

Investigating Academic and Psychosocial Outcomes of First-Generation African
American Postsecondary Students who completed Early College Access

Programming:
A Qualitative Case Study

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative bounded case study examines both the benefits and challenges faced by first-generation African American students who have completed early college access programming (ECAP). Not all children have equal access to higher education, therefore educators have been trying to bridge the gap in education for years. Due to socio-economic challenges in society, there has been a colossal increase in the need for diversity and inclusion within postsecondary institutions. Students from various ethnicities and backgrounds bring different experiences to education and the education learned through those various experiences are valuable. Inequalities in college access experienced by first-generation African American students is the lens for this study. This study addresses the effectiveness of early college access and its effects on first-generation African American students' postsecondary academic and psychosocial outcomes. Driven by critical race theory, this study analyzed student perceptions of their participation in ECAP and whether it supported their academic achievement in college. The study consisted of 10 interviews with Achievable Dream alumni enrolled in six universities across the Commonwealth of Virginia. Results were analyzed using inductive coding to identify components that affect academic achievement. Findings suggest that participation in early college access programming established an educational foundation which led to positive outcomes in academic achievement throughout postsecondary education. In addition to positive outcomes, barriers to achieving academic success were also identified.

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GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT

This case study examines both the benefits and challenges faced by first-generation African American students who have completed early college access programming (ECAP). Not all children have equal access to higher education, therefore educators have been trying to bridge the gap in education for years. Due to socio-economic challenges in society, there has been a huge increase in the need for diversity and inclusion within colleges and universities. Students from various ethnicities and backgrounds bring different experiences to education and the education learned through those various experiences are valuable. Inequalities in college access experienced by first-generation African American students is the lens for this study. This study addresses how early college access effects academic achievement of first-generation African American students while in college. This study analyzed student perceptions of their participation in ECAP and whether it supported their academic achievement in college. The study consisted of 10 interviews with Achievable Dream alumni enrolled in six universities across the Commonwealth of Virginia. Findings suggest that participation in early college access programming established an educational foundation which led to positive outcomes in academic achievement throughout college. In addition to positive outcomes, barriers to achieving academic success were also identified.

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, Audrey and Bobby Patterson. Thank you for always being supportive and raising me to be the woman I am today. Daddy, you have always encouraged me to strive for the best. No matter where life has taken me, you have always been there to support me. Momma, you always focused on the importance of education. When it came to academics, A's were the expectation with no exception, even during my doctoral studies. You said you never wanted me to have to physically work as hard as you did, and schooling would be my ticket out. Momma, even though you are not here with us today, I hope you and Daddy are proud of the accomplishments I have made and the woman I have become.

I also dedicate this work to my children, Gavin, Kenny, and J. I love each of you. You were my motivation to complete my doctoral journey. Although you are not first-generation, this research pertains to each of you. As an underrepresented minority, there may be barriers that must be overcome, but you can always know I will be by your side to support you. With this dissertation, I pledge that it is my life's work to ensure that each of you have a solid foundation to be successful in life. You have heard me say this countless time before, "If I can do it, you can too!"

Lastly, I would like to dedicate this accomplishment to all of the ancestors that came before me, for you laid a solid foundation for me to stand on.

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“When I think of the goodness of Jesus, and all that he has done for me...”

First and foremost, I would like to give honor to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, for without Him, this doctoral journey would not have been possible. This document is a testament that I am blessed and highly favored.

Thank you to all of my family, friends, and colleagues for the encouragement and support you have provided me with over the past three years. The outpouring of texts, calls, posts, and snaps throughout this journey reminded me of the love I am surrounded by and type of people I have in my life.

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“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” -Philippians 4:13

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Chapter One

The Problem

Introduction

As a first-generation underrepresented student, research related to the education of first-generation minorities is intriguing. In this paper, the topic of early college access for first-generation African American students, an important subject to discuss, is addressed, while thinking about early college access for first-generation minorities is compelling, and what potential connections with policy and governance there may be.

This study focuses on investigation of academic and psychosocial outcomes of first-generation African Americans that completed early college access programming (ECAP). Overall inequalities in college access experienced by first-generation African American students is a lens for this study. With this purpose in mind, the study is driven by critical race theory (CRT). Critical race theory is a theoretical framework that examines how the appearance of race and racism shapes and perpetuates itself in society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000). Educational implications of CRT were determined in some of the earliest studies, centered on the intellectual assessment and school achievement of African American and other ethnic minority students (Tate, 1997). Contributing to our understanding of many school achievement issues, class, gender, and their intersections with race are important, although they do not account for all inequalities between Caucasians and African American students (Briggs et al., 2012).

College access interest. Students from various backgrounds bring different experiences to education, the education learned from a diverse group of experiences is immensely valuable. All children do not have equal access to post-secondary education. Despite substantial progress since the 1954 Supreme Court ruling outlawing discrimination in schools, African Americans remain underrepresented in post-secondary education institutions (Walpole, 2008). According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, this population continues to lag behind White and Asian Americans in college enrollment, academic achievement, and degree attainment (Walpole, 2008). The gap has widened between White and African American student enrollment in colleges reinforcing inequity (Walpole, 2008). First generation and underrepresented minorities (URM) often experience challenges when applying to post-secondary institutions (Swail, 2000). As a first-generation student (FGS) of American Indian and African American decent, I found it hard to navigate the application and financial aid process while researching admission to higher

education institutions. As a first-generation student, no one in my family had ever attended college, so I was unable to receive guidance or information from them. My school provided a guidance counselor to each student as a college prep resource. Unfortunately, due to the number of students assigned to each counselor, I could only meet with my counselor a limited number of times. Not knowing where to start, I asked high school students on my bus how I should begin preparing for college. They informed me of an early college access program called Upward Bound. Once accepted into the Upward Bound program, I quickly learned the process of researching universities, the steps to apply for admission, and how to apply for financial aid. Then, I began attending on-campus visits. Without that early exposure, I would not have known how to apply for post-secondary education and most likely would not be in the position I am today, which is being the first person in my family to attend college.

Statement of the Problem

Educators have been trying to bridge the gap in education for years. The founder of Achievable Dream also saw this gap in education and decided to incorporate a small bridge in it, starting in Newport News, Virginia. Achievable Dream is a middle and high school founded on the question: Could kids from high poverty areas succeed if given the chance? This unique public/private school focuses on the success of its students by using the Social, Academic, and Moral Education (SAME) curriculum aligning closely with ECAP. The SAME curriculum provides important life skills that include ethics, etiquette, peaceful conflict resolution, healthy living, financial know-how, and Speaking Green (Achievable Dream, n.d). Each morning students are expected to recite positive affirmations that remind them of the school's beliefs and expectations (Achievable Dream, n.d.).

The goal of the program is to prepare students for postsecondary education or the military. With a 98 percent population of African American students, 78 percent of its students from a single parent household, nine percent from a no parent household, and 100 percent of its students eligible for free or reduced lunch. Encouragingly this school has achieved a 100 percent on-time graduation rate. The numbers demonstrate student success while in the program, but what has not been examined is the postsecondary academic and psychosocial outcomes of the alumni of Achievable Dream and whether they perceive their participation in such school affected their academic experience.

Significance of early college access. The term *college access* is associated with multiple issues such as college choice preparation, how low-SES families can afford post-secondary education, how URM students overcome discrimination and social disadvantage, and preparation for college level course work (Bragg, Kim, & Barnett, 2006). American higher education institutions have been working hard to increase diversity on their campuses (Haring-Smith, 2012). Over time, there has been a decrease in URM applications and acceptances due to increased tuition costs, the number of minority households below the poverty level, and a de-emphasis on affirmative action (Le, 2002).

Improving college access has concentrated on increasing the number of college-ready students entering college. College access focuses less on successful completion of post-secondary education of students who have already qualified for, gained acceptance to, and sent letters of commitment to higher education institutions (Rall, 2016). Mentoring is particularly important for the success and retention of minorities and women, who may have limited access to mentors and who often face additional professional challenges including bias, prejudice, lack of confidence, a sense of isolation, and disparate cultural expectations (Lewis et al., 2016).

Often URMs are FGS meaning their parents did not pursue post-secondary education. It can be difficult for parents to assist a child in preparing for college when they have not attended themselves. Also, not knowing the ins and outs of the admission process is a disadvantage for parents trying to assist their children in applying to institutions and financial aid. Due to FGS parent's lack of knowledge, high school counselors are often relied upon as the student's main college access resource.

High school guidance counselors are typically the first point of contact for a student when looking for guidance in post-secondary education. High schools have become overpopulated and have high student-to-guidance counselor ratios. The high ratios are a disadvantage for those that may need extra mentorship from their guidance counselor, because these students do not have anyone to help assist them with their post-secondary education search.

The increasing student-to-guidance counselor ratios make it difficult for students who may need additional help to receive the appropriate level of mentorship. A study by the National Association for College Admission Counseling shows that the average public school counselor has a caseload of 476 students and spends only 22% of his or her time on post-secondary counseling (Pérez, 2017).

Virginia Tech recognized the need for the additional assistance by students that were underrepresented at the university and began early college access programs to address this challenge. Two programs being utilized as college access initiatives are Upward Bound/Talent Search and College Access Collaborative. Upward Bound/Talent Search is a federally funded TRIO program while College Access Collaborative is a state and university funded program. The programs offer mentorship and financial assistance to high school students that are low income, first generation, have limited English proficiency, from ethnic groups that are traditionally underrepresented in post-secondary education, have disabilities, are homeless, and are in or aging out of the foster care system. With competitive application processes, the programs select underrepresented high school students recommended by guidance counselors and high school teachers based on academic merit as well as drive and initiative to progress and attend a post-secondary institution. Achievable Dream is considered ECAP because its curriculum provides various opportunities for the students to engage in programming related to college access. The strong alignment of ECAP with the SAME curriculum helps to prepare students for postsecondary education.

Connection with affirmative action. Affirmative action is a policy issue related to the topic of early college access for underrepresented minorities. Affirmative action is defined by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights in 1977 as, “any measure, beyond simple termination of discriminatory practice, adopted to correct and compensate for past or present discrimination or to prevent discrimination from reoccurring in the future” (Sax & Arredondo, 1996). A more recent definition states affirmative action means positive steps taken to increase the representation of women and minorities in areas of employment, education, and culture from which they have been historically excluded (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2018). Post-secondary institutions generally use affirmative action as an effort to improve educational opportunities, thereby increasing access among minorities (Palmer, Wood, Dancy, & Strayhorn, 2014). Oppositional citizens have voiced their concern that post-secondary institutions have affirmative action policies pertaining to the admissions process.

There are two sides to every story: When researching the topic of affirmative action, I learned that there are, very generally speaking, two opinions. Some believe that affirmative action in higher education assists those persons who are not given the same opportunities as individuals who have parents with higher education experiences, may be financially privileged

and/or have race privilege. Others see affirmative action as unfair to applicants who are not underrepresented because of belief that an opportunity may be taken away from a qualified applicant in favor of someone who may not be as qualified. Programs like Upward Bound/Talent Search and College Access Collaborative exist to assist those students underrepresented in the admissions process. Although the early college access programs are designed to aid students with the admissions process at the university, critics in the public sometimes view them as race-based admissions programs. The perception is that affirmative action creates reverse discrimination (Garrison-Wade & Lewis, 2004). This concept of reverse discrimination is inaccurate, as the programs only prepare students within the targeted demographic to apply for post-secondary education. The challenges universities face around race-based admission processes and policy sometimes lead to a need for a governing body to step in and make decisions.

Governance connections. A preponderance of court cases have been litigated to uphold affirmative action over the past few decades. In 1978, in the Supreme Court case *University of California Regents v. Blake*, it was ruled that institutions could use race as a factor to foster diversity, but the use of racial quotas was prohibited (Palmer et al., 2014). Later in 1999, the U.S. Court of Appeals overturned that ruling indicating race could not be taken into consideration in admissions decisions (Palmer et al., 2014). In *Grutter v. Bollinger* (2003), the court reaffirmed the ability of the universities to use race as a factor to attain a diverse student body but the process must be narrowly tailored not to function as a quota system (Palmer et al., 2014). More recently a case went to trial in 2013 and the court reaffirmed the ability to use race to diversify student populations in *Fisher v. University of Texas, 2016*.

In the case of *Fisher v. University of Texas, 2016 at Austin*, a White applicant, Fisher was denied admission to a state university and brought action alleging that the university's race-conscious admissions program violated her Fourteenth Amendment right to equal protection (*Fisher v. University of Texas, 2016*). In this case, the university argued that the educational benefits of diversity was sufficient and that it need not identify any metric that would allow a court to determine whether its plan was needed to serve, or was actually serving, those interests (*Fisher v. University of Texas, 2016*). The District Court of Texas granted summary judgement to the university and while the applicant appealed, the Court of Appeals affirmed. Certiorari was granted which lead to the US Supreme Court. They vacated and remanded the decision and on remand the Court of Appeals affirmed again. After certiorari was granted for the second time, the

Supreme Court held that the university's admission program did not violate equal protection (*Fisher v. University of Texas, 2016*).

As one can see with this case, there is difficulty in determining whether special admission programs related to race are constitutional. This case went to the US Supreme Court twice. There must be a compelling state interest to determine the constitutional validity of law, which happens when the government's interest is compared to the individual's constitutional right to be free of law. Researchers agree that abandonment of affirmative action could pose a significant challenge to URM's by restricting their access to higher education (Palmer et al., 2014). Although racial inequality in higher education continues to be in the forefront of today's society, universities are still making the effort to increase diversity.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to examine both the benefits and challenges faced by first-generation African American students who have completed early college access programming. The study scope is to examine the academic and psychosocial outcomes of postsecondary first-generation African American students who have completed ECAP, specifically at Achievable Dream. The aim is to explore student perceptions of their participation in early college access programming and whether it supported their academic achievement in college. The data gained through this study can be used to support the unique public/private partnership of Achievable Dream in relation to illustrating postsecondary academic achievement of students that are alumni.

Justification of the Study

This study is important as educators have been trying to bridge the gap in education for years and Achievable Dream appears to have succeeded in this area. The early college access school, Achievable Dream, is expanding, which provides additional opportunity for reaching more students. Achievable Dream and its' first-generation African American students' academic and psychosocial outcomes are worth investigating not only in dollars and cents, but the need to impact more students in bridging the educational gap. Achievable Dream is growing outside of its original geographical area of Newport News, Virginia, to Virginia Beach City, Virginia and Henrico County, Virginia which shows the outcomes of the programming is reaching more students.

Data obtained through this study can be used to increase educational support not only around Newport News, Virginia Beach, and Henrico counties, but also additional high poverty areas throughout the United States. Increasing awareness around educational success in high poverty areas is one of main purposes of this study. If the data used in this study can demonstrate how ECAP can positively affect students postsecondary academic and psychosocial outcomes, this study can bring valuable data to those working on bridging the gap in education.

Research Questions/Guiding Questions

The available research and literature is examined for evidence relative to the following research questions:

1. What are the academic (i.e., grade point average, hours earned, and academic standing) outcomes of first-generation African American students after graduation from Achievable Dream?
2. What are the psychosocial (i.e., academic determination, discipline, and commitment) outcomes of first-generation African American students after graduation from Achievable Dream?
3. How do first-generation African American students perceive their postsecondary academic and psychosocial outcomes?
 - a. In what ways, if any, do students who participated in early college access programming believe program participation affected their academic experience?
 - b. What do students who participated in early college access programming perceive to be barriers?
 - c. What do students who participated in early college access programming perceive to be the most valuable supports?

Definition of Terms

This section provides a list of clearly defined terms that are used throughout this study, which may be useful in orienting the researcher and reader.

1. *Achievable Dream* is a unique public/private academy that provides middle and high school students with early college access. The academy is in partnership with Newport News Public Schools, where the school system provides instructional and

- support elements while Achievable Dream operates as a 501(c)(3), raising funds for additional components that contribute significantly to the programs' effectiveness.
2. *Affirmative Action* means positive steps taken to increase the representation of women and minorities in areas of employment, education, and culture from which they have been historically excluded.
 3. *African American* is an American of African and especially of black African descent.
 4. *Critical Race Theory (CRT)* is a theoretical framework that examines how the appearance of race and racism shapes and perpetuates itself in society.
 5. *Diversity* is differences among people with respect to age, class, ethnicity, gender, physical and mental ability, race, sexual orientation, spiritual practice, and other human differences.
 6. *Early College Access Programming (ECAP)* is programming intended to serve at-risk and traditionally underrepresented students that provided a comprehensive support system that develops academic and social skills as well as the behaviors and mindsets necessary for college completion.
 7. *First-Generation Student (FGS)* is a student who self-identifies as having no parent or legal guardian that has obtained a bachelor's degree.
 8. *Postsecondary Education* is the educational level following the completion of a secondary school, such as a high school. Also referenced as higher education, postsecondary education is taken to include undergraduate education.
 9. *Underrepresented Minority (URM)* is someone whose racial or ethnic makeup is from one of the following: African American/Black, Hispanic/Latinx, Native American/Alaskan Native, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander.

Limitations/Delimitations

This study focuses on first-generation African American students, which the classification of first-generation status may pose a limitation. Students would need to self-identify as first-generation and it is possible that some students could incorrectly self-identify. The data for this study is based upon self-reported responses in relation to academic achievement. An additional limitation of this study is that the data collected is from one high school in the Commonwealth of Virginia, limiting the generalization of the study. Despite the limitations and delimitations mentioned above, this study is important as it could be effective in

increasing awareness around bridging the gap in education as well as demonstrating the effects of such program on students coming from high poverty areas.

Organization of the Study

This study is organized around five chapters. Chapter One introduces the topic, purpose for the study, research questions, and significance of the study. The second chapter is a review of the literature relevant to the study. Chapter Three explains the methodology used in the study, including site/sample selection, data collection procedures, and instrument design. Chapter Four describes the results of the study. Chapter Five provides the discussion of the findings and the implications for future practice and research.

Chapter Two

A Review of Literature

Background

Diversity and inclusion are essential components of any credible institution. *Diversity* is differences among people with respect to age, class, ethnicity, gender, physical and mental ability, race, sexual orientation, spiritual practice, and other human differences (Castania, (n.d)). Inclusion is used in addition to diversity as a complement to inform others that although a space may be diverse it should also be inclusive. Even though various groups of people may be in a space together, the space should be welcoming. According to Sapon-Shevin (2008), inclusion is not only about disability and schools, but also about creating a society in which all children and their families feel welcomed:

In our increasingly diverse world, all people need to be comfortable with diversity.

Inclusion benefits all students by helping them understand and appreciate that the world is big, that people are different, and that we can work together to find solutions that work for everyone. Inclusion teaches us to think about we rather than I. (pp. 49-50)

A powerful way to combat political apathy is by helping young people make connections between their lives and those of others (Sapon-Shevin, 2008, p. 52). Educational institutions try to be inclusive as they typically have a diverse population, but, unfortunately, underrepresented populations often still exist. Universities have various definitions of underrepresented, but often these definitions reflect first-generation students and/or students of an underrepresented race or ethnicity. Virginia Tech's Office of Recruitment, Diversity, and Inclusion identifies American Indian, Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and First-Generation students all as a demographic that require additional support.

Search Process

Inclusion and exclusion criteria. Search procedures were put in place to yield the most relevant and critical data related to this subject. Academic journals, books, and dissertations were reviewed for this purpose. Parameters for all searches were set to include full text material.

This review utilizes the following inclusion criteria: studies with a publication date 2000-2018, studies written in the English language with a population from the United States of America. Also sought were studies that included graduation rates and that have an evaluative

component: differences in student decisions, differences in program outcomes by race, and differences in program outcomes related to first-generation students.

These criteria were used to exclude studies from this review: written prior to the year 2000, written in a non-English language, that have less than 15 subjects, that are opinion and not empirically based, and where qualitative data were not analyzed.

A search for literature was performed using the EBSCOhost, JSTOR, and ProQuest. The Virginia Tech VTechWorks library was used for this literature review. The following databases were searched: Academic Search Complete, Social Science and Education, Education Research Complete, Chronicle of Higher Education, and the Oxford African American Studies Center. The search yielded the following results:

- pre-college engagement AND Black students and African American students. Yield = 74
- pre-college engagement AND first-generation students. Yield = 15
- early college access AND African American or Black or Americans or Blacks. Yield = 3,646
- early college access AND Black students. Yield = 86
- first generation students AND African Americans or Black or Americans or Blacks. Yield = 52
- pre-college programs AND African Americans or Black or Americans or Blacks. Yield = 13
- college admissions AND African Americans or Black or Americans or Blacks. Yield = 691
- post-secondary education decisions AND Black students or African American students. Yield = 87
- post-secondary education decisions AND first-generation students. Yield = 3
- achievable dream academy. Yield = 586
- race based admissions. Yield = 193
- affirmative action admissions. Yield = 571
- pre-college programs. Yield = 89
- culturally ethnic students. Yield = 5
- college access collaborative. Yield = 2

- first generation college students. Yield = 444
- upward bound. Yield = 75

Methods Used in Sources

While researching for this literature review, I found most studies used research that was qualitative in nature. Authors used qualitative data from interviews to answer the research questions proposed. The type of research questions proposed in this area of study, often require open ended questions which are better answered interview style. Many studies used quantitative data collected via surveys and statistical analysis. I was most intrigued by the studies that were qualitative due to the rich data that comes from participant interviews. The use of qualitative case studies involves focusing on society and culture in a group, program, or an organization (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). By using qualitative case study methodology, one can use questionnaire data to run a quantitative descriptive analysis, use themes that emerge from analysis of qualitative interviews to thoroughly answer the research question.

Synthesis of the Literature

Challenges for URMs. Increased awareness of the value of higher education attainment prompts educators and school administrators to focus on providing adequate and appropriate college access initiatives for traditionally underrepresented groups such as minorities, economically disadvantaged, and first-generation students (Mudge, Higgins, & Antonio, 2011). One reason URMs are not enrolled in predominately White institutions is because they tend to have more barriers when compared to their White counterparts, perceived or otherwise, that affect their decisions (Strayhorn, 2010). These barriers include a lack of mentors of the same or similar ethnicity (Strayhorn, 2010), finances, inadequate preparation, and lack of encouragement and support from culture or family (Perna & Titus, 2005). These barriers can contribute to less minority enrollment in undergraduate and graduate courses. Low-income and racial/ethnic minority students have historically faced the greatest academic and financial barriers to acquiring access to higher education, yet research rarely considers the supplementary resources and skills they need to effectively navigate the educational pipeline (Welton & Martinez, 2014). There are also substantial achievement disparities between Black and White students. This achievement gap is a potential barrier for Black students to obtain an education. URMs have many barriers in

education that can be detrimental to both their collegiate experience and future success (Silas, Kaufman, Scherer, Anderson, & Bohannon, 2016).

Socioeconomic status challenges. Students are trapped in a cycle of poverty and societal marginalization, due to the disadvantage of lack of access to higher education (Stillisano, Waxman, Brown, & Alford, 2014). Socioeconomic status (SES) is a challenge that most students have no control over, but their access to college can depend on it. Research has found that low-SES students are less likely to aspire to, apply to, be prepared for, or enroll in post-secondary education (Walpole, 2007). Parental expectations and definitions of success tend to vary with social status. Specifically, low socioeconomic parents are more likely to view a high school diploma as a norm for their children (Walpole, 2007). These parents view the completion of a high school degree as a normative pathway to upward mobility (Smith, 2008). Low-SES, working-class, and first-generation students have fewer resources and less knowledge about college (Walpole, 2007).

Parents of low-income African-American students are not often equipped to explore college choice, though they have the goal of providing a college education to their children (Smith, 2008). Finances are a critical factor when looking at the inequalities of education. Socioeconomic status can become an issue as early as elementary school. Students that fall under the poverty line may receive free or reduced lunch but may not have the means to buy materials needed for school such as writing supplies or even a book bag. Low-SES students are often bullied because of their clothes—hand-me downs from another sibling; or, their parents may be unable to afford to purchase new items. Students that live in poverty often attend primary and secondary schools that do not have the best academic setting, they cannot afford to pay for advanced placement courses, do not have the means to pay for ACT or SAT examinations, cannot pay for admissions application fees, and most importantly do not know how they are going to pay for college. These students are less likely to view college as a realistic option. Growing up watching their parents work just to make ends meet, low-SES students sometimes feel obligated to obtain a job after high school to assist in earning money for the family. According to a study by the ACT and the United Negro College Fund, African American high school graduates are less prepared for a college-level curriculum than any other racial or ethnic group (Cokley, Obaseki, Moran-Jackson, Jones, & Vohra-Gupta, 2016).

Nationally, FGS have a lower median household income as well as more unmet financial need as opposed to non-FGS (Postsecondary National Policy Institute, 2016). When faced with going to college or working to help the family, low-SES students must weigh their options. By attending college, one is obtaining knowledge to increase opportunities within the job market. If provided financial aid to attend college, the question asked is, “how will it be paid back?”. Today, students question whether they will obtain a job upon graduation from college that will allow them to live comfortably and pay back their student debt.

Lack of mentorship. Factors such as weak preparatory curriculums, lack of quality teachers, and inadequate school funding hinder African American students’ access to higher education (Palmer et al., 2014). According to a national study conducted by the Cooperative Institutional Research Program, Higher Education Research Institute, and the American Council on Education, low-SES African American students have less contact with faculty, study less, are less involved with student organizations, and have lower grades than do their high SES peers (Walpole, 2008). Guidance counselors are a source of mentorship for high school students. Given the large student load counselors are assigned to, they use a variety of tools to boost students’ expectations of their academic abilities (Farmer-Hinton & Adams, 2006). They expose the student’s valuable information and resources related to college planning and organizational skills. Formal planning for college is an important role for counselors as they build school expectations related to college enrollment (Farmer-Hinton et al., 2006). Because URMs frequently require additional time with guidance counselors due to the various obstacles they face, there is often inequality in access to this type of support (Farmer-Hinton et al., 2006). Research shows that consistent exposure to the viability of college access and greater personalized support from counselors can help URMs better navigate the college preparation process (Farmer-Hinton et al., 2006). Parental educational levels can influence student’s college aspirations. FGS must overcome the obstacles associated with experiencing something that no one in their family has experienced before. Several studies have shown that FGS are less likely to attend college compared to the students who have had a parent attend college (Walpole, 2007). Minority students often lack encouragement from their families to attend college, which can be attributed to the lack of experience. Parents that have not attended post-secondary education are not able to mentor their child and guide them through the process of preparing and applying to college. Parental involvement in the college choice process is instrumental for first-generation

and URM students (Bergerson, 2009). Minorities also face obstacles when searching for a mentor. The path to college begins much earlier than secondary school but URM students are challenged with finding people that they can go to for advice. In minority communities there is a lack of mentors. Positive role models early in education can make a difference in the mindset of a young child, and being around a positive role model or having a mentor can provide inspiration to a child. Visually seeing that someone can put their mind to something, and accomplish it, is essential in minority communities. There must be a pipeline of diverse, prepared, and innovative leaders willing to address the issues related to pathways to college for URM students (Watson, 2018).

Imposter syndrome and stereotype threat. Both first-generation and underrepresented minority students experience a phenomenon called imposter syndrome. Imposter syndrome also known as imposter phenomenon is an internal feeling of intellectual phoniness that is often experienced by high achievers, most commonly in URM students (Peteet, Montgomery, & Weekes, 2015). Afraid of being exposed as a fraud, individuals that suffer from imposter syndrome regularly attribute their academic success to external factors such as luck (Peteet et al., 2015). Many high-achieving URM students experience imposter syndrome. Even in an environment where a student is intellectually brilliant, or where the people around are not high achievers, the student can experience imposter syndrome. When surrounded by high achievers, URM students wonder if they have overestimated their intelligence. When surrounded by under-achievers, URM students feel they do not belong because they are not like the others. To date, only one study has examined the relationship between the imposter phenomenon and academic achievement among URM students (Peteet et al., 2015).

Many first-generation minority students suffer from imposter phenomenon, both inside and outside the classroom (Branch, Hart-Steffes, & Wilson, 2019). They tell themselves they do not deserve positive experiences, and any negative experiences affirm their belief that they are at an institution they are not worthy of (Branch et al., 2019). Numerous studies suggest that first-generation college students, especially those of ethnic minority status and low socioeconomic status (SES) tend to experience lower self-esteem, lower academic self-efficacy, greater anxiety and fear of academic failure (Peteet et al., 2015). Self-efficacy is highly important to academic success and is a significant predictor of academic expectations and performance (Peteet et al., 2015).

When leaving home to attend college for the first time, FGS are often faced with the challenge of isolation. FGS sometimes find it difficult to straddle two cultures, college culture and home culture (Branch et al., 2019). Not only are they separating themselves from their families, but they also must establish a new space at their academic institution. This is not an easy task as students may be proud for being the first in their families to attend college, yet feel like they do not belong among their peers.

Culturally ethnic students can also experience imposter syndrome, but from a different perspective. Ethnic identity is a factor that contributes to imposter syndrome (Peteet et al., 2015). Several studies have found a correlation between ethnic identity and academic achievement within African Americans (Peteet et al., 2015). Some also consider stereotype threat a factor that affects academic achievement. Stereotype threat is the threat of being viewed through the lens of a negative stereotype, or the fear of doing something that would inadvertently confirm that stereotype (Perry, Steele, & Hillard, 2018). Everyone experiences stereotype threat but when looking at this subset of students, it is known to affect academic performance (Perry et al., 2018). One student investigated whether stereotype threat experienced by African American students could depress their performance on a difficult standardized test. A significant part of the negative stereotype about the African Americans concerned intellectual ability (Perry et al., 2018). The results showed that stereotype threat did depress African Americans performance on the standardized test (Perry et al., 2018). Research shows that the most achievement-oriented students, who were also the most skilled, motivated, and confident, were the most impaired by stereotype threat (Perry et al., 2018).

College access. Due to the achievement gap in education, college preparation programs have been established throughout the country to diversify the population of college attendees. The precollege outreach programs are used to provide a wide variety of outreach activities to identify and assist underrepresented students in their pathways to college (Tierney, Corbin, & Colyar, 2005). According to Tierney, Corwin, and Colyar (2005), college preparation programs are aimed at enhancing and supplementing a school's regular activities to assist primarily low-income, minority youth who might otherwise not be able to attend college. The programs focus on academic preparation, access to college planning information and navigational strategies, development of self-efficacy and college-going-aspirations, strategies of socialization and acculturation, and financial aid and financial planning skills (Tierney, Corbin, & Colyar, 2005).

Providing academic enhancement activities to low-income students of color increases the likelihood of the students attending and succeeding in college. The barriers previously identified in this chapter are addressed within the college preparation programs increasing access for students. Access to knowledge about the college application process and going to college in general are important factors in promoting college readiness for underrepresented students (Tierney, Corbin, & Colyar, 2005).

Society's response to the college access problem. Significant obstacles continue to impede educational opportunities for African-Americans (Cokley et al., 2016). In 2012, former President Obama issued an executive order calling for a significant improvement in the educational outcomes of African-Americans, including increasing college access and success for African-Americans (Cokley et al., 2016). Obama's enhanced educational outcomes lead to more productive careers, improved economic opportunity, and greater social well-being for all Americans (Obama, 2012). Significantly improving the educational outcomes of African Americans will provide substantial benefits for our country by, among other things, increasing college completion rates, productivity, employment rates, and the number of African American teachers (Cokley et al., 2016). This order brought a charge to the secondary schools in the nation.

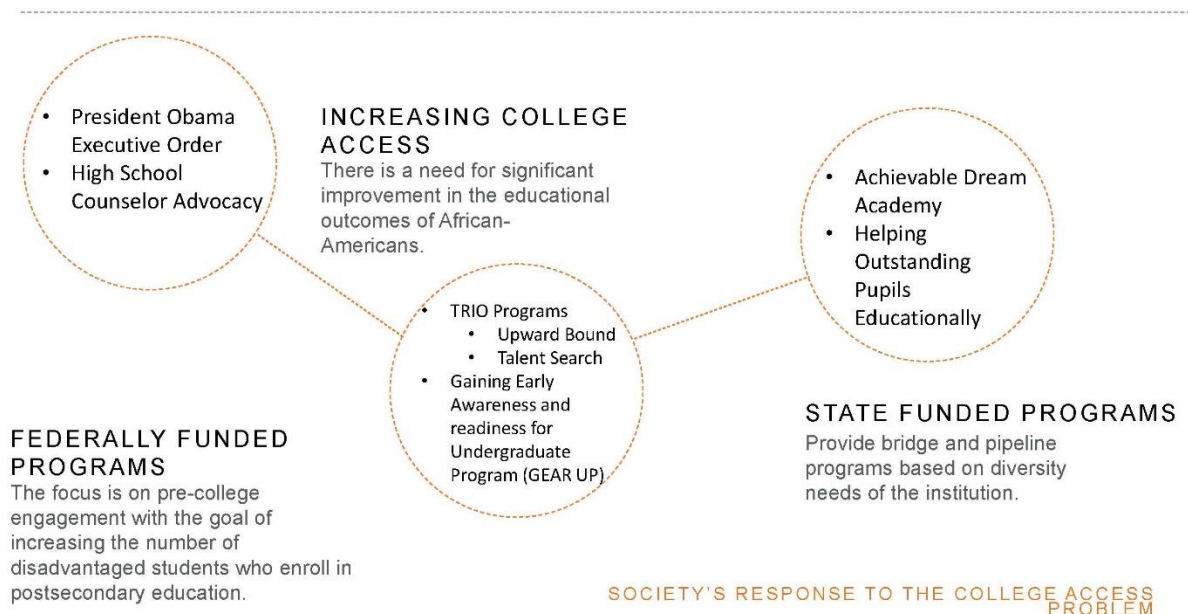
Data and strategies imply that school counselors, through their professional roles and responsibilities, are in a unique position to advocate for increased college access for URMs (Schaeffer & Barrow, 2010). Research shows first-generation minority students benefit from increased academic preparation, family involvement, a supportive environment, and financial aid information (Walpole, 2007). High school coursework and post-secondary success are linked. Data shows URMs can be successful in rigorous high school courses, but few are provided the opportunity (Dervarics, 2005). These solutions would assist students in meeting the challenges they face in accessing a post-secondary education (Walpole, 2007).

School counselors believe advocacy is learned through formal training and indirect modeling by successful colleagues (Schaeffer et al., 2010). The literature stresses the importance of school counselor advocacy (Schaeffer et al., 2010). This is where the connection with early college access programs come into play. The counselors identify the students that would benefit from the programs and refer them for the additional mentorship. Counselors guide students in areas that family members may not be able to help with such as providing tutoring, career exploration, mentoring, counseling, and information about post-secondary education

opportunities. Additionally, counselors provide assistance with the application processes for college and financial aid, family workshops that encourage involvement, information on career and academic development, and college admissions (Kimbrell & Savla, 2013). Program counselors travel to middle and high schools to meet with participants at their high school campuses. Schools and college access programs also provide additional services for participants like weekend tutorials, college visits, and individual tutoring (Kimbrell et al., 2013).

Figure 1

Society's Response to the College Access Problem



Federally funded pipeline programs. The federal government has built a selection of early college access programs as a response to the economic and social crisis. The focus of these programs is pre-college engagement. These programs focus on pre-college engagement, with the goal of increasing the number of disadvantaged, first-generation, minority and physically challenged students who enroll in post-secondary education (Wilson, 2000).

Congress implemented TRIO programs in the 1960s, to help low-income students' access and succeed in post-secondary education (Palmer et al., 2014). Funded under Title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965, TRIO programs such as Upward Bound and Talent Search, focus on FGS and their transition to higher education (Palmer et al., 2014). The programs address social, economic, academic, and cultural factors associated with preparing for college. Services

include tutoring, mentoring, counseling, college readiness and academic workshops, and financial aid seminars (Palmer et al., 2014).

Created as part of the Higher Education Amendment of 1988, Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Program (GEAR UP) is the most recent federal initiative (Wilson, 2000). The program encourages economically disadvantaged middle school students to stay in school, study hard, and take the right courses to attend college (Wilson, 2000). Former President Clinton and Congress supported this initiative by providing grants that increased from \$120 million in 1999 to \$325 million in 2001 (Wilson, 2000). Services include providing students with counseling, tutoring and mentoring (Wilson, 2000).

Federally funded pipeline programs have been successful at preparing first-generation, college bound students for admission to college. A report from the National Center for Educational Statistics showed at-risk students that participated in these pipeline programs, attended post-secondary education at more than twice the rate of those that did not participate (Wilson, 2000).

State funded pipeline programs. As the need for programs that assist with post-secondary education preparation persists, states have begun implementing their own state-funded programs. Institutions use state funds to supplement the increasing demand of early college access programs. State institutions provide pipeline programs based on diversity needs of the institution.

The Academic Pathways to Access and Student Success (APASS) initiative documents existing and emerging academic pathways that assist with high school students in fulfilling their aspirations to attend college (Bragg et al., 2006). The APASS initiative results showed that these programs exist in forty-five states in the U.S. (Bragg et al., 2006). Bridge programs and early college programs are created to target URM and low-SES students and assist with academic preparation so that college-level coursework is achievable (Bragg et al.2006). Although there are multiple programs that exist across the nation, data are sparse related to how effective they work.

A majority of programs are school-state collaborations. Due to the concerns that too few students are successfully completing post-secondary education, some states opt for the early college high school approach (Edmunds et al., 2017). Only 9 percent of first-generation minority students from the lowest income quartile graduate with a bachelor's degree (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). The early college models focus on college readiness associated with increased

enrollment and success in post-secondary education (Edmunds et al., 2017). Research suggests that many URMs do not enroll in college due to lack of academic preparation or failure to complete the steps required to apply for college and financial aid (Edmunds et al., 2017). Early college schools are a pathway for URMs that may otherwise have restricted access to post-secondary education. Students attending early college school are in an environment that views college as a priority (Edmunds et al., 2017).

Programs such as Achievable Dream Academy and Helping Outstanding Pupils Educationally (HOPE), serve as a necessary pipeline to college (Dyce, Albold, & Long, 2012). Not only do these schools establish partnerships with universities to increase rigor and relevance of the high school curriculum, they also offer opportunities for students to have access to higher education (Runge, 2016). Students receive collegiate services upon graduation (Runge, 2016). The schools provide resources after graduation which assist with improving academic success while enrolled in college. Early college schools are increasing in number, but the concept is so new that there is a limited research base (Edmunds et al., 2017). The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation commissioned one of the first national studies of the early college model. Results showed the early college model produces students who perform better overall than other students in their district with positive impacts on post-secondary enrollment, including increased enrollment in post-secondary education (Edmunds et al., 2017).

Differences in the federal and state programs. While federal and state programs might appear to serve the same purpose in the broad scope of post-secondary education preparation for URMs, there is a difference between the two. Although both focus on pre-college engagement of URMs, funding is a critical factor. Federally funded programs have existed for a long time and have proven positive outcomes. Because state-funded programs are a recent phenomenon, the research completed is linked to college access and enrollment. State funding for education is often difficult to access, leading to the need for increased research on state-funded pipeline programs.

The literature does not show if state-funded programs are effective at preparing students for academic achievement while pursuing their post-secondary education. The literature is clear that there are inequalities to first-generation culturally ethnic students. The government has acknowledged the inequalities of access to college and contributes financially to the programs that help prepare students for college. There is a gap in the literature regarding whether the

programs aimed at academic achievement are effective. Throughout the 1990s the national college dropout rate for African Americans was 20 to 25 percent higher than for Whites (Perry, Steele, & Hillard, 2018). The underperformance of minority undergraduates is an unsettling problem (Perry, Steele, & Hillard, 2018). More data must be collected before determining whether the programs offered are effective at producing academically successful students that attain a college degree.

Summary

Figure 2

College Access Graduation Cap Compilation



Closing the achievement gap. In order to comprehend the challenges associated with achieving academic success, one must understand all the barriers that first-generation underrepresented minority students must overcome. These barriers outlined previously in socioeconomic status challenges, lack of mentorship, imposter syndrome and stereotype threat, effect URM's by limiting opportunities or exposure to college access. Several empirical studies demonstrate that URM's have lower academic achievement compared to their peers (DeFreitas & Rinn, 2013). Each day students fall through the educational achievement gap. The achievement gap discriminates against the most vulnerable students and our nation is at risk unless we stem

the tide of inequality that creates such a gap (Gibson, 2007). If primary and secondary education provided more equity, barriers to college access for URMs would be reduced. Research has identified TRIO programs, affirmative action, and college readiness programs (early college schools) as important gateways to post-secondary education for URMs (Palmer et al., 2014). While 82% of universities provide pre-college programs for K-12 students, less than 24% of college enrollees participated in a pre-college program (American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers, 2018). Pre-college engagement of first-generation culturally ethnic students is necessary to increase the amount of diversity in our post-secondary institutions and workforce. With all the barriers imposed on first-generation underrepresented students, it will take the support of community members, educators, and family to close the achievement gap and create the opportunity for academic success.

Chapter Three

Methodology

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine both the benefits and challenges faced by first-generation African American students who have completed early college access programming. The study is a qualitative case study due to the focus on understanding the experiences of a population that has graduated from one high school, Achievable Dream. The qualitative analysis was conducted through interviews with first-generation African American alumni of Achievable Dream that were purposefully selected based on three criteria: self-identify as African American or Black, indicate they are first-generation (neither parent earned a four-year college degree), and are/were enrolled in a four-year degree granting postsecondary institution. Although the study is qualitative in nature, there are some quantitative aspects of the study. The quantitative analysis used data collected from alumni of Achievable Dream that are enrolled in a four-year postsecondary institution. This paper addresses the effectiveness of early college access and its effects on first-generation African American students postsecondary academic and psychosocial outcomes.

Research Design/Methodology

The study uses a qualitative case study approach with qualitative analysis of interviews and incorporating some quantitative analysis. The qualitative approach allows for in-depth analysis of student perceptions of their participation in early college access programming and whether it supported their academic achievement in college.

Questions

The decision to use qualitative case study methodology stems from the overarching research questions:

1. What are the academic (i.e., grade point average, hours earned, and academic standing) outcomes of first-generation African American students after graduation from Achievable Dream?

2. What are the psychosocial (i.e., academic determination, discipline, and commitment) outcomes of first-generation African American students after graduation from Achievable Dream?
3. How do first-generation African American students perceive their postsecondary academic and psychosocial outcomes?
 - a. In what ways, if any, do students who participated in early college access programming believe program participation affected their academic experience?
 - b. What do students who participated in early college access programming perceive to be barriers?
 - c. What do students who participated in early college access programming perceive to be the most valuable supports?

Methodology Rationale

The aim is to explore student perceptions of their participation in early college access programming and whether it supported their academic achievement in college, as well as discern the associations between early college access and academic and psychosocial outcomes for first-generation African Americans. This study uses a qualitative bounded case study design. According to Yin (2014), a case study design is used to investigate a case in depth and within its real-world context. A bounded case study design is characterized by inclusion and exclusion variables (p.16). This study is classified as a bounded as it exclusively includes 176 potential participants who are first-generation African American students attending 4-year postsecondary institutions within Virginia. The study excludes 81 alumni who while are African American, do not meet additional inclusion criteria. Variables of exclusion are non-first-generation, attending a 4-year postsecondary institution outside the state of Virginia, attending a 2-year postsecondary institution either within or outside of the state of Virginia, or are enrolled in the United States military.

Site/Sample Selection

The sample selection in this study is composed of alumni of Achievable Dream. Permission to obtain information from Achievable Dream consisted of demographic data obtained from internal resources to identify alumni that fit within the study parameters. The

alumni received an email requesting completion of a survey with self-reporting questions related to demographic, academic, and psychosocial factors.

Achievable Dream was selected as the site for this study due to its convenience and demographics. Achievable Dream has a population of students that have multiple risk factors where the odds are stacked against them. The students enter the program from single parent households, no parent households, and all are eligible for free or reduced lunch. Ninety-eight percent of the students that attend Achievable Dream identify as African American, and nearly half of the alumni identify as first-generation. The targeted population of the study is so specific, it made Achievable Dream the ideal site to analyze for the case study.

The participants in the study are graduates of Achievable Dream. During the 2019-2020 academic year, Achievable Dream had 433 alumni. One hundred seventy-six were first-generation African American alums that enrolled in a four-year post-secondary institution in the state of Virginia. Fifteen were first-generation African American alums that enrolled in a four-year post-secondary institution outside the state of Virginia. All 176 first-generation African American alumni were sent an email requesting their participation in the study. A link to the Qualtrics questionnaire was included in the body of the email. The Qualtrics questionnaire consisted of demographic and academic questions to be completed if the Alum chose to participate. After analysis of the Qualtrics data, 10 participants were invited to take part in an interview about their perceptions of their academic and psychosocial outcomes. The 10 participants were selected from four-year institutions from three geographical regions in Virginia. Participation in the research and interviews was voluntary.

Data Collection Procedures

During the data collection process, a Qualtrics survey was deployed via email to all first-generation African American alumni of Achievable Dream inquiring about demographic and academic factors. The survey included the choice for participants to give or decline their consent for their data to be used in the dissertation. Consent was obtained and stored. Data collected from the survey was stored in a computer-based data management system and all identifying factors were removed. Upon data analysis, 10 participants were selected to take part in interviews. Three to four participants were pre-selected, using the demographic questionnaire data, from each geographic region, Blacksburg/Radford, Charlottesville/Richmond, and Norfolk/Virginia Beach. The researcher requested permission to audio record the in-person interview session. The audio

transcriptions were transcribed by GMR Transcription Services and all identifying factors were removed.

Data Gathering Procedures

The researcher completed Virginia Tech's Institutional Review Board (IRB) training in Human Subjects Protection (see Appendix B). For this study, social and behavioral research as well as information privacy and security training were required. The researcher completed the IRB training programs for each through the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiatives (CITI) modules (see Appendix C and Appendix D). Prior to data collection, the researcher pursued IRB approval. The researcher completed and submitted the IRB Protocol to Virginia Tech's Division of Scholarly Integrity and Research Compliance. Once IRB approval was obtained (see Appendix F), the researcher contacted the President and CEO of Achievable Dream via email, to obtain permission to conduct the study and seek assistance with recruiting participants (see Appendix E). Virginia Tech had an updated MOU with Achievable Dream, allowing for such information to be disclosed for research purposes.

After permission to conduct the study was granted, a recruitment email was deployed to prospective participants by the President and CEO of Achievable Dream (see Appendix G). The recruitment email included a link to the Qualtrics questionnaire (see Appendix J). Approximately two weeks after the initial recruitment email was deployed, a reminder email was deployed to prospective participants (see Appendix H). Informed consent in Appendix I was obtained prior to data collection. Following data analysis of the survey, individual data gathering interviews were scheduled with participants. The qualitative interview research protocol in Appendix K was utilized for the in-person interviews with research participants. The researcher verbally asked each participant if they wished to participate and if they agreed to the interview being audio recorded the interview session, prior to beginning the interview. Confirmation of the verbal permission to participate and audio record was documented on the verbal consent documentation form (see Appendix L). Once the interview commenced, the researcher asked 10 interview questions to get a more in-depth understanding of the phenomenon (see Appendix M).

Instrument Design and Validation

This qualitative study was designed to examine both the benefits and challenges faced by first-generation African American students who have completed ECAP. Serving as the primary

instrument of data collection for this study, the researcher conducted all interviews and completed the data analysis. The researcher interviewed alumni of Achievable Dream to obtain their perceptions of their participation in ECAP and whether it supported their academic achievement in college. A demographic questionnaire was also deployed to survey the participants. The survey included general demographic questions including sex, race, ethnicity, parents' highest level of education and academic factors including grade point average, hours earned, and academic standing.

The researcher used an existing instrument, the Student Readiness Inventory (SRI) to develop interview questions from an overarching broad perspective. Created in 2005 by Huy Le, Alex Casillas, Steven Robbins, and Ronelle Langley, The Student Readiness Inventory (Le et al, 2005) measures psychosocial and academic-related skill factors found to predict two important college outcomes: academic performance and retention. The SRI inventory evaluates 10 distinct constructs: General Determination, Academic Discipline, Goal Striving, Commitment to College, Study Skills, Communication Skills, Social Activity, Social Connection, Academic Self Confidence, and Emotional Control. Factor analysis confirmed the scales showed a good convergent-discriminant pattern with other variables of interest (i.e., demographic variables and high school GPA) (Le et al, 2005).

The original SRI inventory questions were not available for use, therefore, the researcher developed three interview questions surrounding components of the SRI related to determination, academic discipline, and academic commitment. The three specific SRI components were selected to show what influenced participants to want to excel in higher education. For reliability internal consistency Cronbach alphas was ran for the measures of each of the 10 constructs of the SRI. Cronbach alphas for the three specific constructs were used in this study: Determination (alpha = .72), Academic Discipline (alpha = .83), and Commitment to College (alpha = .86) (Le et al, 2005). All three alphas are representative of strong reliability.

With qualitative methodology, intercoder reliability is often used to determine whether an instrument can measure what it is designed to measure (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). For this study, the researcher focused on reliability of the instrument. Instrument reliability determines the extent to which an instrument consistently measures what it is supposed to, and the data is consistent and stable over time (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). After completion of the interviews, member checks were performed. The member checks serve as a way to verify the

data that comes from the interview is accurate (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). During this study, the participant received a copy of their transcript and was asked to complete an interviewee transcription form (see Appendix N). Intercoder reliability was performed after member checks were received. The researcher developed codes and definitions from the transcriptions. Six doctoral researchers from the researcher's cohort applied codes and themes to the data to check for consistency in meanings and applications (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

Data Management

Individual participants' confidentiality was protected by the research by assigning numerical identification to codes. During the interview, only audio was recorded in order to be discreet and maintain confidentiality. No one had access to research data, including interview data, identifying information of interview participants, or the transcripts from the interview, except advisor, Dr. Carol Mullen, and the researcher. All data documents from the study, including the interview are stored on a secured Virginia Tech Google drive, only accessed by the investigator and co-investigator (researcher). All digital recordings of the interview were deleted upon receipt of the interview transcription consent form. Any data with personal identifiers will be destroyed within two years of completion of the study and dissertation defense.

Data Analysis Techniques

GMR Transcription Services was used to transcribe the digital recordings of each interview. After completion of the transcription, the researcher coded the data. STATA/SE and the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) were the two computer-based data management systems used to analyze the quantitative data. Data collected throughout the quantitative portion of the study were input into the systems and coded. SPSS was used to procure summary statistics, including means and standard deviations. The study also compares outcome results across groups using frequencies and descriptive statistics. STATA was used to stratify the data and identify trends using the variables within the study. Qualitative data was compiled in an Excel spreadsheet. Inductive coding of the data was performed by the researcher to analyze the themes identified within the research.

Timeline

Table 1

Timeline for Study

Step(s)	Dates	Process
Prospectus Defense	February 2020	Prospectus exam successfully defended.
IRB Protocol Submission	April 2020	IRB#20-304, version 1.0 was submitted to the Virginia Tech HRPP. Researcher was informed revisions were necessary. IRB#20-304, version 2.0 was submitted to the HRPP with revisions.
IRB Approval	May 2020	IRB#20-204, version 2.0 was approved by the HRPP.
Data Collection – Part 1	May 2020 – August 2020	The researcher obtained permission to conduct the study. The recruitment email was sent to prospective participants. Participants completed the demographic questionnaire.
Data Collection – Part 2	August 2020 – September 2020	The researcher conducted interviews with selected participants.
Data Analysis	September 2020 – October 2020	The researcher analyzed the data collected from the questionnaire and interviews.

Methodology Summary

Chapter 3 provided an overview of the research design and methodology used during the study. The researcher selected qualitative methodology using interviews to gain an in-depth understanding of student perceptions of their participation in early college access programming and whether it supported their academic achievement in college. Components of the chapter included the purpose of the study, research methodology and rationale, site/sample selection, data collection procedures, instrument design and validation, data management and analysis techniques, and the study timeline.

Chapter Four

Data Analysis and Findings

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine both the benefits and challenges faced by first-generation African American students who have completed early college access programming. The study identified student perceptions of their participation in ECAP and whether it supported their academic achievement in college. The findings that follow were identified based on responses to the interview questions:

1. Participants believed that establishing of continuous relationships with teachers and counselors from secondary education provided emotional support during postsecondary education.
2. Participants shared that knowledge gained through college preparation opportunities was essential to academic success.
3. Participants indicated that financial support provided by Achievable Dream reduced stress associated with the cost of higher education.
4. Participants gained a fundamental level of knowledge during secondary education that prepared them for academic achievement in college.
5. Participants identified academic rigor, mental health issues, imposter syndrome, time management, learning disabilities, and academic motivation as barriers to achieving academic success in college.
6. Participants declared full commitment to obtaining an undergraduate degree.
7. Participants attributed their determination to obtaining an undergraduate degree to being a role model, making an impact, and expanding career opportunities.

Chapter Five provides an explanation of the findings in greater detail.

Demographic Questionnaire

Twenty-two participants completed the demographic questionnaire via Qualtrics. Responses from the questionnaire provided data that shed light on the following research question:

RQ 1. What are the academic (i.e., grade point average, hours earned, and academic standing) outcomes of first-generation African American students after graduation from Achievable Dream?

Analysis of the survey indicates all study participants identified as African American alumni of Achievable Dream, with participant 008 identifying as African American and Hispanic. Seventeen females and five males participated in the study. Parental educational levels ranged from less than high school completion to having obtained an associate's degree, characterizing all participants as first-generation students. Household demographic data indicated participants resided with a guardian, relative, mother, father, or both parents while in high school. Participants identified parent(s), teachers, relatives, friends, high school counselors, and a coach as the individuals that had the greatest influence on their decision to attend college.

Tables 2 and 3 display a summary of the demographic and academic information from the participant questionnaire.

Table 2*Summary of Participant Demographic Information*

Demographic Variable	Subgroup	Obs
Gender	Female	17
	Male	5
Ethnicity	Black or African American	21
	Black or African American AND Hispanic or Latino	1
Parent #1 Highest Level of Education	Associate's Degree	7
	Occupational Training	5
	High School Diploma or GED	9
	Less than High School Completion	1
	Unknown	0
Parent #2 Highest Level of Education	Associate's Degree	5
	Occupational Training	3
	High School Diploma or GED	9
	Less than High School Completion	2
	Unknown	3
Greatest Influence in High School	Coach	1
	Friend	5
	High School Counselor	4
	Parent(s)	17
	Relative	10
	Teacher	11
High School Household Demographics	Both Parents	2
	Father	3
	Mother	12
	Relative	1
	Guardian	4

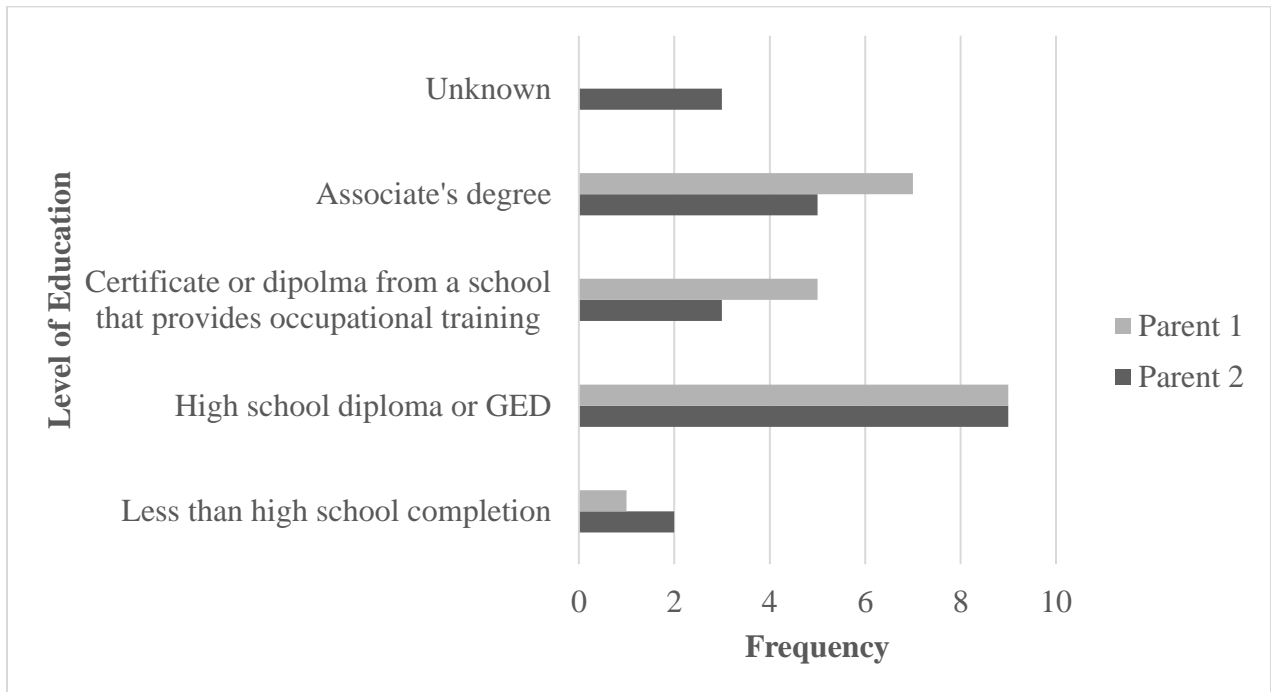
Table 3*Summary of Participant Academic Information*

Academic Variable	Subgroup	Obs
Class Standing	1 st year student	4
	2 nd year student	3
	3 rd year student	5
	4 th year student	4
	5 th year student	3
College Academic Probation	Yes	4
	No	18

The participants' parents' highest level of education was captured in the survey. Figure 3 displays the highest level of education completed by parent one and parent two. Three parents did not complete high school. Eight parents completed certificates or diplomas from schools that provide occupational training. Eighteen parents earned high school diplomas or GEDs. Twelve parents completed Associate's degrees. There were three parents whose level of education was unknown. The data indicate a completed high school diploma or GED was the most common level of education for parents. All parents completed a level of education less than a Bachelor's degree therefore all participants are considered first-generation students.

Figure 3

Highest Level of Education Completed by Parents 1 and 2



The survey captured who resided in the participants' homes while attending Achievable Dream. Fifteen participants lived in a single parent home, 12 of which were a mother and three fathers. Two participants lived with both parents. One participant lived with a relative, while four lived with an appointed guardian. Residents of the participants' homes are noted in Figure 4. All 22 participants shared who had the greatest influence on their decision regarding postsecondary education, represented in Figure 5. The most common influence, shared by seventeen students, was a parent or guardian. Participants also indicated that a teacher, another family member/relative, a friend, high school counselor, or coach had an influence on their decision to pursue higher education.

Figure 4

Participant Household Demographics While Attending High School

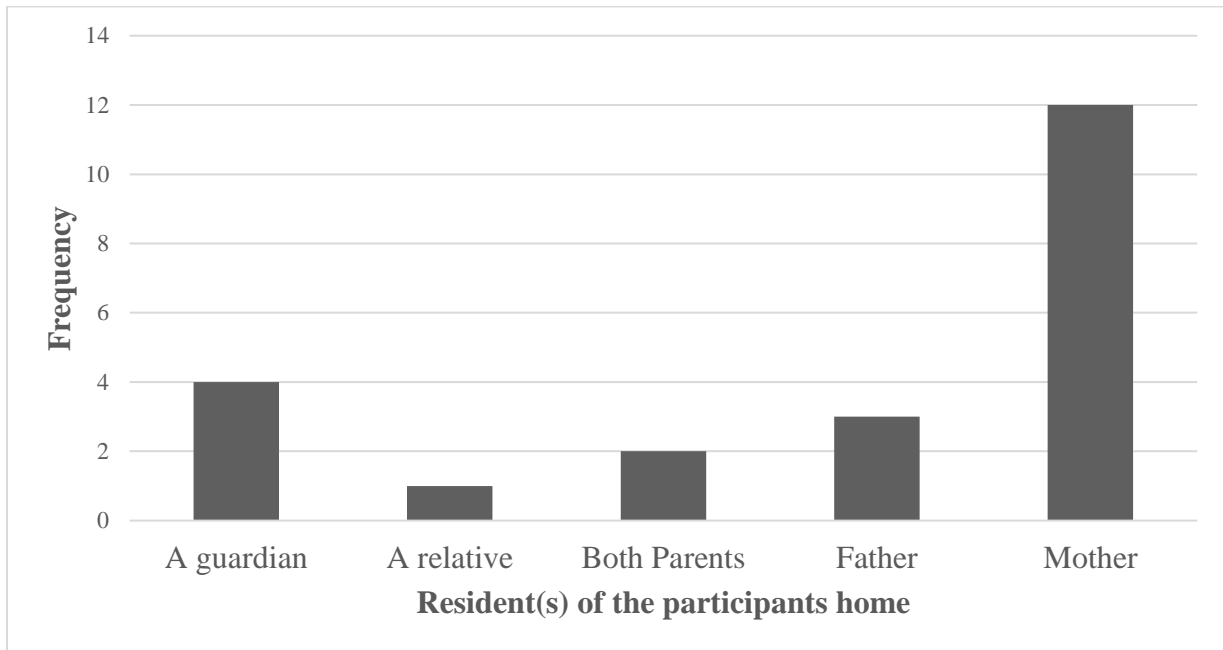
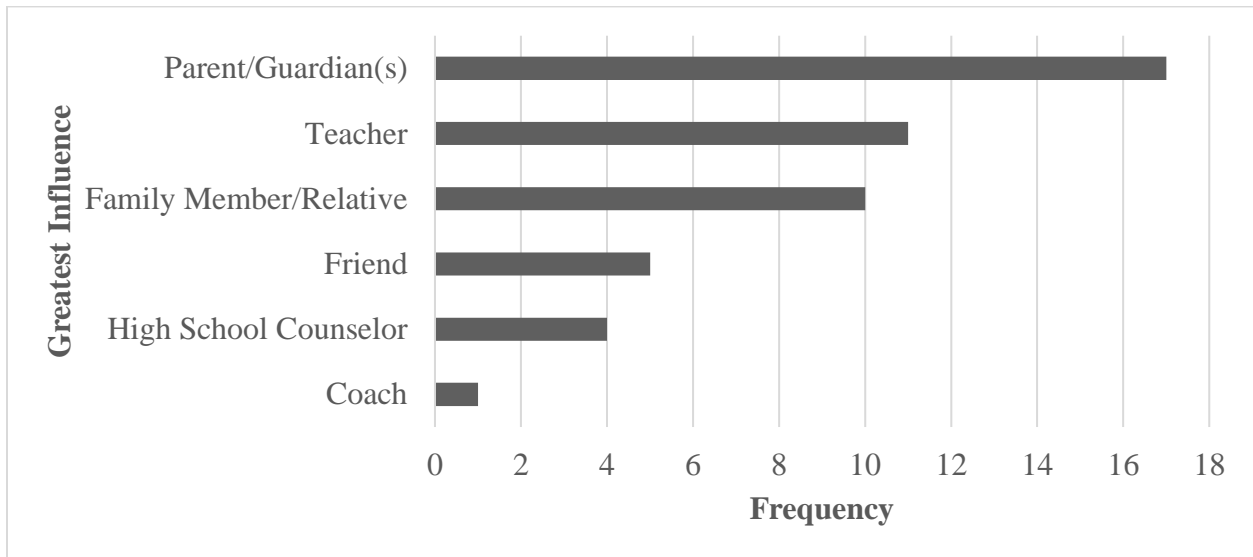


Figure 5

Participant's Greatest Influence on Decision Making Regarding Pursuing Higher Education.



A summary of the data from the demographic questionnaire is shown in Table 4. The researcher stratified high school GPA, college GPA, and hours earned by study group (interviewed participants/non-interviewed participants), gender (male/female), and class standing (1st year/2nd year/3rd year/4th year/5th year). The mean and standard deviation of all survey participants were analyzed and compared to the continuous variables. The high school GPA and college GPA mean remained consistent in all subgroups. The high school GPA mean for all survey participants was 3.3. The college GPA mean was 2.9. In regard to academic progress, the trend in hours earned increased as anticipated with the exception of 5th year participants. The small sample size of men in the study may account for the variation in hours earned between genders. With small sample size for the 5th year, the mean and the standard deviation may be skewed due to a single participant's response. The participant may have misinterpreted the question for hours earned during the current semester instead of total hours earned. Interviewed participants/non-interviewed participants and male/female variables did not have a significant variation in standard deviation indicating the groups were similar. Overall the descriptive statistics of high school GPA, college GPA, and hours earned compared with study group, gender, and class standing showed no significant difference in the survey population.

Table 4*Demographic Questionnaire Information*

Variable		High School GPA			College GPA			Hours Earned		
		Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.
Study Group	All	22	3.3	0.62	20	2.9	0.40	17	74.7	42.98
	Interviewed	11	3.2	0.77	11	2.9	0.48	9	78.2	49.11
	Non-Interviewed	11	3.3	0.47	9	2.9	0.31	8	70.8	37.84
Gender	All	22	3.3	0.62	20	2.9	0.40	17	74.7	42.98
	Female	17	3.3	0.66	15	2.9	0.42	14	72.2	44.19
	Male	5	3.1	0.53	5	2.7	0.32	3	86.3	42.85
Class Standing	All	22	3.3	0.62	20	2.9	0.40	17	74.7	42.98
	1 st year	4	3.3	0.62	3	3.3	0.37	2	30.5	0.71
	2 nd year	3	3.2	0.75	3	2.9	0.40	2	43.5	10.61
	3 rd year	5	3.3	0.87	5	2.9	0.22	5	58.6	21.20
	4 th year	4	3.1	0.78	4	2.9	0.34	3	95.3	23.18
	5 th year	3	3.1	0.15	3	2.3	0.28	3	88	66.30

Analysis of the participant questionnaire revealed positive academic outcomes of first-generation African American students after graduation from Achievable Dream. Generally undergraduate students must maintain at least a standard GPA of 2.0, on a 4.0 scale, to be eligible for federal financial aid and meet graduation criteria. The mean college GPA for all survey participants was 2.9. Only 18% of participants were placed on academic probation while in college. The four participants were only placed on academic probation one time. The survey data also illustrated a consistent increase in hours earned by study participants throughout the first four years of undergraduate education, indicating progressive academic progress.

Interview Process

Of the 22 participants, 10 first-generation African American alums of Achievable Dream were selected to participate in a one-on-one interview with the researcher. Interview participation included four males and six females attending a university in three geographic regions (Southwest, Central, and Hampton Roads) of the Commonwealth of Virginia. Universities represented in the study were Old Dominion University (ODU), Radford University (RU), University of Virginia (UVA), Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU), Virginia State University (VSU), and Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (VT). The 10 participants engaged in one-on-one interviews with the researcher, responding to the following research questions:

RQ 2. What are the psychosocial (i.e., academic determination, discipline, and commitment) outcomes of first-generation African American students after graduation from Achievable Dream?

RQ3. How do first-generation African American students perceive their postsecondary academic and psychosocial outcomes?

- a. In what ways, if any, do students who participated in early college access programming believe program participation affected their academic experience?
- b. What do students who participated in early college access programming perceive to be barriers?
- c. What do students who participated in early college access programming perceive to be the most valuable supports?

All interviews were conducted via the online platform, Zoom or by telephone due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Upon completion of the interviews, the audio recording of the interview was uploaded by the researcher to GMR transcription service. The transcribed interviews were individually sent to the corresponding participant via email by the researcher. Each interview transcript was reviewed numerous times by the researcher and inductive coding was used to identify themes. An Excel file was created for each transcript, including each interview question, the participant response to the question, and the codes/themes identified by the researcher. Common themes and codes were identified based on participant responses. Six doctoral researchers independently coded 10-20 pages of three interviews prior to the researcher's analysis. These researchers identified the same or similar codes, establishing coder reliability.

Tables 5, 6, and 7 compares the researcher's codes to the doctoral researcher's codes for three individual interviews.

Table 5

Sample 1 Intercoder Reliability Codes

Researcher	Intercoder 1	Intercoder 2	Intercoder 3
Welcoming; Understanding; Teacher's positive interaction; Reached student on their level	Welcoming/Sense of belonging; Help on individual level	Welcoming; Understanding; Meet students on their level	Individual support; Circumstance understanding
Rigorous courses; Easy transition to college; Prepared for college; Pushed hard to make the most of classes	Push to take challenging coursework; Harder courses to help with transition and college coursework	Rigorous courses; Higher level courses; Transition	Push to be better, Rigorous coursework; Made college easier due to similarities
Help with supply list; Specify or give options for what's needed for particular majors	Supply list for specific majors; Need help with technology	Supplies	Knowledge of field specifications; Technology; Resources for home
Advisors helped in class selection; Achievable Dream; Professors vary	Advisors are supportive; Input on how best to help	Advisors; Professors; Achievable Dream	Advisors; Differentiation
Better future; Provide for family; 100% committed; Focused on future and degree attainment for more opportunities	Provides better/brighter future; Future is a driving force; Provide opportunities	Future; Committed, Drive	Highly committed; Being better; Improve the future; More opportunities

Table 6*Sample 2 Intercoder Reliability Codes*

Researcher	Intercoder 1	Intercoder 2	Intercoder 3
Connections made; Internship opportunities; College visits; Support system	Support system – faculty in the program	Connections; Support system	Personal Connections/Support System
Negative impact; Hindered academic progress; Lack of teaching styles; Personal connections with teachers	Lack of diversity in teaching styles hindered education	Hindered progress/experience; Lack of connection; Negative Impact	Personal Connections/Lack of Diversity
Mental Health; Anxiety; Tension, Depression; Lack of ability to cope	Mental health	Mental health issues – depression, anxiety	Mental Health
Never on academic probation; Grades did fall though; Scholarship trouble	Set a goal for building GPA back up to requirement for scholarship	GPA over 3.0; Risked losing scholarship – academic plan	No probation/Mental Health
Connections with faculty; Emotional and mental support provided by faculty	Support of faculty	Connections; Support	Personal Connections/Mental Health
It gets hard; Pretty determined; Changed major; Double major	More intrinsically motivated rather than obligated	Determination; Obtainable goals	Determination
Knowledge about the world; Drive to make a difference; Impact on world is motivation	Make a difference in societal norms	Knowledge of real-world-issues; Impactful events; I can make a difference	Desire to make a difference

(continued)

Table 6 (cont.)

Researcher	Intercoder 1	Intercoder 2	Intercoder 3
Forgiving environment; Teachers were understanding	Too much empathy lead to lower expectations	Culture – understanding of situations; Forgiving	Culture of enablement
Best intentions; Empathy hindered success; Students may drop out of college; Challenge attending PWI; Imposter syndrome	Program has good interests for students, but too much flexibility hindered actual success	Cultural divide – not many blacks in industry; College students struggle/drop out due to stress; Not wanting to go; Social challenging	Culture of enablement

Table 7*Sample 3 Intercoder Reliability Codes*

Researcher	Intercoder 1	Intercoder 2	Intercoder 3
Guidance counselors; Foundation of great teachers instilled importance of college	Support system – counselors, teachers	Support from guidance counselors and teachers	Personal Connections
Financial assistance; Early College Program; Commitment necessary; Great support system; Cultivate seeking help	Financial support; Early college program; Clear communication of expectations	Support – financial, early college program, their commitment	Financial Support, Early College Program, Support System
Attending a PWI is a culture shock; Need academic rigor; Need to cultivate more discussion in class	Not prepared for academic rigor of college	Lack of discussion or conversation	Culture of Enablement
Join too many extracurricular activities; Lack of preparation for classes; Not prepared for discussion-based classes; Imposter syndrome at PWI	Lack of preparation; Took on too many responsibilities	Probation because of grades; Extensive social/extra-curricular; Lack of discussion; Predominately white culture	Yes, on probation/ Culture of enablement
Support from Office of African American Affairs; Support of peer advisor	Office of African American Affairs; Peer Advising	Support system – Office of African American Affairs, friend	Support System/Personal Connections
Graduate degree; Career options	Vital depending upon career choice	Higher education	Values Education

(continued)

Table 7 (cont.)

Researcher	Intercoder 1	Intercoder 2	Intercoder 3
Parents; Encouraged to go to college and be successful; Parents enforced positive rewards	Encouragement from parents	Family; Encouragement	Support System/Family Values
Pursue Personal goals; Career options	Intrinsic motivation; Ability to reach personal goals	Personal goal; Societal expectations	Motivated to make a difference
Financial support	Financial support	Financial aspect	Financial Support
Early college classes were helpful and great opportunity	Early college classes were helpful	Early college very helpful; Great opportunity	Early College/Great Opportunity

Interview transcription consent forms, interview transcriptions, and the coded Excel spreadsheets were upload to a Virginia Tech shared Google drive accessed only by the principal investigator and co-investigator. None of the participants selected a pseudonym, so numerical identifiers were used for coding purposes.

The themes that emerged for each interview question as it relates to the research questions (RQs) are presented in this chapter. Slang and filler words have been edited or reduced in some of the participant’s quotes.

Analysis of Interview Questions

Interview question 1 (RQ 3). *Please explain the most valuable support you received at Achievable Dream.*

Each of the participants explained their perspective of the most valuable support they received while attending Achievable Dream. College preparation opportunities, financial support, advising provided by guidance counselors, and faculty/staff encouragement were common themes. Figure 7 summarizes the participants most valuable supports received while attending An Achievable Dream.

Figure 6

Most Value Supports Received while Attending Achievable Dream



Financial support. Six participants identified financial support as a valuable support received by attending Achievable Dream. Financial assistance in general was thought of as a support by participants 002, 006, and 019. One of the most valuable support for participant 014, coming from a single parent home, was the financial support when purchasing books. Participant 017 explained how the financial support with tuition allowed him to maintain his enrollment in college past his first year of college, which took a huge burden off his chest. Tuition assistance and guidance on purchasing low cost alternatives for school supplies was the most valuable support for participant 016. He stated:

The most valuable support I've received is tuition assistance, as well as guidance on purchasing different school supplies, such as textbooks, pens, and stuff like that. They helped me find lower cost alternatives for my school supplies. They helped me get them, find them, and better deals, and they also helped me pay for things.

Faculty/staff encouragement. Five participants noted faculty/staff encouragement as a valuable support received while attending Achievable Dream. The welcoming and understanding environment of Achievable Dream was the most common theme identified by participants. Being in such an understanding environment was helpful for participant 003. He stated, “The teachers really interact with you on that level that you need to be interacted with or they have people that you can get help from. They came down to my level or they just reached my level where I understood it better.” Participant 015 shared:

Since it’s such a small school, everybody really knows each other. You really go along years with the same teacher, same students, same everything. So, when it came to applying to colleges, I still had those same teachers I might have had in seventh or eighth grade like, “Hey, I believe you can go to this school even if your GPA isn’t this, but your SAT scores are this.” Honestly, a lot of teachers, well two teachers in particular really motivated me to actually apply to college because originally, I wasn’t thinking about college.

College preparation opportunities. College preparation opportunities were also shared as a valuable support obtained from attending Achievable Dream. A valuable support for participant 006 was the opportunity to experience summer academic programs on college campuses while in high school. The opportunity to make connections with faculty at the colleges during college visits was the most valuable support for participant 009. The personal relationships established so early made the transition to college easier but also assisted in establishing a support system. Participant 016 found Achievable Dream providing community service opportunities while in high school as a valuable support.

Guidance counselor advising and teacher respect. Participants also shared that guidance counselor advising and teacher respect were two supports they found valuable while attending Achievable Dream. Assistance with the college application process when referencing guidance counselor support was another asset. Participant 002 shared that having a counselor to sit down with, to guide you through the application process, was helpful because there was no one else to do that at home. Similarly, participant 014 identified teachers as a valuable support because they were always there to “lend a helping hand” when needed.

Interview question 2 (RQ 3). *Please describe in what ways, if any, do you believe Achievable Dream affected your college academic experience.*

Participants shared that Achievable Dream did have an effect on their college academic experience. Preparation for college including vigorous courses, speaking green, and college visits were noted as having the most effect on participants. Participant 008 shared:

I took AP courses and they taught us etiquette and how to speak green, so that was a plus when I went to college, because I already knew how to talk to people, which prepared me for college and life in general.

Similarly, participants 002, 003, and 014 indicated taking advance placement (AP) and college courses was preparation for a smooth transition to college. Participant 014 stated, “They affected my college academic experience greatly as far as being able to take some of the higher-level AP classes my senior year that really helped when I got into college.” Visits to college campuses was one aspect of the college preparation opportunities discussed by two participants as having an effect on their college academic experience. Participant 017 explained how she had visited the college she was accepted to numerous times so she was familiar with it, leading to a smaller transition once she arrived. While participant 016 noted that Achievable Dream took them on college trips and exposed them to the idea and concept of wanting to go to college and what it was like.

Participant 015 and 019 shared that that faculty at Achievable Dream held them accountable and that foundational aspect prepared them for the expectations of their college professors. Furthermore, participant 002 recalled Achievable Dream having an environment that cultivated students seeking help stating:

They cultivate seeking help. That’s never something that is looked down upon. You don’t ever have a silly question. That is really important, I feel like, when it comes to being successful in school and having that foundation for it.

Two participants shared the negative experiences they encountered. Having attended such a small high school with the same faculty, staff, and students, transitioning to college with a variety of different people was challenging for participant 015. Participant 009 noted how lack of teaching styles hindered her academic progress. She explained:

The reason that I say it kind of hindered my academic progress or my academic experience was I was very used to a certain type of teaching. Then, responding to that to a certain type of learning. So, because it’s such a small program, we had repeat teachers. So, we got used to how those teachers taught. And we weren’t exposed to a large variety

of just teaching styles. So, going to a large university, not a lot of repeat teachers or professors. There was diverse backgrounds of professors and their teaching styles. It was very hard to switch over.

Interview question 3 (RQ 3). *Although you attended Achievable Dream, are there still barriers to achieving academic success in college? If so, can you identify the barriers?*

Barriers to achieving academic success in college were identified by each participant. The barriers that most frequently impacted academic success in college were academic rigor, mental health issues, imposter syndrome, time management, learning disabilities, and academic motivation/self-motivation.

Participant 002 shared that she was not prepared for the academic rigor she received when she began college. The lack of discussion-based classes in high school made it difficult to participate in college classes. Participants 009 and 016 indicated they struggled with mental health issues while in college which hindered their ability to cope and complete goals. In addition to mental health issues, participant 016 had learning disabilities that held her back from the level of academic success she wished to achieve.

Social/racial barriers were identified by participants 002 and 017 as having an effect on academic success in college. Participant 002 shared that attending a predominately white institution (PWI) was definitely a culture shock. While participant 017 stated,

The vast majority of us at Achievable Dream are black. I didn't think it would affect me that much to go to a PWI, being a minority group, but literally the first class my freshman year I walk in, kind of excited, a little nervous and realize, oh crap, no one else looks like me. And that's something you get used to, but it's something I see a little more frequently, especially now I'm in this new department there are fewer people that look like me. Like, the last class that I just came back from I'm the only black person again. I know a lot of people struggle with that, but I feel like being a minority is kind of – what is the word? Intimidating.

Time management was also noted as a barrier to achieving academic success in college. Participants 008 and 014 shared that during their freshman year they had a hard time with getting things accomplished due to time management. Participant 014 said, "I had to learn how to balance school and work as well as still having high grades and not letting my grades slip." Learning self-accountability and using available resources was utilized by both participants

during their second semester. The last barrier, academic motivation was identified by three participants. Participants 015, 017, and 019 expressed how they lost interest in their studies. Participant 017 shared that he lost interest in the subject matter being studied therefore he changed majors.

Interview question 4 (RQ 2). *Since being enrolled in postsecondary education, have you ever been on academic probation? If so, can you explain the reason you were placed on academic probation?*

Two of the 10 participants confirmed they had been placed on academic probation while enrolled in postsecondary education. Participant 015 indicated she was placed on academic probation during her first semester of college due to socializing more than studying. She stated, “I was partying more than I was doing my homework and it caught up with me.” A letter was sent to her mother indicating she was placed on academic probation and her mother expressed her level of disappointment. She wanted to make her mother proud so when she returned for the second semester, she stopped partying and focused on her studies, removing the academic probation status. Participant 002 was placed on academic probation during her third year of college. Primary reasons for the decline in her grade point average (GPA) was attributed to being a double major and joining a lot of different extracurricular activities. She also explained she had to take statistics, a required course that was taught in a discussion-based format that she was not familiar with. She stated:

I had never taken statistics in high school. I only took calculus. I don't know, that was just rough. It's interesting too because with me being in my psych lab and studying growth mindset, I know the things that I could do to be successful as far as like help-seeking, practicing, and studying, and having that mindset that anything you want, you can grow, your mind can grow. A discussion-based format or structure in the classroom was something that is heavily based upon in the class. Your partner beside you, you have to be able to speak up and you have to be able to engage in that sort of conversation. It may be uncomfortable, but that is what your grade is based upon is your peers around you. That was something that did make me uncomfortable as a first-generation student in a predominantly white institution and oftentimes them already having groups and having to insert myself in certain spaces where it was a lot.

While participant 009 was never placed on academic probation, she noted her GPA did decline due to mental health reasons. This put her at risk for losing her scholarship, so she was asked to create an action plan to assist with accountability.

Interview question 5 (RQ 3). *Can you explain the most valuable support you have obtained while enrolled in postsecondary education?*

Advisors/mentors, family, Achievable Dream teachers, alumni Dreamers, faculty and counseling centers were identified as valuable support for participants while enrolled in postsecondary education. The most common support mentioned by participants was advisors/mentors. Whether it be an academic advisor, peer advisor, or program mentor, participants stated their relationship has supported their success in college. Advisor support with solidifying a major and selecting classes was instrumental for participants 003, 016, and 017. Participant 002 stated, “Somebody who was extremely helpful to me was my peer advisor. He was so instrumental in my life that I became an advisor myself.”

Family is another valuable support mentioned by participants. The constant family support was recalled by participants 008, 015 and 014 as being the reason they are motivated. “My family is always there if I need to talk or get a pep talk,” said participant 014. Participant 015 noted how her teacher from Achievable Dream continues to “check in” on her to ensure she remains on track with her studies. One participant indicated university faculty as a valuable support stating:

When my family wasn’t there for me, they were the ones who were my family. They were the ones who supported me in the ways I needed to be supported. I just needed that emotional and mental support. They really gave that to me.

While participant 016 received support from the counseling center, participants 017 and 019 found support from alumni Dreamers at their universities. Participants thought that the connection with the older Dreamers seems like something simple but it is actually important as they become mentors.

Interview question 6 (RQ 2). *To what extent do you consider yourself committed to your postsecondary education?*

Nine out of 10 participants shared they are fully committed to attaining their degree when asked interview question 6. “I’ve wanted this since I was, like 10 years old,” shared participant

017. Participants 003 and 019 indicated they were 100 percent committed to their postsecondary education. Participant 003 stated:

I'm 100 percent committed. It's just my future. I think about it every day, so that really just drives me to really do what I gotta do and just become something – it's like better than – not the past – not saying my family wasn't really like that. But just like better for my family. And my future is just a very big thing that makes me stay focused and 100 percent committed to my college degree 'cause with a college degree you open more opportunities, way more opportunities — than not having a degree at all.

Participant 016 explained how she was committed at the beginning of her college journey but recently her motivation has decreased. She said, “I don't really have as much motivation as I used to, but I'm definitely still committed to the whole idea itself. I'm committed to school, but I feel like I'm definitely directed by my social circle.” Participant 009 shared that she is committed but often has doubts about actually attaining her degree because sometimes it gets hard.

Interview question 7 (RQ 2). *What do you attribute to your commitment to college?*

Participants attributed degree attainment, family, expanding opportunity, attending graduate school, being financially stable, and job requirements to their commitment to college. Family was determined to be the most common attribute. Participants 002, 003, and 019 explained how their parent or grandparent has encouraged them to go to college to better themselves. Participant 002 shared:

Both of my parents, they didn't go to college. My dad, he works really hard. My mom makes prosthetics and orthotics for artificial limbs. She did not go to college, but she was lucky enough to get into the program and learn the trade. She's always just expressed to me like I don't want you to work this hard. I want you to go to school and just that message of don't do what I did. I want you to go to school. I want you to get an education and be successful and like what you do and have the ability to be mobile in that with your education.

To be the first person in the family to obtain a degree was identified by participant 008 as the reason for his commitment. Participants 006 and 014 indicated they are committed to postsecondary education because it opens doors to financial stability and expanded opportunities. “It's my hometown location. I just want be able to, not get out, but explore different things,” stated participant 003. “Similarly, participant 017 shared that the desire to attend graduate school

to become a professor, is why he is so committed to college. Postsecondary education as a job requirement was discussed by participant 016. Her need to set goals in life and tackle those goals step by step is what drives her commitment.

Interview question 8 (RQ 2). *What makes you determined to obtain an undergraduate degree?*

Three common themes were identified as reasons for being determined to obtain an undergraduate degree: being a role model, making an impact, and career options. Being a role model for family is what drives participants 003 and 008. Participant 003 shared:

I have little nieces and nephews. And I just think about them. I just think about everybody who's counting on me, there's no other choice. I realize, I got those people that are counting on me, so if I quit, they'll quit, or they'll just do the same thing I did. So, I want to prove – not prove, set a good example for them.

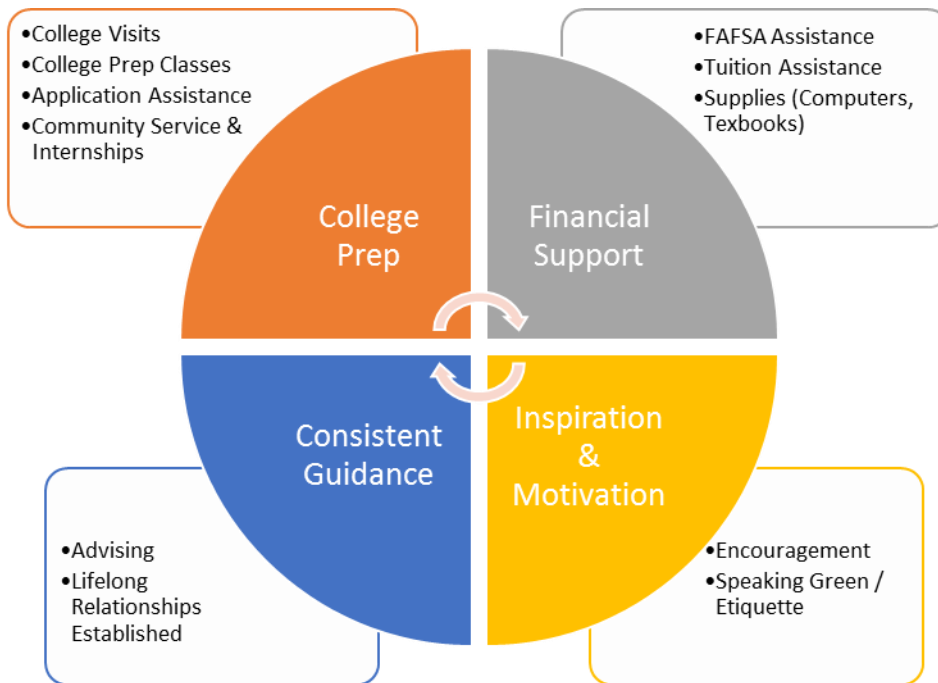
Ambition to make an impact in the world is what makes participant 015 determined to obtain an undergraduate degree. “With a chemistry degree I can work on clinical trials, work in a pharmacy, or be a pharmacologist that compounds medicine that helps people. Honestly, I just want to help others especially the elderly and sick kids,” stated participant 015. Participants 002, 016, and 019 explained how obtaining an undergraduate degree would expand their career options. “There are certain opportunities that you will not be able to get unless you have this certain degree. Honestly, it's the layout of society. That's what they want to see.” shared participant 002. The aspiration to be in a leadership role is what ignites participant 016's determination to complete her degree. Similarly, participant 019 aspires to become a physical therapist and entrepreneur which requires a graduate degree. He stated, “I want to be a physical therapist, so I can open up my own physical therapy office and put it in our hometown, so people can have affordable care.”

Interview question 9 (RQ 3). *Do you think Achievable Dream provided you with the resources to remain on track academically? Please explain.*

Participants shared that Achievable Dream provided them with various resources to remain on track academically. Financial support, college preparation assistance and opportunities, motivation, and consistent support and guidance were noted as having the most effect on participants. Resources provided by An Achievable Dream to remain on track academically, identified by participants are represented in Figure 7.

Figure 7

Resources Provided to Participants by Achievable Dream



It was noted by several participants that the burden of financial stress was eliminated with the financial support provided by Achievable Dream whether it be tuition assistance, assistance completing the FAFSA or support with supplies. Participant 003 shared that resources are always there even as alumni. “You can reach out to them through a simple text. If you need them, reach out to them, as alumni even if its money, you can request it.” he stated. Participant 014 noted:

I think they have definitely provided me those resources from just being there if we needed a tutor, or we’re struggling in a subject and they seen our grades slipping or whatever, or just being there as far as our books and laptops that we get at the beginning when we’re freshman going into school, that was helpful because I know kids that were in college and didn’t even have laptops, or wasn’t even able to pay for books, and it was like we didn’t have to face that struggle because Achievable Dream paid for that stuff for us.

Similarly, participants 006, 008, 014, 017, and 019 indicated the college preparation opportunities offered were a beneficial resource regarding academic success. College visits, community service and internship opportunities, assistance with applications and college preparation courses were noted as prominent resources. Participant 019 discussed his

involvement in the College Orientation Workshop and Youth Leadership Camp. Participant 014 explained:

I think another resource was the classes that they pushed us to take. We didn't necessarily have to, but they, kind of, encouraged us to take so we can have the emphasis on going to college as far as honors classes, AP classes, most of the years, and then having to take some high school classes even in middle school.

Participants thought that the continued support and guidance provided by Achievable Dream is one of a kind. Advising throughout high school and as alumni was recalled by participants. Participant 017 noted, "Just having not only realistic, but consistent support and guidance really helped me out and just kept me on track for college." Lifelong relationships are established between faculty, staff, and students at Achievable Dream and their students building a longitudinal resource for participants. A resource provided throughout secondary education that has proven beneficial in life in general is the speaking green and etiquette classes, added participant 008. "They want us to be successful. I feel like them being on top of us and making sure that we're straight all the time, not just to baby us, but to push us and to keep us focused." stated Participant 019.

Interview question 10 (RQ 3). *Do you have any information you would like to add or questions for me?*

While most participants did not wish to share any additional information, four participants shared their thoughts. Participant 008 shared that he would recommend parents applying for admission to Achievable Dream because they make sure every child is "ready for college or life in general". Participant 014 stated:

I feel as though if I wouldn't have had Achievable Dream, my college experience wouldn't have been the same. I feel as though it would have been more challenging, especially as first-generation student, whether it was financially or the support. I mean it's always good to have support from family, but having that support from a high school you went to as well, was just exceptional and I was so glad that my mom put me in that position to have that support from Achievable Dream, and I continue to have that support still today as a junior. And even after college I feel as though they would still be there to support me, so I'm glad that I was in that position to be in that school, and I don't regret it at all.

Participant 003 added:

Achievable Dream is probably one of the best schools to go to. I look at other kids or my friends that go to public schools and it's a totally different experience. They're all alone. They're not all alone, but they have family. But they don't have Achievable Dream, they're always there. I just really want to say, Achievable Dream is a great school and without them, I wouldn't even be where I am today. And I wouldn't even have this mindset, especially, where we grow up. So, I really just want to thank Achievable Dream.

Participant 002 noted:

Early college courses were really helpful thinking about it now. There were so many classes that I didn't have to take because I did them. I think that if a student is in a position to where they would be successful in stopping high school early and going ahead and doing that, I think that that should definitely be encouraged. Also, do like they did with me and let them know the extent to what they're doing and if they aren't successful then it could mess up the opportunity for the college that they want go to. I think that overall, it's a great opportunity and I would do it again for sure.

Findings for the Research Question

The primary research questions were:

1. What are the academic (i.e., grade point average, hours earned, and academic standing) outcomes of first-generation African American students after graduation from Achievable Dream?
2. What are the psychosocial (i.e., academic determination, discipline, and commitment) outcomes of first-generation African American students after graduation from Achievable Dream?
3. How do first-generation African American students perceive their postsecondary academic and psychosocial outcomes?
 - a. In what ways, if any, do students who participated in early college access programming believe program participation affected their academic experience?
 - b. What do students who participated in early college access programming perceive to be barriers?
 - c. What do students who participated in early college access programming perceive to be the most valuable supports?

Seven findings were identified as a result of the data analysis. Chapter five provides a discussion of the themes that emerged and the findings of the research study.

Chapter Five

Findings, Implications, and Conclusions

Introduction

This study focused on the academic and psychosocial outcomes of postsecondary first-generation African American students who have completed early college access programming. This study addresses a gap in the literature by exploring the effectiveness of college access programming and its effects on first-generation African American student's postsecondary academic and psychosocial outcomes. The purpose of this study was to examine both the benefits and challenges faced by first-generation African American students who have completed ECAP. Furthermore, the study identified barriers to achieving academic success in college for first-generation African American students.

In the study, 22 Achievable Dream alumni completed a demographic questionnaire. Of those participants, 10 alumni were subsequently interviewed regarding their perceptions of the academic and psychosocial outcomes of their participation in ECAP at Achievable Dream. Data was analyzed from the questionnaires and interviews to explore perceptions of their participation in ECAP and whether it supported their academic achievement in college. This chapter is composed of an introduction, summary of the findings, and discussion of the findings; conclusions; implications for practice; recommendations for further research; and researcher reflections.

Summary of the Findings

The participants were 22 African American alumni of Achievable Dream who are enrolled in universities throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia. The demographic questionnaire data was completed by 22 participants. Ten participants completed one-on-one interviews. An analysis of the demographic questionnaire and participant responses to interview questions yielded seven findings.

1. Participants believed that establishment of continuous relationships with teachers and counselors from secondary education provided emotional support during postsecondary education.
2. Participants shared that knowledge gained through college preparation opportunities was essential to academic success.

3. Participants indicated that financial support provided by Achievable Dream reduced stress associated with the cost of higher education.
4. Participants gained a fundamental level of knowledge during secondary education that prepared them for academic achievement in college.
5. Participants identified academic rigor, mental health issues, imposter syndrome, time management, learning disabilities, and academic motivation as barriers to achieving academic success in college.
6. Participants declared full commitment to obtaining an undergraduate degree.
7. Participants attributed their determination to obtaining an undergraduate degree to being a role model, making an impact, and expanding career opportunities.

Discussion of the Findings

Finding 1. *Participants believed that establishment of continuous relationships with teachers and counselors from secondary education provided emotional support during postsecondary education.* All 10 participants shared that relationships established with teachers or counselors during high school lead to emotional support during postsecondary education. Participants discussed how the continuous relationships and connection with the faculty at Achievable Dream led them to believe they were never alone, even though they had graduated and were in college. The statement, “Once a dreamer, always a dreamer” was mentioned several times in regard to participants feeling as if they would always have the support of Achievable Dream. Teachers and counselors become a mentor to their students while in high school, therefore becoming an influence in that student’s life. Tierney, Corbin, and Colyar (2005) state that students who have been involved in programs with committed, long-term mentors have enjoyed college at nearly double the rates of their peers who have not participated in programs with dedicated mentors (p. 21). A strong foundation of trust in the relationship is built with teachers and faculty during high school, establishing rapport. First-generation students do not have parents who can assist them through the process of undergraduate education, so they continue to rely on those that assisted them throughout secondary education to continue to be a resource. One participant noted the value of his math teacher continuing to check in every so often to make sure everything with college is well and to see if he has any questions. Research stresses the importance of developing college-going aspirations in bolstering academic advancement and college outcomes (Tierney, Corbin, & Colyar, 2005). Positive role models

early in education can make a difference in the mindset of a young child, and being around a positive role model or having a mentor can provide inspiration to a child (Watson, 2018).

Finding 2. *Participants shared that knowledge gained through college preparation opportunities was essential to academic success.* All 10 participants indicated participation in early college access programming was an important aspect of their academic achievement in college. Participants shared that assistance in the college application process and opportunities provided such as community service and access to college preparation courses was valuable. College visit field trips and summer programs on college campuses were mentioned as experiences that led to participants wanting to attend college. The opportunities provided a chance for students to get familiar with the college campuses as well as establish connections with postsecondary faculty and staff. One participant stated:

I saw this campus a bunch of times, on different trips, so I was already familiar with the place. It's more like, here's the college I want to go to and now it's time to see what I can do here. So, basically, it wasn't this big transition for me as it was for other students.

Another participant stated he had the opportunity to attend a college orientation workshop (COW program) at the Virginia Military Institute and participated in the youth leadership camp (YLC) and those opportunities provided him with skills to navigate college. Tierney, Corbin, and Colyar (2005) stated that while students may complete college applications based on similar timelines, they need to identify themselves as college bound at earlier points in the academic pipeline to learn about anticipated careers and related college choices (p. 161).

Finding 3. *Participants indicated that financial support provided by Achievable Dream reduced stress associated with the cost of high education.*

Each participant in the study indicated some form of financial support provided by Achievable Dream was beneficial during their postsecondary experience. A participant explained they could not afford college and without the Achievable Dream scholarship, college was not an option. Additionally, another participant shared how Achievable Dream came to the rescue when they requested financial assistance to purchase textbooks. The participant had class assignments due, requiring specific textbooks they could not afford causing stress but the financial support eliminated that stress. Tierney, Corbin, and Colyar (2005) states, "For many, one of the largest inhibitors to college is the prospect of being able to afford a college education." Financial instability is a huge decision-making factor for students with a low socioeconomic status. Not

being able to afford what is needed, higher education can cause undue stress on a student. Money becomes a factor due to the increasing tuition costs and rising cost of daily living. Parents of low-income African-American students are not often equipped to explore college choices, though they have the goal of providing a college education to their children (Smith, 2008). Some students may have to work during undergraduate studies to pay their expenses but then find themselves with less time to focus on their studies, which causes additional stress. This is prevalent in first-generation African American student's lives because most students come from a low socio-economic status. Whether it be the form of scholarship, assistance with textbooks, or even help completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) the financial assistance provided to students is beneficial to the academic success of the student.

Finding 4. *Participants gained a fundamental level of knowledge during secondary education that prepared them for academic achievement in college.*

The amount of coursework assigned can become a barrier when trying to fit in all the requirements of an undergraduate student. Often students are coming from a school where assignments are completed in class and homework is minimal. Adjusting to taking multiple classes with numerous readings and various assignments can be challenging. Participants indicated the AP classes, college classes, and vigorous courses provided during high school prepared them for a smooth transition academically. One participant stated, "The early college program was helpful because when I got to my university, there were certain classes that I didn't have to take, credits I didn't need to worry about. I didn't have to take a heavy course load." Academic preparation one of the five competency areas beneficial to stimulating college readiness. Academic preparation and achievement are important predictors of predisposition of attending college (Tierney, Corbin, & Colyar, 2005).

Finding 5. *Participants identified academic rigor, mental health issues, imposter syndrome, time management, learning disabilities, and academic motivation as barriers to achieving academic success in college.*

All 10 participants identified barriers that continued to affect their academic success even though they had participated in early college access programming. Academic rigor was identified by one participant. She explained that the lack of teaching styles in high school hindered her academic experience in college because she had difficulty adjusting to the various teaching styles. Two participants shared how learning disabilities and mental health issues served as

barriers to achieving academic success. Access to counseling services assisted with limiting concerns from this barrier. Time management and academic motivation was also identified as barriers by participants of this study. Time management and organizational skills are effective strategies students use to deal with the demands of undergraduate education. Once a student determines how to manage their time, they can prioritize what is important, therefore reducing stress. Being organized reduces stress levels, enhances focus, and increases productivity. Students need relationships with individuals with institutional know-how or with people who can provide socioemotional support when barriers stand in their way. These relationships or connections can become integral in aiding students in navigating college (Tierney, Corbin, & Colyar, 2005). Facilitation of those connections with students and the faculty and staff at institutions should be implemented into ECAP.

Finding 6. *Participants declared full commitment to obtaining an undergraduate degree.*

All 10 participants stated they were committed to completing their postsecondary education. Participants attributed their commitment to college to accomplishing career goals, financial security, helping others, and increasing future opportunities. One participant shared they are focused on degree attainment to expand future opportunities to provide for their family. Most of the participants attributed their commitment to college to a parent or grandparent that encouraged them along the way. Family buy-in is important for first-generation minorities. Parental involvement in the college choice process is instrumental for first-generation and URM students (Bergerson, 2009). Lack of finances, inadequate preparation, and lack of encouragement and support from culture or family growing up often drives underrepresented minorities to aspire for more as an adult (Perna & Titus, 2005).

Finding 7. *Participants attributed their determination to obtaining an undergraduate degree to being a role model, making an impact, and expanding career opportunities.*

All 10 participants shared what makes them determined to obtain an undergraduate degree. Four out of 10 participants shared they were determined to be obtain an undergraduate degree because they were a role model for family. Being the first in the family to obtain a degree sets a standard for those that are watching and following in ones' footsteps. Four out of 10 participants indicated expanding career opportunities was the reason they were determined to obtain an undergraduate degree. Often when applying for specific jobs, an undergraduate degree

is required. For those students wanting to attend graduate school, an undergraduate degree is necessary when applying. According to Tierney, Corbin, and Colyar (2005):

Individuals who attend and graduate from college realize a number of short- and long-term benefits. The short-term consumption benefits of attending college include enjoyment of the learning experience, involvement in extracurricular activities, participation in social and cultural events, and enhancement of social status. Long-term or future benefits include higher lifetime earnings, more fulfilling work environment, better health, longer life, more informed purchases, and lower probability of unemployment (p. 174).

Conclusions

This study was designed to address a gap in the literature on early college access. Furthermore, this study examined the effectiveness of early college access and its effects on first-generation African American students' postsecondary academic and psychosocial outcomes. First-generation minorities often have difficulty overcoming barriers that reduce their odds of academic success. Early college access programming is built into the curriculum at Achievable Dream to help students overcome these barriers. Ten Achievable Dream alumni participated in this study, providing valuable insight into their experiences with ECAP.

The findings suggest that participation in early college access programming established an educational foundation which led to positive outcomes in academic achievement throughout postsecondary education. Academically, the alumni remained in good academic standing and the psychosocial outcomes show a positive relationship between commitment to obtaining an undergraduate degree and wanting to make a difference. The graduates of Achievable Dream shared the most valuable support received while attending high school that promoted their success in college. The data analysis also suggested that even though the alumni received ECAP there are still barriers that exist.

The information provided by this study can be used to support the unique public/private partnership of Achievable Dream in relation to illustrating postsecondary academic achievement of students that are alumni. This information can also be used to implement early college access programming at additional high schools. Most high schools do not have ECAP as broad as Achievable Dream due to limitations of resources, but there are components that should be

recommended for every high school. Field trips to college campuses, establishing partnerships with universities, and initiating connections with support persons at universities including resource lists are just a few programming components that should be incorporated at each high school.

Implications for practice

District and high school administrators, principals, guidance counselors and teachers concerned about the achievement gap and equal access to higher education should consider the findings of this study.

1. *High school administrators, principals, and teachers should consider the most valuable support and resources identified by participants.* This recommendation is associated with Findings 1-4. The most valuable support and resources to participants was identified in the data analysis. High school administrators and principals should review the support and resources to identify if they are available within their schools. If appropriate resources are not available, a request for such resources should be initiated. Funding should also be requested within the school's budget to provide such resources and support to students. Teachers should take note of the resources and provide them when available.
2. *High school administrators, principals, and teachers should consider identified barriers to achieving academic success in college.* This recommendation is associated with Finding 5. College access programs are built to identify and reduce barriers for students. This study identifies several barriers for underrepresented minority students. High school administrators, principals should review these barriers to provide guidance counselors and teachers with the appropriate professional development to identify and work on these barriers with students.
3. *District and high school administrators should consider facilitating teacher development, sharing research and curricula, and implementing consistent college counseling between resource-rich schools and resource-deficient schools.* This recommendation is associated with Findings 1-7. The findings in this study show that early college access programming has positive outcomes. If schools with ECAP are able to share information and resources with schools that do not have ECAP, more students will benefit. The facilitation of professional development for all teachers

regarding college readiness and access would increase the likelihood of overall buy-in of ECAP, increasing the implementation of programming in the classrooms. Although the literature shows guidance counselors are often overwhelmed with large caseloads, it is vital that consistent college counseling be provided to first-generation minorities to assist in decreasing the educational achievement gap.

4. *Postsecondary institutions should consider establishing partnerships with high schools to host information sessions and/or summer programming for at-risk students.* This recommendation is associated with Finding 5. If partnerships were established between high schools and postsecondary institutions barriers for first-generation African American students could be reduced. Higher education programs often facilitate college access summer programming that focus on preparing targeted student populations for college. By establishing a partnership, the postsecondary institutions would receive information on which students could benefit from the programs being offered and the high school would receive a valuable resource. An additional component of the partnership could include information sessions and designated days where the universities could come to the high school to inform the students on what they have to offer and get them interested in college programs.

Participants shared that knowledge gained through college preparation opportunities was essential to academic success. Participants identified academic rigor, mental health issues, imposter syndrome, time management, learning disabilities, and academic motivation as barriers to achieving academic success in college.

Policy Implications

There is a national emphasis on education. Educators across the nation are trying to shorten the achievement gap. Research shows that early intervention has an impact on later school achievement (Tierney, Corbin, & Colyar, 2005). Findings 2, 3, 4, and 5 should be considered by state and national legislators when developing educational policy. Barriers continue to block access and academic achievement for underrepresented minorities. Legislators should try to implement more college preparation programs and advocate for additional funding for those programs that currently exist. The funding would support the students that benefit from the resources provided through the programming.

Recommendations for Further Research

Results of this study contributes information for the gap in the literature on early college access. Based on the study findings, the following four areas have been identified for further research.

1. The population sample for this study included alumni from one high school, Achievable Dream. Additional research could expand to additional high schools that offer early college access programming.
2. Further research on this topic could be conducted based on college graduates' perceptions of their participation in early college access programming and whether it supported their academic achievement in college.
3. Further research on this topic could focus primarily on first-generation student outcomes comparing how those outcomes differ between institution, location, and program discipline.
4. Further research could include a study expanding the participant population. By including non-first-generation participants the data analysis would compare the differences in experiences for first-generation and non-first-generation participants.
5. Further research could investigate the seven specific findings of this study to gain a more in-depth understanding of the early college access programming.

Researcher Reflections

As the researcher, through which the research questions were investigated, reflexivity was considered. The research questions were viewed through my lens, that of a 34-year-old first-generation African American Indian middle-class female in a blended family. Each one of the aspects mentioned above from my personal history is relevant to the experiences I had during secondary and postsecondary studies. As a first-generation graduate, I have personally experienced the difficulties of navigating postsecondary education with minimal guidance. While completing my undergraduate degree, I found attending university to be exceptionally demanding due to entering an environment where I was the minority and did not have anyone within my family to assist me through the process. It has been a pleasure to contribute to the gap in literature surrounding early college access. It is my hope that this study provides information

that will assist in promoting early college access and increase postsecondary academic achievement for underrepresented minority students.

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Appendix A

Review of Sources Related to Underrepresented Minorities Pre-College Engagement

Table 2

Review of Sources Related to Underrepresented Minorities Pre-College Engagement

Author and Year	Location/ Participants	Focus & Theme(s)	Methods/Data Sources	Findings	Significance
Farmer-Hinton & Adams (2006)	Augusta, GA / five high school counselors	-College Access -College Preparation -First-generation -College-bound -Counselors	statistical procedures Mixed Methods, Face-to-face Interviews / Audio taped transcribed interviews	-When black students are provided with consistent exposure to college access and greater personalized support from counselors, they can better navigate the preparation process. -Black students have limited experience and knowledge related to college as a viable option. -School counselor's role is to convince first-generation college-bound students that they can attend college.	-Raises an important discourse on ways school-based social capital and institutional agents can positively impact Black students' college preparatory activities.
Edmunds, Unlu, Glennie, Bernstein, Fesler, Furey & Arshavsky (2017)	North Carolina / twelve early college high schools with students enrolled 2008-2009, rural and urban	-Post-secondary education -Early college high school -Transition to post-secondary education -Focus on college readiness -Lack of academic preparation	statistical procedures Longitudinal Experimental Study / Extant data	-High internal validity -Positive impacts on post-secondary readiness, enrollment, and attainment can likely be attributed to early access to college courses. -Can't be compartmentalized -Early college model is narrowing the gap in post-secondary enrollment between targeted subgroups (underrepresented minorities and students eligible for free and reduced lunch).	-Early college high schools are succeeding in its goal to increase the number of students who are graduating from high school and enrolling in post-secondary education.

(continued)

Table 2 (cont.)

Author and Year	Location/ Participants	Focus & Theme(s)	Methods/Data Sources	Findings	Significance
Lamkin (2004)	Florida, New Mexico, North Carolina, Texas, & Virginia / Twenty-seven Achieving the Dream colleges that serve high proportions of underserved students (33 percent minorities)	-Access -Underserved students -Achieving the Dream		-It takes institutional commitment to confirm and implement what works. -Participating colleges must seek input from students -Colleges must pledge to maintain access	- More must be done to increase the success of underserved students
Museus (2011)	First-generation Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPI)	-College Access and Equity -First-generation Asian Americans -First-generation Pacific Islanders -Inequities of college access faced by first-generation AAPIs	statistical procedures Mixed Methods and Intersectionality Analysis / Quantitative-analysis of longitudinal study conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics via survey sample of high school sophomores in 2002 Qualitative-interviews with thirty first-generation AAPI undergraduates who identified with eight ethnic groups	-Single most salient positive influence on participants' decision to pursue higher education was high expectation of parents -Financial constraints influenced participants on whether to pursue higher education and where -Participants felt alone in the application process and choice process due to inability of parents to assist and guide	-The path to college begins much earlier than the senior year of high school. -Disparities between first-generation and continuing-generation Asian American Pacific Islanders whether they apply to a post-secondary institution or matriculate at a college or university.

(continued)

Table 2 (cont.)

Author and Year	Location/ Participants	Focus & Theme(s)	Methods/Data Sources	Findings	Significance
Bragg, Kim & Barnett (2006)	50 US states / 129 state-level secondary and post-secondary officials	-Creating Access and Success -Academic Pathways -Underserved Students -College Access	statistical procedures APASS Study / telephone interviews, site visits, emails, online surveys	-Academic pathways support student transition -Nine pathways: • Advanced Placement • Bridge programs • College-Level Examination Program • Distance learning/virtual high schools and colleges • Dual credit, dual enrollment, and concurrent enrollment • Early and middle college high schools • GED programs that bridge to college • International Baccalaureate • Tech Prep and College Tech Prep	-Models and approaches available to assist students matriculating from high school to college are wide-ranging in their intentions and outcomes. - None of the pathways that we investigated has demonstrated substantial success in facilitating students', particularly underserved students', transition to college. -Low SES African American students have less contact with faculty, study less, are less involved with student organizations, work more, and have lower grades than do their high SES peers or all African American students
Walpole (2008)	12,400 African Americans who attended 4-year institutions, approximately 365 students.	-Socioeconomic Status -Pipeline -African American Students	statistical procedures Longitudinal Study / national, longitudinal quantitative database	-Gap between White and African American students' enrollment in college -Black students continue to be underrepresented in 4-year colleges and universities	

(continued)

Table 2 (cont.)

Author and Year	Location/ Participants	Focus & Theme(s)	Methods/Data Sources	Findings	Significance
Swail (2000)	All fifty states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Guam, and Micronesia / 1,100 precollege outreach programs (TRIO, IHAD, and GEARUP), restricted to serving underrepresented students at the precollege level, with the minimum of twelve students per calendar year	-socioeconomic status -students of color -school reform -GEARUP -TRIO programs -IHAD	statistical procedures Mixed Methods Analysis / Quantitative - National Survey of Outreach Programs conducted Qualitative - focus groups with outreach program directors	- Focus should be on what these outreach programs should be doing and how they should do it. - Four concrete areas to focus on are: 1. Ramping up current outreach activities to reach more of our youth. 2. Improving the instructional quality and delivery of outreach programs. 3. Expanding opportunities for networking among programs. 4. Linking outreach programs directly to our schools and long-term systemic plans.	-Long-term strategy involves the redefinition of our public-school system. -Without large-scale reform, we do not have much chance of changing the direction of mass numbers of lives.

(continued)

Table 2 (cont.)

Author and Year	Location/ Participants	Focus & Theme(s)	Methods/Data Sources	Findings	Significance
Jackson (1988)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Access -Minorities -Equal Access - Achievement Gap 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Financial aid issues, demands for greater accountability in higher education, and racism are contributing factors of the achievement gap. -College admissions counselors must improve their line of communication with high school students, parents, counselors, and teachers. -Admissions standards need to be broadened to produce more minority college graduates. -Admission criteria should include cognitive factors known to be valid predictors of minority performance in college. -Members of the National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC) should sponsor an initiative to ensure that tests are used in a diagnostic and prescriptive fashion to improve minority student performance. -Minority communities must accept responsibility for ensuring that more students are taught the discipline and self-sacrifice that is instrumental in achieving personal success. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Despite the improvement in the academic performance of minorities, there remains a substantial gap between the academic preparation of white and minority students.

(continued)

Table 2 (cont.)

Author and Year	Location/ Participants	Focus & Theme(s)	Methods/Data Sources	Findings	Significance
Lee, Weis, Liu & Kang (2017)		-Unequal Pathways -Undermatching Post-secondary Education -Socioeconomic Status -Affirmative Action -Mobility	statistical procedures Longitudinal Study / National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES)-Baron's data sets	-With academic qualifications and other background conditions being equal, Black students, higher -SES students, and higher-mobility students tend to have significantly higher chances of attending academically matched colleges and universities. - Undermatching occurs when a students' academic credentials permit them access to a more selective college and is prevalent among low-income, minority, and first-generation college students.	-The advantage of being Black may be attributable to affirmative action policies, although the group can be simultaneously disadvantaged in terms of SES and mobility.
Southworth & Mickelson (2007)	Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools in 1997 / Seniors enrolled in 12 th grade English	-College Track Placement -Equality of Access -Racial Composition -Social Inequality	statistical procedures Multi-Method 19-year Study / Quantitative - survey data	-School racial composition has significant effects on the English track placement of different race-gender cohorts. -School's racial compositions interact with student's ascriptive characteristics. -Racially balanced high schools offers all students the greatest equality of access to college prep tracks. Racially imbalanced high schools affect students chances of enrolling in college prep tracks.	-Equality of educational opportunity is related to school racial composition, students' gender, and ethnic background.

(continued)

Table 2 (cont.)

Author and Year	Location/ Participants	Focus & Theme(s)	Methods/Data Sources	Findings	Significance
Black Male Collegians (2014)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Post-secondary Education -Access and Success -TRIO Programs -College Readiness -Affirmative Action -Mentoring 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Factors critical to the success of Black men in post-secondary education are financial support, spirituality, family support, non-cognitive skills, racial identity, and masculine identity. -Mentors are critical to the success of Black men in post-secondary education. -The abandonment of affirmative action may pose a significant challenge to Black men and their ability to access a range of post-secondary educational institutions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Black men must depend on several initiatives to help facilitate their access to higher education. -Although critical, initiatives available to Black men are being reduced and dismantled which poses a significant challenge to access to post-secondary education.
Stillisano, Brown, Waxman & Alford (2014)	Texas / 6 high schools, 34 students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -College Access -Student Aspirations 	<p>statistical procedures Case Study / Statewide educational database, semi-structured interviews, email and telephone</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The college access centers created collaboration and teamwork, varied activities and creative outreach to students and families, teacher/administrator support for the center’s mission, welcoming staff personalities and community partnerships. -Parents and students utilized the services of the centers to a great extent. -The centers built a culture that actively encouraged and assisted in student college-going aspirations. 	<p>College access centers were established in Texas high schools to assist students with college preparation activities and to create a school-wide college going culture.</p>

(continued)

Table 2 (cont.)

Author and Year	Location/ Participants	Focus & Theme(s)	Methods/Data Sources	Findings	Significance
Cokley, Obaseki, Moran-Jackson, Jones, Vohra-Gupta (2016)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Educational Opportunity -Affirmative Action -Barriers to Higher Education -Race and Ethnicity -College Access -Post-secondary Institutions 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The rising ranks of Black students who are immigrants or of mixed racial heritage has begun to conflate and pose a secondary challenge to African-Americans who are descendants of slavery and Jim Crow discrimination and for whom the benefits of affirmative action were intended. -When Black students have strong academic skills, they are not necessarily encouraged to take AP courses. -Black students are not a monolithic group. -Black students are disproportionately more likely to be in schools where they do not receive the academic preparation necessary to compete for spots at competitive institutions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -African-American high school graduates are less prepared for a college-level curriculum than any other racial or ethnic group. -With growing ethnic and nationality diversity within the Black U.S. population, an important question is: Which Black students should get the opportunities and access to highly selective post-secondary institutions?
Smith (2008)	Los Angeles, California / Three urban working class Black single mothers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -College Choice -First Generation -Access to Higher Education -Socioeconomic Status -Parenting 	<p>statistical procedures Qualitative Ethnographic Study / 34 transcribed audio-taped interviews, audio and written field notes, and memos</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Low socioeconomic status (SES) Black parents are very involved in their children's education. -Completion of a high school degree is considered the normative pathway to upward mobility. -Black parents encourage their children to go beyond their own level of schooling therefore creating first-generation college students. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Parents of low-income Black students are ill equipped to explore college choice and thereby achieve the goal of providing a college education for their children.

(continued)

Table 2 (cont.)

Author and Year	Location/ Participants	Focus & Theme(s)	Methods/Data Sources	Findings	Significance
Bergin, Cooks & Bergin (2007)	Eighty-three eighth grade students with a GPA of B and above from 13 different schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Minority Program -Equity -Access to Higher Education -Access Intervention Program 	statistical procedures A Randomized Experiment / questionnaire, survey, experimental group of 43 students and control group of 40 students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Program students were more likely to enroll at the sponsoring university. -Results are suggestive of the scholarship incentive. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Youth from groups underrepresented in higher education will thrive if they have academically relevant goals, skills, and cultural knowledge.

Appendix B

IRB Training in Human Subjects Protection Certificate of Completion



Appendix C

CITI Program IRB Certificate of Completion: Social & Behavioral Research



Completion Date 06-Jan-2020
Expiration Date 05-Jan-2023
Record ID 30678135

This is to certify that:

Angelica Stovall

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Social & Behavioral Research (Curriculum Group)
Social & Behavioral Research (Course Learner Group)
1 - Basic Course (Stage)

Under requirements set by:

Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University (Virginia Tech) CITI Program Institutional Training Initiative



Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w88f8f58e-2e8f-41d0-a2b9-1cc466464039-30678135

Appendix D

CITI Program IRB Certificate of Completion: Information Privacy and Security



Completion Date 06-Jan-2020
Expiration Date 05-Jan-2023
Record ID 30678136

This is to certify that:

Angelica Stovall

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Information Privacy and Security (IPS) (Curriculum Group)
Information Privacy and Security (IPS) (Course Learner Group)
1 - Basic (Stage)

Under requirements set by:

Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University (Virginia Tech) Constitutional Training Initiative



Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w957ddf52-f4e5-433e-82ce-25cff6ce70a3-30678136

Appendix E

Email to An Achievable Dream President and CEO to Confirm Permission to Conduct Study

SUBJECT: Permission to Conduct Study Related to An Achievable Dream (AAD) Alumni

Dear Dr. Vreeland,

Thank you for your continued support of my doctoral work in the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies program at Virginia Tech. I am working under the direction of Dr. Carol Mullen, Dr. Karen Eley Sanders, Dr. William Glenn, and Dr. Ryan Mutcheson. I have proposed a research study related to An Achievable Dream High School alumni that will be my doctoral dissertation. The purpose of this letter is to provide an overview of the study and confirm your willingness to allow me to move forward with the research.

The study will examine both the benefits and challenges experienced by first-generation African American students who participated in college access programming while at an Achievable Dream. The specific purpose of this study is to examine the academic and psychosocial outcomes of the subjects in the study. I will explore student perceptions of their participation in early college access programming, and whether students feel the programming contributed to their academic achievement in college. Overall inequalities in college access experienced by first-generation African American students is a lens for this study.

I sincerely appreciate your verbal approval to conduct the study and request your confirmation in writing. In addition, I ask that you send introductory and follow-up emails to select AAD alumni to invite them to participate in the study. My goal is to interview 9 – 12 AAD alumni. Data gathered through the interviews will be analyzed for commonalities, differences, and patterns. I am confident that information collected in this study will be beneficial to administrators and educators throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia, and help inform best practices related to college preparation activities.

I appreciate your support for this study. I look forward to receiving your written approval to conduct the study. Please contact me if you have questions or need additional information.

Sincerely,

Angelica W. Stovall
Ph.D. Candidate, Virginia Tech
angelicaw@vt.edu
(540) 537-0547

Appendix F

IRB Approval Letter



Division of Scholarly Integrity and
Research Compliance
Institutional Review Board
North End Center, Suite 4120 (MC 0497)
300 Turner Street NW
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061
540/231-3732
irb@vt.edu
<http://www.research.vt.edu/sirc/hrpp>

MEMORANDUM

DATE: May 13, 2020
TO: Carol Ann Mullen, Angelica W Stovall
FROM: Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572, expires October 29, 2024)
PROTOCOL TITLE: Investigating Academic and Psychosocial Outcomes of First-Generation African American Postsecondary Students who Completed Early College Access Programming: A Qualitative Case Study
IRB NUMBER: 20-304

Effective May 13, 2020, the Virginia Tech Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) and Institutional Review Board (IRB) determined that this protocol meets the criteria for exemption from IRB review under 45 CFR 46.104(d) category(ies) 2(ii).

Ongoing IRB review and approval by this organization is not required. This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these activities impact the exempt determination, please submit a new request to the IRB for a determination.

This exempt determination does not apply to any collaborating institution(s). The Virginia Tech HRPP and IRB cannot provide an exemption that overrides the jurisdiction of a local IRB or other institutional mechanism for determining exemptions.

All investigators (listed above) are required to comply with the researcher requirements outlined at:

<https://secure.research.vt.edu/external/irb/responsibilities.htm>

(Please review responsibilities before beginning your research.)

PROTOCOL INFORMATION:

Determined As: **Exempt, under 45 CFR 46.104(d) category(ies) 2(ii)**
Protocol Determination Date: **May 13, 2020**

ASSOCIATED FUNDING:

The table on the following page indicates whether grant proposals are related to this protocol, and which of the listed proposals, if any, have been compared to this protocol, if required.

Invent the Future

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY
An equal opportunity, affirmative action institution

Appendix G

Recruitment Email to Prospective Participants

SUBJECT: Virginia Tech Research Study Opportunity

Dear Achievable Dream Alumni,

Below you will find information about a research study being conducted by a Virginia Tech doctoral student. As An Achievable Dream alumni, you can help by participating in this study. The study will examine both the benefits and challenges experienced by first-generation African American students who participated in early college access programming while at An Achievable Dream. The questionnaire consists of 12 multiple choice/fill-in the blank questions. Thank you for considering participation in this research study.

Sincerely,

Dr. Lee Vreeland

Greetings,

My name is Angelica Stovall. I am a doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies program at Virginia Tech, working under the direction of Dr. Carol Mullen. The study will examine both the benefits and challenges experienced by first-generation African American students who have completed early college access programming while at An Achievable Dream. The specific purpose of this study is to examine the academic and psychosocial outcomes of subjects in the study. I will explore student perceptions of their participation in early college access programming, and whether students feel the programming contributed to their academic achievement in college. To participate in the study, you must be a first-generation African American student who graduated from An Achievable Dream, and are currently attending a 4-year college or university in Virginia. You were identified by An Achievable Dream staff as meeting the required criteria for this research study.

I am writing to invite you to participate in this research study. As a participant in the study, you would first read the Consent to Participate in the Study Form, and then respond to 12 demographic questions via Qualtrics questionnaire. After completion of the questionnaire, 9-12 AAD alumni will be selected to participate in one-on-one interviews via an electronic platform such as Zoom, Skype, or phone. The interviews will be audio-recorded and should 30-45 minutes to complete. The research study will conform to the requirements set forth by the Virginia Tech Human Research Protection Program (HRPP), IRB#20-304.

If interested in learning more about or participating in the research study titled, *Investigating Academic and Psychosocial Outcomes of First-Generation African American Postsecondary Students who Completed Early College Access Programming: A Qualitative Case Study*, please click on the following link:

https://viriniatech.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_b908VGRvsATo9Fz

Thank you for your consideration in participating in this study. Please email me at angelicaw@vt.edu if you have any questions. I appreciate your time. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Angelica W. Stovall, BSN, MBA, QMHP-A,C
Director of Student Affairs, VTC School of Medicine
PhD Candidate, VT School of Education

Appendix H

Recruitment Email Reminder to Prospective Participants

SUBJECT: Reminder: Virginia Tech Research Study Opportunity

Dear Achievable Dream Alumni,

You were sent an email on [insert date] inviting you to participate in a research by a Virginia Tech doctoral student. As Achievable Dream alumni, you can help by participating in this study. The study will examine both the benefits and challenges experienced by first-generation African American students who participated in early college access programming while at An Achievable Dream. The questionnaire consists of 12 multiple choice/fill-in the blank questions. Please click the link below by [insert date] to participate in the study, and contact Ms. Stovall if you have questions.

Sincerely,

Dr. Lee Vreeland

Greetings,

My name is Angelica Stovall. I am a doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies program at Virginia Tech, working under the direction of Dr. Carol Mullen. The study will examine both the benefits and challenges experienced by first-generation African American students who participated in early college access programming while at An Achievable Dream. The specific purpose of this study is to examine the academic and psychosocial outcomes of the subjects in the study. I will explore student perceptions of their participation in early college access programming, and whether students feel the programming contributed to their academic achievement in college. To participate in the study, you must be first-generation African American student who graduated from An Achievable Dream, and are currently attending a 4-year college or university in Virginia. You were identified by An Achievable Dream staff as meeting the required criteria for this research study.

I am writing to invite you participate in this research study. As a participant in the study, you would first read the Consent to Participate in the Study Form, and then respond to 12 demographic questions via a Qualtrics questionnaire. After completing the questionnaire, 9-12 AAD alumni will be selected to participate in one-on-one interviews via an electronic platform such as Zoom, Skype, or phone. The interviews will be audio-recorded and should take 30-45 minutes to complete. The research study will conform to the requirements set forth by the Virginia Tech Human Research Protection Program (HRPP), IRB#20-304.

If interested in learning more about or participating in the research study titled, *Investigating Academic and Psychosocial Outcomes of First-Generation African American Postsecondary Students who Completed Early College Access Programming: A Qualitative Case Study*, please click on this link: https://virginiatech.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_b908VGRvsATo9Fz

Thank you for your willingness to consider participating in this study. Please email me at angelicaw@vt.edu if you have any questions. I appreciate your time. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Angelica W. Stovall, BSN, MBA, QMHP-A,C
Director of Student Affairs, VTC School of Medicine
PhD Candidate, VT School of Education

Appendix I

Informed Consent for Participants in Research Studies Involving Human Participants

Title of the Research Study: Investigating Academic and Psychosocial Outcomes of First-Generation African American Postsecondary Students who Completed Early College Access Programming: A Qualitative Case Study

Principal Investigator: Carol A. Mullen, Ph.D., Educational Leadership & Policy Studies, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (e-mail: camullen@vt.edu, phone: (540) 231-5494)

Co-Investigator: Angelica Stovall, Educational Leadership & Policy Studies, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (e-mail: angelicaw@vt.edu, phone: (540) 537-0547)

I. Purpose of this Study

The main purpose of this study is to examine both the benefits and challenges experienced by first-generation African American students who have completed early college access programming. The specific purpose of this study is to examine the academic and psychosocial outcomes of postsecondary first-generation African American students who have completed early college access programming while at An Achievable Dream. The aim is to explore student perceptions of their participation in early college access programming and whether it supported their academic achievement in college.

II. Procedure

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete a demographic questionnaire. Upon completion of the questionnaire you will be invited to participate in a one-on-one audio-recorded interview via an electronic platform (Zoom, Skype, or phone) with the co-investigator. You will be asked approximately 10 questions by the co-investigator, lasting no more than 30 - 45 minutes. This meeting will involve sharing with the co-investigator your experiences and perceptions of your postsecondary academic and psychosocial outcomes after Achievable Dream High School. The interview will take place at a mutually agreed upon time using the electronic platform of your choice. During the interview, you will be asked to provide a pseudonym to de-identify your information. The audio-recording will be transcribed by a transcription service and you will be asked to complete an Interview Transcription Consent Form after reviewing the transcription.

III. Risks

The risks associated with participating in this study are considered to be minimal.

IV. Benefits

No promise or guarantee of benefits has been made to encourage you to participate. If the data

that are collected from you during the above-mentioned interview are used for the doctoral dissertation, the co-investigator will provide you with a copy of the study results and discuss the results with you after the conclusion of the study.

V. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality

The data that are collected from you during the above-mentioned interview will be de-identified by using the pseudonym of your choice. Your identity will be kept confidential and will be known only to the investigator and co-investigator.

The audio recording of the above-mentioned interview will be transcribed by GMR Transcription Services. After transcription, the audio recording of the interview will be destroyed immediately and electronic copies of the interview transcript, consent forms, and the data analysis will be stored securely when they are not being used. Only the investigator and co-investigator will have access to the above-mentioned data and the signed consent form. Also, at no time will the investigator and co-investigator reveal identifying data or any other identifying study-related information to anyone without your written consent. The transcription of the interview will be erased, and the signed consent form destroyed, two years after the conclusion of the study and dissertation defense.

Please note that the Virginia Tech Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) may review this study's data for auditing purposes. The HRPP is responsible for overseeing the protection of human participants in research.

VI. Compensation

You will not receive any form of compensation for participating in this study.

II. Freedom to Withdraw

It is important for you to know that your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that you are free to withdraw from this study at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Also, your refusal to participate will result in no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you choose to withdraw from the study, any information about you and any data that you have provided will be destroyed promptly. You are also free to choose to not answer any question or to not respond to what is being asked of you, and this choice will result in no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Please note that there may be circumstances under which the investigator or co-investigator determines that you should not continue in the study.

VIII. Questions or Concerns

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, you can contact the investigator or co-investigator, whose contact information is included at the beginning of this consent form.

If you have any questions or concerns about how this study is conducted or your rights as a participant, or if you need to report a research-related injury or event, you can contact the Virginia Tech HRPP at irb@vt.edu or (540) 231-3732.

IX. Participant's Consent

I have read the Consent Form and the conditions associated with this study. I have also had all of my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent:

_____ Date _____

Signature of Participant

Printed Name of Participant

_____ Date _____

Signature of Researcher

Printed Name of Researcher

Appendix J

Demographic Questionnaire

Title of the Research Study: Investigating Academic and Psychosocial Outcomes of First-Generation African American Postsecondary Students who Completed Early College Access Programming: A Qualitative Case Study

Principal Investigator: Carol A. Mullen, Ph.D., Educational Leadership & Policy Studies, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (e-mail: camullen@vt.edu, phone: (540) 231-5494)

Co-Investigator: Angelica Stovall, Educational Leadership & Policy Studies, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (e-mail: angelicaw@vt.edu, phone: (540) 537-0547)

Thank you for agreeing to be a participant in this study. Angelica Stovall is a doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies program at Virginia Tech, working under the direction of Dr. Carol Mullen. The main purpose of her dissertation is to examine both the benefits and challenges experienced by first-generation African American students who have completed early college access programming. The study will examine the academic and psychosocial outcomes of postsecondary first-generation African American students who have completed early college access programming while at An Achievable Dream. The aim is to explore student perceptions of their participation in early college access programming and whether it supported their academic achievement in college. Criteria for participating in the study include identifying as first-generation African American, completed Achievable Dream, and attending a 4-year postsecondary institution within Virginia. You were identified by Achievable Dream staff as meeting the required criteria for this research study. You are being invited to participate in this study.

Demographic Questions

- What is your gender?
 - Male
 - Female
 - Other (please specify)
 - Prefer not to say

- What is your ethnicity?
 - White or Caucasian
 - Hispanic or Latino
 - Black or African American
 - Native American or American Indian
 - Asian/Pacific Islander

- Other (please specify)
- What was your high school grade point average (GPA)?
 -
- What college/university are you currently enrolled in?
 -
- What is your current class standing?
 - 1st year student
 - 2nd year student
 - 3rd year student
 - 4th year student
 - 5th year student
 - Other (please specify)
- What is your current grade point average (GPA)?
 -
- How many hours earned do you currently have?
 -
- Have you ever been placed on academic probation? If so, which semester(s)?
 -
- What is the highest level of education your parent or guardian #1 has completed?
 - Less than high school completion
 - Completed a high school diploma or GED
 - Completed a certificate or diploma from a school that provides occupational training
 - Completed an Associate's degree
 - Completed a Bachelor's degree
 - Completed a Master's degree
 - Completed a Ph.D., M.D., J.D., or other high-level professional degree
 - Unsure
- What is the highest level of education parent or guardian #2 has completed, If applicable?
 - Less than high school completion
 - Completed a high school diploma or GED
 - Completed a certificate or diploma from a school that provides occupational training
 - Completed an Associate's degree

- Completed a Bachelor's degree
 - Completed a Master's degree
 - Completed a Ph.D., M.D., J.D., or other high-level professional degree
 - Unsure
- Who has had the most influence on your thinking about education after high school, if anyone?
 - High school counselor
 - Someone hired by family to prepare you for college admission
 - A teacher
 - Your parent/guardian(s)
 - Another family member
 - A friend
 - Your employer
 - A coach
- Who did you live with in high school?
 - Mother
 - Father
 - Both parents
 - A guardian
 - A relative

The second part of the process includes a 30-45-minute one-on-one interview via Zoom, Skype, or phone. If you are interested in participating in a one-on-one interview, please provide the information below. This information will not be shared or distributed. It will only be used to contact selected participants to schedule the interview.

Name [text box]

Email [text box]

Phone Number [text box]

Appendix K

Interview Protocol

Title of the Research Study: Investigating Academic and Psychosocial Outcomes of First-Generation African American Postsecondary Students who Completed Early College Access Programming: A Qualitative Case Study

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Each interview will be conducted through an electronic platform (Zoom, Skype, or phone) by the co-investigator.

Interviewer:

Thank you for agreeing to be a participant in this study. I would like to explain the purpose of this study before we begin. The main purpose of this study is to examine both the benefits and challenges experienced by first-generation African American students who have completed early college access programming. The study will examine the academic and psychosocial outcomes of postsecondary first-generation African American students who have completed early college access programming while at An Achievable Dream. The aim is to explore student perceptions of their participation in early college access programming and whether it supported their academic achievement in college. Your participation will require no more than 30-45 minutes. I will gather information from 9-12 Achievable Dream alums in three geographic areas of Virginia in the form of interviews, and then analyze the interview responses for common themes, similarities, differences, or patterns. These interviews will be compared with other data sources such as the analysis of the questionnaire responses.

Our interview today will be audio-recorded using a digital device. Any of your identifying information, such as your name will be coded with the pseudonym of your choice. Once our interview is completed, it will be transcribed. A copy of the transcription will be sent to you for your review. Upon reviewing the transcript, you may make any changes in the transcription you believe are necessary on the Interview Transcription Consent Form. No one will have access to our interview data, your identifying information, or the transcripts from your interview, except the transcription service, the principal investigator, and myself (co-investigator). All documents, including the de-identified transcription from our interview, will be stored on a secured Virginia Tech Google drive and destroyed two years after the successful completion of the study and dissertation defense.

You will not be compensated for your participation in the study. The risk to you as a participant in the study is minimal. The benefit of your participation in this study is that your

participation, combined with that of the other participants, will help educators gain a deeper understanding of postsecondary academic and psychosocial outcomes of first-generation African American students that have completed Achievable Dream. Based on your responses, probes may be used to follow-up.

At any time, you are free to withdraw from this study with no penalty to you. Do you wish to participate? Do you agree to be audio-taped? Do you have any questions prior to beginning?

Interviewer: I would like to start by focusing on the ways in which you have found Achievable Dream to have affected your postsecondary academic experience. This could involve coursework, research, your advisor, interacting with other students, professors, or administrators, or any other aspect of your postsecondary education.

1. Please explain the most valuable supports you received at Achievable Dream.
2. Please describe in what ways, if any, do you believe Achievable Dream affected your college academic experience.
3. Although you attended Achievable Dream, are there still barriers to achieving academic success in college? If so, can you identify the barriers?

Interviewer: Now I would like to shift our focus and explore any positive or negative perceptions you may have about your postsecondary experience.

4. Since being enrolled in postsecondary education, have you ever been on academic probation? If so, can you explain the reason you were placed on academic probation?
5. Can you explain the most valuable supports you have obtained while enrolled in postsecondary education?

Interviewer: The last portion of our interview will consist of four questions related to academic determination, discipline, and commitment.

6. To what extent do you consider yourself committed to your postsecondary education?
7. What do you attribute to your commitment to college?
8. What makes you determined to obtain an undergraduate degree?
9. Do you think Achievable Dream provided you with the resources to remain on track academically? Please explain.
10. Do you have any information you would like to add or questions for me?

Interviewer: Thank you for participating in the interview. A record of the transcribed interview will be sent to you for verification.

Appendix L

Verbal Consent Documentation Form

Title of the Research Study: Investigating Academic and Psychosocial Outcomes of First-Generation African American Postsecondary Students who Completed Early College Access Programming: A Qualitative Case Study

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For participants who are being interviewed remotely please complete the following section to document verbal consent:

Do you wish to participate?

Record Subject's Response: Yes No

Do you agree to be audio-taped?

Record Subject's Response: Yes No

Printed Name of Person Consenting

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Date

Name of Person Obtaining Consent (Print)

Appendix M
Interview Questions

1. Please explain the most valuable supports you received at Achievable Dream.
2. Please describe in what ways, if any, do you believe Achievable Dream affected your college academic experience.
3. Although you attended Achievable Dream, are there still barriers to achieving academic success in college? If so, can you identify the barriers?
4. Since being enrolled in postsecondary education, have you ever been on academic probation? If so, can you explain the reason you were placed on academic probation?
5. Can you explain the most valuable supports you have obtained while enrolled in postsecondary education?
6. To what extent do you consider yourself committed to your postsecondary education?
7. What do you attribute to your commitment to college?
8. What makes you determined to obtain an undergraduate degree?
9. Do you think Achievable Dream provided you with the resources to remain on track academically? Please explain.
10. Do you have any information you would like to add or questions for me?

Appendix N

Interview Transcription Consent Form

Title of the Research Study: Investigating Academic and Psychosocial Outcomes of First-Generation African American Postsecondary Students who Completed Early College Access Programming: A Qualitative Case Study

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Co-Investigator: Angelica Stovall, Educational Leadership & Policy Studies, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (e-mail: angelicaw@vt.edu, phone: (540) 537-0547)

Date: _____

Enclosed you will find a copy of the transcription of our interview conducted on _____.

Please read the transcript and choose one of the options below.

After you have completed this form by marking option 1, option 2, or option 3, please sign and return via email. If I, Angelica Stovall do not receive the form within a week of the date printed above, the information will be included in the study.

Thank you,

Angelica W. Stovall

Option 1:

I have read the transcription of our interview and agree that it can be used in its current state.

Option 2:

I have read the transcription of our interview and would like the following additions or corrections to be made before moving forward.

Option 3:

I have read the transcription of our interview and would like to withdraw from the study. With this option I acknowledge the data from our interview will be destroyed.

Corrections or additions:

Interviewee Signature

Date

Appendix O

Participant Demographic Information

Participant	Gender	Ethnicity	Parent #1 Highest Level of Education	Parent #2 Highest Level of Education	Greatest Influence in High School	High School Household Demographics
001	Female	Black or African American	Occupational Training	High School Diploma or GED	High School Counselor; Teacher	Mother
002	Female	Black or African American	High School Diploma or GED	High School Diploma or GED	Teacher; Parent(s); Relative; Friend	Both Parents
003	Male	Black or African American	Occupational Training	Occupational Training	Parent(s)	Mother
004	Female	Black or African American	High School Diploma or GED	Associate's Degree	Teacher; Parent(s); Relative	Father
005	Female	Black or African American	High School Diploma or GED	High School Diploma or GED	Relative	Mother
006	Female	Black or African American	Occupational Training	High School Diploma or GED	Teacher; Parent(s)	Guardian
007	Female	Black or African American	High School Diploma or GED	Less than High School Completion	Parent(s)	Mother
008	Male	Black or African American	Associate's Degree	Unknown	Parent(s)	Mother
009	Female	Black or African American	High School Diploma or GED	Associate's Degree	Friend	Guardian

(continued)

Participant	Gender	Ethnicity	Parent #1 Highest Level of Education	Parent #2 Highest Level of Education	Greatest Influence in High School	High School Household Demographics
010	Female	Black or African American	High School Diploma or GED	High School Diploma or GED	High School Counselor; Teacher	Mother
011	Female	Black or African American	Associate's Degree	Unknown	Teacher; Parent(s); Relative	Mother
012	Female	Black or African American	High School Diploma or GED	Associate's Degree	Parent(s)	Father
013	Male	Black or African American	Occupational Training	High School Diploma or GED	High School Counselor; Parent(s); Relative	Mother
014	Female	Black or African American	Associate's Degree	Occupational Training	Teacher; Parent(s); Relative; Friend	Mother
015	Female	Black or African American	High School Diploma or GED	Unknown	Teacher; Parent(s); Friend	Mother
016	Female	Black or African American	Associate's Degree	Associate's Degree	Relative	Guardian
017	Male	Black or African American	Occupational Training	High School Diploma or GED	Parent(s)	Father

(continued)

Participant	Gender	Ethnicity	Parent #1 Highest Level of Education	Parent #2 Highest Level of Education	Greatest Influence in High School	High School Household Demographics
018	Female	Hispanic or Latino, Black or African American	High School Diploma or GED	High School Diploma or GED	Parent(s)	Relative
019	Male	Black or African American	Less than High School Completion	Less than High School Completion	High School Counselor; Teacher; Parent(s); Relative; Coach	Guardian
020	Female	Black or African American	Associate's Degree	High School Diploma or GED	Parent(s)	Both Parents
021	Female	Black or African American	Associate's Degree	Associate's Degree	Teacher; Parent(s); Relative; Friend	Mother
022	Female	Black or African American	Associate's Degree	Occupational Training	Teacher; Parent(s); Relative	Mother

Appendix P

Participant Academic Information

Participant	High School GPA	Class Standing	Current GPA	Hours Earned	College Academic Probation
001	3.0	3 rd Year	2.89	90	No
002	3.98	4 th Year	3.0	120	Yes
003	3.15	1 st Year	2.97	Unknown	No
004	3.3	5 th Year	2.45	118	Yes
005	2.6	4 th Year	3.3	Unknown	No
006	3.85	1 st Year	3.7	31	No
007	3.3	Other	Unknown	Unknown	No
008	3.0	5 th Year	2.52	134	No
009	4.15	3 rd Year	3.1	49	No
010	3.98	Other	2.93	125	No
011	3.8	Other	3.45	154	No
012	3.8	1 st Year	3.19	30	No
013	3.5	4 th Year	2.54	74	No
014	3.54	3 rd Year	2.89	61	No
015	2.3	4 th Year	2.67	92	Yes
016	3.1	5 th Year	2.0	12	No
017	3.67	2 nd Year	3.15	51	No
018	3.5	2 nd Year	3.07	36	No
019	2.3	2 nd Year	2.42	Unknown	No
020	3.7	3 rd Year	2.5	32	Yes
021	2.53	1 st Year	Unknown	Unknown	No
022	1.89	3 rd Year	2.89	61	No