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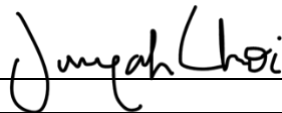
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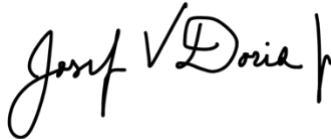


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Examining the Achievement Gap Between College Readiness
Access in Underrepresented Communities
and the Pipeline to College

by

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Ed.D. degree

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to explore the past experiences of underrepresented students who participated in the College Now program, a college readiness program sponsored by the City University of New York (CUNY). More specifically, the study investigated how the College Now program prepared students academically and socially to matriculate into a CUNY senior college. Moreover, the study focused on participants from only five of the CUNY Senior Colleges. Baruch College, Brooklyn College, Lehman College, Medgar Evers College, and York College. This research includes a review of existing literature on college preparation programs and an explanation of how these programs especially influence disadvantaged and minority students during their pathway to college.

There were two theoretical frameworks utilized in this research study. The first was Bourdieu's theory on Social Capital and Cultural Capital. His theory seemed fitting for this study, which focused on college readiness access in underrepresented communities. Participants' pathways to college were determined by their access to social and cultural capital because many of them were first-generation college students. The second theory used was Vincent Tinto's Theory on Student Retention and Success. His approach worked well for this study because there was a primary focus on the importance of college readiness preparedness as a guiding force to prevent post-secondary retention.

The following questions guided the discussion for this research study: What is the gap in college readiness post-secondary to post-secondary education? To what extent is there an alliance between high school counselors and college admissions offices? How did College Now benefit your high school experiences?

The research study identified three significant findings as contributing factors to college readiness access in underrepresented communities and the pathway to college related to their participation in the College Now program, which included college course preparation, social or self-efficacy, and academic advancement.

The first finding included college course preparation. Many participants felt that the College Now program provided early exposure to college course preparation, which made matriculating into a college course post-high school seamless.

The second finding included social or self-efficacy. Some participants gave credit to their guidance counselor and early college professor for giving them the social capital and belief that they could succeed in college following their participation in the College Now program. The third finding included academic advancement. Many participants felt like an enormous benefit of the College Now program was access to academic advancement. Their pathway to college could not have been successful if it were not for their participation in the College Now program.

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“It is not beyond our power to create a world in which all children
have access to a good education.”

Nelson Mandela

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I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my daughter Summer-Zaire. You continue to show me what success, hard work, and dedication look like. You started this journey with me, and you inspired and encouraged me never to give up. I hope this motivates you to want continued excellence in your life. I love you more than words can express.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Research shows that students from underrepresented backgrounds have a more challenging time completing a degree. In addition, students at risk are more likely to miss the traditional pathway if their economic and social conditions get in the way. The disparity among the college pathway rates for underrepresented students of color and their counterparts have continued to grow. Low college success rates for underrepresented minority students are well recorded. Twenty-five percent of first-year students at four-year institutions and 39% at 2-year institutions do not return the following fall, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). The rates are even higher for part-time students. Poor post-secondary results are to some degree attributed to low levels of academic readiness (Karp, 2012, p. 22). College readiness access helps underachieving high schoolers to make a smooth transition into college.

High School students of color who attend low-performing schools or schools within underserved districts are dealing with this crisis daily. To address the issues that low-performing face, a few colleges offer college readiness programs. These programs create a bridge between high schools and colleges. Students who participate in a college readiness or concurrent enrollment program have the opportunity to get a head start in college. The sponsoring higher-ed institution also gives them college credits

However, it is hard to understand why college readiness access is not widely available to high school students, even though this problem has been identified. The literature on college access tends to regard high minority high poverty students from a flawed perspective, noting that they lack access to university resources and academic preparation. This study supports previous research on unequal access to college services in high minority high poverty schools, but it

rejects deficit-oriented research by illustrating how graduates of high minority high poverty schools disrupt structural barriers to accessing capital for college entry (Reddick et al., 2011).

Many college readiness programs nationwide are deemed successful, but the partnership between high school and college makes the college readiness programs successful. One such initiative, implemented in the City University (CUNY) system, is the College Now program, which falls under New York City's early college initiative. It is a city-wide concurrent enrollment program. Students can earn up to 12 college credits in the 11th and 12th grades. College Now is a partnership between CUNY and the New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE).

There are four mechanisms by which College Now can affect the results of students: High school and college collaboration, curriculum design, skilled high school teachers, and gateway college or core courses. Each mechanism has a unique connection to the success of college readiness. For example, through high school and college collaboration, there must be a strong relationship between the guidance counselor of a high school and the admissions or enrollment managers at a university. In addition, the curriculum must align with the college curriculum to maintain the fidelity of a concurrent enrollment program.

Academic affairs, faculty liaisons, and high school educators must have a clear understanding of how the courses should be taught. Their high school students must receive a quality college curriculum in high school that aligns with what they will receive after they matriculate into a degree program. Skilled high school teachers must be able to provide quality instruction that will build a strong pathway into college for their students. The gateway college courses or core courses taught for optimum opportunity are chosen by Academic Affairs to ensure that students are receiving the proper college readiness access and preparation. All of the mechanisms work closely together. This intervention is intended to provide early academic,

structural, attitudinal, and financial support to improve the likelihood of college enrollment and graduation (Britton et al., 2019).

This research study will provide deeper insight into the gap within the division of college readiness access. Despite the existence of the college readiness program, there will also be an emphasis on the lack of services and attention provided to underserved and underrepresented students before their college enrollment, and this warrants further examination. The mechanisms for the College Now program exist but lack full representation because some students may not be encouraged to take advantage of such programs, or they may not be considered because of the school they attend. That trajectory must change. Students deserve to know what kind of access to college readiness is available. This lack of knowledge or insight causes a weak pathway to college. This research uses a phenomenological methodology, as it typically focuses on understanding, describing, and interpreting the meanings of human life. This research intended to make sense of the meanings that college students who participated in the College Now assigned to it to identify the gap between its goal and its accomplishment. College freshman and sophomores' who participated in a City University of New York (CUNY) college readiness program through their high school will be interviewed to assess the gap within the college readiness access pathway. The students' responses will be examined individually.

Through the interviews, students addressed some of the missing links. Their responses will also create a template for high school guidance counselors and college enrollment managers unaware of the existing gap. Through these interviews and conversations with students, there will be an opportunity to learn about the pros and cons of the College Now program and to determine if there is effectiveness in bridging the college readiness gap despite the reputation of college readiness guidance in underrepresented students.

Statement of the Problem

High school students can enrich their post-secondary experience if given the tools and resources before graduation. However, students are set up to fail if the college readiness access

support is minimal. Reid and Moore's research suggests that those students with the most challenges accessing college are often the first generation to attend college, children from immigrant families, and those from low socioeconomic status homes. In addition, most underserved students in post-secondary education are from economically depressed urban areas and remote rural areas (Reid & Moore, 2008, p. 241).

Students already disadvantaged are also at risk of not achieving post-secondary success. They socially and economically reproduce their disadvantages. That means that unequal access in college readiness programs could perpetuate social stratification. Moreover, as a college education becomes imperative for social and economic success, college access is problematic for non-traditional or high-risk students. This situation is due to issues of academic, social, and economic readiness (Byrd & McDonald, 2005, p. 22). Roderick et al. suggested in their research that the joint policy criteria for assisting high schools in fostering university preparedness are to harmonize high school curricula and requirements for graduation with expectations of college readiness. However, an achievement gap remains between college readiness access and college pathways (Roderick et al., 2009, p. 186).

Purpose of Study

This study examined the experiences of underrepresented high school students who participated in a college readiness program sponsored by a City University of New York, CUNY senior college and whose high schools served as an Early College Initiative (ECI) or College Now partner. The narratives of these students will unpack the ins and outs of the college readiness program, specifically how they accessed the program, what benefits they received, and what they lack in the program. The interviewees included five students from five CUNY senior colleges: Brooklyn College, Medgar Evers College, Lehman College, Baruch College, and York

College. These schools have been selected because they are located in four of the five boroughs of New York City: Brooklyn, Manhattan, Queens, and The Bronx.

There is also an opportunity to review the success of students based on their high school's location. Finally, the research will further delve into the models and structure of college readiness partnerships and the challenges that unfold due to the lack of parent support, college choice, guidance, and concurrent enrollment programs. This research and the findings from this study may be helpful to both high schools and CUNY institutions interested in improving, enhancing, or implementing new strategies into their college readiness programs while encouraging stronger partnerships

Theory or Theoretical Perspective

As underserved or underrepresented students attempt to transition to a post-secondary program, many challenges occur. Tucker's research suggests that those with the most effortless transition from high school to college seemed to be those with the most straightforward path. On the other hand, those with no path readily lost confidence in their choices for the present since they had no design for the future to provide momentum (Tucker, 1999, p. 164).

College readiness access becomes complicated for many students since it is associated with more than the school environment and includes the influence of parental support, guidance, socioeconomic background, and self-efficacy. To conceptualize the research questions presented in this study, it is essential to review two connected theories: Tinto's Model and Bourdieu's Theory of Capital.

Theory One: Tinto's Model

Tinto's work is most often cited and related to student persistence studies. Tinto's theory of departure began with his 1973 partnership with Cullen. A previous study by Cullen

analyzed and examined longitudinal attrition studies. The collaboration with Tinto (1973) established an attrition and insistence model with the following components: (a) characteristics for pre-entry students (priorpreparation and family background); (b) objectives/commitments; (c) institutional interactions (academics, interaction between faculty, co-curricular participation and peer group interaction); and integration (departure decision graduate, transfer, dropout; Metz, 2004, p. 4). Tinto's model connects closely to this research based on the idea that if students are not properly guided in high school, there is a chance that they may not have the appropriate tools to succeed in college. Based on Tinto's model, one of the most significant components is preparation. This theory depicts the claim presented in this research through many pathways. Students can only thrive in a college setting if they are provided with adequate resources to model success.

Theory Two: Bourdieu's Theory of Capital

Bourdieu suggested that because the education system presupposes the possession of cultural resources that few students have, "pedagogical transmission" is ineffective (i.e., teaching). This is because students just don't understand what their teachers are trying to get them to understand. For Bourdieu, this is particularly evident in universities where students fearto expose their ignorance.

Yet, considering the significant disadvantages facing lower-class pupils in the competition for educational qualifications, the competitive outcomes are viewed as meritocratic and thus valid. In addition, Bourdieu argued that the academic qualifications possessed by those in hierarchical positions legitimize social disparities. Therefore, the education system plays a vital role in preserving the status quo (Sullivan, 2002, p. 145). Bourdieu's theory has a close relationship to this research because college readiness pathways for students are based on

access. The claim in this research clearly shows that students are deprived of the complete college readiness package based on disproportionate family, school, and community environments. All of which Bourdieu's theory addresses as it relates to cultural and social capital. Cultural capital can be acquired, to varying degrees and depending on the period, society, and social class, in the absence of any deliberate inculcation, and thus quite unconsciously. It is always marked by its earliest conditions of acquisition, which help to determine its distinctive value through the more or less visible marks they leave (such as the pronunciations characteristic of a class or region). In the course of my research, the concept of cultural capital presented as a theoretical hypothesis that explained the unequal scholastic achievement of children from different social classes (Bourdieu, 1983, p. 243).

Social capital refers to the actual or potential resources linked to the possession of a long-term network of more or less institutionalized mutual acquaintance and recognition—or, in other words, membership in a group. It provides its members with the backing of collectively owned capital, a “credential” that entitles them to “credit” in various forms. These relationships can only exist in a practical sense, in the form of material and/or symbolic exchanges that aid in their maintenance (Bourdieu, 1983, p. 248).

Research Questions

The following three research questions guided this study.

RQ1: What is the gap in college readiness post-secondary to post-secondary education?
Interview questions/prompts

- a. What kind of support do guidance counselors and teachers provide high school juniors and seniors during your college prep process?

RQ2: To what extent is there an alliance between high school counselors and college admissions offices?

- a. Did you get enough preparation for college while participating in a dual enrollment or concurrent enrollment course?
- b. How did your participation in a dual enrollment course impact your choice in attending your institution?

RQ3: How did the CUNY College Now concurrent enrollment program benefit your high school experiences?

Significance of the Study

The results of this study can inform CUNY Senior College and NYCDOE professionals on how to plan, develop, and strengthen their college readiness programs and their pathways partnerships. In addition, this study broadens our understanding of why there is a gap in college readiness access and how so many underserved and underrepresented students are affected. This research will also briefly explore a few new dimensions that can change the trajectory of the way underserved and underrepresented students are marginalized in pre-college settings. Finally, the findings from this study can support New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE) administrators and CUNY professionals in creating a stronger pathway for many years to come.

Limitations and Delimitations

The limitations may be that the participants in the study are taking all classes remotely through the end of Spring 2021. Another limitation may be how college readiness or concurrent enrollment programs are structured at the participants' institutions. Some of the participants may be able to create variations through their responses.

The delimitations associated with the study will be the population and the setting utilized. While the participants will all attend a CUNY school currently, their high school experience may have been very different based on the size of the school and location. Another delimitation may

be the participants' apprehension about a particular issue because of their past experiences. For example, students may feel like they are talking poorly about former administrators from their school. There could also be a challenge with audio transcription.

Definitions of Key Terms

The following terms were referenced and utilized throughout this study.

College Now Program

College Now is the largest joint curriculum of CUNY and the New York City public school system. The program provides concurrent enrollment in secondary schools and joint programs in more than 400 high schools in New York City, which enroll more than 20,000 students per year (City University of New York, 2020).

College Readiness

College readiness is a multifaceted concept comprising numerous variables that include factors both internal and external to the school environment. College readiness is composed of four facets. These four areas of college readiness are context skills and awareness, academic behaviors, key content, and critical cognitive strategies (Conley, 2007, p. 12).

Concurrent Enrollment

Programs include a school or district partnership and a nearby university, too. The courses offered may be technical or career/technical, and students receive college credits by completing the course (Cassidy et al., 2010).

First-Generation College Student

Vuong et al. defined first-generation students as those college students who do not have at least one parent who earned a bachelor's or higher degree. In the federal definition, a first-

Generation College Student

An Individual both of whose parents did not complete a baccalaureate degree or an individual whose only parent to provide support did not complete a baccalaureate degree (Vuong & Welty, 2010, p. 50).

Guidance Counseling

High School administrators are assigned to provide guidance and mentoring that can assist with college preparation.

Underserved/Underrepresented Student

Underrepresented students apply to minority demographics, low-income, students of the first generation, students of non-traditional backgrounds, and non-traditional ages. Such students may not get the same access as students within the majority.

Summary

Tinto's model and Bourdieu's Theory of Capital are utilized in this study. This qualitative study will provide a deeper understanding that draws on the opportunity to analyze the gap between college readiness access for underrepresented students and first-year college enrollment transitioning. The data from this study provide insight for CUNY admissions, institutional research, student affairs professionals, and the New York City Department of Education professionals. Chapter 2 presents insight into the theoretical frameworks as they connect to the literature review and the research question. Chapter 3 will focus on the study's research methodology, setting, population, and ethical considerations. Chapter 4 will focus on the data discovered from the study. Finally, chapter 5 will analyze and interpret the data from the interviews.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

There is a sizable amount of research on the gap between college readiness access for underrepresented students and first-year college student enrollment transitioning. High school students are supposed to receive the necessary preparation that can properly transition them beyond graduation. However, based on the decisions that students are making towards their college choices, it is evident that there is a disconnect. Research suggests that one of the main reasons students may delay the college process is the gap between their high school experiences and college expectations. First-year students find that their college courses are quite different from their high school courses (Conley, 2007).

This literature review will explore the gap within college readiness access for underrepresented students and first-year student college enrollment. This chapter will provide an overview of college readiness outcomes with a more in-depth examination of the following: transition from high school to college, secondary school responsibilities, college readiness, dual enrollment opportunities, college choice, parental support, adolescent learning, and underrepresented students.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that connects to this challenge with transitioning and college readiness access would be Tinto's model and Bourdieu's theory of capital. Referring to the university context, Vincent Tinto described student retention and performance behavior. Tinto suggested that the degree to which a student is incorporated into the university's academic and social life and the degree to which a student is committed to their studies and the university's

objectives are predictive of the student's persistence (Schreiber et al., 2014, p. v).

In the Bourdieu model, the pre-enrollment dedication of the students to their target (i.e., graduation) and the institution they attended influenced different kinds of individual qualifications. Tinto emphasized personal qualities, pre-college experiences, and family history as crucial to the intent and institutional commitment of the person. Person characteristics include factors like race, sex, and academic skills. Pre-college experiences include social and educational backgrounds, such as the average school grade and academic and social achievement.

Factors such as social status, climate importance, and predicted climate are protected by the family history. Tinto believed that the educational aspirations of an individual have an effect on their probability of attrition. In specific, how long the student planned to go to the school. Some students consider the college they attend as crucial to their potential job prospects, and others may be content as they are in another college (McCubbin, 2003, p. 2).

Tinto's updated Student Integration model relates a student's previous study entry requirements to institutional experience, eventually to educational results, retention, and achievements, such as family history, skills, and qualifications. Tinto's updated model has the key explanatory variables of students' intentions, priorities, and obligations; the institutional perceptions of students related to the university and social system; academic integration and social inclusion; and the quality of learning and effort. Tinto described it as an "interactive model" with a mainly "sociological" nature (Schreiber et al., 2014, p. v).

Despite its shortcomings, Tinto's theory has been widely applied to the development of a first-year college student's progression and attrition once they integrate into a university setting. It is essential to look at the pre-college component of this model. If students do not receive robust tools in advance, they may not do their best once they get to college. Those high

achieving students also need good mentorship to prevent the distraction that can cause them to give up early. Indeed, Bourdieu's theories of capital include cultural capital, social capital, and community capital. Each type of capital works closely to separate how students are prepared for college and what their access looks like after high school graduation. This theory usually identifies and describes the access that underrepresented minority students have. Reddick's research described cultural capital, which consists of knowledge networks that are mostly privileged and passed to future generations by middle and upper-class families. Fewer high-poverty-related, minority graduates will attend college because many middle and high-income students lack some of the cultural capital variables.

Social capital influences the positive and negative impact of variables like family, friends, structure, and school staff on a college enrolment decision. For example, effective and knowledgeable consultants, mentors motivating students to collective goals, and networks of college-bound partners are variables of social capital that enable students to join the college. Students with parents trained in college will have more access to variables of cultural capital as their parents can share knowledge and experience not accessible to college students of the first generation. Increased variables in social capital can have a positive effect on student access to college. Some contemporary research demonstrates the restricted access to educational opportunities and thus lack of capital to high-minded but high-poverty graduates. However, researchers who analyze community capital claim that these students have a particular form of valuable capital (Reddick et al., 2011, p. 596).

The Transition from High School to College

The transition from high school to college can be a daunting experience if a student has limited resources. The goal for high school students is for them to enroll in a Bachelor's program

following graduation. However, that pathway may not always be easy. Bragg's research suggested that pathways are one way of thinking about opportunities for post-secondary transition. Academic pathways apply to boundary curricula, teaching and organizational methods, and substantive evaluations that connect or extend from high school to college (Bragg et al., 2006). That pathway must bridge the gap for students with limited resources. Academic pathway models must also be strong enough to prepare Students for the college lifestyle. The counselor, teachers, and college admissions officers must work together to ensure that students have the needed resources.

Smith and Zhang suggested that first-generation students are at higher risk of a challenging transition from high school to college, and students who are active academically and socially undergo an easier transition to college and are more likely to stay for their second year (Smith et al., 2009). Meanwhile, research from Karp (2012) indicated that low progress rates for students were well known in college. For example, in 3 years, fewer than 50% of new college students receive an associate's or bachelor's degree in 6 years.

Search Strategy

The search strategy for this study started with organizing a lit review document in Google Drive. Google Scholar and the Saint Peter's University library site were used to search for information. The keywords used were concurrent enrollment, college readiness, dual enrollment, college choice, high school transition, first-year college student, dual credit, CUNY, and high school graduates. ProQuest, Ebscohost, the Saint Peter's University library, and Google Scholar were used to search for articles and information. The sources of information came from mostly peer-reviewed journals, dissertations, and books.

College Readiness

College readiness must be accessible to all students, which can make the admissions pool much more diverse. If students understand the college process, they may have a more disciplined and long-term post-secondary future. The idea of one's belief that they are either good enough for the college classroom or not good enough is dependent on the access to collegereadiness programs.

Roderick et al. (2009) suggested that for students to turn their college ambitions into accomplishments, high schools and teachers need consistent college readiness measures and expectations for success in those indicators. Byrd and McDonald (2005) suggested that college readiness needs estimating. Placement assessments and other quantitative measures predict student readiness for college. Meanwhile, Conley's (2014) research indicated that for a student to excel in an entry-level college course, secondary schools must be able to guarantee that students are qualified in the following four areas: cognitive techniques, subject understanding, academic conduct, and contextual skills and knowledge (Conley, 2014).

Concurrent Enrollment Programs

Concurrent enrollment programs have been a great asset to secondary institutions. Dual credit, dual enrollment, and concurrent enrollment allow students to take college courses on their high school campus. These courses are either taught by a high school teacher or an adjunct faculty member from the partner college, and students can receive up to 12 college credits from the partner college. This option should be attractive to a student with a minimal pathway towards college. However, the lack of college preparedness does not allow the student to build a relationship with the institution providing the credits. Therefore, their eye is on a different prize. Bragg et al. (2006) suggested that one of the most common learning pathways is dual credit or enrollment. Concurrent enrollment programs vary from state, but they all provide the same

opportunities with restricted funding or lack of resources.

Concurrent enrollment services offer a more comprehensive high school education than would typically be available, with attendance intended to enhance students' preparedness for college and promote more informed decision-making on the selection of colleges. Most surveys have also shown that students who take a more comprehensive high school class have better college achievement and higher earnings (Cowan et al., 2015). Karp's research suggested that dual enrolled students get ready for college performance by learning—before they finally enroll—all facets of the college position. They also learn normative expectations, the patterns, attitudes, and actions of effective college students and find ways to effectively enforce these expectations by learning how other people react to their “college attempts” (Karp, 2012).

Tinburg et al.'s (2011) research suggested that dual enrollment is an incentive to connect students not academically top-performers to college compared to early college secondary school systems that employ the best students. These programs, started in the 1970s, were intended to challenge high school students who would be frustrated with a formal high school education and eager to pursue college work (Tinburg et al., 2011).

Different experiences form the basis for higher university graduation rates for concurrent enrollment students. One postulate is that early school exposure is potentially related to greater familiarity and an awareness of diverse facets of schooling, otherwise university students (Kanny, 2015). Lewis' research suggests that concurrent enrollment can boost results, but the evidence shows that it has a limited effect on academic abilities that lead to post-secondary success (Lewis et al., 2008).

Comprehensive high school coursework that provides post-secondary education courses support the distribution of concurrent enrollment for high school students who are middle and

low-achieving. Concurrent enrollment is a way to increase the exposure of students before college enrollment to high-level, demanding courses. In short, it is a way of increasing the complexity and rigor of the curriculum in high school (Bailey et al., 2002). Delicath (2000) asserted that concurrent enrollment programs show success based on academically qualified students. These are the people who are going to improve and do well in college. Concurrent enrollment offers an abundance of college readiness preparation. However, success is only truly measured by individuals' interest in pursuing the dream of attending college. They are the individuals who genuinely benefit and make the decisions the way they do. These "high achieving" students keep their focus on making sure that they take full advantage of getting a head start on their post-secondary journeys. Unfortunately, low-performing students may only take advantage of a concurrent enrollment program to fulfill their high school credit requirements. They may not see the light at the end of the tunnel when it comes to the long-term opportunities the same way a high achieving student may see. The achievement gap exists mainly because of the students who benefit from college readiness opportunities.

Intervention systems are also where high-achieving minority students access a myriad of academically outstanding support services. Many programs take the "cream" of the pupils, which allows high achievers to build peer networks of similar qualities and ability levels. Since even high performers are vulnerable in their educational journeys and can reach far below their ability, interventions seek to improve underrepresented student involvement, self-esteem, and motivation levels and help students achieve their college goals (Contrerars, 2011, p. 504). Concurrent enrollment or college readiness programs can only be great intervention opportunities for underrepresented students if they are given the access. There are limitations on how information is disseminated to them. They may be smart and within a high achievement bracket, but these

qualities are not sufficient to take them to the next level without the right resources.

Secondary School Responsibilities

The No Child Left Behind Act required that education be provided to everyone, but it was also implemented to enhance the academic productivity of educators nationwide. High schools were at the helm because of the goal set to ensure that there would be a clear pathway to college if the right opportunities were put in place. Reid's research suggests that most underserved students in post-secondary education are from economically depressed urban areas and remote rural locations.

Administrators, teachers, counselors, and directors need to consider the challenges of post-secondary education and incorporate interventions that prepare all students in K–12 education (Reid, 2008). Adelman suggested that it is necessary to clearly understand the connection between high school readiness and post-secondary schools and high schools (Adelman, 2006). That link is relevant for many reasons. High school students should have a clear pathway on their journey towards college, and they should be provided the correct information. Hoffman et al. (2008) argued in their research that three resources are necessary for young people to transition post-secondary into post-secondary education and to take a secure path to credentials and must exist in the 9th–14th grades: a rigorous academic program that sequences and pits academic demands into the trajectory which goes from secondary school through college work without interruption; reliable funding for higher education, and a web of support-school based, familial, and community—through post-secondary education (Hoffman et al., 2008).

Gándara argued that under-represented students are more likely to attend crowded, inner-city public schools where the standard of counseling is low. As a result, they are not given sufficient post-secondary opportunities or helped to achieve their goals. Under-represented

students also receive inadequate counseling, significantly limiting their post-secondary opportunities (Gándara et al., 2001, p. 8).

College Choice

Based on the research outlined so far in this literature review, the college choices made by students can have various reasons. There is no absolute answer. One projection made is that academically stronger students benefit more from a dual enrollment program, and they end up moving into college without many hiccups. That claim may be accurate, but it is still unclear why many strong students decide to matriculate into different colleges based on a student's success. Instead of attending the university where they earned their early college credits. It is essential to look at what influences a student to decide on a college.

The research outlines how secondary education responsibility should look. However, this notion may not be the same for everyone. For example, Stokes and Somers' (2010) research suggested that the decision-making process for colleges focuses almost entirely on the variables that affect the "college choice of students attending 4-year colleges and universities.

This research has contributed to creating theoretical models that describe the decision-making process for students pursuing a 4-year bachelor's degree. No attempt has been made to use the current models of choice to decide if the variables that affect the choice of colleges for students attending 4-year colleges and universities also apply to students attending 2-year colleges (Stokes & Somers, 2010). Hossler and Gallagher's research suggest that researchers explore how student history traits, goals, and successes communicate with student expectations. This study also looks at student access to and availability of higher education institutions (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). A flood of literature has suggested that high school students reduce perceived costs and optimize future benefits in their college of choice. One branch of this

research proposes equations to describe institutional, state-wide, or national enrolment based on external economic factors. Such research attempts to understand the economic conditions in which students will prefer to postpone potential earnings by attending college to better position themselves economically for the future (Bradshaw et al., 2001). Armed with a fundamental understanding of the mechanisms and features of students' post-secondary plans, scholars have made a strong call for a deeper understanding of the factors that lead to the continued stratification of American higher education. This emphasis on equity is the umbrella over three other patterns (Bergerson, 2009).

Parental Support

First-generation college students have a commitment to uphold to their parents and family after high school graduation. It is essential that nothing gets in their way. Therefore, there is a huge motivation and desire to set the bar high for themselves. Parental support is critical, and few students are lucky enough to have it during high school or the decision-making moments around the college. Bradshaw et al.'s (2001) research suggested that parents' role in the process of college selection is an essential resource. Eighty-two percent of college-bound students reported that their parents had some impact on their decision to attend college, a study by the Carnegie Foundation reported. Thirty-six percent of this group indicated that their parents impacted their decision to attend college and the final choice of college.

Convertino suggested that although all students benefit from the involvement of families and/or guardians, low-income students, and students of color are much higher at a 4-year college and university enrollment when their parents are interested in education (Convertino, 2018, p. 48). Gándara argued that it is no surprise that the pool of underrepresented students in higher education is limited (Gándara et al., 1999, p. 11). Parent involvement is critical because students

need an adult to help them learn how to adult. Parents know their children better than anyone, and they can navigate a little better. Ford argued that without early and continuing participation in the substantive family, recruitment and retention of talented minority students is incomplete.

Family participation should include participation in the recruiting and retention process—screening, identification, placement, and programming—to ensure that the dotted education program has adequately identified students and that they have academic performance. The primary duty of the school staff is to ensure fair involvement and access for all families, which includes the removal of barriers. Minority parents face various challenges to school participation (Ford et al., 1997, p. 211). In his study, however, Leonard argues that parents should foster knowledge and help to improve reliability, perseverance, and work ethic. Parents should join students in learning about financial support and paying for early schoolwork. Parents should get their children to study and take their full load right after graduation from high school. Most readiness research at universities focuses on students and colleges but not on parents (Leonard, 2013, p. 188).

Underrepresented Students

Underrepresented students are often overlooked during the college preparation process. Therefore, making the transition to college a daunting experience. It is important to find a way to close the gap between college readiness access for underrepresented students and first-year college enrollment.

In her critique of how minorities benefit from the pre-college process, Contreras (2011) suggested that the university transfer rates of under-represented students represent a leak in the pipeline, argues a troubling pattern at a time when the K–12 demographic is the largest increase

in diverse student groups (p. 505). Gandara argued that perhaps the most troublesome part of the gap in academic performance between different groups of students is the various ways in which young people will learn differently according to their race and socioeconomic status. For almost two decades, the nation has been reviewing its education system K–12, experimenting with numerous attempts to boost all American students' performance and reduce the disparity in achievement. The success of these efforts is a highly-discussed topic. However, there is little doubt that the differences in performance between under-represented students and others remain significant or have increased (Gándara et al., 2001).

The other challenge in this research is that all minority students tend to be grouped, whether they are high- or low-achieving. This grouping causes major limitations because a student in high poverty does not equate to no interest in college or little interest in learning, but stereotypes play a significant role when describing the aspirations of underrepresented students. Minority students are less likely than their White and Asian American peers to be identified as gifted or academically talented in schools due to several factors, including lack of cultural and linguistic awareness among teachers and school staff, under-performance among gifted minority students, and latent racial prejudice against minority students. Rates of gross under-representation in professional and talented education at the K–12 level are shared issues across diverse populations (Contreras, 2011). This problem can be easily changed, but it requires a commitment by school counselors, policymakers, college representatives, and educators. Ford argued in her research that to enable talented minority students in these conditions to meet their potential (i.e., reversing underachievement), we must provide them with high-quality educational experience, including listening skills, learning techniques, high-level thinking skills, assessment skills, and time-management skills (Ford et al., 1997).

Summary

It is essential to investigate further the gap between college readiness access for underrepresented students and first-year college enrollment. The problems that students are faced with when they get to college can cause a considerable delay in the transition. This only causes students to experience issues around self-efficacy, low self-esteem, and the temptation to drop out. Therefore, it is necessary to continue identifying where things have fallen short in the K–12 division, specifically high school

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of Chapter 3 is to introduce the research methodology for this qualitative phenomenological study regarding underserved and underrepresented first-year college students who were affected by the gap in college readiness access during their tenure in high school.

Johnson and Christensen suggest that the purpose of phenomenological research is to obtain a view into your research participants' life-worlds and understand the personal meanings (i.e., what something means to them) constructed from their lived experiences (Johnson & Christensen, 2020, p. 422).

This chapter will highlight the interview environment, the specific participant classification, the data collection process, data analysis, and other data related to this study. This chapter will also discuss the applicability of phenomenology to this study, the research questions, the researcher's relationship with the study participants, ethical considerations, and a summary.

Participants

The participants for this study are first-year college students who participated in the College Now Program, a concurrent enrollment program for NYCDOE high school juniors and seniors sponsored by CUNY. The age range of the students will be 18–21. There are both male and female participants. There is a more significant focus on students who attended high school in an underrepresented district. Underrepresented students were interviewed for this study, and there was a deeper perspective presented.

All participants knew about college readiness programs and were given a consent form to participate in the study. Students must be currently enrolled in a CUNY senior college to

participate in the study. The participants in the study were recruited through the researcher's existing relationships in the various CUNY institutions. The researcher utilized email, a Facebook group, and a snowball method to recruit the participants. The goal was for recruited participants to recruit their friends or others who fit the criteria. Once the recruited participants responded to the email, they were given a list of dates to choose from to accommodate their schedules. All participants were given the same questions during their interviews. The responses to the questions varied based on individual experiences.

All participants were current freshmen or rising sophomores at a CUNY senior college. The student demographic at each school varied a bit because of each school's location and degree offerings. Nevertheless, their answers painted a picture of the college readiness gap. Participant demographics were also determined using Bourdieu's class theory. Some students had a different background when it came to social class and cultural class. They attended a high school institution with limited resources, but there were no limitations in areas like family support.

Setting/Site

The conducted interviews were held virtually via (Zoom, Google Meet, or Skype) to protect the safety of the participants and to implement proper social distancing due to the COVID-19 viruspandemic. Each interview was one-on-one in a virtual setting with a unique password-protectedaccess, which also ensured privacy for the participant so that they could be as transparent and candid as they wanted to be. Participants attend one of the targeted CUNY senior colleges; Brooklyn College, Baruch College, Lehman College, and York College.

Baruch College:

Baruch College is a liberal arts college located in Manhattan, New York. The most popular degree focus is Finance. The enrolled student population at CUNY Bernard M Baruch

College is 29.6% Asian, 23.7% Hispanic or Latino, 23.3% White, 9.05% Black or African American, 1.28% Two or More Races, 0.186% Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islanders, and 0.148% American Indian or Alaska Native. Enrollment includes full-time and part-time students, graduate students, and undergraduates.

Brooklyn College:

Brooklyn College is a liberal arts college located in Brooklyn, New York. The degree focus is education, psychology, and business administration. The enrolled student population at CUNY Brooklyn College is 31.5% White, 23.2% Black or African American, 21.5% Hispanic or Latino, 18.1% Asian, 1.56% Two or More Races, 0.185% American Indian or Alaska Native, and 0.135% Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islanders. These numbers include both full- and part-time students, graduates, and undergraduates.

Lehman College:

Lehman College is a liberal arts college located in the Bronx, New York. The degree focus is business administration. The enrolled student population at CUNY Lehman College is 54.6% Hispanic or Latino, 26.9% Black or African American, 8.27% White, 6.25% Asian, 0.906% Two or More Races, 0.184% Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islanders, and 0.177% American Indian or Alaska Native. These numbers include full-time and part-time students as well as graduate and undergraduate students.

Medgar Evers College:

Medgar Evers College is a liberal arts college located in Brooklyn, New York. The degree focuses are business, science, and education. The enrolled student population at CUNY Medgar Evers College is 76% Black or African American, 15.2% Hispanic or Latino, 2.57% Asian, 1.89% White, 1.22% Two or More Races, 0.316% American Indian or Alaska Native, and

0.105% Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islanders. These enrollments include both full-time and part-time students as well as graduates and undergraduates. By comparison, enrollment for all Baccalaureate Colleges is 54.9% White, 14% Black or African American, and 12.6% Hispanic or Latino.

York College:

York College is a liberal arts college located in Queens County, New York. The degree focus is psychology and business administration. The enrolled student population at CUNY York College is 36.7% Black or African American, 25.9% Hispanic or Latino, 25.3% Asian, 5.23% White, 1.44% Two or More Races, 0.902% American Indian or Alaska Native, and 0.738% Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islanders, including full-time and part-time students as well as graduates and undergraduates.

Researcher's Relationship with Participants

The researcher has been working in higher education professionally for 17 years (7 years directly with College Readiness/dual enrollment) and holds a Bachelor of Arts in English from St. Francis College and a Masters of Arts in English Education (7th–12th) from New York University. The researcher has taught dual enrollment courses and was tasked by her university to serve as the faculty liaison with the NYC Department of Education administrators and high school Guidance Counselors to ensure academic continuity. Therefore, the researcher was proficient in the skills necessary to conduct this study. In addition to serving as an instructor and liaison between the university and the New York City Department of Education, the researcher has served on various hiring search committees as an interviewer. The researcher also served on subcommittees during the higher ed accreditation process where the interviews took place. This skill provides a clear validation that the researcher could interview participants efficiently.

Data Collection

The data collection took place utilizing a virtual method. The questions were asked and then transcribed by the researcher following the interview. The interviews were recorded and stored. The interviews were transcribed using Temi transcription software. Interviews took place via Google Meet, Skype, or Zoom. They only take place by phone if those other services were inaccessible to the participants. This format was to protect and provide safety for the participants due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Each interview lasted no more than 60 minutes.

The researcher interviewed with verbal and written consent from the participants. The transcripts are stored on a hardware-encrypted USB flash drive. The USB drive has the interview data stored, and it is locked in a locked file cabinet box at an undisclosed location in possession of the researcher. This method will ensure the safety of the data as well as maintain a high level of protection. After the interviews took place, there was no continued communication with the participants. They had no role in writing or editing the results, nor did any participants have access to any of the previously recorded interviews.

Data Source(s)

The participants came from 5 CUNY Senior colleges located in four of the five boroughs of New York City. Baruch College, Brooklyn College, Lehman College, Medgar Evers College, and York College. These five institutions were chosen for this study based on their college readiness partnership programs. Each school selected houses CUNY's College Now program, which provides college credit to high school students. Each of the institutions has a similar program partnership. Their program also targets high school students in the underrepresented districts.

Data Analysis

In a traditional phenomenological research study, the researcher collects and presents his experience with data from various people. The knowledge is usually gathered through detailed interviews. Using interview data, the researcher attempts to minimize claims on the common core or nature of the research participants' established experience. To explore their memories, students must be able to relive them in their minds and focus on the moment and nothing else (Johnson & Christensen, 2020, p. 425). The researcher read the interview data to gain a better understanding of the research phenomenon. The researcher further analyzed the data that was collected by conducting open coding. This process allowed the researcher to focus on a better understanding. The researcher also identified themes associated with the data to assist with the coding process.

When researchers recognize a significant part of the text in a transcript, they assign a name of the code or category to identify or classify the particular section. Thus, it is apparent that segmenting and coding work together because segmenting involves locating strong data segments, and coding involves tagging or annotating those segments with codes or categories (Johnson & Christensen, 2020, p. 544).

Coding helped the researcher significantly avoid overusing a particular theme when the interview data were being reviewed. Transcripts of the interviews were coded after they were done, which allowed the researcher to focus on and slightly change interview questions as theories emerge from the data. All data were manually coded.

Ethical Considerations

The participants in this study provided all obtained information voluntarily. The related risks for human participants were low. The American Educational Research Association (AERA)

has developed a set of standards designed specifically to guide the work of educational researchers. The researcher plans to follow and adhere to those guidelines. Federal legislation and AERA guidelines require informed consent by the research participants before they can engage in a study (Johnson & Christensen, 2020, p. 126).

Participants were 18 years of age or older and had no diminished capacity as measured by their ability to graduate from high school or enroll in college. The researcher ensured that all participants were qualified for this study. Participants did not reveal their first or last name during the interview. Before the interview, all participants received a pseudonym list. Their anonymity was preserved by choosing the desired pseudonym they chose. The researcher does not plan to utilize data from this study in any future research. The data collected will be stored for 3 years. Once all final dissertation reports have been approved and satisfied by the committee, the data will be destroyed by a commercial shredding company. During the interview, if any questions became uncomfortable for the student, they were given the opportunity to move onto another question or end the interview. This study was voluntary. There was no pressure imposed if a student became uncomfortable.

Summary

Chapter 3 focused on underserved and underrepresented first-year college students affected by the gap in college readiness access during their participation in the College Now program. The discussion raised in this comprehensive qualitative analysis of the study subjects, the recruiting process, data collection, and interview questions explained how the study would be carried out and who would participate. The researcher used phenomenological methods to hypothesize the lack of college readiness access for under-represented students. By discussing their past perceptions of the College Now program in high school and how it has led to their

college choice and academic career ethics today, all participants contributed to this theory.

Chapter 4 will analyze the findings of the data and include the study's outcome.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine how previous College Now students describe their experiences receiving college readiness access and their pathway to college. I intended to explore critical factors developed in the College Now program that played a vital role in providing college readiness access and successfully matriculating into a 4-year CUNY college. The purpose of this study, using a qualitative study design, was to better understand College Now participants and their perspectives on their motivation to attend college and their personal experience with the program.

The research questions for this study were as follows: (a) What is the gap in college readiness post-secondary to post-secondary education?; (b.) To what extent is there an alliance between high school counselors and college admissions offices?; and (c) How did College Now benefit your high school experience? The additional understanding of the impact on students who participated in the College Now program provides guided insight into how these high school students receive college readiness support and an opportunity to successfully matriculating into a CUNY senior college. This information has a long-term influence on a community filled with students who have completed their high school requirements and the requirements for an early college course.

Emerging themes and discrepant data retrieved from the interviews detailing how students described their College Now experiences are presented in this chapter. This chapter covers three themes: the benefits of College Now, the unintended outcomes of College Now, and the shortcomings of College Now.

Theme 1: Benefit of College Now

Most participants mentioned attending a college fair and a college tour as the most benefits of participating in the College Now program. Amanda, for example, mentioned, we had a whole bunch of college fairs and a bunch of college tours even out of state. Our counselors would actually take us to go and see these different colleges of different leagues. We had ivy leagues; we had SUNYs and private schools. They made it diverse so that we knew what the different options look like. Along with the fairs, we even had, like, the Marines and the Navy come, and they have school systems as well. They were there at the fairs, and we were able to see the diversity, even in colleges of what you can get. One thing our counselor used to really insist on was like: go around and ask questions. On every tour, they'd have these papers we had to fill out, like these questions that we could ask the guides and stuff like that, while we were touring. There were questions that we know, what are necessary to apply, what is the tuition, the GPA necessary? It was so beneficial when it came to actually applying to set colleges because a lot of us were actually applying to these colleges we had already toured and seen in our school building. I'm so happy that they insisted on us asking instead of doing the research on our own at the very last minute.

Based on this participant's reflection, one of the benefits that stood out was the opportunity for College Now participants to attend a college fair or college tour. The limitation of this benefit is that while College Now is a CUNY-sponsored program, CUNY schools were not a part of the sites included. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the exclusion of the CUNY school representatives during touring and school fairs.

Other than a college tour as a benefit, many interviewees mentioned that being ahead by getting college credits is a primary benefit. Getting an early start on college courses seemed highly beneficial for this participant. She was able to make a clear connection of the direction that her college path was going. Aniyah said,

I mean, when I took them, I was about 16 or 17 years old, so I don't feel like I took it seriously. I did like the fact that I was in college, like getting credits. Because I would always brag about it. Like, oh yeah, I'm in college, you know. A lot of people liked the fact that I was in college at 17, taking credits.

Another student, Carla, mentioned,

I wanted the extra credit. My counselor recommended it. My mom is an immigrant, so you know I'm the first in her family, other than my uncle, that has really graduated high school and college. So, you know, I wanted to transfer the credits, to be a little bit ahead.

College Now provided her with a cultural capital that she lacked as a first-generation college student. This capital is vital for many because they lack access or income to support a college education.

College Now provides college opportunities to those who otherwise could not afford to go to college. Maherun stated,

I was the salutatorian for my high school, and I was really into my studies. So, my guidance counselor that I worked with is Ms. Jackson. She was really nice, and she pushed me like, at first, I did not know about it. And then she told me about the program, and I was really into it. And then, I needed some help completing the application. It's been 4 years since I moved to this country. I'm originally from Bangladesh. We had some financial problems when we came here, but the College Now program was supportive

with that and provided me with all of the supplies and everything.

Needs were met for this student because of her financial situation. The College Now program was beneficial to her and her family's needs. It also allowed her to add to her high school resume the chance to serve as a salutatorian for her graduation. Rayshal shared,

I had no clue what College Now was or anything. When I heard about it, I was very interested in it, so I signed up for it. I really liked it. I did it for me because I wanted to go into college brand new with college credits. Like I did this in high school, and I thought that was amazing.

Rayshal noted in her reflection that the opportunity to start college with credits was a huge benefit. That is an advantage for students who may have very little access both socially and economically. It is also an excellent advantage for a student who feels limited in college readiness access, and the College Now program is their pathway to college.

Jabesh's case is a bit different because he was at a high school that did not offer College Now, so he transferred out to another high school with the hopes of having the opportunity to receive college readiness support. Jabesh shared,

When I was transferred, I was hearing from my friends that Social Center High had College Now classes, which I really wanted to do because it gives you that dual credit option. You can get some credits before you go to college, which Billy Academy didn't. That was the main reason why I transferred over, but the AP classes that Billy provided at that time were not as expanded as Social Center High School did, so that was another reason.

The interview data showed that another important benefit of College Now was that it provided more access to resources. Jabesh expresses the importance of having more access to

college readiness resources. Due to the unavailability of the College Now program at his first high school, he had to get the resources from another high school. His hopes of building a brighter future for his college career came with the understanding that he would have more access to dual credit and AP courses. Moreover, having access to the College now program. It is evident that high school students who desire to attend college look for opportunities that can allow them to excel towards a closer pathway to college.

Sharis supported this claim by saying, “I really think taking College Now classes in high school. It really gets you ready for college, and it helps you graduate early, and you could get scholarships. There’s a lot of things that College Now could do for you.” Sharis’s reflection shows that College Now was not only beneficial towards her pathway to college, but it also opened up some doors to scholarships. Sharis also said that if she had taken advantage of additional College Now courses like her friends, she would be much further ahead in college. It also speaks to the commitment that a student aspiring to succeed in college has during their final moments in high school. It is important to reiterate that College Now can be beneficial if students desire to commit to additional work while in high school. They may see the opportunity themselves, or it can be through the lens of a guidance counselor or teacher who sees potential.

In most interviewees’ cases, a guidance counselor significantly impacted the decision to participate in College Now. Sarita asserted,

My guidance counselor suggested it. He was always trying to give me better opportunities to get credits and join AP classes. I had taken College Now in 11th grade, and that teacher was also my teacher for the previous year. So, she was kind of trying to convince us to do it the year prior and talked about how great of an opportunity it would be for us. And the last thing was like, I knew that those credits would be easy to transfer

to a 4-year CUNY, so I wanted to take it for myself, so it would be one less class for me to take in college.

Sarita described the College Now program's advantages for students who may not know what their vision for college looks like. Most of the participants have expressed an explicit description of how College Now allowed them to receive and transfer college credits. College Now also served as a foot in the door for students who may have not otherwise had access if it were not a program offered through their school. Taina asserted, “my guidance counselor told me about it, and it was during application season. It was like, you know, you can sign up to take these courses. A handful of students go from different schools. Every high school can join the program. My teacher was suggesting that I take it. I was like, well, I will think about it. I only thought about it for a day, and I decided that I wanted to go.” Taina did not understand the true benefit of the program, but she took the advice of both guidance counselor and teacher. Doing so gave her access to college readiness resources and boosted her cultural capital since this was new information. Both Taina and Sarita express their desire to participate in the College Now program based on a guidance counselor’s recommendation. It is also clear that once they saw the program's benefits, it was the road that they chose to travel.

All participants who share their reflections have a common theme of the benefit of College Now. They all express what they were able to take away from the program. Some speak about dual credits, transferring credits to a college after high school, AP course support, and college tours and fairs during their junior and senior year. There is still a gap because every school does not offer the College Now program or resources that assist with college readiness. Therefore, making the pathway difficult for some students who may not know what path towards college may be available to them. It is a different experience for everyone. That claim cannot be

emphasized enough. Malik asserted,

I don't think my attitude towards college is because of the College Now program or anything, but it could probably be because I'm just stubborn. I think it's different for everyone, but for me personally, it did not change my views in college at all.

Malik may be an anomaly, based on the reflections of the other College Now participants.

However, his assertion addresses the gap in access that occurs with students who are not just limited in not having social and cultural capital but also may not have the support that encourages a stronger pathway to college.

College Now may not open doors for every student, nor does it provide access to every student. The students who benefit are selected based on their grades and not their ability to do the work. This clear gap also creates some academic segregation between high school students with potential and struggling students who can use the support. Clarice asserted,

There is a selective process when choosing the students because my classroom for College Now wasn't as full as my regular classrooms. I guess when they put you up as a candidate for College Now, then they look at your grades, and if you're already doing well, then yes, you might be a good fit for it. But like for a student who's struggling in a specific course or in general, they probably might not want to offer that student in that course. So, yes, there's definitely a gap between a certain population of students that are doing well. And then another population, which is not doing so well, or probably the best to say average or so.

Theme 2: Unintended Outcome Of College Now

Outside of the credit benefit, many interviewees mentioned that getting a feel for the college experience is a benefit of College Now. Jabesh mentioned,

It changed my attitude a lot because, in high school, the experience that I got from College Now, it's very, very valuable because in high school like the attitudes of the teachers and then the availability of the teachers are a lot more frequent than what you get in college. Now I'm experiencing it firsthand. College Now gave me a pathway that I can transition from high school to college.

Jabesh had a mixture of experience participating in the College Now program. He pointed out the availability of teachers in college being different in high school. This difference that students experienced in College Now presents a challenge because students must become familiar with the cultural differences between high school and college. In addition, students have to learn behavioral norms expected as college students; however, some feel that they were not offered adequate step-by-step guides. While the College Now program may have provided this student a glance into the behavior patterns of college instructors, there is still a need for students to be provided with that exposure through more resources.

A College Now interviewee recounts how a lack of college prep tools made understanding the college pathway outcome challenging. Those outcomes did not help the student's first-year college experience. Some students mentioned that they did not receive clear direction on how the earned credits are used in college. Several interviewees spoke to the need for a smooth transition between their high school guidance counselor and college administrators. There were limitations on the information and what a College Now student should be doing with their credits upon completing the program. Rana shared,

I forgot what the College Now schedule was, but I remember I couldn't take a lot of the classes that I wanted to take. Like, if there was an advisor or a representative for the College Now program coming in to talk about it, rather than just our teachers, like

throwing fliers at us, like “hey, do this, if you want to succeed”. I didn’t even know until I got to college that the College Now credits that I got didn’t affect my GPA at all. It just gave me the credit. So, there was a lot I didn’t know about the program.

Rana expressed her concerns about wanting more representation from College Now available to provide deeper insight into the program’s long-term benefits. Unfortunately, that information was limited, and it did not make the college transition very easy for the participant. Once she noticed that her GPA did not change, it was more about participating in the program during high school, but the follow-through to college is limited. Perhaps the services made available varied from site to site.

Maherun had a different response to her experience. She believes that the college life exposure that College Now has a benefit in terms of academic preparedness. Maherun mentioned,

College Now is like an environment you have like when you’re in college. The professors were very helpful. Also, City tech held workshops every two weeks. The workshop was like connecting with students. Also, they made information about certain colleges, how to apply to college, financial aid, everything so easily accessible. Then my high school encouraged me to also go to college. I was like going to college is easy if you have the will and motivation to study. So, through those workshops, I connected with I of professors and other students. So, it encouraged me a lot to go to college.

Maherun believed that she had been given the tools during her College Now experience to understand the access available to graduating high school students. She took advantage of the various opportunities offered, as she made very clear. Maherun’s experience shows that interactions with the high school staff and college faculty have a massive effect on how students

move ahead.

Aniyah feels a bit different than Maherun's claim. She did not feel prepared after her College Now experience. She believed rigor in College Now is lacking. Aniyah asserted, I think that if in high school we were given more information about how college is, then maybe so, but the most college readiness that College Now really gave us was like note-taking, and even time management wasn't as important. Well, let's say it wasn't important, but if someone didn't do something on time. We would still have the time to do it. Like they weren't as strict on us in high school as they are in college. If we don't do something by 11:59 pm, you get a zero, or they don't really care how you can take your notes in college and what is best for you. I guess high school could have shown me more about or informed me more about how college was.

Aniyah's reflection exposes some of the limitations of College Now. Those limitations address the

gap in college readiness access and speak to how high school students may feel misled or misinformed.

While some of the limitations of College Now may be exposed, the data shows that students have the ability and willingness to do better if given the tools. In other words, the interviews reveal that College Now is not operating the way that it proclaimed as a college readiness program. The unspoken norms expected of students in College Now are not in sync with those of high school students. Therefore, even if high school students benefit from getting a feel of college, they were not equipped with academic and behavioral skills equivalent to college students. High School students cannot be held accountable for having the discipline of a college student if they are not provided with the necessary tools. Sarita mentioned,

I can only say that I've had one challenge, and we were required to do some journals over the whole semester. As a high school student, I've never been given a project assignment that was, like, given in the beginning of the semester, and I had the whole semester to do it. So instead of gradually doing it as I went, I waited until the last minute for it, and it really hit me, so I was up late cramming and just trying to finish all those journal assignments at one time. It was probably about 40 of them, and it made me realize that I need to hone in on my time management and my organizational skills when I go into college.

Sarita was trying to hold herself accountable for her need to strengthen her time management and organization skills. However, this is a college readiness resource that should be provided with stronger support. Instead, it serves as an unintended outcome of the College Now program. In addition to students becoming properly informed or guided, students like Sarita were placed in courses without being oriented on the expectations or intended course learning

outcomes. Amanda asserted,

I had brought up the College Now materials and how we weren't really prepared for the materials that we would be introduced to. But then there's also like you have a high school paper, and then you have a college paper, and they're different. I went from writing high school, middle school technical papers—you know, "You're expected to write like this"—and the transition was a bit rough. So, I just feel like there should have been a bit more of a better transition for how we're going to be upgrading our style of writing and what is expected for us. I could have been prepared just a little bit better.

Amanda addresses the missing resources connected to being taught or prepared to become a college-level writer. She did not believe that the College Now materials allowed her to transition effectively into college. Her claim speaks to the gap in college readiness resources and opportunities that may have been missed for students receiving all of the information they needed. Another interviewee, Rayshel, mentioned,

College Now was wonderful, but it was challenging because I would have my work from high school to do, and my work from college. It was really challenging, but that taught me time management and how to manage my time. So, I really appreciated that process.

Rayshel understood the time management expectations of college-level work. However, it is still important to have better tools to assist with this transition or pathway to college. Time management is a critical college readiness tool that students may miss if they do not have a clear understanding of it. College Now must offer more than the courses to their students. There needs to be mentoring as well. Students are unclear about what their roles are beyond the high school classroom. They only become lucky if they are guided by a guidance counselor who shares the importance of their work ethic in college. Otherwise, some do it just because it is their

opportunity just to have exposure to college, as was the case with Sanzida, who mentioned,

I participated in the College Now course because I wanted to gain experience of college. How classes are taken, how exams are taken in college, how it's different from high school. It's totally different from high school classes. So again, experience, so I can like, actually know what to expect in an actual college class.

Sanzida's reflection addressed the highs that she received from taking a College Now course.

She believed that it offered her all of the college readiness tools that she was looking for.

Everyone's College Now experience is very different, and it shows what is considered a priority need or tool for students to receive during this college readiness process. Sharis had a similar experience. She shared,

After doing the College Now classes, I mean, I got the hang of it, but I started looking into college more and, like, doing more research and stuff. So, the only thing on my mind when I graduated from school was to just graduate from college early and go to nursing school at a certain time. Everything was just about school. I wasn't really looking for my friends and all that stuff. I still do the same thing now. It's just all about that. Just graduating and becoming a nurse.

Sharis expressed in her reflection that College Now assisted with organizing her focus. In addition, she asserted that the program offered her an incentive to get serious about the college experience.

While there may be limitations in the tools that College Now provides to their participants, there are still a few outcomes that provide opportunities for growth if the student has been appropriately guided. Those outcomes include exposure to social and cultural capital for many of its participants. As Taina mentioned,

I would say that it was a great experience. I learned so much from going there while being in high school, but it helped me also to grow. Like just, overall, my skills in, you know, writing, reading, doing math, everything just to improve it more, so I can put in the good work.

Taina also addressed how various skills improved based on her participation in the College Now program. She saw her growth in preparing for college and helping her succeed better in high school. If the high school skills are lacking, then it may be extremely tough to assimilate into college. The college preparation and college readiness show that they lacked at some of the College Now sites. The situation is different for everyone. College Now representatives could have done a better job communicating the commitment with students taking the courses. That includes all of the logistics surrounding a course. Carla supported this claim in her reflection,

I don't know, but I guess I would say the class time. Because I took two classes . . . like, towards the second one, it was around the time school was about to close. Then I woke up early on Saturdays, which were days that were supposed to be free time.

College now participants are registered for classes, but they are given limited information once the semester begins. They are expected to follow the routine of a college student. Based on the reflection shared, the more mature the student is, the more committed they are to being disciplined enough to complete the course. However, just because a student can be disciplined does not mean they should not have college readiness access. Some students need extra support, which does not help if the resources are limited. Each participant within this study provides a clear picture of how this process worked for them.

Justin described the anxiety that came with the college-level work that his College Now instructor introduced him to. However, while there was anxiety, there was also a sense of pride

because of his commitment to doing well on the assignments. Justin's reflection also shows that some College Now participants challenge themselves with college readiness with hopes that they can succeed beyond college.

Jabesh shared in his reflection that for some College Now students, college readiness access may not be the problem. It may be what a participant decides to take advantage of during their course. Jabesh mentioned,

When I was attending College Now, even though the CUNY library and the CUNY databases were available to me, I was not using them at the moment because most of my College Now courses, which I took, were psychology and then entertainment technology, the professors were really helpful. I would say I had learned more about all of the College Now resources at that time, it would be better.

Jabesh described his access to the CUNY library and the CUNY databases, but he never took advantage of them. Jabesh was able to provide that reflection because his College Now instructors filled the gap with their course curriculum, preventing him from needing to use all the CUNY resources. That is a massive downfall for CUNY admissions and College Now because the college library also serves as a college readiness resource and a marketing tool.

Students who do not take advantage of the college library risk missing on-campus engagement. The college library or resource center can also guide students, who may miss some essential resources that may not be readily available in the classroom, as was the case for Clarice, who asserted,

If the college now experience was going to directly reflect what a college environment would be like, as far as, you know, like taking a course an actual course with like a professor, then I guess they could implement things so that we could actually get a feel of

what it would be like to be in a course for an entire semester. I would also say there should have been more research facilities to write better. When you're writing for college, you have different styles of writing like APA and MLA. And so, if they would have probably taught us about it. Then we would probably already have an idea of what, you know, college professors would expect from us in that regard.

Clarice's claim differs from Jabesh's, who spoke about library and database access. There were limitations on library access, and the students did not receive a course outline, which made it difficult for the student to separate the class between a high school class and a college course based on the inadequacy of the curriculum presentation.

Data clearly shows that the most significant limitation of College Now and most dual enrollment programs is the ability to interact on a college campus in its entirety. Some students are only left enrolled in a course while having little guidance on assimilating into a college classroom. Aniyah shares, "I guess based on the class, my experience was different because even when I was at LIU, my professor was also patient with us, because it was a bunch of us the same age, the same age group and stuff like that. But when I was at Medgar taking the College Now program credits, you know, he wasn't as patient. They weren't as patient and going slow with us. They were going at a regular pace." Clarice provides feedback about the direction her course went during College Now. Based on her experience, it seemed like there were challenges with the maturity level of the students. Some of the students could have benefited from a pre-college readiness prep before being placed in the class. It could make the process smoother for the student and the instructor, who may be new to teaching high school students on the college level. If students are not given college readiness prep before taking a college course, the outcome may not be positive. Clarice was able to distinguish what the program looked like at two different

locations. She did not feel so comfortable at the location where there was a mixture of age groups. Her experience told of the site setups of College Now.

The next interviewee, Marehun, had a different experience. The pre-college pressure worked for her, and she did not believe that College Now lacked anything. Maherun asserted, "Because, in high school, if you don't submit the work, your teachers will push you to some extent. But in college, it's a completely new environment. You do the work, you get credits. You don't do the work, Professors are not going to e-mail or going to go after you, so I learned about that. Also, you have to be held responsible for your work. In high school, if you got a bad grade, the teachers always had the opportunity to make it up with extra credit or her makeup tests. But in college, no, you have to be serious. You have to do your work on time. The deadline is the deadline."

Maherun spoke on college-level work and the commitment required. Her understanding of the expectations was slightly different from Aniyah's because it seemed like she was prepared to assimilate into a college course.

Both participants were a part of the same program. However, they discuss the comfort level as something very different. It is clear that each College Now participant has a different outcome, and it could be based on the lack of college readiness access through workshops and course prep.

Depending on how the program is administered, College Now may or may not be compatible with college preparedness tools available to the students. There is a gap between the expectations of the high school participants and what the program actually offers. Daritchy shared,

Sometimes, the work might be a little hard at times. It was that I was trying to also

balance it with the other classes that I had. Because I would have homework from one of my high school classes, and I would also have to do college-level work, which might be kind of hard. I think I was able to keep up with it and keep going.

Daritchy spoke of the challenging work of juggling high school and college courses, which is an unintended outcome for students who may not have an idea of the responsibility that comes with taking a college course. Unfortunately, College Now may have failed to offer the appropriate resources to students.

Data shows the importance of the role of the guidance counselor in high school. Some of the College Now participants have a better grasp of the program more than others. It may be partially because of the guidance that those individuals have. This claim was confirmed by interviewee Richelle, who mentioned,

I always thought that it was important, and I like college. I wasn't really thinking about it in terms of the workload, but I feel like College Now, I came out of it thinking the same way, like college was important. The workload didn't feel much different from my school.

Richelle had a similar reflection to that of Daritchy. Again, the students who participate in the College Now program are given college readiness tools that provide balance.

Theme 3: Shortcomings of College Now

When everything is said and done, students who participate in the College Now program stand to benefit from the initiative. However, the drawbacks that some of the interviewees mentioned outweigh any potential benefits. For example, Aniyah thought that if the high school provided more information about college, it might have more college-ready students. However, the extent to which she emphasized note-taking and time management in the college preparation

efforts provided paled compared to the effort put in to learn important material. Thus, this hypothetical situation has a bland conclusion: In that situation, we can safely assume that College Now students encounter shortcomings during their experiences.

The resources of a college readiness program should be provided in as many ways as feasible to benefit students. When a student does not know what they are searching for in a program because they lack maturity or knowledge of what college prep entails, it is essential to inform students of the various opportunities. Based on Aniyah's assessment, she believed that College Now lacked the information they could provide regarding the course structure and how assignments needed to be delivered. This data effectively shows that College Now sets pupils up for probable failure since some participants feel unprepared. It does not help that the high school graduation process has already proven to be particularly tough for recent grads.

Another notable drawback of College Now is that it does not meet the needs of every high school student. Interviewee Rana offers a distinct point of view regarding College Now. Her reflection focuses on the insularity of the program. One of the main challenges that the program faced was that it had to work hard to increase access. In the end, many people felt excluded, as access was mainly provided to students who had done well in the first place, while it would have been an enormous benefit to the average or below-average students. In addition, students who do not match the eligibility requirements are prohibited from taking College Now courses. This rule makes the schism within the student body wider and ensures that the gap between high school and college students will only grow because of the severe limitations placed on students who do not meet the standards for taking college-level courses while in high school.

In contrast, the following interviewee, Cindy, confirmed Rana's assertion while sharing her College Now experience. It appears that the College Now program has some exclusivity

because some students are unable to complete a course. Cindy said, “They were having difficulty with the course, and some of them had dropped out.” According to Cindy’s reflection, several students struggled with the College Now course. They eventually dropped out of the College Now program without obtaining any advantages. This experience also offers insight into the level of pre-college preparatory training that high school students may require to complete the College Now program successfully.

The interview participants offered several anecdotes from which several conclusions can be deduced: The College Now program not only failed to inform participants well but was also hampered by a lack of resources. Furthermore, the ultimate college selection and the decision-making process were not dependent on the student’s involvement in College Now.

According to many of the participants, the flaws of the College Now program did not merely stem from individuals who were uninformed or without resources. It moreover discloses in the study that throughout the last stages of their high school education, college choices and decisions were not undergirded by involvement in College Now. Other respondents, meanwhile, focused on what they were able to obtain from the overall experience. For example, Sarita expressed delight at bypassing an English course during her first semester because she had completed it through College Now. She was also quite confident in her grasp of the course material. This student was similarly proud to sit with upperclassmen with an experience that had taken them by surprise.

The next interviewees continued to highlight their challenges during the College Now program. They discuss their highs and lows concerning how they made their college choices and what resources were made accessible at the end of their journey. The most apparent drawback of the College Now initiative is the need for improved ties between admissions offices and partner

high schools. In addition, students should have a better awareness of the programs available at their CUNY-affiliated college.

“Medgar Evers College was probably not on my radar at all while I was attending College Now and after I graduated,” Clarice said. So, taking College Now had no bearing on my decision to attend Medgar. When you think about what school you want to go to, you think about the ideal program for you, and you think about how being there can benefit you, what they have to offer in terms of student support, and things like that. So, I guess that wasn’t on my radar because I suppose I lacked that information.” Clarice states in her reflection that Medgar Evers College was not an institution she had considered, even though she had taken College Now courses there. She desired various advantages in college, and even throughout her time in the College Now program, she did not obtain appropriate information on Medgar Evers College’s programs and academic majors. Clarice’s reflection sheds light on the difficulty that many students confront when engaging in the College Now program but are not mentored by admissions counselors or advisers from the CUNY-sponsored institution.

College Now reps must function as a stronger link between their institution’s admissions office and high school guidance counselors. A student’s success in this program cannot be assessed solely by the number of college credits they earn. There must also be a pathway that connects the high school with the collaborating college. Participants in College Now have a clear goal and desire to finish high school. However, based on this research, any college prep provided to students must have a strong follow-through where College Now students are directed post-high school regardless of their college choice. The obvious flaws of the College Now initiative extend far beyond funding and access. It also underlines the lack of interest that College Now participants have in matriculating into their CUNY affiliated institution if there is a weakness in

the college prep process.

Lastly, College Now must offer more insight on the sponsor colleges. Students may not choose to enroll in the College Now sponsor college, but they need to have a chance to explore what that institution offers. Based on what these interviewees shared, it also looks like College Now did not do their best to give additional college readiness access tools. It was a considerable limitation to this student's pathway to college.

Summary

This study attempted to depict the benefits and drawbacks of the CUNY College Now program and how it may or may not influence high school students on their pathway to college. This study also attempted to understand the ways cultural or social capital can potentially impact the way high school students are receptive to college readiness and the college process. Finally, this study aimed to broaden the scope of literature on whether college readiness prep programs aim to ease the pathway to college.

The following research questions guided this study: (a) What is the gap in college readiness post-secondary to post-secondary education? (b) To what extent is there an alliance between high school counselors and college admissions offices? (c) How did the CUNY College Now concurrent enrollment program benefit your high school experiences?

There were three major themes, *The Benefit of College Now*, *Unintended Outcome of College Now*, and *Shortcomings of College Now*. Each participant was ready to reflect and be open about their experiences, and each had an appreciation demonstrated in their achievements thus far. Their expression spoke volumes. It was apparent that they appreciated the value of the College Now program and were thankful for the resources and information they had obtained as

a consequence of their participation.

Participants, who were current college students, believed that the College Now program gave them the support they needed to get a head start on their college careers. Additionally, they discovered that College Now has offered them an advanced level of exposure to college courses, which has provided them with the opportunity to move on to the next level of specific courses as newly matriculated college students.

This study is critical because many underrepresented students do not have access to a program like College Now. Therefore, it shows the persistent gap between college readiness access and the pathway to college.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Overview of Study

College preparedness is an issue that is becoming increasingly prevalent in the minds of education leaders, educators, and researchers. This topic has gained prominence among the federal government and state and local governments, school districts, universities, and philanthropic organizations engaged in researching and enhancing college readiness (Tierney & Sablan, 2014). This growing phenomenon has the potential to get better.

It is reasonable to believe that, considering the growing popularity of college preparation programs, the College Now program, and the increasing number of questions about the program, that a comprehensive evaluation of the impact of participation in the College Now program on other measures of educational achievement was necessary. This study intended to build on the existing body of literature on college readiness access. According to Conley (2005), previous research suggested that one of the primary reasons students falter in college is the gap between their college experiences and expectations. In addition, many first-year students find that their college courses are fundamentally different from their high school courses.

While the College Now program or any college readiness access program is designed to prepare and enrich the lives of high school students for a successful pathway to college, that is not always the outcome. Therefore, it is essential to review the trajectory of this claim by understanding that students who take a more rigorous high school curriculum have higher educational attainment and earnings (Cowan & Goldhaber, 2015). Implementing a college preparedness program is a deliberate endeavor to close the gap. The College Now initiative and other college access and success programs strengthen the road to college in underrepresented

school districts. There is also an opportunity to provide long-term post-secondary success.

An emerging body of research and practice suggests that providing college-level work in high school is one promising way to better prepare a wide range of young people for college success, including those who do not envision themselves as college material (Hoffman et al., 2009). Research has suggested that “college-ready” kids have the necessary subject knowledge and solid academic habits to succeed and the socio-cultural capital to navigate the atmosphere of higher education (Strayhorn, 2014). The following research questions guided this study: What is the gap in college readiness post-secondary to post-secondary education? To what extent is there an alliance between high school counselors and college admissions offices? How did College Now benefit your high school experiences?

The participants in this study consisted of sixteen college Freshmen and Sophomores who participated in the College Now program and successfully enrolled into a CUNY senior college (such as Baruch, Medgar Evers College, Lehman College, Brooklyn College, and York College). Each participant took advantage of college readiness resources made available through their College Now sponsored institutions and their high school. Their backgrounds varied from being first-generation students in their households to coming from homes with two college-educated parents.

Through in-depth, semi-structured zoom interviews, a review of transcripts, and member checking, the findings revealed internal and external factors that contributed to participants’ reflections about the impact of the College Now program. The emergence of three distinct themes that impacted their journey throughout the College Now program and the pathway to college were: *The Benefit of College Now*, *Unintended Outcome of College Now*, and *Shortcomings of College Now*. This analysis differs from prior research on college preparedness

programs in that it focuses on the College Now program and the participants' life experiences. Their unique and diverse experiences provided an outlet to deepen knowledge of the impact of college-ready programs on the students they are intended to serve and establish whether there is a gap between college preparedness access and the pathway to college. Their thoughts provided insight into both the advantages and limitations of the College Now program.

College Now Program and Tinto's Model

Tinto's Model was one of two theoretical frameworks used to guide this study. Colleges can be viewed as a collection of overlapping and sometimes nested academic and social communities, each influencing the other in significant ways. By extension, the broader process of academic and social integration can be seen as evolving from student participation with professors and student peers to future involvement in the college's broader intellectual and social communities (Tinto, 1997).

In this study, the participants shared their reflections about preparing to assimilate in the college classroom based on their College Now experiences. While many participants expressed the benefits and unintended outcomes of their participation in College Now, others addressed the program's shortcomings that could hinder a successful outcome after matriculation. Tinto's definition of integration as the alignment of student attitudes and values with the social part of student life (particularly peers), the academic part of student life (faculty/staff), and the institutional aims of the university is critical to understanding his theory. As integration improves, so do the personal goals that bind the student to the institution; conversely, unpleasant experiences alienate the student from the academic and social communities of the institution, reducing commitment to common goals (Schreiber et al., 2014).

Participants shared reflections closely related to Tinto's assertions about successfully

assimilating in a college classroom to reduce student retention. Tinto's model's positive and negative assertions spoke clearly through the participants' experiences and their college readiness pathway.

Tinto's argued that if students are not given the proper pre-college experience, it can result in an unsuccessful college experience. Some participants had a strong pre-college community because their guidance counselors had strong ties with the College Now sponsor college. The involvement in this college community is a factor in determining success. Participants were committed to the college pathway because they were made comfortable from the onset of the college readiness process.

Moreover, according to the study results, some College Now participants did not feel integrated into the college community, owing to a combination of a lack of direction at the high school level and a weak connection at the College Now sponsor site. Regardless of the strength of the College Now program, there is a vast demographic of underserved and underrepresented students who are highly affected. Their pathway to college is measured by what they are given before their first year of matriculation. Hence, based on Tinto's assertion, it is essential to ensure that students receiving college readiness tools are motivated to complete a degree program after high school. The pre-college experience has an impact on long-term objectives. Tinto (1993) argued that most of the research on institutional retention, student learning, and growth emphasizes the need to create educational communities that include all students rather than simply a select group. This claim is pivotal when ensuring that all students receive the same opportunities to foster a successful pathway into college.

College Now Program and Cultural Capital

Cultural Capital theory was two of three frameworks used to guide this study. This theory

helped frame the ongoing claim that there is a gap between college readiness access in underrepresented communities and college pathways. While many of the participants could participate in the College Now program, some lacked cultural capital. In this study, the participants discussed how they received cultural capital through the resources that their guidance counselors, high school teachers, and the College Now faculty provided. This claim is evident because many of the participants were newly exposed to the college classroom. Some were even breaking barriers within their family because they were first-generation college students. Therefore, the College Now program opened up a door of exposure for many of the participants. Some of the participants continuously address the changes based on their new access, but they needed more resources. While some exposure provided cultural capital, some participants lacked it because they were unsure how to use what was newly acquired through College Now. They understood the participation in a College readiness program. However, some felt slightly lost following the completion of the program.

Students benefit from cultural capital, according to Bordieu, through school-based procedures in which institutions implicitly recognize and reward cultural capital. Many experts point to instructors' relationships with students, in particular, to explain how cultural capital influences academic outcomes. According to this idea, students who have cultural capital benefit academically because they can communicate effectively with teachers and comprehend the implicit rules of the game better than students who do not have cultural capital (Wildhagen, 2009). The participants in this study express their fondness for what College Now offered them because they may not have otherwise had the opportunity. Some of the participants in this study were receptive to a new source of cultural capital acquired during College Now. The College Now program allowed some of the participants to apply the resources from guidance counselors

and teachers, which opened the pathway to college. Some participants mention that their guidance counselor's support was the strength of their journey and what made cultural capital a positive acquisition during the college prep process. Cultural capital is institutionalized; its widely distributed and high-status cultural indicators (attitudes, preferences, formal knowledge, activities, ambitions, and credentials) are used to justify social and cultural exclusion. This concept supports capital's metaphorical connotation as a marketable resource in the quest for privilege. Cultural capital is like money to store, invest, and spend to obtain other resources (such as access to academic or economic positions; Kingston, 2001)

College Now Program and Social Capital Theory

The third theoretical framework that guided this study was Social Capital Theory. Lin (2017) suggested that social capital may be characterized as a set of resources inherent in a social structure that may be accessed and/or deployed for specific purposes. The concept of social capital, according to this definition, consists of three components: resources inherent in a social structure, individual access to such social resources, and individual use or mobilization of such social resources in purposeful acts. The structural (embeddedness), opportunity (accessibility), and action-oriented (usage) components of social capital are the three factors that cross structure and action. The gap between college readiness access and the pipeline to college affects underrepresented students. While College Now provides opportunities to high schools within rural communities, it is not accessible to everyone. In the study, some of the participants shared that they learned about the College Now program through their network, which continued into their college careers. In addition to the College Now students acquired social capital by building a new network of information, they gained access to the college professors, admissions officers, and other stakeholders who could contribute to the academic growth of these students in ways

that their families could not because they lacked the capital.

A few of the research participants were first-generation college students. They either had a teacher, guidance counselor, or College Now rep provide access to capital that they had never dreamed of gaining through any other affiliation. Multiple participants' reflections amplified this claim. For example, Maherun shared that her opportunity to become the Salutatorian for her high school graduation was attributed to the College Now program. The resources received by the program, in her case, were largely beneficial because she was also new to the country and had next to no cultural or social capital. Another participant, Jabesh, gained new access to social capital when he changed high schools to enter college readiness programs. The concept of social capital integrates three elements: embedding, access, and use. The participants understood clearly how these components were valuable to their college readiness process.

Implication for Teachers, College Now Administrators, and Policymakers

Dutkowsky et al. (2009) suggested that academically rigorous high school courses, as virtually all educators unanimously agree, play an essential role in students' growth and academic readiness. This role is especially evident for college-bound students, who make up the bulk of the student population at many high schools. Moreover, such courses keep these students challenged, reducing senior burnout. The findings of this study, on the other hand, are positive for CUNY College Now administrators, guidance counselors, and policymakers who are interested in the success of initiatives geared at closing the gap between underrepresented students' college preparedness and the pipeline to college.

This research is crucial for many reasons. For students who would not otherwise feel that college is achievable, access to higher education opens the door to stability and a brighter future. This research also provided clearer suggestions on how College Now's materials should be

delivered. Students in high school should not just be given college credits but should also be assisted through the pipeline to college.

The College Now program should serve as a factor when students identify the college they want to enroll in following high school. In addressing these factors, researchers should look at how the CUNY College Now program influences and impacts the student's pipeline to college. The college credit outcome should not be the sole factor that measures the success of the participants.

The researchers must carefully review the overall college preparedness of the participants and their overall future success.

Suggestions for Future Research

According to Suss and Goldsmith (1989), in 1984, Kingsborough Community College, a division of the City University of New York (CUNY), launched College Now, a partnership initiative with four public high schools in New York City. The program's goal was to promote college for moderately achieving high school seniors, defined as students who have five characteristics: (a) their high school average ranges from 65 to low 80 percentiles, (b) they are not chronically absent from school, (c) they are not classified as discipline problems by faculty, and (d) they have a limited vision for their education, (e) they need to strengthen their remedial skills.

Over three decades later, the College Now Program uses a different approach. What started as a program for moderate academic achievers has now become exclusive to students who meet high academic achievement today. Regarding the academic outcomes, research demonstrates the positive effects of the College Now program on students' college-related

outcomes. Therefore, College Now directors and college preparatory researchers should expand on the body of literature that addresses the disparities that impact college readiness access for underrepresented groups.

Participants in this study did not allow the lack of social or cultural capital to prohibit them from completing high school and matriculating successfully into a 4-year program. Instead, they took advantage of both the social and cultural capital resources received through their participation in the College Now program, and they tried to thrive in a college setting despite limitations. The challenge that affected them was the disconnect between their high school guidance counselors and the admissions officers of the CUNY-sponsored college.

Future research should address the gap between college readiness access and the pipeline to college. There should also be a discussion on how to get more students to matriculate into their CUNY-sponsored College Now institution or to have much more insight into the degree major offerings present throughout the CUNY institutions.

Moreover, it is essential to review the research design and some of the limitations that existed during this research process. A future researcher can supplement interview data with observation data. My data were limited in scope because I could not visit the CUNY College Now campuses to interview the participants. If not for the COVID-19 restrictions, I might have reached a broader demographic of students who participated in the College Now program. Future researchers will be able to find substantial data based on visiting a campus and immersing themselves in the lifestyle and access of a College Now student. A future researcher also can connect with more than just the five CUNY Colleges, but perhaps a further reach to all 22 CUNY campuses. It is also important for a future researcher to have the chance to talk to College Now reps and guidance counselors to have a broader scope of data to work with and create

balance for the students based on their college readiness support.

Concluding Thoughts

The purpose of this study was to share the experiences of students who participated in the College Now program and matriculated into a CUNY Senior College while identifying the gap that exists between college readiness access and the pipeline to college. The first chapter explained that although there were many successful college readiness programs throughout the US, the College Now program has supported the needs of academically and socially disadvantaged students within underrepresented high schools. Chapter 2 described the literature that conveys ideas from academic scholars who have either presented the foundation of college readiness access through their research or found a gap in the College Now program. Chapter 3 provided the research design, which was used to identify the study participants. In light of the data collected in Chapter 4, the College Now program should provide a mandatory Freshman Orientation course before students begin their selected course load. There should also be an orientation that includes parents, teachers, and guidance counselors with College Now reps. Lastly, the College Now program should find a better strategy to partner with the different CUNY admissions offices so that there is a direct pathway that eliminates student hesitation.

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APPENDIX A

APPROVAL DOCUMENTATION



Saint Peter's
UNIVERSITY

Institutional Review Board

To: Adero-Zaire R. Green
From: Dr. Joshua Feinberg, chair
SPU Institutional Review Board
Date: April 6th, 2021
Approval #: 01272125

Project Title: **Examining The Achievement Gap Between College Readiness Access In Underrepresented Communities and The Pipeline To College**

Protocol Approval Date: April 6th, 2021 – April 6th, 2022

In accordance with DHHS Regulations for Protection of Human Subjects (45 CFR 46.110), the human subjects application for this project underwent **Expedited** review and was approved as minimal risk to subjects. This project is approved as of April 6th for research to Begin April 6th, 2021, and the approval remains active until April 6th, 2022.

The IRB has received a copy of the proposal and approves the consent, methodology, and use of the questionnaire. The PI may collect data from participants from CUNY after receiving express permission from that site.

The investigator agrees to conduct the research in accordance with the SPU Institutional Review Board guidelines as well as the IRBs of each respective institution listed in the application. IRB approval from each of the listed institutions must be achieved. Such IRB letters should be forwarded to the SPU IRB for our records.

Re-review of this project is required if: You wish to continue the project beyond April 6th, 2022. There are any changes in the research protocol. There are any reports of injury or unanticipated problems involving risks to human subjects.

Note: any injuries or adverse events must be reported to the IRB within three days of

the event. Sincerely,

Joshua M. Feinberg, Ph.D.
Chair, Institutional Review
Board Saint Peter's University
Jfeinberg@saintpeters.edu

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT FORM



Department of Higher Education

INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION IN A RESEARCH PROJECT

PROJECT TITLE: Examining The Achievement Gap Between College Readiness Access in Underrepresented Communities and The Pipeline To College.

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Adero-Zaire Green

MENTOR: DR. Jung-ah Choi, Ph.D.

SPU SPONSOR: INTRODUCTION

You are invited to consider participating in this research project. Please take as much time as you need to make your decision. Feel free to discuss your decision with whomever you wish, but remember that the decision to participate, or not to participate, is yours. If you decide to participate, please sign and date where indicated at the end of this form.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this research is to strengthen the achievement gap between college readiness access in underrepresented communities and the pipeline to college.

PROJECT PLAN

You are being asked to take part in this research because you participated in the CUNY College

Now program or a dual enrollment program during high school. You are also 18 years or older, currently a college Freshman or Sophomore, and you either attend CUNY Baruch College, CUNY Brooklyn College, CUNY Lehman College, CUNY Medgar Evers College, or CUNY York College. About 20 subjects will take part in this research.

If you decide to participate in this research, you will participate in a 60-minute interview that includes questions asked. You will be given a unique password to access Zoom, and then once you log on, your interview will begin.

The research will be looking at the achievement gap between college readiness access and the pipeline to college. The focus will be on the CUNY College Now program and their partner CUNY Senior Colleges. The research sessions will take place on Monday's-Sunday's from 11:00-5:00 pm by appointment via Zoom. You will be in the project for about 60 minutes.

This research will require audio recording of your interview. The recording of the interview is a requirement for participation.

The transcripts will be stored on two separate hardware encrypted USB flash drives. One drive will store the interview data and will be in the possession of the researcher. The other USB drive will be locked in a locked file cabinet box at an undisclosed location. This method will ensure the safety of the data as well as maintain a high level of protection until the project is complete. Once you successfully complete the interview, you will receive a \$20 Amazon e-gift card.

RISKS

There are minimal risks associated with participating in this research. Psychological and Social Risks.

Psychological Risks: The interview questions may possibly make the participants feel uncomfortable. During an interview, if feel uncomfortable sharing their personal experience, you can stop the interview at any time. This is a voluntary study.

Social Risks: The participant may know another participant who did not have the best experience in the program. You may inadvertently mention another person's confidential data. All participants are asked to use pseudonyms during their interview and will be reminded. I will minimize the risks by never sharing any confidential data to another participant.

The researcher will try to reduce this risk by keeping the documents safe at all times.

BENEFITS

If you agree to take part in this research, there will be no direct benefit to you. However, information gathered in this research may help deter College Now students from transferring or matriculating into other schools outside of CUNY. It will be an incentive for the CUNY Admissions, CUNY Academics Affairs, and CUNY Institutional Research divisions.

According to my literature review, dual enrollment programs provide a strong head start for high school students. However, there is much more required by the partner college in order to get a full buy-in from the high school students after graduation.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Every effort will be made to keep any information collected about you confidential. However, it is impossible to guarantee absolute confidentiality. In order to keep information about you safe, the transcripts will be stored on two separate hardware encrypted USB flash drives. One drive will store the interview data and will be in the possession of the researcher. The other USB drive will be locked in a locked file cabinet box at an undisclosed. This method will ensure the safety of the data as well as maintain a high level of protection. . Participants will not reveal their first or last name during the interview. Before the interview, all participants will receive a pseudonym list. Their anonymity is preserved by choosing the desired pseudonym they choose. The researcher does not plan to utilize data from this study in any future research. The data collected will be stored for three years. Once all dissertation final reports have been approved and satisfied by the committee, the data will be destroyed by a commercial shredding company. During the interview, if any questions become uncomfortable for the student, they will be given the opportunity to move onto another question. There will be no pressure imposed if a student becomes uncomfortable.

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FOR RESEARCH-RELATED INJURIES

Researchers will make every effort to prevent research-related injuries and illnesses. If you are injured or become ill while you are in the study, you will receive emergency medical care. The costs of this care will be charged to you or to your health insurer. No funds have been made available by Saint Peter's University or its affiliates, or any government agency, to compensate you for a research-related injury or illness.

YOUR RIGHTS AS A RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

Participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You can choose not to participate at all, or to withdraw at any point. If you decide not to participate, or to withdraw, there will be no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled, or any effect on your relationship with the researcher(s), or any other negative consequences.

If you decide that you no longer want to take part in this research, you are encouraged to inform the researcher of your decision. The information already obtained through your participation will not be included in the data analysis and final report for this research.

QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS

If you have questions about this research project, you may contact Adero-Zaire Green at (718) 635-4396 or agreen2@saintpeters.edu. You may also contact the researcher's faculty mentor, Dr. Jung-ah Choi at jchoi1@saintpeters.edu Please contact the Saint Peter's University IRB at 201 761-6300 or jfeinberg@saintpeters.edu if you have any questions about your rights as a research participant.

STATEMENT OF PERSON OBTAINING INFORMED CONSENT

I have fully explained this research to the participant. I have discussed the purpose and

procedures, the possible risks and benefits, and that participation in this research is completely voluntary. I have invited the participant to ask questions and I have given complete answers to all of the participant's questions.

Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

Date

STATEMENT OF CONSENT

I understand all of the information in this Consent Form. I have gotten complete answers for all of my questions. I freely and voluntarily agree to participate in this research project. I understand that I can withdraw at any time. My signature also indicates that I am 18 years of age or older and that I have received a copy of this consent form.

Participant Signature

Date

Printed Name of Participant

Once you sign this form, you will receive a copy of it to keep and the researcher will keep another copy.

I understand that I will be audio recorded as a part of this research.

Please indicate whether you agree to be audio recorded as a part of this research.

- YES** (*If you change your mind about this at any point, please let the researcher know*)
- NO**

Please indicate whether you agree to have your full name *If applicable*: as well as your (organization's name/ job title/etc.) used alongside your comments in the final (publication/presentation/essay/etc.) that result from this research.

- YES** (*If you change your mind about this at any point, please let the researcher know*)
- NO**
- ALTERATION:**

Name or pseudonym to be used: _____

Participant Signature

Date

Printed Name of Participant

APPENDIX C

RESEARCH INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Did you attend a specialized high school or a zone public school?

Specialized High School

Zone Public School

2. Which high school did you attend?

2a. What was your high school environment like?

3. Why did you participate in a College Now course/courses? Please answer the following that apply.

School counselor suggestion

Parent/guardian wanted me

Teacher suggestion

Friend suggestion

I wanted to be able to transfer credit to a two-year college or university when I graduated from high school

I wanted to be able to transfer credits to a four-year college or university when I graduated from high school

4. Are you a first-generation College student? If so, what has your family support been like during the pathway to college?

5. Which CUNY Senior College did you take your College Now course(s)?

Baruch

Brooklyn College

Lehman College

Medgar Evers College

York College

6. How were you selected to participate in College Now?

6a. Did you inquire about the program based on another students' recommendation?

6b. Did your teacher or guidance counselor make the program available?

7. Did your participation in the College Now program change your attitude toward college?

8. Did you apply and transfer your College Now credits to that college?

8a. If you did, what motivated you to do so?

- 8b. If not, what prevented you from that decision?
9. Did your CUNY sponsor college make the pre-college experience exciting? How?
10. What challenges did you face while participating in the College Now program?
- 10a. Did that make an impact on how you made your college choice?
11. Overall, how would you describe your College Now experience while in high school?
12. How could your College Now experience have been better?
13. What college readiness resources could have enhanced your experience?
14. Was the process to register for a college course easy to understand? Why? Why not?
15. How were the College Now instructors?
16. How did the College Now instructors contribute to your college choice decision making?
17. What do you believe your former high school lacked when it came to college readiness access?
18. What kind of support did your guidance counselors and teachers provide during your junior and senior year of high school?
19. Was there a strong alliance between high school counselors and college admissions offices? How did you benefit?
- Scholarship opportunities
 - College essay workshops
 - College fair
 - Internship
 - College tour
20. After completing high school, did you believe that you had the tools to successfully complete a Bachelor's degree program?

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