least a bachelor’s degree had graduated and only 20% left before earning a degree. The report indicates that first-generation students are less likely than their counterparts to earn their bachelor’s degree. Additionally, first-generation students start college enrolled in more remedial courses and are more likely to begin without having identified a major or selected a major in a vocational field. Often earning fewer credits and lower grades, they are also more likely to withdraw from or to repeat a course. Any of these factors may prolong the time it takes to earn a degree, which is often associated with leaving before degree completion (Chen, 2005).

Student Departure, Retention, and Persistence Models

Although Braxton (2000) notes that research on the topic of student departure dates back more than 70 years, it is Tinto’s (1975) interactionalist theory that “enjoys near paradigmatic stature in the study of college student departure” (p. 2). Tinto’s (1975) theory emerged from the foundation provided by the work of Durkheim (1951) and Spady (1970, 1971). Inspired by
Durkheim’s (1951) theory of suicide, which argued that the lack of intellectual and social integration into society increased the likelihood of suicide, Spady’s (1970, 1971) sociological model of student dropout claims that a lack of social integration and connection with the college environment often resulted in a college student’s decision to drop out. Drawing upon Durkheim’s (1951) suicide model and building upon Spady’s work, Tinto’s (1975) model further explores the student dropout process and became widely referenced and recognized in student retention literature. Tinto’s student integration model (Figure 1) describes how the background characteristics and individual attributes of students as they enter college influences their institutional commitment as well as their aspirations to graduate. Students’ level of commitment greatly influences their degree of academic and social integration. Greater levels of integration into the social and academic environment increases the positive impact on subsequent institutional and goal commitment, thereby resulting in lower dropout or higher retention rates.

Despite Tinto’s (1975) widely recognized model of student integration, it has been met with criticism. Tinto (1982), criticizing his own work, explains that the model failed to fully consider the role of finances in student departure as well as the experiences of students of different race, gender, and socioeconomic status. The development of the longitudinal student integration model in Tinto’s (1993) later analysis expands his original model to recognize that students expressed diverse needs and benefited from targeted retention efforts. Likewise, he reasons that institutions possessed distinct characteristics and required unique strategies for retention programs. Tinto (1993) also asserts that academic and social integration are essential to retention and students must separate from their homes and communities to truly assimilate into their college environment.
Attinasi (1989) challenges the theoretical framework of Tinto’s model because quantitative research disregarded the context influencing a student’s decision to persist. Attinasi insists that qualitative analysis is essential for the development of a new theory. Furthermore, Attinasi asserts that theories of student departure should be constructed based on investigations from within higher education, not developed from other cultural groups or populations, which were included in Tinto’s model. Tierney (1992) also rejects Tinto’s (1993) notion of ritual, which suggested that all individuals must go through a “rite of passage.” Because ritual is something unique to a culture, Tierney argues against the concept of “rite of passage” because it supports the dominant culture over all others therefore favoring those of privilege. Tierney opposes Tinto’s idea of conformity and the responsibility placed on the individual to integrate.
Each of the aforementioned criticisms of Tinto’s theory advocates for qualitative research on student departure. Tinto (1982) suggests that qualitative research would provide information to help revise his theory while Attinasi (1989) asserts that qualitative research would offer a more descriptive adaptation of the theory. Tierney (1992) argues that qualitative research should be used to develop cultural analysis and a student departure model to replace Tinto’s model.

Also offering criticism of Tinto’s model, Braxton, Sullivan, and Johnson (1997) emphasize that little attention has been given to the empirical support for the 15 testable propositions of Tinto’s theory. Specifically, they assert that Tinto’s theory fails to provide evidence that considers how various types of institutions and diverse groups of students are impacted by each proposition. Braxton et al. (1997) state that although Tinto’s theory serves as a useful framework for continuing research at individual institutions, the theory lacks “empirical internal consistency” (p. 108) and therefore needs revision. Consequently, Braxton et al. (1997) recommend a revision of the theory that addresses these shortcomings as well as integrates psychological, social, and economic theoretical perspectives of student departure to enhance Tinto’s theory.

The following section explores psychological, societal, economic, and interactional perspectives (Table 1) and provides explanations for student departure. Although the early work of sociologists Spady (1970) and Tinto (1975) greatly impacted the theoretical underpinnings for explaining student departure, Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) warn “developmental theories and the research based on them suggest that other important student traits may be overlooked if the perspective is strictly sociological” (p. 58).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Perspective</th>
<th>Theorist</th>
<th>Impact on Persistence/Retention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Model of the Undergraduate Dropout Process</td>
<td>Sociological</td>
<td>Spady (1971)</td>
<td>A lack of social integration often leads to student departure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Integration Model</td>
<td>Interactional</td>
<td>Tinto (1975, 1993)</td>
<td>The greater the level of integration into the social and academic environment, the greater the positive impact on institutional and goal commitment, resulting in lower dropout or higher attrition rates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Attrition Model</td>
<td>Psychological</td>
<td>Bean (1980)</td>
<td>When a student’s level of satisfaction increases, so should their level of institutional commitment; Students with greater institutional commitment are less likely to dropout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model of Student Involvement</td>
<td>Interactional</td>
<td>Astin (1984)</td>
<td>The more students get involved academically and socially, the greater their potential for success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to Pay Model</td>
<td>Economic</td>
<td>Cabrera, Stampen, and Hansen (1990)</td>
<td>Student persistence is increased when financial barriers are removed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrated Model of Student Retention</td>
<td>Merged</td>
<td>Cabrera, Castaneda, Nora, &amp; Hengstler (1992)</td>
<td>Integrated Tinto’s and Bean’s models positing that academic and social integration increase the likelihood of retention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approach/Avoidance Model of Coping</td>
<td>Psychological</td>
<td>Eaton and Bean (1995)</td>
<td>Responses to stressors impact social and academic integration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrated Model of Student Persistence</td>
<td>Interactional</td>
<td>Berger and Milem (1999)</td>
<td>Integrated Tinto’s and Astin’s models noting behavior and perceptions influence integration and ultimately persistence</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Psychological Models of Student Departure

Psychological approaches presume that students’ personalities govern how they make decisions. Four models are presented to illustrate student departure from psychological perspectives. Stage (1989) provides a perspective suggesting that persistence patterns differed among student subgroups while Brower (1992) argues for implementing life-task constructions to improve persistence predictions. Both studies respect the premise of Tinto’s model and provide evidence to consider psychological variables. Bean (1980) develops a model that focuses on external factors, attitudes, and behaviors influencing student persistence and Cabrera, Castaneda et al. (1992) merge Bean’s model with Tinto’s to offer an integrated model of student retention. Finally, Eaton and Bean’s (1995) model links students’ coping behaviors with their degree of academic and social integration.

Stage’s Measure of Motivational Orientation

Stage’s (1989) analysis addresses a weakness of Tinto (1975) and notes that the model fails to provide empirical support for how diverse groups of students persist. Stage examines student entry characteristics, commitment levels, institutional involvement and persistence of three subgroups of students based on their “motivational orientation.” Stage concludes that persistence patterns are different among the three subgroups, reinforcing the concept that background characteristics do impact persistence. Stage also finds that, based on their goals and objectives, students pursue different outcomes in college. Consequently, Stage encourages the use of psychosocial categorizations in addition to demographic categorizations of students to enhance the effectiveness of Tinto’s model.
\textit{Brower’s Life-Task Model}

Influenced by social psychology, Brower (1992) expands Tinto’s theory by incorporating the life-task model as a central element in the overlooked “second half” of integration. Brower explains that the “second half” was where students actively engaged in shaping their college experience by choosing particular educational paths and routines as a result of prioritizing their life tasks. Classified into the categories of achievement and affiliation, the seven life task areas include the following: “academic achievement, social interaction, future goal development, autonomy, identity formation, time management, and physical maintenance/well-being” (Brower, 1992, p. 446). Brower argues that students are more likely to persist when they had opportunities to actively determine their educational paths and when they found what they were looking for at their institution. Unlike Tinto’s model, which focuses on the process of students finding their “fit” within the institutional environment, Brower examines the impact of the dynamic interaction between what students want to do and actually do and hypothesizes that incorporating the life-task perspective into Tinto’s model would improve persistence predications.

\textit{Bean’s Student Attrition Model and Cabrera, Castaneda et al.’s Integrated Model of Student Retention}

Bean’s (1980) student departure model uses a psychological process to examine external factors, attitudes, and behaviors contributing to student attrition. Drawing upon employee turnover models in the corporate environment, Bean forms parallels and adapts the model to apply to student persistence. With the influence of their own background experiences and characteristics, students interact with their institution and develop a certain degree of either satisfaction or dissatisfaction. According to Bean’s model, as the level of satisfaction increases,
so did the level of institutional commitment. In turn, students with greater institutional commitment are less likely to dropout.

Cabrera, Castaneda et al. (1992) merge Tinto’s (1975) model with Bean’s (1980) model to offer insight on student departure with the Integrated Model of Student Retention. Uniting Tinto’s (1975) perspectives of academic and social integration along with Bean’s perspectives on external factors, attitudes, and behaviors, Cabrera et al. (1992) note that both of the models recognize the impact of students’ entry and background characteristics on college persistence.

**Eaton and Bean’s (1995) Approach/Avoidance Model of Coping**

Eaton and Bean (1995) present a link between students’ coping behaviors and their degree of academic and social integration. Their approach/avoidance model describes options for students to either respond aggressively or passively to their stressors. They determine that students experience greater academic integration when they employ “academic approach behaviors” such as asking questions in class. Similarly, “social approach behaviors,” such as being involved in student activities, result in greater social integration. Academic and social “avoidance behaviors,” such as neglecting to study and working long hours off-campus, decrease the likelihood of integration.

**Societal Model of Student Departure**

**Anderson’s Status Attainment Model**

Societal approaches concentrate on the process of social attainment, including social structure within the larger community. Anderson (1988) examines how social factors affect student departure. Providing her perspective on the impact that education has on improving
social status, Anderson (1988) uses the status attainment model to elaborate on Tinto’s model and underscore the significance of student entry characteristics. Specifically addressing socioeconomic status, Anderson notes that students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds generally enter institutions with a higher socioeconomic composition, stronger academic environment, and more cohesive community, which encourages increased levels of involvement, goal commitment, and ultimately persistence.

Economic Model of Student Departure

Tinto’s (1975) model has been criticized for failing to consider the impact of students’ ability or inability to pay on student persistence (Cabrera, Stampen, & Hansen, 1990; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1982). Early persistence models considered finances during college selection or entry, but deemed them irrelevant once the student enrolled assuming that financial need had been met (Tinto, 1982). However, the role of finances in student retention began to receive attention in the 1990s. Cabrera et al. (1990) incorporated economic theory with Tinto’s perspective and presented the ability-to-pay model. The model recognizes that when financial barriers were removed, students were freed from the need to work long hours and thus able to participate in the academic and social activities offered by their institution. Cabrera, Nora, and Castaneda (1992) enhanced this model by writing that finances not only increased the likelihood of persistence through cost-related benefits, but also helped to foster social and academic integration. Furthermore, students who expressed satisfaction with the costs of attending were more likely to persist. To be satisfied with the cost of a college degree, the student believed that the benefits of attending college outweighed the costs (Cabrera, Nora, & Castaneda, 1992; Cabrera et al., 1990).
Interactional Models of Student Departure

Astin’s Theory of Involvement and Berger and Milem’s Integrated Model of Student Persistence

Astin (1984) credits student involvement with positively influencing student persistence. His theory describes student involvement as the amount of energy devoted to studying; spending time on campus; participating in organizations; and interacting with faculty, staff, and fellow peers. Astin’s (1984) theory, based on five postulates, evolves from a longitudinal study of college student persistence. He argues that positive environmental characteristics lead to increased involvement and an increased likelihood of persistence. Likewise, he argues that the negative characteristics lead to decreased involvement and a decreased likelihood of persistence.

The first postulate of Astin’s theory (1984) refers to “the investment of physical and psychological energy in various objects” (p. 298). These “objects” could be anything from an experience in the classroom to participating in a theatrical performance. The second postulate further explains that “regardless of the object, involvement occurs along a continuum” (Astin, 1985, p. 298) where students commit varying levels of energy. Some students will choose to be more involved in certain activities than others. The third postulate of Astin’s theory identifies both “quantitative and qualitative features” (p. 298). Quantitative components include the amount of time a student invests in an activity while qualitative components would include the degree of significance and attention with which the object was approached. The next postulate states that “the amount of student learning and personal development is directly proportional to the quality and quantity of student involvement” (p. 298). In other words, the more students invest in a program or activity, the more they will get out of it. Finally, “the effectiveness of any educational practice is directly related to the capacity of that policy or practice to increase
involvement" (p. 298). Astin argues that students need to actively engage in order for learning and growth to occur.

Astin’s 1993 empirical study of this theory underscores the impact that student involvement has in enhancing many aspects of student development. “Learning, academic performance, and retention are positively associated with academic involvement, involvement with faculty, and involvement with student peer groups,” he writes (p. 394). Astin’s (1993) conceptual framework for studying student development is based on input-environment-output, or the I-E-O model. Students’ characteristics at the time of college entry are identified as “input.” The “programs, policies, faculty, peers, and educational experiences” the students are exposed to make up their “environment” (Astin, 1993, p. 7). After exposure to the college environment, the “outcome” may be determined based on the students’ characteristics. There are five broad categories which are included in the “environment” of Astin’s model: academic involvement, involvement with faculty, involvement with student peers, involvement in work, and other areas of involvement.

Berger and Milem (1999) incorporate Tinto’s and Astin’s viewpoints into a model emphasizing that both behavior and perception influences academic and social integration and directly impacts persistence to graduation. Perception and behavior are continuously transformed by one another as students integrate socially and academically. Combining the behavioral and perceptual components provides greater explanation of how students interact and engage with their college environment.
Summary of Student Departure, Retention, and Persistence Models

Attempts to revise or enhance Tinto’s (1975) student integration model demonstrate that the model benefits from other theoretical perspectives that strengthen its explanatory power and provide further examination of the concepts of academic and social integration. Despite the magnitude of research on student retention and the development of student persistence models, however, a gap exists between researchers’ findings and what practitioners need to know about fostering student retention. Research fails to adequately identify institutional strategies to support retention. Currently, there are no established metrics for determining either academic or social integration. While there may be agreement that variables such as academic and social integration affect college student retention, consistency is lacking in their measurement.

This study used student persistence models and retention research as a conceptual framework to gather qualitative descriptive accounts of the impact of social integration, academic integration, and financial support among the first-generation students participating in the Coca-Cola Scholarship Program at The University of Alabama. The following sections explore academic integration, social integration, and financial support and the ways in which each influences student persistence.

Academic and Social Integration

Regardless of discrepancies among the various retention theories and models, student integration theory has provided the prevailing framework for examining student departure in higher education. According to Spady (1971), Tinto (1988, 1993), and Pascarella and Terenzini (1983), academic progress and attrition are influenced by the degree of student integration. Attrition is described by these theories of integration as the divergence between the standards
and values of the student and those of the institution. Tinto (1993) argues “some degree of social and intellectual integration and therefore membership in academic and social communities must exist as a condition for continued persistence” (p. 120).

Tinto identifies academic and social systems within institutions as separate, yet interconnected, and therefore made a distinction between social and academic integration. According to Tinto’s (1975) model, academic integration is measured by academic performance, interaction with faculty, and participation in intellectual groups. Academic integration is comprised of structural and normative components where structural integration refers to the degree in which students complied with institutional policies and expectations. Grades serve as a measurement of academic performance indicating students’ ability to meet institutional standards. Normative integration, on the other hand, refers to the degree in which students related to the normative structure of the institution. Referring to social and intellectual integration, Tinto (1993) asserts that the former refers to that form of integration which results from personal affiliations and from the day-to-day interactions among different members of society. The latter comes from the sharing of values, which are held in common by other members of society. (p. 101)

Academic achievement and interaction with faculty are considered indicators of academic integration, while participation in extracurricular activities and interaction with peers are signs of social integration (Tinto, 1993). Similarly, Kuh and Love (2000) assert, Academic integration represents the extent to which students are doing reasonably well in their classes (academic achievement), perceive their classes to be relevant and have practical value (e.g., prepare them for jobs), and are satisfied with their majors. Social integration refers to students’ levels of social and psychological comfort with their colleges’ milieus, association with or acceptance by affinity groups, and sense of belonging that provides the security needed to join with others in common causes, whether intellectual or social. (p. 197)
Documenting grades and the amount of college credits earned provide objective measurements of academic integration. However, objective measurement neglects to consider subjective aspects such as the impact of academic experiences on integration (Cabrera, Castaneda et al., 1992). A lack of consistency in the operational definitions of academic and social integration results in both conceptual challenges as well as questions of how to appropriately measure integration. Tinto (1993) defines interaction with faculty as a component of academic integration, while Braxton, Milem, and Sullivan (2000) categorize these interactions among social integration. Alternatively, Pascarella, Duby, and Iverson (1982) consider the context of interactions to determine the type of integration. For instance, a formal interaction that involves discussion or advice related to the classroom is classified as academic integration. However, informal contact between the student and faculty outside the classroom would be classified as social integration. Cabrera, Castaneda et al. (1992) describe academic integration as the vigor in the classroom, good study habits, interaction with faculty outside the classroom, and supportive faculty advising. While Cabrera, Castaneda et al. (1992) consider the development of close friendships among peers and involvement in student activities as social integration, Pascarella et al. (1982) focus on the frequency of interactions among peers and faculty outside the classroom to determine social integration.

The ambiguity in distinguishing between academic and social integration poses challenges in discussing the concepts separately. Nora and Cabrera’s (1996) student adjustment model regards persistence as an interrelated series of interactions arguing that academic and social integration are not mutually exclusive. Like Tinto, they acknowledge the significance of pre-college characteristics and the “fit” between student and institution. Nora and Cabrera
(1996) recognize that interactions and experiences with faculty, staff, and peers affect students’ academic and social world.

According to Astin (1984), "student involvement refers to the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience" (p. 297). This academic experience is acquired both in the classroom as well as outside the classroom in more informal environments. In either case, involvement requires action on the student’s part. "It is not so much what the individual thinks or feels, but what the individual does, how he or she behaves, that defines and identifies involvement" (Astin, 1984, p. 298).

Students who are actively engaged both inside and outside the classroom are more likely than their peers to persist (Astin, 1993; Berger & Milem, 1999; Braxton, Milem, & Sullivan, 2000; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1993, 2005). Although Astin’s (1993) theory of student involvement concentrates on actual student behavior, his theory neglects to consider how students made meaning of their experiences. Tinto’s (1993) model, on the other hand, focuses on students’ perceptions of integration. Tinto’s model contends that academic and social integration, or engagement, has a positive impact on persistence. However, student involvement does not necessarily equate to student engagement. Action and purpose are necessary for engagement and deep learning (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 2005). The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) gauges the levels of student engagement, beyond involvement, based on the students’ activities and behaviors.

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) collects the responses from first-year and senior-year students about their behaviors and activities during the academic year. The students report on 42 items such as how often they talked to faculty, how often they worked on problems inside the classroom and how much time they read or wrote. Harper and Quaye (2009)
provide a description of the five benchmarks comprising the NSSE survey which also underscore the significance of academic and social engagement:

1. Level of academic challenge – Working hard to meet professors’ expectations, analyzing and synthesizing ideas, applying theories and course concepts to practical situations, studying and academic preparation activities, and composing papers of various length.
2. Active and collaborative learning – Asking questions and contributing to class discussions, making class presentations, working with peers on projects during class, collaborating with classmates outside of class to prepare assignments, participating in community-based projects as part of class activities, and discussing ideas from reading or course concepts with others outside of class.
3. Student-faculty interaction – Talking through career plans with professors and advisors, discussing ideas from readings or assignments with faculty outside of class, collaborating with faculty on committees and assorted campus activities, and working on research projects with professors.
4. Enriching educational experiences – Interacting across difference, taking foreign language courses, completing a culminating senior-year experience, and participating in a range of value-added activities, including student organizations and campus events, community service or volunteer work, study abroad programs, internships, faculty-supervised independent study experiences, and learning communities.
5. Supportive campus environment – Students’ perceptions of the support needed to succeed academically, thrive socially, and cope with non-academic matter, as well as the self-reported quality of relationships with other students, faculty, administrators, and staff at the institution. (Harper & Quaye, 2009, p. 5-6)

Researchers continue to develop and enhance the work of student departure models to measure the concepts of academic and social integration. Davidson, Beck, and Milligan (2009) recognize the disadvantages of generalizing variables that impact retention. Retention rates are affected by variations that included institutional characteristics, type of institution, and student body demographics. “It is becoming increasingly apparent that variables that prominently influence the persistence decision of one student or one group of students may be weakly related or unrelated to the persistence of other undergraduates,” conclude Davidson et al. (2009, p. 373). Modifications to the models may be necessary to examine integration for specific groups of students, such as commuter, minority, or first-generation. Metz (2004, 2005) encourages institutions to identify and understand the predictors of retention that pertain to their specific
institution as opposed to relying on the idea that “one size fits all.” Similarly, Harper and Quaye (2009) assert,

> A dependency on sameness is no longer appropriate, as contemporary cohorts of students at colleges and universities are different; the ways they experience and respond to our campuses are varied. Thus, educators and administrators must be strategic and intentional about fostering conditions that compel students to make the most of college, both inside and outside the classroom. (p. 1)

Consequently, the following sections examine academic and social integration as they relate to first-generation students.

*Impact of Academic Preparedness and Performance on Academic Integration for First-Generation Students*

High school GPA, course rigor and completion, and college admissions tests are determinants of students’ level of preparedness and likelihood to persist upon entering college. First-generation students are less likely than their peers to have taken college entrance exams, and, when they did, demonstrate lower scores (Chen, 2005; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Warburton et al., 2001). Fewer first-generation students taking the SAT or ACT in high school results in fewer enrolling in four-year institutions that require the test scores for admission (Choy, 2001).

High school GPA and ACT test scores are two of the best predictors of first-year college GPA (Lotkowski et al., 2004). Chen (2005) reports that first-generation students average a 2.5 college GPA trailing their peers who average a 2.8 college GPA. First-generation students are less likely to have taken advanced courses during high school and are generally less prepared for the academic rigor of the college curriculum than their non-first-generation peers (Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998). Even when first-generation students have the same level of preparation as their peers, they complete fewer credit hours; demonstrate difficulty in determining a major;
have lower grades; and are more likely to withdraw from, repeat, or take remedial courses in college (Chen, 2005; Pascarella et al., 2004; Terenzini et al., 1996; Warburton et al., 2001). Chen (2005) reports that 55% of first-generation students take remedial courses, compared to 27% of their peers. Forty percent of first-generation students took one or more remedial math courses, compared with 16% of their peers and 13% took one or more remedial reading courses, compared to 6% of their peers.

College major and credit hours also impact persistence (Tinto, 1993). Using data from the National Study of Student Learning (NSSL), Terenzini et al. (1996) find that first-generation students completed fewer first-year credit hours, took fewer humanities and fine arts courses, and studied fewer hours. When selecting a major, 33% of first-generation students had not made a choice compared to only 13% of their peers. Moreover, first-generation students are more likely to select majors in a vocational or technical field (Chen, 2005). Earning an average of 18 credits, first-generation students lagged behind the 25 credits typically earned by their peers during their first year thus lengthening the time to earn a degree (Chen, 2005). Despite a lighter academic load, first-generation students still had lower GPAs (Ishitani & DesJardins, 2002). Earning fewer credits and a lower GPA increases the likelihood of student departure (Chen, 2005).

Impact of Faculty, Staff, and Peer Interaction on Social Integration for First-Generation Students

According to Tinto’s (1975) model, social integration occurs when students interact among faculty and peers during nonacademic activities. Additional research continues to underscore that interaction with faculty, staff, and other students is one of the strongest predictors of student persistence (Astin, 1997; Kuh et al., 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1993). First-generation students, however, are less likely to develop relationships with
faculty members and other students (Terenzini et al., 1996). The lack of financial resources available to first-generation students often results in their living and working off-campus while attending classes part-time, thereby limiting their time on campus for social and academic interaction (Cabrera, Nora & Castaneda, 1992; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Terenzini et al., 1996).

Many first-generation students hesitate to get involved in activities and campus life until they determine how to balance and manage the transition to college (Astin, 1997; Billson & Terry, 1982; Cabrera, Castaneda et al., 1992; Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Pascarella et al., 2004; Terenzini et al., 1996). This delay is unfortunate for first-generation students because of the benefits gained from engaging in interactions with faculty and their fellow peers. Hahs-Vaughn (2004) state that introducing and engaging first-generation students in academic and social support programs prior to and during college helps raise their educational aspirations and expectations. These programs also connect students to faculty and staff who served as mentors. Support from faculty, advisors, and peers is particularly important because first-generation students are often unable to rely upon their own families for this support (Hahs-Vaughn, 2004).

Braxton and McClendon (2001-2002) propose eight domains of institutional practice that foster social integration and retention. Academic advising, which promotes student faculty interaction, is among the recommended practices. Specifically, advisors are encouraged to urge advisees to enroll in courses taught by faculty members who received positive course evaluations on their organization and instructional clarity. Braxton, Bray, and Berger (2000) assert that these particular teaching skills have a positive impact on social integration and Pascarella, Edison, Nora, Hagedorn, and Braxton (1996) write that they also cultivate student learning. Severiens
and Schmidt (2009) determine that social integration levels are higher for students in problem-based learning environments which confirms the findings of Braxton et al. (2000) that active learning through higher-order thinking and class discussion fostered academic and social integration. Involvement is especially important in the classroom as it is often the only place where students interact with faculty. If involvement did not begin in smaller environments, it is less likely to occur outside the classroom or in the broader campus community.

After reviewing 62 empirical tests that identified factors influencing social integration of traditional-age students in residential and commuter institutions, Braxton and Hirschy (2004) identify “commitment of the institution to student welfare, institutional integrity, and communal potential” as three factors that influence social integration (p. 70). Institutions exhibit their commitment to student welfare by administering policies and rules fairly and offering students opportunities to impact decisions regarding institutional policies and rules (Berger & Braxton, 1998). Implementing active learning in the classroom also reinforces institutional commitment to student welfare (Braxton et al., 2000). Similarly, institutional integrity is demonstrated when faculty, staff, and administrators exhibit behavior that reinforces the institutional mission. Students who perceive that their institution is devoted to its mission demonstrate greater levels of social integration. Finally, students experience greater social integration when they believe that there is a potential for community with fellow students who shared similar values, beliefs, and goals (Braxton & Hirschy, 2004).

Social networks offer access to resources and support for students. The more students are able to connect within their network, as well as connect to those in other networks, the greater their access to resources and benefits. Thomas (2000) uses a social network approach to examine students’ social ties in an attempt to better understand the influence of social and
academic integration in the persistence process. By measuring the actual degree of connectedness shared with other students, Thomas (2000) reports that students with more connectivity outside their own peer group perform better academically and are more likely to persist. However, he warns that too much connectedness could work to the detriment of academic performance.

Studies assessing “sense of belonging” for minority students might be considered for first-generation students. A student’s perceptions of value or acceptance within an institution can impact their social and academic integration. Hausmann, Schofield, and Woods (2007) studied African American and White students’ sense of belonging during their first year and the impact it had on their intentions to persist. Interventions were initiated to enhance some students’ feelings of value and connectivity to the institution, while other students received no intervention. Both groups expressed diminished feelings about their sense of belonging and their intentions to persist as the academic year progressed. However, students who received interventions felt more strongly about their connection to the university than those who did not receive intervention. Hausmann et al. (2007) conclude that although “sense of belonging” may be implied by social and academic integration, it had not been studied independently. Similarly, Hurtado and Carter (1997) studied a sample of Latino students and their feelings of value and belonging and called for future work in this area.

Financial Support

Even though students now face fewer challenges with access and gain entry into a variety of institutions based on their merit (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Mortenson, 2008), students with little financial support are often limited to institutions offering lower tuition or greater institutional
support (Engle & Tinto, 2008). Dennis (1998) notes, “While access is the opportunity to enroll in an institution of higher education, choice is the opportunity to choose among schools which meet a student’s academic and career needs, academic capability, and family income” (p. 61). Unfortunately, a student’s institution of choice may not be a financially feasible option.

As institutions compete among one another for students to increase their enrollment, institutional funds are often used to attract students with the greatest aptitude as opposed to those with the greatest need. Financial aid programs are specifically impacted by marketing plans developed to encourage increased enrollment. Dennis (1998) notes that many approaches for enrollment and retention management identified financial aid as one of the elements significant to recruitment, admission, and retention efforts. Callan (2006) states that “for many institutions, the principal public purpose of financial assistance to needy students has been transformed into the narrower institutional purpose of a recruitment incentive to attract desirable students” (p. 21). According to Engle and Tinto (2008), “less than half, 46%, of all institutional grant aid given in 2003-2004 was awarded based on need-based criteria” (p. 24). Furthermore, low-income, first-generation students received only 15% of the grant aid issued from institutional sources compared to the 61% received by their peers (Engle & Tinto, 2008). While many low-income, first-generation students chose to attend a less-costly institution, in doing so, they may also have chosen an institution that does not offer as much grant aid. Institutions may be overlooking low-income, first-generation students if they do not restrict their grant awards to need-based criteria.

Financial aid from federal sources provides low-income, first-generation students with greater support than that from institutions. Federal sources provide 76% of the financial aid offered to low-income, first-generation students. Student loans represented just over half of this federal aid with 53%. Grants accounted for most of the remaining amount of federal aid at 44%,
with work-study representing 3% (Engle & Tinto, 2008). The type of aid and the amount available depended upon the institution as well as their financial and market position.

When comparing data from years 1972 and 2003, both first-generation and non-first-generation students express increasing concerns regarding financing their college educations (Saenz et al., 2007). Each group reports that low tuition as well as financial assistance affects their decision to attend a particular college. Also consistent for both years is the gap between the first-generation students and their peers. First-generation students are almost twice as likely to express major concerns about financing college as their counterparts (Saenz et al., 2007). While one-third of students whose parents had at least some college education are from low-income families, first-generation students are at a greater financial disadvantage with half coming from low-income families (Horn & Nunez, 2000). Thus, many first-generation students face double jeopardy because they are more likely to come from low-income families.

**Impact of Financial Support on Persistence of First-Generation Students**

In addition to the role financial support plays in the college selection process for students and the recruitment process for institutions, some researchers disagree over the impact financial support has on student persistence (Cabrera, Nora et al., 1992). At one time, researchers doubted the influence of financial aid on persistence (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1987). However, research recently confirmed that finances played a key role in impacting student persistence (St. John, Cabrera, Nora, & Asker, 2000). In fact, St. John, Paulsen, and Starkey (1996) suggest that financial factors have greater effects on the variance in persistence than academic and social integration.
Some researchers argue that students who received financial aid persist at comparable rates to those who did not receive aid (Bresciani & Carson 2002, Murdock, 1987; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Stampen & Cabrera, 1988). A few provide further explanation (Murdock, 1987; Stampen & Cabrera, 1988), however, insisting that the rates of persistence were comparable for instances in which financial aid diminished or eliminated the reasons an aid recipient might dropout. Rather than focus on the amount of gift aid that was awarded, Bresciani and Carson (2002) assert that the amount of total unmet financial need is a better predictor of persistence.

Perna (1998) reports that the various types of financial aid affect persistence differently and that grants, in particular, are more effective than loans in supporting student persistence. Grants, scholarships, and work-study are credited with increasing the likelihood for first-generation student persistence (Lohfink & Paulson, 2005; Somers, Woodhouse, & Cofer, 2004). Unfortunately, during the last 20 years the federal government has shifted its support of postsecondary education from primarily providing grants to mostly offering loans. Although the need-based Pell Grant program has grown considerably since its 1973 inception, the value of the grants have not kept pace with the increasing costs of tuition (Dowd, 2004; Engle & Tinto, 2008). In 1980, 77% of the cost for attending a public-four year institution would have been covered by Pell Grant. Only 36% could be covered by Pell Grant in 2008 (Engle & Tinto, 2008):

The precipitous increase in college tuition in recent years combined with the declining value of the federal Pell Grant and the trend toward non-need or merit aid at both the institutional and state levels has created a perfect storm for disadvantaged students like low-income, first-generation students who are working and borrowing more than ever yet still finding themselves struggling to cover all of the costs associated with going to college at a time when they can’t afford not to earn a college degree. (p. 24)

Despite declining resources from the state and federal governments, public colleges are expected to continue producing graduates. In fact, graduation rates were often used as a measure
of institutional performance (Dowd, 2004). Many states referred to graduation rates to measure institutional performance for the purpose of connecting institutional accountability with budget allocations (Burke & Minassians, 2001, Carnevale, Johnson, & Edwards, 1998). When state appropriations decline and institutions are forced to rely on tuition for revenue, the retention of students becomes vital (Anderson, 1985).

St. John, Andrieu, Oescher, and Starkey (1994) compared and analyzed five approaches that measured the effects of financial aid on persistence. Based on their model of analysis, when tuition increased, it took more time for students to complete their degrees, thus adversely impacting persistence. Data from the College Board indicated that tuition and fees for public institutions increased 683% from 1980 to 2005 (Saenz et al., 2007). Consequently, students and their families are responsible for an increasing share of financing education. Often choosing to attend a college with lower tuition, low-income, first-generation students generally spend less money overall than their advantaged peers. Nevertheless, low-income, first-generation students still demonstrate greater financial need than their advantaged peers because the amount that they or their families contributed after financial aid did not cover the cost of their attendance (Engle & Tinto, 2008). Low-income, first-generation students often work additional hours to pay for the remaining balance (Engle & Tinto, 2008). While working up to 20 hours a week could have a positive impact on persistence rates (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), low-income, first-generation students often work more than 20 hours per week which can have an adverse effect on persistence. Somers et al. (2004) found that while loans increased their persistence, first-generation students were debt averse and even a small amount of debt decreased persistence because they will often choose to work as opposed to taking out a loan.
Examining the role of finances when academic and social integration as well as student commitment were taken into account, Cabrera, Nora et al. (1992) suggest that financial aid allows students to participate in social and academic activities and become more engaged and committed to their institution thus becoming more likely to succeed. Leveling the financial playing field presents low-income students with opportunities comparable to those enjoyed by more affluent students. However, a lack of sufficient financial aid to cover the costs of attendance drives many low-income, first-generation students to spend their time outside of the classroom working an off-campus job. Consequently, these students miss opportunities to engage and connect with their campus community. The lack of financial support adversely influences students’ academic and social integration into college and, ultimately, their persistence.

Conclusion

When students depart from an institution, the greatest numbers of students do so before their second year of college. Of the 228 public four-year institutions participating in the 2004 “What Works in Student Retention” survey, approximately 60% of campuses reported having a goal for improving the retention of students from first to second year, but only about 45% had a goal for improving degree completion (Habley & McClanahan, 2004). The 2008 ACT annual survey indicated that after their first year, approximately 30% of students at four-year public institutions did not re-enroll.

Astin (1990) reinforces the notion that retention is not a “one size fits all” concept and that each institution should adapt retention programs to serve the specific needs of the students.
within the context of the environment provided by each particular institution. Tinto (2005) states,

> What is needed is a model of student persistence and in turn a model of institutional action that provide institutions guidelines to develop effective policies, procedures, and programs that enhance the persistence of students, especially those who continue to fare less well in higher education. (p. 320)

Unfortunately, the experiences of first-generation students are not always reflected in retention data, hence the motivation for conducting this qualitative study.
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Because of the benefits available to those who possess a college degree, ensuring access to higher education for underrepresented groups has been one of great concern (Choy, 2001; Fitzgerald, 2006; Grodsky & Jones, 2004; King, 1996; Vargas, 2004). In their international comparative research, which includes the United States, Thomas and Quinn (2007) examined access and retention of underrepresented students in higher education, specifically those of first-generation status. They asserted that student access must be followed by retention efforts from the institution to support student success. Thomas and Quinn further noted that obtaining higher education was “associated with privilege and enhanced life opportunities, including improved social standing, employment and earnings, civic participation, cultural engagement, health and life expectancy” (p. 1). However, according to the Institute for Higher Education (2005), only 18% of the population 25 and older possesses a bachelor’s degree. Engle and Tinto (2008) argued,

For too many low-income, first-generation students, the newly-opened door to American higher education has been a revolving one. The unavoidable fact is that while college access has increased for this population, the opportunity to successfully earn a college degree, especially the bachelor’s degree has not. (p. 3)

Despite having one of the world’s highest college participation rates, low-income, minority, and first-generation students were underrepresented in this country (Engle & Tinto, 2008).
Neglecting the needs of first-generation students precludes them from resources essential to realizing a better way of life.

First-generation students represent one of the main groups influencing the increasing demographic diversity of the undergraduate student population (Baum & Ma, 2007; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Hottinger & Rose, 2006; Pascarella et al., 2004). Approximately 30% of all beginning postsecondary students attending a four-year institution were first-generation students (Choy, 2001; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998). After 6 years, the graduation rate for first-generation students at a public four-year institution was 34%, compared to the 66% graduation rate of their peers (Engle & Tinto, 2008). The disproportionate number of first-generation students receiving degrees from four-year institutions exposes a need for understanding the unique challenges of first-generation students’ experiences. Current retention efforts, which were intended to address the needs of the general student population, fail to meet the unique needs of first-generation students. Consequently, this study seeks to better understand the experiences of first-generation students.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the experiences of first-generation students participating in the Coca-Cola First Generation Scholarship (CCS) Program at The University of Alabama, a four-year public institution. The CCS Program was funded by a $1M gift from the Coca-Cola Foundation in 2006. The University of Alabama was the first public higher education institution partner to the CCS Program. Based on the guidelines for awarding the scholarships from Coca-Cola, the partnership was designed to fulfill a 7-year obligation. The Program provided $5,000 annual renewable scholarships to 48 students who are Alabama residents and the first in their families to attend college.
The significance of studying the Coca-Cola Scholarship Program at The University of Alabama during the spring 2010 semester provided the opportunity to capture the experiences of the students in the Program who represent each of the four participating cohorts. No comprehensive assessment has been conducted to quantitatively or qualitatively measure the effects of the CCS Program on the participating first-generation students.

The primary research question was as follows: What are the experiences of the first-generation students participating in the Coca-Cola Scholarship Program? The following research questions examined the experiences among the recipients and guided this dissertation:

1. What role does academic integration play in the first-generation student experience?
2. What role does social integration play in the first-generation student experience?
3. What role does financial support play in the first-generation student experience?
4. What is the impact of the CCS program on first-generation student retention?

Research Design

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the experiences of first-generation students (Scholars) participating in the Coca-Cola Scholarship (CCS) Program at The University of Alabama, a four-year public institution. A qualitative methodology was selected because a quantitative analysis would not completely explore or capture the experiences of first-generation students participating in the CCS Program. Qualitative methods include an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem . . . the researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting. (Creswell, 1998, p. 15)

Qualitative research allows for a deeper understanding of the experiences of the first-generation students participating in the CCS Program.
Merriam (1998) noted that one of the most essential characteristics of qualitative research is a focus on how people “make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” (p. 6). Individuals are recognized as constructing their own reality. The goal of qualitative research is to understand this reality, not from the researcher’s perspective, but from that of the subjects. To best illustrate the perceptions and understanding of the Scholars in the CCS Program, the descriptive case study method was chosen. Descriptive case studies are often the method of choice for investigating “innovative programs” in education (Merriam, 1998, p. 38). The primary justification for selecting a descriptive case study design was that it allows for the most comprehensive investigation of a single site program. Case study designs are used to “gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved” and the final product should provide a rich description of the experience or occurrence being studied (Merriam, 1998, p. 19).

The CCS Program at The University of Alabama is a natural fit for a descriptive case study. Merriam (1998) asserted that “the single most defining characteristic of case study research lies in delimiting the object of study” (p. 27). The CCS Program was established for a specified number of years to serve a limited number of students. The University of Alabama became the first public university partner to the CCS Program when it accepted a one million dollar donation to the “Our Students. Our Future,” capital campaign in 2006. The largest donation designated for undergraduate student scholarship in the history of the University was awarded to a total of 48 first-generation students over the course of 7 years. In the fall of 2006, 12 inaugural scholars each received a $5,000 scholarship and received $5,000 each year for the following 3 years if they maintained a 2.8 grade point average their freshman year and a 3.0 GPA thereafter. Twelve additional students were awarded in 2007, 2008, and 2009 (“Coca-
Cola,” 2006; “Twelve UA Students,” 2006). The clearly defined parameters make the CCS Program at The University of Alabama an appropriate subject for case study.

Setting and Site Selection

Despite outreach programs focusing specifically on preparing first-generation students for postsecondary work, numerous barriers remain. Choy (2001) summarized the experiences of first-generation students based on data produced from three longitudinal National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) studies. The NCES studies revealed that in addition to postsecondary access, first-generation students faced disadvantages regarding persistence and degree attainment. Choy (2001) reported that postsecondary enrollment rates are lower for first-generation students as a result of several factors including lower expectations, lack of preparedness, lack of support from parents and schools in college planning, as well as lower family income. For first-generation students who do overcome these challenges, they are still less likely than their peers to stay enrolled and attain a degree.

Although the disproportionate number of first-generation students electing to attend a four-year institution is certainly worthy of attention, it is the disproportionate number of first-generation students receiving degrees from a four-year institution that merits further investigation. The University of Alabama was selected for this study because it is a four-year institution with a specific support program for first-generation students. A single site study was conducted to provide the foundation and framework for any future studies which may include multiple institutions or opportunities for comparative studies. When the donation from the Coca-Cola Foundation was made, The University of Alabama was the first and only public institution partner to the CCS Program.
The state’s oldest public university, founded in 1831, The University of Alabama is a senior comprehensive doctoral-level institution covering 1,000 acres within the city of Tuscaloosa in Alabama’s west central region (UA Factbook, 09-10). In the fall of 2008, UA was recognized for the eighth consecutive year by U.S. News and World Report as one of the top 50 public universities in the nation. That same year, UA welcomed its largest incoming class of 5,116 entering freshmen. Total enrollment also reached a record high of 27,052, which included 22,343 undergraduate students (UA Quick Facts, 2009). The number of first-generation students within the freshman class or within the undergraduate class is unknown as this is not data collected and recorded by the University at this time. However, it is estimated that approximately 20% of students at the University are first in their family to attend college (L. Fuller, personal communication, November 17, 2009).

Participant Selection

The students in this study were selected based on their participation as Scholars within the Coca-Cola Scholarship Program at The University of Alabama. Twelve students were recognized as Scholars each year for 4 years beginning in 2006 for a total of 48 Scholars. As required by the considerations of the CCS, Scholars had no immediate family (parents or siblings) who attended classes or graduated from college (Appendix A). All Scholars were Alabama residents and entered the University with at least a 3.0 cumulative high school GPA. They were also required to maintain a 2.8 grade point average their freshman year and a 3.0 GPA thereafter. Preference was shown to those with “demonstrated financial need” (Appendix A).

The coordinator of the CCS Program provided the Scholars names, cohort classification, and email addresses to the researcher. Each of the 48 Scholars received an email from the
researcher inviting them to participate in an approximately 1 hour, one-on-one interview about their experiences in the CCS Program. Attached to the email invitation was a participant information form, which provided additional details about the study. Fifteen Scholars (3 from cohort 1, 3 from cohort 2, 5 from cohort 3, and 4 from cohort 4) responded favorably to the invitation and interviews were scheduled during a mutually agreed upon date and time. To secure additional interviews, the researcher requested assistance from the CCS coordinator who emailed individual Scholars directly and requested their participation. Following her contact, four more interviews were scheduled (1 from cohort 1, 2 from cohort 2, 1 from cohort 4). The 19 participating Scholars and their respective cohorts are presented in Table 2. Pseudonyms were used throughout this study to protect the Scholars’ anonymity.

Table 2

*Coca-Cola First Generation Scholarship Recipient Research Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Cohort</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Caleb</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monica</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kim</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pamela</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kori</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Becky</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Nick</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shannon</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hope</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carter</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jonathan</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brittney</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trey</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Joined the CCS Program their sophomore year after original participant dropped. Both were recipients of another first-generation scholarship prior to being invited to CCS Program.*
Four University administrators were also selected to participate based on their affiliation, knowledge and history of the CCS Program (Table 3). The four administrator interviews included the faculty member who instructed the BCE 101 freshman seminar course designated for the Scholars, the director of corporate and foundation relations from the advancement staff who served as the liaison between the University and the Coca-Cola Foundation, the coordinator of the CCS Program who began working part-time at the beginning of the 2009 fall semester, and an administrator who was indirectly connected but volunteered to support the Program.

Table 3

*Coca-Cola First Generation Scholarship Administrator Research Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Foster</td>
<td>BCE instructor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Lori Fuller</td>
<td>University liaison to Coca-Cola Foundation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Barbara Allen</td>
<td>CCS Program Coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Lawrence</td>
<td>Volunteer; affiliated with program from beginning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Collection

The dialogue conveyed in the following chapter was derived from interviews with 19 Scholars participating in the CCS Program as well as four administrators affiliated with the Program. Descriptive information was derived from documents related to the Program, which were collected by the researcher. Qualitative data were collected from interviews and document analysis, which were consistent with case study research. The descriptive case study design was selected because it allowed for the most comprehensive investigation of a single site program and it solicited an in-depth understanding of the experiences of the students who benefited from participation in the CCS Program.
The study consisted of 23 individual, one-on-one interviews conducted during the spring 2010 semester on the University of Alabama campus. Prepared interview protocol forms were used to guide the interviews. Deviation from the questions was permitted to allow each participant the opportunity to express themselves without restraint. The researcher encouraged conversation with follow-up questions to their responses.

The interview questions were developed prior to the interviews and were designed to collect the individual experiences of the participants. The protocol for the Scholars was the same for each interview. A core set of questions was developed for the administrator interviews; however, some specific questions were tailored for each administrative participant based on their role with the CCS Program. Each interview was scheduled for 60 minutes and was audio-taped with the permission of the interviewee. The researcher also recorded personal notes during the interview recording any special observations or non-verbal actions. Following the interviews, the researcher personally delivered the audio-tapes to a transcriber. The identification of each participant was protected by providing a code for each tape. The audio tapes were then transcribed verbatim, stored in an electronic format, and later analyzed for common themes. The attached interview protocol, with open-ended questions, was used to collect the data from the interviews (Appendices B and C).

All 19 Scholars were interviewed in the student union building on campus. After meeting at the information desk, the researcher and Scholar identified a table where the interview could be conducted. The student union was suggested by the researcher because it is a familiar location to students, centrally located on campus, and provides a student-friendly atmosphere. Regarding the setting of data collection, John Creswell (2003) stated,

"Qualitative research takes places in the natural setting. The qualitative researcher often goes to the site (home, office) of the participant to conduct the research. This enables the
researcher to develop a level of detail about the individual or place and to be highly involved in the actual experiences of the participants. (p. 181)

Despite the natural setting, at the beginning of each interview the researcher offered to move the interview to an alternate location if the Scholar was concerned with needing additional privacy. None expressed a desire to identify an alternate location.

The three administrators with defined connection and responsibilities to the Program were interviewed prior to the Scholars interviews. These interviews were conducted first to provide the researcher with an understanding of the origins, the management, and the infrastructure of the Program. The fourth administrator, who has been involved peripherally with the Program since the beginning, was interviewed following the 19 Scholars. Each of the administrator interviews was conducted in their respective offices.

The purpose of the 19 Scholar interviews was to gain extensive qualitative data about how the CCS Program may have influenced their lives and how participating impacted their academic and social integration as well as persistence. The interview questions allowed the researcher to gather the personal experiences of the Scholars and their perceptions of how the financial support of the CCS Program may or may not have provided them with an opportunity to focus on academic and social integration.

Document analysis represented another form of data collection. Merriam (1998) suggested document analysis supplements interviews as a part of the collection process. A copy of the Coca-Cola First Generation Scholarship application was obtained from the University’s undergraduate scholarships website and reviewed (Appendix A). The BCE 101 course syllabus (Appendix D) was also examined and the topics and activities evaluated. Finally, three annual reports documenting the status of the program and the progress of the Scholars were examined.
Data Analysis

Constant comparison and inductive analysis were used to analyze the data collected from document analysis, personal interviews, and the researcher’s notes. The documents’ (CCS annual reports, BCE 101 course syllabus) content provided details informing the researcher of the structure and curriculum of the CCS Program as well as the status of each cohorts’ progress. The researcher also reviewed related press and news releases to gain a better understanding of the CCS Program, the Scholars and the relationship between the University and Coca-Cola Foundation. Each of these documents aided the researcher in understanding the Program as well as guided the researcher in the development of the administrator and student interview protocols.

Constant comparison during interview collection was used to identify recurring patterns and emerging themes (Merriam, 1998). Three of the four administrator interviews were conducted prior to the student interviews for the purpose of understanding the CCS Program’s history, development, curriculum and support structure. The data collected during the administrator interviews provided foundation and insight which helped guide the student interviews. While conducting the student interviews, a fourth administrator was consistently identified as key to the Program. Consequently, this administrator was interviewed at the conclusion of the student interviews.

The themes that emerged reflected the broad categories of research presented in the literature. However, additional themes were allowed and did emerge during data collection. As each interview was conducted and transcribed, modifications to the protocol were made and new questions were considered to collect the richest and most descriptive accounts of the interviewees’ experiences (Merriam, 1998). Data were reviewed using an inductive data analysis approach allowing the researcher to examine and condense large amounts of interview transcript
data as well as to create connections between the study’s research questions and the raw transcript data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). As suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1998), open coding was used to assign meaningful categories and themes to the data.

Continuous evaluation of the data presented preliminary groupings of information that confirmed the categories presented by the research questions. Statements and phrases collected from each participant interviewed were coded and placed into categories based on the theme and their relation to each research question. The researcher relied on axial coding to organize the data and develop subsets of categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Researcher Positionality

As a first-generation student, I have often reflected on my own experiences as a college student. While I recognize that my parents were very supportive of my educational endeavors, there were times I felt lost trying to navigate the university I attended. Because of a few key individuals who believed in me, encouraged me, and helped me to envision a future that I was unable to see for myself, I am now approaching the end to a long academic journey. I openly acknowledge that my expressions of gratitude to these individuals have been to “pay it forward.” I strive to be as helpful to students as my mentors have been to me.

I have been employed at The University of Alabama for 7 years. My first 5 years were spent working in the Division of Student Affairs in the areas of leadership as well as New Student and Parent Programs. Both experiences provided opportunities to work closely with students. While I am pleased to play a role in a student’s development, I am especially willing to take extra efforts in assisting first-generation students. When I learn of a student’s first-generation status, I introduce myself as a resource to them and often follow up with a meeting to
get to know them. I recognize that my eagerness to provide support to first-generation students may introduce a perception of bias, as I will be the interpreter of the data. However, as Strauss and Corbin (1988) stated, “This is not necessarily a negative trait; after all, persons are the products of their cultures, the times in which they live, their genders, their experiences, and their training” (p. 97). I commit to maintaining credibility and integrity throughout this study because I understand that my work can serve to benefit first-generation students.

My interest in first-generation students, particularly the CCS Program, has resulted in invitations to attend CCS events. I observed a few of the interviews for the selection of cohort three; I have attended scholarship luncheons recognizing selected cohorts; I attended the “Telling Our Stories” event in which the first graduating class of Scholars shared their experiences with an audience including members of their family as well as UA administrators and friends. Although attending these functions was not for the purpose of making observations for my research, the involvement did provide me with a familiarity and awareness which enhanced my understanding of the CCS Program. Additionally, my attendance at the events offered opportunities to be visible to the Scholars and introduce myself and my interest in learning more about their experiences.

Validity and Trustworthiness

Quotations and rich, detailed descriptions of the experiences of those associated with the Coca-Cola Scholarship Program have been used to ensure trustworthiness (Merriam, 1998). This study employs multiple research methods, which were used to inform the other and enable a holistic evaluation of the program. Although the student interviews serve as the primary source of data, administrator interviews and document analysis offer additional opportunities to gain
insight into student experiences. The notes taken by the researcher during and after each interview supported reliability.

Since data analysis occurred as an ongoing event from the inception of the study, modifications were made when appropriate to ensure a study representative of the phenomenon. Thick description and triangulation are techniques that were utilized to minimize bias and maximize trustworthiness. Triangulation was utilized during the process of data collection and analysis to ensure that new data supports what is already recognized. Triangulation allows the researcher to use multiple sources of data “to build a coherent justification of themes” (Creswell, 2003, p. 196).

Conclusion

Chapter 3 provided an explanation of the course of action followed in conducting this study. My personal background and experiences have been considered as I serve as the researcher. A qualitative approach served as the best method for gathering the data necessary for answering the research questions posed in this particular study. Through case study, the perspectives of the first-generation Coca-Cola Scholars are presented, as well as the context in which their perspectives are grounded. The following chapter will present the findings and discuss the emergent themes as they relate to my research questions. Chapter 5 presents the conclusions and implications of the study.
CHAPTER 4
DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction

The Coca-Cola Scholarship [Program] has been probably the most important thing I’ve been a part of at the University--no doubt. I’ve been a part of some really great things. It’s up there; it’s definitely up there because it is something I’ve been involved with every single year and it’s who I am--it’s like my identity here. (Kim, cohort 1)

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the experiences of first-generation students participating in the Coca-Cola First Generation Scholarship (CCS) Program at The University of Alabama, a four-year public institution. The CCS Program was funded by a $1M gift from the Coca-Cola Foundation in 2006. The Program provided $5,000 annual renewable scholarships to 48 students who are Alabama residents and the first in their families to attend college. According to Ms. Lori Fuller, University liaison to Coca-Cola Foundation, “Coke has done . . . other things with public universities, but it is the first time they have done this actual program and especially the cohort model in a public institution.”

Themes

The findings derived from the four research questions are examined and analyzed in the following chapter. Based on the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 and the data analysis, this chapter emphasizes the five themes that emerged for this study. Social and academic integration as well as financial support were each reflected in the literature review, as well as data analysis.
The students’ reflection on their first-generation status and intentions to persist were themes that emerged during the course of data collection. The five themes for this study are:

1. First-generation Status Examined
2. Role of Academic Integration in the First-generation Student Experience
3. Role of Social Integration in the First-generation Student Experience
4. Role of Financial Support in the First-generation Student Experience
5. Persistence of the First-generation Students in the CCS Program

First-generation Status Examined

This section examines the Scholars’ perceptions of their first-generation status. The Scholars shared their feelings of responsibility towards their siblings, parents, community, and self as they represented “the first” to attend college. The role of family, whether supportive or unsupportive, was pervasive in the Scholars’ communication about their experiences as first-generation students. They also revealed that among their greatest challenges were managing financial burdens and a lack of knowledge when navigating college processes. Finally, the Scholars shared the differences they observed between first-generation and non-first-generation students. The following subsections are categorized to explore the meaning of first-generation status, challenges for first-generation students, role of family for first-generation students, and differences between first-generation and non-first-generation students. Themes and language emphasizing the importance of family, the attention to finances, and the lack of knowledge and access to resources, are recurring.

Dr. Lawrence’s involvement with the CCS Program began when she worked in admissions, which guided the scholarship component of the Program. Although she changed
jobs at the University, Dr. Lawrence continued to be involved peripherally with the CCS Program. She disclosed that she had a “real special heart for first-generation students” and had participated in the selection of the Scholars every year. Dr. Lawrence’s remarks encapsulate many of the emotions and sentiments that were shared by the Scholars throughout this section:

You watch these students carry the weight of their families and all the expectations of their families and they come not only with their goals, but all the hopes and dreams often for their families, their siblings, their cousins. I have become much more aware of that over my years here on campus and that’s a large burden. They carry it well, but it is a burden and there’s that fear of disappointment; fear of failure which goes much deeper than themselves. And I think programs like Coke help them navigate through that—normalize it, give them a place where they can talk about it and then help them move forward realistically in what they want to do.

Meaning of First-generation Status

Bearing the title “first-generation” extended beyond the obvious implications of being first, for the Scholars. Although challenges were associated with the status, and those are further explored in the following subsection, being first-generation was not a designation lightly assumed, but rather accepted with a sense of duty. Translated from biblical scripture (Luke 12:48), the phrase “for of those to whom much is given, much is required” epitomized the Scholars’ earnest obligation. Some described the weight of the responsibility that accompanied the “first-generation” title and their subsequent ambition to provide a positive example for their younger siblings and the youth within their home community. Others expressed a desire to please their parents by taking advantage of an opportunity that would enable them to realize a better way of life. Finally, a few Scholars noted being first meant uncertainty and learning things on their own. For each of the Scholars, however, along with the title “first-generation,” came responsibility.
Representing the oldest among their siblings, Kim, Monica, and Sam conveyed the importance of setting a positive example for their younger brothers and sisters. Likewise, Robert and Kori expressed a sense of obligation to be positive role models for their siblings, but they also acknowledged the importance of their role within their community and extended family. Even though they anticipated being observed, none of the Scholars expressed feeling pressured to perform.

Bursting with energy and animated expressions, before she completed a thought Kim often began another. Immediately at ease, she swiftly recounted the details of her experiences as a first-generation student and a Scholar among the inaugural cohort. Kim described the magnitude of the first-generation designation in a single word--“everything.” The enormity of the opportunity and the impact it had on her family was not lost on Kim. Explaining the significance of her role, Kim remarked,

It means more than just me as an individual. . . . It’s a way to represent my family and to me family is the most important thing. So I think that it is really exciting to combine something for me individually but you represent your family at the same time.

Following in her footsteps, Kim’s younger sister also attended UA and both planned to graduate during the spring 2010 semester. She expressed optimism that her 14-year-old brother would also attend college.

Monica, whose mannerisms and pace were the antithesis of Kim’s, was also a first cohort Scholar and the oldest among her siblings. Monica recognized how important it was for her to succeed and set a positive example for her younger siblings. Both of her parents, who received GEDs through correspondence courses, stressed college to each of their four children:

My dad had to drop out of high school to take care of his family because my grandfather hurt his back and he couldn’t work anymore. And my grandfather was the first person to graduate from high school in his entire family. So my dad couldn’t go to college and my
mother got married to my father at a very young age so they both finished through GED or correspondence courses--neither of them had a chance to go to college.

Like Kim and Monica, cohort four Scholar, Sam, shared “it’s a start for my family” and that he was “setting the pace” for his younger brother and sister.

For Robert, being a first-generation student ultimately meant opening a door for his little sister. However, having been influenced by his cousin who graduated from UA and currently attends graduate school, Robert acknowledged that he also wanted to inspire others in his home community to attend college. Robert proudly stated, “I’m just showing [my sister] and the rest of the members of my family that it can be done.” Inspiring more than her younger siblings was important to Kori, as well. Representing the first-generation not only in her immediate family, but also her extended family, Kori remarked, “I’m the topic of conversation at Christmas. To me, it means to give my younger siblings, younger cousins someone to look up to--someone who is not in jail; who’s not doing something bad; who’s actually in college doing something positive.” She strived to be the catalyst needed for her family to “get over this hump” by being someone that her younger siblings and cousins could look up to.

Although many of the Scholars expressed a sense of duty in providing a positive example for younger siblings and those within their community, overwhelmingly, the Scholars shared that going to college meant having an opportunity to pursue something that their parents did not have or take the opportunity to pursue. They were encouraged to attend college by their parents from early ages so that they might benefit from the possibility of a better future. Pleasing their parents was of key concern for both Caleb and David. While Caleb asserted that his parents would be proud of him regardless of his accomplishments, he explained that being a first-generation college student gave them one more reason to be proud:
Personally, I... I would say it’s given me a chance to prove to myself that I am capable of accomplishing, whether it be school work or just meeting any task or assignment I’ve been given. Being able to meet that and do well at it. So... so it’s given me a chance to make myself proud as well as my parents, and my family in general. They’d be proud of me anyway just cause I’m their son of course. But, it gives them another reason to be proud of me for what I’m doing and what I’m accomplishing while I’m here.

David’s father, who has worked in a factory for 30 years, desired for him to have a life different from his own. David shared how his father urged him to aspire for more:

He would tell me stories like when [he and my mom] first got married he was working two shifts, 90 hours a week, 7 days a week. He always instilled in me that you want to go to college. You don’t want to be going into a nasty factory like me every day. ... I want to do this because he’s instilled that in me.

Often, being a first-generation student meant taking care of oneself as opposed to modeling behavior for younger siblings or pleasing parents. Sarah was one of the few Scholars whose family had not encouraged her to attend college. However, their lack of support played an integral role in motivating her to attain a higher education. She revealed,

My family... must have thought that I was crazy... to just pack up and leave and think I was going to come down here and make it. My dad had admitted to me he never thought I would make it because most of the other kids don’t. They come back home and he based that off of what he saw from most other kids from my hometown.

Consequently, Sarah admitted that the unsuccessful students returning to her hometown, accompanied by her father’s doubt, only served to make her take college more seriously.

Also exhibiting personal determination, Pamela, Shannon, and Nick noted that the lack of assistance from a parent or a guidance counselor resulted in their feelings of uncertainty as well as their initiative to apply for college and scholarships on their own. Referring to her experience preparing for college and expressing her displeasure with the performance of her high school guidance counselor, Pamela emphasized that being first-generation connoted uncertainty. She had no idea what to do when she began applying for college. Furthermore, she had no one to talk to or ask. She looked for scholarships and progressed through the application process by
herself. She criticized, “I was going through this completely by myself and that includes looking for scholarships. I know if I hadn’t specifically gotten the e-mail for this scholarship [CCS] and specifically gone to the office inquiring, I would never have found out about it.” Because Pamela self-identified as a first-generation student on her application for admission to UA, she received a personal email from Ms. Fuller’s graduate assistant, who notified her of her possible eligibility for the CCS. Ms. Fuller was the University liaison to the Coca-Cola Foundation and worked closely to “flesh out what would become the [CCS] Program--the programmatic pieces.”

Also noting her dissatisfaction with her guidance counselor, Shannon felt as though she was on a “solo journey” in determining not only how she would go to college, but also where she would apply. She described how being first-generation held another layer of meaning for her. As a member of a family with predominantly military careers, Shannon’s decision to attend college was an unfamiliar option:

My entire family pretty much joined the military and anybody who has received any sort of college experience at all has personalized training through the military and not a four-year college degree. . . . My parents had no idea of how to help me to do anything.

Feeling alone in his journey too, Nick described entering into the college experience “blinded” because there was no one to tell him what to expect. The youngest of three, Nick was not only the first in his family to attend college, but also the first in his community. Nick likened his determination to attend college to that of a “trailblazer.”

Whether the Scholars felt a responsibility to self, siblings, parents, extended family, or community, each of the Scholars identified a sense of obligation and duty with their role as a first-generation student. Becky’s comment encapsulated the magnitude of the first-generation status that many of her peers also expressed:

Being a first-generation student means that I’m the first and that I also carry a lot of responsibility with that. I was raised a [Connolly] and this last name came with
something so now this label is coming with something. It means that I not only have to prove it to myself, but to all of my family and to the school, the institution, that this is important.

The distinction of “first-generation student” was not a choice for the Scholars, but one that was assigned the moment they chose to pursue higher education. However, each Scholar did choose to embrace a certain degree of responsibility with the designation. Although weighty in its implication, Becky and her fellow Scholars described the title “first-generation” as comparable to a badge of honor as opposed to a burden. They expressed their determination to succeed because of this distinction, not in spite of it.

Challenges for First-generation Students

In the previous subsection, the meaning of first-generation was, for some Scholars, often associated with a lack of parental support or understanding. As explored in this subsection, not being able to rely upon parents for advice or for understanding was identified by several Scholars as their greatest challenge. A few Scholars claimed to have had either no challenges or minimal challenges, while others expressed that although they had challenges, they did not believe them to be any different from other students. Most of the Scholars, however, noted that financial hardship presented the greatest challenge for first-generation students. Ms. Fuller expressed that she believed first-generation students had unique needs and challenges. She observed a “common thread” described as,

the lack of understanding of how to apply to college for financial aid, just understanding the process, of being very intimidated by the processes, family not understanding, not being on board, not really feeling it is important, you know, being overwhelmed when they get to college, and not feeling like they fit in--being a little bit intimidated or just feel like they don’t belong.
Although each response provided by Caleb was deliberate and intentional, he took a particularly long and thoughtful pause as he expressed concern for providing an “accurate response” to describing his greatest challenge as a first-generation student. Now a senior, Caleb explained that not being able to rely upon his parents for answers was his greatest challenge during freshman year. He shared, “I was so used to going to my parents during high school with anything . . . ‘what do I do about this, can you help me with this?’ But, when I got here, it’s ‘we can’t help you there. You know, we don’t know.’” Consequently, Caleb found himself identifying resources and people who could answer his questions or assist him with problems. Likewise, Sam overcame the challenge of not being able to rely on his mother by figuring out how to do things on his own or relying on others. He elaborated, “I guess having to find somebody to ask questions to and like what classes I should take--I would have to find somebody to ask those kinds of things.” Hope would have liked to ask her parents for advice about how to manage her finances and balance her time between studying and social activities, but she recognized they did not have the experience to draw upon. Hope expressed,

not being able to call my mom to ask her, “how did you do when you had this final” . . . just not being able to have my mom and dad to call and ask about college . . . So I have to ask other people who have been to college or older people that I go to school with.

According to Monica, not understanding “the simple things” that no longer worried her as a senior, posed her greatest challenge as a freshman. She felt most freshmen came to college understanding credit hours, how to create their course schedule, and how to apply for financial aid. She “had no idea.” Echoing the need to understand the simple things, Nick expressed, “it really comes down to the small things as simple as needing a bedspread for your dorm room or needing a shower curtain. It’s a lot of simple things that you really don’t know when you are a first generation scholar.”
Although Caleb, Sam, Hope, Monica, and Nick expressed their greatest challenge was a lack of knowledge, most notably during their freshman year, each referred to their challenges as something in their past. They indicated that although they were uninformed about certain things, they overcame this challenge by identifying individuals or resources to compensate for the deficiency.

As communicated by some of the Scholars, perhaps the most difficult challenge to overcome was the financial challenges. Sarah proposed that a lack of family understanding often leads to a lack of financial support. Unable to depend on her family for any financial support, Sarah worked as a server in hostile and unhealthy work environments, which only compounded the stress of her financial burdens. She disclosed,

I was sexually harassed at three restaurants I worked at and it was where the manager knew I couldn’t leave; he knew I had to have the money and he would give me the best shifts. And I thought I was a strong enough person that I would have turned him in, but I was in the stage where I didn’t know how I would come up with enough money to pay for anything. . . . I couldn’t take 2 weeks to train at another restaurant. He knew that.

Sarah finally stopped trying to prove herself to her family when she realized they would never understand how difficult it was for her to attend college and support herself. Sarah’s greatest challenges were lack of emotional and financial support from her family.

Jennifer, Robert, and Kori expressed quite simply, and with little additional explanation, that financial hardship was their greatest challenge as first-generation students. Although Pamela also stated that the financial burden was the most challenging aspect of being first-generation, she further explained that aside from finances, she believed the experiences for first-generation and non-first-generation students were very similar once on campus:

Apart from, I guess, things that are inherent in being a first generation student themselves--the things that it implies like my parents don’t have a degree. They don’t make the best salaries. I have to do everything completely on my own. Luckily, my dad’s work covers my health insurance, but besides that it’s all me, my cell phone bill,
my apartment rent, my food, everything. Even with the scholarship, I still have to work. So I definitely think that’s the toughest part. And then the application process was kind of tough on a first-generation student but then once you get here, it’s actually not as bad as you think. So once you get here, you kind of fall into the same rhythm as everyone else and even though there are freshmen whose parents went to college, that doesn’t necessarily prepare you for college either. So I definitely think the hardest thing about being a first generation student after you get here is just the financial aspect.

A few Scholars expressed that they had either encountered no challenges or that there were no differences in the obstacles for them and their non-first-generation peers. For instance, Brittney did not consider her challenges as a first-generation student any different from those experienced by any other student. She explained that students whose parents did go to college went so many years ago that they do not have a clear understanding of what college is like for their student. “So is going to college 20 years ago like going to college now? Not really,” Brittney asserted and continued,

So I really don’t think I’m all that different from any other college student. . . . I mean I don’t feel like I’m missing anything. . . . But the fact that I’m the first one to do it--I mean it’s just a bigger sense of pride. I haven’t really done anything that every other student on this campus hasn’t done.

Similarly, David described being challenged to adjust to a new pace of life as most freshmen are challenged. He explained how he is now responsible for his own meals, washing his clothes, and managing his classes. He also described the culture shock he experienced moving from a small town to a campus where he had the opportunity to interact with people of various nationalities and cultures. David shared,

I think my biggest adjustment or fear in coming down here is how am I going to handle all of this. It’s a culture shock--I’ll be honest--I come from a town that is predominantly White; it’s an old fashioned town, and here you can walk across the Quad and see every nationality every which way and all kinds of different people. It was a big culture shock for me. But I never really had any other friends that weren’t White. That was another big adjustment for me which I’ve adjusted to it fine. I enjoy it now. I think the funny thing is that I never go back home now--I stay in Tuscaloosa year round.
Third cohort Scholar, Will, and fourth cohort Scholar, Jonathan, have not encountered any challenges to speak of. Jonathan expressed quite simply and without explanation, “There really isn’t any challenge.” Will reported that the strong support network in place mitigated the challenges, “I have the support of family--they always make sure I am okay--you know having that structure around us with Student Support Services and Ms. Allen and everybody kind of watching over us.”

Role of Family for First-generation Students

Woven into the responses provided by Scholars in the two previous subsections, family played an integral role in how the Scholars defined what first-generation meant as well as the challenges inherent in this role. Although a few Scholars noted that they were unable to rely upon their family for understanding or guidance, most families have been overwhelmingly supportive. Several of the Scholars shared that much of their motivation for attending college was to have the opportunity for a better life than their parents. Every Scholar interviewed stated that a decision was never made about attending college because each of them always knew they would attend. None of the Scholars entertained the thought of not going to college, but a few expressed that there were moments of uncertainty pertaining to how and where.

When speaking of their families’ support, some Scholars noted particular family members--parents, sibling, grandparents--and the specific roles they played. Monica, Shannon, and Trey expressed that, in addition to being extremely proud, their families played significant roles in supporting their education. Specifically, Shannon shared, “My family is extremely proud that I have come to college. . . . They are a huge support factor.” Trey also described his family’s support as “huge.”
Encouragement from their parents was important to Kim, Hope, Jonathan, and Nick. They relied on each of their parents for different types of encouragement and motivation. Kim described her mom as her “silent supporter.” She explained, “She’s not one of those pushy mothers. . . . She has always let me make my own decisions and let me do my own thing. She sort of stands back and watches and if I ever need her, she just waits for me to come.” Conversely, it is Kim’s dad who pushed her toward taking the MCAT for a third time, following two disappointing scores:

I have had aspirations to go to medical school and that’s not happening right now because I did very poorly on my MCAT. So it was to the point that I actually took it twice and did worse the second time. . . . My dad was the one--because it was to the point I was like I don’t want to do math anymore--like this isn’t for me; this isn’t what I’m meant to do and it may still be that way, but it was after two tries I was ready to give up and say I’m ready to do something else because I know I’m going to be able to succeed in whatever I do. And medicine may not be it, but my dad was the one that was like I just feel you need to give it one more shot not to regret trying all the way.

Hope experienced a similar dynamic as Kim with her parents, only the roles for her parents were reversed. Hope’s father was more like the “silent supporter” Kim described. He does not understand college but is a “great listener. I just call him and talk to him,” explained Hope. Her mother, on the other hand, encouraged her when she was too hard on herself. She explained,

If I call them and say “hey I made an A on this test,” she’s like “that’s so great--you are doing really good.” . . . I am so hard on myself. If I make a B on something, I think I could really have made an A- on it. . . . So my mom, especially, is really, really supportive because I get stressed easily because I want to do my best on everything and I want to help everybody and please everybody which I have to stop doing that because I’m really stressed out.

Although Jonathan’s dad did not complete high school, he worked as a butcher for 30 years and he owns a successful business. Jonathan reasoned that if his father could do as well as
he did without an education, he would be able to do much more with an education. Besides, he added, “in my Mom’s book it was nothing but college. So I had no choice.”

Nick’s father worked as a carpenter and when Nick was young, his father would take him to job sites and say, “Okay. I want you to come out and work with me so you can see what it will be like if you don’t go and get a college education.” Nick described working in such cold weather that his hands and feet would be numb. He also recalled his first glimpse of the nice lake homes and well-manicured lawns in the affluent communities where they would sometimes work. His father told him that if he went to college and did well, he would be able to buy one of those houses some day. Nick commented, “I saw the results of not going to college by working with him in the hot sun and cold weather and also I got to see a lifestyle of what will happen if you get an education.”

Grandparents have also played a special role in supporting several of the Scholars. Caleb shared that not only had his parents urged him to go to college and wished for him to do well, but so had his grandparents. Caleb stated that he never considered any options other than college because that is what everyone expected him to do. While Caleb’s dad urged him to get a degree to avoid a 4 a.m. job with heavy physical labor like his, Caleb’s grandfather was especially supportive of his decision to go to college:

He always pushed me towards that mindset of wanting to go and wanting to get something more after I graduated high school. . . . He always said “garbage in, garbage out” . . . which is true. Whatever you put into it is what you are going to get out of it.

Likewise, David and Pamela received emotional support from their grandparents, despite wishes for more frequent visits home. David revealed, “Every day I have a grandparent calling or mama and daddy. . . . I don’t want to let them down. . . .” Although his family enjoyed him coming home for visits, David explained, “They stay on me, too, because they don’t want me coming
Pamela’s grandparents wanted her to come home more often too. She stated, “They didn’t even finish high school and so they would miss me and want me to stay around home and they are always asking me ‘now why do you need to go to college; why can’t you just stay around here.’” Although Pamela’s grandparents did not understand her need for a college education, they supported her pursuit of a degree because it was something that she strongly desired and they wanted her dreams to be fulfilled. Pamela’s parents, on the other hand, understood and supported her decision to pursue a degree because they recognized what their lives have been like without a college education. Describing her parents, Pamela shared, “They do what they can; they give me the emotional support that they can and they make sure I don’t forget how important it is that I graduate.” Pamela wanted an education so that she would have the option to do work that she loved. Very respectfully referring to her parents, Pamela shared,

They worked hard and I respect the work that they did, but you know they would come home and they would complain about their jobs; they didn’t like what they did; and so it’s not so much about money because I don’t care. I could live in a cardboard box as long as I love what I’m doing and I knew the only way I could truly do something that I love was to come and get an education.

Sometimes family support came from a sibling, as opposed to parents and grandparents. Britney, the fifth of six children, had been living with her older brother and his family since the death of her mother, because she had a less than ideal relationship with her father. Britney acknowledged how much her brother had sacrificed over the past 7 years for her to be in college. When asked what her family thought about her going to college, she replied, “They are just over the moon about it. They are more proud of me than I’ve ever seen them be for anything else. . . . They care more about me than they care about themselves.”

Two Scholars, Kori and Sarah, noted that their families were absent from their college experiences. Kori asserted that her family had no role in her being in college. Without
judgment, she recognized that they loved and supported her, but they were limited in what they were able to do for her. In a very matter-of-fact manner, she expressed, “They have come down to visit me a couple of times; they are very proud of me--I know that and that’s the gist of it.”

Sarah’s family was absent from her college experience as well. While her family was more supportive as she approached graduation and they realized she was going to finish, she arrived on campus alone and without her family’s best wishes. With strong-willed resolution, however, she persisted. Holding back tears, Sarah shared how difficult it was to focus on school when there were times when she did not know if she would be able to make it another month:

I didn’t have furniture or anything, and I found a guy I knew would finance me to buy furniture and I worked all summer and paid it off. I’ve never--when I’ve had problems I never had anybody to figure them out--I always had to figure them out on my own. For example, in my first semester down here my bathtub cracked. I was living in a trailer and I called plumbers to fix it--they were like it’s going to be $1,200. I didn’t have $1, 200, so I took a crowbar and took my bathtub out by myself and that’s crazy stuff that 18-year-old girls in college shouldn’t be having to worry about. And I found a guy that knew a little bit about plumbing. We put it in together and I paid him like $200. So I saved $800 when it was done.

Sarah never lived on campus because she determined that by avoiding the cost of a parking permit and a meal plan (required as a part of the freshman residency program), living off-campus would be less expensive. She also depended on rent from roommates who were not always reliable, which caused additional financial strains.

Regardless of what member of the family provided understanding and encouragement, Becky warned that the support is vital. She emphasized the role of family, despite any other support offered to first-generation students:

Our parents’ support is still very important because coming into this--we all came into it blind and now we know something that they don’t know, but we want them to understand. We want them to recognize how much of an honor and an importance it is that we are here and how much of a big deal it is. . . . We still need the approval of our parents more so than some other students may.
**Differences between First-generation and Non-first-generation Students**

In a previous subsection, which described the unique challenges of being first-generation, many of the Scholars noted that two of their greatest challenges were being uninformed and struggling with financial burdens. These same two issues arose once again as some of the Scholars identified them as the differences, sometimes the only differences, between first-generation and non-first-generation students. A few Scholars introduced intrinsic qualities that were unique to first-generation students. Although noting these differences, many of the Scholars did not consider them significant.

The difference between first-generation and non-first-generation students, observed Brittney, is not as great as some people suggest. Brittney stated, “It’s not just me,” but “everyone who comes here is like ‘what did I do!’” She believed that every student who came to college felt overwhelmed. She recognized that there may be first-generation students who developed the mindset that they were at a greater disadvantage, but doing so only served to make their experience more difficult.

After thoughtful consideration, Caleb, like Brittney, stated that he did not suspect a great difference between first-generation and non-first-generation students either. He surmised that both groups “have great expectations to meet.” Non-first-generation students were expected to follow in their parents’ footsteps and go to college. On the other hand, first-generation students don’t “have those footsteps to follow in, but [they] have to make [their] own and [they] are still held to a high expectation . . . because [they] are the first one to make it there.” Caleb suspected there may be more similarities than differences between the two groups.

Monica and Sam agreed that except for the lack of financial support from their parents, there was very little difference between them and their non-first-generation peers. Sam
explained, “A lot of students who aren’t first generation they are kind of a little better off.”

Referring to non-first-generation students, Monica expressed that she felt “a lot of the students were more well off . . . their parents typically make more money.” She noted that although she had not been able to enjoy “outlandish things,” such as spring break in the Bahamas, she was able to participate in the “normal things” and perceived no major disadvantage to being first-generation. Similarly, Pamela remarked that students whose parents attended college seemed to have greater financial capacity. However, she observed that after arriving on campus, there were no differences in the experiences of first-generation and non-first-generation freshmen.

Becky, on the other hand, emphasized that non-first-generation students differed because they benefited from a different level of preparedness. Their families had contacts and access to information and resources that families of first-generation students did not:

I’ve heard a lot of students say their parents registered them for college, applied them for college, and my jaw drops because my parents don’t even know where to go to get an application. Also students whose parents went here, they can call their parents and ask them where is this or when is the best time to sign up for this as well as students who have brothers and sisters that went here or go here--that’s a big difference because they come in with a set group of friends already planned for them; they have contacts; they have information and resources that first generation students don’t.

Similarly, Shannon, Will, and Nick expressed that non-first-generation students have a better idea of what to expect and a better idea of the opportunities available to them. “They have the upper hand in knowing what is going,” remarked Shannon. She continued,

When I decided to come to The University of Alabama, all I had to go on was the website and there is like 12 million things to do on this campus and you just can’t stay in front of a computer and read all of those.

Will agreed that students whose parents went to college showed their children “the ropes” and provided them with “a heads up” about what to expect. “It’s a lot of small things,” according to Nick, “that play into the difference of being a first-generation Scholar.” Using the FAFSA
application process as an example, Nick explained that first-generation students simply do not understand the processes nor do they have someone at their side guiding them through the various steps along the way.

Dr. Lawrence recognized that first-generation students often came with “different expectations, different confidence levels” and a lack of knowledge about how to “navigate the system” versus non-first-generation students. She perceived the CCS Program as an opportunity for “leveling the playing field.” Dr. Lawrence clarified that she did not believe non-first-generation students are completely informed, just more aware “of opportunities and there are connections that enable them to move through the experience a little more smoothly.”

While some Scholars identified access to information and a level of preparedness were what separated the non-first-generation students from the first-generation students, others recognized that it was something intrinsic that made them different from their counterparts. Drive, motivation, pride, and gratitude were the qualities that many of the Scholars identified as distinctive characteristics of first-generation students. Internal “drive” was what distinguished first-generation students like Robert from his non-first-generation peers. He referred to fellow students who strived only to achieve the minimum because they knew they would simply return home to money and a job with the family business. Not having such an option, he expressed, “I am trying to wring everything out of this college I can get.” Similarly, Pamela commented that first-generation students were often more motivated because they understood “the stakes.” She explained, “We have lived with the stakes our whole lives. I have never met more motivated and determined people than the others who have this scholarship with me because we have something to fight for.”
Kori knew she was receiving $20,000 and because she recognized the great impact that gift would have, she stated, “they could tell me I have to scrub toilets with a toothbrush for four years and I was going to do it.” Kori described herself as a “warrior” who understood hard work and exhibited pride in knowing that she could take care of herself:

I don’t want to generalize because I know everyone is not like this, but I work hard. I don’t have a choice but to work. A lot of people here don’t go to class; don’t go to--first of all don’t go to class. They don’t even have a job to blame it on and still swear they have the hardest life--“Oh no, what am I going to do?” I think I’m a warrior--I can’t even lie--I am--I’m a trooper. I’m blessed to have the life that I’ve had because it has made me a trooper. I feel like these kids when mom and dad die they are going to be like, “what do I do?” Whereas me and people like me are going to be, “I’ve got this; I’ve been doing this forever.” I have heard people complaining about you didn’t buy me the right color BMW. Really?

According to David and Carter, first-generation students exhibited a different sense of pride. Carter explained that first-generation students grew up differently and for them, attending college is a “once in a life time opportunity.” Fellow Scholar, David, asserted that first-generation students appreciated the opportunity more. He expressed being thankful every day that he is in college and how his level of gratitude is different from that of non-first-generation students:

They probably have always known wherever I want to go and whatever I want to do, I’ll be able to do it. They kind of--I wouldn’t say take it for granted, but they have a different view of this whole situation. . . . It’s just I think people like me--we appreciate it a whole lot.

Despite the 3 years of tough financial struggles, a resilient Sarah disclosed how grateful she was for the opportunity to attend college. Stressing how serious she has been about college, she recalled how nervous and worried she would get before taking tests and she would remind herself,

I’m so blessed just to be here and just being so eternally grateful for the opportunity just to be on campus and I would think about people back home who tried and didn’t make it
and I think I could be in their position. And so I feel like I’m more grateful, more proud, and I think it makes me take college more seriously than other students.

Summary

This section examined the Scholars’ perceptions of their first-generation student status and what it meant to them to be the first in their family to attend college. The Scholars shared their sense of responsibility to their siblings, their parents, their community, and to themselves. While most of the Scholars received support and encouragement from their families, they also described how challenging it was for them to manage their finances as well as learn to navigate many university processes. Finally, if the Scholars could identify any differences between themselves and their non-first-generation peers, it was that their peers were more likely to have access to resources and know what to expect of college. The Scholars also believed that they are different because they possessed a unique intrinsic drive and motivation.

Role of Academic Integration in the First-generation Student Experience

According to Tinto’s (1975) model, academic integration is measured by academic performance, interaction with faculty, and participation in intellectual groups. Academic integration is comprised of structural and normative components where structural integration refers to the degree in which students comply with institutional policies and expectations. Grades serve as a measurement of academic performance indicating students’ ability to meet institutional standards. Academic experiences such as interaction with faculty also impact a student’s integration. In some instances, faculty interaction is characterized as social integration. For the purpose of this data analysis, faculty interaction in the classroom is categorized as
academic integration and faculty interaction outside the classroom is classified as social integration, which will be addressed in the following section.

The following subsections examine the Scholars interactions with faculty inside the classroom and how they valued their relationships with faculty. Many of the Scholars expressed a desire for smaller classrooms, which would promote greater levels of interaction. They also revealed how important it was for their professors to be passionate about teaching, as well as know them by name. Some Scholars demonstrated personal initiative and classroom participation in an effort to develop positive relationships with their professors. Supportive faculty advisors, as well as academic preparedness upon entering college, were vital to positive academic experiences for the Scholars.

A shared academic experience was implemented as part of the CCS Program. Each cohort in the CCS Program participated in BCE 101, a course designed to facilitate the “academic and social integration of first-year UA students . . .” by introducing them to resources and activities at UA (Appendix D). The Scholars claimed to receive only minimal benefit academically from this course, while many of them expressed social benefits. As such, the BCE 101 course is discussed in the social integration section of this chapter.

Interaction with Faculty

Many of the Scholars valued developing positive relationships with and having access to their professors. Several Scholars specifically mentioned how meaningful it was when their professors knew them by name. Consequently, smaller classrooms were often preferred by the Scholars as those were more conducive to personal interaction with their professors. No matter the context, however, the Scholars explained that although most of their experiences had been
positive, they desired a more personal connection with faculty. A few of the Scholars credited personal initiative and participation in the classroom as their strategies for developing positive relationships with professors.

Trey found interacting with college professors to be easier than he expected. He compared it to his experiences as a high school student where “everything is real small and you always have a teacher to ask and I thought college was going to be completely different.” While a few of his college classes were so large that it was difficult to capture his professor’s attention, Trey found that if the professors were unable to address his concerns during class, they were generally available to assist him following class. Similarly, Jennifer shared that even though the professors she had for her larger classes were accommodating when she wanted to talk to them, “they are more than willing to come to you like after class or you can go to their office hours.” The smaller classrooms, however, afforded her more “individualized attention” where help was often provided in class.

Caleb stated his preference for classrooms with 25-30 students as opposed to some of the large lecture classes he had during his freshman and sophomore years. Making connections with his professors and their accessibility was important to Caleb. He commented,

So knowing, having that mindset that somebody knows me, I think that helps you do better because there’s more of a chance of a connection between you and the professor. And now that I am taking all of my upper level courses, I love it because all of my teachers, they all know my name. And at that level, I think they realize where you are at, what you are about to finish up and they are very accessible, very willing to help out.

The passion exhibited by her professors, as opposed to class size, was more important to Brittney. Her 8 a.m. lecture class with 200 students had “the makings to be just awful.” Despite the class time and the number of students, she explained how much she enjoyed the class because the professor made it fun. The course was one that demanded she study a great deal, but
she learned valuable study skills as a result. On the other hand, she was taking another course that had only 30 students and she stated,

It has the makings to be an awesome class . . . to be a discussion class and the teacher--she is just not into it. . . . I’m sure if you needed help, she would help you but she just isn’t passionate about what she’s teaching and just kind of like I have to be here telling this stuff--the same stuff I told last semester and so it’s a different energy. I dread that class.

Like Brittney, Kori found it frustrating when her professors were not enthusiastic about teaching her classes. She criticized, “some of these professors do this because it’s a job--not because they want to teach. . . . It’s honestly like they don’t know that part of their job title is teach. They are not very personable.”

Several Scholars valued their professors being “personable”--a label often reserved for the professors who knew them by name. Transitioning from his small high school classes where every teacher knew his name to large college classes where only his English professor knew him by name, was an adjustment for Sam. He described his college classes as big and impersonal: “you go in; they teach; we listen; and we leave. There may be a few e-mails here and there, but it’s strictly business. . . .”

Jonathan’s observations were not unlike Kori’s and Sam’s. He attended classes and took notes. If he had questions, he asked them and then he left. Jonathan admitted having difficulty paying attention during the lecture style courses because of the length of the classes and he expressed a desire for more opportunities to have one-on-one interaction with faculty in his math class, in particular. He felt that his math class was more of a “self-learned” course unlike the higher divisions where the professor spends more time teaching. Jonathan explained, “When it comes to 100, 112, 115, it’s like you go to class, you do your work, if you have questions, you
ask, but you really don’t have anybody just showing you how to do it. And I don’t think that’s fair.”

Interacting with faculty, according to Pamela, “really depends on the department. I’m learning very quickly after this semester of philosophy that the business world and the philosophy world are completely different. . . . ” Pamela noted that perhaps it is because the philosophy department is so small, but her professors remember her name and greet her in the hallways. Although she has had good relationships with her economics professors, once those classes ended so did the relationships.

Taking a less passive approach, a couple of the Scholars revealed that personal initiative was their strategy for successfully developing relationships with faculty. For instance, David emphasized attending class and purposely making an introduction to his professor. He claimed that many students underestimate the significance of simply introducing themselves to a professor. Furthermore, he urged talking to a professor even when there is no problem or question. David made it a personal rule to meet his professors each semester. He perceived the professors as eager to help and he advised,

If nothing else, keep e-mail contact with them. They will be there to help you. I mean stuff comes up--things happen where you can’t get stuff turned in and if a professor wants to help you--and they love for students--I think they love for students to come in and talk to them.

David believed that the difference in receiving the one point he might need in a class could be determined by the relationship he has or has not developed with his professor. He considered the relationship with his professor a vital component to his success as a student. He did not overlook the role of teaching assistants and encouraged fostering a relationship with them as well.

Also recognizing the benefits of developing relationships with her professors, Hope recommended,
You just have to get to know your teachers. They will help you. I talked to my teacher and he said if you ever need any extra help, just let me know. If you don’t ever raise your hand in class; if you don’t ever talk to your teacher outside of class, they’re not going to know who you are.

Although demonstrating personal initiative worked for David and Hope, not all of the Scholars were so bold. Making deliberate efforts to participate in the classroom was the strategy utilized by Robert, Will, and Monica. Both Robert and Will described their interactions with faculty from the perspective of serving as “helpers.” They took on roles to support the efforts of their professors. For instance, always sitting near the front of the classroom, Robert shared that he was the student who raised his hand to help start class discussion. He added that he made an effort to avoid sleeping, talking, or texting while in class and, he added, that not texting is extremely difficult. Robert tried to contribute positively. He remarked,

I just try to keep the classroom exciting for [my professors] and everybody because I know they love what they do and I know for most students, if it’s not their major, it’s boring to them. I think [my professors] really appreciate that at the end of the day.

Similarly, Will tried to participate and ask questions when his professors attempted to engage the class. He described,

Professors will try to engage us in conversations and discussions, and that’s my kind of classes--just asking a simple question like what goes here; what’s the solution--I would try to participate that way by answering when I felt like I knew the answer. And that has helped me get recognized by my professors.

In his larger classes, Will also made a point to know the teaching assistant.

On one end of the spectrum are the Scholars who initiated introductions and scheduled meetings with professors in an effort to develop relationships and create opportunities for interaction. On the other end of the spectrum are Scholars like Monica and Shannon. Neither of them desired or expressed a need to interact with faculty. Monica shared that she would sometimes answer questions in class and she liked to get involved in class discussions. But, she
did not contact her professors outside of class unless they requested that she do so. Similarly, with the exception of one professor who initiated communication with Shannon after learning that they were from the same hometown, Shannon did not talk with her professors either. Most of her classes were “huge, lecture hall classes,” which had teaching assistants. Shannon explained that if she had a problem or needed assistance, she would speak with the teaching assistant.

**Faculty Advising**

While the Scholars valued a personal connection with faculty in general, several of the Scholars expressed that having a personal connection with their faculty advisor was vital. For example, Becky, a self-professed outspoken and friendly person, did not utilize faculty office hours because she had not experienced difficulty in building relationships with her professors in the classroom. However, she developed a close relationship with the faculty advisor she selected from among her freshman year professors. She credited her advisor with encouraging her to continue in her particular major. Becky’s advisor also recognized that she was a first-generation student and helped her understand what she referred to as the “tween stage”--how she wears a different “hat” at home versus the “hat” she wears at school. Becky remarked on the kinds of topics she discussed with her advisor:

 Mostly class or there have been times where I’ve just felt very overwhelmed or when I was trying to make a decision on what minor to pick, but mostly things about school. But it doesn’t necessarily have to be about class.

Although most of the discussions between Becky and her advisor addressed issues related to academics, Becky was comfortable sharing with her advisor when she felt overwhelmed. Becky
also had classes from her advisor’s husband and, consequently, felt that she had developed a personal relationship with the couple.

Despite struggling with the MCAT, Kim expressed to her faculty advisor her unrelenting desire to attend medical school. Offering the advice she needed, Kim’s advisor stressed that she was taking on too much and if medical school was her dream, he wanted her to pursue it, but doing so meant letting go of some other things. Kim admitted that she still takes on too much, but she commended the honest and direct advice she received from her advisor stating, “He is just straight up with you, which is definitely what I need. I don’t need people trying to talk around what I need to do.”

A trusting relationship with an advisor may not always prove to be beneficial to a student. Referring to the academic advisors within his college, Nick claimed that their lack of understanding of students’ particular needs may result in sending “students off on the wrong path.” He shared that one of his friends from high school, also a first-generation student but not in the CCS program, was advised to take 18 hours his first semester. Unfamiliar with college and not knowing what to expect, Nick’s friend unquestioningly relied on his advisor’s instruction. The lack of a personal relationship or connection with faculty, Nick explained, can be detrimental. He emphasized the importance of the CCS because of the support provided through the Program as well as the connection to mentors and resources in Student Support Services (SSS). He shared that although “you can only go so far in someone’s personal life . . . it really helps if you can get that individual who can really tap into someone’s personal capabilities and needs, wants, and aspirations. . . . I think that is one of the big things--being personal.”
**Grades and GPA**

Students’ grades are often examined and used as an objective measure for determining academic integration. Students in the CCS Program were required to maintain a 2.8 GPA their freshman year and a 3.0 GPA each following year. According to Ms. Barbara Allen, the coordinator for the CCS Program, “The only way they can be dropped from this Program is academics.” She shared that one student was dropped from the CCS Program because he failed to make his 3.0 and he “was involved in some things at the University that really got him in academic difficulty. So he was dropped.” Ms. Lori Fuller, UA liaison to the Coca-Cola Foundation, disclosed that they typically lose one or two Scholars per cohort. She remarked on their efforts to support the success of the Scholars in the Program:

> We document everything we do with them and there has been at least probably 20 attempts to salvage this opportunity for them. But at some point--the vast majority of the students just have not really owned the opportunity is how I would say it to be honest.

Despite her 4.0 college GPA, Kim noted that she was never at the top in any of her classes. She explained, “It’s just very challenging to not be on the top because when you come from a smaller town and you are at the top and then you come to a bigger university, it’s just not going to be that way.” Rarely earning higher than a B on her tests, Kim relied on her homework and class participation to maintain an A average. The difficulty she experienced taking tests not only affected her in the classroom, but had a negative impact as she struggled to score well on the MCAT.

Shannon credited pressure from the CCS Program with motivating her to earn better grades. She expressed,

> Coke puts a lot of pressure on us . . . not in a negative way at all. . . . As a matter of fact, a lot of times they tell us do what’s best for your GPA. If you need to drop a class, drop the class. You can make up for it later. But they watch our grades like crazy.
Shannon predicted that she would have multiple emails in her in-box tomorrow because an unimpressive mid-term grade just posted. She predicted that she would be asked how she is doing, if she needed a tutor, as well as reminded to pull her grade up. Although Trey found the GPA requirement for the CCS to be stressful, like Shannon, he also used it as a motivator. He did not produce the 3.5 GPA his fall semester that he had planned, but he did not fall short of the requirement. He sees the requirement as a goal and “something to push for.”

Sam believed that the 3.0 GPA requirement would “be a little tight,” especially for his major in engineering. Although he admits the requirement serves as a motivator, he worries “all the time” that he will struggle more after his freshman year.

I am going to have to keep my grades up and I’m always . . . on-line using the GPA calculator trying to see what I can possibly get in certain classes to keep that 3.0. I think that GPA is always in my head because I know when that hits the money is gone.

Academic Preparedness

The rigor of a student’s high school curriculum can contribute to or hinder academic success in college. Assessing a student’s academic performance in college is one of the ways that academic integration is gauged. The Scholars offered varied accounts of how well their high schools prepared them for college. Of greatest benefit to the Scholars were opportunities to take AP courses and participate in dual enrollment courses while in high school.

Kim definitely believed that high school prepared her for college. She remarked, “I really owe a lot to my high school and the people there.” She took every AP course that she could in high school, not just for the college credit, but to begin learning at a college level. Kim entered college with 22 hours of credit. Will also took advantage of AP courses. He took AP Calculus his senior year of high school and then Calculus I his first semester of college. “I
placed into it at the beginning and it was basically the same thing [as high school],” he explained. “Our [high school] teachers did a great job of preparing us because I made a low B in her class and I came in [to college] and made an A+. I know having it again helped.”

Brittney attended “an awesome high school” where she took honors classes, but only a few AP classes. She professed that she was not an “overachiever,” and because she found it easy to make good grades in high school she did not study often. She was thankful, however, that she participated in dual enrollment courses: “if I hadn’t taken those classes my senior year and been forced to learn how to study, [college] would have been a lot more difficult.”

Monica argued that it would have been helpful to have entered college with credit hours because the CCS is only available for 4 years. Entering with credit hours would have allowed her an opportunity to take more classes during college. Although noting that her high school did the best they could with the resources they had, Monica felt that she was at a disadvantage entering college alongside students who had already earned college credit.

The honors and dual enrollment courses that Hope took were helpful in providing her with a better understanding of college courses and expectations, but as far as her high school classes preparing her for college, she stated “no, not at all.” She explained that she only wrote one research paper in high school and was ill-prepared for writing a research paper in college. Consequently, Hope sought assistance from the writing center on campus. Pamela stressed that her high school definitely did not prepare her for college either. “I honestly thought my first semester of college that I was just dumb because there was so much that I had never learned.” She expressed that she “felt stupid” in the Calculus class she took for her math minor because she did not have Calculus in high school like many of her classmates. Like Hope, Pamela was
not prepared to write a paper in college. “I’d never even had to write a real paper before I came to college.” Pamela explained that in high school,

If you can spell your name right and if you don’t make any blaring grammatical mistakes, you are going to get at least a B. You are probably going to get an A. And then I came to college I wrote my first paper and I thought I did a good job on it and it came back and it was a C and I just didn’t know what to think or what to do.

Robert also learned how to write a paper in college because he knew little more than how to develop a thesis statement. Furthermore, having always excelled in math, Robert was surprised to begin college in Math 100. Despite being unprepared in these areas, he is the only Scholar who addressed being prepared for the social aspects of college. Robert credited his high school for teaching him how to “adjust to new things and deal with problems.”

Unlike Hope, Pamela, and Robert, Nick’s high school prepared him well for math and English. However, he took the initiative to teach himself chemistry and computer science. “My GPA may be a little lower if I only depended on my high school education,” commented Nick. “If I never had the initiative to actually learn things myself and teach myself things, it might be a different story.”

Finally, Sarah and David expressed their disappointment in their high school experiences. David described how his high school curriculum was not very rigorous, while Sarah shared being dismayed that her teachers had not been more encouraging. High school is “a joke compared to college,” David stated and further defended his argument:

It’s just a complete 180. In high school if you can just show up, you can make a B in a class. If you can show a little bit of effort, you can make an A in a class. It’s not like that in college where you have to study and you have to know your stuff and you have to be organized.

The mentality of her high school teachers contributed to Sarah’s apprehension and feelings of being ill-prepared for college. She expressed,
They didn’t expect us to do anything and I feel like they probably didn’t expect me to do anything with my life—maybe that’s kind of been one of the things that has driven me so hard—when people don’t expect you to succeed, it makes you want to try harder to be successful. . . . I feel a lot more kids I graduated with could have made it if they would just have known they could have made it.

Summary

Several of the Scholars credited AP courses and dual enrollment opportunities with exposing them to some of the expectations of college. However, many of the Scholars indicated that they were unprepared for the academic rigor of college, especially in the areas of math and writing. This lack of preparation may explain why many of the Scholars desired stronger personal connections with their faculty, especially during the freshman year. Scholars specifically cited the positive impact of their professors knowing them by name.

Role of Social Integration in the First-generation Student Experience

According to Tinto’s (1975) model, social integration occurred when students interacted among faculty and peers during nonacademic activities. Additional research underscored that interaction with faculty, staff, and other students was one of the strongest predictors of student persistence (Astin, 1997; Kuh et al., 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1993). The following section describes how developing friendships, engaging in social activities, and interacting with faculty and mentors, has contributed to the social integration of the Scholars.

Development of Friendships and Campus Involvement

Alabama Action is a service-learning experience for incoming freshmen who participate in the University Honors Program. Participants move onto campus 1 week before classes to
participate in service projects such as painting murals, building classrooms, and mentoring at local underprivileged schools. Alabama Action was implemented with the entry of cohort two for the purpose of providing a common experience for the Scholars. Ms. Fuller, University liaison to Coca-Cola Foundation, explained the implementation of the service program for the CCS Program:

We are required per the Foundation to provide some type of supplemental orientation for the Coca-Cola First Generation Scholars and so we were able to set up an arrangement with the Honors College to let our twelve freshmen every year participate in Alabama Action as participants. And the registration fee and other things are covered by the grant. . . . We do that and then the kids just loved it and a lot of times a handful of them the next year will then be volunteers...it’s an interesting experience for them, being with Honors College kids. I mean some of our students are Honors College eligible coming in, but the majority join Honors College later just due to not having as high an ACT as needed to get in. . . . They do service, they go to an elementary school and do a service project and eat lunch with the kids and get to know them. It is typically a high poverty elementary school and they learn about poverty and have speakers. So it is interesting for them to see it from a different point of view and many of them have experienced it themselves. And it is a real bonding experience for them.

Participating in Alabama Action was overwhelmingly noted as a positive experience and one that served as a catalyst for introducing many of the Scholars to campus and new friends. Because Alabama Action was not implemented as part of the CCS Program until cohort two, cohort one Scholars often credited living in the residence halls with providing their first interactions with individuals who became their closest friends. The cohort itself provided a context for many Scholars to develop friendships, especially among cohort three. Finally, Facebook was credited with helping two of the Scholars meet friends.

Many of the Scholars noted that participating in Alabama Action provided them with not only an introduction to campus life, but also an introduction to many of the individuals who would become their closest friends. Even though Kori stated that she did not “have time for a lot of people” and that her boyfriend of 4 years was truly her best friend, she explained that her two
“best friends on campus” were people she met through Alabama Action. Will described the experience as the “main jumpstart of meeting people” because the program brought about 100 freshmen together who were with one another “every second of the day for 7 straight days.” Will became close friends with his student leader who continues to be one of his closest friends. Will also explained that although community service has always been important to him, his perspective of service changed during Alabama Action:

I got a different spin on it and we got to work with children in schools and I want to say that I kind of saw myself in that. I knew people that didn’t have to help me for twelve or thirteen years while I was in school—even in high school. I felt that was the least I could do is give back. . . . I actually became a student leader . . . and this will be my third year in the program.

Initially Brittney was quite unhappy about reporting to campus before the start of classes and being “encouraged” to participate in Alabama Action. She had planned to work and spend her final days at home among family and close friends. She did not expect the CCS Program to be so involving. She thought she would receive the scholarship money and that would be it. Brittney described how she felt when her family and best friend drove away from campus 15 minutes before she reported to her first Alabama Action lecture:

So I’m standing in the parking lot and they are driving away and I’m not even a crier—and I was just like please come back. I went directly to Shelby Hall and I was just feeling all those emotions, but I look back and they were totally normal. But I was just like I am the only person in the world that feels like this.

Then, Brittney explained how participating in Alabama Action united her with a group of people, two of whom remain her best friends. She shared memories of her first day:

I really had not met anyone that day. In fact I met people that were getting on my nerves. . . . I just wanted to go home—forget college. . . . I guess I’ll sit down at an empty table. . . . I did and people sat down around me and being the person I am I just struck up a conversation and the girl that sat across from me is my best friend and the girl that sat to her right is a Coke Scholar too . . . and she is one of my best friends as well. I loved the girls that were at the table and am still friends with them. We just struck that up and then it grew after introducing each other to other people so by the time classes started, we had
this little group of people and as I went to classes, I was so thankful for that because sitting in class is really not the opportune time to make friends. . . . I have that group of friends and in fact Alabama Action united us.

Had it not been for Alabama Action, Sarah explained, “All of these great things that have happened for me would not have happened. . . . I really feel very fortunate that it was my introduction to college--amazing, intelligent kids civically engaged and that care.” One of Sarah’s greatest accomplishments was founding the Hispanic Jumpstart Program with two fellow UA students, one of whom she met during Alabama Action. The program assists Hispanic preschool students with learning English as their second language and it prepares them for the academic and cultural challenges of school. The investment that the Coca-Cola Foundation made in Sarah as a first-generation student inspired her to invest in preschool students in the Tuscaloosa community. Regarding the Program’s importance, Sarah shared the following:

I feel like the Coca-Cola Foundation took a chance on me. They invested money in me when first generation students aren’t always as successful statistically, but they still invested in me and that’s the same way it is with the Hispanics students that I help and it makes me feel like I deserve what I’ve gotten by helping them and investing in their lives even though they also have struggles to overcome. So that’s been great for me just because I guess it made me feel more deserving of being here.

Sarah’s devotion to serving others is also demonstrated by her lifetime membership in UA’s prestigious Blackburn Institute, an organization committed to developing a network of leaders dedicated to improving the life of Alabama citizens. Sarah recognized the significance of participating in programs like Alabama Action and the Blackburn Institute because of the network of people involved. She stressed the importance of students developing a network and finding an appropriate “friend circle.” Sarah shared the unfortunate experience of one of her friends who had come to Tuscaloosa with her:

One of my friends that came down and got into the whole drugs friend circle, she failed out the first semester at Shelton [community college] when she was going to be premed, extremely intelligent, and I feel like making the right friends helps so much because those
kids [Alabama Action] were 32 ACT kids and then I had them in classes and made them my study buddies. So it’s very beneficial. I think the whole Alabama Action thing was just wonderful and I would suggest that for any first generation program that there could be some kind of introduction to college through something like that. Get them around good kids that have it together--that have the family structure.

Until she began studying for the LSAT, Sarah also played women’s rugby. She enjoyed the team atmosphere and an environment that allowed her to alleviate stress. Each of these activities provided Sarah with a “family structure” and network, which were particularly important because she received no support from her own family.

Because Alabama Action was not implemented as part of the CCS Program until cohort two, members of cohort one developed friendships in alternate ways. Many of the cohort one Scholars, and some members of other cohorts as well, shared how they developed friendships in the residence halls. Caleb, a senior and Scholar from the first cohort, said that his roommate from freshman year is “still my roommate right now and one of my closest friends.” After meeting other residents who lived on his floor, Caleb attended a few fraternity parties and considered pledging. Ultimately he chose not to pledge a fraternity, but explained that he met people though that process. Caleb added that he also spent much of his time during his freshman year with people he met during Wednesday night church services.

Although a Scholar in cohort two, Becky replaced a Scholar who was dismissed after failing to meet expectations of the Program. Consequently, Becky did not have the opportunity to participate in Alabama Action or the BCE 101 course with her fellow Scholars. She credited living in a residential community with helping her to develop friendships. A “falling out” with her high school best friend during the summer before college, resulted in Becky going “potluck” for her roommate selection. Now a junior, Becky shared, “I still have two of the same roommates that I had freshman year.” As she reflected on her freshman year, Becky wished she
had spent more time on campus as opposed to returning home most weekends. Becky commented,

I loved my roommates, but I loved my boyfriend more and I’m glad we are still together, but at the same time I think there are a lot of memories I could have made if I had stayed on campus. And I would have done better in astronomy.

Participating in a living-learning community provided the opportunity for Pamela, from cohort one, to meet people and make friends during her freshman year. Doing so automatically placed her with a roommate, and she lived with and attended classes with the same students each day. Additionally, Pamela studied a foreign language that placed her in a small class with only 16 other students with whom she became very close. She also served as a conversation partner to international students studying English and she spent a year studying abroad.

Jennifer from cohort two, as well as Shannon and Robert from cohort three, developed friendships with fellow Scholars. Laughingly admitting that she did not “have much of a social scene,” Jennifer succinctly and simply stated that she met people through the CCS Program and in her classes and study groups. Shannon first developed friendships with those in her cohort who, as a group, “instantly clicked.” Because they were such a close group, Scholars in her cohort introduced their friends to one another and they began making friends through one another’s friends. Building upon friendships from various circles worked for Robert as well. His circle extended beyond CCS to include friends he met through Bama Blast (an activity for new students during the Week of Welcome that introduces them to campus traditions) and participating in sports at the student recreation center. He explained that his social circle continued to grow as the friends he made in each program or activity introduced him into their circle. Unfortunately, Monica, a Scholar from cohort one, did not make friends until her boyfriend joined a fraternity and she became friends with the girlfriends of his fraternity
brothers. She described herself as “shy and withdrawn” and said that making friends was a “long, drawn out process.”

Many of the Scholars have been engaged in a variety of additional activities, which they simply listed as intramural sports, social events and community service with sororities or fraternities, honor societies, and student government. Two Scholars specifically cited Facebook as a useful tool in helping them connect with people and develop friendships. Facebook helped Sam, a cohort four Scholar, connect with people the summer before attending UA. There were approximately 25 students from his high school who attended UA and Facebook helped him connect with many of them, even if he did not know them when he was in high school. Although she cited making friends among her cohort and from Alabama Action, Hope stated that Facebook had been a useful tool for meeting people too. She even met her boyfriend on Facebook.

BCE 101 Course

None of the Scholars identified the BCE 101 freshman seminar course as particularly helpful in providing academic support. They were able to list a few topics from the course that aided them in navigating campus such as what classes to take and how to register for them, how to pick a major, and how to resolve a problem with a professor. Shannon, Robert, Brittney, and Monica specifically mentioned that one of the most important things they learned in the course was how to calculate their GPA. Shannon shared that they learned “what that extra 30 minutes of studying would do that separated a B- from a B and how that can greatly impact your GPA.”

A couple of the Scholars mentioned that learning about parking on campus was helpful as well as the general tips for managing life on campus. Jonathan appreciated learning about the
“shortcuts” for navigating his way around campus. Likewise, David shared that they discussed everything from where to find a particular building on campus, the best time to eat at the student union, and which fork to use at a formal dinner. He further explained,

> It helped me out a lot--just letting me know--really if I had a question, I knew I could ask it in this class and they would have an answer for me and they would provide me with other opportunities with speakers and contacts.

Guest speakers invited to address the Scholars during their BCE 101 class included the university president, campus police officers, and staff from the student recreation center. They introduced a variety of departments, programs, and resources available to the Scholars as well as ways they may get involved. David enjoyed meeting people who were invited to speak to his class, especially the president. He recognized that other students did not have the opportunities or access to people like they did. David commented about the class:

> We had a place for us in a whole semester and we got a grade for it. Also, it helped me get to know my fellow scholars better because it was just us in there and two days a week. That was a big deal. I’m not sitting here saying that I hang out with every Scholar all the time every weekend, but we know each other, we keep in contact, if we are ever in classes together, we help each other out. It really helped us get to know each other; we are kind of a group.

While BCE 101 helped lay out a plan for how to be successful at UA, Kim noted that she was already on track academically and felt that she needed minimal guidance in this area. Socially, however, she enjoyed the camaraderie with her cohort that the course encouraged. She commented,

> It is really important to have that connection with each person because we are so different but yet similar in this one aspect of being a first generation college student. . . . Why be a part of something so wonderful as the Coca-Cola First Generation Scholarship and not even know these other people that have gotten in?

Caleb noted that the course was the “easiest two hours of credit” he had earned. He found it relaxing to be among 11 other first-generation students who were having similar
experiences and that they could share what was going on with them. He noted that they rarely see one another now, but they got to know each other enough during their first semester that the experience “made a difference.” Other than the parking rules and general information for navigating campus, Kori did not recall much about the topics they discussed in the class. She did not rely upon the course for academic support; however, she remarked, “It was a chill class where we could go, ask any question you needed to, get any information that you needed as long as you ask, and it was a comforting class to go to.” Brittney looked forward to the BCE 101 class and missed not getting together with her cohort. She described the class as “lax” because it was one that focused on how she and the other students in the cohort were feeling and doing.

The course was helpful to Pamela because it provided her an opportunity to get to know other students. “But it was definitely good to at least--you come here as a freshman, you don’t know anyone--it was at least good to say that you knew some people on campus.” Carter and Hope agreed that the course helped them ease into the college process and make friends among their cohort. Hope stated,

Well I liked it because we were all together. It’s the only time we were ever really all together at one time every week. Now I don’t really see them that much because we’re all busy working. But it helped.

Monica, a member of the first cohort, shared that she and several others in her cohort had wished for a class like BCE every semester so that they would have more time to spend together. She said that they are all so busy that they rarely see one another anymore. Jonathan, a fourth cohort member, shared a similar sentiment stating that he and his cohort peers wished the course was available all 4 years because they saw the benefit of being together.

According to Robert, the course was especially effective in bonding members of cohort three. Their cohort would attend the BCE class and then afterwards, 8 or 10 of them would go to
the campus dining hall to have lunch together. Will is in the same cohort with Robert and noted how well their cohort bonded and that they had been recognized as the cohort that bonded best. He explained that many of them tried to schedule their classes with one another. “We were kind of close even before the class, but we came together in that class and we still--I know I try to schedule--we all try to schedule classes with each other when we can.”

Sarah commented that the course could have been academically supportive with a different approach, but she felt that the social support was beneficial. She knew she had the Student Support Services (SSS) and academic tutors to rely upon for the academic support. She appreciated the course and explained,

I got to know my cohort better and develop relationships with them and I do believe being successful in college depends a lot on the relationships that you have here and feeling like you have a community here especially for someone like myself.

Although Becky applied and interviewed for the Coca-Cola Scholarship, she was not among the 12 Scholars selected for cohort two. Nevertheless, she was awarded a scholarship designated for first-generation students, which provided some financial assistance during her freshman year and an end-of-the-year email reporting the status of her academic progress. At the beginning of her sophomore year, Becky was invited to join cohort two when one of the original Scholars failed to meet the criteria established for participating in the CCS Program. She did not expect the CCS Program to be very different from the experience she had with her other scholarship. However, Becky was surprised at the level of involvement expected. She stated,

Sometimes it’s been an inconvenience just because they are so involved, but it has really benefited me in the end just because I feel like I’m building my resume with volunteer work and campus involvement as well as having friends and contacts outside of the classroom.

Unfortunately, Becky described gatherings with the cohort she has joined as “sad and awkward” because they already knew one another and had established relationships. Although she did not
feel bonded with her cohort, she did feel that she bonded with the advisors and mentors associated with the CCS Program.

Nick, on the other hand, was another student who was invited to join the CCS Program to replace an original Scholar who was unable to continue. Completing his first semester in the CCS Program, Nick commented,

Socially, I have actually met a lot of the people out of the cohort and I see they are really active people and a lot of them actually have some of the same goals and aspirations that I have in being successful. And with most of the people that I actually know or met and talked to, I see they carried the same type of personal attitude of being outspoken and going out and not being afraid to start a conversation and being very nice people. They accepted me in as one of their fellow cohort members. Socially, I think, I can say that I received a warm welcome from them.

Faculty Interaction

When asked about interaction with faculty outside of the classroom, most of the Scholars referred to either the four administrators affiliated with the CCS Program (Ms. Allen, Ms. Fuller, Dr. Foster, & Dr. Lawrence), or to the SSS counselors assigned to them. When students accepted the CCS, they automatically became members of SSS, a federally funded TRIO program. SSS was proposed as a component of the CCS Program to provide infrastructure and academic support. Scholars were assigned a counselor and required to meet at least three times each semester to discuss academic, personal, or financial needs.

Before becoming the coordinator for the CCS Program, Ms. Allen was the academic counseling coordinator in SSS. She was Caleb’s SSS counselor and he said,

She is one of the closest faculty members to me right now. I still go to her. Well, I have been lately, especially, every other week. . . . She was always there and still is for anything that I need.
Caleb spoke of his relationship with Dr. Lawrence as well. Their communications began during the summer before his junior year of high school and since then, she has been someone he could go to. Caleb shared that Dr. Lawrence invited the Scholars to her home each year for a Christmas dinner. He enjoyed the time away from campus in a relaxed atmosphere because “it helps you step back and just enjoy where you’re at.”

Kim specifically mentioned the access she had to Dr. Foster, Ms. Fuller, Ms. Allen, and Dr. Lawrence because of the CCS Program. She remarked, “The connections we had that freshman year has seriously stayed strong all four years and without those people we would not be able to do anything we want to do…Through those people I was able to make more connections.” Sharing Kim’s sentiment, Monica and Shannon agreed that they are close to the CCS Program administrators and faculty. Monica elaborated, “The Coca-Cola program has done more to help me than anything because I normally don’t talk to my professors unless we have to for assignments.”

A few of the Scholars made connections with administrators and faculty members who were not affiliated with the CCS Program. Because Jennifer’s work-study position was in the same building where she took most of her classes, she had an opportunity to see many of her professors outside the classroom. They are friendly to her, she remarked, “they always come up and talk and say ‘Hey, how are you doing?’ And even professors I don’t have--they’re always really nice to me.”

Both Robert and Brittney shared how they were a bit surprised by their interactions with faculty outside the classroom. Robert described interactions with the dean of his college and one of his professors at the Student Recreation Center as “funny.” Robert’s professor was on a flag football team during a game that Robert refereed. He lightheartedly admitted wondering if his
professor would fail him on a test if he messed up a call. Robert also had an encounter with the dean of his college at the gym. “He and I just had a random conversation about, I forgot what we talked about--it was just random. It was funny to see the dean working out at 6:00 in the morning.” After having several meetings with her dean, Brittney’s perception of him changed. She described how professional and “straight-laced” he seemed during class and how her interactions with him outside of class revealed a funny man. “They are real people I guess, and not like, I don’t know, non-human.”

**Mentors**

The Scholars were encouraged to describe their mentors based on how they defined a mentoring relationship. Some of the Scholars defined their mentors as a resource from which they obtained answers, while others relied upon their mentors for more personal advice and guidance. For many of the Scholars, their mentor served as a source of support and genuine understanding in the absence of a knowledgeable family. Peers, Scholars from older cohorts, and a few administrators not affiliated with CCS were also named mentors. Two Scholars disclosed that they had no mentor.

Many of the faculty or staff named in the previous subsection on faculty interaction appear in this subsection where they are also described as mentors. Dr. Lawrence, who supports the CCS Program as a volunteer, is identified by several of the Scholars as a mentor. Regarding the financial support and human support provided to the Scholars through the CCS Program, Dr. Lawrence disclosed the following:

The scholarships say to these students we believe in you; we see something in you that shows you have what it takes to be successful as a college student and beyond. And you can want something so badly, but it helps tremendously if someone recognizes that you have the ability. And that is one of my greatest joys of being associated with a program
is yes the money is very, very important, but even more is that investment in their confidence level—their emotional stability of saying that we are—not only do we believe in you, but we’re also going to support you through this.

Because his BCE 101 class was the one that brought her cohort together, Dr. Foster was among the individuals Kim named as a mentor. She respected his knowledge of the University and his “sweet spirit.” Although she interacted with him very little after her freshman year, Dr. Foster remained a “prominent figure” in Kim’s life. Kim also identified Ms. Fuller, one of the primary contacts for the Scholars in cohort one, as a mentor:

She is definitely my friend. . . . I can’t say enough about her. It’s sort of—I don’t have words—I can just say that she is my friend and that she is there—we can go a long time without talking and she’ll just call me up or she’ll see me and make sure everything is okay and she was there—I talked with her a lot last semester. We went and had dinner . . . because it was really rough. So she was there when I really needed her.

“Genuine” and “an inspiration” was how Kim described Dr. Lawrence, another mentor. Kim shared how Dr. Lawrence worked with her so that she could take an independent study course through Honors College and work on developing a project that she was personally passionate about. With admiration, Kim stated, “She is what you want to be. She’s what you want to be like.”

Like Kim, David identified Ms. Fuller and Dr. Lawrence as mentors. David also included Ms. Allen, the CCS coordinator, among the individuals who are “just a phone call away and they are so eager to help all of us and they have all just changed my life.” David also recognized his advisor in SSS and the Scholars from cohort one as valuable resources when he needed them.

Because the most educated person Sarah interacted with before attending college was her high school English teacher, she was apprehensive about any interactions with Ms. Fuller and Dr. Lawrence. Sarah described the women:
They are just so over the top. It’s nerve-wracking to go in and have conversations with people like that. . . . But they are wonderful and they make you so comfortable and now I am so grateful for that aspect of it because I feel that has helped me just as much as the financial benefits.

Ms. Fuller served as Sarah’s mentor for her first few years of college before Ms. Allen became her “main mentor.” Sarah expressed that she needed these mentors because she was unable to rely on her family for support.

Nick, Becky, Jonathan, and Robert all referred to Ms. Allen as a “mother-figure.” Nick shared that when other advisors or counselors only covered the basics and simply took care of business during their sessions, Ms. Allen really cared. Nick remarked,

I really feel like if it weren’t for Ms. Allen a lot of the doors that have opened for me in the past very recently, probably would have stayed closed. I have a lot to be thankful for as far as when it comes to Ms. Allen and how she’s helped me.

She inspired him to want to do well by expressing concern for what he does. Nick shared that if he does not do well, he will feel as though he is disappointing Ms. Allen. “Supportive, extremely friendly,” and “totally interested” was how Becky described Ms. Allen. She represented a mother-figure to Becky because she demonstrated understanding and interest in things Becky shared with her.

Although Jonathan relied on the SSS staff for assistance, Ms. Allen served as his primary resource:

I meet with Ms. Barbara [Allen] just to go in and talk because she makes me feel so confident and she just makes anything feel like it is possible. . . . She plays the role if I need a counselor . . . if I’m having trouble with English and I need to have someone proofread my paper--I’ll take my paper in there and she’ll proofread my paper. So it’s like anything I have or anything I need, Ms. Barbara [Allen] is there. It’s kind of like having a mom right here on campus.

Ms. Allen recognized that most of the Scholars had parents who did not know how to assist them with their financial needs. She explained that much of her role was conveying
information to the Scholars and “sort of being (I hate to say this) but sort of a surrogate parent and saying the things that a parent would say to a student if that parent had this knowledge at their fingertips.”

Because of the financial investment being made in him, Robert anticipated those overseeing the CCS program would “keep tabs” on him and his fellow Scholars. He described the Scholars and those affiliated with the Program as a “close-knit family away from home” and he expressed that he was going to do whatever was expected of him. Ms. Allen, Ms. Fuller, Dr. Lawrence, his SSS counselor, and his academic dean all served as mentors to Robert. “I feel like if I start slipping, any one of those--I would expect an email from one of them on the spot saying, ‘Robert, what are you doing? We need to talk.’” Robert believes mentors are important because they serve as a “mother or father figure away from home.”

Shannon said she turned to Ms. Allen because “anytime I have ever needed anything, she was on it--100% there for me.” Anything from choosing a minor, gaining access to a restricted course, or launching a community service project, Ms. Allen served as a valuable resource. Similarly, Brittney relied on Ms. Allen for anything that she needed. “From the get-go,” Brittney claimed, “anything that you need, anything you have any concerns about, anything at all, she’s like, I’m here.” Even when she had the most “random questions” and did not know where to begin, Brittney started with Ms. Allen. Sometimes Ms. Allen would tell her that she would have to do some research, but she always got back to Brittney with an answer.

Although the Scholars overwhelmingly identified individuals affiliated with the CCS program as their mentors, a couple of the Scholars named primary mentors who were not connected with the Program, and a few other Scholars recognized their peers as mentors. Caleb named one of his professors as a mentor. He said, “She’s a teacher, but she’s also a resource . . .
he’s offered any help that I need, not just class work, but as far as internships, just anything in
general. She’s been helpful.” Trey noted that mentors supporting him in the area of financial
assistance had been the most helpful. Although Ms. Allen kept him informed of internships and
scholarships that provided opportunities for financial assistance, an administrator in the Dean of
Students office helped Trey find jobs and work when he had “a little trouble paying off [his]
student bills.” Trey commented, “I see him probably more than he likes.”

Will considered his friends as his mentors. Will surrounded himself with positive people
who “do the right things . . . if you stay around people like that, they serve as mentors too, I
believe.” One friend, in particular, who was his student leader during a mentoring program for
elementary school students, continued to look out for Will and often provided him with
encouragement.

Scholars from cohort two served as mentors to Hope. They introduced her to many
different things when she arrived on campus, which she described as follows: “When I first
moved here, I was so shy. I didn’t really talk to a lot of people . . . I didn’t know anybody when
I first got here.” She depended on the advice from preceding Scholars to determine which
teachers and courses to take as well as whether she would be able to manage a certain
combination of courses at one time. She also relied upon these Scholars for advice on how to
balance a job and what types of activities to get involved in on campus.

Importance of Mentors

Feeling lonely and not knowing who to ask when there are questions are the reasons why
Monica noted having a mentor is so important for students. Sharing a similar sentiment, Brittney
attempted to imagine life for students who do not receive the benefits of the CCS Program and its resources:

I’ve wondered what do people who are not first generation students, who are not in the Coke program, who are not in Student Support Services, who don’t have all these people watching them. . . . I can only imagine that it’s--how lonely it must be to not have a go-to person--to just be walking around feeling alone like you don’t have any resources.

Jonathan, Shannon, Trey, and Kori agreed that mentors are necessary for helping students feel comfortable and confident in a large university environment. Each noted how easy it would be to get lost at the University and how crucial it is to have “a person” or “somebody” who can provide answers or direct them appropriately. Even when they suspected “their person” would not have the answers, they were confident they would be guided appropriately. Knowing that they always had a place to start was vital. Kori dreamed of students having access to a phone number or an option on MyBama (the University’s interactive website providing email, course information, and campus news) that allowed them to report “this just happened to me, what do I do?,” and receive immediate feedback.

Although Sarah initially found the idea of interacting with a mentor unappealing, she is convinced that being connected with the appropriate person is necessary. She explained,

Sometimes it’s just finding that person that for whatever reason you can connect to and that understands you and you are comfortable with just talking about whatever. So first generation students--we’re smart, we got into college--it’s more of, I think, the social support that’s needed.

Contemplating the meaning of “mentor” in its purest sense, Pamela asserted that she did not have one. She explained that she has had professors who have been helpful to her for their respective classes, but she did not rely on the relationship after the completion of the semester. Disclosing that her grades most certainly would have suffered without the involvement of her
professors, she does not recall a relationship with any professor that might have resulted in an email expressing concern for how she was doing.

Sam recognized that there were individuals on campus who were available to assist him, however, he shared he did not have a mentor. Sam and his friends (not in CCS) had discussed how they needed mentors. “I think you can do without [mentoring],” Sam explained, “but I’ve noticed a lot of students talk about needing mentors and some students who do have them. People might not say it, but everybody is looking for some kind of mentor. . . .” However, when Sam later described his expectations of the CCS Program, he shared, “I thought that I would apply, interview, and get some money like the other scholarships I have. I didn’t know that it was going to be mentors like Ms. Allen and the whole class getting to know each other.”

Summary

The preceding section described how the development of friendships, engaging in social activities, and relationships with mentors contributed to the Scholars’ social integration. Many of the Scholars noted that participating in Alabama Action and BCE 101 provided them with not only an introduction to campus life, but also an introduction to many of the individuals who would become their closest friends. Most of the Scholars identified Ms. Allen, the coordinator of the CCS Program, as their mentor. She provided the Scholars with important information and advice, as well as, served as a “mother-figure” by offering understanding and genuine concern. Despite who their mentors were, the Scholars stressed the importance of having a person on campus they could go to any time they had any question or need.
Role of Financial Support

Transformational--funding makes it possible for these students to be transformed and they are. And they really would never become the people what they are supposed to be if they did not have the scholarship. (Ms. Allen, CCS Coordinator)

Like many of his fellow Scholars, David explained that there was not a debate about “do I want to go to college,” but “what am I going to have to do to get to the college I want to be at.” Many of the Scholars investigated the options available to support their decision to attend UA. For instance, Shannon explained, “I had already made the decision to come to the University--I was just looking for a reason to justify it.” Despite the support of the Coca-Cola Scholarship, most of the Scholars still had unmet financial need. Although the majority of Scholars did not work their freshman year, or at least their first semester, many eventually found that working was necessary to cover all of their expenses. For Scholars who benefited from additional scholarships or financial support from their families, work-study opportunities and on-campus jobs were most popular. However, a few of the Scholars were responsible for completely supporting themselves and sought off-campus jobs, which offered more pay. While many of the Scholars expressed trying to avoid student loans, several commented that they had to rely upon those as well. The significance of the support from the CCS, however, is that it was the deciding factor for many of the Scholars choosing to attend UA. Regarding the impact of the CCS on her decision to attend UA, Kori declared,

It made it. Not impacted--it made it. . . . When I got the Coca-Cola Scholarship, I knew exactly where I was going to go. I mean Alabama was always my first choice, but I was realistic--I couldn’t afford it. But then I got Coca-Cola and literally my dreams came true.

During Caleb’s senior year of high school, he and his parents visited the financial aid office on UA’s campus to discuss the cost of attendance, the availability of grants, and how
heavily they should rely on student loans. They determined that Caleb attending the University of Alabama would be feasible; however, loans would be necessary. He shared how receiving the CCS “sealed the deal” for his choice to attend UA:

I really did want to go here. And you know, we, my parents and I, both knew the cost of it, but it was something that I wanted to do. So when I got the [Coca-Cola] scholarship it was . . . let’s take it to the house and let’s do this.

Even with the CCS, graduating senior Caleb held a work-study position every semester, with the exception of the spring semester of his freshman year. He worked approximately 12 hours each week and shared, “That money is much needed, especially having bills to pay and all the other whatnot expenses.” The job also helped him to stay disciplined. He arrived to work at 8 a.m. two mornings each week and when he was not given a task, he would spend his time studying or getting ahead on his class assignments.

David also had a job on campus and his parents assisted him with his living expenses. However, attending a community college or entering the work force were the options he would have considered had it not been for the CCS. He further remarked,

I feel that if I didn’t get this scholarship, I would end up just working being an average Joe, staying at home, finding a wife, getting married, living there for the rest of my . . . which there’s nothing wrong with that at all, but it wasn’t for me.

David described the people he has met and the opportunities, including internships, which have resulted from receiving the CCS and attending UA. “I would not enjoy my life I don’t think if it weren’t for this Coke Scholarship. I’d be miserable right now,” asserted David. “Coke has changed my life completely. I’ll tell anybody that.”

Will had already made plans to attend another university when he learned that he was receiving the CCS. Although another institution was offering him more scholarship money than UA, Will explained that it was not enough to compensate for the “full experience” he expected to
receive as a member of a campus community like UA. Consequently, Will made a choice not to
work his freshman year. However, he began tutoring at the Center for Teaching and Learning
on-campus during his sophomore year. “I’m really thankful for this job,” he shared. Will found
that tutoring helped him retain important information for his own classes and he had time to
study when he did not have appointments.

Monica usually worked 15 hours a week at her campus job, which began as a work-study
position her sophomore year. When her work-study was cancelled, she explained, “I got a job
there again this year because my boss called me back and asked me if I wanted to come work for
him again. They put me on payroll.” Even with the CCS, her job and a presidential scholarship
from the University, Monica took out several loans over the course of her 4 years to support her
unmet financial need. She has been responsible for supporting herself entirely with the
exception of paying for her insurance.

Jennifer has taken advantage of work-study for the 3 years she has been at UA. She
enjoyed the benefits of networking and access to information that resulted from working on
campus. She also received three additional scholarships, which helped support her unmet
financial need.

Shannon has worked both years she has been in school. She works in the campus supply
store, and because of football season she can typically work 20-30 hours in the fall compared to
15-20 hours in the spring. She also receives $500 a semester from another scholarship, some
assistance from her parents, and student loans. Carter also took out student loans in addition to
working about 15 hours per week as an office manager in one of the residence halls. He works
as much as 40 hours per week when classes are not in session.
Pamela used her savings, the money she saved since she began working at 16, to cover expenses so she could focus on doing well in her classes her first semester. Realizing she did not have enough money to cover her expenses, she began working during her second semester anywhere she could find a job. Since then she has worked on campus for one summer as an orientation leader, for 2 years at the library, and she taught English as a side job while she studied abroad. Pamela has also been a waitress, worked in fast food, and in retail. “I’ve done it all,” she remarked, “... you name it.” The most Pamela worked while school was in session was 25-30 hours a week, which she described as “pretty tough.” During the summers she worked about 60 hours a week so that she could save money for the fall and spring semesters. Regarding student loans, Pamela tried not to rely heavily upon them. “I would much rather practice that restraint now than to graduate $30,000 in debt instead of the $15,000 that I’ve got right now.” Pamela claimed that without the CCS, she is fairly confident that she still would have chosen to attend UA. However, she acknowledged, “knowing what I know now about the financial burden, I don’t know if I could have stayed enrolled.” Because of the subjects she wished to study, her objective was to attend a four-year institution as opposed to a community college. Pamela explained that even with the CCS and work, it had been a challenge “making ends meet.” Knowing what she does now about her financial responsibilities she expected that there would have been a strong probability that she would have had to either drop out or take some time off to save money and then return to college.

Reflecting on the financial hardships she has encountered even with the benefit of the CCS, Sarah did not hesitate to share that she would not have been able to stay at UA without the CCS. She stated,

If I had not gotten this scholarship, I know now having been here, I’ve held on by a thread and I know if I had not had that money, there is no way financially that I would
stayed here. I would have had to go back to the community college and move in with my parents and try to go that route. I mean there’s no way I would be here without this scholarship. I was just too close too many times to not making it.

There were many weeks when Sarah worked 40-60 hours, explaining that “a lot of times I had two jobs.” She described her “easiest semesters” as those where she worked a minimum of 20 hours a week. Having endured working in some hostile environments among negative influences as a waitress, Sarah would have enjoyed a campus job but stated, “if you would have offered me a $7.00 an hour job, I couldn’t have taken it.” Furthermore, she lived off campus to save money. She figured by avoiding the costs of purchasing a parking permit and a meal plan, she saved about $1,500 each semester.

Last year Becky took 15 credit hours and worked approximately 30 hours a week as a waitress, but experienced sexual harassment and no longer works there. She stated, “I was taking 15 hours--I think I ended up with like 10 hours. It was awful.” This semester, she tutored from 6 to 10 hours each week and she put the money she earned into her savings or used it as spending money. She found the tutoring job “totally manageable” with her 17-hour course-load. Becky commented, “For the most part, whatever the [Coca-Cola] scholarship doesn’t cover, my parents are paying for.”

The CCS is the only scholarship that Robert received, but it secured his decision to attend The University of Alabama. Without the scholarship and with no regrets, Robert stated that he would have attended a university close to home so that he could live with his family and avoid the financial burden of attending UA. In addition to the CCS, Robert also worked and took out student loans. “I knew I would need to pull all my possible resources,” he explained. Robert never wanted to ask his mom for money because he felt she was already stretched and he did not want to cause additional stress for her. In fact, he shared some of the student loan money with
his mom, which was intended for his rent, and it left him in a bind for a couple of months. He received some help from individuals who worked in his college as well as took a job at the Center for Teaching and Learning to pull him through. He claimed that if it had not been for the support from the people in the college, however, he probably would have had to drop out:

Even though--it’s like I guess just struggling the way I did my freshman year, even though I have a whole lot of scholarships this year because of my grades, I never want to get close to that point for the rest of my life of struggling like that. So if I save my money like my dad said I try not to buy anything I can’t buy three or four times over. Even though I may have to study for a test, I still work 20 hours a week just to save the money. . . . I’m still saving my money; I’m still applying for more scholarships. Even though I don’t need it for tuition, I would rather have it in the bank just knowing if I didn’t get a scholarship next year, I’ve still got this money to fall back on.

Finances must be the first issue addressed for first-generation students, stated Robert: “If they are worrying about money--most are not going to worry about their classes.” After that, first-generation students need opportunities to make friends as well as “discover themselves.”

Working an on-campus job 15 hours a week, a retail job 15-20 hours on weekends, and babysitting about 10 hours a week was how Kori covered her unmet financial need. Because her classes have been harder this semester, she eliminated the softball lessons she had also been providing. Although she found work and school difficult to balance, she asserted that she had no other option. “I don’t dwell on it; I just know that my life is different than the guy who goes to class, goes home and takes a nap. It’s just the way that it is.”

Without the CCS, Kim would have chosen to attend a less desirable institution based on the amount of financial assistance offered to her. Her father encouraged her to consider another institution because he felt that their offer of financial support was recognition of Kim’s academic achievements. But Kim wanted a different campus environment. When she considered The University of Alabama, she remarked,
I wanted this campus atmosphere; I wanted to feel that I was at a college. . . I was really worried that I wasn’t going to come here, but then the scholarship was able to allow me to do that, and I would not have probably had Dr. Foster, Dr. Lawrence, Lori--I would never have known the three of them. . . . I would have not been able to get into the Tuscaloosa community like I wanted to. . . . I probably would not have been in The University of Alabama.

Like Kori, finding a balance between work and academics was a challenge for Kim. The final semester of her senior year was the only one that Kim did not work and that was because she needed to manage her many activities and focus on preparing for the MCAT.

Jonathan wanted to avoid distractions to focus on studying as well. Although he would like a job, he explained, “My mom won’t let me. She told me the only reason I could get a job is if they get to the point where they can’t afford to pay the rest of my money for school.” Jonathan felt pressure knowing he has to maintain a 3.0 GPA to keep the CCS. Without the CCS, Jonathan would most likely have attended a smaller university or a community college. When he received the CCS, however, he did not consider any other institution. He shared that he would not feel as much pressure if he knew he could afford to attend classes an extra year if he did not do well. However, that just is not the case for Jonathan and as he said, “that’s life.”

Although she anticipated getting a job next year, Brittney did not work her freshman year. Her family has provided support as they are able so that she can focus on school. Because her brother and his wife took her in when she was 11, Brittney shared that even though she had already made the decision to attend UA, “I never wanted to go to college and be expensive to them. It’s not their position to pay for me.” Brittney acknowledged how stressful working will probably be for her and that receiving the CCS put her “mind at ease.” She further expressed, “Now that I am here, I mean there’s no other place I would rather be. I am obviously where I’m meant to be. . . .” With the CCS, additional scholarships and her savings, she avoided taking out student loans or relying on her family for money. Consequently, she explained, “I’ve been able
to make friends and spend 11 hours at the library without having to go anywhere. It is awesome.”

Although UA was Trey’s first choice, he explained that financially it was beyond reach but “the Coke scholarship definitely got it within reach.” Even with the CCS, Trey attempted, but was unable, to secure an on-campus job:

You know trying to find a job on campus or just in Tuscaloosa in general is pretty tough . . . you know I am only taking 15 hours which isn’t a lot, but when I need to study . . . it’s hard to factor in a 9 to 5 kind of job.

An administrator in the Dean of Students office offered to hire Trey to do work around his house or to find work for him if he became desperate for money. Trey shared that he found comfort in that offer.

Summary

Although the University of Alabama was the college of choice for many of the Scholars, without the financial support provided by the CCS they would have chosen another institution. Even with the CCS, most of the Scholars revealed that they depended upon income from work-study positions, off-campus jobs, or student loans to support their unmet financial need. The CCS provided enough financial support to make it the determining factor in several of the Scholars not only choosing to attend UA but also in being successful at UA.

Persistence of the First-generation Students in the CCS Program

Tinto’s (1975) student integration theory described how students’ level of commitment greatly influenced their degree of academic and social integration. Then, greater social and academic integration resulted with an increased positive impact on subsequent institutional and
goal commitment, thereby resulting in lower dropout or higher retention rates. The following subsections explore the Scholars’ expectations of college, if they had entertained leaving college, and what recommendations they have for providing a better experience for first-generation students.

Expectations of College

Nick shared, “you have to make [college] what you expect it to be. . . . I am making it what I want it to be.” He further expressed that the kind of experience a student has “depends on what you are willing to do and what you’re willing not to do.” A few of Nick’s fellow Scholars found that although making the transition from high school to college presented some challenges, it was not as difficult as they anticipated. Others noted that they were not expecting the stress of managing so many responsibilities.

Jennifer and Caleb transitioned to college with ease. Jennifer came to UA after spending three years at a boarding school where she was accustomed to “living in dorms and having to get [herself] up and do homework.” She expressed that aside from studying more, being in college was not a big transition. For Caleb, college was a bit easier than he expected. He explained, “I think maybe just because I knew I was going to have to work for whatever I got. I think I was prepared to do that.”

Will described college as “more intimidating from the outside than it is once you get here. . . . I mean there are differences between high school and college but it’s not as drastic a change as I thought it was going to be.” Pamela made a similar observation. Based on comments from her high school teachers, Pamela was under the impression that if she missed a homework assignment or did not take notes in class, she would fail in college. While she learned
that college was not so extreme, she discovered a freedom that she had not experienced in high school. “You can do whatever you want but you have to expect the consequences of whatever you do,” Pamela explained, “So if I want to go out to dinner with my friend instead of studying two hours for my exam tomorrow, I can do that and I might not fail the exam, . . . but I probably won’t do very good on it.” Pamela initially was not prepared to demonstrate the personal responsibility her professors expected.

Monica was uncertain if college was what she expected, but she was certain that she experienced things differently than she thought she would. She expected to work hard and succeed. She had not expected to miss home so much. She also had not expected the many opportunities she had or friends she made through the CCS Program and service projects. Like Monica, Brittney found many of her friends and opportunities through participation in the CCS Program. Brittney remarked,

I never had the thought after that first day that this isn’t where I belong . . . and I didn’t expect that. A lot of it had to do with being a Coke Scholar. I mean if I wasn’t a Coke Scholar I wouldn’t have been in Alabama Action and I wouldn’t have met those people. . . . There would have been time for me to feel lonely and there was none.

David was surprised that there were not parties every night like he thought there would be. He explained,

This town is pretty reserved Monday through Thursday. . . . I think that was the one things that surprised me. I had thought, “Man whenever I am ready to do something, I don’t care if it’s Monday through Sunday, I’ll have something to do that night.” It’s not like that at all.

David stated that his experience had been positive and that he was simply glad to be at UA.

College was “everything and more” for Trey. “It’s just as much fun as I thought it would be and more. It’s just as much work as I thought it would be and more and it’s definitely a lot more stress than I thought it would be.” Trey’s fellow Scholars, Shannon and Robert, agreed
that the stress and responsibility was also greater than they anticipated. College came with greater responsibility than high school where Shannon had people pushing her. Aside from individuals associated with the CCS Program, Shannon had to learn to manage her time and responsibilities. Although the classes and coursework were what she expected, she had not considered how difficult it would be living in an apartment and working while going to school. With regards to balancing her commitments, Shannon remarked, “it’s definitely more responsibility getting things done on our own time and balancing everything else that we are involved in on campus.”

Similarly, Robert did not realize how much college would force him to grow up. Unable to rely upon his family for assistance, the responsibilities of maintaining an apartment, paying bills, and managing a bank account were stressful. There was also the added stress of studying for his classes and the fear that he would be presented with the same challenges each semester to come. After enduring the challenges once, Robert planned to avoid being in a similar situation. He applied for every scholarship that he could and he surrounded himself with a less social crowd and more goal-oriented friends.

Sarah admitted being “naïve” and commented that college was nothing like the place she had always dreamed about:

I’m going to college at The University of Alabama and I’m going to go study in Spain and it’s just going to be wonderful. I had no idea how challenging it would be or what I was getting myself into. It’s completely different than I expected. Everything is different. The classes, the whole tension on campus between the Greek life, and it’s nothing like--I just thought it would be all fun and happy and no troubles like in my dreams that I had from five years old when we’d go to school . . . I had no idea. It’s probably a good thing I did not know because I would have been scared off.

Whether the Scholars were completely surprised by their transition to college or found it necessary to make minor adjustments in their assessment, most underestimated the amount of
responsibilities and stress they would encounter. However, each demonstrated resourcefulness and persistence in achieving their ultimate goal of obtaining a degree. Despite how much some of them struggled, they were determined to succeed.

**Considered Not Completing**

“No,” “never,” or “not at all” were the responses of Monica, Brittney, Caleb, Kori, Nick, Jennifer, Carter, Will, and Trey when asked if they ever considered not completing college as a result of academic, social, or financial challenges. Underscoring the difficulty of their financial situation, Hope and Shannon both shared that although they had joked about not finishing, they never meant it. However, several Scholars revealed their worries or struggles to remain in college.

David did not mention if he had ever considered leaving college for academic reasons, but he expressed an acute awareness and fear of the consequences of losing his scholarship and returning home. He stated, “I didn’t want to be one of those kids that went away for a semester and either got homesick or flunked out.” While his dad reminded him that if he does not keep his grades up he will have to return home, David credited the CCS with giving him extra motivation for keeping his grades up.

At one point, Becky believed she would not be able to cope with college. She struggled with anxiety, especially during the spring semester of her freshman year when she felt most overwhelmed. Becky disclosed, “There have been days where I’ve thought I am so ready for school to be over with or if school doesn’t hurry up and get over with, I am going to hurry up and leave.” Because Becky was one of the students who joined the CCS Program after a Scholar had been dismissed from the Program, she did not benefit from participation in Alabama Action or
BCE 101, two of the bonding experiences for the cohort. However, the support from her family encouraged her during those tough times.

A few of the remaining Scholars specifically cited financial struggles as the reason they had contemplated leaving college. There were two semesters in which Sarah was not sure how she would be able to remain in school. She stated, “It was scary. It wasn’t that I didn’t want to be here, I didn’t know how I was going to be able to figure it out and I didn’t feel like I had anybody to turn to.” Although Pamela ultimately decided against leaving, she considered taking time off so that she could work additional hours and earn money to help pay for school. Robert also considered leaving during one semester of his freshman year because of financial trouble. Reflecting on that time Robert revealed, “It made me a man. I respect money a lot more--that’s why I respect community service a lot more because of struggling like that.”

In spite of any struggles, every Scholar clearly articulated without hesitation their certainty of graduating. Specifically, 13 of the Scholars stated that they were “100%” certain that they would graduate. David, a cohort two Scholar, elaborated,

I’m on pace to graduate in spring 2011. I haven’t had anything yet that has tripped me up. Now I can see the finish line. I don’t foresee anything stopping me from getting a college degree and I have Coke to thank for that.

Recommendations for Better Undergraduate Experience for First-generation Students

Kori enjoyed the shared class experience and suggested that providing a similar class for more first-generation students would be beneficial. A “come and get used to this” class, as she called it. Likewise, Monica suggested that the BCE 101 course would be helpful to any first-generation student because it provided information and details about navigating campus. David offered the same and added, “The biggest thing I think for the first-generation scholar is
interacting and knowing people and getting help. . . . If you get them interacting on campus, it would make things a lot easier for them.” He also proposed that students live in four-person, as opposed to two-person, suites or residential communities to provide more opportunities for interaction. With a similar observation, Hope shared that she did not know any people in her residence hall except for her roommate. Opportunities to mingle and get to know other residents in their community would be helpful.

“Get them connected with someone. That’s really the best thing I had going for me,” stated Pamela. “Get them in some kind of network. In a way, that is more valuable even than money.” Pamela went on to describe how critical a network is for a student. Her relationships with fellow cohort members as well as the administrators affiliated with the CCS Program were essential to her success and she is unaware of any other scholarship that provides this network to its recipients. Sarah also underscored the importance of establishing a network:

If you really want it bad enough, you can always make a way and I would just tell them to try and connect to the right people and use every opportunity when they are in a room of people at an event to find people that can help them because first generation students we don’t have that network--to build that network that helps you stay here and helps you once you leave college to get jobs. Even to get into associations and societies on campus to get somewhere on campus--it’s just helpful to have that network and when you come here not knowing even other students, you’ve got to build it yourself. And that just comes by meeting people and reaching out.

Similarly, Nick expressed the need for a faculty or staff person who is responsible for developing a one-on-one relationship with each first-generation student in a group of 20. Nick was concerned about what happens after a student receives the scholarship money and then enters the University community feeling completely lost. “I guess I don’t want to sound like a special case, but many times you might get a first-generation scholar who is good that you help the financial issue out, but they go out into the university and are completely lost.” Although Nick recognized there are a multitude of offices and support services are available for students,
the personal relationship with a first-generation scholar is what makes the difference. Carter suggested providing mentors like Ms. Allen for first-generation students to guide them through such an overwhelming experience. “My first suggestion would be to just not stay on top of them, but stay in contact with them. They don’t need a babysitter, but they do need an encourager,” stated Kori. She also added that there needs to be opportunities for them to network with each other. In concert with the suggestions of Nick and Kori, Will recommended,

Ms. Allen and that whole staff . . . have been key in looking out for us. . . . I think having somebody there for the students who are coming in without a clear picture of what to expect is very useful. That might be the best thing that is going on as far as first-generation students. . . . Maybe have--institute some organization or some kind of program that has first generation upper level students that run it and they could sit together and come up with things that they thought would be beneficial coming from the same situation--have some kind of mentoring program set up.

Shannon suggested providing an option to join a program like the CCS where there are opportunities to interact and network with others. She specifically described how helpful it has been having a fellow Scholar in some of the same academic classes and that they rely upon one another when they do not understand something in class or help them catch up when they miss. Shannon added that providing a mentor or counselor, like Ms. Allen is for the CCS, would be helpful:

Everybody in my cohort has at least one other member just in our cohort who is in the same college as them or has the same major. So having that connection just among ourselves--I’m in accounting right now with one of my cohort members. I was in all my econ classes with at least of my cohort members and that helps out a lot. If you didn’t understand something--chances are one of them did. If you had to miss class because you were sick, they were there. . . . I didn’t have anybody back home at all that I could call when I got into a bad spot. . . . I think that would give first-generation scholar students a huge academic support system if they met other first-generation college students.
Summary

The Scholars entered college with a variety of expectations about what college would be like. Despite some of their financial struggles, each Scholar expressed conviction and certainty regarding their expectations to graduate. Their recommendations for providing better support to first-generation students included a shared experience that would supply information and details about navigating campus, opportunities to network and interact with other first-generation students, and a staff person or mentor devoted to first-generation students.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the experiences of first-generation students participating in the Coca-Cola First Generation Scholarship (CCS) Program at The University of Alabama. Five themes emerged for this study: (1) First-generation Status Examined: Dialogue emphasizing the importance of family, the attention to finances, and the lack of knowledge and access to resources, were recurring. (2) Role of Academic Integration in the First-generation Student Experience: Many of the Scholars indicated that they were unprepared for the academic rigor of college, especially in the areas of math and writing. Although many of the Scholars credited AP courses and dual enrollment opportunities with exposing them to some of the expectations of college, the overall lack of preparation may explain why many of the Scholars desired stronger personal connections with their faculty, especially during the freshman year. (3) Role of Social Integration in the First-generation Student Experience: Many of the Scholars noted that participating in Alabama Action and BCE 101 provided them with not only an introduction to campus life, but also an introduction to many of the individuals who would become their closest friends. Most of the Scholars identified Ms.
Allen, the coordinator of the CCS Program, as their mentor. She provided the Scholars with important information and advice and served as a “mother-figure” by offering understanding and genuine concern. (4) Role of Financial Support in the First-generation Student Experience: Although The University of Alabama was the college of choice for many of the Scholars, without the financial support provided by the CCS they would have chosen another institution. Even with the CCS, most of the Scholars revealed that they depended upon income from work-study positions, off-campus jobs, or student loans to support their unmet financial need. (5) Persistence of the First-generation Students in the CCS Program: In spite of any struggles, every Scholar clearly articulated without hesitation their certainty of graduating.
CHAPTER 5

IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

This study was designed to investigate the experiences of first-generation students participating in the Coca-Cola First Generation Scholarship (CCS) Program at The University of Alabama, a four-year public institution. The Coca-Cola First Generation Scholarship Program was funded by a $1M gift from the Coca-Cola Foundation in 2006. The Program provided $5,000 annual renewable scholarships to 48 students (Scholars) who are Alabama residents and the first in their families to attend college.

The data analysis for this qualitative study included one-on-one interviews with Scholars participating in the CCS Program as well as administrators affiliated with the Program, document analysis, and personal notes while conducting fieldwork and collecting raw data. Specifically, this study examined the impact of social and academic integration, as well as financial support, on first-generation student persistence and retention. As a result of this study, both researchers and practitioners will better understand the unique needs of first-generation students attending a four-year public institution.

Five themes emerged that reflected the students’ and administrators’ thoughts and perceptions of the Coca-Cola Scholarship Program:

1. First-Generation Status Examined
2. Role of Academic Integration in the First-Generation Student Experience
3. Role of Social Integration in the First-Generation Student Experience
4. Role of Financial Support in the First-Generation Student Experience

5. Persistence of the First-Generation Students in the CCS Program

In addition to the data analysis provided in Chapter 4 that emphasized the five themes that emerged, this chapter discusses the findings derived from the four research questions, assesses the implications of the research, and culminates with recommendations and suggestions for future research.

Discussion of Findings

Retention research underscored the importance of students integrating socially and academically to increase their potential for persistence and academic success (Astin, 1997; Kuh et al., 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1975, 1993). For low-income, first-generation students, lack of financial support was often an additional impediment to academic and social integration, making financial resources another significant factor impacting their persistence (Engle & Tinto, 2008). After 6 years at a public four-year institution, the graduation rate for low-income, first-generation students was 34%, compared to the 66% graduation rate among their peers (Engle & Tinto, 2008).

Despite the research on student retention and the development of student persistence models, a gap exists between researchers’ findings and what practitioners need to know about fostering student retention. Currently, there are no established metrics for determining either academic or social integration. This study used student persistence models and retention research as a conceptual framework to gather qualitative descriptive accounts of the impact of social integration, academic integration, and financial support among the first-generation students participating in the Coca-Cola Scholarship Program at The University of Alabama.
Figure 2 illustrates the elements impacting persistence that were presented in the review of literature in Chapter 2. Because low-income, first-generation students have demonstrated a greater risk for attrition than their non-first-generation peers (Horn & Nunez, 2000), the figure also illustrates how the CCS Program mitigates many of these risks by providing academic, social and financial support.

While there was no prescribed matrix or formula used during the process of choosing the Scholars for each cohort, the selection committee sought students with demonstrated abilities to succeed, demonstrated abilities of commitment, and obviously, demonstrated financial need. The committee also expected applicants to exhibit passion for education and a determination to persevere. Possessing such attributes, one might argue that the Scholars would have been successful students regardless of their participation in the CCS Program. However, the absence of any one element of support provided by the Program, (academic, social, or financial) might have adversely impacted the Scholars’ persistence.
Figure 2. Influence of CCS Program on persistence factors.
Research Question 1

What role does academic integration play in the first-generation student experience?

Among academic integration, social integration, and financial support, academic integration played the smallest role in the Scholars’ experience as examined through their participation in the CCS program. The role of academic integration may have been smallest because the students who were chosen to participate in the CCS Program had proven academic competencies. The Scholars experienced academic success and excelled as high school students. Consequently, their successes in high school may have prevented the elements of academic integration in college from presenting greater challenges than those encountered.

Although they excelled academically in high school, many of the Scholars indicated that they were unprepared for the academic rigor of college. AP courses and dual enrollment opportunities were credited with exposing many of the Scholars to the expectations of college. Several Scholars explained that while minimal effort was needed to earn A’s and B’s in their high school classes, they quickly learned that their writing skills and math aptitude were inadequate for University work.

As part of the CCS Program, the Scholars were automatically accepted as participants in Student Support Services (SSS), which provided them with free tutoring, as well as assigned them to a personal counselor to monitor their academic development. The partnership with SSS and the level of involvement of CCS administrators safeguarded against the Scholars falling through the proverbial cracks or finding themselves in a situation where it was too late to salvage a potentially bad grade.

The Scholars reported that faculty interaction, advising, and academic preparedness entering college were elements that affected their academic integration. They were also sensitive
to the impact of their academic performance on their scholarship and were extremely grade conscious. Retaining the scholarship required a minimum 2.8 GPA during their freshman year and a 3.0 GPA thereafter. For several of the Scholars, the GPA requirement for maintaining their CCS was a stressful motivator. For some, losing the scholarship would have resulted in their inability to remain at the University. Although some of the Scholars identified their concerns and worries about maintaining the required GPA, others suggested the requirement was a positive pressure. The Scholars who recognized the requirement as a motivator may have done so because they were already performing well. However, the requirement may have impelled Scholars to drop courses prematurely or deterred them from pursuing certain courses or degrees for fear that they would struggle. Because the CCS was offered to the Scholars for only 4 years, an additional semester or year in college as a result of dropped courses and changing majors might have presented financial challenges.

The Scholars’ overall lack of preparation entering college may explain why many of them desired more access to and stronger personal connections with their professors. Consequently, smaller classrooms were often preferred by the Scholars as those were more conducive to personal interaction with their professors. The personal connections with faculty, as well as smaller class sizes, were especially important to the Scholars during their freshman year as many of them were transitioning from small high schools. Although they noted that their professors were available after class and during office hours, many of the Scholars described the impersonal nature of the large lecture-style classes where there was little opportunity for interaction with their professors. The classroom experiences for some of the Scholars were routine and mechanical. Some Scholars noted being disappointed and frustrated by the lack of passion and enthusiasm exhibited by a few of their professors. The Scholars wanted and
expected to attend classes and be engaged. Many recognized that this was their one and only opportunity to receive a higher education and they held high expectations of their professors.

As a result of the desire for interaction, a few of the Scholars made deliberate attempts to introduce themselves to their professors and graduate teaching assistants. Others made efforts to actively participate in class and engage in classroom discussions. Some Scholars did not develop relationships with their professors nor did they feel the need to do so. However, they noted that if they needed to make a connection, they felt that their professors would be accessible.

Several Scholars specifically cited the positive impact of their professors knowing them by name. They also noted the importance of a personal relationship with their academic advisor. The Scholars believed it was essential that their advisors not only knew them, but understood them. The Scholars recognized the benefit of having a personal relationship as it often led to direct benefits such as academic opportunities or internships. The Scholars explained that although most of their experiences interacting with faculty had been positive, they desired a more personal connection.

The lack of a “relationship” between the Scholars and their professors would be of greater concern if the Scholars were not developing relationships with administrators, faculty, and staff as a result of their involvement with the CCS Program. Consequently, the Scholars expressed more of a desire, rather than a need, for a relationship with their professors. Had the elements of academic support not been provided by the CCS Program, the divide between the Scholars and their professors may have adversely impacted their academic performances.
Research Question 2

What role does social integration play in the first-generation student experience?

The development of friendships, engaging in social activities, and relationships with mentors contributed to the Scholars’ social integration. Although social integration provided some of the greatest benefits to the Scholars, it was perhaps the easiest for them to initially underestimate and disregard because the benefits were not as easily foreseen as those anticipated from academic integration and financial support. The Scholars overwhelmingly noted that participating in Alabama Action and BCE 101 provided them with not only an introduction to campus life, but also an introduction to the individuals who became their closest friends.

In an effort to provide the Coca-Cola Scholars with a meaningful shared experience, each incoming cohort (with the exception of cohort 1) was invited to join the University Honors Program students in Alabama Action the week before classes began. Alabama Action, a service-learning experience, provided an opportunity for students to participate in service projects at local underprivileged schools. The experience allowed the Scholars to familiarize themselves with campus as well as interact with other students who were also driven and determined to succeed. Participating in Alabama Action helped the Scholars ease into their transition to campus and allowed them to focus on social integration without the stress of the academic components. Before Alabama Action was implemented as part of the CCS Program, most cohort 1 Scholars reported meeting their friends in their residence halls.

BCE 101, the freshman seminar course taught during each cohort’s first semester, integrated academic and non-academic components to help the Scholars develop social networks as well as academic competence. The course introduced the Scholars to essential campus resources and services. While the Scholars noted that they learned valuable pieces of
information about navigating campus, they benefited most from being together with their fellow Scholars. They reported that meeting twice a week as a group provided them with a safe place to ask questions and talk about what they were experiencing as college freshmen. Being in the class helped the Scholars recognize they were not alone and other students had similar questions and experiences. Unable to rely upon advice from their parents about how to manage the academic and social aspects of college life, the course addressed this need. The course also provided an opportunity for administrators to obtain an assessment of the Scholars welfare and address any potential problems or issues. BCE 101 was a positive experience, and some of the Scholars expressed their wishes for the course to continue all 4 years.

Alabama Action and BCE 101 removed many of the stresses the Scholars would have experienced trying to develop friendships and a sense of belonging, by providing ready-made communities through shared experiences. The Scholars may have relied more heavily upon the BCE 101 course for academic support had they not been receiving it from Student Support Services. Because they were receiving academic support from SSS, the Scholars were able to use the BCE 101 class time to identify and address other concerns and issues they were facing.

In addition to shared experiences, also essential to the Scholars’ social integration were the interactions with faculty outside the classroom. Most of the Scholars referred to the four administrators affiliated with the CCS Program as the faculty with whom they interacted most. Furthermore, these same administrators were identified by many of the Scholars as mentors. Most of the Scholars, especially in the later cohorts, identified Ms. Allen as their mentor. Ms. Allen, the coordinator of the CCS Program, provided the Scholars with important information, advice, and personal guidance. Several of the Scholars considered Ms. Allen a “mother-figure” because of her genuine concern for them and their well-being. Despite who their mentors were,
the Scholars stressed the importance of having a “go-to” person on campus that was accessible, personable, and resourceful. Because many of the Scholars were balancing challenging personal, financial and emotional issues, having a contact on campus who offered a safe environment where they could receive guidance was imperative.

*Research Question 3*

*What role does financial support play in the first-generation student experience?*

All of the Scholars reported that they always had intentions of attending college. None could recall a time when they considered otherwise. The debate, however, was in what institution they would select and how they would fund their college education.

Although the University of Alabama was the college of choice for most of the Scholars, without the financial support provided by the CCS they would have chosen another institution or they would have attended UA but struggled to remain enrolled. Even with the CCS, most of the Scholars revealed that they depended upon income from work-study positions, off-campus jobs, or student loans to support their unmet financial need. The significance of financial support from the CCS is that it was the deciding factor for many of the Scholars choosing to attend UA.

Many of the Scholars remarked that they were surprised by how expensive college was even with the CCS and a job; most of the Scholars noted that they were trying to avoid relying on student loans. Several of the Scholars accepted work-study positions on campus and worked 10-20 hours per week. Many of the Scholars who were in work-study positions were also fortunate to receive some financial support from their families. The Scholars who reported receiving no financial support from their families took off-campus jobs that provided
opportunities to earn more money and work more hours than work-study jobs. Unfortunately, the off-campus jobs presented challenging environments of their own.

Receiving the CCS allowed the Scholars to make the decision to attend UA. Unfortunately, after receiving the CCS, unmet financial need still presented a burden for a few of the Scholars. They were acutely aware of their financial situation and did everything they could to make ends meet. Although the Scholars continued to express concerns about their finances, the CCS mitigated some of the burden thus allowing the Scholars the freedom to focus less on finances and more on academic and social integration.

Research Question 4

What is the impact of the CCS Program on first-generation student retention?

The CCS Program provided academic, social, and financial support, which positively impacted the retention of the participating Scholars. Because most of the Scholars would have been unable to attend UA without the CCS, the primary level of support was financial, followed by academic and social. Although the CCS covered a large portion of the Scholars’ tuition and fees, unmet need would not allow financial matters to move far from the forefront of their concerns. The CCS, however, did provide enough financial support to allow some of the Scholars to avoid working or work manageable hours. Consequently, the Scholars were able to focus on their academic and social integration. In other words, the academic and social integration components were secondary to the Scholars after addressing financial needs and meeting financial obligations.

The CCS Program required Scholars to join SSS, which ensured that academic support was provided by assigning a counselor to each Scholar. The Program also implemented an
academic component by requiring BCE 101, a freshman seminar course. However, the Scholars credited the course with providing social support and a safe environment where they could ask questions and learn about navigating campus as opposed to academic support. BCE 101 and Alabama Action offered shared experiences for the Scholars and the greatest opportunities to develop friend networks. The network among their fellow Scholars and the CCS administrators was critical to the Scholars’ success. Most of the Scholars recognized the coordinator of the CCS Program as their mentor and reported the significance of having a person on campus that was accessible to them any time with any concern. In the absence of a knowledgeable family, Ms. Allen was recognized by many of the Scholars as a “mother figure.” She was essential because she was the “go-to” person when the Scholars had questions or concerns.

In spite of any academic, social, or financial struggles, every Scholar clearly articulated without hesitation their certainty of graduating. A few noted that due to financial struggles, they had contemplated their options and considered the possibility of leaving college temporarily to earn more money. One Scholar shared that she had difficulty coping with college. She was a Scholar who was invited to join the CCS Program during year two and did not have the opportunity to participate in the shared experiences of Alabama Action or BCE 101, which may have alleviated the stress and anxiety she was experiencing about her transition to college.

Implications for Practice

The CCS Program was established for a specified number of years to serve a limited number of students thus providing an appropriate fit for a descriptive case study. The University of Alabama became the first public university partner to the CCS Program when it accepted a $1M donation designated for a total of 48 first-generation students over the course of 7 years.
During the course of this study, the Coca-Cola Foundation agreed to renew their gift for an additional 4 years to support four more cohorts of 48 students at The University of Alabama.

Based on the experiences and observations shared by the Scholars and administrators of the CCS Program, many of the successful elements of the Program can be replicated to better support the general first-generation student population. The following implications for practice were derived to reinforce the significance of academic integration, social integration, and financial support for first-generation students:

Recommendations for Students

1. Take advantage of dual enrollment opportunities while in high school to better prepare for the academic rigor of college. Dual enrollment courses may be offered at a lesser cost to high school students than when taken as a college student, thus reducing the financial burden.

2. Be proactive in meeting with a high school guidance counselor for assistance in completing college applications and FAFSA applications.

3. Make yourself known to your professors. Actively participate and engage in class and seek out opportunities to interact with faculty and staff. Make it a point to schedule an appointment to meet with your professors during their office hours.

4. Be selective and become meaningfully engaged in a few campus organizations or activities to develop a network and supportive community of friends.

5. Seek out a faculty or staff member who may serve as your point of contact or mentor on campus.
Recommendations for Institutions

1. Prepare first-generation students for the expectations of college by fostering partnerships with high schools to provide dual enrollment opportunities for Grades 9-12 to ensure that they are better prepared for the academic rigors of college.

2. Offer a free special session or mini-course in writing and math to prepare first-generation students who are not entering college with AP or dual enrollment credit hours. Create a student ambassador program where college students provide precollege tutoring to first-generation students at local high schools.

3. Schedule web conferences with high school guidance counselors to interact with first-generation students and their families in their local high school to assist with the college application process and FAFSA application.

4. Present special sessions during summer orientation to first-generation students and their families to introduce the resources and services available to help them navigate the university and its processes. Consider fee waivers and opportunities that make it easier for them to travel and attend.

5. Print a special publication to provide to the parents and families of first-generation students providing information and tips that will assist them in supporting their college student.

6. Guard against using the scholarship GPA requirement as a high level stressor. Determine how to set a high standard, but evaluate how to make it a motivator so that students feel free to pursue interests as opposed to choosing the path of least resistance.

7. Encourage faculty to develop relationships, not just interact, with first-generation students. Especially encourage academic advisors to connect with first-generation students on a personal level.
8. Provide faculty entertainment grants to support professors in offering receptions or opportunities to develop relationships with their first-generation students outside the classroom.

9. Create opportunities for smaller classroom experiences.

10. Require a freshman seminar course for all first-generation students.

11. Develop a pre-test/post-test to assess the learning outcomes (academic and social) for freshman seminar courses such as BCE 101.

12. Establish opportunities for meaningful shared experiences for first-generation cohorts.

13. Establish similar cohort programs as the CCS Program for first-generation students.

14. Create a living-learning community for first-generation students.

15. Develop a mentoring program pairing first-generation faculty and first-generation students.

16. Create opportunities for older cohorts to mentor younger cohort and co-teach BCE 101 course. Offer a stipend for teaching and assisting with the course.

17. Encourage college development officers to solicit donors who may have an interest in endowing scholarships to support first-generation students.

Limitations of the Study

The sample of students participating in this study was limited to those who were selected for the CCS Program. The CCS Program was established for a specified number of years to serve a limited number of students at The University of Alabama. Four cohorts, each containing 12 Scholars, received support for 4 years. Of the 48 Scholars in the CCS Program, 19 elected to participate in this study. Because the Scholars chosen for the Program had demonstrated abilities
to succeed and demonstrated abilities of commitment, they may not have been representative of
the estimated 20% of first-generation students who enroll at The University of Alabama each
year. As such, the findings of this study may not be generalized to all first-generation college
students at UA or first-generation students attending similar institutions.

This study was also limited in that the amount of pre-college preparation attained by each
Scholar is unknown. First-generation students who are introduced to the academic expectations
of college courses may be more likely to succeed in college than those who do not have an
opportunity to earn college credit. Documentation of the number of AP courses completed and
dual enrollment hours earned by each Scholar would have provided additional insight into the
factors impacting academic integration. Likewise, ACT scores were not collected and evaluated.

A third limitation is that Scholars who were dropped from the CCS Program, as well as
first-generation students who were interviewed and not selected as a Scholar, were not invited to
participate in this study. While this study focused on the experiences of first-generation students
participating in the CCS Program, the factors impacting those who did not persist in the Program
are unknown. Of the Scholars selected, neither their race nor their gender were isolated or
examined as variables, which may have further impacted their persistence. Finally, the Scholars
were asked to share personal information and experiences. Consequently, the results are limited
to the extent that the students honestly and thoroughly provided information.

Recommendations for Future Research

The implications of practice, in addition to the results of this study, support the argument
for continued research and analysis that will further examine the unique needs of first-generation
students. There were four main elements of the CCS Program that supported the retention of the
Scholars. First and foremost was financial support, followed by mentoring and the shared
experiences of Alabama Action and BCE 101. Alabama Action not only provided an opportunity for the Scholars to participate in service-learning, it also offered an environment where many of the Scholars developed their first friendships. BCE 101 encouraged cohesion among each cohort as well as provided guidance on how to navigate campus. Finally, each cohort had access to a “go-to” person or mentor who was accessible and available to answer any questions they might have.

Based on the findings of this study, there are five areas recommended for further research. First, additional research on the impact of pre-college preparation is needed, including AP courses, dual enrollment, college and financial aid application processes, and transition issues. The results of this study indicated that many of the Scholars were not adequately academically prepared for college.

Second, the few Scholars who were dropped from the CCS Program deserve investigation. Why were these Scholars unable to persist with an academic, social, and financial support structure in place? The results of this study indicated that the Scholars were unsuccessful because they failed to meet the GPA requirement. However, it would be important to explore what did not work for these students. It would also be beneficial to learn about the experiences of the students who were interviewed but did not receive the CCS and if they were still able to attend UA.

A third area of suggested research would be comparing the various CCS Programs. Following The University of Alabama, the University of Georgia and Ohio State University became the next two public four-year institutions to receive the Coca-Cola First Generation Scholarship. Consequently, program comparisons could be conducted among the three institutions. However, the program at Ohio State specifically benefits incoming women who are
reentering college to complete their careers and may not offer as strong a comparison as a University of Alabama and University of Georgia program comparison.

Similarly, with the renewal of the CCS Program at The University of Alabama, a study of the next four cohorts could certainly build upon the results of this study. Further research might include the following: whether the Program impacts minority students differently; what impacts the persistence of first-generation students at UA who are not in the CCS Program; a closer inspection of Alabama Action to determine why it is such a successful element of the Program; request that the Scholars share access to the weekly letters they submit during BCE 101, which documents their observations and thoughts about their college experiences and transition.

Finally, the role of family, whether supportive or unsupportive, was significant to each of the Scholars. Future research might include interviews with the families. Some of the Scholars received tremendous family support while others expressed that their families were not capable of knowing how to support them. Understanding the positive or negative impact of family would be an important element to explore.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the experiences of first-generation students participating in the Coca-Cola First Generation Scholarship (CCS) Program at The University of Alabama, a four-year public institution. The CCS Program was funded by a $1M gift from the Coca-Cola Foundation in 2006. The Program provided $5,000 annual renewable scholarships to 48 students (Scholars) who are Alabama residents and the first in their families to attend college. Although this study represented a small sample size at a single institution, it supports the impact and value of academic integration, social integration, and financial support on first-generation student persistence and retention.
Although The University of Alabama was the college of choice for many of the Scholars, without the financial support provided by the CCS they would have chosen another institution. Even with the CCS, most of the Scholars revealed that they depended upon income from work-study positions, off-campus jobs, or student loans to support their unmet financial need. Additionally, many of the Scholars indicated that they were unprepared for the academic rigor of college. However, the Scholars received academic support from Student Support Services as a component of the CCS Program. Finally, participating in Alabama Action and BCE 101 provided the Scholars with not only an introduction to campus life, but also an introduction to many of the individuals who would become their closest friends. Most of the Scholars identified Ms. Allen, the coordinator of the CCS Program, as their mentor. She provided the Scholars with important information and advice and served as a “mother-figure” by offering understanding and genuine concern.

In spite of any struggles, every Scholar clearly articulated without hesitation their certainty of graduating. This study provides both researchers and practitioners with a better understanding of the unique needs of first-generation students attending a four-year public institution. Specifically, this study supports the impact and value of academic integration, social integration, and financial support on first-generation student persistence and retention.
REFERENCES


Application for the Coca-Cola First Generation Scholarship Program
The University of Alabama

Mail application to: The University of Alabama
Attn: Anna Jackson
Office of Undergraduate Scholarships
Box 870109
Tuscaloosa, AL 35487-0109

Application Priority Deadline: December 1, 2006
FAFSA Priority Deadline: March 1, 2007

* Any student whose parents or siblings are not attending nor hold a degree from a college is considered a first generation college student.

Name ____________________________

Campus Wide Identification Number (CWID) ____________________________

Mailing Address ____________________________

City______________ State____ Zip Code________

Permanent Phone Number (____)_________ Cell Number (____)_________

E-mail Address ____________________________

Please indicate University of Alabama College or School in which you plan to enroll for the Fall of 2007:
□ Culverhouse College of Commerce and Business Administration
□ College of Education
□ College of Engineering
□ College of Arts and Sciences
□ College of Human Environmental Sciences
□ Capstone College of Nursing
□ College of Communication and Information Services
□ School of Social Work
Honors and Awards/Leadership roles

Community and School Activities

Additional Information:
1.) Applicant must submit, with application, an essay describing 1.) what it means to you to be the first person in your family to go to college and 2.) how the Coca-Cola scholarship would help you achieve your dreams. (300-word minimum)

2.) Optional: Provide an additional essay explaining any factors you would like the scholarship committee to know.

3.) Please attach a resume.

Certification and Release Authorization
I affirm that no member of my immediate family has attended classes at or graduated from a four-year institution. I intend to enroll as a full-time freshman for the 2007-2008 academic year at The University of Alabama. I certify this information is true, complete and accurate. I authorize release of information to confirm and/or verify this application.

Signature

Remember:

Application Priority Deadline: December 1, 2006
FASFA Priority Deadline: March 1, 2007

If you have any questions about the scholarship application, please contact:
Undergraduate Scholarships (205) 348-8201
## Coca-Cola First Generation Scholarship Program

Due to the generosity of The Coca-Cola Foundation, Coca-Cola First Generation Scholarships will be awarded to twelve incoming freshmen that are first generation college students, beginning in the fall of 2006 for four consecutive years. Any student whose parents or siblings are not attending or have attended a college is considered a first generation college student.

In addition to this requirement, applicants must be Alabama residents, have a minimum 3.0 cumulative high school grade point average, and be admitted to the University of Alabama as a freshman student. First consideration will be given to those with demonstrated financial need; for priority consideration, a student must submit the FAFSA by March 1 of the year in which they are planning to enroll.

There is an additional application and essay for this scholarship. Priority deadline for application and essay is December 1.

Recipients will receive:

- $5,000 per year; renewable for four years if required GPA is maintained (2.8 GPA for freshmen year and 3.0 GPA thereafter)
- Eligibility to participate in services provided by Student Support Services
Support in adjusting to college life, as well as many opportunities to grow

Incoming freshman students can obtain a printable version of this application here. You will need to print the form, complete it, and mail it to the address listed at the top of the application.

UA Video News Release: Inaugural Coca-Cola First Generation Scholars

<< Back to Types of Scholarships Index
APPENDIX B

STUDENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
1. Tell me what it means to you to be a first generation college student.
2. What led you to make the decision to come to college?
   a. What were your other options?
3. How did you learn about the Coca-Cola Scholarship Program?
   a. Were you recruited to participate in the CCS program?
   b. How did the CCS impact your decision to attend UA?
   c. What expectations did you have about participating in the CCS Program?
4. Each cohort participated in a freshman seminar (BCE 101) twice a week during the fall semester of their freshman year. Was this course beneficial to you in providing academic or social support?
   a. Describe some of the out of classroom activities you have participated in as a cohort.
5. Each CCS received financial support. How has participating in the CCS Program impacted your academic performance?
   a. As a Coca-Cola Scholar, I understand that you must maintain a certain GPA. (2.8 as a FR, 3.0 three years following). If you needed academic support, what resources would you use?
6. How many of your closest friends from home are here at UA as opposed to another college, working full-time or remained in your hometown?
7. How have you made friends at college?
   a. How important is it to have friends who are also first-generation students?
8. How much do you think you have in common with other students on campus?
9. Tell me about how you are involved in campus activities.
10. How satisfied are you with your social life as a college student?
11. What has been most helpful to you in getting connected to the university community?
12. If you have needs that are different from the majority of students here, how well does the university meet those needs?
13. What have been your greatest challenges as a first-generation college student?
   a. How are you managing or how did you overcome these challenges?
14. Describe your interactions with faculty or administrators.
   a. In class?
   b. Out of class?
15. How important would say it is for first generation students to have a mentor?
16. When you applied, how did you plan to cover the costs associated with tuition, fees, room and board at the University of Alabama? (personal loans, Pell grants, out of pocket)
17. Did you apply for financial aid?
18. After receiving the CCS, how do you manage any unmet financial need?
19. Have you ever worked a full-time or part-time job while taking 12 or more hours?
   a. On-campus? Off-campus? Number of hours?
20. At this time, how certain are you that you will earn a college degree?
21. At any point, have you considered not finishing your degree due to financial, academic or social reasons?
22. What role has your family played in supporting your education?
23. Is college what you expected it to be?
24. What suggestions might you have for improving the undergraduate experience for first generation students?
APPENDIX C

FACULTY INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
1. Describe your role or affiliation with the Coca-Cola First-Generation Scholarship Program.
2. How, if at all, is the support you offer to the CCS Program within the scope of your official position at the University?
3. How do you think the CCS would be impacted if you did not support them in this way?
4. What role do you think you play in helping the CCS persist at UA?
5. What type of support services are provided to students once they are in the CCS program?
6. Based on your experience, do first-generation students have unique needs?
7. Currently, how does the University provide first-generation students with academic support?
   a. Social support?
   b. Financial support?
8. Do you think the University should offer specific support programs, like the CCS Program, to first-generation students?
9. Tell me about your perceptions of first-generation students in this program. How do they compare to first-generation students not in the CCS Program? To non-first-generation students?
10. What, if any, interactions do you have with the CCS outside the classroom?
11. What suggestions might you have for improving the undergraduate experience for first generation students?
12. Funding from the Coca-Cola Foundation for the CCS Program ended with the 2009 cohort. How successful do you think the program has been for the four participating cohorts?
13. Do you think the University should seek funding to provide programs to continue supporting first-generation students?
14. Do you have any additional comments to share with me about the program or the first-generation students who participated?

Specific to Development Officer: (in addition to general questions above)
1. What characteristics beyond those on the application (being first-generation, an Alabama resident, having at least a 3.0 high school GPA, being admitted to UA as a freshman student and demonstrating financial need) do you look for in terms of successful participants?
2. How do you determine if the 12 students selected have those characteristics?
3. What is the protocol for students who fail to meet the requirements of the CCS program?

Specific to BCE 101 instructor: (in addition to general questions above)
1. How was the BCE course designed for CCS? Did that change over the course of the four cohorts?
2. How did the BCE course provide academic and/or social support to the CCS?
3. How many BCE 101 courses do you currently teach? (in the past?)
4. How are the students in the other BCE 101 courses organized? (by major, alphabetically, randomly)
5. What differences, if any, have you noticed in the experiences of first-generation students from other students?
6. Is the syllabus for the BCE 101 class for the first-generation students different from the syllabi of the other BCE 101 courses?
7. How did you determine to use the same syllabi as the other BCE 101 courses OR Why did you provide a different syllabus to your first-generation class?
Course Syllabus

Instructor:

Office/Office Hours: By appointment

Telephone: e-mail:

Class Time:

Class Location:

Credit: 2 credit hours, Pass/Fail


Also Required: An academic planner (monthly calendar), and *The University of Alabama Undergraduate Catalog*.

Course Description: This course is open only to first-year UA students and provides an introduction to the nature of higher education and to the functions, resources, and activities of The University of Alabama. BCE 101 is designed to help students make a successful transition to the University, develop a better understanding of the learning process, and acquire basic academic survival skills. The ultimate goal of the course is to equip each student with the confidence and basic skills necessary for degree attainment.

Course Purpose: All sections of BCE 101 share the common purpose of facilitating the academic and social integration of first-year UA students through (a) interactions among students, faculty, and advisors, (b) exploration of the UA environment, expectations, and resources, (c) involvement in campus academic and co-curricular activities, (d) acquisition of academic skills, and (e) participation in career development activities.

Course Objectives: Upon successful completion of this course, the student should be able to:

1. Describe significant and unique aspects of The University of Alabama in order to gain a sense of institutional tradition
2. Utilize the *University Catalog* to find pertinent information
3. Identify campus facilities and their services
4. Identify their academic advisor and utilize the advising/registration process
5. Define personally appropriate steps to be taken in the process of career/academic decision-making
6. Describe University academic, social, and cultural, recreational resources and routes of involvement
7. Develop and follow an appropriate time-management plan.
9. Use computers for correspondence and search purposes (e-mail, Internet).

Methods of Instruction: Small group exercises; group discussion; individual exercises; guest speakers; audiovisuals; out-of-class assignments; lectures; visits to the Center for Teaching and Learning, the university library, and the Career Center; assigned chapters in the textbook; weekly writing assignments.

Course Expectations: Attendance is very important, as is coming to class on time. You may miss no more than four classes. These four absences should be used only for illness or emergencies. Failure to comply with this attendance policy will result in receiving an "F" for the course.

It is expected that students will complete all of the assignments by the assigned due date. Assignments turned in late will be subject to a reduction in grade.

Students are expected to complete all assignments. If a student is absent on the date a particular assignment is due, he/she must submit a valid medical excuse in order to avoid a reduction in grade.

Course Requirements: All of the following are required of all students:

Attendance policy as stated above. Also, students are expected to participate actively in classroom activities and discussions. Lack of class participation may result in a reduction in grade.

Weekly letters: Students are to submit a letter to the instructor at the beginning of class each Monday. These letters are intended to be a record of your college experiences as well as to respond to specific assignments or topics. The letter should be used to record observations about the transition to college, about performance in classes or as a member of a group, or about other matters. The letter can be considered one end of a written conversation with the instructor. It is the place to make comments or ask questions and is kept confidential. Each letter should be a minimum of one page and may be typed, handwritten, or sent via e-mail.

UAFreshmanConnection: Articles from www.uafreshmanconnection.com will be assigned according to topics covered in class. You will go to the website and read the assigned article and complete the survey question if one is present.

Faculty interview: Students will interview a faculty member, preferably one of their own instructors, or an instructor in a discipline they are interested in. Students will then make a presentation to the class on the results of their interviews.

Cultural events: Students are expected to attend one play and one musical event in the Moody Music Building. The instructor will explain this requirement further.
Student organizations: Students are expected to attend the campus wide “Get on Board Day” held on August 30th, and become familiar with at least two student organizations that interest them. Students will make a report to the class on these organizations.

Visit the Career Center, the Center for Teaching and Learning, and a University Library. Various classroom activities and assignments will relate to these visits.

Two Tests will be given; one around the middle of the term and one at the end of the term. Questions will come primarily from the textbook reading assignments. Questions may also be based on in- and out-of-class activities.

Grade Requirements: This course is graded on a Pass/Fail basis. Points are awarded for the following activities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Total Possible Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weekly lectures, 14 @ 10 points each</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>These lectures are required. Failure to turn in a lecture will result in a reduction of 10 points. Turning in a lecture late without a valid medical excuse will result in a reduction of 5 points.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance, 30 classes @ 10 points each</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Points will be deducted regardless of whether the absence is excused or unexcused.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oral presentations</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure to make a required oral presentation will result in a reduction in points.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written reports and assignments</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure to turn in a required written report will result in a significant reduction in points.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class participation</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure to participate actively in classroom activities will result in a significant reduction in points.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Test 1 grade</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Test 2 grade</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL POINTS POSSIBLE</td>
<td>940</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: TO RECEIVE A PASSING GRADE, YOU MUST EARN 80% OF THE TOTAL POSSIBLE POINTS. TO PASS THE COURSE YOU NEED 750 POINTS.

Bonus/Extra Credit Points: A maximum of 30 extra credit points may be earned by making use of the services and programs offered by the Center for Teaching and Learning. Verification must be provided. One hour at the CTL = 10 points.

NOTE: Attached to this syllabus is a schedule of activities listed by class date. It is your responsibility to refer to this schedule and keep up with what is going on in the course. Assignments must be turned in by the due date listed. Keeping up with the assignments and when they are due is one of the skills you will need to develop, so please be on time with all of your assignments. Since you are not allowed to miss more than four classes, it is essential that you keep up with your absences.
**Policy on Academic Misconduct:** The Academic Misconduct Disciplinary Policy will be followed in the event of student misconduct. All acts of dishonesty in any work constitute academic misconduct.

**Policy on Disability Accommodations:**
Please contact the Office of Disability Services (348-4285, 133B Martha Parham East) and the instructor if disability accommodations are needed.

**Extra Credit Bama Interactives**

Below is a list of the Bama Interactives that can be used for extra credit and the UA.FreshmanConnection articles with which they are located.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INTERACTIVE</th>
<th>UA.FRESHMANCONNECTION ARTICLE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Finding Resources</td>
<td>Welcome Home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School vs. College</td>
<td>Making the Transition to College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting &amp; Meeting Goals</td>
<td>Troubleshooting Guide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greek Life</td>
<td>Getting Involved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virtual Bartender</td>
<td>Just DON'T Do It</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol: Jim's Scenario</td>
<td>Just DON'T Do It</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol: Jack and Diane</td>
<td>Just DON'T Do It</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol: Julie</td>
<td>Just DON'T Do It</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol: True or False</td>
<td>Just DON'T Do It</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Management</td>
<td>Your Bama Lifestyle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress Much?</td>
<td>Your Bama Lifestyle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memory Test</td>
<td>Exam Preparation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memory Test Part II</td>
<td>Exam Preparation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What's Your Learning Style?</td>
<td>Exam Preparation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Skills</td>
<td>Textbook Skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Assault</td>
<td>Safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality</td>
<td>Thinking About Your Major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Thinking</td>
<td>Critical Thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active vs. Passive Learning</td>
<td>Critical Thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nutrition</td>
<td>Health and Wellness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity: How Do Your Beliefs Compare?</td>
<td>Diversity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity: Are You a Global Citizen?</td>
<td>Diversity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheating and Plagiarism</td>
<td>Academic Honesty</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
COURSE OUTLINE AND SCHEDULE OF ASSIGNMENTS

The following is a general outline for the semester. This schedule may change somewhat because of scheduling conflicts or tours. The instructor will let you know if changes need to be made. YOU SHOULD CONSULT THIS COURSE OUTLINE FREQUENTLY. YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR KNOWING WHEN ASSIGNMENTS ARE DUE. YOU ARE ALSO RESPONSIBLE FOR COMPLETING THE READING ASSIGNMENTS BY THE DATE INDICATED IN THIS OUTLINE.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>ASSIGNMENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wed. Aug. 23</td>
<td>Introduction and purpose of the course, course syllabus, course overview and requirements. Getting to know each other, group exercise. Assignment for Monday: Read the Introduction and Chap. 1.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mon. Aug. 28</td>
<td>Overview of Chapter 1 - exercises in Chap. 1. 1st letter to the instructor due next Wed. Sept. 5. Write about: “What I have found to be different at college so far.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Wed. Aug. 30   | CTL Tour  
Class will meet at the Center for Teaching and Learning, Orch Hall.  
Assignment: Read Chapter 3, Staying Healthy, for next time  
Attend Get On Board Day; find out about 2 student organizations; be prepared to tell the class what you found out. |
| Mon. Sept. 4   | Labor Day Holiday. No Class. |
| Wed. Sept. 6   | 1st letter to the instructor due. (see topic above).  
In-class: Discuss Chapter 3, Staying Healthy.  
In-class: Exercises from Chap. 3 Emphasis on alcohol awareness.  
Letter for next Monday: “How I have used my time appropriately and inappropriately so far,” and also list “Something good that has happened to me at college.”  
Assignment: Read chap. 2 for next time. |
| Mon. Sept. 11  | Letter to instructor on time management due.  
Chapter 2: The Academic Lifestyle.  
In-class: Exercise from Chap. 2: Grade Point Averages.  
Also today, reports from Get On Board Day.  
Students need to be familiar with Chapter 6 dealing with getting involved.  
Group exercises: Discuss information from Chapter 6 on Becoming Involved. |
| Wed. Sept. 13  | Chapter 4 Time Management  
In-class: Exercises from Chapter 4. Group activities.  
Assignment Exercise 42, Student need to buy some sort of calendar or planner for the semester.  
Letter for Monday: “Successes I have had so far.” |
| Mon. Sept. 18  | Chapter 4 continued: Priorities and To Do Lists.  
Letter on successes in college due.  
Be prepared to show instructor your calendar for the semester.  
In-class: Exercises 4.6 and 4.7. |
Wed. Sept. 20  In-class: Chap. 5, Learning Styles. Take Learning Styles Inventory
Letter for next Monday, “How I am balancing my social life and academic life.”

Mon. Sept. 25  Letter due on balancing social and academic life.
Continue Chap. 5. Discuss results from Inventory.
Do other exercises in Chap. 5.
Assignment for Wednesday, read Chapter 7, Note Taking.

Wed. Sept. 27  In class, Chap. 7, Taking Notes.
In class, Exercise 7.2, 7.3.
Letter for next time: Am I getting enough rest? How can I change my habits to get more rest?
Assignment: Read Chap. 6 and obtain a University catalog, you will need it soon.

Mon. Oct. 2  Letter due on getting enough rest.
In-class: Chapter 8, Reading College Textbooks. Do-in-class exercises.
Assignment: Begin reading Chapter 10.

In-class: Discussion and exercises from Chapter 10.
Letter for Monday: “Things I have learned outside the classroom.”

Mon. Oct. 9  Letter due on Things I have learned outside the classroom.
Chapter 10 continued. Exercise 10.3. Review for test on Wednesday.
Assignment: Study for test on Wednesday.

Wed. Oct. 11  FIRST TEST: will cover chapters 1-7, 10, and in-class discussions.
E-mail assignment: Students need to send the instructor an e-mail message.
Letter for next time: “Do I fit in at the University of Alabama?” can be e-mailed.
Read Chapter 9 for Monday. Bring a University of Alabama catalog to class.

Mon. Oct. 16  Letter due on fitting in at UA.
In-class, Chapter 9, discussion of academic divisions and pre-registration. Exercise 9.1.
Do exercise 9.2 for Wednesday. Different students will be assigned questions from exercise 9.3.
Assignment: Pick up pre-registration packet and a spring schedule of classes and bring to class on Wednesday along with the undergraduate catalog.

In class: Planning your schedule. Students will bring a schedule of classes and begin to plan their schedules for next semester.
Letter for next Monday: “Why I have chosen the major I have chosen?” or “Why I am thinking about changing majors?” or “What majors am I considering and why.” Also read Chapter 11.

Mon. Oct. 23  Letter due on majors.
Chapter 11, Career Exploration.
Career exploration exercises in Chapter 11.
Next class: meet at the Career Center.

Wed. Oct. 25  Meet at the Career Center (upstairs in Ferguson) for a Career Center tour.
Career Center assignment will be distributed.
Career assignment reports due next Wednesday.
Letter due next Monday: Am I living a healthy lifestyle?
Assignment: Read Chapter 12.
Mon. Oct 30  Letter due on healthy lifestyles
  In class: Chapter 12, the Purpose of a University Education.
  Also, exercises 12.2 and 12.3.
  Career assignment reports and presentations due on Wednesday.
  Read Chapter 13 for Wednesday.

Wed. Nov. 1  Presentations on careers and job research.
  In class: Chapter 13, on university faculty.
  Discuss assignment on interviewing an instructor, due in 1½ weeks.
  Letter for next Monday: “My goals for the future, how they changed in the last 3
  months?”

Mon. Nov. 6  Letter due on goals.
  Chapter 13 continued. Guest speaker, faculty member will discuss what they do.
  Be prepared to ask the faculty member questions.
  Assignment: Instructor interview due soon (exercise 13.1)

Wed. Nov. 8  Library tour. To be arranged.
  Library assignment will be distributed to be handed in Monday Nov. 13.
  Instructor interview assignment due next Wednesday.
  Letter for next week: “What I have learned about college teaching and college
  instructors.”
  Assignment: Read Chapter 14 for next time.

  In-class: Chapter 14, Communication Skills. In-class exercises 14.1 and 14.2.
  Instructor interview assignment due Wednesday. Students will report their findings to
  the class.
  Also, read Chap. 15 for Wednesday.

Wed. Nov. 15  Instructor interview assignment due.
  Student reports on instructor interview.
  Chapter 15, Money Management. In-class discussion.
  Letter for next Monday: “Interesting things I have learned from this course.”
  Read Chapter 16 for Monday.

Mon. Nov. 20  Final letter due
  Chapter 16, Historical aspects of U.A. presentation (Dr. Livingston)

Wed. Nov. 22  NO CLASS. Happy Thanksgiving.

Mon. Nov. 27  Instructor Discretion. Review for test.

Wed. Nov. 29  TEST 2 will cover Chapters 9, 10, 11-16 as well as classroom activities and
  assignments.

Mon. Dec. 4  Last Class. Last day to turn in assignments etc.
  Reports and presentations on cultural activities due.
  Summing up: Group Activity. “Advice I would give to next years freshman class.”
  Preparing for final exams.

Wed. Dec. 6  Instructor use as make-up day. Study for finals.
APPENDIX E

IRB APPROVAL
February 2, 2010

Brandi Lamon
ELPITS
College of Education
The University of Alabama

Re: IRB # 10-OR-037 “Experiences of First-Generation Coca-Cola Scholars at The University of Alabama”

Dear Ms. Lamon:

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board has granted approval for your proposed research.

Your protocol has been given expedited approval according to 45 CFR part 46. You have also been granted the requested waiver of informed consent for the student participants. Approval has been given under expedited review category 7 as outlined below:

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Your application will expire on February 2, 2011. If your research will continue beyond this date, complete the relevant portions of Continuing Review and Closure Form. If you wish to modify the application, complete the Modification of an Approved Protocol Form. When the study closes, complete the appropriate portions of FORM: Continuing Review and Closure.

Please provide student participants with a copy of the attached participant information sheet. Please use reproductions of the IRB approved informed consent form to obtain consent from your faculty/staff participants.

Should you need to submit any further correspondence regarding this proposal, please include the above application number.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Carpalato T. Myles, MSM, CLM
Director & Research Compliance Officer
Office for Research Compliance
The University of Alabama
UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS
REQUEST FOR APPROVAL OF RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

I. Identifying Information

Principal Investigator
Name: Brandi Lamon
Department: Ed Leadership
College: Education
University: The University of Alabama
Address: Box 870200
Telephone: 205-348-7594
FAX: 205-348-8373
E-mail: blamon@eng.ua.edu

Second Investigator
Name: 
Second Investigator
Department: 
College: 
University: The University of Alabama
Address: Box 870200
Telephone: 205-348-7594
FAX: 205-348-8373
E-mail: 

Third Investigator
Name: Karri Holley
Second Investigator
Department: Ed Leadership
College: Education
University: The University of Alabama
Address: Box 870302
Telephone: 205-348-7825
FAX: 205-348-2161
E-mail: kholley@bamaed.ua.edu

Title of Research Project: Experiences of First-Generation Coca-Cola Scholars at The University of Alabama

Date Printed: 1/18/10
Funding Source: None

Type of Proposal: [X] New [ ] Revision [ ] Renewal [ ] Completed [ ] Exempt

Attach a renewed application

UA faculty or staff member signature: Karri A. Holley

II. NOTIFICATION OF IRB ACTION (to be completed by IRB):

Type of Review: [_____] Full board [_____] Expedited

IRB Action:

[_____] Rejected Date:
[_____] Tabled Pending Revisions Date:
[_____] Approved Pending Revisions Date:

[_____] Approved—this proposal complies with University and federal regulations for the protection of human subjects.

Approval is effective until the following date:

Items approved:
Research protocol: dated
Informed consent: dated
Recruitment materials: dated
Other: dated

Approval signature: [Signature] Date 2/3/2010

180