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# First to Finish: Supporting First-Generation Students of Color

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THESIS

First to Finish:
Supporting First-Generation Students of Color

Allena R. McCloud

May 2021

First to Finish:

Supporting First-Generation Students of Color

A Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of the

Department of Educational Foundations and Policy Studies

West Chester University

West Chester, Pennsylvania

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of

Master of Science

By

Allena R. McCloud

May 2021

## Dedication

I would like to dedicate this thesis to all first generation students of color that I have had the pleasure of working with.

Acknowledgements

      I would like to thank all of the HEPSA faculty and staff who have provided me with a great experience. I would like to especially thank Dr. Hodes for leading a great program and being an example of good company. A special thank you to Dr. Morrison for being a supportive, dedicated, and helpful thesis advisor. To my family and family, thank you for supporting all of my goals and future dreams. To my HEPSA friends, thank you for being you. To the LARC team,  thank you for being amazing co-workers, I have enjoy my GA over the last two years. To Dr. Manigo,  and Mrs. Rita Patel Eng, thank you for allowing me to grow as a professional and a student.

Abstract

The thematic concern for this thesis is the barriers impacting the retention and persistence of first-generation students of color. This concern is important because first generation students of color are attending college at a higher rate than continuing generation students of color. Research has shown that the retention drops at the second and third year which impacts persistence to graduation. The intervention for this thematic concern is a conference titled First to Finish. This one-day conference to be held once a semester was created to help address the barriers impacting these students. The conference would include workshops, networking events and a scholarship. This conference will leave students wanting to attend again and support their fellow peers. For higher education, this conference is something that can be adapted among the state system of higher education.

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**Chapter One: Introduction**

Graduating college can be seen as a major milestone for some people. It has a different effect on how people see themselves and where they see themselves in the future. For some people, they may be the first in their family at completing this major task, while for others graduating college may be seen as just the next step in their life journey. Students of color already have to deal with their racial identity so adding another identity, such as being first-generation, on top of that in a place that is foreign to them can be a huge struggle. With this in mind, the thematic concern of this thesis is the barriers impacting the retention and persistence of first-generation students of color. In this chapter, I discuss my positionality in relation to this thematic concern. My positionality is separated into parts that explain how an event or experience brought me to care about this important issue.

**Positionality**

Life can give you many opportunities, being who you are is important when enjoying what life brings your way. My identity and how I identify myself is crucial for showing the most holistic version of me. I would identify myself as a female American of African descent with a college education from the lower middle class. I grew up in a predominantly white, wealthy school district in Pennsylvania where I struggled with identifying where I fit in with the groups and organizations in middle and high school. As we go through life it is important that we feel connected to groups and that we are comfortable with the many identities that we have.

Being a first-generation college student is one way that people identify themselves and can hold important meaning for them. As a higher educational professional, first-generation college students of color graduating are important to me because I have seen

first-hand how meaningful and important that is to a person and how it can affect the people around you. My father was a first-generation college student and it influenced and impacted not only his life but my life and education as well. This identity group would follow me throughout my k-12 and college education. My parents, my experience as a student of color and my professional experience in higher education have all influenced this concern, which I believe must be addressed as the world of higher education evolves.

*Parents*

From a young age you are given lessons in life. Throughout our lives we are given choices to make that can be easy or hard. Some choices are easier to make than others especially when they are choices you're passionate about. A person's parent or guardian is a huge influencer in a person's decisions in life. My father is one of five kids and his parents gave him and his siblings the same option when they graduated high school. They could either go to college or head out into the workforce. Both of his parents never went to college so it would be their responsibility to get there and pay for it themselves. My dad was able to ask some of his siblings for guidance, but he had to figure out most of it himself. My dad only applied to two schools and had to do the financial aid process himself. My dad went to Cheyney University where he received his degree in mathematics.

After graduation my father went on to teach mathematics at high schools in major cities. He eventually went on to work in high school athletics where he would help students reach their goals of possibly playing in college. He gave his students the same advice that his parents did, that they could go to college or into the workforce after graduation, but he would emphasize the importance of a high school diploma.

When evaluating my mom's experience with higher education she was the only one of her siblings to go to college. Her mother received her nursing degree while my mom and her siblings were young children. Her father graduated high school and went right in the workforce. Since neither of her parents had a four-year college experience, it was hard for her parents to relate to her experiences in college. My mom has told me on many occasions that even if your parents helped you financially or emotionally it sometimes still not enough because you have to deal with the pressure that you put on yourself and they put on you even if they don't know it. Both of my parents graduated from Cheyney University and many of their friends that they went to college with were either first-generation or second generation college students.

As I reflect on both my parents' experiences and compare them to what first-generation students experience today, there are a few overlapping themes. Financial Aid and money is one themes that is very common. Both of my parents shared that both brought 7-10 sets of clothes and that is what they wore all semester. They both also explained that they worked 1-2 jobs each semester to afford the bare necessities such as personal care items and food for when they were off campus, during holiday breaks, or when the cafeteria would close. Networking and internships are something both my parents had to do in order to graduate from college. My mom explained that being a black woman in computer science was already hard because it was a male dominated field, however since she didn't know anyone in the field, it was hard to try and navigate getting internships. She said that attaining her first two were overwhelming, but it got easier as she became a senior. Internships are common for most students during college, when you are new to the college environment and

a racial minority, attaining an internship can be daunting when you do not know many people and don't have outside connections.

### *Student of Color Experience*

As a Black student in a predominately white school district, it was hard for me to block out people's assumptions of my grades or what my parents do for a living or what I would be doing after high school. From elementary school through high school, many people would assume that my parents were divorced and that my parents did not have a college degree. Throughout most of this time my mom was a stay-at-home mom and when she would come to my school with my younger siblings, people would ask if we had the same father because they didn't see my dad dropping me off or picking me up from school. It was not until high school that I started responding back to people's assumptions.

Your high school guidance counselor is supposed to be a person who helps you pick your options about your future. Each spring students would meet with their guidance counselor to discuss classes for their senior year. During my sophomore year, my guidance counselor helped me pick classes that would help me be eligible for sports in college and classes that were either college prep or honors. At the end of my meeting, she recommended that I start preparing for the SAT and ACT. During my junior year I took both tests and did well enough to apply to colleges. At the end of my junior year, I received a new counselor who was not as supportive of my goals. They assumed during our first meeting that I had no plans on going to college or that I should take the time to look at junior/community colleges. This particular counselor did not know my family history or that I already had plans and goals set with my previous counselor. Meeting with this counselor was hard for me because I had to hold in my feelings without being disrespectful.

When I got to college, I had many similar experiences with the same assumption and stereotypes. Peers would assume that students of color were athletes or received low test scores on major exams. Personally, peers would give surprised comments and looks when I would say my parents graduated from college. Statements such as "oh" or "wow" or "of course they would go there." Many times, it felt good to break their assumptions and surprise them with grades higher than they expected. I am blessed to not have many negative experiences with professor or college administrators. Most professors were helpful and gave guidance to help plan for the future some on the other hand were surprised and not supportive by the paths that I planned for myself post-graduation. Applying for graduate school was difficult because neither of my parents went and some professors were surprised that I was planning and thinking about my future at that level.

### Higher Education Experience

During my time in college, I have met many first-generation students of color, who also have other identities that affect their college experience. Being a first-generation student of color comes with its own set of barriers and struggles that a second or third generation college student may not understand. As a person who has worked at the community college and a four-year college environment, I have had different experiences that have made this concern a passion of mine that I want to provide a way to address.

At the community college level, I had met many first-generation students of color whose parents never finished their bachelors or worked in the trade industry and only needed an associate degree or certificate. Some of these students came to community college just to learn and acclimate themselves so they can transfer to a four-year college their sophomore year. Other first-generation students of color were also first-generation

American, and their citizenship and language status also influence their reason to come to college. During the 2016 presidential election, I remember talking to some of these students and they were concerned that some of their family members and siblings were going to be deported so they would be here getting their education on their own. The students that I met at community college who planned on transferring had different stories than the ones I met at four-year institutions.

While at West Chester University, I encountered first-generation students of color as an undergraduate and a graduate student.  As an undergraduate I felt like more of a supportive classmate who wanted to understand their reasoning behind what they felt when they said things such as "I don't know how much longer I can do this" or "I can't afford what the other students have" or "It's not the same for me when I go to that office." I heard these statements often from first-generation minorities and all I could do was relate it to what I heard my parents say. I knew many of the campus resources and was able to help guide them to the right people to talk to about their concerns.

Now that I work in higher education professionally, I want to ensure that these students are able to graduate without them feeling like they don't have the resources or that these support services don't care or cannot relate to how I am feeling. As a professional, I have had to sit with students and have conversations about what they feel is preventing them from coming back next semester or what is making them feel like they are not going to be able to graduate. Some students have explained that money is their primary issue and that they don't understand how financial aid works. As reported by Jaschik (2019), the National Center for Education Statistics shared data of why students did not complete the FAFSA. The data showed that 32 percent thought they or their family may be ineligible or may not

qualify for financial aid and 15 percent did not know they could complete a FAFSA. This data supports what some of my students have shared with me. This is important to note because as a professional I need to make sure they feel that they can be there. Yet many of my students have also shared that they don't feel they belong at the institution because of their identity. This is concerning to me because students have multiple identities and it's important that they feel they can identify with others and see themselves in their college or university. This can include helping them find offices on campus that they can be a part of or organizations they can join. Throughout my time in higher education, these experiences and others have impacted my view on this concern and have given me a passion to develop an initiative to help this concern.

## Thematic Concern

The thematic concern of this paper is the barriers impacting the retention and persistence of first-generation students of color. In this paper first-generation will be defined as a student whose parents/guardians have not earned a bachelor's degree. Retention in this paper will be defined as students who continue to enroll in classes each semester. Persistence will be defined as students progressing to graduation by completing a certain number of credits each semester towards their degree. Retention and persistence directly influence each because if we are not retaining them then they are not taking classes towards their degree to complete the required classes to graduation. This is important because there are more first-generation students attending college (NASPA, 2020). In Chapter 2, I will discuss how higher education was not created for women and people of color. This is important as the population discussed in this thematic color overlaps with both groups.

The National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) has created a center to focus on first-generation student success. The center provides data on first-generation student and how institutions can become first-gen forward. When reviewing the data from NASPA I found that that there are more first-generation students of color entering college than continuing generation students of color. The data showed that for white students their continuing generation students is still higher than first-generation students. This means that first-generation students are disproportionately students of color, which is why this thesis will focus specifically on this population.

As higher education institutions strive to becomes more equitable for more people, this concern should be important to others because it will directly influence the future support needed on college campuses. We higher education professionals are going to continue to see students whose families never had anyone attend higher education before or who have people in their family who have never graduated college. As these students start to attend different types of institutions, it is important that support is offered at all levels. Student affairs professionals should be aware that they will be seeing more from this population and should know how to meet the needs of these students.

**Chapter Two: Theoretical Frameworks**

**Philosophy of Education**

Each person's idea of education is influenced by their own beliefs, cultures, and religions. The idea of education is influenced by a person experiences when they learn or experience new information. Learning comes in many shapes and forms. It can come with work experience, engaging in new culture and learning new topics. When it comes to learning about money, health, suitability, and other basic life necessities, these topics may only be covered at home. In America, education is going to school from grades k-12 with the intent of the person going to college after. The American education system is focused solely on producing a certain type of student that only studies what America wants you to know. In America we follow this one-size-fits-all style of teaching with the main focus being on the regurgitation of digested information.

My philosophy of education is that education is based on the learning process allows people to experience different ways of gaining information as well as different cultures, work styles and environments. The role of an educator in my philosophy is to create the space for educational experiences not to be the dictator of the experience. The learning process can be different for each person, for example, a person can have a disability and needs to have text in larger print to be able to read. An educational experience is one where a person is able to take the information gained and use it to allow them to be able to grow and further their own knowledge and experience. Gaining knowledge from different cultures is important to the educational experience because it allows a person to have a different experience that may let them question why things are done a certain way. It also allows them to question what they have learned from society and their k-12 education. Working in

different environments allows a person to gain multiple problem-solving skills necessary to a person's ability to be adaptable. Work styles is important because not every task can be achieved the same way and being able to adjust your way of thinking is part of having educational experiences that you can build upon.

*My Influences*

My philosophy of education is influenced by Paulo Freire, John Dewey, and bell hooks. Each of these philosophers provide a different idea for the environment in which education can be achieved and how education should be done.  Understanding and defining educational experience is important because each philosopher has their own definitions and points, they want to get across. Dewey (1916), for example, stated that:

> Experience does not go on simply inside a person. It does go on there, for it influences the formation of attitudes of desire and purpose. But this is not the whole of the story. Every genuine experience has an active side which changes in some degree the objective conditions under which experiences are had. (p.69)

Dewey believes that after an experience is had the attitudes and beliefs of a person can change. If the experience is genuine, then the information shared is not being forced upon someone to believe in the same thing. This concept from Dewey influenced my philosophy of education because it explains the importance of experience with regard to how an individual thinks about things. For example, I believe an educational experience is an event that allows a person to use the knowledge gained in the future. It also can influence a person's thought process or beliefs about a concept.

When I look at my philosophy of education, I find it important to talk about how educational experience does not just influence the moment in time that it happened. These

educational experiences influence the future and do not have an alarm that announces how this will shape how one thinks in the future. As Dewey (1916) explained:

> The quality of any experience has two aspects. There is an immediate aspect of agreeableness or disagreeableness, and there is its influence upon later experiences. The first is obvious and easy to judge. The effect of an experience is not borne on its face. It sets a problem to the educator. It is his business to arrange for the kind of experiences which, while they do not repel the student, but rather engage his activities are, nevertheless, more than immediately enjoyable since they promote having desirable future experiences. (p.62)

Dewey explains that a quality experience is something a person can tell whether they agree with or not right away. However, it is not clear how the experience will influence the future right away because the experience does not have a mirror where you can see the future. It is an educator's responsibility to create an experience where students are able to engage and to think critically without being repelled by the experience. I believe the environment where you have an experience influences a student's engagement level. The educator also plays a huge role in how students engage in education whether that is a traditional or experiential. As student affairs professional it's our job is to create learning opportunities outside the classroom. For example, if there is an event on or off campus that impact the student body you work with then create a safe space where those student care share their feelings and emotions.

Paulo Freire is another philosopher who influences my philosophy of education. Freire focuses on comparing two types of education, problem posing education and banking education. Freire(1972) has explained banking education as:

The banking method emphasizes permanence and becomes reactionary; problem-posing education—which accepts neither a "well-behaved" present nor a predetermined future—roots itself in the dynamic present and becomes revolutionary. (p.83)

Freire describes the banking model as not requiring dialogue and therefore seeing people as fixed, with the ability to turn people into machines. The banking model of education is the teaching style that the United States uses in the k-12 education system. This style of teaching is very "either you get, or you don't." If you don't, then you're mostly left out of the learning process and material needed to be known is not processed. Freire then compares banking education to problem posing education. Freire (1972) had defined problem posing education as such:

In problem posing education, people develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation. (p.84)

Problem-posing education allows people to think critically in their own way and develop their own understanding of why things exist the way they do. An example of problem posing education would be having students defend their stance on a topic discussed in class. In the banking model students would be told what side to defend. The problem posing education matches my philosophy of education because it allows students to find out who they are through education. Freire says that problem posing education is the process of becoming and that people are always evolving and that we are never in a finished setting when it comes to learning (Freire, 1972). Problem posing is a part of my philosophy of

education because it pushes the idea of personal educational experiences and the importance of thinking critically in a way that allows for group dialogue in the education process. When a student is engaged in their learning, they are able to think critically about what they are experiencing,

My philosophy of education is also influenced by bell hooks because of the focus on a multicultural educational experience. Experience and learning about other cultures are important to being able to think critically about the histories of minorities. Gaining knowledge about different cultures allows for the ability to adapt to different people. In the work environment people will have to work with people of different backgrounds and cultures. It's important for students to develop an understanding of other people's cultures. The following was stated in bell hooks (1994) about cultural experience in the educational environment in her writing Teaching to Transgress:

> For those of us on the margins (people of color, folks from working class backgrounds, gays, and lesbians, and so on) who had always felt ambivalent about our presence in institutions where knowledge was shared in ways that reinscribed colonialism and domination, it was thrilling to think that the vision of justice and democracy that was at the very heart of civil rights movement would be realized in the academy. (p.30)

This quote emphasizes the importance of teaching the counternarrative in the education system. The counternarrative is the ideas and facts that are taught from marginalized cultures. The master narrative is the colonial history that is based on the white perspective of history, taught throughout the k-12 education and even post-secondary education. With the counternarrative pushing the critical thinking process it is important to note that only do

BIPOC have the time to think critically, so does the majority of white students. For white students, this might be the first time that they are hearing about the counternarrative and the history of the culture they are talking about.

All three of the philosophers that I discussed push the idea of having people learn in different environments and think critically of what they learn about. For many people this style of learning is not taught at an early age and many may not learn to think like this until they get to college. Currently colleges are seeing more student of diverse background and experiences. It is our job as higher education professionals to push these experiences. An example would be recognizing different cultures and holidays inside and outside the classroom. Students of color have multiple cultures and religious practices that are discussed very limitedly with in education. College is a time where regardless of who you are you should feel fully engaged in what you're studying and participating outside the classroom.

***The Current Philosophy of Higher Education***

In higher education there is the outside of the classroom learning experiences then there is the inside the classroom learning experiences. Depending upon the professor you have teaching your course work, you could have a banking model teaching experience or a problem posing teaching style. For most college students they probably experience a banking model teaching style. Based on my philosophy education the banking model does not work best and does not give students the opportunity to think critically about what they learn. The admission requirements for most colleges are based on banking model style test such as the SAT and ACT. I believe that colleges that are moving to test optional style application are understanding that banking style test does not truly tell you how great of a student that person can be.

Higher education is based on the return on the investment philosophy. Meaning that colleges goals are to make the most money and get students out in a four-year time span. David Lebaree (2017) discusses how higher education is based on a dynamic market system. He explains that there are four rules that influence how the higher education systems operates with school that have the most money and research institutions being the top (Labaree, 2017). This statement by Labaree emphasizes the idea about the return on investments. It explains how the larger institutions are the ones on top and with that idea majority of the institutions probably use a banking model theory do to the number of students they hope to educate. This research one institutions may allow for the opportunity to use problem-posing thinking in their research. Many large-scale institutions focus on the how many students they can graduate with in four years.

Today higher education only somewhat matches my philosophy of education. The professors that teach in a problem posing teaching style and student that fully engage in the campus opportunities, meet the goals of my philosophy of education. However, most students do not get that experience because of the style of teaching and number of opportunities that are available to students to engage in experience that allow for continually growth. My philosophy of education is based on the idea that education is a continual learning process that allows a person to think critically and engage in experiences not had. I feel education should not be limited in time and should not have astronomical cost to achieve. For example, a student having the opportunity to study abroad and experience different cultures while learning the required course material is an example of my philosophy of education. Being able to apply the material learned in class then reflecting on

it critically and coming up with alternatives to any issues that occurred would be an example of what I hope higher education would look like.

### *My Philosophy and My Concern*

My thematic concern that I plan to investigate is the barriers impacting the retention and persistence of first-generation students of color. The concern will address how to best help first-generation students of color through their time at their current institution. First-generation college students are defined as students for who neither parent has received a bachelor's degree. Retention is defined as the year to year returning rate for a student. My goal through my research is to create an initiative that will support these students through their four years of college. My philosophy of education applies to this concern because the students educational experience can influence how likely the student is to return to the institution. As educators at the institution helping student problem-pose the problems in their lives allows them to feel a part of the process when addressing their concerns.

Engagement inside and outside of the classroom, and problem posing education were discussed in my philosophy of education.  Both of these concepts are important to this thematic concern because we are looking at retention and persistence. Students are more likely to graduate from an institution that keeps them engaged inside and outside the classroom. That is why offices such as study abroad, multicultural affairs and the center for women and gender equity are so important. These offices create a sense of belonging for students and also encourage students to think critically about the future. In chapter 3, I will the discuss barriers influencing the retention and persistence of first-generation students of color.

**Critical Action Research**

Critical Action Research (CAR) is a specific type of research conducted with a goal a researching a concern with a critical lens. This type of research is meant to be conducted regularly and with the idea that the researcher is a part of the research itself. Ernest T. Stringer (2014) states that "action research is a systemic approach to investigation that enables people to find effective solutions to problems they confront in everyday lives" (p.1). This is just one of many ways that action research is described and understood. Through Stringer's definition, it could be understood that this type of research is used to examine and explain problems in everyday life. Stringer (2014) also states that "action research is a color additive approach to inquiry or investigation that provides people with the means to take systemic action to resolve a specific problem" (p. 8). Both statements focus on how action research must be conducted in a specific approach to reach an understanding before an intervention is put into place. I agree with both of Stringer's statements because as higher education professionals it is important that we understand the population we plan to support before creating interventions to support them. It is important that we understand who the group is and what barriers they may face. This information can be collected through qualitative surveys, focus groups, and understanding the key stakeholders.

Critical action research has two parts the critical and the action research. The critical focuses on looking at a topic through multiple lens and is continuous. Through the critical lens it is important that the research is inclusive of all stakeholders. When adding the critical lens to research you now have action research that focus on looking at an issue through multiple lenses. Action Research can be chosen to explore different ideas and topics. Action research is an important type of research because it focuses on the why behind the concern

being addressed. According to Bryon-Miller (2003), "action research has a complex history because it is not a single academic discipline but an approach to research that has emerged overtime from a broad range of fields." This statement explains how action research itself is ever changing and that the research we conduct ourselves should be involving overtime itself. Meaning that the work itself is never done and should be continued even after program is implemented.

As a higher education professional, I would say that action research is the process of researching a concern with hopes of finding a solution with the research being apart of the entire process. This research should be done with the hope of involving the stakeholders in the research process, and an understanding that all stakeholders are vital to developing a solution to the concern. In higher education, we develop programs, policies, and support programs on a rolling basis. It is important that prior to those things being created that research is done to determine what does work, what doesn't work, and what the stake holders need to help improve the concern being addressed.

CAR is an important framework for research in Higher Education Policy and Student Affairs because the research we conduct is with the intent to solve a concern that has a history. It is important that research is conducted critically because we are affecting students' lives with the outcomes determined in the research. Reviewing and having a strong understanding of what influences this concern is important to understanding what will shape the study of the concern. The concern that I am focusing on in higher education is persistence and retention rates of first-generation minority students. For CAR it is important that I research and understand the history of this population. This would include interviewing people from this group and looking at past student data. It is important with

research that any data collection is done with current and past members of this population. This method of research matches both Stringer and Bryon-Miller and their belief that researcher must be actively participate in the research itself.

**Chapter Three: Literature Review**

The history of higher education follows the history of the United States of America very much. Any major events in the US would affect the campus and how student would interact with each other. The historical context of the concern in this thesis is not only influenced by the history of higher education but the history of social movements as well. First, we must look at the history of higher education and how the goal was to only give white men the access to this opportunity, thus, preventing women and people of color from having access to colleges and universities. Social movements are the next area to look at because many protests on college campuses have to do with the community, current pollical events and events happening in the country.

**Who was the University For?**

The university was created to educate white men for a bachelor's of arts with a concentration in ministerial preparation during the colonial time period. As the United States grew it is important that it is understood that education was a privilege. For many, the average student was a white wealthy male who had a family history of attending college. In 1862, President Lincoln endorsed the Morrill Land Grants Act, which affirmed the importance and the permanence of public higher education. This marked the first public high education institutions open to all white males regards of economic status (Rentz & MacKinnon 2004).

It is important to note that women and people of color were not allowed access to higher education. As a result of the Morrill Land Grants Act, policies were put in place to ensure that if Blacks were not allowed to attend public universities that there was a separate but equal institution available to them. This would lead to the creation of historically black

colleges and universities. This would lead to two types of education, Historically Black Colleges & Universities (HBCUs) and Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) (Rentz & MacKinnon 2004). In 1837 some college institutions became co-ed, however, this did not become popular until the late 1800s. This shows the push for inclusion has been an ongoing process and will continue to be over the next century (Rentz & MacKinnon 2004).

## The Push for College Inclusion

In 1821, the first women's college institution emerged. This was a critical moment in women's history as women were able to educate themselves in the same way that men were learning in their institutions. The creation female colleges allowed for gender equality in education. This allowed women to get the education need to work in the domestic sphere, and, only if needed, as teachers. This is an important history to note as there is a large number of women attaining college degrees (Rentz & MacKinnon 2004).

In the book Ebony & Ivy, Wilder (2013) discussed how institutions were built on stolen land from indigenous people. Institutions were also built by slaves and slaves then severed as servants to the students, faculty and staff (Wilder, 2013). This is very important because slaves were not allowed to get an education. Until 1837, many black people were unable to get any form of higher education. In present day there is a lack of recognition of the effects that the creation of universities had on indigenous and black communities. In 1837, Cheyney College, the first historically black college, was founded to educate minorities. This was the start of the development of historically black colleges and universities in the USA. These institutions would go on to be where many black students would get their education (Rentz & MacKinnon 2004).

In recent years, there has been a decrease in attendance at HBCU's. This is because many students of color are starting to attend PWI's. Currently for many institutions there is a concern of what the future of higher education would look like. David Labaree (2017) discusses how higher education is based on a dynamic market system. This shows that many state owned and historically black colleges struggle to stay on top and in competition with other institutions. In the future, I feel that many colleges will start to reduce in number of attendance because there will be lower amount of students attending college because the generation z is going to be a smaller generation before them.

**Social Movements in Support of First-Generation Students and Student of Color**

College is a time that students look forward to attending and becoming the adults they dream of. While in college students have the opportunity to explore different ideas, cultures and political groups. As students explore, they learn to explore what organization they do and do not agree with. College, for many students, is their first time expressing their thoughts and beliefs. Perhaps not surprisingly then, college student movements have been common throughout history. Some of the biggest social movements on college campuses come from political events in the world. Today, with social media, it is easy for a student to share what issue they are experiencing on campus, whether a group is protesting on their campus, or if the students themselves are protesting against social injustice. Student affairs professionals are counting to support students during times when social movements arise on campus and guide them through the process of how to be heard in a positive manner.

The shift in social movements started in the late 20th century. The late 50's and early 60's was the start of several new college organizations such as Congress of Racial equity( Core), National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and Student

Peace Union (SPU) (Altbach & Peterson, 1971). Altbach and Peterson (1971) explained these movements produced educational material and were not always campus related. Tension also increased among student organizations with opposing views. Student movements on college campus echoed adult movements outside the university. An example of this would be from the civil right era where four students from North Carolina Agricultural and Technical College staged a sit in at a lunch counter in the south. This particular movement spread through the south and influence future college protests.

As contemporary issues developed in the world, they also developed on college campuses. Student affair professionals had to change how they support and represent those issue on college campus. Free speech and racial climate are still big issues just like they were in the 60's, 70's and 80's. Student groups, such as the Black Student Union can now be seen on many PWI campus to be a support for black students on those campuses. Racial climates on campus are also reflected in events that happened in the US and World. In the 90's you would see free speech and racial climate issues interact, for example, when Nelson Mandela became president in the 90's in South Africa. Today in the 21st century it would be the murders of unarmed black men and women. Free speech is a crucial part of how student express their feels and emotions when major events happen across the country. For students, understanding boundaries is the key to successful student movement. More importantly the support of the campus faculty and staff can really affect how the university reacts to these major US and World events. Student Affairs professionals, such as directors of multicultural center, directors of diversity & inclusion, and organizational advisors are looked at to guide student through these movements and protest.

As generations become more accepting of others and their cultures and beliefs, it is important to understand how those groups developed on college campus. Inclusion of the LGBT community has been an issue just as long as racial climate issues. Queer activism at Columbia and Cornell played an indefinite roll on the LGBT activism of the late 60's. A notable event for this activism was the students' fight against anti-gay culture at Gordon College in Massachusetts. Gordon College was one of fourteen college leaders writing to President Obama opposing the executive order that prohibited federal contractors from discriminating based on sexual orientation (Wheatle & Commodore, 2019). Many college campuses are developing centers to support students LGBT students on college campuses.

Just like the LGBT community, first-generation Americans and immigrants are also a small group of people on campus who are also majorly affected by US and world events. A major event that effects these students was the DACA policy. The Trump administration attempted to end the DACA policy and DREAM ACT. It remained in place and allowed for undocumented student remain in college. The issue of the DACA Policy spread across US campus like wildfire and pushed student protest. UCLA and USC had major protests against the cancelation of the DACA Policy. Faculty and staff at these institutions helped students get their campuses to reaffirm their commitment to protect and support all members of the campus community (Wheatle & Commodore, 2019).

As the number of first-generation college students of color continue to increase across America it important to understand what those students' other identities are. From racial identity to sexual and gender orientation to immigration status, it is important that campuses know what service these students are likely to use to be supportive of their incoming students' success. The services given to these group should have a strong understanding of

what population is first-generation and what services are needed to provide affective service to those students. Location and beliefs of the campus are important factors as well. Directors of these community-based centers should support the success of all identity groups and be pushing for the needs of these students the campus hierarchy.

<div align="center">**Relevant Factors**</div>

As higher education professionals we should be aware of all the factors that will impact our students and the student groups we serve directly. Understanding student development theories that shape student experiences is one way of understanding first-generation students of color. Power and privilege are also two factors that influence laws, policy and equity within the higher education in America. When creating programs or inventions for any group, it is important that we understand the factors that affect them and ensure that we don't create factors that will prevent these students from engaging in our programs.

### *Student Development Theories*

There are two student development theories that are relevant to first-generation students of color. The Transition Theory written by Nancy Schlossberg (as cited in Paton et al., 2016) is crucial because it explains the four factors that influence a person's ability to cope with transitions. The transition process has four major factors called the four S's: situation, support, self and strategies. Situation looks at examining important factors such as triggers, timing, control and more. Self is examined in two categories: personal and demographic characteristics and psychological resources. In the support area, it is comprised of three facets: types, functions and measurement. Strategies focus on the area of how the person plans to adjust and modify to the circumstances (as cited in Paton et al., 2016). For

first-generation students of color there is an adjustment to campus that takes place upon the student's arrival. This experience involves all four parts of the transition theory. If this transition does not occur in an effective manor then we can lose students. Losing students mean we are not retaining them from semester to semester or from academic year to academic year.

The Mattering and Marginality by Nancy Schlossberg is another important theory that effects first-generation students of color. Schlossberg states that "feelings of marginality often occur when individuals take on new roles especially when they are uncertain about what their new role entails" (as cited in Paton et al., 2016). This group of students knows what it means to be a student, however, coming to a campus may be foreign to them. Also, they are in a new place that they might feel is hard to navigate not knowing people who they can turn to for help. Additionally, Schlossberg notes that "for members of minoritized groups, marginality is often a permanent condition, others such as first year students from dominant population may experience these feelings temporarily" (as cited in Paton et al., 2016). Students of color are already part of a marginalized group at colleges and universities that are predominantly white. When they are also first-generation, these students have even more pressure to feel the need to be a part of something that they feel they can relate to.

The concept of mattering has four aspects to it; attention, importance, ego-extension and dependence are the four aspects Schlossberg focuses on (as cited in Paton et al., 2016). These four aspects of mattering can be address with programs that are specific for students of color who are first-generation students. Programs that allow networking with other students of the same demographic as well as meeting faculty and staff that share the same identity with help the student feel that they matter because it covers the aspect of attention,

importance and dependence. In regard to ego-extension this is specifically addressed with mentors who share the same identity of being a first-generation student of color.

### *Power and Privilege*

Power is the developed ability to asserted control over a group or person and the ability to create privilege, ideology and oppression. With power comes ideology and ideology produces and reproduces power. Power is not a physical thing and is not controlled by just the government and laws. Power cannot thrive, grow and be maintained with support behind it. Foucault(1980) would describe power as a something that is all around us and not in one person or thing. He believes that power produces knowledge, which produces opportunity that creates change. This allows for the understanding that power can be created and it just has to have the energy needed for the ability to create what the power wants. His main goal is to show that power creates discourse and truth. To break power down and defeat it you need resistance and in order to break free of power you have to counter it with counter conduct.

First-generation students are becoming a strong population in the college community. First-generation students are defined as students who neither parent nor guardian obtained a bachelor's degree. First-generation students are coming from privileged and non-privileged backgrounds. Students with privilege may struggle less with affording college, however still have experiences similar to those of non-privilege students. Some intuitions may have limited resources for first-generation students and struggle supporting them. Minorities and first-generation Americans make up a strong portion of first-generation students. First-generation students are oppressed by the structure of the getting an education in America. Power determines what is needed and what is not when it comes to services available.

First-generation students are one of the most oppressed students in the college population. With the structure of how universities run, first-generation students may not understand how things operate in the university. An example would be understanding how to appropriately take out and use loans, and understanding loan applications such as subsidized and unsubsidized loans controlled by the government. The university itself has the most power against first-generation students as they are what is between the student and graduation. First-generation students have to also deal with the power of students who are not first-generation. Students only have energy together when they fight for injustice and change. The power for first-generation students can only come if students work together to build need strength for their own needs.

### *Laws and Policies*

Laws and policies are everywhere in higher education whether that is through the institutions themselves or the government. Thus, it can be hard to know if you are doing everything needed to be successful. As higher education professionals we need to be aware of these laws and policies so we can provide proper guidance and support. Having financial aid events that examine the important concepts students need to know is one way that we can give support. Even if you do not work in financial aid, it is important that we listen to our student and give them the correct contact to help support them. Another policy that may affect students is the satisfactory academic progress report that states that students must be able to show that they are completing enough credits in a specific time period to keep their financial aid (Staying Eligible, 2021). If a student is not aware of this policy from the beginning of their college career, they may struggle if they end a semester not in good standing academically. As we become more aware of what barriers first-generation students

of color have, we can better assist them in learning what they need to be successful outside the classroom.

Equity in access to education is the goal for higher education professionals, however, this is not always the case even when policies are put in place to do so. In 1965, the Higher Education Act was put in place to ensure that everyone, regardless of income or zip code, could have access to a postsecondary education (Higher Education Act, 1965.). This act would allow students to apply for federal aid through the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Even though everyone can apply for the FAFSA, it is very hard to understand and complete. Many intuitions host events to help their students complete the FAFSA because they know it can be over whelming. For many first-generation students of color this could be the first time that anyone in their family would have to complete the application. There are specific things a person needs to have in order to apply. This process can be over whelming and if there is no support given it can prevent a person from completing the application.

<div align="center">

**Current State of Concern**

</div>

My thematic concern that I have been researching is the barriers impacting retention and persistence for first-generation college students of color.  This concern is important because there are more institutions serving this population. First-generation students are not of a specific age range and have various personal backgrounds. Completing a college degree requires persistence through a set number of required courses, and if students are not completing this then they are not persisting through to graduation. It is crucial that we understand the barriers for first-generation students of color if we plan to help them with their retention and persistence.

*What does being first-generation mean?*

When it comes to the demographics of first-generation students there is no one particular group that makes up first-generation students. First-generation students come from all races, cultures and socioeconomic statuses. This information is important because not all colleges will see the same demographics. An overall general definition for first-generation college student is any students whose parents have not obtained a bachelor's degree. According to Ernest (2004) and Green (2017), this definition is the most commonly used when describing this student population. This population is about 32% of college campus populations.

The National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) has created an initiative to focus on first-generation success. The term first-generation is defined differently by many organizations, institutions and researchers. For this paper we will follow the NASPA definition that states "the term "first-generation" implies the possibility that a student may lack the critical cultural capital necessary for college success because their parents did not attend college"( NASPA, 2020). In figure 1 provided by the NASPA Center for First-Generation Student Success we are able to see why this population is so important to the future of higher education. As of the 2015-16 academic school year, 56% of undergraduates nationally were first-generation college students (neither parent had a bachelor's degree), and 59% of these students were also the first sibling in their family to go to college(RTI, 2019a). There are two groups being compared in this data first-generation students and continuing generation students (students whose parent attained a bachelor's degree). This data just show the surface of this concern. If we look specifically at the students of color, there are more first-generation students of color attending college then

continuing generation students of color. This is important because if an institution has a small student of color population, that means more of them are first-generation. It is also important to note that there is more first-generation females than continuing generation. Many students in this population have financial work study, families to take care of, and struggle building connection to campus staff and faculty (RTI, 2019b).

females.

**Figure 1**

*First-Generation Student Data*
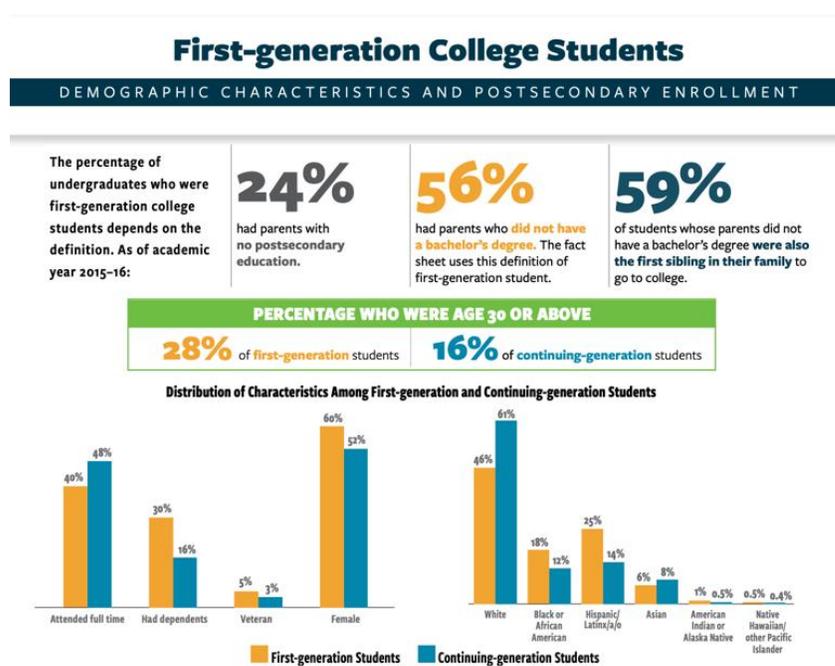


Note: This figure displays the difference between first-generation and continuing generation students.

*Understanding the Challenges of First-Generation Students*

Understanding the challenges of this group is important if schools want to develop a plan on how they will support this student population. There are many challenges that all student face so it is important to determine which challenges this specific group may face.

Underrepresented minorities that are first-generations may have no idea about nor connection to the college world. According to Matthew (2014), this particular population can have challenges not fully associated with academics. For example, access to technology, money, and support are the most popular challenges outside of the classroom.

In a recent article titled "College Belonging", the author interviews Lisa M. Nunn. Nunn makes two important statements about first-generation students and members of minority groups. The first take away that directly influences my concern is that the idea "finding your place" puts an additional level of pressure on first-generation students. Nunn states that "clubs and orgs and communities are withholding belonging rather than offering it." This is important because first-generation students will see not being able to connect with campus as a failure. The impact that this has can lead to students not returning. The second take away from this interview focuses on the minority group and their experiences. Nunn explains that the many of these college campuses are white spaces and do not reflect different cultures in campus: food, curriculum, events and clothing. As higher education professionals we must work to show acceptance of other cultures through our work not just in multicultural centers on campuses. During campus club fairs, there must be options for first-generation students and first-generation students of color to meet people that identify the same way so that they feel that sense of connection to at least one thing on campus.

***Programs that Support First-Generation College Students***

There are many different programs created to help first-generation college students from summer programs to yearlong programs. Research shows that summer programs are great for helping student navigate campus and it functions. It allows for connections between student, staff and faculty. This is great for first year college students, however, the

main issue is how do you keep student engaged with these support services as they progress

through their career? When it comes to programs, they need to be intentional in showing

how there will be support throughout the students four years of college. Schelbe (2019)

supports the idea that support should run all four years of a student's experience because

they can accrue different challenges as they progress. This is supported by data collected in

the study done by Schelbe. According to Grace-Odeleye (2019) there should be certain

departments that are involved in building support for this population not only in the summer

bridge program but college wide support offices as well. All departments should understand

what struggle this population faces and how to best support them through their college

years. This includes knowing what struggles they may face such as employing for jobs,

internships and fellowships. It also involves knowing that these students may not have

strong network connections and networking skills.

Based on the research above it is important the programming is continuous. NASPA

has the Center for First-Generation Student Success which created different programs and

services to help aid in the support for these students. Recently, Rowan University was

named to their First-gen Forward institution list for the university's flying first program. The

program was developed to enhance academic access for our first-generation students while

focusing on an increased sense of belonging within our campus community. This is just one

on many institutions that are working to support first-generation students and retention and

persistence.

### Internship Experience in Connection Concern

During my graduate program I had the opportunity to have a graduate assistantship as

an academic success coach and a graduate internship as an academic advisor. Both

opportunities gave me a chance to meet students with different demographics, socioeconomic status and educational backgrounds. The first-generation students of color that I did have the opportunity to work with had some shared experiences and individual experiences. Between both opportunities I learned that access to support and the people who provided the support to the students have a grave impact on these students' futures.

Financial aid and connecting with professors were two popular experiences that I witnessed at both my assistantship and internship. Students would share how it was hard to interact with the people who work in financial aid because they expect us to have answers and understand everything they are talking about. For many of these students, their parents were only helpful to a certain extent. When it can to college professors, student have shared that not having professor on campus that looks like you, can affect students seeking help. Others shared that some professors expect them to have a strong understanding of technology and college readiness. Students all shared that many of them were the only minorities in their class. All of these experiences can highly impact the retention of these students of color.

When we think about our students of color there are some that have been in America their whole lives and understand the American education system, however, that is not the case for all students. One of my students that I had the pleasure of helping was stressed because she was a first-generation student of color but was also a first-generation American. This particular student was the first of their siblings to go to college and want help finding people on campus who shared the same interest. I was able to help them find clubs and organization that match their interest as well as find staff and faculty that shared similar identities. After working with me for a semester this student felt that the college is

somewhere they could see themselves continuing their education even with their rocky start to the semester. This is one of the individual experiences that made this concern so important and why I feel my invention in Chapter 4 will help the students the shared about in this section.

**Chapter Four: Program Design**

In the previous chapter, I discussed the historical events, relevant literature, and the barriers facing first-generation students of color. Historically, colleges were not created for women or people of color, which has affected first-generation students of colors for many years. First-generation student of color are attending college at a higher rate than continuing generation students of color (NASPA, 2020). Currently there are multiple barriers preventing first-generation students of color from attaining their college degree (Matthew, 2004). These barriers include: inequity in funding for education, the cost of attendance, a lack of sense of belonging and emotional and mental support. The term first-generation has multiple definitions but the most common is a student where neither parent or guardian has attained a bachelor's degree (Ernest 2004). The program intervention that I have developed is the First to Finish conference for first-generation students of color. First-generation students of color are a growing population across all college campuses (NASPA, 2020). This conference is an opportunity for first-generation student of color to engage in workshops, discussions, and meetings to help them feel a sense of belong within the colleges they attend. The conference is intended to be held once a semester and rotate between the state system higher education (SSHE).

**Goals, Objectives, and Outcomes**

- Program Goal #1: Increase State System of Higher Education (SSHE) first-generation student of color retention and persistence.

  - Program Objective #1: Encourage the development of student academic skills.

- Learning Outcome #1: As a result of the first to finish conference, first-generation students of color will be able to identify campus resources to support their academic career.

    - Program Objective #2: Create opportunity for students to develop a sense of belonging.

    - Program Objective #3: Provide a scholarship opportunity to combat financial inequality.

    - Program Objective #4: Facilitate multicultural engagement.

- Program Goal #2: Provide career development opportunities for students throughout the conference.

    - Program Objective #1: Schedule networking session that will encourage students to engage with new people.

        - Learning Outcome #1: As a result of the first to finish conference, first-generation students of color will be able to create a networking plan for their college career.

    - Program Objective #2: Create a career development session for students to attend.

        - Learning Outcome #1: As a result of the first to finish conference, first-generation students of color will be able to assemble a portfolio with a resume, curriculum vita, and educational works

**Theory to Practice**

The First to Finish Conference is designed to create space for first-generation students of color to learn and engage with other students with similar identities. Two theoretical

frameworks inform the design of the First to Finish Conference. The first framework is Freire's (1972) problem posing education theory. According to Freire (1972) people should be allowed to think critically in their own way and develop their own understanding of why things exist. Informed by this educational framework, this conference provides first-generation students of color the opportunity to engage in a conference that focuses on allowing them to not only think critically of how they want to achieve their degree, but also how they want their college experience to go.  The goal of each workshop is to provide participants with information and allow the students to think critically of how they might use this information in their future. The sessions allow for ample dialogue between the presenter and the students.

The second framework is multicultural experience by bell hooks. In *Teaching to Transgress*, by bell hooks multicultural experience is explained as gaining knowledge about different cultures allows for the ability to adapt to different people. This framework focuses on having students interact with different cultures, religions, and ethnic groups. Informed by this multicultural experience framework, the First to Finish Conference will include opportunities for students to gain experience interacting with people of different backgrounds. Examples include an alumni panel, affinity group sessions, keynote speaker, and networking symposium. Each of these conference components focuses on students interacting with people of different identities and gives them an opportunity to discuss and understand different cultures.

The National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) has created an initiative to focus on first-generation success. As of the 15-16 academic school year, 56% of undergraduates nationally were first-generation college students (neither parent had a

bachelor's degree), and 59% of these students were also the first sibling in their family to go to college (RTI, 2019a). There are two groups being compared in this data, first-generations students and continuing generation students (students whose parent who attained a bachelor's degree). There are more first-generation students of color attending college then continuing generation students of color (RTI, 2019a). These findings demonstrate that a program that focused on retention and persistence of first-generation students of color is important. The data suggest the need for a program that focuses on students who are in their second or third year (Schelbe, 2019). According to Ernest (2004), persistence for first-generation students is hardest during the student's second year of college. Students may repeat classes in their second year (Ernest, 2004). This literature shows that there is a need for programs that focus on second and third year students. The First to Finish Conference is design for all students regardless of their year which address they need describe by these researchers.

Students who are first-generation students of color are more likely to struggle with a sense of belonging compared to their white counter parts (Matthew, 2004). Students need opportunities to find their sense of belong and meet people with shared identity (Schelbe,2019). The conference will address sense of belonging by have multiple opportunities for student to meet others with shared identities. It is also important that the First to Finish Conference lets students know that everyone's path is different and that there is not one right way to achieve a college education.

**Program Proposal**

The purpose of the First to Finish Conference is to create a space for first-generation student of color to learn and network. This section includes a detailed description of the conference, the conference schedule, workshop titles, and session descriptions.

**First to Finish**

The first to finish conference was created to support the retention and persistence of first-generation students of color. This conference is intended to create opportunities for students of color who are first-generation to not only network with each other but to hear from alumni who were also first-generation students of color. The ideal setup for the conference would be to offer it once a semester rotating between different state-owned schools, allowing students to be able to network with students at their institution and throughout the SSHE system. The conference would hopefully rotate between each of the state schools allowing opportunities for students to travel and engage in different environments.

The conference would be hosted once in the fall either in September or October and once in the spring semester either in February or March. The conference would take place on a Saturday so students will not miss any class. All aspects of the conference would be recorded for students who are unable to attend due to prior commitments or athletics. Some incentives for students will be: giveaways, the scholarships, and the opportunity to travel to different campuses. Students can follow the conference on social media to stay up to date on when the next conference will be and scholarship opportunities. Students who are not first-generation students of color are welcome to attend the conference and will be informed that not all aspects of the conference will apply to them.

To make this conference a success, we would need the support of not only the SSHE but the individual campuses as well. Specific campus offices include career services, learning centers, financial aid, and the alumni office. Each of these offices will play an important part in the workshops being hosted or the conference panels. For example, career services would help conduct the "Career Prep" workshop where students have the opportunity to create their own resumé and cover letter with the support of the staff guiding them through the process. In the "Money Basics" workshop, the financial aid office would be able to speak to students on the importance of completing the FASFA and managing your money while in college. The panel discussion would be hosted by the alumni office. This office would help the conference committee find alumni for the panel as well as possibly a keynote speaker.

*Scholarship Opportunities*

A scholarship will be created specifically to go with this conference to help support students who show academic success, but are also first-generation students of color. We hope to collaborate with the alumni offices to get donations to support these scholarships. At each conference we hope to award a one-thousand-dollar scholarship to a student. There would be a scholarship application for students to fill out prior to the conference. The scholarship requirements are that one must be a first-generation student of color, have a 3.0 GPA, have two letters of recommendation, and a personal statement outlining why they feel they deserve the scholarship. This award would support program goal one of retention and persistence. The scholarship application can be found in appendix A.

A conference committee will be responsible for the planning and success of First to Finish Conference. This committee would include representatives from each SSHE school. There would also be committee positions to ensure things run smoothly. The committee

would oversee the conference budget, select scholarship recipients, and work with host institution. The committee would be responsible for finding the presenters for all the sessions, ordering the for lunch, and organizing the giveaways.

*Conference Components*

In this section, there is a conference agenda to show the order of the conference events. Table 1shows that the conference is set to start in morning and end by midafternoon. The conference would be held on a Saturday to avoid students missing class. After the conference agenda is the workshop session. There are two workshop session to allow the students to see the sessions the most interest them. The workshop sessions are spaced to allow presenters and student to network and eat lunch.

**Table 1**

*Conference Agenda*

| 9:00am-9:45am | **Welcome and Opening Speaker** |
|---|---|
| 10:00am-10:45am | Workshop 1 |
| 11:00am- 11:45am | Networking Symposium |
| 12:00 pm-12:45pm | Lunch |
| 1:00 pm - 1:45pm | Workshop 2 |
| 2:00 pm – 2:45pm | Keynote Address |
| 3:00pm – 3:45pm | Affinity Group Meeting |
| 4:00pm – 4:45pm | Alumni Panel |
| 5:00pm- 5:30pm | Closing Remarks ( Scholarship Award and Give A Ways) |

Note: This table is an example of the conference agenda for First to Finish.

**Workshop Sessions.** Each of the workshop sessions listed below would be offered in one of the two workshop blocks so that students can have an opportunity to see the sessions that interest them. Each workshop session supports program goal one of increasing retention and persistence. In table 2, each session listed has a short explanation of the goal of that session.

**Table 2**

*Session Descriptions*

| Session | Description |
|---|---|
| "New Home" | This session will focus on campus acclamation and helping students navigate the college environment. |
| "College Tips and Tricks" | This session will focus adjusting to college learning and providing study skill strategies. |
| "Transfer 101" | This session is designed to support students who have transfer in from other institution. |
| "Money Basic" | This session will focus on personal money management & FASFA how to fill out a FASFA. |
| "Career Prep" | This session will provide strategies for writing a resume and cover letters. |
| "Internship 101" | This session will focus on professional networking strategies and to find an internship |
| "Ready to Fly" | This session will focus on post-graduation planning and job searching strategies. |
| "Grad School 101" | This session will focus on applying for grad school and funding. |

Note: This table is a list of conference sessions and there corresponding descriptions.

**Keynote Speaker.** The keynote speaker session will happen after the second workshop series. The goal each year would be to have a speak who was a first-generation college student of color and possibly an alumnus. The speaker would focus on sharing their story and give their advice to the students. We will provide a question-and-answer session after. This session would support program goal number one and two.

**Networking Symposium.** This symposium would be an activity for students to interact with other students in the conference and discuss events that are impacting one another's communities. Topics of discussion would include equity, social justice, environmental justice, and access. This session would support program goal number two of networking opportunities.

**Affinity Group Meeting.** The affinity group meetings will allow students time to meet with communities they identify with. Students will be able to build connections with

students from their campus and other campus as well. Groups include black males, black females, Latinx, Asian, LGBTQ+, First-Generation American, and Native American/Pacific Islander. This session would support both program goals.

      **Alumni Panel.** The alumni panel will feature first-generation student of color graduates. Panelist would be asked to share their college experiences, provide advice to current students, and share post-graduation achievements. There will be an opportunity for questions and answers. This session would support program goal number two.

<div align="center"><b>Challenges</b></div>

      There are few challenges that I see with this conference. The first would be having a conference committee to run the conference. We would need volunteers from the participating colleges to sit on the conference committee. These volunteers would serve an important role as they would represent the campuses that are attending as well as the needs of the students that they are bringing to the conference. Having a strong committee that has a connection to this population is important because we want to ensure that the students attending have people that support them. The second challenge would be the getting financial support of the institutions within the state system. It is possible for one college from SSHE to host the conference, however it would require the committee to have strong communication with the hosting institution. This conference model can be incorporated at any school; however, the goal is to make sure that we're bringing institutions together to allow students to network not only with students on their own campus, but with students at surrounding colleges as well. Another challenge would be ensuring there is funding to have the conference. Since there would not be a venue renting cost, most of the budget would go items such as food, keynote speaker, gifts for the presenters and panelists, and the scholarship

awards. In chapter 5, I will discuss the implementation plan, funding, marketing, and budget for the conference.

## ACPA/NASPA Competencies

ACPA and NASPA are two organizations that provide competencies and guidelines for higher educational professionals to follow in their work. The two competences that inform my program are Social Justice & Inclusion and Advising and Supporting. Social justice and inclusion which "this involves student affairs educators who have a sense of their own agency and social responsibility that includes others, their community, and the larger global context" (American College Personnel Association [ACPA] & National Association for Student Personnel Administrators [NASPA], 2009, p. 30). The social justice and inclusion competency informs my program because it is designed to elevate a specific student group who is generally marginalized because of who they are. This population continues to grow throughout multiple college campuses across the United States of America (NASPA, 2020).

This program supports the development of this population and adjusts how student affairs professional support this population who may have already had inequities prior to entering college. The goal of the affinity group session is to provide first-generation student of color with opportunities discuss social justice within their community.  It is also important to provide first-generation students of color with opportunities to meet other people who were shared identities and support one another through their college experience.

Advising and Supporting is another competency that this program is informed by because this "competency addresses the knowledge, skills, and dispositions related to providing advising and support to individuals and groups through direction, feedback,

critique, referral, and guidance" (ACPA& NASPA, 2009, p. 36). The goal of this program is

to show that students have support not only from their counterparts, but from the staff and

faculty within the institution and conference setting. The goal of this conference is to ensure

that students leave with a network of support and knowledge of places where they can

receive support to help retain and persist at their institution. As student affairs professionals

we need to ensure that we are creating engaging opportunities where students feel that

support is naturally around them.

**Chapter Five: Implementation and Evaluation**

In Chapter 4, I discussed the goals of the program, the theories that influence the program and the program itself. In chapter 5, the implementation plan, the assessment and evaluation, and the limitations of this program will be explained. The goal of the chapter is to give a full understanding of the program and how this can be accomplished with the barriers we face today.

**Implementation**

**Timeline**

*Fall Semester Prior to Conference*

This semester the following task will need to be complete by the end of December: getting volunteers for committee, funding, sponsorship. The volunteers would come from each SSHE campus. The volunteers from the committee must come from SSHE campuses and be able to engage first-generation students of color. They must understand that there is no pay in this position and support the mission of this conference. Once the committee is formed they will need to work as a team to getting funding for the conference. Funding and sponsorship for the conference and scholarship will involve working with campus alumni offices and local businesses. Sponsors will be advertised in programs, on conference website and on social media.

*Spring Semester Prior to Conference*

During the spring the semester the main tasks are: a) selecting host campus location and date, b) booking presenters, c) scholarship application opening, d) start marketing, and e) selecting a keynote speaker. Selecting a campus and date will be based on campus availability and location. As a committee, it is important that they pick a date and time that

would be in the middle of the fall semester for ample attendance. Appendix A is the scholarship application, which would need to be sent to campuses, students, and uploaded to university websites and social media. This would provide enough time for the applications to be reviewed by the committee in the summer and fall. The application would be available in January and due in May. The marketing plan, described later in this chapter, would start in January of the spring semester and be continuous. The final goal for the committee this semester would be to select a keynote speaker. This would involve the committee creating a list of speakers and offering the opportunity to selected speakers.

*Fall Semester of Conference*

At the start of the fall semester, registration for the conference would be opened. Three weeks prior to the conference the committee will need to order food for the conference. Programs will need to be ordered for print a month before conference date. The selection of the scholarship recipient would need to be determined at the beginning of the semester. The committee needs to find and select the panelist of the conference. Another task would be ordering give-a-ways and raffles.

**Budget**

Below in table 3, is the budget for the cost of the conference to be held once a semester. The budget includes expense for food, marketing, conference raffles, and the scholarship. The conference location will alternate between campuses, in order to not have to pay venue rental fees. Listed in the conference budget is T shirts, the goal would be to have the different conference t-shirt each year to commemorate participation.  For meals we will use the catering provided through the campus cafeteria this will prevent any issues with using outside vendors and will help save money.

**Table 3**

*Conference Budget*

| Expense Item | Amount | Justification | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| Keynote Speaker | 1 | Opens Conference | $1,500 |
| Conference T-shirts | 100 | Marketing for future conference | $1,000 |
| Programs | 100 | Need for attendees to understand conference schedule and include scholarship application and note pages | $500 |
| Food | 75-100 people | Increases attendance for second half of conference | $2,500 |
| Student Raffles | 3 | Raffles for attendees air pods, gift cards etc. | $1,000 |
| Name Badges | 200 | Identification throughout conference | $100 |
| Flyers/Posters | 2 types | Marketing for conference | $200 |
| Panelist Gifts | 4 | Gift bags -$50 per bag | $200 |
| Scholarship | 1 | Given to a student each | $1,000 |
| Total | | | $8,000 |

*Note: The cost to host the conference each semester is 8,000.*

**Marketing**

Marketing for the program will involve working with the committee to get all the forms of marking on the campuses and to the students. Flyers will be created to send to campus offices and dorms. These flyers will come in multiple sizes to accommodate given space. We will provide digital flyers for offices to send in weekly emails or newsletters. This material would be sent to multicultural offices, first-generation campus clubs and campus with the Tri Alpha honors society. Each of these offices and organizations would be able to invite and inform students about this conference. Social media is another platform to get information out about this conference. The committee would need to use the following three platforms for optimum success: twitter, Facebook and Instagram. Each of these platforms can linked to each other, so when information goes out the other accounts will share the same information. Each committee member would help get their campus to follow

the account. Flyers and information would be shared with an SSHE accounts or parent groups related to the colleges. During the actual conference pictures and event photos would be shared to showcase what happened during the conference.

## Leadership

My definition of leadership is the process of helping a group reach a common goal. For me leadership can be displayed in positive and negative manors. Positive leadership creates environments that allow growth within the team and within the leader. An example is encouraging people to use their strengths in their assigned task. Negative leadership can lead to multiple issue not only for students but the universities as well. An example of negative leadership is making teammates feel uncomfortable. Students that see negative leadership can either adapt that leadership style or push against that leadership style. Pushing against negative leadership style can be bad for students because the leadership can loss its student body. Loss of student body effects enrollment and student moral. If students stay in negative leadership they will either be resistant and or bring effective potential change to the campus student body and its campus staff.

My preferred leadership style is informed transformative leadership. Having a leader that allows delegation of task and promotes teamwork is crucial to my success as a team member and as a future leader. The use of transformative leadership is crucial for creating change. I prefer this leadership style because it is designed to promote change that supports groups and the right of others. According to Northouse (2004), leadership can be defined as a process, the involvement of influence, occurs in groups, and involves a common goal . This statement supports my idea of positive leadership and how that can impact a group. Leadership is a process because it requires the development of trust between the team and

the people they serve. As leaders it's important to beware of the mission and vision of the organization. The people in the group must all want to reach the mission and goal of the organization. Organizations that work in the best interest of their consumers have a stronger connections to the  purpose and goals of the consumer.

### *Leadership in First to Finish*

Bolman and Deal (1991) have a four frames model for student affairs administration that is effective in transformative leadership. The four frames are structural, human resource, political and symbolic. At the structural frame the leader helps to make everything flow with all the members of the group and it works in the factory sense. This frame works well for leaders of large groups and organizations with multiple parts in it. Since there is a committee hosting this conference, it is important the committee structure is effective and easy to understand when looking at the committee positions. The human resource frame is more of a supportive framework that works with the whole person. The committee and conference are there to serve a specific population and the committee should focus on making sure that the environment they work in and the conference environment is open and welcoming.  Students who attend the conference should feel like its homecoming and they feel comfortable and happy to be where they are. Small minority based organizations or departments that are small and intimate are growing across higher education.

The last two frames are political and symbolic. There are many student affairs offices that work within the political framework of leadership. An example would be a director of a program support their student without crossing a political line. Political events influence how student behave on campus and it is crucial that students have a strong understanding of where their campus stand on political events. Throughout the conference there will be

multiple opportunities where political events could be discussed. It is important the committee and conference have safe environment for these topics to be discussed with students and presenters. Possible topics include: immigration, DACA, Black Lives Matter and hate crimes. Bolman and Deal (1991) explain the symbolic frame as the organization theatre made up of stories with heroes and villains. Examples given are sports, traditions, mascots and fight songs. These events are started by leaders and allow other leaders to follow that will promote the growth of other leaders and organization members. For this conference committee it is important the visuals for the conference have meani8ng and that any traditions started have meaning. The conference logo would need to be diverse and inclusive and show that being the "first" is meaningful. If there is a campus roll call then each campus must be addressed. A campus roll call would include each campus in attendance yelling their campus motto.

<div align="center">

**Assessment**

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Assessment is needed for the conference to evaluate if the goals are being met. Assessment helps identify strengths as well as areas of improvement in programs. Assessment results can determine what needs to be added and what can be eliminated. Assessment should include all involved in the conference. For this intervention two types of assessment will be used to determine if the goals of this conference have been reached. Qualitative and quantitative data will be used to explain where improvement may need to be made. Since this type of conference would be new for SSHE it is important that we have data to keep the program running. The data collected can be used to help get funding and sponsorship for future conference. Having both forms of assessment allows us to get

specific information on what is working for the conference and what needs to change for the success of future conferences or programs.

At the end of each conference all participants will fill out a survey to evaluate the conference. On each survey we will ask if they would be comfortable being contacted in the future. This information will allow for us to conduct focus groups with our participants. Focus groups will provide qualitative data about the conference. These focus groups will be held after each conference with a total of 8 students in each focus group. Questions for the focus group participants and the conference survey can be found in Appendix B. These questions are designed to see if the goals for the conference are being met. The conference survey questions were designed to determine participants satisfaction with the conference.

### Limitations and Looking a Head

The limitations for this program would be funding and attendance. Funding would be a limitation because the conference would have to adjust to different budgets for each conference. Working with campus offices and sponsors will help keep the conference being offered each year. If budget would need to scale down, offering digital programs and getting donated raffles would be an option. In regard to attendance, campuses that are central to all other SSHE institutions would work best for campuses that are bringing students. Campuses that are bringing students will have to be able to provide their own transportation and lodging if the drive is too long to do in one day. Being able to get transportation that is not expensive may be an issue for some campuses. To combat this issue, the start time of the conference can be later in the morning. If money was not a concern, then this conference could be held in a major city convention center and invite colleges and universities that are not in the state system of higher education.

Covid-19 has proved that online events can be effective, however not as impactful as in-person events. Having a virtual conference can be very cost effective for the conference and will allow for students and higher education professional from non-SSHE schools to attend. A benefit of awarding the scholarship recipient virtually allows their friends and family to attend. Zoom has been a major factor when hosting events in 2020 and 2021. As we look forward at the world of higher education, higher educational professional must understand how their work will effect different student groups such as first-generation student of color.

**Conclusion**

Currently in the world of higher education there is lack of equality and equity. In some situations there is just equality or just equity, which is just as harmful as having none at all. As we look at the world of higher education we need there to be more equity in how we provide students with access and support in college. Michelle Obama once said "When I arrived at the school as a first-generation college student, I didn't know anyone on campus except my brother. I didn't know how to pick classes or find the right buildings. I didn't even bring the right size sheets for my dorm bed. I didn't realize those beds were so long. So I was a little overwhelmed in a little isolated."(News, 2008) . This quote may resonate with first-generation students of color and provide a small glimpse of how it might feel to be in space that was not meant for you. As higher education professionals we need to make sure that we create space for first-generation students of color so they feel a sense of belonging on their campuses.

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**Appendix A**
**First to Finish Scholarship Application**

The First to Finish scholarship was created in 2021 to support first generation student of color who have a 3.0 GPA. Below are the directions to apply for the scholarship.

Direction:

1.      Complete Applicant Information Form
2.      Attach 2 Letters of Recommendation
3.      Attach a personal statement outlining why you feel you deserve this scholarship
4.      Send in official transcripts to firsttofinish@sshe.gov

Applicant Information:

Name:_____

       (Last)                            (First)                      (Middle)

Home Address:

_____

                        Number and Street

_____  _____  _____

   City                                    State           Zip Code

Home Phone: (_____) _____ Cell Phone: (_____) _____

E-Mail Address:_____

Male ____      Female ____

Full Name of Institution you are currently attending:_____

Please check present academic classification:

____Freshman     _____Sophomore     _____Junior     _____Senior.

Grade Point Average: _____

Major Course of Study:_____

Minor:_____

**Appendix B**

*Focus Group Questions*

Please introduce yourself by stating your name, pronouns, you college attend.

Can you share something that really stuck with you from the conference?

Can you recall anything the keynote speaker discussed?

Can anyone recall an opportunity or relationship that you gained from the conference? How did you use that information when you returned to campus? What did you gain from the conference

Did anyone attend the financial workshop? What were your thoughts on that workshop? How has that workshop impacted how you handle your finances?

Tell me about a campus resource you have used after the conference. When did you learn about that resource? How has it impacted your experience on campus?

*Conference Survey*

### First to Finish Conference Survey

What is your current year?

○ First Year

○ Second Year

○ Third Year

○ Fourth Year

○ Fifth Year +

What college are you attending?

Your answer

What gender do you identify as?

○ Female

○ Male

○ Non-Binary

○ Prefer Not to Answer

How would you best describe yourself?

○ Black/ African American

○ Hispanic

○ Asian

○ Middle Eastern

○ Multiracial

○ Native American

○ Pacific Islander

○ Prefer Not to Answer

○ Other: _____

Please rate the following statements.

|  | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Nuetrual | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I would attend the conferrence next year. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| I would recommend the conference to others. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| I was happy with the conference agenda. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| The date and time of the conference work for me. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| The event location was good. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| The food selection was good. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |