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Understanding College Readiness Experiences of Rural High School Students in Pursuit of Postsecondary Education

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We must always remember that education is freedom. Therefore, I dedicate this work to all the freedom seekers, who had the courage to pursue higher education, despite their circumstances.
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ABSTRACT

This is an applied research study, designed to understand the college readiness skills and protective factors (i.e. non-cognitive skills) of rural high school students, who participated in different types of federal college preparedness programs. This investigation compares the college readiness experiences of three groups of twelfth graders, which are as follows: those who did not participate in any college preparedness program; those who participated in Federal TRIO programs, which are designed to assist low-income and potential first-generation college students with college enrollment; and lastly, those who participated in the school’s dual enrollment program, and completed college courses. This research is significant because rural students have lower college enrollment rates compared to other non-rural students nationally. Rural students are behind because they are typically minorities, from low-income households, who attend low performing schools. This study is framed by resiliency theory, which was used to understand how academic resiliency occurs for research participants in the study, in spite of the aforementioned drawbacks.

An online survey and focus group interviews were the research methods used, which led to evidence that the rural students in this study had lower academic outcomes compared to the national statistics for college readiness indicators, such as ACT and SAT scores, grade point average, completed college applications, and knowledge of Federal student aid. Additionally, rural students in this study had very low non-cognitive skills (i.e. protective factors), which are predictors for success in college. Lastly, this study also provides practical steps that can be implemented to create a college readiness culture within the research setting.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Framing the Problem

Scottie’s Story…

I once knew a rural student named Scottie, who came from a severely impoverished background. As the oldest of twelve children living in his single parent household, Scottie had great responsibilities to help his mother with providing for his siblings. Despite his situation, he still had a sincere interest in going to college. I spent several weeks guiding him through the college application process. This was a daunting task because there were so many challenges for Scottie to overcome. For instance, I recall he did not have a cell phone, or access to the internet outside of school. His economic problems were further exacerbated because he was academically challenged, in that he had very low ACT and SAT scores. When I met Scottie, he was in the last semester of his senior year, and he had already used all the college entrance exam waivers that were available to him. With a little encouragement, I was able to convince Scottie that it would be worthwhile for him to scrape up the money to take the exam once again. Imagine my dismay when I heard that his mother began to harass him when she found out about his extra money; which made him feel guilty about investing in his future. Fortunately, his suffering was not in vain; since he was accepted into a four-year institution. However, this would be one of many hurdles for Scottie as he would continue to be faced with dilemmas, wherein he would have to choose between helping his family financially or staying on track for college.

Scottie’s situation is not uncommon for students living in poor communities. According to Noguera (2011), “Over 50 years, numerous studies have documented how poverty and related social conditions (e.g., lack of access to health care, early childhood education, stable housing, etc.) affect child developments and student achievement” (p. 10). These issues are even greater for students who reside in rural communities because they are faced with issues, such as high rates of poverty and limited school resources to prepare them for college. In general, “living in
rural settings bring about a distinct set of challenges, such as low-wage, labor intensive jobs, lack of public transportation, and limited access to services” (Crockett & Carlo, 2016, p. v).

In spite of these challenges, there are still some rural high school students who make it out of the wilderness, both figuratively and literally. I am interested in telling their stories and understanding the resiliency strategies they have adopted, which help them enroll in college. This study aimed to understand the demographic characteristics and student outcomes of rural high students who are resilient in their efforts to enroll in college, and graduate. This investigation also accounted for the role that socioeconomic characteristics play in the students’ ability to reach their goals, as well as their school’s resources.

The thought process is that there are some students, like Scottie, who struggle to reach their goals because they do not take full advantage of resources to help offset their demographic background until it is almost too late; whereas other students participate in college readiness activities throughout middle and high school, which may put them in a better position to enroll in college immediately following high school graduation. The research setting for studying this phenomenon is unique in that it is the host site for three college readiness initiatives, which are federally funded TRIO programs that aim to prepare low-income and potential first-generation college students for college enrollment. These Federal TRIO programs help students acquire skills, knowledge and attitudes towards college preparation.

The first of the three federal TRIO programs serving students in the research setting is Upward Bound, which “serves high school students from low-income families; and high school students from families in which neither parent holds a bachelor’s degree” (U. S. Department of Education, 2017). “The goal of Upward Bound is to increase the rate at which participants complete secondary education and enroll in and graduate from institutions of postsecondary
education” (U. S. Department of Education, 2017). The second program is called, Talent Search or Educational Talent Search (used interchangeably). According to the U.S. Department of Education (2017), the Talent Search program “provides academic, career, and financial counseling to its participants and encourages them to graduate from high school and continue on to and complete their postsecondary education” (U. S. Department of Education, 2017).

Additionally, “Talent Search encourages persons who have not completed education programs at the secondary level or postsecondary level to enter or reenter and complete postsecondary education, the goal being to increase the number of youth from disadvantaged backgrounds who complete high school and enroll in and complete their postsecondary education” (U. S. Department of Education, 2017).

Currently, there are two separately funded Talent Search programs delivering services to students in the research setting, which means there are technically three TRIO programs available at the school. The Federal government stipulates that students can only participate in one TRIO program at a time, which will reduce the likelihood of duplication in results. There will be more information regarding the history of Federal TRIO programs and more details about these three programs, in particular, within subsequent sections of this dissertation in practice.

Statement of the Problem of Practice

This dissertation in practice will focus on a problem identified in a rural high school in the Southeastern part of the United States. In this region, there is a significant disparity between black and white high school graduation, and college enrollment rates for students. Low rates of college matriculation may be attributed to the geographic location of the research setting, wherein “adults from rural areas tend to have lower average education levels than adults from urban areas” (Crockett & Carlo, 2016, p. 9). Additionally, there may be other factors to consider
when determining why some populations lag behind in high school graduation and college enrollment. This study will assume that demographic characteristics, both cognitive and noncognitive skills, are implications for college enrollment. Therefore, minority students who live in high poverty, rural areas, with limited school resources and parental support, are likely to be at a disadvantage when preparing for college enrollment.

Since a student cannot enroll in college until they graduate from high school, secondary graduation rates can be used as predictors of college enrollment. According to state level data from the Department of Education, students who reside in the same state as the anonymous research setting for this study, are graduating from high school at a rate of 77% (“2014 – 2015 Graduation Rates,” 2016). Students in the school district of the research setting are graduating from high school at a lower rate, of 65% (“2014 – 2015 Graduation Rates,” 2016). That means that students in the study are behind 12%, for the state’s high school graduation rate (“2014 – 2015 Graduation Rates,” 2016). The disparity is further exacerbated when examined by race. For instance, in the state, white females graduate from high school at a rate of 86.3%; and white males graduate at a rate of 79.4 % (“2014 – 2015 Graduation Rates,” 2016). Adversely, black or African American students are graduating from high school, in the state, at significantly lower rates; wherein black females graduate at 73.1% and black males graduate at 62.9% (“2014 – 2015 Graduation Rates,” 2016). The high school population of the students in the research setting are predominately black or African American, which may explain why the school district is so far behind the state’s high school graduation rate.

**Significance of the Research Problem**

This research is significant because the findings have the potential to influence educational policy for programs and initiatives that can help increase college enrollment rates for
rural students, as well as close the gap between black and white students who graduate from high school—thereby increasing their eligibility for college enrollment. State colleges and universities will be interested because findings from this study may help them tailor their recruitment and admissions strategies to help increase rural high school graduates’ enrollment to institutions, especially those located in the urban areas. Federal and state funded programs, that are designed to increase college enrollment for low income and potential first-generation students, will be interested in this research effort because it may help justify their existence, as well as help to ensure continued funding to provide programmatic services. Schools and school districts, with similar student populations as those in the research setting, will also be interested because the information may assist them in meeting state mandates and goals, geared towards college and career readiness of high school students.

**Justification for the Research Problem**

In the early days of education, college was only available to wealthy white males, whose families could afford to finance a proper education for their sons. In recent decades, individuals with lower socioeconomic statuses have been able to access opportunities in higher education. This is partly due to governmental resources made available through programs, such as Federal Student Aid (U. S. Department of Federal Student Aid, 2017). This federal program is responsible for “managing the student financial assistance programs authorized under Title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965”, that provide financial assistance in the form of grants, loans, and work-study funds to eligible college students (U. S. Department of Federal Student Aid, 2017).

Now that money for college is available, there are other circumstances preventing college enrollment for rural students. Due to their attendance at low performing schools, the outcomes
are rural high school students have lower test scores and grade point averages, and lack of rigorous course selection, which puts them at a disadvantage for college enrollment. Additionally, their parents do not have the means or experiences to take up the slack from schools. When these challenges supersede some students’ ability to enroll in college, the implication is that higher education becomes exclusively for wealthier students again. All of these concerns are justification to carry out a research study to understand the challenges rural high school students, when attempting to pursue a college degree.

Social Implications of the Research Problem

There is a societal need to help increase the number of college students who come from disadvantaged backgrounds—especially students from rural communities. According to Cynthia Hudley, et al. (2009), students who come from privileged backgrounds are more likely to attend college; while underprivileged students are less likely to access higher education (p. 438). For those low-income students who do enroll in college, the risk of not completing a four-year degree doubles for even the most talented students (Hudley, et al., 2009, p. 438). These facts are relevant in making policy decisions that will ensure all capable students have an opportunity to access higher education, regardless of their socioeconomic status, parental involvement and educational attainment, and race. This is important for our society because we all gain from having a highly educated workforce. Therefore, this research also impacts target audiences associated with various job markets and industries.

State significance. During the Obama Administration, it became a priority of the U.S. Department of Education to make sure states, districts, and schools worked towards college and career readiness for all students (An & Taylor, 2015). The impact of this policy is evidenced by the state level policy for assessment standards, which mandates the state’s K-12 assessment
system to ensure that all students graduate from high school ready for college and careers. Oftentimes, these reforms garner unintended consequences that disproportionately impact high “minority” and high poverty schools because sometimes these institutions become more focused on meeting state standards than on helping students (Welton & Williams, 2015). This could result in too much emphasis placed on high-stakes testing, and very little effort, on behalf of schools, to establish a college-going culture, beyond test scores (Welton & Williams, 2015).

Local significance. The research setting is situated in a community that has a low college enrollment rate. According to the United States Census Bureau (2009-2013), the county where research participants reside, has a population of 46,281 residents; of which 55% are black or African American; 32% are white alone; 10% are Hispanic or Latino, and 1% are of mixed race and/or considered as a minority of other races (“State & County Quick Facts,” 2015). Majority of the students that attend low-performing schools in local school district are predominately black or African Americans and Hispanic or Latino. The rate of the county’s residents with a high school diploma or higher is roughly 77%, and the rate of individuals with a bachelor’s degree or higher (age 25+) is 14% (“State & County Quick Facts,” 2015).

As you can glean from these statistics, there is a noticeable difference between the county’s residents who have obtained a degree in higher education, versus those who only have a high school diploma. The county’s rate of college graduates is 14%, which is roughly half the national rate of 28% (“State & County Quick Facts,” 2015). In U.S. Census Bureau data from 2009-2013, the county’s median household income reported was $35,380, and 26% of the residents were classified as persons living below the poverty level (“State & County Quick Facts,” 2015). This economic description in this rural community is problematic because very
few citizens leave this impoverished community, which suggest that they are stuck, and bounded by their limited educational opportunities.

The low educational attainment and low-income status should come as no surprise in this rural area. Historically, attaining a college degree was not common for the working-class residents in this rural community, wherein many residents held menial, labor intensive jobs in agriculture (e.g. picking tobacco and strawberries). Today, many high school students are being herded into the military, vocational programs, and a fast-growing prison system where they are being trained to work as correctional officers.

**Implications for Practice**

This study has the potential to influence college readiness practices of the school district because the administrators, faculty, and staff may find the study’s results to be informative when making decisions about college readiness curriculum. Additionally, this research may help to build and enhance school partnerships with Federal TRIO programs, to better situate these partners as valued resources for the school in helping them meet state objectives for making sure all students are college and career ready.

Tangible outcomes may result in the creation of a training manual on best practices for college and career readiness, as well as a survey instrument that can be used on an on-going basis to assess college readiness for students throughout the school district. These tools could inform the practices of district leaders who make fiscal decisions pertaining college readiness resources. Moreover, the study’s findings may help decision makers ensure students have access to rigorous academic courses to strengthen chances of college enrollment; as well as build their non-cognitive skill set. These strategies could lead to an initiative that would change the way students are experiencing college readiness in the school, as well as school district.
Deficiencies in the Evidence

There are a significant number of studies on college enrollment patterns of students in urban settings; however, most of these type studies are quantitative in nature. Therefore, most college enrollment studies do not depict the true realities and surrounding circumstances that determine college readiness for students; especially those living in poor, rural communities. This means that there are limited sources with the same goal as this study, which aims to provide both descriptive statistics on rural students, as well as qualitative data on their skills, knowledge and attitudes related to college readiness. Another deficiency is the limited amount of information available from the school district in which the research setting belongs. At one point, roughly five years ago, the school district was actively tracking college enrollment and postsecondary plans of recent high school graduates. However, there is no evidence that suggests the school district is still collecting such data. Furthermore, there is no current effort to gather data related to understanding what the skills, knowledge and attitudes are for students, which determine their college readiness needs.

Relating the Discussion to Audiences

Rural students are the main beneficiaries of this research study because they will have more opportunities to access higher education. Additionally, the schools and districts that serve rural students will also gain from this qualitative investigation because it will help them shape their policy decisions based on more than quantitative test scores and enrollment data. This study will help school leaders in the research setting understand the needs of their students, and hopefully, inspire them to develop programs and partnerships dedicated to college preparedness. Lastly, rural communities, such as the one associated with the research setting, benefit from their
citizens earning degrees, which may improve their socioeconomic status and improve the overall economic climate of the community.

**The Purpose of the Study and Research Questions**

The purpose of this mixed method study, is to understand the skills, knowledge and attitudes of rural high school students in their preparation for college enrollment and whether these beliefs are shaped by their participation in different types of college readiness programs. The research setting is a rural high school located in the southeastern region of the United States. The research participants are high school seniors, some of whom are participants in Federal TRIO programs, which serve students who come from low income households, and will be the first in their immediate family to attend college. The experiences of TRIO participants were compared to non-TRIO participants, to better understand how twelfth-graders are being prepared for college readiness in the research setting, and to interpret whether these students’ beliefs are shaped by their participation in different types of college readiness programs and activities. This scholarly investigation is framed by resiliency theory, to assist the researcher in identifying college readiness skills and protective factors used by research participants in overcoming challenges in their pursuit of college enrollment.

**Research questions.** The main research question guiding the study is, “What are the skills, knowledge and attitudes related to the college readiness of rural twelfth-grade students, enrolled in a low-income school district?” The following questions will be used to help answer the main research question:

1) What are the college readiness skills of twelfth-grade students enrolled in a rural high school?
2) What are the protective factors of twelfth-grade students enrolled in a rural high school?

3) How do college readiness skills and protective factors differ between rural high school participants in Federal TRIO programs, and students who do not participate in Federal TRIO programs (including Dual Enrollment students)?

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

**Resiliency and resilience.** The theory of resiliency and resilience is often used by psychologists to help youth explore their ability and strength to grow through adversity (Richardson, 2002). Although this is not a study focused solely on resiliency and resilience, the theory will be used as a lens to help understand the college readiness experiences of participants in the study. Unlike traditional academic grounding in theory, resiliency and resilience theory takes a phenomenological approach to identifying characteristics of survivor; mostly young people, living in high risk situations (Richardson, 2002). Therefore, the assumption is the research participants in this study are living under circumstances that may threaten their college readiness.

Glenn E. Richardson (2002) developed a metatheory of resiliency and resilience, which is described as taking place in three phases (p. 307). Phase one identifies resilient qualities in research participants captured by phenomenological identification of developmental assets and protective strategies (Richardson, 2002). The second phase describes the disruptive and integrative process for accessing resilient qualities (Richardson, 2002). The third phase, applies to the resilience part of the metatheory, which suggests that clients and students receive help in
discovering and applying “the force that drives a person to grow through adversity and disruptions” (Richardson, 2002, p. 307).

Richardson suggests there are outcomes associated with each phase. The first phase produces outcomes which help researchers describe the resilient “qualities, assets, or protective factors” that help people grow through adverse situations (Richardson, 2002, p. 308). The outcome of the second phase relates to the resiliency process in which individuals cope with disruptions, whether positive or negative, that can change the course of their current realities (Richardson, 2002). In this second phase, research participants also begin the reintegrative process, wherein they can go back to their comfort zone, which involves the characteristics they possessed before the disruption occurred; or they can begin reintegration with loss (Richardson, 2002). The third phase, is when researchers help clients and students discover the motivational forces within, to reach self-actualization, by resiliently reintegrating from disruptions (Richardson, 2002). Figure 1, below, is a model depicting how individuals move through the three phases of Richardson’s Metatheory of Resilience and Resiliency.

![Figure 1. Richardson’s metatheory of resilience and resiliency model (2002). This figure illustrates three phases of resiliency.](image-url)
Application of Resiliency Theory

In Richardson’s metatheory model, there are three phases of resiliency and resilience. However, this study will only use the first two phases, as a snapshot, to help provide context for the college readiness experiences of rural high school students. Therefore, the focus will be on resiliency specifically, wherein phase one of Richardson’s metatheory will be used to identify the demographic characteristics and protective factors exhibited by rural high school students in the study; and phase two will be used to identify the types of disruptions that can occur when rural high school students prepare for college enrollment. Phase three will not be used in the conceptual framework of the study, due to the limited time provided for carrying out the study, and the investigator’s lack of expertise in psychology, wherein phase three is mostly applied by therapists who are trained to assess clients and coach them traumatic situations.

The conceptual framework of the study is based on the assumption that rural high school students are at a disadvantaged with regards to their college readiness skills because of their demographic characteristics (i.e. race, socioeconomic status, parent’s educational background, household structure, employment status and limited school resources). The conceptual framework also assumes that rural high school students may have developed protective factors, such as skills, knowledge, and attitudes to help offset drawbacks that may be associated with their personal traits. Lastly, the conceptual framework takes into consideration the disruptions that may occur in a student’s college planning and enrollment. Individuals learn to cope with routine disruptions or life prompts, whether internal or external, such as stressors, adversity opportunities and other forms of change, because of their learned behaviors in dealing with experiences from previous disruptions (Richardson, 2002).
When the life prompts are normal for the individual, they can remain in a comfortable space, called biopsychospiritual homeostasis, captured in phase one of the metatheory (Richardson, 2002). However, when unplanned life prompts occur (whether positive or negative) this can thrust an individual into the second phase of the metatheory called, disruptions or reactive disruptions. This is the point where the process for resilience begins. Keeping in mind, that the conceptual framework for this study purposely focuses on understanding what happens during phases one and two; real life accounts of challenges for rural high school students, like Scottie from the story mentioned earlier, demonstrate the importance of students developing protective strategies to deal with poverty. For example, a negative disruption occurs when Scottie has the unanticipated cost of retaking the ACT or SAT to meet college admissions requirements. On the other hand, a positive disruption came from the support of a community member who donated money to help Scottie with the cost of retaking the ACT or SAT. By focusing on phases one and two, the investigation reveals the types of disruptions that students encounter when preparing for college. More rationale for this decision will be provided in Chapter three, during the discussion on research methods.

The conceptual framework is depicted in Figure 2, on page 15. The illustration is based on Richardson’s Metatheory Model (2002), however, revised to show the emphasis on phase one, wherein the downward facing black arrows represent life prompts, and the yellow arrows facing upward represent the protective factors that students develop to address the life prompts. Biopsychospiritual homeostasis is represented in a yellow circle to show that it is also a part of phase one. The second phase is represented by a blue circle, which shows that students can encounter unplanned interruptions to their college readiness experiences; and these circumstances can be either positive or negative.
Figure 2. Conceptual framework for understanding college readiness experiences of rural high school students. This figure illustrates phase 1 of Richardson’s Metatheory Model.

Although, the theoretical framework for understanding how rural students are being prepared for college, is based on Resiliency Theory, the researcher is specifically concerned with the academic resiliency of students, and what factors put them at risk for low academic achievement” (Morales & Trotman, 2004). The next section, will explain the researcher’s positionality for carrying out this study.

Positionality

Personal background. Early on in life, I understood that I would one day attain a college degree. Perhaps, my upbringing contributed to this level of confidence. I was raised in an upper-middle class, two-parent household, wherein both of my parents were college educated. In fact, my father earned three advanced degrees (i.e. Master of Education, Master of Public Administration, and a Master of Business Administration), and my mother was a college
graduate and high school business education teacher. Additionally, I was fortunate enough to attend good schools that offered rigorous courses to prepare me for college. For example, I participated in a dual enrollment program that allowed me to get ahead by earning college credit while in high school. I would not have achieved my goal without my community’s ethos, which encouraged my pursuit of higher education.

In retrospect, I believe my parents deserve a great deal of credit for my success. I was the beneficiary of their hard work, and those who had helped them. Many of my peers were not as fortunate. I understood that I would have to work hard to maintain what I had been given. After all, I was still a black female who would have to someday leave the cocoon my parents had so graciously provided, and fend against the harsh realities of discrimination, racism, and other obstacles that could have potentially prevented my successful completion of college.

Nevertheless, I endured the struggles. Some might even agree that I have overcome because I am completing a doctoral degree. Even though I have struggled, there are some parts of my personal background that may create blind spots in my ability to relate to experiences of the research participants in this study. Although, I share the same race as many of the students in the research setting; I did not grow up in a low-income household, nor was I the first person in my family to earn a college degree, and I did not attend a rural high school. I acknowledge that my background may result in some biases towards me, and vice versa towards the research participants. However, I think my biases are overshadowed by my sincere interest in seeing these students succeed. I believe that all students, regardless of their race, class, or family background; should have the opportunity to pursue a college degree, if they have the willingness and aptitude.

My drive for helping students is akin to that of Harriet Tubman and other Underground Railroad conductors, who after obtaining their own freedom, they decided to aid others in their
journey to freedom. Every time I assist a student with their college plans, I envision myself as a modern-day conductor on an Underground Railroad, with the calling to provide refuge to students who want to escape poverty through higher education. Being a part of the movement to increase the number of college graduates, who come from low income and non-degree attaining households, I gain a greater sense of purpose, rather than resting on my own accomplishments. My activism is carried out every time I help a student through the educational pipeline. When my students win, I believe we all win as a society.

**Professional expertise.** My past and current professional experiences uniquely position me to conduct research on the college readiness of rural high school students. My passion for eliminating inequalities, especially in Education, began over the course of several years that I spent working for the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center; a nonprofit located in Cincinnati, OH. This organization is dedicated to American slavery, as well as Underground Railroad education and research. While working for this organization, I gained an appreciation for history, advocacy, and leadership. The Freedom Center is where I developed my passion for helping disenfranchised groups receive fair and equitable treatment. Naturally, these experiences have prepared me to serve as an advocate for equity in Education.

According to the U.S. Department of Education (2016), “Federal TRIO Programs are outreach and student services programs designed to identify and provide services for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds (para. 1). I am currently employed with a Federal TRIO program called, Educational Talent Search or Talent Search; which is funded to operate on the campus of Florida A&M University in Tallahassee, Florida. During my tenure with the FAMU Talent Search program I have served as a counselor, as well as the interim program director for several months. In these roles, I have provided guidance to middle and high school students in
rural communities. I have also been fortunate to provide programmatic vision and administrative oversight, which allowed me to increase the organization’s capacity.

Federal TRIO programs, affectionately known as TRIO, consist of “eight programs targeted to serve and assist low-income individuals, first-generation college students, and individuals with disabilities to progress through the academic pipeline from middle school to post-baccalaureate programs” (U.S. Department of Education Office of Postsecondary Education, 2016, para. 1). The programs are as follows: “Educational Opportunity Centers, Ronald E. McNair Post-baccalaureate Achievement, Student Support Services, Talent Search, Upward Bound, Upward Bound Math-Science, and Veterans Upward Bound” (U. S. Department of Education Office of Postsecondary Education, 2016, para. 1). “TRIO also includes a training program for directors and staff of TRIO projects” (U. S. Department of Education, 2016, para. 1).

Additionally, TRIO professionals have the opportunity to participate in professional associations that are designed to “promote awareness, education, and advocacy for TRIO personnel” (FL TRIO, 2016). I am proud member of two professional organizations for TRIO employees called, Florida TRIO, formerly known as the Florida Association of Educational Opportunity Program Personnel (FAE OPP), and the Southeastern Association of Educational Opportunity Program Personnel (SAE OPP). I have actively served on committees to help plan annual conferences that provide a platform for TRIO professionals to engage in conversations about issues and policies that impact TRIO students.

In total, I have spent several years working with Federal TRIO programs. First, I served as the academic coordinator for the Florida A&M University Upward Bound program. Secondly, in my current role I work for the Florida A&M University Talent Search program, wherein I
assist disadvantaged students from rural communities with fulfilling their dreams of graduating from college. In this capacity, I have had the opportunity to build positive relationships with students, parents, school leaders, and other stakeholders. In the process, I have become quite knowledgeable about some of the educational needs and concerns of students who come from rural communities.

My expertise on the subject matter comes from informal observations in schools, and testimonials of students, like Scottie. I know dozens of students who come from similar circumstances. Some of whom have gone through college successfully, and others who have struggled—and even dropped out. I am very passionate about understanding their experiences because I think my research efforts will help to educate policy makers on effective strategies for serving low income, potential first-generation college students, who reside in rural areas.

In conclusion, this chapter has outlined the problem of practice that this study addresses, which is the low college enrollment rate of rural students. Chapter two will explore this problem further in a review of literature on the threats to, and best practices for college readiness.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

Framing the Study

A literary review of various sources aims to provide insight on the research topic, and other concepts that were introduced in conceptual framework for the study, discussed in Chapter one. In order to accomplish this objective, the literature review has been organized into three sections. The first, will focus on providing an understanding of the research topic by defining “college readiness,” and describing the demographic characteristics of rural individuals. The second and third sections of the literature review will focus on explaining the implications of demographic characteristics and protective factors, on college readiness for rural high school students.

Understanding the Research Topic

Definition of college readiness. Historically, college readiness has been defined primarily in terms of quantitative measures, such as high school courses taken, grade point averages and test scores on college entrance exams (Conley, 2007). More recent practices recommend, not only considering cognitive factors, such as academic achievement and coursework; but, also taking into account the noncognitive factors possessed in order to properly assess the college readiness of students (Conley, 2007). It is imperative that “all facets of college readiness must be identified and eventually measured if more students are to be made college ready” (Conley, 2007, p. 10).

For a student to be considered “college ready” they should demonstrate a solid understanding of the expectations in college courses, and the content presented in said courses;
as well as complete the course with the knowledge and lessons that the course was intended to provide (Conley, 2007). Additionally, a college ready student must have an understanding of the culture and structure of postsecondary education, as well as a positive attitude and aptitude to successfully maneuver through the academic and social environment on a college campus (Conley, 2007).

Numerous factors must be considered when defining college readiness in schools, as well as for individuals. There are many variables to consider, such as the internal and external factors of a school’s environment; which include “contextual skills and awareness, academic behaviors, key content, and habits of mind” (Conley, 2007, p. 9). These factors are similar to the protective factors discussed in Richardson’s Metatheory of Resiliency and Resilience.

**Characteristics of rural students.** Currently, there is no universal definition to describe rural communities, however, the federal government’s descriptions of “rural” gives researchers some guidance (Crockett & Carlo, 2016). Certain aspects should be considered when describing rural areas, such as “population density, community size, land use (e.g., farming, mining, logging), and geographic isolation” (distance from larger urban landscapes) (Crockett & Carlo, 2016, pp. 2-3). These aspects may not apply to all rural designations. Therefore, researchers need to understand the complexity of rural communities, and that there is no cookie cutter approach to describing these communities (Crockett & Carlo, 2016).

Although, indicators of rural areas may vary, here are some things we do know about the people who live in these types of communities. As of 2010, there are 51 million people who reported residing in rural communities across the United States (Crockett & Carlo, 2016). Additionally, there are approximately 12 million children under the age of 18, who live in rural communities (Crockett & Carlo, 2016). In comparison to urban areas, poverty rates are higher in
rural areas, and minority children in these communities are the poorest. According to Crocket and Carlo (2016), in 2009 there were 36% of black children, and 31% of Latino children who made up 36% of those living in poverty; which was much higher than the national rate of 22% (Crockett & Carlo, 2016). The poverty rates in rural areas can be attributed to low educational levels adults, and consequently, rural areas do not offer employment opportunities that require high levels of education (Crocket & Carlo, 2016).

**Implications Related to Demographic Characteristics**

Demographic characteristics of rural residents present many disadvantages, which can create an environment of stress and adversity, similar to the situation described in Richardson’s Metatheory (2002) and the conceptual framework for the study. The assumption is demographic characteristics such as race, socioeconomic status, educational attainment of students and parents, can pose a threat to the state of being “college ready” for rural students.

**Race.** There is “ample research which illustrates poverty’s impact on multiple facets of individuals’ lives, including health outcomes, food security, exposure to violence, and educational outcomes” (Rigby & Tredway, 2015, p. 4). Minorities (African Americans and Latinos) face “organizational and social structures that systematically disenfranchise their access to goods, services, and opportunities” (Rigby & Tredway, 2015, p. 4). These disparities have a long-lasting impact on minority students who live in impoverished communities.

According to Andrew J. Fuligni and Christina Hardway (2004), “adolescents from Latino and African American backgrounds appear to be less prepared to become healthy, productive, and successful adults” in comparison to their peers (p. 99). As a result, minority youth, aged 18 and over who do not attend college, have more difficulty finding employment than their white counterparts who have similar educational backgrounds (Fuligni & Hardway, 2004). Although,
race and ethnic identity can hinder college readiness for rural students; minority families have
cultural resources that help them adapt to their environment, such as close family ties, values and
practices, and religious beliefs (Crockett & Carlo, 2016). These resources are considered
protective factors which demonstrates resiliency.

**Socioeconomic status.** As previously discussed in the section describing rural
characteristics; students in rural areas typically come from high poverty communities (Herman,
et al., 2013). However, this section will provide more depth to understanding the problem by
highlighting a study conducted by Hudley, et al. (2009), which documented the challenges that
some high school students faced when preparing for college by using a model called, “Attinasi’s
two-stage process of college-going” to conceptualize high school behaviors, attitudes, and
experiences as the process of getting ready for college” (Hudley, et al., 2009, p. 444). The study
found that “low socio-economic status doubles the risk that a talented student will not complete a
four-year degree” (Hudley, et al., 2009, p. 438).

**Parental involvement and educational attainment.** An integral part of a student’s
college readiness experience involves the role of their parents. First-generation college students,
meaning the first in their immediate household to attend a 4-year institution, face unique set of
challenges in college (Hudley, et al., 2009). Parents who attend a college or university have
positive effects on their children’s college readiness experiences. The parental figures typically
transfer their educational beliefs on to their children to create a continuation of education in the
family (Allen, 2013). Parents of second generation college students also demonstrate positive
investment strategies, use examples of college to promote success to their children at an early
age (Allen, 2013). These parents have intentional conversations on a consistent basis, which
helps to prepare their children for college readiness and success (Allen, 2013).
Additionally, college educated parents keep their children engaged in extracurricular activities which help their children to be well-rounded, and these interactions provide a platform for their conversations about college and success (Allen, 2013). Involved parents also encourage their children to attend their alma maters ensured their child’s success, and provided a familiar environment for them (Allen, 2013). Lastly, college educated parents believe encouraging their children to surpass their accomplishments in higher education helps to instill similar educational values when their children enter adulthood, that can be passed down to the next generation (Allen, 2013).

Positive parental involvement can enhance a student’s understanding of college readiness. However, children from first-generation households do not experience parental involvement in this way, because their parents never attended college. Therefore, first-generation college students have to develop protective factors (skills, knowledge, and attitudes) from other resources, such as their school, community groups, or college readiness initiatives, such Federal TRIO programs. These aspects will be discussed further in subsequent sections of the literature review.

**Academic achievement.** College success is often determined by a student’s academic achievement in high school. College enrollment is based upon a student’s grade point average, ACT or SAT scores, and rigorous coursework. These factors may indicate whether or not a student has the academic mastery of key content knowledge and cognitive skills to be deemed college ready (Conley, 2007). These factors will be discussed in more detail in the next several sub-sections; from test scores to financial aid.

**Test scores.** One of the college enrollment thresholds for rural students is to overcome make an adequate score on college entrance exams, such as the ACT and the SAT. These exams
are defined as College Readiness Benchmarks (Conley, 2007). For example, if students master at least 75% or greater on the ACT, they will have a chance of obtaining a course grade of C or better in college (Conley, 2007). The ACT and SAT are rooted in probability and do not directly measure a student’s thinking skills, as well as other cognitive and noncognitive factors that may demonstrate they have other qualities that may suggest their success in college (Conley, 2007). The ACT assumes that students who meet these benchmarks are ready for college. However, students in rural communities attend schools that lack resources to provide test preparation. Therefore, rural students struggle to earn the minimum ACT and SAT scores for admissions. This means that they may not be able to enroll in colleges and universities with competitive admissions requirements, nor would they be eligible for most scholarships which require high test scores.

In a study on the college entrance examination score deficits in Ag-intensive, rural, socioeconomically distressed North Carolina counties, researchers Herman, Huffman, Anderson, and Golden (2013) reported that “the rural/non-rural difference in college enrollment has largely been attributed to differences in socioeconomic and demographic backgrounds of students in these areas” (p. 45). This is evidenced by the differences in the college entrance exam scores of urban versus rural students (Herman, et al., 2013). The problem has been so prevalent that research analysts have been able to predict how a student will perform on the SAT college entrance exam, just by correlating the student’s family income and parents’ education; wherein students from lower socioeconomic households perform lower on the SAT than students from more privileged backgrounds (Herman, et al., 2013).

Explanations for disparity in test scores, between urban rural students, can be attributed to the lack of money that rural students have, to purchase test preparation services like those that
wealthier students benefit from (Herman, et al., 2013). Rural students do not have access to the same resources that urban students have in relationship to college enrollment and degree attainment (Herman, et al., 2013). Having a lack of resources can be very debilitating for rural students. Test scores can also take a toll on their self-esteem and attitudes towards going to college. The Herman, et al. (2013) study found that rural students have lower education and career aspirations compared to urban students (p. 46).

**Grade point average.** College admission requirements at some institutions have a minimum grade point average of at 2.0, which is the same as most state level high school graduation requirements, and are considered low to average academic performance for college enrollment. On the other hand, there are some institutions with such a highly competitive pool of applicants that they do not quote a minimum grade point average for admission. Instead, these institutions assess academic records based upon the average grade point averages of the entire freshman class of the previous enrollment year, which could sometime result in students being accepted who have earned higher than a 4.0 grade point average.

When highly successful students apply to competitive institutions, the mean goes up, leaving some students reaching for least a 3.5, or higher just to compete. These measures for high school grade point averages are changing so rapidly without regard to implications on disadvantaged students who attended rural high schools. These inflated grade point averages reduce the impact of hard working average students being accepted. For instance, a “B” average in high school today, may reflect course mastery equivalent to a “C” average from decades ago (Conley, 2007). This presents a problem for rural students who attend schools that do not offer rigorous courses, such as Advanced Placement and Honors, which can add weight to a student’s cumulative grade point average.
**Rigorous course preparation.** Taking rigorous courses in high school is also an indicator of a student’s college readiness. Many students will take Advanced placement and Honors courses in an effort to boost their grade point average. However, recently, there have been growing concerns from admission offices of colleges and universities that it is hard to determine whether high school instructors are “actually” teaching courses with the same rigor as institutions of higher education. Therefore, course titles must be approved by college admissions offices, in advance (Conley, 2007). When there is a lack of alignment between course learning outcomes between high schools and postsecondary institutions, this can threaten a student’s true assessment of being college ready (Conley, 2007).

**Dual enrollment programs.** College readiness can also be determined by student participation in dual enrollment programs. The belief is that taking college courses while in high school, especially in the senior year, can increase college access and success, reduce time to a college degree, and save students money (Conley, 2007). Students who dual enroll are believed to earn higher grades and are more likely to attain a college degree than students who are not dual enrolled (Conley, 2007). Dual enrollment can also reduce the need for remedial courses for participants (Conley, 2007).

**College selection.** Students who are college ready understand the college application process. Many students need assistance in writing personal statements and preparing resumes. Since the requirements for college applications has become so competitive, there are an increasing number of high schools that serve high proportions of potentially, first-generation college students, who are making it mandatory for students to apply to at least one college, during the fall semester of their senior year (Conlel, 2007). However, it is still imperative that these students receive hands on assistance with completing applications.
**Financial aid.** College readiness can be determined also by a student’s understanding of financial aid options. However, working-class families and first-generation households are the least educated on the financial aid processes (Conley, 2007). They are especially at a disadvantaged compared to economically well-off students (Conley, 2007). College readiness means that students are familiar with the financial aid system, as well as timelines and documentation requirements (Conley, 2007). Therefore, students who cannot conceptualize the institutional bureaucracy associated with the demanding administrative processes that institutions have to secure federal student aid, may miss out on grants, loans and work-study.

**Implications Related to Protective Factors**

The conceptual framework of this study suggests that rural students develop protective factors to help them become college ready. For the purpose of this study, protective factors are seen as noncognitive indicators, such as the skills, knowledge and attitudes that students need to possess in order to be college ready. The following sections will discuss some of these indicators, as well as resources such as Federal TRIO programs, schools, and community stakeholders that can assist students with developing skills, knowledge, and attitudes for college readiness.

**Self-concept.** If a student has positive self-concept it can influence their attitudes about college. Self-concept also relates to academic achievement. In a study conducted by researchers DeFreitas & Rinn (2013), they examined the self-concepts of high school students based on variables such as ethnic differences in verbal and math self-concept scores, as well as GPA” (DeFreitas & Rinn, 2013, p. 59). There were 167 research participants (48 African American, 86 Latino, 14 white, and 19 Asian) (DeFreitas & Rinn, 2013, p. 59). A total of 79.6% of the participants were female and first-generation college students (DeFreitas & Rinn, 2013, p. 59).
The research participants were enrolled in a 4-year public institution in the southwestern United States (p. 59). A demographic questionnaire was administered; as well as self-description questionnaire designed to measure their self-concepts (DeFreitas & Rinn, 2013, p. 59). The main finding was that “higher verbal and math self-concept scores are related to better academic achievement” among the diverse sample of participants (DeFreitas & Rinn, 2013, p. 62). The study also found that students with lower self-confidence performed lower academically (DeFreitas & Rinn, 2013, p. 62). Regardless of whether the students were first-generation college students, “high verbal and math self-concepts” were tied to “higher academic achievement” (DeFreitas & Rinn, 2013, p. 62).

**Non-cognitive skills.** Contextual skills and awareness are needed for college preparation. A lack of understanding of the context of college can result in students feeling alienated, frustrated, and even humiliated during their freshman year (Conley, 2007). Students who possess interpersonal and social skills are more successful (Conley, 2007). College requires certain skills, such as working well with others, interacting with faculty and staff, and feeling comfortable around diverse groups of people (Conley, 2007). Non-cognitive skills can make the difference in whether a student persists in college or drops out; regardless of their intellect and academic competencies (Conley, 2007). William Sedlacek (2004) believes that a student’s potential for succeeding in college should not be solely based on standardized test, or college entrance exams, such as the ACT or SAT. Alternatively, the student’s non-cognitive skills should also be assessed as predictors for their success in college. The reason non-cognitive skills should be considered because the traditional measures can be biased in not recognizing the other strengths that are not measured on ACT or SAT (Sedlacek, 2004). Students who are impacted the most by this practice of only relying on standardized tests, are usually nontraditional students and minorities.
Therefore, the recommendation for educators who are interested in equitable opportunities in education, is to look beyond ACT or SAT scores when assessing college readiness for students (Sedlacek, 2004).

**Federal TRIO programs.** Since the 1960s, there has been federal legislation to address the need to provide educational opportunities for disadvantaged students. President Lyndon B. Johnson is one of the most notable governmental pioneers who helped to advance equal rights in education by signing the 1964 Civil Rights Act (Baptiste, et al., 2004). Johnson was personally compelled to ensure racial and economic equality (Baptiste, et al., 2004). However, his work did not stop there; in 1965 Johnson signed the Higher Education Act which provided federal aid, loans and work study programs to the economically disadvantaged students (Baptiste, et al., 2004). In an interview, Johnson reflected upon his experience of growing up in poverty as child living in a small, rural town in Texas by stating, “When I was young, poverty was so common we didn’t know it had a name” (Baptiste, et al., 2004). President Johnson’s personal understanding of poverty help shape a political platform which was built on two messages often referred to as, “The Great Society” and the “War on Poverty” (Baptiste, et al., 2004).

Today, this legislation provides Federal TRIO grants to educational entities who are charged with “identifying qualified individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds, to prepare them for a program of postsecondary education, and to provide support services for such students who are pursuing programs of postsecondary education” (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). There are eight TRIO programs being funded nationally at various institutions of higher education, local school districts, and nonprofits. They are as follows: Educational Opportunity Centers, Ronald E. McNair Postbaccalaureate Achievement, Student Support Services, Talent Search, Upward Bound, Upward Bound Math-Science, Veterans Upward Bound, and Training
Programs for Federal TRIO Programs Staff (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). This is a massive undertaking on behalf of the federal government to provide funding to these organizations in order to address the problem of low-college enrollment rates of low-income and potential first-generation college students.

First-generation students are likely to receive less support from their families for attending college (Girmard & Maddus, 2004). This is because their parents did not earn a college degree, which means they cannot relate to their children’s experiences. They are less likely to be supportive to them as they go through the process of preparing for college. This is where college-access programs, such as Federal TRIO programs, can be helpful in filling in the gap for first-generation college students, wherein staff members often help educate parents and family members on their role in helping students with college enrollment and financial aid.

A qualitative study by Marsh-McDonald and Sybil Schroeder (2012), was conducted “to understand the experiences of ten women from a pool of 100 Upward Bound participants, who were transitioning from childhood poverty to adult life” (p. 1). The study found that “these women needed a good listener, an objective voice, and safe place to express their feelings” (p. 19). In the process of conducting the study the researchers focus changed from learning about “the women’s lived experiences” to the “process of change and or shift in identity for the participants” (Marsh-McDonald & Schroeder, 2012, p. 10). The researcher learned the best strategies to support low income and first-generation college students, was the support provided by Federal TRIO programs, like Upward Bound.

School culture. Rural schools are often located in poor communities, which generate minimal tax revenue to support schools in providing educational resources. The variation of resources between urban schools and rural schools is “books, computers, art and science
supplies, course offerings and adequately heated and cooled buildings” (Herman, et al., 2013). The implication is that the educational experience of most rural students is inadequate compared to students who attend schools in middle class or upper-middle class communities.

In a qualitative case study, wherein one African American, low-income parent was studied, shed light on the economic challenges of the parents living in high poverty communities (Compton-Lilly, 2014). Some of these challenges are not always visible to teachers and outsiders. Therefore, schools must show that they care, and teachers, in particular, should listen to students while being respectful of their family situations” (Compton-Lilly, 2014, p. 39). Another study found that “talking to teachers and counselors had strong relationships with social and academic adjustment, as well as with positive attitudes for all students” (Hudley, et al., 2009, p. 439). This is significant because “first generation students, spend the least time of any group talking to teachers outside class” (Hudley, et al., 2009, p. 439). Participants in the study believe that “discussions with high school staff positively relate to first-generation students adjusting academically” (Hudley et al., 2009, p. 439).

In a study by Morrison (2015), the researcher discusses their role as a teacher, and their observations shed light on college readiness issues of rural high school students in Arizona. The main issue was the school (research setting) had no specific guidance counselor, just a variety of individuals, none of whom were full-time guidance counselors (Morrison, 2015). Therefore, the research enlisted teachers served as “college coaches” and serve as a part of the study (Morrison, 2015). The study found that rural students in Arizona, “acquired varying levels of critical consciousness by benefitting from having adult mentors coaching them about college-going” (p. 3). The study also found there was a need to implement a college-going curriculum (Morrison, 2015). The researcher found that the curriculum “demonstrated that students’ college-going
competency improved over the course of the semester” (Morrison, 2015, p. 122). Additionally, the “students’ perceptions of their college-going confidence levels changed significantly” during the study (Morrison, 2015, p. 123). Lastly, the critical literacy of the students’ perception of college-going increased in the first semester of school (Morrison, 2015, p. 124).

Many poor or low-income schools struggle to provide college preparation resources for students. Research has found that there is a major difference in instruction for students living in poverty that attend low performing schools, versus the classroom experiences of students who attend schools with more resources in higher income neighborhoods (Venezia & Jaeger, 2013). Additionally, “research has demonstrated how an overemphasis on the exit exam can shift the school culture from one that is focused on college-going to a culture of test taking and diminished college readiness opportunities” (Welton & Williams, 2015). Therefore, the school’s role in assisting students with college enrollment, is to provide opportunities in rigorous curriculum, especially for low-income and potential, first-generation college students.

Critics of the new movement of high stakes testing cultures developing in schools around the country, has shed light on the need for schools to adopt a college-going culture in order to support students beyond passing state assessments. There must be an intentional effort to assist students with preparing for college, on behalf of schools by putting personnel structures in place to support students (Welton & Williams, 2015). This is more so critical for students in rural schools because they lack the family structure and socioeconomic status to strengthen their chances of postsecondary enrollment. Researchers evaluate college-going by analyzing the different perspectives and expectations of school leaders to ensure that all students have the support needed to achieve their college and career goals, regardless of their background (Welton & Williams, 2015). There are nine principles that can be used to identify a college-going culture.
First, teachers must engage their students by talking about college often (Welton & Williams, 2015). Secondly, school leaders must set clear expectations amongst faculty and staff that all students will be prepared for college (Welton & Williams, 2015). Third, the school should make college information and resources accessible to students and their families (Welton & Williams, 2015). Other systemic changes must occur, including the fourth principle which is for the school to ensure that a comprehensive counseling model exists (Welton & Williams, 2015). This is important because, again, too often schools place a lot of the testing burden on guidance counselors who struggle to find time to provide college and career counseling for their students. While, too much testing can be a threat to the college-going culture, the fifth principle encourages schools to provide testing curriculum and preparation tools for students (Welton & Williams, 2015).

The sixth principle is that everyone must be involved and participate in college readiness efforts—including the faculty, as well as the students’ families (Welton & Williams, 2015). Principle seven suggests that schools must include opportunities to engage the students and their families around the discussion of college planning—together. This leads to the eighth principle which is for the school to initiate college partnerships between secondary and postsecondary institutions to enhance the student’s college readiness processes (Welton & Williams, 2015). The college access partnerships are often established with Federal TRIO programs, which originated from the Higher Education Act of 1965, wherein these programs are housed on the campuses of postsecondary institutions and charged with providing college access services to the community by assisting low income and first-generation college students with postsecondary enrollment. These efforts usually include the participation of the students’ parents, which relates to the sixth principle of developing a college-going culture. Lastly, the ninth principle; there is articulation
amongst staff to reinforce college readiness efforts on the school’s campus (Welton & Williams, 2015).

Other stakeholders. In addition to Federal TRIO programs, the state departments of education have historically implemented federal College and Career Ready (CCR) initiatives, which began with Common Core Standards that were adopted by 42 states. The idea behind CCR initiatives is that students should be prepared to enter the workforce of enroll in college upon the completion of high school. The CCR initiatives are an offshoot of the Race to the Top act (the reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind federal legislation), which “is to adopt standards and assessments that prepare students to succeed in college and the workplace and to compete in a global economy” (para. 1). College access programs help to fulfill this national objective in order for “all” students to benefit from higher education.

There are federal and local initiatives around the country that assist disadvantaged students with college enrollment. “Community-based organizations can play a key role by supporting and advocating on behalf of college outreach and preparation initiatives (including federal TRIO programs)” (Harper & Harris, 2012, p. 11). In addition to Federal TRIO programs, the government has other initiatives that could potentially increase college enrollment. According the U.S. Department of Education (2015), the first priority of the Race to the Top act (the reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind federal legislation) “is to adopt standards and assessments that prepare students to succeed in college and the workplace and to compete in a global economy” (para. 1). Additionally, President Obama’s Administration enacted a college and career readiness policy, and mandates to states requiring all high school students to be ready for college or a career. College access programs help to fulfill this national objective in order for “all” students to benefit from higher education.
In closing, Chapter two has provided a deeper look into what it means for students to ready for college. This literature review has also provided examples of the challenges for rural students, in becoming college ready. Lastly, this chapter also discussed some of the solutions for helping these rural students to prepare for college, such as helping them build non-cognitive skills, in which Federal TRIO programs is an ideal resource. The next chapter will explain the investigative approach that was applied to understand the college readiness experiences of rural high school students.
CHAPTER 3
INVESTIGATIVE APPROACH

Methodology & Research Design

Past research suggests that students who are ready for college exhibit specific characteristics that determine the likelihood of their successful matriculation in college. Therefore, previous studies were used as a guide for developing the research methodology for this study, which used mixed methods to investigate the college readiness of high school students in a rural setting. The study was structured into two phases. The first part of the research study was quantitative, wherein a College Readiness & Protective Factors Survey (CRPFS) was designed to gather descriptive data on high school seniors in the research setting; to include demographic characteristics as well as their skills, knowledge and attitudes towards going to college. The second part of the study was qualitative, in which three focus group interviews were conducted with high school students who exhibited varying degrees of college readiness characteristics based upon how they answered questions in the CRPFS.

Research Questions

As a recap on the discussion of research questions in Chapter one, this study was guided by a deep interest in answering the following guiding question, “What are the skills, knowledge and attitudes related to the college readiness of rural twelfth-grade students, enrolled in a low-income school district?” The research questions, which helped the investigator understand the skills, knowledge and attitudes of rural high school twelfth-graders are as follows:

1) What are the college readiness skills of twelfth-grade students enrolled in a rural high school?
2) What are the protective factors of twelfth-grade students enrolled in a rural high school?

3) How do college readiness skills and protective factors differ between rural high school participants in Federal TRIO programs, and students who do not participate in Federal TRIO programs (including Dual Enrollment students)?

**Research Setting**

The research setting was a rural high school, located in the southeastern region of the United States. The name and exact location of the school was made anonymous to protect the identities of the research participants, most of whom were under the age of 18 during the time of their participation in the study. Going forward, the research setting will be referred to as Promise-land High School (PHS), of Promise-land School District (PSD), located in Promise-land County (PC).

**Promise-land High School.** PHS is situated within a school district that is primarily comprised of Title I Schools, in which majority of the students are from disadvantaged households. According to the U. S. Department of Education (2016), a Title I School receives financial assistance from the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) due to “high numbers or percentages of children from low-income families” in which the funding “helps to ensure that all children meet challenging state academic standards” (para. 1). All public schools within the research setting’s school district, with the exception of one, are recipients of Title I funding. Therefore, students in this school district are considered low income based on their school’s Title I designation, and the fact that majority of the students receive free or reduced lunch.
The Title I schools in the school district are also categorized as low performing schools. The school district recently reported each school’s grade. None of these schools received a grade higher than a C. Promise-land High School, received a school grade of “F”, during the 2015-2016 academic school year. This information was retrieved from the school district’s website, which will not be cited to protect the identity of the research setting.

**Federal TRIO programs.** Additionally, Promise-land High School (the unit of analysis in the study) currently has three Federal TRIO programs providing college readiness services to students. The first Federal TRIO program in the setting is called, Upward Bound. This program operates at a four-year university that is considered as a predominantly white institution (PWI), wherein white students account for more than half of the enrollment. This program will be referred to as UB-PWI, throughout the remainder of the study. The second and third Federal TRIO programs, are called Talent Search. The first Talent Search program operates at a four-year university that is classified as a Historical Black College or University (HBCU), wherein majority of students enrolled classify as black or African American. Since there are two Talent Search programs involved in this study, the first program will henceforth be referred to as TS-HBCU. The second Talent Search program is housed on the campus of community college, and referred to as TS-CC.

The UB-PWI only serves students at Promise-land High School. The UB-PWI program participants come from low-income households, and their parental figures have not earned a college degree. The purpose of the program is to enhance the academic and personal skills of its participants, to prepare these young people for college admission, retention, and graduation. UB-PWI accomplishes its goal to complete secondary education and enroll in post-secondary education through academic support provided after-school, and during Saturday sessions, a six-
week summer residential and summer bridge programs, exposure to the cultural and career activities, and lastly, a six-year program plan to monitor the progress of program graduates in college.

The UB-PWI program director reported having 24 program participants who graduated from PHS during the 2016-2017 school year, of which 21 are currently enrolled in a post-secondary institution. During the 2017-2018 academic school year, there are 52 active participants.

According to the U.S. Department of Education (2018), the Talent Search program identifies and assists individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds who have the potential to succeed in higher education (para. 1). Both the TS-HBCU and TS-CC serve middle and high school students throughout Promise-land School District (PSD). These programs provide academic, career, and financial aid counseling, with the purpose of helping students graduate from high school and enroll in a post-secondary program of study. When asked by Promise-land High School administrators, both TS-HBCU and TS-CC, program directors respectfully declined to report on the college enrollment data for their 2016-2017 graduates. This might have been due to the timing of the request, since the UB-PWI had already reported figures to the Federal government during the Fall semester, and the Talent Search programs were not scheduled to report until late Spring.

**Research Participants**

The participants in the study were high school seniors, during the 2017-2018 school year, with the intent to graduate from high school in the Spring semester of 2018. At the time of the study, there were roughly 155 high school seniors enrolled at PHS. (The number seniors varied occasionally due to transitional students, who were impacted by the school’s recent merger.)
Rigorous effort was made on behalf of the investigator to recruit participants for the study by making presentations to all 12th grade English IV classes, and dual enrollment classes held on the high school’s campus.

Since participation in the study was not mandatory, there were 61 students who volunteered and were eligible to participate in the study, by providing the appropriate signatures on the parent consent and student assent forms. However, there were 50 research participants who completed the College Readiness & Protective Factors Survey (CRPFS), which represents 32% of the senior class. This was a decent level of participation considering the limitations of the study, which will be addressed later in this chapter. There were 20 research participants who were invited to participate in one of three focus group interviews. However, due to scheduling conflicts and absenteeism, only 15 students participated in the focus group interviews. This was 30% of the research participants.

**Sampling technique.** Purposeful criterion sampling was used to select participants for the qualitative part of the study. At the end of the college readiness survey, respondents were prompted to answer a question that asked them if they would like to be contacted about participating in an interview. If the respondent said, “Yes” then they were considered for a focus group interview based upon criteria. Initially, the plan was to have two focus groups—one with TRIO participants, and the other with Non-TRIO participants. After reviewing survey data, it became glaringly obvious that amongst the Non-TRIO research participants, there was a disparity between the students who were highly ready for college versus those who were not. This became the impetus for creating a third group of research participants, wherein the Non-TRIO research participants were split into two groups, such as the Non-TRIO Focus Group (includes students who are moderately prepared for college), and Non-TRIO Dual Enrollment
Focus Group (comprised of students who are already on track for college, and exhibit qualities of high academic achievement). Further explanation of the rationale for inquiry into the phenomenon of Non-TRIO Dual Enrollment research participants will be discussed in subsequent sections.

Criteria for focus groups. The criteria for selecting research participants for the TRIO Focus Group are as follows:

- Must volunteer to participate in focus group interviews (as indicated in the college readiness study).
- Must be willing to meet with focus group moderator, during regular school hours for roughly 90 minutes.
- Must be a 12th grader enrolled at the research setting.
- Must provide grade point average.
- Must have knowledge of ACT or SAT requirements.
- Must be a participant in one of the three Federal TRIO programs offered in the research setting; and provide the name of the Federal TRIO program.

The criteria for selecting research participants for the Non-TRIO Focus Group are as follows:

- Must volunteer to participate in focus group interviews (as indicated in the college readiness study).
- Must be willing to meet with focus group moderator, during regular school hours for roughly 90 minutes.
- Must be a 12th grader enrolled at the research setting.
- Must provide grade point average.
- Must have knowledge of ACT or SAT requirements.

The criteria for selecting research participants for the Non-TRIO Dual Enrollment Focus Group are as follows:

- Must volunteer to participate in focus group interviews (as indicated in the college readiness study).
- Must be willing to meet with focus group moderator, during regular school hours for roughly 90 minutes.
- Must be a 12th grader enrolled at the research setting.
- Must provide grade point average.
- Must have knowledge of ACT or SAT requirements.
- Must have taken Honors, Advanced Placement (AP), or Dual Enrollment courses during their senior year.

**Recruitment and access.** This study was approved by the Florida State University Institutional Review Board (IRB). Additionally, the school’s principal consulted the superintendent of the school district before providing written approval for research activities to commence at Promise-land High School. The principal then instructed the head of the School’s English Department to meet with the twelfth-grade English teachers to encourage collaboration with the researcher, to schedule classroom presentations, and to allow eligible students to meet with the researcher during class time to complete the College Readiness & Protective Factors Survey (CRPFS). The teacher appointed to administer the Dual Enrollment program on campus, also worked with the researcher to allow access to eligible students. The school’s Media
Specialist supported the researcher with providing access to computers and lap tops, which were used by the participants to complete the CRPFS. The twelfth-grade guidance counselor was also consulted to provide updates on the senior class. The school’s administration and leadership team also assisted with providing approval for students to be excused from class in order to participate in one of the three focus group interviews.

**Limitations of the study.** A major effort was put forth to recruit research participants. Nonetheless, there were four limitations on the part of students that reflected their ability to participate in the study. The limitations were their lack of interest in the subject matter, challenges in obtaining parental consent forms, excessive absenteeism, and class schedules. Perhaps, the participation level is a reflection of students’ willingness to participate in a structured activity about college readiness. This may be the result of fewer students being interested in going to college; which indirectly justifies the need for this type of study in the first place. Students may have lacked interest in participating because it was not mandatory, and had no impact on their grade in their English IV class. There were no perceived benefits to them other than the incentive, provided by the researcher, wherein students who participated in the CRPFS were entered into a raffle for a chance to win a $50 Visa gift (four $50 gift cards were raffled off).

There were still many students who inquired about participating in the study, but they failed to submit their parent consent forms. This could have been due to challenges in their household wherein they may have parental figures who are disinterested in their education, or due to students being unorganized and misplacing forms. Having to take the extra precaution to ensure that underaged human subjects were vetted properly to participate, may have created a barrier for participating in the study for many students.
This leads to the issue of excessive absenteeism. There were some students who turned in their paper work, yet, they were not at school on the days in which the researcher tried to contact them. The researcher made several attempts to invite students to the Media Center to complete the survey, at which time the researcher was informed that the student(s) were absent. Lastly, class schedules were a conflict for students who were not enrolled in an English IV class, or did not participate in the Dual Enrollment Program. Since these students had already met their graduation requirements for English, they opted to attend classes off campus at the local trade school and community college. There was another group of students who were enrolled in a training program for law enforcement, housed on the campus, but program staff did not show a willingness to work with the researcher to recruit these students to participate in the study.

Data Collection

**College readiness and protective factors survey.** The first phase of the data collection process included a College Readiness & Protective Factors Survey (CRPFS) that was administered to 50 twelfth-graders at Promise-land High School, in the form of an online questionnaire developed with Qualtrics software. The purpose of the CRPFS was to capture descriptive statistics of the senior class. The first part of the CRPFS asked demographic questions about the research participant’s race, household structure, parental educational level, etc. The second half of the CRPFS was designed to help the researcher identify protective factors of the research participants, such as their non-cognitive skills. The questions for this part of the CRPFS were based on William Sedlacek’s (2004) Noncognitive Questionnaire (NCQ).

you can copy or modify and distribute” (Sedlacek, 2004, p. ix). Therefore, the use of his non-cognitive questionnaire has been permitted. The NCQ assessment was developed as a basic noncognitive questionnaire to assess students based on eight noncognitive variables, such as “positive self-concept, realistic self-appraisal, successfully handling the system (racism), preference for long-term goals, availability of strong support person, leadership experience, community involvement, and knowledge acquired in the field” (Sedlacek, 2004, p. 37). These attributes relate to the protective factors discussed in Richardson’s Resiliency Theory. Therefore, the Sedlacek’s NCQ helped to provide a tested assessment as a foundation to build a survey upon. (The questions for the survey can be found in Appendix D.)

**Scoring.** The second part of the CRPFS asked a series of questions that were based upon Sedlacek’s non-cognitive instrument. It should be noted that the numbering used in Sedlacek’s original equations, were changed to fit the revised ordering of questions in the College Readiness & Protective Factors Survey. In this section, survey takers had five answer choices to select from. The answer choices had a numeric value ranging from 1 to 5, with 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest. The answer choices were as follows: Strongly disagree = 1, disagree = 2, neither agree or disagree (neutral) = 3, agree = 4, and strongly agree = 5.

The Qualtrics data was exported into an Excel spreadsheet. Then, new columns were added, in which specific formulas were then entered. The formulas generated non-cognitive category scores for each research participant. The scores were determined by respondents’ answers to specific questions, in which a numerical value, ranging from 1-5, was entered into a mathematical equation. The output of the equation which produced a score for each of the 50 research participants, in each of the eight non-cognitive areas. The category scores were then summed across all eight non-cognitive items to produce an overall non-cognitive score. Table 1,
on page 47, illustrates the mathematical formulas that were applied. Table 1 also shows the and score range for each variable (i.e. non-cognitive category).

Table 1. College Readiness & Protective Factors Survey (CRPFS), and non-cognitive questionnaire. This table displays Sedlacek’s NCQ math equations and score ranges, with adjustments.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Equation No.</th>
<th>Non-cognitive Variable</th>
<th>Math Equation</th>
<th>Score Range (low – high)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Positive self-concept or confidence</td>
<td>Q11 + Q49 + (6-Q28) + (6 - Q32)</td>
<td>4 - 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Realistic self-appraisal</td>
<td>Q49 + (6 – Q24) + (6 – Q35) + (6 – Q37)</td>
<td>4 – 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Understands and deals with racism</td>
<td>(6 – Q30) + Q34 + Q36</td>
<td>3 – 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Adjusted)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Prefers long-range goals to short-term or immediate needs</td>
<td>Q50(a) + Q25 + (6 – Q41) + (6 – Q44)</td>
<td>4 – 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Availability of a strong support person</td>
<td>(6 – Q26) + (6 – Q29) + (6 – Q38) + Q47</td>
<td>4 – 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Successful leadership experience</td>
<td>Q52(a) + (6 – Q27) + (6 – Q30)</td>
<td>3 – 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Adjusted)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Demonstrated community service</td>
<td>Q52(b) + (6 – Q33) + (6 – Q37) + (6 – Q42)</td>
<td>4 – 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Knowledge acquired in a field</td>
<td>Q50(b) + Q52(c) + (6 – Q40)</td>
<td>3 – 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Adjusted)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Overall scores can range from 29 – 145.

Additionally, adjustments to three of the mathematical equations were made to account for questions that were omitted, due to their lack of relevance for the research respondents. The reason being, Sedlacek (2004) developed the NCQ with college students in mind, especially minority students enrolled in predominately white institutions. Therefore, some questions did not
relate to the experiences of high school students in a school that serves mostly black or African American students. For example, the research participants in this study may have encountered racism in a different way than what Sedlacek’s NCQ intended. The three adjusted variables are as follows: Positive self-concept or confidence; Understands and deals with racism; and Knowledge acquired in a field. These equations were adjusted by removing the omitted questions from the equation, which resulted in the score range being 3 - 15, instead of 4 – 20 like the other five questions. The overall range for non-cognitive score is 29 – 145. These adjustments are represented in Table 1, on page 47.

Additionally, it was important to ensure that the three research questions guiding this study were answered. Therefore, the investigator made sure the survey questions were tied to each of the research questions. Please see Table 2, below, which illustrate the linkages between the research questions, and survey items.

Table 2. Linkages between research questions and survey items. This table illustrates which survey items relate to the three research questions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Linkages Between Research Questions &amp; Survey Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Research Questions and Theme(s)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RQ #1 College Readiness Skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RQ #2 Protective Factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RQ #3 Differences between Trio and non-Trio participants</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Focus group interviews.** The second phase of the study used the qualitative method of focus group interviews to provide a more in-depth understanding of student’s experiences with college readiness. Focus groups help provide context on the phenomenon being studied, which in
this case is college readiness (Patton, 2015). Focus group interviews also helped the researcher understand the protective factors and disruptions (risk factors) of twelfth grade students.

**Focus group participants.** The second phase of the data collection process included focus group interviews. There were 15 research participants that were selected and categorized into a three focus groups based on the criteria discussed earlier in the Chapter three’s section on research participants. The first group is called, the TRIO participants, which had six research participants (3 females and 3 males). Two were members of UB-PWI, and four were members of TS-HBCU. Participants from the TS-CC were invited however, they did not show up on the scheduled date for this focus group meeting.

The second group is the Non-TRIO participants, which had four research participants. This group consisted of all males. There was a female invited to participate, but she did not show up to the meeting. Lastly, the third group is called, the Non-TRIO Dual Enrollment participants, which consisted of five research participants (3 females and two males).

The purpose of the focus groups is to create interactions between a small number of students in order to deeply understand their views about their protective strategies, and to elaborate on various types of situations that can disrupt their college enrollment plans (Patton, 2015). The racial makeup of the focus groups was somewhat diverse, in spite of the lack of diversity within the school. Majority of the participants classified themselves as black or African American, including three who described themselves as being two or more races, and two participants who are Hispanic (non-White).

**Focus group format.** The focus group sessions were held over the course of two days, toward the end of the fall semester. At this point in the school year, many students have either started or completed the college application process. Two hours were reserved for each focus
group. A classroom within the school’s Media Center was the location for all three focus group interviews, which was conducive for small group discussions.

The interviews were recorded via digital recorder, as well as a recorder application that is compatible with iphone and ipad. The researcher also took handwritten notes. Each focus group was reminded of the purpose of the study, their voluntary participation, and given instructions for how to participate in the session. Research participants were encouraged to keep personal information shared during the interviews, between members of the group. This was an attempt to discourage research participants from sharing or gossiping about other members of the group.

The focus group interview should be an enjoyable experience for research participants to share their ideas and perceptions about college readiness (Patton, 2015). The researcher was positioned as a moderator for a relaxed discussion on going to college, with the intention of creating a safe atmosphere for research participants. The strategy of being seen as a moderator, instead of researcher, helps to remove barriers between the investigator and research participants (Patton, 2015). Providing light refreshments at the end of each session really helped participants to relax. This was evidenced by the additional banter and conversation about college, that continued even after the interviews were over.

**Focus group interview questions.** Participants in all three groups were asked the same open-ended questions, which are linked to the main research question, and sub-questions (see Appendix E for the list of interview questions). By asking each group the same questions, the researcher was able to organize results to help with analyzing and comparing the responses from all three groups. There was no previously created model used to develop these questions. However, the questions were designed so that responses could be sorted into the “characteristic triad” used to describe academic resiliency (Morales & Trotman, 2004). The triad uses three
categories to examine qualitative data in resiliency studies, which are as follows: disposition, family, and environment (Morales & Trotman, 2004). This approach to data analysis was inspired by the research of Morales & Trotman (2004), which will be discussed further in Chapter four.

**Data Analysis and Reporting Techniques**

Qualtrics, a data analysis software program provided by Florida State University, was used to analyze the College Readiness & Protective Factors Survey. Queries were run in Qualtrics to provide descriptive statistics on the research participants. A dataset was also exported into Excel to calculate the non-cognitive scores for each participant. The qualitative data collected from the focus group interviews were transcribed and coded. Additionally, the transcripts were uploaded and analyzed with NVivo10, a qualitative data analysis software program. Programs such as NVivo help researchers to “facilitate data storage, coding, retrieval, comparing, and linking” (Patton, 2015, p. 529). Although, this strategy helped to reduce some of the burden of tracking the frequencies of responses linked to the research themes, the researcher still had to code the interview data manually with parent and child codes. The researcher’s positionality was a strength in coding data, wherein an understanding of language, and cultural expressions was needed for a better understanding of participant responses. Lastly, an analysis was done by grouping focus group interview responses together, and summarizing different perspectives on central issues (Patton, 2015).

**Validity of Results**

Issues concerning validity of data will be supported by triangulating data from the survey, focus group interviews, and additional data sources (Patton, 2015). This strategy is in keeping with the research standards, wherein it frowned upon to use one single method to interpret
results; which could hinder the researcher’s ability to address rival explanations (Patton, 2015). Therefore, the mixed methods in this study will be used in a complementary fashion to answer different questions, and to ensure a well-integrated picture of the state of the college readiness skills and protective factors possessed by the research participants (Patton, 2015). A discussion of the validity of results will be provided in Chapter 4.
CHAPTER 4
REPORT OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

Chapter four provides an account of data collected by the investigator. This chapter begins with a discussion on the characteristics of the participants in the study, including both survey takers and focus group members. Next, the research questions are presented, along with an explanation of how results from the survey and focus group interviews connect to each of these three research questions. Next, data regarding the college readiness skills and protective factors of research participants are provided, along with a discussion comparing the college readiness and protective factors of TRIO participants versus non-TRIO participants. The last section of Chapter four will explain the researcher’s interpretation of data from the focus group interviews, for a deeper understanding of the experiences of the research subjects in the study.

Characteristics of Research Participants

There were 50 participants in the study, which included 20 males and 30 females, who completed the College Readiness & Protective Factors Survey (CRPFS) online. Respondents’ ages ranged between 17-20. Majority of the participants described themselves as black or African American (83.33%), the remaining were white (Non-Hispanic) (5.56%), Hispanic (7.41%), Native Hawaiian (1.85%), and two or more races (1.85%). The racial makeup of the survey respondents can be found in Figure 3, on page 54.

The College Readiness & Protective Factors Survey (CRPFS) asked research participants to identify the parental figures living in their household. Participants could have chosen from the following responses to describe their households: two-parent, single parent (with their mother), single parent (with their father), and lastly, living with a guardian or family member.
Respondents (n=50) are from the College Readiness & Protective Factors Survey (CRPFS).

Figure 3. Research participants by race. This figure illustrates the racial makeup of research participants.

The household structure for majority of the research participants was 49.02%, wherein they indicated that they live in two-parent households. There were 41.18% living with a single parent who was their mother, and 7.84% living with their fathers only. Lastly, only 1.96% of research participants reported living with a guardian or other family member. Figure 4, on page 55, illustrates these ratios for the different types of parental figures for participants in the study.

The College Readiness & Protective Factors Survey (CRPFS) asked research participants to identify the level of education their parents have attained. The participants could have selected one of the following answers to describe their parent’s educational level: No high school diploma, high school diploma, certificate (vocational or trade school), some college (no degree earned), A.A. degree, bachelor’s degree, or graduate study. Based upon responses, majority of participants’ parents have a high school diploma (39.22%), only. There were 25.49% of
Respondents (n=50) are from the College Readiness & Protective Factors Survey (CRPFS). Figure 4. Research participants’ household type. This figure illustrates the type of parental figures that live in the participants’ households.

respondents who reported their parents had not received a high school diploma. The remaining findings for parental educational attainment reflect the parents who have earned above a high school diploma. The postsecondary education for these parents are as follows: Associate of Arts degree (13.73%), one or two years of graduate or professional study (7.84%), bachelor’s degree (5.88%), some college, but did not receive a degree (3.92%), trade school or vocational certification (1.96%), military service (1.96%). None of the research participants reported having a parental figure to have earned a doctoral degree. Figure 5, on page 56, depicts the level of educational attainment of parents of the College Readiness and Protective Factors Survey (CRPFS) research participants. Please note, the military service for parents is not included in this figure because the purpose of this illustration is to reflect the educational attainment of parents, in a classroom setting, and it is difficult to determine the type of education the research participants’ parent may have received in the military.
Respondents (n=50) are from the College Readiness & Protective Factors Survey (CRPFS). Note. Military (.196) is not represented.

Figure 5. Research participants parents’ educational attainment. This figure illustrates the level of education received by the participants’ parents.

The College Readiness and Protective Factors Survey (CRPFS), asked respondents to indicate their educational aspirations. They were given the following answer choices: college, but less than a bachelor’s degree (i.e. A two-year degree), bachelor’s degree (i.e. A four-year degree), one or two years of graduate or professional study (i.e. Master’s degree or beyond a four-year degree), doctoral degree (i.e. M.D., Ph.D., Ed.D., etc.), military training, or online courses. The findings showed that majority of the research participants plan to earn a bachelor’s degree (37.25%). There were 25.49% who said they aspire to earn a doctoral degree, and 13.73% who plan to complete a graduate degree or professional study beyond a four-year degree. Some students plan to attend college, but do not expect earn a bachelor’s degree (11.76%). A small number of research participants are planning to receive military training (5.88%) or take online courses.
courses course at some point (5.88%), with no intention of completing a college degree. Figure 6, below, illustrates the anticipated educational attainment of respondents.

**Educational Aspirations of Research Participants**

![Educational Aspirations of Research Participants](image_url)

Notes: (n = 50) Figure 6 illustrates the anticipated educational attainment level CRPFS research participants. Figure 6. Educational aspirations of research participants. This figure illustrates the educational plans identified by research participants.

In summarizing the overall characteristics of research participants in this study, findings show that the research participants are primarily black or African American. These students come from mostly two-parent households, or single parent homes where the mother is the parental figure. Although, most of their parents only have a high school diploma, the participants in the study aspire to exceed their parents’ educational attainment. Interestingly, majority of them want to earn a college degree or a doctoral degree. The next section will provide descriptions of the focus group interview participants.
**Focus Group Participants.** There were 15 research participants, of the 50 who completed the survey, that were invited to participate in three focus group sessions wherein they were interviewed with the same interview questions. (Please see Appendix E, for a list of the interview questions.) Initially, there were twenty survey takers invited to participate in focus group interviews. However, only fifteen people showed up at the scheduled time of their interview session. These individuals were assigned to one of three groups. Since each group was intentionally formed with the intent to have like-minded participants together, they were given group names.

First, the TRIO Focus Group, includes only TRIO participants. The group of six was comprised of four individuals, who participate in a Federal TRIO program that is housed at a historically, black public institution, and the last two group members are in a Federal TRIO program that operates on the campus of a predominantly white institution. It should be noted that two students who participate in the Federal TRIO program affiliated with the community college, were invited but did not show up for the interview session.

The second focus group is called, the Non-TRIO Focus Group because these research participants do not belong to a TRIO program, and they had lower outcomes from the CRPFS, which were their college readiness indicators and protective factors (non-cognitive scores). Lastly, the third group is the Non-TRIO Dual Enrollment Focus Group, which consist of students who, instead of participating in a TRIO program, are enrolled in college courses by way of the school’s Dual Enrollment program, during their senior year. These research participants also exhibited characteristics of high achieving students. The next subsections will briefly describe each of the focus group members. The short biographical information provided came from the participants’ responses to the online College Readiness & Protective Factors Survey (CRPFS).
Additionally, their descriptions highlight their non-cognitive strengths, which were determined by their scores from the non-cognitive section of the CRPFS, in which individuals section scores range from 4 – 20, or 3 – 15, in each category. (Please, see Table 1 on page 46, for explanation of differences in category score ranges.) The overall score range was from 29 – 145. Lastly, please note that students in the focus groups were given pseudonyms to protect their identities.

**TRIO focus group participants.** The next descriptions are for six students in the TRIO focus group; of which four belong to the HBCU Talent Search program, and the other two are a part of the PWI Upward Bound program. One student from the Community College Talent Search program was invited to participate. However, she had a scheduling conflict and could not participate.

**Dina (age 17),** classifies herself as black or African American. She lives with her mother, who is a single-parent. Although, her mother’s formal education consists of a high school diploma, Dina hopes to earn a bachelor’s degree from a four-year institution someday. Her ACT scores ranged between 15 – 19, and her she has not taken the SAT. Her grade point average is between 3.0 and 3.4. She has never taken and rigorous courses in high school.

In her own words, Dina’s goals are to “strive to have a high g.p.a., graduate with honors, and pass the ACT with a high score.” Three things she is proud of having done thus far are “maintaining a 3.0 or higher, not procrastinating on school work, and participating in organizations and groups on the school campus.” Dina’s overall non-cognitive score was a 52 out of 145. She scored the highest in area of positive self-concept or confidence.

**Christopher (age 17),** identifies as being two or more races. He lives in a single-parent household with his father who has served in the military. In the future, Christopher plans to
attend a four-year institution to earn a bachelor’s degree. His grade point average falls with the 2.5 and 2.9 range; with an ACT score range is 15 – 19 and SAT score range of 800-999.

Christopher’s goals are to go to college, serve in the National Guard, and save money for college. He is most proud of his SAT scores, improving on his reading skills, and his musical talents. He is a section leader in the school’s marching band, and he performs at his church. Christopher’s overall non-cognitive score was 43 out of 145.

**Analise (age 17),** is a Hispanic female. She lives in a single-parent household with her mother who did not complete high school. Analise aspires to one day receive a bachelor’s degree. Her grade point average is between a 2.0 - 2.4, and her test scores on the ACT are between 15 to 19. She has not taken the SAT.

Analise says she is proud of being eligible for high school graduation, improving her grades, and participating in the school’s Key Club. One of her goals is to get a scholarship. Her overall non-cognitive score is 56 out of 145. Her highest scores were in the areas of: preferring long-range goals v. short-term goals or immediate needs, availability of strong support, and demonstrated community service.

**Cairo (age 17),** is a black or African American male who lives with his father, who is a single-parent. Cairo’s educational aspirations are to earn and doctoral degree, which far exceeds his father’s high school diploma. He has only taken the SAT, in which he scored between 600 to 799; and his grade point average is between 2.5 and 2.9.

Cairo wants to one day serve as a Federal prosecutor. His interest in government is evidenced by his participation in Student Government Association (SGA), Junior Reserves Officers’ Training Corps (JROTC). He also participates in three of the school’s bands (marching, concert, and jazz), as well as the Track & Field and other groups. He is most proud of his role in
JROTC, being inducted in Mu Alpha Theta, and serving as the drum major for the marching band. Cairo’s overall non-cognitive score was 53 out of 145, with his highest scores being in two categories: demonstrated community service and knowledge acquired in a field.

**Paris (age 18),** is a black or African American female who lives in a two-parent household. At least one of her parents has attended college, but, did not receive a college degree. However, she plans to earn a doctoral degree in the future. Paris’ grade point average falls the range of 3.0 and 3.4. Pairs reported that she scored below a 14 on the ACT, and between 800 and 999 on the SAT.

Paris’ goals are to graduate from high school with honors, receive numerous scholarships, and to be accepted into her top three schools. She is proud of maintaining a 3.0 grade point average throughout high school and finishing her core courses ahead of schedule. She is especially proud of the way she has improved her self-discipline. Paris scored 56 out of a possible 145 points for her overall non-cognitive skills score; in which her strongest areas were in positive self-concept or confidence and knowledge in an acquired field.”

**Parker (age 17),** is a black or African American male, who resides in a two-parent household. He plans to obtain a doctoral degree in the future, although his parents took college courses, but did not complete a degree. Parker has a grade point average that ranges between 3.0 and 3.4. He scored below a 14 on the ACT, and he had not taken the SAT at the time of completing the CRPFS.

Parker’s goals are to pass the ACT, get accepted into a world renown performing arts school, and to be successful in college. He is proud of finishing his high school graduation requirements, despite his lack of motivation and obstacles—he believes he has been successful.
He participates in a teen-oriented fraternity, which meets regularly in a neighboring city, with a more urban population than his own rural community. Parker’s overall non-cognitive score was 64 out of a possible 145. His strongest non-cognitive skills are in positive self-concept or confidence; and understanding or dealing with racism.

*Non-TRIO focus group participants.* The Non-TRIO focus group consists of four, black or African American males. The group was not intended to be all males. However, one female was invited to participate, but she had a scheduling conflict that prevented her from being a part of the session. These next four descriptions are for the four students who do not participate in neither a Federal TRIO program, or dual enrollment program.

**Max (age 20),** is a black or African American male. He lives with his mother who has a high school diploma. Max plans to receive an associate’s degree. He has not taken the ACT or SAT, and his grade point average is between the 2.5 and 2.9 range. His goals are to finish high school, and to focus on his long-term career. He is proud of passing his classes and staying on track for graduation. Max’s overall non-cognitive score was 55 out of 145, and his strongest non-cognitive skills are in the areas of positive self-concept or confidence and understands and deals with racism.

**Calvin (age 19),** is a black or African American male who lives in a single-parent household with his mother. She has an associate’s degree, and Calvin plans to earn the same. Calvin’s grade point average is between 3.5 – 3.9, and at the time of the focus group interview session he had not taken the ACT or SAT. Although, he enjoys participating in a culinary group, his goals are to finish high school and concentrate on a career in automotive technology. Calvin is proud of having good grades and passing the state’s assessments. He is currently in search of
scholarships. Calvin’s overall non-cognitive score was 64 out of 145, with his strengths being in the categories of availability of strong support person, and successful leadership experience.

**Craig (age 18)**, is a black or African American male who lives in a two-parent household. His parents’ highest education is a high school diploma. Craig plans to complete a bachelor’s degree. His grade point average falls within the 2.5 – 2.9 range. On the ACT he scored between 15 and 19, and SAT he scored between 600 – 799.

Craig’s goals are to become a doctor, play baseball, and work on cars. He is proud of passing his state assessments, and for being promoted to the next grade level with a good grade point average. He belongs to two athletic teams in high school. His overall non-cognitive score is 62 out of 145, and his highest scores were in the areas of understanding or dealing with racism, as well as preferring long-range goals to short-term or immediate needs.

**Nico (age 19)**, is a black or African American male, who lives in a two-parent household. His parents have high school diplomas. Nico plans to complete a master’s degree one day. His grade point average falls within the 3.5 – 3.9 range. At the time of his group’s interview session he had not taken the SAT, but his ACT scores were between 15 and 19. Nico’s goals are to attend college, receive a track scholarship, and compete in the Olympics. He later wants to be an FBI agent. He is proud of making good grades and following his dream of going to college. Nico had an overall non-cognitive score of 62 out of 145. His highest scores were variables: positive self-concept or confidence, and availability of strong support person.

**Non-TRIO dual enrollment focus group participants.** The members of the Non-TRIO Dual Enrollment focus group consists of five students. There are three females and two males in the group. Four of the students are dually enrolled in college courses at a nearby community
college, and one student takes courses at the local trade school. The last five descriptions are of students who do not participate in a TRIO program, but they earn college credits in a course offered outside their high school.

**Simon (age 18),** is a black or African American male, who lives in a single parent household with his mother, who has an Associate of Arts degree. Although Simon is not a first-generation college student, he plans to earn a doctoral degree someday. According to Simon, his goals are “becoming a successful business man, graduating from college, and becoming a millionaire.” In his own words, he is most proud of receiving scholarships, getting a head start in college (through the school’s dual enrollment program), and staying focused. He is an active participant in an all-male organization for high school students, which is spearheaded by a local fraternity chapter, that is associated with a Historical Black College or University (HBCU).

Simon’s ACT scores ranged between a 15 and 19, his SAT scores were between 1000 – 1199, and his grade point average ranges between 3.0 and 3.4. Simon’s overall non-cognitive assessment score was 67 out of 145. He scored the highest in the areas of positive self-concept or confidence, understands and deals with racism, and demonstrated community service. Simon feels confident that he will meet the college admission requirements at the schools he is most interested in applying to. By the mid-point of the fall semester of his senior year he has already been accepted at an out-of-state university, with the prospect of receiving an athletic scholarship.

**Miles (age unknown),** identifies as being two or more races. He lives in a two-parent household. The highest education of at least one of his parents is an AA degree. He aspires to receive a bachelor’s degree in the future. By the midpoint of the first semester of his senior year, he still had not taken the ACT or SAT. However, his grade point average ranges between 3.5 and 3.9. Miles has taken Honors or Advanced Placement courses in high school, as well as college
level courses through dual enrollment. However, his plans after graduation are to enroll in trade school.

Although, he did not indicate that he was involved in any extra-curricular activities, Miles says that his three goals right now are, “Understanding the authority that everyone possesses, and how to use that for the preparation of my future relationships; being all that I can be in my community by participating in every opportunity presented by the school; and be an influential factor in my community that can bring change and make a difference in society, and the hearts of people.” Miles’ overall non-cognitive assessment score is 62 out of 145. His strongest areas are positive self-concept or confidence, long-range goals v short-term or immediate needs, availability of strong support person, and demonstrated community service—all of which were tied with the same score of 9.

**Rhianna (age 17),** classifies herself as a biracial female (black or African American and white (non-Hispanic)). She lives in a two-parent household. Her parents are not college graduates. However, they have earned trade school or industry certifications. Rhianna aspires to earn a doctoral degree. By the midpoint of first semester of her senior year she has not yet taken the ACT or SAT. Her grade point average ranges from 3.0 to 3.4. Rhianna’s overall non-cognitive assessment score was a 50 out of 145. Her strengths are in the positive self-concept or confidence category, and the demonstrated community service category.

Rhianna has taken Honors, Advanced Placement, and dual enrollment courses. She plans to enroll in college in the fall semester upon graduating from high school. At this point, she has not applied to any colleges or universities. However, she does plan to apply to several institutions (both four-year and two-year colleges). Rhianna says, “As of now my goals are to get as many credits as I can with the dual enrollment program that I am in (at a community college);
I would then like to receive a sufficient amount of scholarships before I graduate; and, my last goal is to earn a good GPA.” Rhianna is most proud of the fact that she started dual enrollment as a tenth grader. She is also proud that she has gained acceptance from her teachers, and that she is graduation ready in her senior year, due to completing required courses early.

**Kelly (age 17)**, is a slack or African American female. She lives in a two-parent household, wherein her parents have earned high school diplomas. Her educational plans include earning a doctoral degree. Kelly has scored above a 25 on the ACT, and she falls within the highest range for SAT test scores (between 1400 – 1600 points). She also has above a 4.0 grade point average. Kelly has taken Honors, Advanced Placement, and dual enrollment courses. Her overall non-cognitive assessment score is 62 out of 145, and her strengths are in the areas of positive self-concept and confidence, as well as a three-way tie in scores for realistic self-appraisal, demonstrated community service, and knowledge acquired in a field, which was an eight.

Kelly’s goals include graduating from high school, with an earned Associate of Arts degree from a community college. She also wants to learn Chinese, in preparation for studying abroad. Lastly, she wants to get accepted into a good university. At this point, she has already applied to a predominately white institution, and she plans to apply to two others, as well as one historical black college or university. Kelly is most proud of dual enrolling in college courses as a ninth grader; and maintaining a 4.0 unweighted grade point average. She feels strongly that she will graduate at the top her class. Lastly, she is also proud of being a good role model for her younger siblings.

**Jennifer (age 17)**, is a Hispanic female. She lives in a single parent household, where her mother is the parental figure. Jennifer’s mom does not have a formal education. Jennifer plans to
earn a bachelor’s degree. Although, Jennifer’s grade point average is between 3.5 and 3.9, she scored in the 15-19 range on the ACT, and the 800-999 range on the SAT, and she does not feel like her test scores will be competitive enough to gain admission into her ideal college or university. However, she has taken Honors, Advanced Placement, and dual enrollment courses. Her overall non-cognitive score is one of the highest, at 71 out of 145. She scored the highest in the areas of demonstrated community service (11); and tied scores in the areas of realistic self-appraisal and prefers long-range goals to short-term or immediate needs, with a score of ten.

Jennifer plans to enroll in college in the fall semester immediately following high school graduation. She intends to apply to three, four-year institutions, and one private, two-year college. Jennifer’s goals include finishing high school, starting a YouTube channel as a hobby, and getting a job to create income that will help her mother pay bills and raise money for a car. When she is not in school or helping her mother, Jennifer likes to earn volunteer hours for community service through her participation in her school’s Key Club. She takes pride in stepping out of her comfort zone by speaking up for students, who she feels are like her, because they are left out of the communication loop when receiving news about school events and updates because they are unpopular. Jennifer describes her proudest moment as the time she organized a unity movement with her classmates centered on Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), Black Lives Matter, and unity; wherein she and her peers walked in a community parade together to show their support for these issues.

In conclusion, none of the focus group members have extremely high non-cognitive score based on the scale from 29 – 145. However, relative to the other research participants, their scores seem to be higher than most. Jennifer has the highest score among the entire group. Their
non-cognitive scores will be discussed further later in this chapter. The next section will provide results for each of the three research questions.

**Research Question 1: “What are the College Readiness Skills of Twelfth-grade Students Enrolled in a Rural High School?”**

In this study, indicators of college readiness include student outcomes in areas, such as college entrance exam scores (ACT and SAT scores), grade point average, and rigorous course selection. Additionally, college readiness is also determined by the student’s college enrollment plans, and their knowledge of the financial aid processes. The next subsections will provide findings related to college readiness. This section, of Chapter four, will provide findings from the College Readiness & Protective Factors Survey, that directly relate to the research questions guiding this study. The subsections, within each of the three research question discussions, will provide an account of the outputs gathered for each variable that was studied in the online survey, as well as focus group data. Participant responses were obtained from 50 surveys, and three focus group interviews, which included 15 interviewees.

**College entrance exam scores.** The American College Test (ACT) is a college entrance exam used by colleges and universities to determine a student’s potential for academic achievement in college. ACT scores are utilized in the college admission process to assess a student’s potential for maintaining the academic requirements of the rigorous courses offered at colleges and universities. Therefore, ACT scores can be used as predictors for college readiness in this study. The ACT has for areas in which students are tested, they are as follows: English, Mathematics, Reading, and Science.
The CollegeBoard is a non-profit organization that has helped more than seven million students prepare for a successful transition to college by providing college readiness and success services; such as their work in governing the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) (CollegeBoard, 2018). The Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) is another college entrance exam, which predicts college readiness skills of students. Therefore, the survey’s findings on the participants testing status, whether they have taken a college entrance exam or not, can provide an idea of their college readiness.

*Self-reported ACT scores.* The CRPFS determined that less than half of the research participants (47%), said they had taken the ACT. The remaining 51% said they had not taken the test, and 2% were unable to answer the question; which means these students are at a disadvantage, with regard, to college readiness and testing. There were only 40.8% of research participants who said they had taken the SAT. Therefore, the 55.1% who said they had not taken the test, and the 4.1% who were unable to answer the question, do not show strong strengths in this area of college readiness.

Taking the ACT and SAT is a strong indicator of a student’s interest in going to college. For both the ACT and SAT, majority of the research participants had not tested at least once, at the time of taking the survey, which was roughly at the end of the first semester of their senior year. This is concerning since best practices for college readiness suggests that educators should encourage students to, at least, begin taking college entrance exams in their junior year of high school. Therefore, these students are considered behind scheduled, compared to the national norms.

When it comes to college entrance exams, there is a sense of fear and procrastination for research participants. One student said, “I haven't even taken an ACT–none of that. I'm like way
behind” (Miles, Non-TRIO Dual Enrollment Focus Group). Another student states, “It's kind of like that period where you're kind of like scared because I don't really know what I'm doing. And so, as of now, it's kind of just like the whole typical, apply for college, try to finish on taking the ACT and all the other stuff” (Rhianna, Non-TRIO Dual Enrollment Focus Group).

When asked if they thought they had earned an ACT or SAT score that will meet the college admission requirements, only 18% said, “Yes”; whereas 24% said, “No.” There were 22% of research participants who said, Maybe, and 36% were unable to answer the question. Based on these findings, the research participants seem to lack confidence in their test scores. Although, the highest score for the ACT is 36; even the strongest, academically sound, students struggle to gain confidence with their test scores. For instance, a student with a 32 on the ACT stated, “I was just recently thinking about applying to some IVY Leagues, but I don't think I have the scores for it” (Kelly, Non-TRIO Dual Enrollment Focus Group). This relates to participants’ self-concept, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

Kelly is a strong student, with a very competitive ACT score. However, a student like Parker, has a different experience with taking the ACT. He falls within the 18% of respondents, who did not think they had a score that would make them eligible for college enrollment. He places the responsibility for his test scores on his perception of the school’s resources. For instance, he stated, “Places that we come from don't really prepare us to be making 26's or 25's on the ACT, so that's why we're trying to get to the institution (meaning college), so that next time we do take a test like this, we'll be scoring the 25, or making the 30, or whatever” (Parker, TRIO Focus Group).

There were 48 survey takers who were able to report their ACT score, of which 50% of them were not able to provide their ACT score. Based on the survey takers who did respond,
there were 35.42% who had an ACT score that was between 15—19. In 2017, the national benchmark scores for each area were as follows: an English score of 22, a Mathematics score of 18, a Reading score of 22, and a Science score of 23 (American College Test, 2018). In 2016-2017, the average ACT composite score was a 21. Majority of the research participants who self-reported scores (43.75%), did not meet the national average score. Therefore, these students are barely meeting the national college entrance requirements for the ACT.

Another research participant, Parker, provides more insight into how he feels his test scores are holding back his college application process. He states, “I haven't had a decent ACT score yet, so that's what's has been holding me back” (Parker, TRIO Focus Group). He explains that he has been busy on his campus with extracurricular activities, so he has not had the time to reschedule taking the ACT again. Parker expounds by stating, “I've really been scheduling to take more of the ACT, but I'm just hoping and praying that at least in my senior year that when I do take the ACT on December 9th, that the score would be good enough for me to finish my application for these schools” (Parker, TRIO Focus Group).

Although, majority of the students’ self-reported ACT scores that were below the average score needed for college admission, there was a small percentage of survey takers (4.17%), who scored between 20—24; and 2.08% of the research participants scored a 25 or Higher. These scores would be considered exceptional for this setting, and they were self-reported by members of the Non-TRIO Dual Enrollment Focus Group. Although, later, in this chapter the differences in test scores between TRIO participants, versus non-TRIO participants will be discussed. Please see Figure 7, on page 72, which illustrates the self-reported ACT scores for all research participants who responded.
Self-reported ACT Scores

![Graph showing ACT score ranges]

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Respondents (n=48) are from the College Readiness and Protective Factors Survey. Note, there were 50% of survey takers who were unable to answer.

Figure 7. Research participants’ self-reported ACT score ranges. This figure illustrates the ACT score ranges for participants who were able to provide an answer.

**Self-reported SAT scores.** According the CollegeBoard’s SAT Suite of Assessments Annual Report (2017), there are two sections on the test, Evidence-based Reading and Writing (ERW) and Math; wherein test takers can earn a score between 200-800 points per section, and a combined score range between 400-1600 points (p. 2). In a national report, the CollegeBoard stated, “The mean total score for students in the class of 2017 who took the new SAT was 1060” (“The 2017 SAT Suite Annual Report,” 2018).

There were 40.8% of research participants to report they had taken the SAT, at least once. There were 55.1% who said they had not taken the SAT, and 4.1% who said they were unable to
answer. Of the research participants who had taken the SAT, 60% were unable to provide their test score. This is an extremely high number of students who did not have this information. This is a concern because it seems as if they are not keeping track of their progress on this exam. If you are unaware of your score, it will be difficult to know what skills you may need to improve upon to increase your score.

There were 26% of research participants who had a score, which fell between 800—999. This is not the most competitive score range, since the national mean score was 1060 (“The 2017 SAT Suite Annual Report,” 2018). Only 6% of students had a score over 1,000. This is a relatively small percentage of students in the school’s setting, who are in a competitive position for college enrollment, based on their SAT scores. Figure 8, on pages 73 and 47, depict these scores and percentages.

![Self-reported SAT Scores](image)

Figure 8. Research participants’ self-reported SAT score ranges. This figure illustrates the SAT score ranges for participants who were able to provide an answer.
Grade point average. Every research participant self-reported a GPA above a 2.0, which is a minimum requirement for high school graduation. Meeting the high school graduation requirements is setting the bar very low. One student reflects on his academic experience by stating, “Coming from here, this school, I don’t feel like I’m well prepared academically. And, I’m just hoping when I get there (to college) that I have a support system enough to help me get to where they are (non-rural students) when they left high school, and then get on the college level” (Parker, TRIO Focus Group).

Parker recognizes his academic preparation may have been very different from students who attend schools with more resources. He states, “It’s a decent school, but compared to other schools, we’re not on the level of competing with (future) classmates when we get to these institutions” (Parker, TRIO Focus Group). Figure 9, on page 75, supports this claim since most of the research participants, (43.1%) have decent GPAs, which fall within the 2.5—2.9 range.
There are many colleges who will accept at least a 2.5 GPA. However, to compete for admission into ivy league and public universities, as well as a scholarship; a college applicant will need a competitive grade point average. In the study, less than half of the research participants have earned a competitive grade point average, wherein 31.4% had between 3.0—3.4. Roughly, half of the participants who were doing exceptionally well, with a grade point average of 3.5 and higher.

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Respondents (n=50) are from the College Readiness & Protective Factors Survey (CRPFS).

Figure 9. Research participants’ self-reported ranges for grade point average (GPA). This figure illustrates the GPA ranges that were reported by research participants.
Rigorous course selection. Students who take rigorous courses, such as Honors and Advanced Placement (AP) demonstrate the ability to complete curriculum that is consistent with the rigor of college level courses. This is especially true for students who are dually enrolled in both high school courses and college courses, at the same time. In the survey, the research participants could indicate whether they were enrolled in Honors or AP courses on their high school’s campus, or dual enrolled in college courses off campus. However, in some case students fell in both categories.

There were 27 out of 49 (roughly, 55%) survey takers, who responded yes to the question, “Have you taken any Honors or Advanced Placement (AP) courses?” There were 16 out of 50 (32%) of research participants who said they have participated in dual enrollment programs. Please note, that dual enrollment courses are offered at a community college, as well as a local trade school. This is important to note because some students may have indicated they were in a dual enrollment course, but the credits they earned are required for a certification, and not an A.A. degree. However, for this study, research participants who either of these scenarios apply to, are classified as dual enrollment students. Figure 10, on page 76, shows the percentage or research participants who took an Honors/AP course, as well as those who have taken a dual enrollment course.

College enrollment plans. In addition to the CRPFS, the research participants were asked two additional questions in a follow-up questionnaire, which was used to determine their college plans. There were 47 research participants who completed this follow up questionnaire, which first asked if students had completed a college application. There were 19 out of 47 (40%) of survey takers who said they had already completed an application for college. There were 28
Respondents are from the College Readiness & Protective Factors Survey (CRPFS). Note: Percentages are based on respondents who answered the question for Honors/AP (n=49), and those who answered the question about dual enrollment courses (n=50).

Figure 10. Rigorous course selection. This figure illustrates the percentage of research participants who indicated they have taken Honors, Advanced Placement (AP), or Dual Enrollment courses in high school.

out of 47 participants (60%), who said they had not completed a college application. Most of the research subjects had not completed a college application, by the first semester of their senior year in high school. Again, this is showing they are not strong in the college readiness indicator.

Survey takers were asked to list a college or university they were interested in applying to, and then they were asked what their application status was for this school. They could have added up to four schools, for this section. However, the most students reported at least one school, wherein 43 research participants provided an answer. For their first school, there were 34 out 43 respondents (79.07%), and only 3 out of 43 (6.98%) replied that they had already applied to that school. As a college readiness indicator, the college application status shows that participants are not applying to college. Yet, there were at least 30 colleges and universities,
located across the country, that were identified as institutions that the research participants were interested in attending. Figure 11, below, illustrates this data.

### College Enrollment Plans

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respondents are from the College Readiness & Protective Factors Survey (CRPFS). Note: completion of application (n=47), and application status for college or university (n=43). All survey takers did not complete this question.

**Figure 11.** College enrollment plans. This figure illustrates the college application status of research participants.

**Financial aid.** When asked if they had completed a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), there were 18 out of 50 respondents (36%), who said they had completed their FAFSA, at the time of the study. There were 26 out of 50 (52%), who said they had not completed a FAFSA. Lastly, there were 6 out of 50 (12%), who said they do not plan to submit a
FAFSA. Therefore, a large number of research participants seem to be aware that they will need to complete a FAFSA in order to receive financial assistance for college.

Although, research subjects are aware of the FAFSA, they still appear to be uncertain about the different types of aid available. There were 35 out of 50 (70%) of research participants who said, “definitely yes” to anticipating receiving a scholarship. There were 9 out of 50 (18%), who said, “probably yes” and 5 out of 50 (10%) who said they “might or might not” anticipate a scholarship. On the surface this may seem impressive, but the reality is many of these students do not have competitive test scores and grades that would allow them to qualify for scholarships. Perhaps, there may be a lack of understanding of the requirements and expectations for receiving a scholarship.

On the other hand, when asked if they plan to use student loans to assist with paying for college, the participant responses are fairly even. For instance, 10 out of 50 participants (20%) said, “definitely yes”; eight out of 50 (16%) said “probably yes”; and 17 out of 50 participants (34%) said they, “might or might not” utilize loans. Then, 7 out of 50 participants (14%) said “probably not”, and eight out of 50 participants (16%) said, “definitely not.” The students who have no intentions of taking out loans may be considering employment, as means to pay for college. One student explains, “After high school, it's basically the same, try to go college or university and maybe part-time because I do also want to find a job, help my mom out and stuff” (Jennifer, Non-TRIO Dual Enrollment Focus Group). It is not uncommon for students to think they have to find a job on their own, rather than taking advantage of work-study positions on their campuses, which is also a form of financial aid. Figure 12, on page 80, illustrates the financial aid status and borrowing plans for research participants.
### Financial Aid Status & Borrowing Plans

#### Have you completed a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>36.00%</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>No. However, I plan to submit a FAFSA</td>
<td>52.00%</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>No, I do not plan to submit a FAFSA</td>
<td>12.00%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Do you anticipate receiving a scholarship to assist with paying for college?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Definitely yes</td>
<td>70.00%</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Probably yes</td>
<td>18.00%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Might or might not</td>
<td>10.00%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Probably not</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Definitely not</td>
<td>2.00%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Do you anticipate using student loans to assist with paying for college?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Definitely yes</td>
<td>20.00%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Probably yes</td>
<td>16.00%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Might or might not</td>
<td>34.00%</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Probably not</td>
<td>14.00%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Definitely not</td>
<td>16.00%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respondents (n=50) are from the College Readiness & Protective Factors Survey (CRPFS).

Figure 12. Financial aid status. This figure illustrates the financial aid status of research participants, and their plans for borrowing money to pay for school.
Research Question 2: “What are the Protective Factors of Twelfth-grade Students Enrolled in a Rural High School?”

In this study, protective factors are defined as the non-cognitive skills that students possess, which help them maneuver through life’s disruptions related to preparing for college or post-secondary enrollment. Additionally, protective factors include the positive, personal characteristics of a student, also referred to as dispositional factors in this study. Lastly, a student’s family and environment can also produce positive characteristics that serve as protective factors. The next sections will report findings on the non-cognitive scores of research participants; and cite examples of the dispositional factors, familial factors, and environmental factors of the focus group participants in the study.

**Non-cognitive assessment scores.** The non-cognitive scores of research participants were determined by the questions posed in the second half of the College Readiness & Protective Factors Survey, which were based on Sedlacek’s (2004) non-cognitive assessment. Please note, the educational attainment of parental figures may also be considered a protective factor, however, the assessment tool focuses on the eight non-cognitive skills identified by Sedlacek (2004). An overall non-cognitive assessment score was formulated by adding together each participants’ score for each of the following eight variable categories: positive self-concept or confidence; realistic self-appraisal; understands and deals with racism; prefers long-range goals to short-term or immediate needs; availability of strong support person; successful leadership experience; demonstrated community service; and knowledge acquired in a field. The overall non-cognitive assessment scores for 50 research participants ranged from 41 – 77. However, the average overall score, for all 50 participants, was 58.86. Based upon Sedlacek’s scoring instructions, possible overall scores could range between 29 to 145. Appendix G, provides
overall non-cognitive scores for all 50 research participants, and provides each individuals’ non-cognitive score per category.

In Figure 13, the average scores are presented for each of the eight non-cognitive areas found in the College Readiness and Protective Factors Survey. Five non-cognitive areas (positive self-concept, realistic self-appraisal, long range goals, strong support, and community service) were assessed using a 20-point scale. Research participants had an average score of 9.2, in the area of positive self-concept and confidence. Therefore, the research participants had roughly 45% out of 100% for this category, wherein the highest possible score was 20 points. The realistic self-appraisal score was 7.8. This means that the research participants had roughly 39% out of 100% of 20 possible points for this category. In the area of preferring long-range goals to short-term or immediate needs, the average score was 7.8. This is also roughly 39% out of 100% of the highest possible score of 20 for this category. The average score for strong support person was 7.7. This is 38% out of 100% of the highest possible score of 20 for this category. Demonstrated community service had an average score of 7.3. This is roughly 36% of the highest possible score of 20 in this category.

Three items (understanding racism, knowledge of professions, and successful leadership) were assessed using a 15-point scale. The category of understanding and dealing with racism had an average score of 7.0. This equates to 47% out of 100% of the 15 possible points allotted for this non-cognitive variable. Knowledge acquired in a professional field category had an average score of 6.7, which shows that that the research participants had only acquired 44% out of 100% for this skill, in which 15 was the highest possible score in this category. Finally, for the category of successful leadership experience, the average score was 5.4. This is roughly 36% of 100% of the highest possible score of 15 for this category). Overall, research participants had
not mastered any of the non-cognitive skills. However, their strongest areas were understanding and dealing with racism, as well as positive self-concept. Successful leadership experience and community service were the weakest skills exhibited by participants. Please see figure 13 below.

**Percentage of Average Score for Each Non-Cognitive Category**

![Percentage of Average Score for Each Non-Cognitive Category](image)

Respondents (n=50) are from the College Readiness & Protective Factors Survey (CRPFS).

Figure 13. Percentage of average score for each non-cognitive category. This figure illustrates the average score among research participants, for each non-cognitive category.
The focus group members provided in-depth examples of the research participants’ experiences with these eight non-cognitive variables. For the remainder of this sub-section, some examples related to non-cognitive categories will be cited from the focus group interviews, and discussed in the next sub-sections.

*Positive self-concept and confidence.* Sedlacek (2004) believes that students who come from non-traditional backgrounds need a good self-concept because they have the added burden of “dealing with a system that was not designed for them” (p. 39). In discussing how he stays positive and focused on going to college, one research participant stated, “My family is really keeping me grounded. Even though, like I'm at school and I socialize a lot, and I'm like really out there and stuff. When I get home, I have to come back and like be a man again, because I remember all the things-- my dad taught. All the things that made me into the person I am today. I have to come back to my core values” (Miles, Non-TRIO Dual Enrollment Focus Group).

*Realistic self-appraisal.* According to Sedlacek (2004) “Realistic self-appraisal is the ability to assess one’s strengths and weaknesses” (p. 41). One student said, “For me, one of my biggest fears is just not getting into college like now because when I'm filling out applications and I get to the part of extracurriculars and stuff, that kills me because I have like almost none. Well, not really, I'm in a couple of clubs, but I don't feel like it's enough, so I feel like that might hold me back” (Kelly, Non-TRIO Dual Enrollment Focus Group). Another student notes his strengths as being his ability to do a lot of things. However, he understands that being this way can be a double-edged sword wherein he stated, “It might be weird but me wanting to do everything would probably kind of keep me from actually not going to college, if I had to pick something, because I have so many things I know I can do, but it's just like you can't do everything” (Simon, Non-TRIO Dual Enrollment Focus Group).
**Understands and deals with racism.** This category means that students are able to negotiate the system by being realistic about personal experience with discrimination, while not being submissive or combative, and asserts that the school has a role to fight discrimination on their behalf (Sedlacek, 2004). This non-cognitive skill was harder to determine, since the majority of the research participants share the same race. However, one research participant who happens to be Hispanic (a minority within the research setting) seems to be especially attuned to holding the system accountable. Jennifer (Non-TRIO Dual Enrollment Focus Group) states, “Students have been left out of many important information (updates) because we are a small select group. And, I just feel like they should-- when they think of events or when they think of important data to give us—keep in mind that there are more people than just those that need help. There are people that got it done, have it done. They still need this information.”

**Prefers long-range to short term immediate needs.** In explaining the rational for the non-cognitive variable for preferring long-range goals to short-term or immediate needs; Sedlacek (2004) suggests that nontraditional students have difficulty understanding the relationship between current efforts and future outcomes (p. 44). Minority students, especially, struggle with delaying gratification because they are preoccupied with pressing immediate issues. However, students who are able to set realistic long-range goals are often more successful (Sedlacek, 2004). Sedlacek’s assessment scoring key gives more points for students who can state specific goals, with a future orientation. When asked, where they saw themselves in 10 years? The male participants in the focus groups stated general goals that involved making money, becoming a millionaire; but, they had no specific plan for reaching these goals.

One student said (sarcastically), “If I don't have at least a million in my bank account I've failed” (Simon, Non-TRIO Dual Enrollment Focus Group). On the other hand, the female focus
group participants were very specific about their goals. For instance, one student said, “In 10 years, I'm pretty sure I'll be done with medical school. I'll probably figure out what I want to specialize in, probably dermatology. And I want to have at least traveled to a lot of different countries and stuff. And I want to learn like three other languages, hopefully” (Kelly, Non-TRIO Dual Enrollment Focus Group).

*Availability of strong support.* Research participants weighed in on their availability of strong support person (within the school). Rhianna (Non-TRIO Dual Enrollment Focus Group) states, “Nobody has really pushed me about school except for two people. And that'll be the guidance counselor, because she stays on my behind about school” (Rhiana, Non-TRIO Dual Enrollment Focus Group). Although she does not participate in TRIO, she notes that the HBCU Talent Search counselor has been helpful. Rhianna recalls being in the library one day when the HBCU Talent Search counselor assisted her with a college application. She said, “I was procrastinating with that application and she was like, “Go ahead and do a little” to get started” (Rhianna, Non-TRIO Dual Enrollment Focus Group). Rhianna also praises her dual enrollment sponsor for encouraging her when she feels down. She states, “When I'm be slacking, she'll be like, “Rhianna” I know you're better than that because a lot of times the kids who do the best also struggle very hard” (Rhianna, Non-TRIO Dual Enrollment Focus Group).

*Successful leadership.* The Successful leadership experience is determined when non-traditional students show the ability to organize and influence others (Sedlacek, 2004). Non-traditional students are likely to demonstrate their leadership in unconventional ways (Sedlacek, 2004). There were some focus group members who displayed these traits by encouraging the members within their focus group, as well as citing examples of how they influenced their peers outside of the group. One participant reflected on his thoughts about making a difference in in
his school, as leader, wherein he stated to his friends, “Honestly, I was sitting at the game last night. I was sitting at the JV game and I was like, “Little do y'all know, this is the future of our school. This JV game will soon be the varsity games. And, it's like these are the ninth and eleventh graders who will soon be the seniors and the juniors. So, it's like you've got to look at things as, “How can I invest into the future?” How can I make it go from bad to good by the time the little ones become the big ones?” (Parker, TRIO Participant Focus Group).

**Demonstrated community service.** Evidence of demonstrated community service was when research participates, who were involved with youth groups, cited groups whose main purpose is community service. The research setting offers Key Club as a means for students to earn community service hours. This organization was mentioned many times within the study, one person said this about Key Club, “The best thing that they help us with would be community service because they're giving us like a lot of opportunities to get involved in the community and get our hours up and stuff (Kelly, Non-TRIO Dual Enrollment Focus Group).

**Knowledge acquired in a field.** According to William Sedlacek (2004) “Women and students of color who have shown evidence of non-traditional learning prior to college tend to be more successful in college than those who show no such evidence” (p. 49). There are some research participants who exhibited that they had acquired knowledge in a field by the specific descriptions they provided about their professional plans. One individual explains, “I'm probably going to go to FSU, and I will study biology. And afterwards, I'm going to go to medical school. I was considering like IVY League, now, for medical school, but that's what I planned right now” (Kelly, Non-TRIO Dual Enrollment Focus Group). In conclusion, the research participants who took the survey have very low, overall non-cognitive scores. However, they exhibited
strengths in the category Positive self-concept. This finding will be addressed later in the chapter, when discussing the researcher’s interpretation of focus group data.

**Research Question 3: “How do College Readiness Skills and Protective Factors Differ between Rural High School Participants in Federal TRIO Programs, and Students who do not Participate in Federal TRIO Programs (including Dual Enrollment Students)?”**

There were 15 TRIO participants who completed the College Readiness & Protective Factors Survey; including three who participate in the UB-PWI program, 10 who enrolled in the TS-HBCU program, and two from the TS-CC program. The TRIO students were combined (n=15). Also, the non-TRIO students in the study (n=35) were combined, to include both non-TRIO students and non-TRIO Dual Enrollment students. Outcomes for both groups were compared, by each variable which shows the differences in their college readiness skills and protective factors. The remainder of this section will report the findings of these comparisons. Additional data from the focus group interviews will provide supportive evidence of their experiences.

**Comparison of Student Demographics**

**Family characteristics.** Differences in household structure and parent’s educational level were compared between TRIO participant and non-TRIO participants. The researcher found that 53% of the TRIO participants came from households wherein they had only one parent (mother only). Whereas, 54% of the non-TRIO research participants came from two-parent households. Additionally, 53% of the TRIO parents had earned a high school diploma. In contrast, only 34% of non-TRIO parents had received a high school diploma. A third of parents of non-TRIO students (34%), did not have a high school diploma, in comparison to only 7% of parents to TRIO students. Table 3, on page 89, illustrates these findings.
Table 3. Comparison of household and parental background of TRIO v. Non-TRIO participants. This table describes differences in research participants by household structure and parent’s educational level.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Household Structure</th>
<th>TRIO Percentage</th>
<th>Non-TRIO (Combined)</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Two-parent</td>
<td>5 33%</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single Parent (Mother only)</td>
<td>8 53%</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single Parent (Father only)</td>
<td>2 13%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guardian, or other family</td>
<td>0 0%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>15 100%</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent's Educational Level</th>
<th>TRIO Percentage</th>
<th>Non-TRIO (Combined)</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No High School Diploma</td>
<td>1 7%</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Diploma</td>
<td>8 53%</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military Training</td>
<td>1 7%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college, no degree</td>
<td>2 13%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certification (Training)</td>
<td>0 0%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.A. Degree</td>
<td>1 7%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor's Degree</td>
<td>1 7%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate Degree</td>
<td>1 7%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctoral Degree</td>
<td>0 0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>15 100%</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respondents (n= 50) are from the College Readiness and Protective Factors Survey. Note: All TRIO students were combined (n=15), and not separated by program, since they make up only 30% of all survey takers. Additionally, the non-TRIO and non-TRIO Dual Enrollment participants were also combined.

Kelly (Non-TRIO Dual Enrollment Focus Group) recounts her parent’s experience with education by stating, “Well, for me, neither of my parents went straight to college after high school but they went back to school around the time I started high school. So, for me, they really encouraged me to go ahead and get into college early and get involved in all the opportunities I'm given right now, so that I don't regret anything later.” (Kelly, Non-TRIO Dual Enrollment Focus Group). Simon attributes his view on education to his father’s immigrant family members from Africa, who are instrumental in pushing his educational plans for college. He states, "Since my dad's side of the family came here they're all about education. And if you don't get your education, they kind of like just throw you away – cast you out. They're just all about education."
So, like my grandfather, my grandmother, my dad, my uncles are just all really successful. So, like growing up around them is just like the life I want to live” (Non-TRIO Dual Enrollment Focus Group).

**Comparison of College Readiness Skills**

Indicators of college readiness include test scores on college entrance exams (i.e. ACT and SAT), grade point average, rigorous course selection, and understanding of Financial aid. The following sections will report outcomes of TRIO participants compared to non-TRIO participants in these areas.

**ACT and SAT scores.** First, when reviewing data related to college entrance exams, it was uncovered that nine out of 15 of the TRIO participants (60%) in the study had taken the ACT at least once, compared to 15 out of 35 who were non-TRIO participants (roughly, 42%). However, 14 out of 33 of these participants (roughly, 44%) had taken the SAT, compared to only 5 out of 15 of the TRIO participants (33%). This data suggests that TRIO participants are gravitating toward the ACT more than their non-TRIO counterparts, who seem to prefer taking the SAT. Perhaps, this could be due to the practices of TRIO programs, wherein in the past years test preparation and waivers were more readily accessible for the ACT, compared to the SAT. However, there may be a shift in these practices, due to the CollegeBoard’s recent partnership with Khan Academy, which links student SAT scores to their Khan Academy account, wherein they are provided with free, online tutorials. The CollegeBoard asserts that some students’ test scores have increased by as much as 200 points, as a result of this partnership. Please see Table 4, on page 91, which are two smaller tables within, which show the comparisons of ACT and SAT attempts.
Table 4. Comparison of ACT and SAT attempts of TRIO v. Non-TRIO participants. This table shows the TRIO research participants who attempted to take the ACT and SAT, at least one time, compared to the Non-TRIO participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Have you participated in a Federal TRIO program, such as Upward Bound or Talent Search? (Please select below.)</th>
<th>I am a PWI Upward Bound participant.</th>
<th>I am a HBCU Talent Search participant.</th>
<th>I am a CC Talent Search participant.</th>
<th>I do not participate in Upward Bound or Talent Search.</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unable to answer</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Have you taken the SAT at least one time? (Please select below.)</th>
<th>I am a PWI Upward Bound participant.</th>
<th>I am a HBCU Talent Search participant.</th>
<th>I am a CC Talent Search participant.</th>
<th>I do not participate in Upward Bound or Talent Search.</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unable to answer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respondents are from the College Readiness and Protective Factors Survey: ACT (n= 50); and SAT (n=48). There were two non-TRIO students who did not provide a response about SAT. Note: the non-TRIO and non-TRIO Dual Enrollment participants were also combined n=35 for ACT, and n=33 for SAT.

Majority of the TRIO participants, five out of 15 (33%), had an ACT score, which ranged between at 15-19. These scores barely meet the college entrance exam requirements for most universities and colleges. Although, 12 out of 33 (35%) of the non-TRIO participants also fell within this range, this group had 2 out of 33 (6%) of students who scored a 20 or higher, which is also above the minimum requirement for most institutions. Twenty percent of TRIO participants (3 out of 15), who took the SAT scored between 800-900. This is not a highly competitive score range because the national average is 1060 (previously discussed). More non-TRIO participants, 9 out of 34 (roughly, 27%), fell within this range also. However, the non-TRIO group also had 3
out of 34 participants (roughly, 9%), who had scores which ranged between 1,000 – 1,600. These are highly competitive scores that strengthen the chances of these students being admitted to a four-year institution. The TRIO participants did not have any students to report competitive scores, such as this. Please see Table 5, below, which illustrates the comparison of ACT and SAT score ranges, reported by research participants.

Table 5. Comparison of ACT and SAT score ranges of TRIO v. Non-TRIO Participants. This table shows the TRIO research participants self-reported ACT and SAT scores, compared to the Non-TRIO participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Have you participated in a Federal TRIO program, such as Upward Bound or Talent Search? (Please s...)</th>
<th>I am a PWI Upward Bound participant.</th>
<th>I am a HBCU Talent Search participant.</th>
<th>I am a CC Talent Search participant.</th>
<th>I do not participate in Upward Bound or Talent Search.</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Which range best describes your composite ACT score (i.e. All sections added together.) (Please s...)</td>
<td>25 or higher</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20 - 24</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15 - 19</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14 or lower</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unable to answer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Have you participated in a Federal TRIO program, such as Upward Bound or Talent Search? (Please s...)</th>
<th>I am a PWI Upward Bound participant.</th>
<th>I am a HBCU Talent Search participant.</th>
<th>I am a CC Talent Search participant.</th>
<th>I do not participate in Upward Bound or Talent Search.</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Which range best describes your composite SAT score (i.e. All sections added together.) (Please s...)</td>
<td>1450 - 1600</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1200 - 1399</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1000 - 1199</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>900 - 999</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>600 - 799</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>599 or lower</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unable to answer</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respondents are ACT score ranges (n= 48) in which there were two non-TRIO students who did not provide an ACT score; and SAT score ranges (n=49) in which there was one non-TRIO student who did not provide a response about SAT. Note: the non-TRIO and non-TRIO Dual Enrollment participants were also combined n= 33 for ACT, and n=34 for SAT.
Rigorous course selection. TRIO participants in the study took Honors and Advanced Placement (AP) courses at a higher rate than non-TRIO participants. There were 9 out of 12 (75%) TRIO students who self-reported taking Honors, or AP courses. There were only 3 out of 12 who reported that they were dually enrolled. There were 18 out of 31 (over 58%) of non-TRIO participants, who reported taking Honors or AP course, and 13 out of 31 (42%), who reported taking post-secondary courses while in high school. The non-TRIO participants were dual enrolled at a higher rate, wherein 42% of these students were enrolled in college level courses, compared to 25% of the TRIO participants. Please see Table 7 below, which illustrates this data.

Table 6. Comparison of rigorous course selection for TRIO v. non-TRIO participants. This table shows the TRIO research participants’ rigorous course selection, compared to the Non-TRIO participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comparison of Self-Reported Rigorous Courses Selection</th>
<th>TRIO</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Non-TRIO (Combined)</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Honors, or Advanced Placement</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dual Enrollment</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respondents (n= 43) are from the College Readiness and Protective Factors Survey. TRIO participants (n=12), and non-TRIO participants (n=31). Some participants did not provide an answer, or either do not take rigorous courses. Note: TRIO students were combined and not separated by program, since they make up a small number of all survey takers. Additionally, the non-TRIO and non-TRIO Dual Enrollment participants were also combined.

Financial aid. Another indication of college readiness is a student’s knowledge or understanding of financial aid options for paying for college. Students who show a strong likelihood of going to college, tend to apply for financial aid using the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Students who are college ready also demonstrate some knowledge of the different types of financial aid options available to them. At the time of taking the survey, 6 out of 15 (40%) of TRIO students had completed a FAFSA, compared to 12 out of 35 (roughly, 34%) of non-TRIO participants. Additionally, more TRIO participants anticipated
receiving scholarships to pay for college. There were 12 out of 15 (80%) of TRIO participants versus, 24 out of 35 (roughly, 69%) of non-TRIO participants, who indicated they plan to receive a scholarship.

More non-TRIO students anticipated using loans to pay for college. There were 13 out of 35 (roughly, 37%) who said, “yes, or probably yes” to using loans to finance their education, and five out of 15 TRIO participants (roughly, 34%), who plan to use loans as well. Based on these findings, it seems as if TRIO students are slightly more knowledgeable about the financial aid process, since they have completed their FAFSAs at a higher rate, and they know of other ways to pay for college besides relying on loans as much. Below, Table 8 provides an illustration of these findings.

Table 7. Comparison of financial aid for TRIO v. non-TRIO participants. This table shows the TRIO research participants’ financial aid and borrowing plans, compared to the Non-TRIO participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Financial Aid Status &amp; Borrowing Plans Comparison Tables</th>
<th>Have you participated in a Federal TRIO program, such as Upward Bound or Talent Search? (Please s...</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am a PWI Upward Bound participant.</td>
<td>I am a HBCU Talent Search participant.</td>
<td>I am a CC Talent Search participant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No. However, I plan to submit a FAFSA.</td>
<td>No. I do not plan to submit a FAFSA.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respondents (n= 50) are from the College Readiness and Protective Factors Survey. TRIO participants (n=15), and non-TRIO participants (n=35). Note, the non-TRIO and non-TRIO Dual Enrollment participants were combined.
College enrollment plans. The best indication of someone’s intent to enroll in college is their completion of college applications. Below, is a table which depicts a comparison of the college application status of TRIO v. Non-TRIO participants in the study. The research participants in the focus groups (n=14), were used to show the differences in college enrollment plans for TRIO participants, Non-TRIO participants, and Non-TRIO Dual Enrollment participants. One focus group participant did not take the follow-up questionnaire. At the time of the follow-up questionnaire, none of the non-TRIO participants had applied to college yet. Two out of the five Non-TRIO Dual Enrollment participants had applied to college, and one out of the six TRIO participants had applied to college. Overall, only 21% of focus group participants had met this college readiness measure. These findings are displayed in figure 14 below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respondents (n=14) are from the three focus group participants who completed the follow-up questionnaire. Note: one Non-TRIO participant did not complete the follow-up questionnaire.

Figure 14. Comparison of college enrollment plans. This figure illustrates a comparison of the college enrollment status of research participants, by focus groups.
Comparison of Protective Factors

The protective factors, also referred to as non-cognitive skills, varied among research participants. This sub-section, accounts for the differences in non-cognitive scores for each of the three focus groups, as well as the overall scores for the individuals within these groups.

Non-cognitive scores. The average scores for each of the eight non-cognitive variables is compared among the three focus groups (TRIO participants, Non-TRIO participants, and Non-TRIO Dual Enrollment participants). Figure 15, below shows this data.

Respondents (n=15) are from the three focus groups, who completed the CRPFS. Figure 15. Comparison of non-cognitive category scores. This figure illustrates a comparison of the average score for each non-cognitive category, by focus group.
The TRIO Focus Group members averaged higher scores in only one non-cognitive category, which was their knowledge acquired in a professional field (7.3). This could be attributed to the exposure to college majors and career choices provided to them by Federal TRIO programs. The Non-TRIO Focus Group led in three of the non-cognitive categories; which were understands and deals with racism (8.25), preferring long-range goals to immediate needs (7.75), and availability of strong support person (9). This could be due to this group being comprised of all black or African American males, with moderate success academically. Sedlacek discusses the understanding and dealing with racism category from the perspective of a minority student learning how to maneuver in a predominantly white institution. However, these young men in the focus group may have learned how to maneuver their school’s system as students who are just above the margin in terms of being considered at-risk. They have adopted strategies to help them avoid negative situations in their school or community. This can also be the reason why they had the highest score for availability of strong support person, because they are taking advantage of the assistance that school leaders seem to be providing to students who would normally be marginalized in other school settings. This idea will be explored further in analysis of qualitative findings in the next section.

Members of the Non-TRIO Dual Enrollment Focus Group had the highest score for positive self-concept or confidence (10.6). This is not surprising, since positive self-concept is correlated with academic success, whereas this group has proven to be the most successful in their courses and standardized test scores. This group also had the highest scores for realistic self-appraisal (8.2), successful leadership experience (6.6), and demonstrated community service (9.4). This could be attributed to their high score in positive self-appraisal, which leads to being highly motivated in other areas. The scores in Figure 15, on page 96, are consistent with the
overall non-cognitive scores for individuals in each group. Table 9 on page 98, shows the overall, non-cognitive score for each participant, as well as the group’s average overall non-cognitive score.

Table 8. Comparison of overall non-cognitive category score. This figure illustrates a comparison of the overall, non-cognitive score for each participant in each of the three focus groups; as well as the average overall score for each group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>TRIO Participants (6 Group Members)</th>
<th>Non-TRIO Participants (4 Group Members)</th>
<th>Non-TRIO Dual Enrollment Participants (5 Group Members)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>41</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>52</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>53</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>56</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>56</td>
<td></td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>64</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group Avg.</strong></td>
<td><strong>53.66</strong></td>
<td><strong>60.75</strong></td>
<td><strong>62.4</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respondents (n=15) are from the three focus groups, who completed the CRPFS.

This section provided comparison data of TRIO participants versus those who do not participate in these programs. The findings showed that Non-TRIO Dual Enrollment Focus Group members had the strongest non-cognitive skills, among all three groups. However, when comparing results of all 50 survey takers, TRIO participants had more competitive, self-reported grade point averages. TRIO participants also self-reported their enrollment in Honors/AP courses at a higher rate than non-TRIO participants. Furthermore, TRIO participants had a better understanding of financial aid options compared to non-TRIO participants. Each of the three focus groups have their strengths and weaknesses. The next section of Chapter 4, will provide further insight into the researcher’s interpretation of the qualitative data, which support these findings, as well as other conclusions drawn from the focus group interview data. Additionally, the next section will provide a discussion on the themes and codes that emerged from the focus group interviews.
Analysis and Interpretation of Qualitative Findings

Emerging themes and codes. The process for coding focus group interview transcripts consisted of transcribing audio recordings into a Microsoft Word document. Next, a considerable amount of time was dedicated to determining meanings of the patterns and themes that emerged from audio files and transcripts (Patton, 2015). After hearing specific issues come up over and over, the process of coding began. There were twelve parent codes identified, and 40 children codes. The codes found in each member’s transcript were tabulated to capture the frequency of each time that interviewee touched on a specific issue. The codes and frequencies can be found in Appendix F, Table 9, pg. 147. This sub-section lists the themes and patterns that were found when the focus group participants responded to the interview questions (Patton, 2015). There were five themes that resounded the loudest in the interviews, they are as follows:

Theme 1: Procrastination—Focus group members delay applying to college for fear of being rejected by college and universities.

(Dispositional factors)

Theme 2: Self-esteem—Focus group members either have a positive self-concept, or they have developed strategies to cope without have positive self-esteem.

(Dispositional factors)

Theme 3: Parental involvement—Focus group members believe parent and family support is important, whether they have supportive families or not.

(Familial Factors)

Theme 4: Perception of School Support—Non-TRIO Dual Enrollment participants feel as if they are being ignored and unsupported by school administrators;
and Non-TRIO participants feel that they are being supported; while TRIO “participants support one another. (Environmental factors)

Theme 5: “County Mentality”—All focus groups believe there is a negative stereotype associated with being from their county. (Environmental factors)

Characteristics triad as an academic resiliency lens. Most children and adults experience difficult situations in life, and it is important to identify the protective factors they possessed, which allow them to overcome such difficulties (Garmenzy, 1991) (Morales & Trotman, 2004). There has been limited research done to investigate the protective factors of individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds, especially as it relates to their academic resiliency. Furthermore, there has been very little research on the protective factors of rural students in particular. Garmenzy (1991) developed the “characteristic triad” to help investigators identify components that facilitate resiliency among poor groups, and students who have demonstrated academic achievement in school (Morales & Trotman, 2004). However, rural students have a different experience with poverty compared to youth who attend schools in urban and suburban areas. Therefore, the characteristics triad will be applied to understand the academic resiliency of rural students, while considering their unique challenges.

The characteristics triad consists of disposition, family, and environment. These characteristics overlap or intersect with one another to provide a sketch for understanding each student’s individual experience. The triad can be analyzed to demonstrate how the individual has been resilient despite having unfavorable background factors or experiencing disruptions in their college plans (Morales & Trotman, 2004). Figure 16, on page 101, depicts this rationale.
Figure 16. Characteristics triad. This figure illustrates the three characteristics used to understand focus group data, which are as follows: dispositional factors, familial factors, and environmental factors.

The characteristics triad was used in this study to help organize qualitative data from the focus group interviews. Therefore, the themes and codes will be discussed in the context of the characteristics triad (dispositional factors, familial factors, and environmental factors). The idea behind this is to discuss the themes that were uncovered, and then to reveal those themes and patterns with sufficient context (Wolcott, 2009). Hence, the remainder of this section within Chapter 4 will use direct quotes from the focus group interviews to provide supportive documentation on how the themes and codes were interpreted.

Dispositional factors. When discussing dispositional characteristics, the researcher considers this as the acquired personality traits that attribute to academic resiliency. Dispositional factors came up 373 times during the focus group interviews. Sedlacek’s eight non-cognitive traits were used as the basis for creating parent and child codes to explain dispositional factors, and they were treated as separated parent codes. However, it should be noted that positive self-concept or confidence was grouped in with other child codes to support the Parent Code 1: Dispositional factors; and availability of strong support system was grouped with other
child codes under Parent Code 5: Environmental factors. Therefore, the researcher used this math equation to determine the overall frequency for disposition: Parent Code 1 (188 total) + Parent Codes 6 – 11 (164 total) + Child Code 26 (21 total) = 373. Table 10, on page 136 shows frequency data. Please note, the next sub-sections include direct quotes from research subjects, which may include slang and vernacular, to maintain authenticity of the results.

The first theme, Procrastination, stood out when looking at the dispositional factors of focus group members. The researcher views procrastination as the hesitancy shown by research participants towards carrying out or acting on their college plans. Although, research participants exhibited signs of positively asserting college or postsecondary plans, by sharing their educational plans after high school, 44 times, during the interviews. There were 11 times wherein the group members admitted they were procrastinating with their college plans, whether it was, for example, not retaking the ACT or SAT to obtain a higher score, or not completing their applications. This means at least 11 out of the 15 research participants, mentioned procrastination as an issue. They explain in their own words in the next three sub-sections.

Procrastination & TRIO focus group. Christopher admits he is procrastinating because he plans to attend a community college, which he believes is not hard to get enrolled. When asked to explain how he is procrastinating, he stated, “Like being lazy, not finishing the app (as in application). But, I know I’m going so, you know, it’s not that hard to get in” (Christopher, TRIO Focus Group). In the discussion Parker agrees with what Christopher is saying about procrastinating because you may think something will come easy for you. For example, he explains how he procrastinated with an application to attend a summer bridge program, that helps students enroll in college early. This program happens to be affiliates with his Upward Bound program. He stated, “Because I’m a scholar of the Upward Bound Program… I thought
like maybe I'll be a shoe-in. But, then the deadline was creeping up on me and I had to rush and get everything in. So yeah, I get what he's saying. If it's like not hard to get into. and that'll make you procrastinate and stuff” (Parker, TRIO Focus Group).

**Procrastination & Non-TRIO focus group.** This group did not have much discussion of their college plans specifically. Although, the participants may have briefly mentioned the school they wanted to attend, but they did not talk about the actions steps they were taking to enroll in a postsecondary program, except for two examples. Craig is an athlete, who hopes to get an athletic scholarship. He only mentioned what his coaches were doing to assist him in getting a scholarship, but he did not talk about what he needs to do. Calvin wants to attend a vocational school in the neighboring county. His biggest issue with procrastination is worrying about the logistics of getting there. Calvin stated, “Well, it was just more of the transportation expense.

**Procrastination & Non-TRIO dual enrollment focus group.** One research participant describes her anxiety about applying to college, “So right now, it's kind of like that period where you're kind of like scared because I don't really know what I'm doing” (Rhianna, Non-TRIO Dual Enrollment Focus Group). “I feel like the biggest fear when it comes to college is just utter failure, and I feel like, for me, I think like the same - God forbid, let's say I don't get accepted to (a four-year university), I obviously have the option to go to (a community college) but it's kind of like “Dang, I couldn't even get into the college that I wanted to get into”” (Rhianna, Non-TRIO Dual Enrollment Focus Group).

**The second theme, Self-esteem,** was another dispositional factor that was obvious in the focus group discussions, Child code 2: Positive self-esteem or self-concept (confidence), was found 79 times in discussion with research participants. It was apparent that some research participants exhibited positive self-concept or confidence, while others showed signs of being
withdrawn from their peers, as well as being fearful. Both the TRIO Focus Group and Non-TRIO Dual Enrollment Focus Groups exhibited this quality roughly, 30 times, while the Non-TRIO Focus Group showed half as much, with exhibiting this quality only 18 times. Please see Table 10, on page 136 for details. The next sub-sections will provide cited examples of the self-concept of research participants.

*Self-esteem of the TRIO focus group.* Parker and Paris had the highest frequency of positive self-concept among the TRIO students. Parker had a frequency of 11, while Paris’ frequency was 9 times of showing this trait. Parker says he stays positive by telling himself, “You’ve just got to make it! You’ve got to make it work no matter what you’ve got because coming from here, this school, I don’t feel like I’m well prepared academically. And, I’m just hoping when I get there (meaning college) that I have a support system” (Parker, TRIO Focus Group).

Paris also believes she is self-motivated, but she also feels like her family drives her motivation to be successful. “I have three younger siblings. And they look up to me. So, I just want to set a good example for them. But, a lot of it comes from within because I know I’ve seen my grandparents struggle without having college degrees, so I want to be better than them. I want to be able to give back to them for helping me grow into the woman that I am today. So, I’m doing it for myself even though I’m going to give back to my family” (Paris, TRIO Focus Group).

*Self-esteem of the non-TRIO focus group.* This group’s non-cognitive score for positive self-concept was lower than the TRIO group, but higher than the Non-TRIO dual enrollment group. Craig is positive by stating, “I don’t take anything for granted but I always am a nice person. I feel like there’s always hope in the world and like there's something, always feel that I
can be more confident. I think people around me feel like I'm more nice than mean.’’ He also admits, ‘‘I'm a quiet person but I'm really nice. And I just feel like you can go further by helping people and sort of being nice.’’ Calvin talked about feeling different from his peers. He states, ‘‘I'll say I have a different mindset, like in different stuff, that people doesn't like or haven't heard of before.’’

_Self-esteem of the non-TRIO dual enrollment focus group._ The Non-TRIO Dual Enrollment group is had the lowest score for positive self-concept. They do not seem to be very outgoing with their peer group. Rhianna states, ‘‘It's kind of like me already being a person doesn't really like people or meeting new people. I feel like it will be really hard to kind of like find that stuff outside of just school (in college) because I feel like that's important as well – it's finding stuff outside of academics. However, she plans to change in college. She stated, ‘‘My expectation for myself would be college is new so just try to break out of that whole. I don't really want to associate with other people more than I have to already. So, I feel like I would try to do that even if it's probably kind of hard.’’

Simon is also not as outgoing. He states, ‘‘So, in high school, I wasn't really involved in a lot of stuff. I always had like a heavy load but not because I had to. I always just put the heavy load on myself just to be better.’’ He expounded by stating, ‘‘So, in college, I know, for sure, I'm going to be like more open because I plan to play in college and I just plan to be like really active on the campus. But I mean, I don't feel like that's going to stop me from like getting to my goal and like completing.’’

Miles seems a little more social with his friends, at school. It seems as if he does this to fit in. However, when he leaves the campus he has a different reality. He said, ‘‘I think what makes me different, individuality really, is individuality, knowing who you are. As for me, I
know who I am. Even though I portray myself as somebody at school, when I go back home, I know who I am. And so, that's it, really. I just know who I am.”

**Familial factors.** Although, the student’s family can be considered as part of the environment, researchers who have used the characteristic triad for investigation encourage separating familial factors from environmental factors. Therefore, the focus group members’ parental involvement and support system will be discussed for this section, because the home environment is a predictor of academic resilience (Morales & Trotman, 2004). Parent Code 4: Familial factors, came up 93 times. Table 10, on page 136 shows frequency data.

**The third theme, Parental Involvement,** came up frequently. Most research participants described positive interactions with their parents. Child Code 17: Positive Parental Involvement, came up 29 times. Additionally, focus group members noted Child Code 19: Receiving support from other family members (i.e. siblings, aunts, uncles, close family friends), a total of 43 times. However, Child Code 18: Negative Parental Involvement came up 21 times. The Non-TRIO Dual Enrollment Focus Group had the highest frequency for positive interactions with parents, for a total of 16. Whereas the TRIO Focus Group and Non-TRIO Focus Group had higher frequencies for receiving support from family members in general. This frequency data can be found in Table 10, on page 136. The next sub-sections will provide examples of how the focus group members view their parental involvement.

**Parental involvement of the TRIO focus group.** When talking about family involvement, there were two TRIO participants who got emotional, while listening to the other students describe how supportive their families were. One student Annalise even began to cry when she heard Paris say, “My support system is aggressive. Like, they've given me the opportunity to either be something, or be on my own basically. So, the way my mother tells me-- she's not
giving me options like not to be nothing, so I don't really have no choice. And, I appreciate that a lot because if she just let me do what I want to do, I wouldn't be focused as I am right now” (Paris, TRIO Focus Group). Like Annalise, Cairo is in awe, he asks the group to tell him more about their parents support them. He then describes his situation. Paris explains, “My support is like she (referring to her mother) will look at my grades and she pushes me, she would say to me, “Oh, you can do better.” And if I have a B, she won't be satisfied with a B. She'd be like, “You could do better than that.”

Cairo does not seem to relate to having parental involvement like this. He recalls a moment wherein his family did not support him, by failing to show up for a senior recognition night for 12th graders. All the group members begin to nod their heads in agreement because they witnessed this situation first-hand. Cairo explains that his family was not being there to walk him across the field during the half-time of a football game. He said he was so overwhelm, that he began to cry when his classmates joined him on the field to stand in for his parents. Cairo, gives other examples of his lack of parental support by stating, “My family didn't come to my Mu Alpha Theta induction, nor my key club ceremony, they have not supported me. Even on like holidays, throughout this year, I have been by myself” (Cairo, TRIO participant).

_Parental involvement of the non-TRIO focus group._ The participants in this group credit both their parents, as well as extended family such as close family friends, and neighbors, who have been supportive for them. Craig stated, My mother wants me to be successful. She said before she leave this Earth, she said she wanted to see me graduate. And, my dad take me as a role, and (encourages him) and say, “Life is tough, you've got to move forward and don't quit.” Calvin said his mother often tells him, “Do good things and get out of this County and do good with my life.” Calvin said, “Neighbors… Well, they always tell me to keep track with my
progress and do it for myself. And they just tell me to have a good life with what I'm doing and enjoy.” He stated that his neighbors provide support by, “Well, probably good ideas and good encouragement.”

Max also says his mother tells him, “to make it out… get to school.” She say that, “Oh, she's proud of me doing good with myself. Passing all my stuff.” She say that, “I make good, I'm going to be a good man when you grow up and get older so. Like, what helps me is that when--like when my family and good neighbors and stuff, stay on me a lot like about my grades, keep myself up, stay focused.

**Parental involvement of the non-TRIO dual enrollment focus group.** Jennifer (Non-TRIO Dual Enrollment Focus Group) discusses how her immigrant mother was hesitant about her enrolling in college courses, while in high school. She states, “Well, my support system, it's good but it wasn't always like that in the beginning. I know, when I started dual enrollment, my mom was actually against it. She didn't know how to feel about it. And, I kind of understand because she didn't finish school. She didn't finish even elementary school because she had to help her family in El Salvador and stuff. She was against it. Now, she is really supportive. She does want me to continue. She doesn't want me to slack off in any type of way.”

Rhianna (Non-TRIO Dual Enrollment Focus Group) has had a very different experience with her support system. She reveals that she was adopted, and although her mom and dad often share stories about the mistakes they have made in their educational journeys, it is her younger brother who motivates her most of all. She stated, “What pushes me even more, ironically, because I see where they're heading, will be my brother because, he doesn't take school nearly as seriously as I do.” She is concerned that if he doesn’t work hard to be successful she will have to help him financially when he becomes an adult. She tries to set a good example for him, and
states, “I kind of do it in a kind of a way to kind of like show him what school is about. I feel like that kind of motivates me to do better, honestly.”

**Environmental factors.** The environment should be considered when understanding resiliency including, school characteristics, mentorship, and institutional/governmental initiatives (Morales & Trotman, 2004). Individuals who are resilient by surviving highly stressful environments tend to be seen as confident, competent, and caring (Morales & Trotman, 2004). The Environmental factors was interjected into the focus group discussions 254 times. (Please see Table 10, on page 136 for details.) In the discussion, the students talked about their school’s culture, frustration with the school leaders, and their annoyance with being from a rural county, that has been negatively stereotyped.

**The fourth theme, Perception of School Support,** refers to the students’ perceived level of support from their administrators. There were three child codes that helped the researcher understand how the research participants viewed support within the school. First, was child code 22, wherein participants showed frustration towards school leaders. This came up 45 times (TRIO participants (23 times), Non-TRIO participants (1 time), and Non-TRIO Dual Enrollment participants (21 times)). Also, child code 21, which was the participants showing frustration with their school’s culture, which came up 38 times (TRIO participants (24 times), Non-TRIO participants (3 times), and Non-TRIO Dual Enrollment participants (11 times)). Lastly, child code 26, wherein research participants described positive interactions with an available support person, came up 21 times (TRIO participants (5 times), Non-TRIO participants (12 times), and Non-TRIO Dual Enrollment participants (4 times)). These frequencies can be found in Table 10, on page 136.
The understanding of the researcher is that the TRIO and Non-TRIO Dual Enrollment groups do not feel supported by their school leaders. Both groups also feel frustrated with the school’s culture. However, they address their frustrations in different ways. These two groups also had less positive interactions with an available support person on their campus, than the Non-TRIO group comprised of black or African American males. The Non-TRIO group also seems to feel more support from school leaders. The next sub-sections will provide cited examples from research participants.

*Perception of school support by TRIO focus group.* The TRIO participant group acknowledges the actions of the school leaders. However, they lean on one another for support, to fill in where the school leaders may fall short. Federally funded initiatives and programs, such as TRIO, are aimed at increasing educational opportunities for disadvantaged students (Morales & Trotman, 2004). These programs begin as a contest system but return to sponsorship once the student is accepted into the group” (Morales & Trotman, 2004). The TRIO sense of community is demonstrated when Paris and Parker come to the aid of their group members, Annalise and Cairo, who become overwhelmed in talking about their lack of familial support and challenges in school. These students began to encourage their peers.

The TRIO focus group does not seem to complain about their school’s leadership, with specificity, like the Non-TRIO Dual Enrollment group. However, they do complain about the lack of resources the school leaders provide. Paris compares what she thinks non-rural schools get, that they do not get because they attend a rural school. She believes the school leaders are responsible for the students missing out on the same resources. Paris believes other schools provide a better education, wherein her school is concerned with “bringing up the grade level, but it ain't no type of—(programs).” Paris asks her peers, “what new programs have we got?”
She explains, “We had the motivational speakers, but they (her administrators) need to bring that.” Paris compares other schools to their school in stating, “They have study groups, study halls, after school study halls… Was that last year when (a neighboring county) had a speaker?” She recalls the school brought in motivational speakers on a regular basis during her ninth-grade year. She stated, “They brought in new speakers – motivational speakers. We had that like in my ninth grade.”

Parker adds by stating, “Honestly, ain't no opportunities. Like, this is my first time ever seeing this nice bright classroom.” With this statement, Parker is explaining to the group that he had never seen the classroom in which the focus group interviews were held, which was a space originally designated for a journalism program, that the school does not offer.

Cairo introduces a new perspective on the discussion by focusing on his teachers and not just the administrators. He stated, “You should hear how many teachers say, “Oh, I've got this raise for coming down here.” I know they want the money and they have the degree to teach but they're just talking about, “Oh, I came down here because – oh, they offered me more money. Oh, they got me from here. I had to move here to help you out. I didn't have to do this.” Cairo says his response to his teachers are, “You don't have to be here either. It could've been another teacher. They try to put it back on us like, “Oh, you - as the student, you need us here.” Yeah, we need a teacher, but it don't have to be you.”

Perception of school support by non-TRIO focus group. The Non-TRIO participant group seem to have a completely different experience from the Non-TRIO Dual Enrollment participant group. This group of males seem to believe the school leaders work hard for them, and that they are given a lot of support. Max says, “Like, the good part about is that they really had took out all the ones that were causing trouble, pushed them out. So now, everybody can like get their
stuff going, keep it going.” Calvin stated, “It is good. It's good at the end but it's just like get rid of the bad people. And then I think is it'll improve the school image and, plus, the County's image too. Craig stated, “But, also, it's just dealing with the fact that you've got some good teachers, you have some bad teachers. Yeah, I can understand that. But mainly I think the school is trying to go up and it's like half and half and like trying to fight out, all the bad apples and try to get more gooder. That's what I'm trying to say. Which is it makes more kids want to come to this school and feel more comfortable at the school.”

Perception of school support by Non-TRIO dual enrollment focus group. The research participants in the Non-TRIO Dual Enrollment Focus Group, seem to have a very different experience from the Non-TRIO Focus Group, which believes they are being supported. The dual enrollment research participants think the school leaders have not adequately recognized them for their hard work academically. The group recalls a senior class meeting, wherein one of the administrators told them they could not transfer to a different school because they needed their academic performance to increase the school’s grade. Moreover, Simon explained how he felt threatened when the administrator started “like, putting prices on our heads” (Simon, Non-TRIO Dual Enrollment Group). Simon stated that the administrator said, “You guys can't go anywhere else. They're not going to accept your transcripts because once they see that you're from this County and they look at your credits, they're just going to throw that away.” Simon responded, “That's not the case for me.”

Kelly relates to what Simon has shared by stating, “I feel like they put a lot more importance on the people who aren't doing the right stuff. They pretty much ignore us completely. They always putting so much focus on what we're doing wrong. And, then there's a few of us who actually do the right thing and it's like nobody knows about it.”
Her focus group members seem to agree, in which Simon adds to her point by stating, “I could kind of see why they (administrators) do that because, of course, the--I don't want to say regular kids or regular students but the people that they are worried about--I'm pretty sure they outweigh us as the select group that's actually the ones you see who has their head on straight, focused. I'm pretty sure that they outweigh us by a lot, so I kind of see why they're doing that.” Although, he understands their dilemma he says, “they can't just like leave us out to dry and just forget about us.”

The issue of feeling a lack of support is exacerbated for non-black or African American students. Jennifer stated, I just feel like here, it's very hard for people like myself as in like Hispanics to really reach out and have someone there for them as well to be known, seen, heard. She explains further by sharing a reflection, “I just remember being in a multicultural class and it was Hispanic Week. And it was the most uncomfortable week I've had there. It was last year. And it was like no one wanted to know, no one really cared. It was just a very, very awkward experience.”

The fifth theme, “County mentality,” refers to how the research participants view the negative people or unsuccessful members in their community. Past researchers have defined resilience as the capacity to overcome, deleterious life events, in which the process of doing so is accompanied by obstacles, stress, and conflict (Morales & Trotman, 2004). The focus group members even used air quotes to emphasize that having this type of mentality is bad. They also noted that feel insecure about being from this county, and that people in neighboring areas look down upon people who are from their county. This topic came up 59 times in the focus group discussions: the TRIO group (24 times), Non-TRIO group (16 times), and Non-TRIO Dual
Enrollment group (19 times). Please see Table 10, on page 136 for details. The next sub-sections will provide cited examples from research participants.

_County mentality defined by TRIO focus group._ Paris states, Well, for one, the school system is like when you apply for a college and they see that you came from a school like the County they may think that you're dumb when that's not the case. We get labeled as dumb, violent, gang bangers—.“ Christopher gives a thorough definition of what is mean to be from “The County.” Christopher stated, “I mean, the County mentality are the people that graduate, to me, and they have that mindset they don't want to go nowhere. They're going to stay in their communities, walk around and do nothing all their life. That's the County mentality as a lot of people know - that they don't do anything.”

_County mentality defined by non-TRIO focus group._ Craig states, “Ever since I was like a kid, I’ve seen-- you know, my dad say back then they had all of this stuff here at the time when he was at (the local high school back then) and stuff. But like now, it was a little better when I was little because they had all types of things going on in the County. But now, it just fall down because most people moved to Miami. That fled the County. And some of them moved to Fort Myers. So, most of them moved and things have been changed.”

Max said, “The County is like you hear stuff everyday – on the news, every day. Fighting in the County. Somebody got hit by a car. Somebody got shot. Things going on. Everybody fights.”

_County mentality defined by non-TRIO dual enrollment focus group._ Jennifer said, “I feel like I'm different, not only because am I respectful but I feel like I appreciate the small things that are given to me. I don't expect much from anybody but when I do get or receive anything..."
from anybody, I am very thankful. I feel like here, people think they deserve stuff even if they
 don't. So, I just feel like that's why I feel like I'm different.”

Simon add his thoughts, “I just-- I just feel like I was lucky enough, blessed enough to be
 raised in a family where there was success when, like a child, when I see things, so I know it's
 out there. Rather than being here and not know anything but County or the neighboring County
 so. But I don't know, that's maybe.”

Kelly stated, “Well, for me, I'm from the County. My family is from the County. And, I
guess, I kind of differentiate myself in some kind of way. I have no idea how. Usually, when I go
to different places here, nobody thinks I'm from here. Like, when they see me, it's like, “Wait,
where are you from?” Like, “I'm from here.” They're like, “For real?” I'm like, “Yes.” But, I
guess, it's how I carry myself, and how I act, and how I treat other people. And I have like bigger
dreams to get out of the County.”

In closing, the participants in the TRIO group had the lowest, overall non-cognitive score
found from the CRPFS findings. Yet, in the focus group discussions they seem to be more
outgoing and nurturing towards their peers. The Non-TRIO Dual Enrollment group described
instances, wherein they keep more to themselves. The Non-TRIO group, of all black or African
American males, also seem supportive of one another, and they do not have a strong support
system. This group also had the highest score among the other groups, for being able to
understand racism and maneuver the system. This would explain their thoughts about the school
providing a lot of support for them, in place of the lack of support they have at home.

Although, it was not reflected in the CRPFS data, the TRIO focus group members
appeared to have the most non-cognitive strengths in the discussions. Paris and Parkers in
particular seem to have strengths in ways the rest of participants did not. They both have positive self-concept, extremely supportive families, and they participate in a TRIO program. This is evidence that students who have strengths for all three characteristics of academic resilience: disposition, family and environment; seem to be in the strongest position for college readiness. Therefore, based upon these findings Chapter 5 will discuss implications of practice that will aid the school in developing a plan to help other rural students improve their academic resiliency, and non-cognitive skill set.
CHAPTER 5

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Chapter five will discuss the results from chapter four; and explain why these findings are significant to the research problem of increasing college readiness skills and protective factors for rural students, who attend high-poverty, low-performing schools. On that basis, the first section in this chapter will revisit Scottie’s story, which was shared at the beginning of chapter one. The rationale for this course of action is to insert reflective thinking on a previous case, to introduce the researcher’s new understanding of the problem after reviewing the study’s results. After this reflection, the next section of this chapter will summarize the results from the study. Following the summary, that section will discuss literature on best practices for promoting college readiness and protective factors. The last section will discuss implications for practice to help increase college readiness skills and protective factors for rural students.

Revisiting Scottie’s Story…

Scottie was a student I met at Promise-land High School, a few years ago. In the short interactions I had with him, I was able to ascertain his college readiness was at-risk. First, he was behind by applying for college towards the end of his senior year. His ACT scores were low. Lastly, Scottie also carried the heavy burden of helping his single mother provide for his eleven brothers and sisters. Despite all of this, he was still accepted into a four-year college—conditionally. He had only one semester to prove himself, but he was unsuccessful. Scottie had made the personal decision to give his mother his financial aid money, instead of purchasing his textbooks, which resulted in his failure in two classes. If only Scottie would have developed the non-cognitive skills or protective factors that were necessary for survival in college. I ask myself, where was he supposed to attain these skills—at home? Perhaps, if he had joined a TRIO program in high school—would things have been different? What if his high school had promoted a college readiness culture, or if at least one strong support person had made themselves available to him early on? Who was responsible for Scottie’s situation?
Summary of Research Findings

This is a brief overview of an applied research study, designed to understand the college readiness experiences of rural high school students. The researcher’s goal was to find results for the following research questions: 1) What are the college readiness skills of twelfth-grade students enrolled in a rural high school; 2) What are the protective factors of twelfth-grade students enrolled in a rural high school; and 3) How do college readiness skills and protective factors differ between rural high school participants in Federal TRIO programs, and students who do not participate in Federal TRIO programs (i.e. including dual enrollment participants)?

There were fifty, twelfth-graders who participated in this research study, by taking an online College Readiness & Protective Factors Survey. Subsequently, there were 15 research participants who were purposefully sampled, from the 50 survey takers, to participate in one of three focus group interviews. The three focus groups were comprised of the following: 1) students who participated in a Federal TRIO program, 2) students who participated in the school’s Dual Enrollment program, instead of a Federal TRIO program, and 3) students who did not participate in neither a Federal TRIO program, or a Dual Enrollment program.

The survey instrument was developed with the intention of gathering data on student characteristics, as well as student’s college readiness skills and protective factors. In this study, college readiness skills are outcomes for the following: ACT and SAT scores, grade point average, rigorous courses, college enrollment plans, and financial aid status. For this study, protective factors are non-cognitive skills, such as: positive self-concept or confidence; realistic self-appraisal; understands and deals with racism; prefers long-range goals to short-term or immediate needs; availability of strong support person; successful leadership experience; demonstrated community service; and knowledge acquired in a field. As discussed in chapter
three, non-cognitive category scores ranged from either 3 – 15, or 4 – 20; and the score range for the overall non-cognitive score is 29 – 145. Please refer to Table 1, on page 47, for more information on how the non-cognitive scoring was carried out.

**Student characteristics.** This sub-section will provide an overview of research findings tied to the research participants’ race, parental figures, and educational aspirations.

**Race.** Majority of the research participants classified themselves as black or African American, wherein there were 83.3%. The remaining research participants were either White (Non-Hispanic), Hispanic, Native Hawaiian, or Two or more races.

**Parental figures.** Research participants were mainly from a two-parent household, at 49.02%; or either a single parent household, wherein 41.18% said their mothers were their parental figures. The research participants reported their parent’s educational attainment, wherein 39.22% of parents had a high school diploma, and 25.49% did not graduate from high school.

**Educational aspirations.** The research participants reported their educational aspirations, which far exceeded their parents. The findings showed that 37.25% of the research participants said they plan to earn a bachelor’s degree; 25.49% who said they want to earn a doctoral degree, and 13.73% who expect to complete a graduate degree or professional study beyond a four-year degree.

**A discussion on college readiness indicators.** This sub-section will discuss the study’s findings related to research participants’ college readiness indicators, such as ACT and SAT test scores, grades, rigorous courses, college enrollment plans, and financial aid status.

**ACT and SAT scores.** The research participants reported data for their status on taking college entrance exams, such as the ACT and SAT. There were 50% of research participants who
were unable to self-report their ACT scores, and 61.22% who were not able to self-report SAT scores. (Please see Figure 8, on page 73.) The assumption is that either they did not take a college entrance exam, or they do not know their scores. Either way, these students are at a disadvantage to compete for college enrollment. According to the CollegeBoard’s SAT Suite of Assessments Annual Report (2017), there were 83% of graduates in the Class of 2017, in the same state as the research setting, who took the SAT during high school (177,707 students); and within the Class of 2018, 43% (217,826 students) had taken the PSAT during their junior year of high school. Based on these figures, it is apparent that research participants in the study are taking the SAT at a lower rate than students across the country. This is not surprising because majority of the research participants in the study are black or African American, and the CollegeBoard reported that black or African Americans made up only 20% of state level test takers (“The 2017 SAT Suite Annual Report,” 2018). There were 35% of whites, and 33% of Hispanic or Latino students who took the SAT in 2017 (“The 2017 SAT Suite Annual Report,” 2018). Therefore, many students in the research setting have the potential risk of being behind for this college readiness indicator.

For the research participants who did take the ACT, there were 35.42% who scored between a 15-19; and of the students who took the SAT, 24.49% had a score between 800-999; neither of these ranges meet the state or national standard for college enrollment. (Please see Figure 7, on page 72). In 2017, the CollegeBoard reported that black or African American SAT takers (29,417 students) had a total, mean score of 914, while White SAT takers (51,758 students) had a total, mean total score of 1089. Hispanic or Latino SAT takers (49,062) had a total, mean score of 1003. Therefore, research participants in the study do not have test scores, which put them in a competitive position for college enrollment nationally.
**Grades.** The respondents grade point averages were split, whereas 50% had below a 2.9 grade point average, which is considered low for college enrollment, and 50% had above a 3.0 grade point average. (Please see Figure 9, on page 75). But, only a few had exceptional grades, with averages between 3.5 and 4.0. According to the CollegeBoard (2017), test takers for the SAT, who had B or C grade point average in high school had a total, mean score range from 881-986; and test takers who had a grade point average between A+ and A-, had a total, mean score range from 1104-1203. Therefore, students with higher grade point averages, perform better on the SAT. Only 18% of the participants in this study had a 3.5 or higher, which means other students are at risk of not meeting this college readiness indicator.

**Rigorous courses.** There were 55% of students who had taken Honors or Advanced Placement (AP) courses, and 32% who were dually enrolled in college courses. Although, this is a large percentage of research participants who are proving that they can handle the academic rigor of college by taking these course offerings; only 40% of the research participants had applied for college admission, by the end of the second nine-weeks. This means that students are considerably behind the national standard, wherein students with high college readiness indicators, apply as early as the summer before their senior year in high school. Therefore, these students are two semesters behind.

**Financial aid.** Lastly, at the end of their first semester, only 36% of research participants had completed a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Moreover, 70% of research participants said they expected to definitely receive a scholarship, yet they do not have competitive test scores or grade point averages to compete for scholarships. Additionally, the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Federal Student Aid (2018), released a report detailing the FAFSA completion rates for public school districts, during the 2017-18 school year. The
report found that students in the school district, where this study was conducted, had a completion rate between 20-24% (U. S. Department of Federal Student Aid, 2018). This was the lowest completion rate for the entire state. If students are not applying for financial aid, and they do not have competitive test scores and grades, it is questionable that they are ready for college. However, a look at non-cognitive factors, in the next section, may help explain this inference.

**A discussion on non-cognitive assessment scores.** This section will discuss the non-cognitive scores of research participants who were assessed on eight non-cognitive factors, which again, are as follows: positive self-concept or confidence; realistic self-appraisal; understands and deals with racism; prefers long-range goals to short-term or immediate needs; availability of strong support person; successful leadership experience; demonstrated community service; and knowledge acquired in a field.

**Non-cognitive scores for research participants.** On a scale from 3 – 15 or 4 – 20, for each category, research participants’ average scores determined that their strongest non-cognitive skills were in positive self-concept or confidence, as well as understands and deals with racism. Research participants achieved 45% of the positive self-concept or confidence skill, which means they demonstrate confidence, strength of character, determination and independence (Sedlacek, 2004). Research participants also achieved 47% of the understands and deals with racism skill, which means they can successful handle the system (Sedlacek, 2004). (Please see Figure 13, on page 83 for non-cognitive category scores for all research participants.) These findings suggest that in spite of their challenges, students still have a positive outlook and they know how to survive their high school setting.

Many of the research participants noted their aspirations were to graduate from high school, or they were proud of the fact that they were on schedule to graduate from high school.
Although, these are good goals, they seem to be limiting to their ability to see college as a real option. They just only seem concern with surviving their current situations.

The research participants were less skilled in the category of successful leadership experience, wherein they achieved 36% of this skill. Additionally, their demonstrated community service scores, showed they only achieved 36% of this skill as well. Students who demonstrate strong leadership in any area of his or her background is important (Sedlacek, 2004). This leadership skill can be applied in various settings such as, church, school, athletic programs, or even neighborhood gangs (Sedlacek, 2004). Students who show evidence of leadership prior to going to college are often more likely to be successful than students who do not have leadership experience; this is especially true for women and minority students (Sedlacek, 2004). Therefore, a low non-cognitive score for leadership may be an indication that these students are not in a strong position for success in college.

Non-cognitive scores for focus groups. The TRIO participants had a group average, overall non-cognitive score of 53.66. The Non-TRIO focus group had a group average of 60.75, and the Non-TRIO Dual Enrollment participants had the highest group average of 62.4. Still, none of the groups had high scores relative to other settings, since research could have earned up to 145 points.

A discussion on differences between trio and non-trio participants. This section will highlight some of the differences between TRIO versus Non-TRIO participants. There were two differences in the research participants characteristics that stood out. First being, more TRIO participants live in single-parent households with their mothers. This result emphasizes the fact that single mothers are taking advantage of the resources provided by TRIO programs. Secondly, TRIO programs are federally funded to provide college readiness services to first-generation
college students. Therefore, when the findings showed that parents of TRIO participants, mostly had high school diplomas, this verified the practices of the TRIO programs, wherein they adhere Federal regulations for recruitment. Furthermore, results showed that parents of non-TRIO participants had earned college degrees at a higher rate than TRIO participant parents; which justifies the need for programs of this nature.

The results from the College Readiness and Protective Factors Survey showed that TRIO participants took the ACT at a higher rate than non-TRIO participants. Even though, TRIO participants choose to take the ACT more, they do not outperform non-TRIO participants on this exam. Additionally, TRIO participants have higher grade point averages than non-TRIO participants. Although, TRIO participants took Honors or AP courses at higher rate, the high performing non-TRIO participants chose to participate in dual enrollment, rather than take Honors or AP courses. This may be because the Non-TRIO Dual Enrollment focus group participants perceive taking courses on a college campus, while in high school, as more practical because they can earn college credits. One student noted this was the reason she did not join a TRIO program because she did not see the benefit of participating in a program where she could not earn credit hours in college. This may explain the Non-TRIO Dual Enrollment focus group’s relatively high, non-cognitive score for realistic self-appraisal. Students with the ability to realistically appraise one-self, are more likely to recognize their strengths and deficiencies in academics, work hard at self-development, and recognizes when to broaden their individuality (Sedalacek, 2004).

**Best Practices for Understanding College Readiness**

This section will concisely discuss the importance of helping students develop non-cognitive skills or protective factors. In chapter one, Richardson’s Metatheory of Resilience and
Resiliency Theory was introduced. This theory assumes that resilient students have qualities, assets, or protective factors that help them maneuver adverse situations (Richardson, 2002). There are other researchers who have determined that protective factors, or non-cognitive skills, are essential to a student’s academic success. Morales & Trotman (2004), explain that academically resilient students possess characteristics such as disposition, family, and environment which help them to thrive. The next three sections will expound on this claim.

**Dispositional factors.** Literature suggests that a student’s ability to succeed in college, cannot solely rest on their cognitive skills. For students, like Scottie and the participants in this study, they will need more than just competitive test scores and grades to be ready for the disruptions and challenges that come with pursuing postsecondary education. These students need to have a strong disposition for success. Researchers, Morales & Trotman (2004), state “disposition starts with emotional intelligence, wherein students have a better and deeper understanding of oneself, which leads them to better decision making” (p. 156). We can apply this thought process to Scottie’s story, wherein we see that his poor decision making resulted in his academic failure in college. It is imperative that students also have resources, such as family and environment to help them develop their emotional intelligence.

**Familial factors.** Previous research correlates college enrollment with parent’s educational attainment. The premise being, students are more likely to enroll in college and graduate if their parents have earned a college degree. This may be because these parental figures have a concept of the emotional intelligence needed for their children to be successful in college, because of their own personal experiences. However, for parents who do not have a college degree, they may not know what skills to help develop in their children. With that being said, many people develop their work habits and dispositions before they are of school age (Duke,
Thus, the home is where students learn how to deal with disappointment and frustration (Duke, 2015).

Unfortunately, some young people, particularly those raised in impoverished and dysfunctional homes, may not have developed strong dispositional factors or non-cognitive skills (Duke, 2015). Family members influence the education process, whether they want to or not. The notion of “families as educators” was first introduced by Clark (1983); who added to findings from a study by Williams (1976), wherein it was determined that there are three significant functions that families provide; which are families have the ability to stimulate, reinforce, and foster high expectations in education (Morales & Trotman, 2004). When parents are not able to provide positive interactions with children, regarding education, the student’s environment can act as a resource.

**Environmental factors.** Students who are academically resilient belong to school environments that offer varying characteristics, mentorships, and institutional/governmental initiatives (Trotman & Morales, 2004). Characteristics of schools that promote academic resilience, include the following: “fostering high self-esteem, promoting social and academic success, high level of structure in classrooms, thorough teacher preparation and planning, the use of incentives and rewards, and the willingness of school authorities to allow students to take responsibility for their actions and activities in the school” (Morales & Trotman, 2004, p. 12).

In his book on developing leadership for low-performing schools, Daniel L. Duke (2015), discusses how educators can help students increase their non-cognitive skills by providing direct instruction concerning intelligence and learning, reinforcing the value of effort and academic work, teaching perseverance, developing self-efficacy, and stressing self-regulation (p. 116). Here are some takeaways from Duke’s research, who believes teachers should not assume
students know they can improve their intelligence, and they should show them how learning can
increase intelligence (Duke, 2015). Additionally, the researcher found that students work harder
when teachers have informal conversations with them about their work ethic (Duke, 2015). The
researcher recommends teachers connect the curriculum to real life situations, so that students
understand the importance of what they are learning, and they can begin to make understand how
small tasks lead to achieving long-term goals (Duke, 2105). These are practical ways the school
can help students gain the non-cognitive skills that their family members did not teach them. The
next section will provide an outline for developing a college readiness culture at Promise-land
High School, based on the research findings and best practices.

**Implications for Practice: Creating a School-wide College Readiness Culture**

Focus group participants in this college readiness study, provided rich examples of how
they perceived their school’s role in their ability to prepare for college. The short review
literature in the previous section, also describes the positionality of the school, to create a college
readiness culture that can help increase the protective factors or non-cognitive skills for students.
This section will outline five steps that can be used to develop an intentional college readiness
culture at Promise-land High School. Although, there may be some unintentional strategies being
employed currently to increase the non-cognitive skills of students, there does not appear to be a
systematic approach in place. This was apparent to investigator throughout the study, based upon
feedback from the research participants. Five steps for creating a college readiness culture are as
follows:

**Step one: conduct on-going assessments of students’ non-cognitive skills.** The school
and district must broaden its focus from state assessments and testing, to include a plan to
develop students’ protective factors (non-cognitive skills). The first step in this direction, should
be to assess non-cognitive behaviors of students on a regular basis. School administrators must decide upon one standard assessment that can be used for all grade levels. The College Readiness and Protective Factors Survey (CRPFS) can serve as a guide for administrators. However, it is strongly recommended that a consultant or internal evaluator, with expertise in this area, be appointed to lead the process for developing and administering these non-cognitive assessments. Their role would be to provide quarterly reports, which will capture increases in non-cognitive scores for students, and indirectly quantify the impact of the school’s new college going culture.

Non-cognitive assessments can also be in the form of focus group interviews. For example, research participants in this study noted that participating in group interviews allowed them to express their feelings about going to college—without judgement. The focus group members indicated that they valued the opportunity to discuss their thoughts and feelings about going to college. In doing so, qualitative data collection techniques should also be included in the assessments of non-cognitive skills.

**Step two: provide equitable opportunities for student recognition.** Members of the Non-TRIO focus group felt that their needs were being taken for granted by administrators, who seem to spend more time trying to address behavioral issues in the school. These students said they felt like administrators recognized bad behavior, rather than acknowledging their academic excellence. The students agreed that the recognition did not have to be formal (i.e. an induction ceremony, or banquet). They said it would be encouraging to them if they received positive affirmations from school leaders, on a regular basis. The school environment is constantly changing, it may be hard for administrators to reach every student in the school. Therefore, the recommendation is for school leaders to utilize technology to provide personalized recognition for students, which also aids the non-cognitive assessments wherein tracking and organizing
messages serve as data, all while students are still receiving some form of encouragement. Perhaps, the Information Technology (IT) staff can play a huge role in assisting administrators and research consultants with implementing this strategy.

**Step three: identify a role for parental figures and family members.** TRIO and Non-TRIO Dual Enrollment participants believe their parents are more supportive than their school leaders. These students seem to hold their parents in very high regard. Therefore, parents seem to be an untapped resource for the school. The recommendation is to administer a survey to find out if, and how, parents want to participate in creating a college readiness culture for their children—at school. The survey will help to identify parental figures who are dedicated, and creative. The parents who know how to encourage their children, may be the best role model for other parents. Since “parent and community partnerships sometimes fail because the school personnel are too vague about the intended goals of such efforts” (Duke, 2015); the recommendation is to survey parental figures first. For new administrators, it may also be beneficial to research prior efforts that have taken place to build parent-school and community-school relationships (Duke, 2015). Conducting a survey and researching prior efforts are simple ways to find out which efforts have been more successful than others, and under what circumstances have parents and community groups been willing to support improvement efforts (Duke, 2015).

**Step four: develop a faculty & staff mentoring program for students.** Literature indicates mentorship is important to increase non-cognitive skills for students. The students in the Non-TRIO focus group noted their community (i.e. neighbors, teachers from earlier on in childhood, etc.) were mentors for them. These students recognized community mentors more than their parental figures. School administrators should consider bringing this informal,
external culture of mentoring into the schools. Most of the participants in the focus group could only name one or two people, at school, who they perceived as a strong support person.

Therefore, the recommendation is to target students who lack strong parental involvement. (The non-cognitive assessments can help to identify these students.) Next, these students should be assigned a faculty or staff member, who will serve as their mentor. The faculty and staff’s role as mentor, will be to encourage students to work on self-efficacy and self-regulation. For example, each mentor may have up 10 students who will be required to check in with their mentors weekly. This is probably already being done in an informal way. But, assigning students to mentors in the school makes it more intentional. Although, instances wherein teachers are disciplining students, may result in lessons about self-regulation; formalizing this process may turn reprimands into opportunities to praise students—being proactive instead of reactive.

Step five: develop intentional strategies for collaborating with TRIO programs.

There are three Federal TRIO programs that provide college readiness services to students at Promise-land High School. Currently, students are reached during non-academic hours (i.e. after-school, during lunch, and off-campus field trips and activities). The contact with TRIO participants during the school day, is limited due to the challenge of not disturbing structured classes and testing; as well as tracking down students who may be gravitating towards negative influences on campus. The nature of these accessibility issues, make TRIO programs an underutilized resource for schools, in creating a college readiness culture. Therefore, a recommendation is for administrators is to enhance access to TRIO participants by modeling a classroom structure, that is similar to the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) programs.
AVID programs operate on high school campuses. AVID offers its college readiness program services as elective courses. Since, Promise-land High School does not currently offer an AVID program, this is an opportunity to collaborate further with the Federal TRIO programs. School leaders could add an elective for college readiness, wherein TRIO staff provide the instruction during regular school hours.

Looking Ahead: Future Research and Conclusion

Future research. This section will discuss the potential for future studies on rural students and college readiness. A program evaluation could be conducted for each of three TRIO programs. Additionally, this study could be duplicated in another rural setting, wherein non-minority, rural students are the focus. It would be interesting to see if there are any similarities or differences in the college readiness and non-cognitive skills, between students in an all-White school, versus those who participated in this study. Also, carrying out a similar study in another rural setting, in the Western part of the country, oppose to the Southeastern locale this study. Lastly, William Seldacek’s study was originally designed to assess students who were already enrolled in college. Perhaps, a future study might include the development of a non-cognitive assessment instrument, specifically for high school students.

Conclusion. There is an obvious need to implement a plan to help to increase the college readiness and non-cognitive skills of rural students within this high school. Currently, the school administrators are working toward improving the school’s grade—like most schools, their primarily focus is on testing. However, there is not intentional effort to increase college enrollment for their graduates. Many of the participants in this study saw the value of participating in these focus group discussions about college. They believe that this was the first time they were really given the opportunity to express their true feelings about their college
readiness experiences. In reflecting on his participation in the study, Parker (TRIO Focus Group) stated, “Like, I must say my senior year, I think, is the first year that I really got told what college is going to be, like what to expect.”

Other participants said their twelfth-grade year was also the first time they were receiving assistance in preparing for college. They credited the HBCU-Talent Search program counselor, as well as their twelfth-grade English teacher, and guidance counselor for this experience. Although, there were other faculty members who were mentioned, at least once and sporadically in the focus group discussions, it was apparent that these three individuals were consistently directing college readiness initiatives. All of the focus group members acknowledged that these individuals provided them with some level of support for going to college. However, the school’s college readiness culture cannot rest on three individuals. Mentoring and support does occur in the high school, however, there is definite room for improvement. The school and school district need to make a declaration to help these students—who are crying out for support. The low non-cognitive scores of research participants, validates this claim.

Reflections from researcher. When thinking retrospectively about this process, I can honestly say that I was a bit naive in believing I would face very few challenges when carrying out this study. In fact, to my surprise, I was met head on with opposition from the very beginning of the data collection phase. It was in this moment that I realized why so many of my colleagues warned me when they heard that I wanted to conduct a study in a secondary school. Apparently, most researchers avoid working with minors in schools because of the red tape and difficulty associated with recruiting and accessing human research subjects.

I innocently assumed that the school district would welcome me with open arms, since this study would assess the college readiness of their high school seniors, which helps
administrators reach state mandated goals for college and career readiness initiatives, without impacting the school district’s budget. Instead, I was denied initially when I attempted to gain permission from district leaders to conduct this study. I understand now that much of their apprehension was due their past, negative experiences with for-profit researchers who had exploited their students, and misrepresented findings to reflect negatively upon the school district. Knowing this helped me to proceed with caution as I continued to articulate the significance of my study.

Thankfully, I was given the opportunity to meet with the school’s principal (head administrator of the research setting) to explain the purpose of the study in greater detail. After clarifying my role as a graduate student, she believed that the findings from the study I was proposing would be beneficial to the school, as well as district. She communicated her support for the study to the superintendent and deputy superintendent, who gave her the approval to allow me to begin my study. After going through the initial denial, it made me even more sensitive to protecting the integrity of my study, as well as the individuals who participated.

After receiving support from the school’s leadership, I was faced with the challenge of recruiting students. I set out to recruit research participants through their English IV classes, but I soon found out that many of the students I wanted to target had already completed their twelfth-grade English requirements. Therefore, I had to adapt my strategy to include working with the dual enrollment coordinator. I also wanted to reach other seniors who were participating in a career development program on the campus. However, the coordinator of the program was not interested in her students participating in the study, even though their participation in the study could have potentially helped them with their college plans. In fact, she went so far as to complain about the study being a distraction.
Fortunately, in life road blocks such as this can make one stronger. This experience helped me to appreciate my own ability to be resilient. In fact, the positive end to this situation was my discovery of the Non-TRIO Dual Enrollment Focus Group, which became the gem, or diamond in the rough, for the study. Ultimately, I think this focus group was an ideal addition to the study, and it provided rich data that was truly insightful in understanding college readiness from various student perspectives.

Overall, I am thankful I was able to successfully complete my investigation. I wholeheartedly believe this investigation provided a lot of useful data to the research setting. The best part of the experience is that, as the researcher, I served as a role model to the research participants. I feel that because of their interaction with me and their participation in the study, many of the research participants have considered pursuing a doctoral degree. Whereas, prior to working with me, I am sure many of them only aspired to earn a bachelor’s degree. If at least one of them makes it through the educational gauntlet, to graduate with a doctorate degree, it would have been worth all the adversity and challenges that I had to overcome to make this research study a reality. In closing, I hope that my candid reflection may serve as encouraging words to other researchers, who may find themselves faced with similar challenges. My advice to them would be to persevere, and always remember that when maneuvering uncharted territory, the final reward is much greater than the struggle of getting to the finish line.
APPENDIX A

FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

APPROVAL LETTER

Office of the Vice President for Research
Human Subjects Committee
Tallahassee, Florida 32306-2742
(850) 644-8673 • FAX (850) 644-8392

APPROVAL MEMORANDUM

Date: 10/06/2017
To: Angela Codley
Address:
Dept.: EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP
From: Thomas L. Jacobson, Chair
Re: Use of Human Subjects in Research
Understanding College Readiness Experiences of Rural High School Students in Pursuit of Postsecondary Education

The application that you submitted to this office in regard to the use of human subjects in the proposal referenced above have been reviewed by the Secretary, the Chair, and two members of the Human Subjects Committee. Your project is determined to be Expedited per 45 CFR § 46.110(7) and has been approved by an expedited review process.

The Human Subjects Committee has not evaluated your proposal for scientific merit, except to weigh the risk to the human participants and the aspects of the proposal related to potential risk and benefit. This approval does not replace any departmental or other approvals, which may be required.

If you submitted a proposed consent form with your application, the approved stamped consent form is attached to this approval notice. Only the stamped version of the consent form may be used in recruiting research subjects.

If the project has not been completed by 10/05/2018 you must request a renewal of approval for continuation of the project. As a courtesy, a renewal notice will be sent to you prior to your expiration date; however, it is your responsibility as the Principal Investigator to timely request renewal of your approval from the Committee.

You are advised that any change in protocol for this project must be reviewed and approved by the Committee prior to implementation of the proposed change in the protocol. A protocol change/amendment form is required to be submitted for approval by the Committee. In addition, federal regulations require that the Principal Investigator promptly report, in writing any unanticipated problems or adverse events involving risks to research subjects or others.

By copy of this memorandum, the chairman of your department and/or your major professor is reminded that he/she is responsible for being informed concerning research projects involving human subjects in the department, and should review protocols as often as needed to insure that the project is being conducted in compliance with our institution and with DHHS regulations.

This institution has an Assurance on file with the Office for Human Research Protection. The Assurance Number is IRB00000446.

Cc: Linda Schrader
HSC No. 2017.23884
APPENDIX B
PARENT CONSENT FORM

October 9, 2017

Dear Parent,

My name is Angela J. Corley and I am a graduate student in the College of Education at Florida State University. Your son or daughter is invited to participate in a research study about college readiness, to assist in our understanding of how rural high school students are preparing for college. I am asking that your child take part because they are in the age group I want to study. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to allow your child to participate in this study.

The study: The purpose of this study is to find out the skills, knowledge, and attitudes toward going to college, for twelfth grade students who live in rural communities. The study is designed to find out the types of resources that are helpful to students in their preparation for college. If you agree to allow your child to take part, your child will be asked to fill out a 50-question survey. Your child will be asked about their college plans, goals, leadership skills, problem solving skills, and ideas about college. Your child will also be asked to rank themselves based on their grade point average, and ACT or SAT test scores. Lastly, your child will be asked to provide information on their household structure, and organizational affiliations at school. The survey should not take longer than one (1) hour to complete, and will only be offered to your child during school hours that are approved by the school’s faculty and staff.

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept confidential, to the extent permitted by law. The survey will ask only for age, gender and race, and will not include your child’s name. It will not be possible to figure out your child’s answers. The college readiness survey will be available in two formats, online and paper. The online surveys will be kept securely for one year on Florida State University’s secure server, and the paper surveys will be kept in a locked cabinet and office for at least one year. However, research information that identifies your child may be shared with the FSU Institutional Review Board (IRB) and others who are responsible for ensuring compliance with laws and regulations related to research, including people on behalf of FSU College of Education and the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP).

Voluntary participation: Your child’s participation in this study is completely voluntary. Your child may skip any questions he or she does not feel comfortable answering. Your decision, whether or not, to allow your child to take part will not affect your current or future relationship with Florida State University, or with your child’s school. If you decide to allow your child to take part, your child is free to not do the survey, skip any questions, or stop at any time. You are free to withdraw your child at any time without affecting your relationship with the University or your child’s school.

Risks and benefits: The risks in this study are that survey questions about your child’s feelings towards their school and household, in terms of how these groups have contributed to
their attitudes and perceptions about preparing for college may be sensitive. There are no benefits to you or your child if he or she takes part in the study.

**Compensation:** Each child who participates in this study by completing a college readiness survey, will automatically be entered into a raffle for a chance to win a $50 Visa gift card, to be used however they choose. There will be four drawings held during the fall semester of the 2017-18 school year. Therefore, your child will have at least four chances to win one of the Visa gift cards. All four winners will be notified before the Thanksgiving holiday break.

Please feel free to ask any questions you have now, or at any point in the future. As the researcher for this study, I can be reached by phone at [contact information], or email at [contact information]. If you should have additional questions, you may also contact my major professor, Dr. Linda Schrader at [contact information] or [contact information]. If you have any questions or concerns about your child’s rights as a research subject, you may contact the FSU Institutional Review Board (IRB) at (850) 644-8633, or you may access their website at http://www.fsu.research.edu. Should you desire, you will be provided a copy of this consent form for your records.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Ms. Angela J. Corley

For Official Use as Parental Consent to Participate in a College Readiness Study

Please enter your child’s name and sign below if you give consent for your child to participate in this college readiness study.

Your child’s name: ___________________________________________

Parent or Guardian Signature: ___________________________ Date: ______________

Student signature (If 18, or older): _________________________ Date: ______________
Dear Student,

My name is Angela J. Corley and I am a student researcher from Florida State University. I am asking if you would like to participate in a research study about college readiness, involving twelfth grade students who attend high schools in rural areas. The purpose of this study is to find out your skills, knowledge, and attitudes toward going to college. The study is designed to find out what you think are the types of resources that are helpful to you, as you prepare for college.

If you agree to participate you will be asked to fill out a 50-question survey, about your college plans, goals, leadership skills, problem solving skills, and ideas about college. You will also be asked to provide your grade point average and ACT or SAT test scores, by selecting a range (You will not have to provide your exact grade point average or test scores). Lastly, you will be asked to provide information on your household structure, and any school organizations you belong to. The survey should not take longer than one (1) hour to complete, and you will be provided time during school hours that have been approved by the school’s faculty and staff.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. However, I still need you to talk this over with your parents or guardians before you decide, whether or not, to participate. I will ask that your parents or guardians give their permission for you to take part in this study. But, even if your parent or guardian agrees to give you permission, you can still decide not to participate in the study, and that will be fine. If you do not want to be a part of this study, then you do not have to participate. This study is voluntary, which means that you decide, whether or not, to take part in the study. Being in this study is up to you, and no one will be upset in any way if you do not want to participate or even if you change your mind later and want to stop.

Your time is valuable and very important. Therefore, if you decide to participate you will be automatically entered into a raffle for a chance to win a $50 Visa gift card, to be used however you want. There will be four drawings held during the fall semester of the 2017-18 school year, and one name will be drawn each time. Therefore, you will have at least four chances to win one of the $50 Visa gift cards. All four winners will be notified before the Thanksgiving holiday break.

You can ask any questions that you have about this study. If you have a question later that you did not think of now, you can reach me by phone at [Contact Information], or email me at [Contact Information]. If you should have additional questions, you may also contact my major professor, Dr. Linda Schrader at [Contact Information], or [Contact Information].

Signing your name on
the back of this letter means that you agree to be in the study. You and your parents/guardians will be given a copy of this form after you have signed it.

Sincerely,

Ms. Angela Corley

For Official Use as Assent to Participate in a College Readiness Study

Please write your name and sign below if you, understand the above terms and conditions, and would like to participate in this college readiness survey.

Name of student (Please print): ________________________________

Signature of student: ________________________________ Date: ________________
APPENDIX D

COLLEGE READINESS & PROTECTIVE FACTORS SURVEY (CRPFS) QUESTIONS

(Part A)

Please fill in the blank or circle the appropriate answers.

1. How old are you?

____________________

2. Your gender is (Please select one):

Male or Female

3. Your race is (Please select the group(s) you identify with)

1. Black (African American)
2. White (non-Hispanic)
3. American Indian or Alaska Native
4. Asian
5. Native Hawaiian
6. Pacific Islander
7. Other (Please fill in the blank) ______________________
8. Two or more races (Please fill in the blank) _______________________

4. Which best describes the parental figures in your household (Please select one)

1. Single parent (Dad only)
2. Single parent (Mom only)
3. Two parents
4. Guardian or other family member

5. Which best describes your parent’s highest level of education (Please select one)

1. No high school diploma received
2. High school diploma
3. Service in the military
4. Some college, but did not complete a degree
5. Trade or industry certification
6. Associate of Arts (A.A.)
7. Bachelor’s degree (B.A. or B.S.; or equivalent)
8. One or two years of graduate or professional study (ie. master’s degree)
9. Doctoral degree such as M.D., Ph.D., or EdD

6. How much education do you expect to gain during your lifetime? (Please select one)

1. College, but less than a bachelor’s degree
2. B. A. or equivalent
3. One or two years of graduate or professional study (ie. master’s degree)
4. Doctoral degree such as M.D., Ph.D., or EdD

7. Do you plan on submitting a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) to assist with paying for college?

Yes or No

8. About 50% of college students typically dropout before graduating. If this should happen to you, what will be the most likely cause?

1. Absolutely certain that I will finish
2. To accept a good job
3. To enter the military service
4. It would cos more than my family or I could afford
5. Marriage
6. Disinterest in study
7. Lack of academic ability
8. Insufficient reading or study skills
9. Other (Please provide a brief explanation) _____________________________

9. Please list three goals that you have for yourself right now:

1. _____________________________
2. _____________________________
3. _____________________________

10. Please list three things you are proud of having done:

1. _____________________________
2. _____________________________
3. _____________________________
11. Please list groups belonged to (formal or informal) and offices held (if any) in your high school or community.

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

12. Do you belong to a Federal Trio Program such as Upward Bound or Talent Search? (Please select one response)

1. I am an Upward Bound participant
2. I am a Talent Search participant with __________ (fill in the name of the college or university)
3. I am not a participant of Upward Bound or Talent Search

13. How long have you participated in Upward Bound or Talent Search?

________________________________________________________________________

14. Why did you decide to join Upward Bound or Talent Search?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

15. Which range does your grade point average fall within (Please circle one):

- 4.0 or higher
- 3.5 – 3.9
- 3.0 – 3.4
- 2.5 – 2.9
- 2.0 – 2.4
- 1.9 or lower

16. Have you taken the ACT or SAT at least one time (Please circle one)?

- Yes
- No

17. If yes, please fill in your best score(s) in the spaces provided below:

- ACT Composite _____  Reading _____  Math _____
- SAT Combined _____  Reading and Writing _____  Math _____
(Part B)

For the next section or this survey, please indicate the extent to which you agree with each of the following items. Respond to the statements below with your feelings at the present time or your expectation of how things will be. Please circle one response per question.

18. I am a leader in school.

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<th>5</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
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19. It should not be very hard to get a B (3.0) average here.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
</tr>
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</table>

20. I get easily discouraged when I try to do something, and it does not work.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
</tr>
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</table>

21. If I run into a problem concerning school, I have someone who will listen to me and help me.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

22. In groups where I am comfortable, I am often looked to as a leader.

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<td>Agree</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

23. When I believe strongly in something, I act on it.

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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

24. My family has always wanted me to go to college.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5</th>
<th>4</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

25. If course tutoring is made available on campus at no cost, I will attend regularly.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5</th>
<th>4</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

26. My high school grades do not reflect what I can do.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5</th>
<th>4</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
27. I find I get more comfortable in a new place as soon as I make some good friends.

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<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

28. My friends are exclusively the same race as I am.

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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

29. I have a good understanding of my strengths and weaknesses.

<table>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
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</table>

30. When I am treated unfairly, I express my anger in a strong and direct way.

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<td>Agree</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

31. I know the areas where I am weak, and I try to improve them.

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<td>Agree</td>
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<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
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32. Contact with teachers is important to academic success.

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<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
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</table>

33. I usually come up with the ideas that my friends end up doing.

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<td>Agree</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

34. I have learned more outside school than in school.

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<td>Agree</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

35. I have talked about my career goal with someone who works in that career.

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<td>Agree</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

36. I expect to find lots of people who are like me, when I get to college.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

37. I am sometimes looked up to by others.

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<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
38. I know what I want to be doing ten years from now.

5 4 3 2 1
Strongly agree  Agree  Neutral  Disagree  Strongly disagree

39. I enjoy going along with what a group likes to do.

5 4 3 2 1
Strongly agree  Agree  Neutral  Disagree  Strongly disagree

40. I expect to be involved in many off-campus activities when I am in college.

5 4 3 2 1
Strongly agree  Agree  Neutral  Disagree  Strongly disagree

41. I do not expect to get to know my professors personally during my first year of college.

5 4 3 2 1
Strongly agree  Agree  Neutral  Disagree  Strongly disagree

42. I know how college works.

5 4 3 2 1
Strongly agree  Agree  Neutral  Disagree  Strongly disagree

(Part C)

43. Would you be interested in participating in a focus group discussion with your peers, to talk about your experiences with getting ready for college?

Yes  or  No

44. Are you willing to meet at least twice this year, during regular school hours?

Yes  or  No
APPENDIX E

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What are your plans after you graduate from high school?
2. Do you feel that college is an option for you? (Why or why not?)
3. Which colleges or universities are you considering applying to?
4. If you have not started your college applications, when do plan to get started?
5. If you have started your applications, where are you in the process?
6. At this point, do you feel as if you are prepared to enroll in college? (Why or why not?)
7. Have you had any challenges so far, regarding college enrollment?
8. Do you anticipate any challenges between now and the time you will start attending college?
9. How would you describe your support system for helping you reach your college readiness goals?
10. What could be better regarding your support system?
11. What role does your family play in helping you reach your college readiness goals?
12. What role do your friends play in helping you reach your college readiness goals?
13. What role does your school play in your preparation for college (i.e. principal, guidance counselors, teachers, coaches, etc.)?
14. Are you receiving support outside of school to help you prepare for college? If so, please explain.
APPENDIX F

FREQUENCIES DERIVED FROM FOCUS GROUPS

Table 9. Codes & frequencies derived from focus group interviews. This table lists the codes and frequencies found in the focus group interview data.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent Codes</th>
<th>Children Codes</th>
<th>TRIO Frequency</th>
<th>Non-TRIO Frequency</th>
<th>Non-TRIO One Arm Frequency</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Child Code</th>
<th>Parent Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cc1: Feeling fearful in general</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cc2: Positive self-esteem or self-concept (Confidence)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cc3: Negative self-esteem or self-concept</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cc4: Difficulty interacting with adults</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cc5: Lack of social skills; difficulty making friends in high school</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cc6: Feeling different from others (Internalizing oneself)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cc7: Feeling a sense of gratitude or gratefulness (i.e. spiritual)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pc2: College Plans/Readiness

Cc8: Positively asserting college/postsecondary plans | 1 | 1 | 8 | 5 | 4 | 19 | 3 | 3 | 5 | 4 | 15 | 5 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 30 | 44 |

Cc9: Feeling fearful of failing in the college process | 1 | 1 | 6 | 7 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 4 | 3 | 13 |

Cc10: Concerns about college admission | 1 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 5 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 10 |

Cc11: College entrance exams (ACT or SAT) are a challenge | 1 | 2 | 2 | 5 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 4 | 12 |

Cc12: Procrastination: delaying progress towards college | 2 | 1 | 2 | 5 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 11 |

Cc13: Finances: paying for college | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 4 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |

Cc14: Difficulty making friends in college; recognizes social aspect | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 4 | 3 | 8 | 1 | 7 | 13 |

Cc15: Recognizes procrastination will be a challenge in the future | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

Cc16: Concerns about keeping up with academic rigor and study skills | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 4 | 7 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 15 | 48 |

Pc3: College Expectations

Cc17: Positive parental involvement/positive relationships between parent and child | 5 | 1 | 6 | 3 | 1 | 3 | 7 | 3 | 4 | 1 | 4 | 1 | 6 | 26 | 29 |

Cc18: Negative parental involvement | 5 | 1 | 12 | 18 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 21 | 98 |

Cc19: Receiving support from other family members (i.e. siblings, aunts, uncles); and/community (i.e. neighbors, etc.) | 8 | 1 | 2 | 5 | 4 | 15 | 8 | 2 | 4 | 14 | 17 | 5 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 31 | 48 |

Cc20: Showing peer support of one another in group (friendly) | 1 | 1 | 3 | 3 | 26 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 4 | 1 | 1 | 7 | 34 |

Cc21: Frustration or concern with school culture | 2 | 2 | 8 | 10 | 24 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 7 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 11 | 38 |

Cc22: Frustration with school leaders/administration | 4 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 23 | 1 | 1 | 8 | 11 | 2 | 23 | 45 |

Cc23: Feeling lack of support; recognition from school leaders, faculty and staff | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 4 | 3 | 5 | 3 | 1 | 6 | 17 |

Cc24: Uncertainty of the educational/school system | 1 | 1 | 2 | 8 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 6 |

Cc25: Feeling left out of school’s communication loop | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 8 | 4 |

Cc26: Positive support from faculty and staff (Availability of strong support person) | 1 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 1 | 5 | 1 | 12 | 1 | 3 | 4 | 21 |

Cc27: Frustration with “county mentality” (concern about negative stereotypes/image) | 1 | 2 | 2 | 5 | 12 | 24 | 3 | 4 | 6 | 3 | 16 | 8 | 7 | 1 | 3 | 29 | 58 |

Cc28: Demonstrating high school survival skills (maneuvering within school culture) | 1 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 10 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 5 | 18 |

Cc29: School provides academic rigor (Honors, AP, and Dual enrollment courses) | 0 | 0 | 5 | 1 | 6 | 3 | 1 | 4 | 10 |

Cc30: Regular high school curriculum is not challenging | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 4 | 4 |

Pc4: Social/self-appraisal

Cc31: Understands his or her own strengths and weaknesses | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 7 | 2 | 14 | 4 | 1 | 5 | 11 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 29 | 38 |

Cc32: Demonstrates understanding of delayed gratification (shows maturity) | 1 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 7 | 14 | 2 | 6 | 1 | 9 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 4 | 29 |

Cc33: Evidence of participating in community service | 3 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 5 | 8 |

Cc34: Successful Leadership | 1 | 3 | 5 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 13 | 4 | 3 | 1 | 8 | 53 |

Cc35: Encouraging of peers & evidence of leadership qualities | 1 | 3 | 2 | 5 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 13 | 4 | 3 | 1 | 8 | 53 |

Cc36: Understands and deals with racism or discrimination | 1 | 1 | 1 | 4 | 5 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 8 |

Cc37: Frustration of TRIO programs and services | 1 | 1 | 1 | 4 | 8 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 11 |

Cc38: Lack of understanding of TRIO programs and services | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 8 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 8 | 12 |

Cc39: Frustration of/or experiences with TRIO programs | 1 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 6 | 7 | 26 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 26 |

Cc40: Negative Impression of/or experiences with TRIO programs | 2 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 4 |
**APPENDIX G**

**NON-COGNITIVE SCORES FOR ALL 50 RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS**

Table 10. Non-cognitive scores for research participants. This table illustrates the non-cognitive scores by category and overall score for all research participants in the study.

Respondents (n=50) are from the College Readiness & Protective Factors Survey.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>UNQ-L.D.</th>
<th>PSCE</th>
<th>RSA</th>
<th>LQDR</th>
<th>LQST</th>
<th>AVSSTUPRT</th>
<th>SLEXP</th>
<th>DCS</th>
<th>KRQGACQ</th>
<th>Total NCQ Score</th>
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Totals: 9.18, 7.82, 7.06, 7.52, 5.34, 7.38, 6.6, 58.85

Legend: **SCOCS**

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<tr>
<th>TRIO FG</th>
<th>PSCC = Positive self-concept, or confidence</th>
<th>AVSSTUPRT = Availability of strong support person</th>
<th>SDS = Demonstrated community service</th>
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<tr>
<td>Non-TRIO FG</td>
<td>RSA = Realistic self-appraisal</td>
<td>SLEXP = Successful leadership experience</td>
<td>KNOWACQ = Knowledge acquired in a field</td>
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<td>Non-TRIO Dual Enrollment</td>
<td>UDVR = Understands and deals w/audit sm</td>
<td>DCS = Demonstrated community service</td>
<td>LQST = Performs long-range goals v. short term needs</td>
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Respondents (n=50) are from the College Readiness & Protective Factors Survey.
REFERENCES


BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Dr. Angela J. Corley is an advocate for opportunities in postsecondary education for underrepresented students, particularly those who come from rural communities. For the past several years, she has worked for Florida A&M University (FAMU), wherein she has held positions with the FAMU Upward Bound program, FAMU College Reach-Out Program (CROP), and FAMU Educational Talent Search program. In these roles, she has provided college readiness services to TRIO participants, who are potential first-generation college students. She has performed numerous counseling sessions, workshops, instructional activities, and speaking engagements; which are centered on professional development, financial aid training, maneuvering the college application process, and building non-cognitive skills. Through her experiences with first-generation college students, Dr. Corley was inspired to conduct an applied research study called, “Understanding the College Readiness Experiences of Rural High School Students in Pursuit of Postsecondary Education.”

Prior to working in Higher Education, Dr. Corley spent several years serving as a Public Relations professional, for a major non-profit organization located in Cincinnati, OH, called, the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center. She was an integral part of the community engagement team, which helped to raise awareness for the $110 million capital campaign for the completion of this museum; which uses the stories of heroic leaders from the Underground Railroad to inspire modern-day freedom conductors. During her tenure at the Freedom Center, Dr. Corley served as a communications professional who provided expertise in building strategic partnerships, leading community forums, developing publications, managing volunteers, and event planning. Dr. Corley’s experiences at the Freedom Center, sparked her spirit of activism, which she uses today, to connect students to opportunities in education.