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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

PERCEPTIONS OF SUPPORT, LIKELIHOOD OF RETENTION, AND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN PLACES OF ORIGIN AMONG FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS.

First-generation college students are less likely to attend and complete college than their peers whose parents have completed college. Among the reasons cited for this disparity is lack of parental familiarity of the college admissions process and financial aid opportunities. First-generation youth wishing to pursue a college education must rely on others for this knowledge. This study examines first-generation college students' perceptions of support and whether their places of origin have any bearing on their future plans. The study examines interviews with participants through the lens of Tinto's (1993) model of student departure to examine whether their responses, and whether their places of origin, point toward likelihood of student retention. This study finds that students cite parents and high school faculty and staff as most supportive when preparing for college. After arriving in college, there are no differences among students based on place of origin and likelihood of retention. Participation in a retention program appears to help the students meet the criteria for student retention as outlined by Tinto's model.

KEY WORDS: First-Generation College Students, Perceptions of Support, College Persistence, Place of Origin, Student Retention

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June 10, 2011

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COLLEGE STUDENTS.

THESIS

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the
College of Arts and Sciences
at the University of Kentucky

By

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2011

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The following thesis would not have been possible if not for the guidance and assistance of several people. I am forever grateful to my advisor, Shaunna Scott, for her encouragement, patience, feedback, criticism, and excellent instruction without which this thesis would not be possible. My committee members, Jane Jensen and Dwight Billings, provided excellent guidance, criticism, enthusiasm, and curiosity for which I am deeply thankful. I would also like to acknowledge Tom Janoski for his feedback, which pushed me to consider this material in a different light.

In addition to the technical and academic assistance above, I would like to acknowledge equally important assistance from family and friends. To my parents, Steve and Eileen Radomski, who have always been my biggest cheerleaders. Many friends provided me with encouragement and an ear to listen. Among these, John Strada never ceased to push me forward and offer advice and support when it was most needed. I wish to thank the NOVA program staff who were willing to work with me in conducting this research. Finally, I wish to thank the students who participated in this study for their openness and trust.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Improving student retention is an ongoing focus at many colleges and universities. Indeed, both the University of Kentucky and Eastern Kentucky University have cited retention as a priority in recent years (Biglieri et al. 2007; Eastern Kentucky University Strategic Planning Committee 2006). Anecdotally, some believe that low student retention rates at the University of Kentucky are the result of behaviors of students from the Appalachian region who remain connected to their home place and do not graduate from the university. These claims are met with skepticism from others in the university community. Negative stereotypes regarding people living in the Appalachian region are drawn in part because of the persistent poverty and low educational attainment found therein (Haaga 2004). Individuals dwelling in the Appalachian region are believed to be particularly connected to place and family (Gottlieb 2001), and this stereotype has led to a belief that students from Appalachia return home for frequent visits, resulting in a lesser degree of immersion in the university community, and eventually to the decision to leave the university during or at the conclusion of the first year of college.

First-generation college students, or college students who are the first in their families to attend college, are likely to be from families with low socioeconomic status (SES) and are overrepresented in high poverty areas such as Appalachia. First-generation students are less likely to graduate from college (Blackwell and McLaughlin 1998; Smith, Beaulieu, and Seraphine 1995; Terenzini et al. 1996). Lack of knowledge about the college admissions process, the college environment, and financial aid is cited as one reason for this disparity (Luna de la Rosa 2006); another is lack of academic preparedness, both in terms of knowledge and in terms of study skills and related skills

(Davis 2010; Terenzini et al. 1996); a third, a lack of socialization within the family that includes attitudes and expectations that prepare youth for the academic and social demands of college (McGrath et al. 2001). Assistance and support from significant others in the student's life can help mitigate these deficiencies that put them at a disadvantage from their continuous-generation peers.

For a student to complete a college degree, he or she must first be accepted into an institution. For a student who would be the first in his or her family to attend college, navigating the college admissions and financial aid process can be a daunting task and require the help of various persons outside of the family. Once granted admission into the university, the student must complete the degree. This process requires navigating through another set of processes, including a transition to social and intellectual communities that are unfamiliar to the family from which the student comes. To examine this process, we will use Tinto's (1993) model of student departure. Although it is a model of attrition, it is frequently used to develop programming aimed at student retention. It will be used to examine retention in this study as well.

Tinto's model of student departure is based on Van Gennep's work on stages of passage. Such stages of passage require separation from normal or everyday life, a transition period, and reintroduction to the new social surroundings. Tinto's model describes the high school-to-college stage of passage thusly: first, that students will first separate themselves from their communities of the past (typically the high school community and the family); then, that students transition from high school to college; and finally, that students join and become integrated into the college community. Integration into the college community includes formal and informal memberships into the college

community that emerge from interactions with students, faculty, and staff in a variety of environments (Tinto 1993). Failure to successfully navigate these stages of passage results in the student leaving the institution.

Tinto's model begins by acknowledging that the college or university exists in its own environment with its own expectations and requirements. Students enter the university with personal goals regarding education and varying levels of commitment to achieving those goals. Students with greater commitment to their goals are more likely to achieve them. The more academically ambitious the goals, the more likely the students are to complete a bachelor's degree.

Once at the university, the student is then faced with the task of integrating into the social and intellectual communities of the university. Students who have membership in some part of the social life of the university are less likely to leave the university. The more contact a student has with other students at the university, the more likely that student is to have the desired memberships and thus find him or herself integrated into the social life of the university. Additionally, a student can find membership in the intellectual life of the university through participating in sufficiently challenging courses and through both formal and informal interactions with faculty and staff of the university. The greater the number of these social and intellectual memberships in the university, and the closer these memberships fall to the center or mainstream of the campus life (which varies from campus to campus), the less likely the student is to leave prior to completion of her or his educational goals.

Competing with the student's social and intellectual integration are memberships and commitments outside of the university. Most frequently, these are family and job

commitments, and they are most problematic for nontraditional students. The demands of these outside commitments can make the student's integration into the social and intellectual communities more difficult by placing demands on the student's time or by weakening the student's commitment to achieving their goals. However, when these external commitments and communities are supportive of the student and his or her educational goals, they can help the student to achieve those educational goals.

Tinto's model acknowledges that all of these components are interrelated and interdependent. A negative, formal classroom interaction with a faculty member may negatively affect a student's perception of the university as a whole, leading the student to avoid integration into the intellectual and social life of the university. Conversely, a positive interaction with a faculty member may positively affect a student's perception of the university and encourage further integration into the university. The quality and quantity of the social and intellectual interactions a student has on campus affects the student's degree of integration. Students who are not well integrated into the university socially or intellectually are not likely to complete their educational goals at that institution.

Tinto's model of student departure is used as the basis of many student retention programs. This study examines the NOVA program, a retention program for first-generation college students at Eastern Kentucky University, which sets out to prevent student departure in a way consistent with Tinto's model. The NOVA program facilitates students' memberships into the social and academic communities of the campus by providing intrusive advising and peer mentoring, and by requiring participants to take

certain courses as a cohort. These steps are designed to foster relationships among the students and between the students and the program staff.

Unlike the participants in the NOVA program, a high school student with one or more parents with a college degree has people in her or his own home who can provide practical advice regarding the college admissions process and financial aid, and who are able to prepare the student in terms of expectations of the college experience. If that student does not have a parent with a college education, that student is less likely to pursue more education and less likely to persist to a bachelor's degree if she or he does pursue college; additionally, that student is more likely to experience academic difficulties. In order to overcome the lack of knowledge within the family, a first-generation student must look elsewhere for the knowledge that her or his peers find within the family. The purpose of this study is twofold. First, this study seeks to examine who first-generation college students find to be most helpful as they are preparing and applying for college, and in what ways those persons are helpful. Second, this study examines how the same first-generation college students utilize relationships on the college campus within the context of Tinto's model of retention. The belief that students from Appalachia are less likely to complete a degree is centered on the idea that these students visit home more often than students from other places, and are thus less integrated into the social life of the college campus. In the language of Tinto's model (1993), these students have external commitments that are pulling them away from the institution, and should show fewer memberships on campus, both in formal organizations and in informal social settings. This study will examine the participants' integration into campus life to determine if any differences emerge between the place of origin groups.

Much of the research on first-generation college students has been limited to persistence through the first year and start of the second, and does not seek the students' perspective. This research seeks to expand the qualitative body of work that examines the details of the students' experiences in preparing for and attending college, perceptions of the help they received, and how these things fit into a model of college student retention. Finally, this research aims to serve as a springboard for future research in this area.

This study seeks to identify differences in how students from different areas utilize help in pursuing and persisting in higher education. It examines how they use different kinds of support during the social and academic process of beginning of college. This study also seeks to identify whether place of origin impacts first-generation college students' plans for persistence in higher education.

Many of the differences between first-generation college students and continuous-generation college students can be reduced to differences in social and cultural capital. Social capital refers to the interconnected web of social relationships, both close and distant, and "the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them" (Putnam 2000). Social capital has been shown to have a number of benefits relating to job opportunities, economic growth, mental and physical health, safe neighborhoods, government efficacy, and educational achievement (Halpern 2005). These benefits are in part related to the social control generated by the mutual trust between individuals and by the knowledge shared between individuals who are in contact with each other (Smith, Beaulieu and Seraphine 1995). These relationships are also believed to have a positive effect on educational achievement and persistence.

Putnam (2000) distinguishes between two types of social capital: bridging and bonding. Bonding social capital is exclusive, existing among those with close relationships with each other, such as one finds among close friends and family. In comparison, bridging social capital is inclusive and exists across groups. These are the linkages among actors who share some similarity or common interest, but not a close personal relationship. Both types of social capital can have positive effects. Bonding social capital can be a source of positive support. Bridging social capital can provide information and exposes one to opportunities available outside of one's in-group.

Both types of social capital play a role in higher education. The family, a locus of bonding social capital, can provide motivation and support to a high school student pursuing a college education. Similarly, the family can transfer the cultural capital necessary to be successful in college, or inform the student, implicitly or explicitly, that the student is expected to attend college. Friends and other significant actors in the student's life may play a similar role. Bridging capital can link students to resources that can improve grades and test scores, improve their odds of admission into a particular institution, and direct them to scholarships, internships, and other opportunities that enhance the college experience.

Both the family and the community are sources of social capital for high school-aged youth considering higher education. The family is considered the main source of social capital for school-age youth because the family is influential to youth and provides a set of relationships that enable knowledge to be shared. As a result, it is considered an important source of social capital regarding higher education (Coleman 1988; Halpern 2005; McGrath et al. 2001; Smith et al. 1995; Walpole 2003). First-generation college

students have been shown to suffer from a number of disadvantages when pursuing higher education. Among these is a lack of the social capital relevant to higher education that is held by the student. Such capital is often conferred by parents, but these students' parents are unable to provide the information and resources helpful to the student in pursuing a college degree (McGrath et al. 2001; Smith et al. 1995; Walpole 2003). Such students must then utilize their bridging social capital to obtain the information relevant for a college degree. Involvement in community groups and local schools has also been shown to produce social capital that translates into educational benefits (Coleman 1988; McGrath et al. 2001; Smith et al. 1995; Tierney and Venegas 2006; Walpole 2003).

Rather than emphasize the role of social capital in education, Bourdieu places greater emphasis on cultural capital. Cultural capital is embodied in the objects of culture, including works of art and literature, as well as in one's own knowledge of and education in the objects of culture that help one acquire and maintain power and status (Bourdieu 1986). He argues that the educational system is a means of reinforcing inequalities in cultural capital.

According to Bourdieu, cultural capital is transmitted first and most easily within the family. Those families possessing cultural capital in the embodied form, or possessing the knowledge that is considered culturally desirable, are able to transmit it to their children, giving them an advantage in the educational system over those children whose parents are unable to transmit such cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986). Acquiring cultural capital is time-consuming, and receiving it during the socialization process is the most efficient way of doing so; hence the importance of the family in its transmission. Those

seeking to accrue additional cultural capital will find that doing so takes considerable time and effort.

Bourdieu identifies academic degrees as a form of cultural capital that has become institutionalized and can be utilized as a means toward economic capital. He argued that the education system, in which students with greater cultural capital tended to achieve higher degrees than those with less cultural capital, was reinforcing the existing economic structure by rewarding those with the greatest cultural capital and progressively eliminating from participation in the educational system those with little cultural capital (Bourdieu 1990).

Tinto's model is utilized to promote higher education as a tool for upward social mobility, and often programs are developed to promote retention among underrepresented populations. This view of higher education contrasts with Bourdieu's view of higher education as a means of perpetuating social inequality. Bourdieu sees higher education as a space in which power, held by those in control of the institutions, is perpetuated by rewarding those students who come from higher socioeconomic classes by valuing the cultural and social capital that such students bring with them to higher education. The utilization of Tinto's model of student departure as a model for retention programs erodes the entrenchment of higher education as a space for the reproduction of social inequalities. Such programs seek to assist students accrue meaningful social and cultural capital that will enable them to climb the socioeconomic ladder. To the extent that these students are allowed social mobility through higher education, such programs challenge the existing power structure described by Bourdieu.

As Bourdieu claims, many of the challenges first-generation college students face in pursuing post-secondary education stem from the family of origin's lack of educationally-relevant social and cultural capital. First, the lack of parental experience with education, particularly higher education, leaves the student lacking knowledge that their continuous-generation peers received from their parents. Parents who did not attend college are often unable to provide the necessary information relating to college admissions and the financial aid processes, and later to the college experience. Parents who did complete college are assumed to have this knowledge, or an understanding of the process and of its importance (Luna de la Rosa 2006). The lack of knowledge about the college admissions and financial aid processes can be supplemented by knowledgeable others in the school and community, and sometimes extended family. Although those knowledgeable others exist, some first-generation students and their parents may find it a challenge to find the appropriate officials to assist them with admissions and financial aid.

Second, parents who did not complete college may be less enthusiastic about the prospect of spending several years and a considerable amount of money on education when it was not necessary in their own lives, when they perceive it unnecessary to function in the local community, or when they believe that education will result in the child moving away from home (Corbett 2007). Even those parents who are eager to see their children pursue and attain a college degree may pull their children away from academic responsibilities to address family needs (Davis 2010). The presence of supportive family members willing to part with the student for at least the duration of the educational period and perhaps longer is important. Youth socialized into a family that

believes staying in the place of origin is ideal may have a more difficult time attending college and pursuing a career that will take them away from home.

The socioeconomic differences between first-generation and continuous-generation college students can further exacerbate the differences in educational attainment. Because educational attainment is related to socioeconomic status and income, these students are more likely to come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. The relationship between income and education suggests that parents with less education also have lower incomes, thus limiting the financial contribution they are able to make toward their child's education. Because of the high degree of residential segregation based on education in the United States, parents with fewer years of education and earning smaller incomes are likely to live in economically disadvantaged communities with fewer persons holding college degrees where property taxes are lower and thus schools receive less funding (Domina 2006a). This can lead to a lower quality of education with fewer academic options available. There are likely to be fewer adults with college degrees to serve as role models and create additional social and cultural capital that could further encourage college attendance. Such communities may place lesser emphasis on education as well, creating an environment where young people are expected to forego further education and seek employment after completing high school.

Because some first-generation college students do not come to college prepared for the academic, social, and emotional demands of college, many colleges have developed support programs designed to retain at-risk students through the first year and into the second year, when those students are at highest risk of dropping out (Ishitani 2003). Common components of these programs include identification of at-risk students

during the admissions process; academic and social preparation prior to the start of the freshman year; assistance with course selection (also known as intrusive advising); academic services that provide support specific to the courses in which participating students are enrolled; a social component that helps to provide social connections among program participants; and the message that active participation in the program will lead to the student's success (Muraskin 1998). Such programs show that participating students are more likely to be retained through the first year and persist to graduation (Dale 1995; Muraskin 1998).

In order to examine the educational prospects of students from Appalachia and students who are the first in their family to attend college, it is helpful to widen the scope of the literature in order to examine the educational prospects of low-income students and rural students. Appalachia, like all of the rural United States, is a diverse region; however, we will examine relationship between rural place of origin and high education, as well as the relationship between socioeconomic status and higher education. The relationship between educational attainment and future earnings makes information regarding low-income students relevant, because students who are the first in their families to go to college are more likely to come from lower income tiers (Choy 2001).

Socioeconomic status (SES) is an important predictor of college success (Blackwell and McLaughlin 1998; Chenowith and Galliher 2004; Walpole 2003). Students of traditional college-going age inherit the SES of their parents. High SES parents are able to provide resources that can directly benefit the education of their children, such as tutoring, supplementary educational materials, and access to high-performing public or private schools. These parents are also likely to socialize their

children toward high educational goals and provide markers of social status that are rewarded by those in educational institutions (McGrath et al. 2001). In short, high SES youth learn expectations and behaviors that direct them towards higher education and beyond. Additionally, high SES students are more easily able to make connections with significant actors that can assist with admissions, scholarships, internships, and jobs to ease and supplement the college experience.

Students from low SES families do not experience these benefits. There is a strong positive relationship between parental education and student education; thus, students whose parents are not college educated are less likely to attend college themselves. These students are less likely to talk to their parents about financial aid, and they anticipate less of a family contribution towards college costs (Luna de la Rosa 2006). Of the low SES students that do attend college, they spend less time participating in campus activities, are more likely to work during college, spend less time studying, and are less likely to report an A or B+ GPA, compared to high SES students (Walpole 2003). Because low SES students engage in different activities during college, they accrue different types of capital, leading to different outcomes after college; these outcomes tend to provide limited social mobility. However, low SES students who have high SES peers appear to accumulate more social capital than those without high SES peers (Walpole 2003).

In addition, the cost of tuition affects college choices. A study of low-income high schools found that of the financial aid information students received, most came from school officials (i.e. teachers, counselors, or coaches), while family members were the third most common source for financial aid information (Luna de la Rosa 2006). The

same study found that a greater number of 11th graders report planning to attend a four-year college while a greater number of 12th graders report planning to attend a two-year college. Further, it found that financial aid was seen as something important to students planning to attend a four-year college but not a two-year college. These findings suggest that within that year, students become aware of either academic or financial unpreparedness, and thus change their future plans. Luna de la Rosa (2006) suggests that financial aid information given out in conjunction with college preparation programs that are run throughout high school instead of just at application time will better prepare students to make college decisions.

Parental education is an important predictor when it comes to the education of their children. A parent with a bachelor's degree has a child with a slightly higher GPA (Grayson 1997). Parents with more education have children who are more likely to expect to go college from a young age, more likely to enroll in college, and more likely to be academically prepared for college (Choy 2001). College-educated parents are also more involved in their children's choices in school, helping them to choose a curriculum that leads them to be more academically prepared for college. Students whose parents are unable to assist them in college preparation must rely on others in the school and community to provide them with such information.

Parents who did not attend college can still be beneficial for their college-bound children if they are involved in their child's education prior to high school and if they are able to be supportive of their child when the child pursues a college education. Low-SES parents who take an active role in a child's education improve the child's educational self-schema, which leads to higher educational aspirations (Garg et al. 2002; McCarron

and Inkelas 2006). The positive effects of parental involvement can become detrimental, however, when a parent's desire to remain connected to her or his child results in making demands on the child's time and attention that conflict with academic needs (Davis 2010). Nonetheless, parental involvement in education appears to mitigate some of the disadvantages first-generation college students face in higher education.

Based on this relationship, it becomes clear that first-generation students are at a disadvantage compared to their peers. First-generation students have less assistance from their parents in applying for college and they know the least about the price of college (Choy 2001). Once in college, first-generation students spend less time on campus and are involved in fewer campus activities and organizations (Grayson 1997). They are more likely to leave four-year colleges before the second year, less likely to keep themselves on track to graduation, and less likely to have remained enrolled and earned a degree after five years, compared to students whose parents attended college (Choy 2001). Based on this information, it is likely that place of origin is less relevant in college persistence than first-generation student status. Because Appalachia is a largely rural region, it is important to examine the experiences of rural students as they prepare for and attend college. Rural students' road to college is different than students from urban and suburban areas. For rural students, community factors are correlated with college attendance and achievement. Youths from areas with high incomes, low poverty rates, and high adult educational attainment are more likely to have high educational aspirations (Blackwell and McLaughlin 1998), suggesting that the community, in addition to the family, plays a role in learning behaviors relating to education attainment. Community factors have different effects on different genders: males are more likely to attend college

if the home community has a high overall education attainment, while females are more likely to attend college if they perceive the local unemployment rate to be high (Blackwell and McLaughlin 1998).

Overall, nonmetropolitan areas have higher rates of poverty than metropolitan areas. The common belief is that education is an important part of emerging from poverty. The high degree of educational segregation at the county level in the United States suggests that a college degree, for many, leads one to leave the place of origin (Elder, King et al. 1996; Domina 2006a; Domina 2006b). Rural high school students, particularly the ambitious, high achieving students, often forego family attachments and choose to live elsewhere, leaving the community without contributing to the overall educational attainment and social capital of the community (Domina 2006a; Elder, King, and Conger 1996).

Comparisons of rural and urban areas show that students from rural areas are less likely to pursue and complete higher education. Rural youths appear to see less use for higher education than do their urban counterparts (DeYoung and Lawrence 1995). They are less likely to complete high school, to attend college, or to earn an associate's or bachelor's degree (Blackwell and McLaughlin 1998; Smith et al. 1995). They have lower educational aspirations than do urban youth (Blackwell and McLaughlin 1998). Rural students face multiple disadvantages regarding college attendance: they come from families with lower average incomes, their parents are less likely to have attended college themselves, and they see fewer college graduates in their daily lives and thus are less likely to have role models regarding higher education (Smith et al. 1995). Rural youth do have an advantage if they are church-goers; church attendance is positively correlated

with educational aspirations for rural youth and appears to be a valuable source of social capital (Johnson, Elder, and Stern 2005; Smith et al. 1995).

SES is an important predictor of college attendance in rural areas, in addition to urban areas. A study examining three groups of students in rural Iowa found that those whose parents were in professional-managerial occupations or were farmers were more likely to attend college than students with parents in low-status occupations. What is notable in this study is that children from farm families were virtually on par with students from professional-managerial families, likely because farm families in this part of the country to hold high status in the community. The role of social capital attained through membership in the family was sufficient to translate into high educational aspirations (McGrath et al. 2001). While the likelihood of the low-status students attending college was far lower than their higher status peers, they could overcome the lack of familial social capital by integrating into their religious community and having high educational ambition from an early age. Indeed, the higher status youths whose families were less integrated into the community through involvement with community organizations, the school, and religious institutions, had lower educational aspirations. Social capital appears to be a better predictor for rural students' educational aspirations than economic measures. This social capital comes from school and community sources as well as from the family (McGrath et al. 2001; Smith et al. 1995).

Central Appalachia (consisting of parts of West Virginia, eastern Kentucky, and western Virginia) is an impoverished region. Counties in this region consistently post some of the highest poverty rates in the United States. As with many economically disadvantaged areas, educational attainment is low (Haaga 2004). Due to this, many high

school students in the region, if they choose to pursue higher education, would be first-generation college students. There are numerous disadvantages these students must overcome if they decide to pursue higher education. Thus, when examining Appalachian students seeking higher education, we must take into account the fact that most people in Central Appalachia have not completed college (Haaga 2004).

Studies of Appalachian high school students' college plans had similar findings to those found of rural students. Parental education was found to have a positive relationship with the college plans of their children. For the West Virginia sample used by Chenowith and Galliher (2004), members of the extended family, particularly aunts and uncles, were also linked to a youth's decision to pursue a college education. Consistent with research demonstrating a relationship between SES and college attendance, students planning to attend college were likely to report that their father was engaged in a professional occupation (Chenowith and Galliher 2004; McGrath et al. 2001). However, SES alone was not a strong predictor of female college attendance. All female participants in the study reported that a friend was planning to attend college, regardless of their own plans. Male respondents, however, reported that their friends tended to have similar post-secondary plans to their own. Overall, Appalachian teenagers' college aspirations were strongly related to their ultimate educational goals, their high school curriculum, perceptions of preparedness, and their perceived intelligence. The main roadblock to higher education cited by students in the sample was ability to afford tuition (Chenowith and Galliher 2004). However, this sample of high school students did not look beyond the college admissions process.

First-generation college students are less likely to complete college than students whose parents have a college degree. This study examines how first-generation college students' perceptions of support fit into Tinto's model of student retention, and whether a student's place of origin has any bearing on the likelihood of retention.

CHAPTER 2: METHODS AND DATA SOURCES

The goal of this study is to explore the relationships utilized by first-generation college students as they pursue a post-secondary degree. In undertaking a study with a population as specific and unique as the NOVA program participants, this study sacrifices generalizability. However, generalizability can draw attention away from those features that make a case unique (Stake 2005). In examining the experiences of first-generation college students participating in this retention-focused program, we can see how such programs affect a student's postsecondary experience.

The researcher interviewed seventeen participants from Eastern Kentucky University (EKU), a large, public, regional university, for this study. Prior to the interview, the participant was asked to list all individuals who were helpful to the participant as they were preparing for college, and all the individuals who were helpful to him or her during the college experience (see Appendix A). The researcher then conducted a semi-structured interview seeking to find out how the individuals that the participant listed as helpful were helpful to them, how he or she prepared for college, and his or her plans for the future (see Appendix B). The results were analyzed for patterns in the types of support described by the participants, and for differences in responses between the place-of-origin groups.

Instrument

The descriptive nature of this study warranted greater understanding of the individual participants rather than a purely statistical overview of their responses. The first part of the instrument, the survey, asks the participants to identify the people they perceived to be helpful to them when preparing for college. The participant was

instructed to identify everyone they could think of who they perceived to be helpful or influential to them in any way. They were also asked to rate, on a Likert scale of 1 to 6, how helpful each person identified was to them. The participant was then asked to complete the next page of the survey, which asks the participant to identify and rate the importance of the people who were helpful to them after beginning college.

Once the surveys were completed, the interview began. The interview was semi-structured to give consistency to the questions asked, but allow for the interview to flow naturally and give the participants an opportunity to describe their experiences in their own words (Esterberg 2002). The first questions focused on how the people the participant identified in the survey were helpful to them. The interview examined the college-attendance behaviors of those listed as influential and others in the peer group of the participant. Questions about positive experiences in college, helpful university officials, and extracurricular involvement were designed to identify those forces pulling a student toward continuing enrollment in college, while the question about negative college experiences aimed to identify forces pushing the student away from continued enrollment. Students were asked about jobs to identify where they were working and whether that commitment conflicted with their coursework. Finally, participants were asked about their future plans to determine if they planned to persist to graduation and what they wanted to do after graduation.

To determine who was most helpful to the participants during the preparation for college, a combination of methods was used. First, the people that the participants listed as helpful to them in preparing for college were separated into organizational categories, essentially, a series of bins to organize the data for further analysis (Maxwell 2005).

These categories consisted of family, friends, high school faculty and staff, and "other." From this point, the responses were further separated based on the repetition that appeared in the participants' responses. The family category was subdivided into parents, grandparents, and other family. The "other" category was subdivided into co-workers and clergy. One participant talked about Upward Bound staff, but because she was the only person to cite staff from a college preparation program, her response was not part of the comparison.

Next, the number of participants reporting at least one person in the above organizational categories was noted. Then, the Likert scale values for each category were averaged. While this study was not designed to examine participant responses quantitatively, this method provides a simplified comparison of information that can be difficult to compare simply by analyzing content. These results can be found in Table 1. Finally, the interview transcripts were analyzed for the content of the relationships described by the participants and organized based on the categories identified above. The content of the relationships was partnered with the relative helpfulness the participants assigned via the Likert values to determine what types of support and from whom were most helpful to the participants in preparing for college.

Participants

All participants in the study were participants in EKU's NOVA program. The NOVA program is an intensive student-support initiative funded by the United States Department of Education as a TRIO program, which provides funding for programs that promote post-secondary success for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. NOVA program participants are first-generation college students who show academic promise.

Students in the NOVA program have a supplemental academic advisor during their freshman year, participate in a specialized general studies course that teaches successful college practices and behaviors, meet with peer leaders and their supplemental advisor on a regular basis, and have the opportunity to participate in other courses and activities designed to help participants succeed in higher education.

The term "first-generation student" can be defined very narrowly as the very first person in one's family to attend college, or more loosely as a college student for whom neither parent possesses a post-secondary degree. The United States Department of Education defines first-generation college students as "an individual both of whose parents did not complete a baccalaureate degree" for the purposes of TRIO funding (1998). Because the NOVA program is TRIO-funded, this is an appropriate definition to use for this study. Additionally, due to the large increase in recent years of adults pursuing a post-secondary degree after the traditional college-going ages of 18-25, finding participants for whom no parent had completed any post-secondary education would prove difficult. Thus, this study considered first-generation college students to be those for whom neither parent had completed a post-secondary degree. Indeed, several participants talked about one or both parents attending college at some point, and two discussed older siblings attending college (one older sibling had graduated at the time of the interview, the other was still in college).

In order to maintain consistency in the academic and socioeconomic backgrounds of the participants, this study focused on first-generation college students who attended high school in rural Kentucky counties and who immediately matriculated from high school to college. The study required immediate matriculation from high school to

college to maintain some consistency in the experiences of participants. All participants were in-state students to maintain greater consistency in high school curriculum and college tuition. Three participants were eliminated from the study because they did not immediately begin college after completing high school, they attended high school out of state, or they were not a NOVA program participant. Participants are identified in this study with fictional names.

Participants for this study were recruited in the NOVA program's general studies course or a communications studies course that was partnered with the general studies course. All first-year students in the program are required to take these courses. The researcher asked for participants from rural Kentucky to participate in a study about how the people they know have influenced them regarding college. Seventeen students volunteered to participate and scheduled times for interviews. The researcher reminded those students about the interviews via phone or email. Three students did not show up for the scheduled interview and were not able to reschedule for another time. The NOVA program staff also sent out an email to all students in the program on behalf of the researcher to elicit volunteers for the study. Two students replied to the email, but did not respond to further contact from the researcher. The researcher planned to recruit 20 participants for this study. Despite the requests made to four classes, each with approximately 25 students, and the email sent to all NOVA program participants, only 14 eligible participants volunteered for this study.

Of the 14 participants in this study, three were male and 11 were female. This disparity in gender was not intentional. All participants were Caucasian. Participants in the study were members of four student cohorts, differentiated by the year the participant

began college. One participant was in Cohort A, and was in his ninth semester of college as a senior. One participant was in Cohort B, and was in her fifth semester of college as a junior. Seven participants were in Cohort C and were second-semester freshmen. Five participants were in Cohort D and were first-semester freshmen. Interviews were conducted during the first freshman semester to Cohort D and the second freshman semester to Cohort C. The uneven distribution of participants across the cohorts is due to the convenience in recruiting first-year students and relative difficulty in recruiting older students due to the structure of the NOVA program, which provides its most intensive interventions during the first year of college. All participants had been continuously enrolled at ECU and had only attended ECU since completing high school. Interviews with the upperclassmen were included to give additional perspective in an area where research primarily focuses on the first year of college.

Participants were classified into three groups: Appalachian students, non-Appalachian students, and students living near home, called the "around here" group. The study initially intended to compare only Appalachian and non-Appalachian students, but the number of participants that attended high school in the same city as the university, or within 30 miles of that city, was great enough to warrant their inclusion. Because of their proximity to home networks and presumed ability to participate actively in home life, it is worthwhile to treat them as a separate group. The "around here" group is defined as those students that matriculated from a high school within a 30 mile radius of the university, a total of four participants. The "Appalachian" group consists of the six students who live in Appalachian counties, as defined by the Appalachian Regional Commission (see Appendix C). The "non-Appalachian" group consists of the four participants who live

neither within a 30 mile radius of the university nor in an Appalachian county. See Table 2 for a complete description of each participant based on gender, cohort, and place of origin, and Table 3 for a more detailed breakdown of participants' responses.

Table 1: Perceptions of Assistance in Preparing for College.

	Number of participants mentioning	Number of total mentions	Average Likert value
Parents	14	23	4.91
Grandparents	9	11	5.18
Other family	9	10	4.7
Peers	10	17	4.53
High School Faculty and Staff	13	25	4.84
Clergy	2	2	4
Coworkers	2	4	4

Table 2: Description of Participants.

<u>Pseudonym</u>	<u>Gender</u>	<u>Cohort</u>	<u>Place of Origin</u>
Avery	Female	C	Non-Appalachian
Calvin	Male	A	Non-Appalachian
Gordon	Male	C	Appalachian
Hannah	Female	C	Around Here
Jennifer	Female	D	Appalachian
Johanna	Female	D	Appalachian
Kathryn	Female	D	Around Here
Kendra	Female	C	Around Here
Kelly	Female	D	Appalachian
Kipp	Male	C	Appalachian
Leah	Female	B	Appalachian
Paula	Female	D	Non-Appalachian
Samantha	Female	C	Around Here
Sarah	Female	C	Non-Appalachian

Table 3: Demographic Description of Participant Responses.

<u>Role in Participant's Network</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>Appalachian</u>	<u>Non-Appalachian</u>	<u>Around Here</u>
Family member wanted participant to have a better life than he/she did	0	3	2	1	0
Participant wanted to make family member proud	1	4	3	0	2
Family member provided financial support	3	4	4	3	0
Participant identified high school teacher as helpful in preparing for college	3	6	4	2	3
Participant identified high school guidance counselor as helpful in preparing for college	0	2	1	1	0
Participant identified coach in as helpful in preparing for college	1	2	1	2	0
Participant identified preacher in as helpful in preparing for college	0	2	0	1	1
Participant identified high school administrator as helpful in preparing for college	1	1	2	0	0
Participant identified unhelpful guidance counselor in preparing for college	1	1	0	2	0
Participant identified NOVA advisor as helpful since arriving at college	3	10	6	3	4
Participant identified NOVA peer leader as helpful since arriving at college	0	5	2	0	3

Table 3: Demographic Description of Participant Responses (continued).

Participant identified NOVA staff as helpful since arriving at college	0	2	2	0	0
Participant identified major advisor as helpful since arriving at college	0	3	1	2	0
Participant identified college faculty as helpful since arriving at college	1	4	3	1	1
Participant had family who attended college	2	9	4	4	3
Participant took part in extracurricular activities	2	7	4	2	3
Participant held a job	2	5	3	3	1

CHAPTER 3: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Every participant in the study identified one or two parents as helpful in preparing for college. No participant discussed a step-parent. All but two participants ranked at least one parent either a five or a six on the six-point Likert scale. Kelly ranked her both of her parents at four on the Likert scale. Kelly talked about her grandmother being very important to her; her parents were also helpful but comparatively less so.

Well, the one who was the most helpful in helping me make the decision to actually go to college was my grandmother...she always was telling me how she really wanted to go on and make something better of herself...and I was her youngest grandchild and the only one who had any want-to go to college, so she really wanted me to do that... My parents, they, neither one of them ever went to college, so they really wanted me to go and, you know, better myself. My mother, you know, barely finished high school and so it was a big deal to having her child go here and stuff like that.

Gordon ranked his mother at a two and his father as a one on the Likert scale.

Although his family was proud that he was attending college, they were not insistent that he attend. He said, "If I choose not to go, no one in the family will be really sad, so it's like as if I'm pushing myself to succeed." He explained that his parents and grandparents were willing to make financial contributions, but did little else to support him in pursuing a college education. For example, they were willing to bring him to the university for freshman orientation, but dropped him off and did not attend with him. Gordon was acutely aware that his family was unable to provide him the kind of college-related help that other parents provide, and so sought out such help elsewhere.

In addition to parents, twelve participants noted other family members who were helpful in preparing for college. The participants cited grandparents, siblings, aunts, and cousins as helpful to them to varying degrees. Grandparents tended to provide emotional

or financial support. The participants who identified a helpful aunt said that the aunt provided emotional support like that of parents or grandparents. Siblings and cousins played one of two roles. Younger siblings, and younger cousins along with them, were people for whom the participants wanted to be a good role model. The participants talked about not wanting to let younger siblings and cousins down by doing poorly in school or setting a bad example. The older siblings (no older cousins were identified as helpful by the participants) were said to be helpful because they were role models who had gone to college before the participant and were able to answer questions and offer specific encouragement that the participants found particularly relevant.

Participants described family members as emotionally supportive, encouraging, and motivating. They said that these family members were "there" for them and encouraged them to pursue and continue their educations. Paula said that her mom

...brought to my attention how well I did in high school and um what I wanted to do with my life and just like, encouraged me to, do what I wanted to do...So she pushed me to figure out what I wanted to do, and is college something I wanted to do to get there. And she just encouraged me and said, I know the wedding's gonna be expensive, but I'll help you with that, so that's what my mom did, and she was just a good support.

With the exception of Gordon, participants reported that their families, and parents in particular, wanted them to complete a college education, and the participants found this source of and kind of support to be very helpful. In most cases, when listing the people who were helpful to the participants in pursuing higher education, most participants listed parents and grandparents first.

Three participants talked about the importance of pursuing an education in order to be a role model for people in their lives. For these participants, it was important to

pursue an education because there were people in their lives watching them. This provided another form of motivation to succeed. Kelly said that her younger cousin and teammates from her high school speech team were, "trying to emulate [me] and be like [me] and stuff, and you want to go on and, you know, do better so they'll hopefully follow in your footsteps." Paula placed similar pressure to finish her degree on herself because of a younger cousin, saying, "I just didn't see myself not going to college and not being a good role model for her so she would wanna go to college too." For these two students, and Paula especially, completing college will make her a family pioneer, and she sees completion of her degree as an important milestone for her entire family.

Nine participants were attending college to make significant others in their lives proud. They had expectations of success in education and in life from various family members and friends that motivated them to pursue their educations. These participants did not want to let their families and friends down. Kelly was motivated to earn a college degree to fulfill the wish of her grandmother.

Well, the one who was the most helpful in helping me make the decision to actually go to college was my grandmother. Um, she never actually finished grade school, like, she went to seventh grade, got married, got pregnant, that kind of thing, and she always was telling me how she really wanted to go on and make something better of herself and how her own children didn't go to college because they couldn't afford it at the time and so and I was her youngest grandchild and the only one who had any want-to go to college, so she really wanted me to do that, sort of make a plot for myself where she fell through, so that was a grounding force there.

Kelly was not the only student who said that the person they were striving to please wanted her to have more than they had. Jennifer also talked about family members who told her "how much they struggled because they didn't go to college." The promise of a

better future motivated the family and friends of these participants to encourage them to go to college.

Few participants were able to draw on family members for help in seeking knowledge about college, although three participants did identify family members as sources of such information. Kathryn's mother and aunt had decided to go to college by the time Kathryn was making college choices, and they offered her advice. Sarah and Calvin both had older siblings who were in college when they started college. Sarah explains that her brother "got me ready" as she watched him move away and adjust to the rigors of college-level academics. Sarah visits her brother at his school and she tries to keep her grades as high as his, with the mutual goal that both can get on the dean's list. Calvin's sister went to ECU before he did. He says that his sister "showed him the ropes" and was a big help in navigating the ins and outs of the university.

Seven participants talked about family members who were providing financial assistance, supplies, or services to the participants that they found helpful. Paula's father helped her move twice. Kipp said that his parents made sure he had enough food and money. Johanna said that her mom

saved up money getting me stuff to be very prepared...all these tablets, and supplies and everything. And my grandma, um, doesn't have much money and she saved a comforter for my dorm.

Grandparents were most frequently cited as a source of financial support; six participants said that their grandparents provided them with support in the form of money, school supplies, and Jennifer's grandparents even bought her a car as a gift for starting college. The participants did not place a large emphasis on the financial support they received, but it was important to them.

Ten of the fourteen participants found a member of their high school's faculty or staff to be helpful to them in preparing for college. The participants cited teachers, coaches, guidance counselors, or school administrators as helpful to them in pursuing a college education. These individuals helped the student apply to the schools, fill out financial aid forms, apply for scholarships, gave advice to the participants interested in careers in education, and provided emotional support and encouragement as the participants considered their postsecondary options.

Four participants cited teachers, coaches, counselors, or administrators from their high schools as sources of emotional or motivational support that was helpful to them in pursuing a college education. Some of these high school faculty and staff had a personal relationship with the participants in this study. Kipp, in particular, had a strong relationship with several high school teachers because he

was from a small school, and so the principal was around all the time and you know we lived right next to him, real close, so he was just like family most of the time, really. And my English teacher, uh, she was, she was one of my friends really. And then my science teacher one of my best, one of my best friends' mom, so she was, I mean she was always around too, and she was trying to help me with whatever she could do.

For other participants, high school faculty and staff used their knowledge of the students' academic performance to motivate them to pursue further education. Paula said that her basketball coach "really pushed me to go to college because she knew that I had potential to go to college."

When participants talked about academic preparation for college, the help they received came most frequently from high school faculty and staff. High school faculty helped participants learn the information they needed to know to graduate, and

participants identified those who gave them the most help in doing so. Some teachers helped with certain aspects of the college preparations process, like Leah's guidance counselor and English teacher, who helped her put together admissions essays, or Johanna's English teacher, who helped her prepare to take the ACT.

Six participants identified high school teachers and counselors as sources of knowledge about college. These high school officials provided advice regarding scholarships and financial aid, and three students reported teachers who prompted them to attend ECU specifically. Leah talks about one teacher who pushed her toward ECU because "at the time, I wanted to be a Spanish major and he told me that had a good program, in that" and another who "went here so he pushed me towards that...because it's his alma mater, and just from the stories.

One participant, Gordon, was very aware of the lack of knowledge about college that he could receive from his family, and so looked elsewhere for information about college. He described how he was on his own for freshman orientation:

I got dropped off by my grandparents and my mom during orientation, but, you know, none of them sat through it with me so I had to sit there and listen to the financial aid jargon and all the technical details, so a lot of it I didn't understand...and I don't think that my mom and grandparents would have been able enlighten me anymore on this kind of stuff, so I had to go to, you know, my teachers in high school and even call, um, ECU and the people who I talked to were very helpful and friendly so that helped out a lot and they would explain things in better detail.

Prior to arriving at ECU, Gordon's high school teachers helped him apply for college and financial aid. Gordon explained how his senior co-op teachers helped him with applications and financial aid.

They really helped me out like with questions instead of being like some parents are to their kids, parents will call and, uh, figure things out and stuff for and the

kids will just sit on the sidelines and wait for their parents to do it, like, I had to sit down and, you know, they would help me look up the number but I would, in the end, have to call them, and make sure everything was good.

Gordon aspires to be an art teacher, and his high school art teacher mentored him.

Gordon's art teacher helped him to pursue college by taking him

to the Corbin campus of ECU during their spotlight and he helped me fill out everything I needed to know, you know, to get into the art education field and I thought that was very outgoing of a teacher, to do all that outside of class to help out a student...

At the time of the interview, Gordon was meeting with his high school art teacher regularly to talk about his progress in college. Gordon was the only participant to speak so candidly of his family's lack of knowledge about college and about his need to gain college information from other sources. Gordon utilized the resources that he had available to him to find out what he needed to know about attending college, which he continued to do after arriving at ECU.

Eight participants identified peers who were helpful to them as they went through the college selection and admissions process. Friends, boyfriends and girlfriends primarily provided emotional and social support. Three participants identified a friend who was older than the participant and already enrolled in college, who that helped the participant fill out the college paperwork and was able to answer questions about college. Two other participants talked about friends who were applying for admission to ECU at the same time as the participant. These participants found it helpful to go through the process with a peer.

Four participants had friends who provided them with support as they pursued a college education. Most of the time, the emotional support of friends was described

simply as "supportive." Kelly was able to elucidate best how two of her friends from high school had been helpful to her as she adjusted to college life:

...they make me want to stay here because I have someone to talk about things and one of 'em's my roommate so I always have someone who I can kind of complain to and stuff about things and that makes me keep going when I don't feel like it.

While the participants in this study overwhelmingly listed family as helpful and were very clear about how they were helpful, most participants identified only one or two friends, if any at all, and only about half of those participants said that their friends provided helpful emotional support.

Eight participants described their peers as sources of knowledge about college. Kipp's girlfriend was a sophomore and helped him with college paperwork. Kathryn also had a friend who was an upperclassman and helped her with her classes. Paula's older friend went to another university but gave her advice as she went through the admissions process. Jennifer said that her friend "helped me, like, pick my classes on the internet, at orientation, she walked around with me, she got me into the NOVA program, she told me about it." Johanna attended Upward Bound throughout high school, and a former Upward Bound counselor who was an ECU student at the time of the interview helped Johanna "pick out the teachers that were good." Peers may provide different advice from the advice that college faculty and staff provide students, but such advice carries a certain perceived validity because students trust the experiences of other students.

Two participants identified helpful employers and coworkers. Jennifer found her co-workers to be supportive when she decided to go away to college. She still returns home to work at the same business on the weekends. Kendra, a nursing student who worked as a nurse's aide, talked about her former employer and two current co-workers,

all of whom she ranked as fours on the Likert scale. Her former boss had a son in college, and talked to Kendra about college while they worked together. Kendra had two co-workers at the nursing home at which she worked at the time of the interview who encouraged her to continue her studies so she could work with them full time. One of those co-workers was a single mother who had gone to nursing school while raising her kids, and then worked two jobs to put her kids through college. Kendra looked at this co-worker as a role model, saying "It just amazes me how, you know, she can do that, she can work so hard to put them through there, so it's just like, if she can do that, then yeah, I can."

Two participants talked about the role of clergy in their college admissions experience. Samantha's preacher helped her find scholarships. For Samantha, the financial assistance this provided was very helpful as she prepared for college. Sarah's pastor sat down with the high school seniors during a church-sponsored trip and talked to them about the difficulties and responsibilities associated with moving away from home and living away from their parents. Sarah ranked her pastor at three on the Likert scale, suggesting that his talk was helpful but not critical to her as she prepared for college.

Gordon and Kendra, the two participants who were most aware of the lack of college knowledge from their families, discussed in their interviews that they actively sought to find people who could help them in ways that their family members could not. Gordon in particular found several teachers who helped him to get to college, and once at ECU, two professors who were helping him maintain his academic standing. Gordon's awareness that there was information that he needed to seek out and help he needed to

find when some of his peers did not need to seek out such assistance likely helped him make it to college.

Both Gordon and Kendra describe the lack of support from their families in such a way that evokes Davis's (2010) description of the "college myth," wherein parents inform their children from a young age that college is an important step toward adulthood. That message is less likely to exist in homes where parents do not have a college degree, and so their high school graduates do not find themselves with the same pressure and expectations to pursue more education. Gordon and Kendra will find themselves with less resistance if they choose to leave college than will the other participants, and this puts them at greater risk of attrition. However, both Gordon and Kendra have multiple significant others who provide support that their parents are unable to provide. Further study into the perceptions of support of first-generation students whose parents promote college attendance compared with those whose parents do not is an unexplored area.

Upon looking at participants' responses to see who was most helpful to the participants in preparing for college, it appears that family members, and parents specifically, and high school faculty and staff were the most helpful to the participants. Each of the fourteen participants cited one or both parents as helpful to them in preparing for college, with an average Likert score of 4.91 for parents. Thirteen participants identified at least one member of his or her high school's faculty or staff, with an average Likert value of 4.84. The frequency of mentions of both parents and high school faculty and staff, and the similar average Likert values suggests that both parents and high school

faculty and staff are perceived as very helpful. The content of the interviews points to the different ways in which they are helpful.

Parents provided support and encouragement for their children as they prepared for college. The participants who assigned a parent a low Likert score described their parents as happy that they were attending college, but not insistent that they do so. The other participants talked about how their parents had long talked about why they should go to college and encouraged them to do so.

The high school teachers, coaches, guidance counselors, and administrators identified by the participants provided them with support and encouragement as well, but not nearly at the frequency that parents and family did so. The high school faculty and staff were able to provide assistance with the college admissions and financial aid processes that family members were not able to provide. Additionally, they provided academic preparation that the participants needed for college success.

It appears that having parental support, or having support of someone acting as a proxy for a parent, was important for these students as they pursued college degrees. The three students who found their parents the least helpful each identified at least one other individual who provided the emotional support and motivation to pursue a college degree. For Gordon, that person was his art teacher; for Kelly, her grandmother; and for Kendra, her coworkers.

Grandparents were assigned an average Likert scale value of 5.18, and were mentioned by nine of the fourteen participants. "Other family" were assigned an average Likert scale value of 4.7 and were mentioned by nine of the fourteen participants. The frequency at which parents were discussed as helpful suggests that parents are more

helpful than these other family members, but these figures suggest that support of the whole family, through encouragement and financial and material assistance, is part of a larger picture of college student support. Peers were mentioned by ten of the fourteen participants and were assigned an average Likert scale value of 4.43. Clergy and coworkers were each mentioned by two participants and each had an average Likert scale value of 4. While the lack of frequency of clergy and coworkers suggests that such support is not necessary, having additional support from a variety of sources helps the student see the value in pursuing a degree.

College Retention: Applying Tinto's Model

The belief that was informally expressed by some in the University of Kentucky community about students from the Appalachian region was that those students frequently returned home on weekends and, as a result of these frequent trips home, did not socially integrate into the university community. This belief relates directly to the model of college retention utilized in this study, which states that membership in communities external to the college can pull students away from membership in the college community (Tinto 1993).

In examining the participants' responses, five of the ten participants described external memberships that were pulling them away from the university community. Of those four, two were from the Appalachian group, one was from the non-Appalachian group, and two were from the "around here" group. The two participants from the "around here" group, Kendra and Kathryn, had similar circumstances pulling them away from college life: Kendra worked as a certified nursing assistant and Kathryn as a home health aide. Kendra explained that she worked full time. Additionally, Kendra was living

with her boyfriend, who was not actively supportive of her attending college. As she described the situation, "He just lays there and talks a lot, makes me not able to study, but he does, I mean, I guess he is someone I can vent to."

Paula, from the non-Appalachian group, went home to work on weekends. She explained,

I work at [my hometown tanning salon]. I tried to work at the Richmond [tanning salon] because I just, I needed to keep, I always worked at [a tanning salon] over my senior year ...I need to keep a flow of money for gas and stuff like that and my parents are really close to me and they wanna see me a lot... That did not work out here because it was Tuesdays and Thursdays when I was scheduled to work and they don't close til eleven, so, can you imagine how late I'd get home and yeah, and I'd not wanna move my car so I'd have to walk back and it was scary at night so I was like, we can't do this. So now I go back to [my hometown].

Jennifer was from Appalachia and, like Paula, went home to work on weekends. Jennifer was also visiting home frequently because her mother had fallen very ill. She explained, "Every single weekend so far I went home. With my mom being sick and my boyfriend being there, it's kinda hectic but I wouldn't have it any other way." Johanna was also from Appalachia and was interested in moving to New York City because she was interested in fashion photography and being active in the LGBT community. While Johanna was not sure if she would transfer away from ECU at the time of the interview, Jennifer was planning to transfer to the ECU satellite campus in her hometown.

Participants varied in how often they reported visiting home. Those from families living near campus either lived at home or returned home often for meals or to do laundry. One reported visiting home every weekend for work, one reported visiting home most weekends, and two reported visiting home every other weekend. Those living farther from home tended to visit less often; the seniors did not visit home as often as the

freshmen. Although there is evidence to suggest that students who spend less time on campus are more likely to drop out of college (Tinto 1993; Walpole 2003), however, most of these students did not discuss the possibility of leaving EKU to live closer to home.

While Tinto's model shows that membership in these external communities can pull students away from their studies, it also acknowledges that memberships in external communities can give them support that is ultimately beneficial to the student's persistence through degree completion. Tinto acknowledges that family and employers who are supportive of the student's education can provide emotional support, financial resources, and professional development to positively contribute to the student's success. Kendra and Kathryn, the two students from the "around here" group who worked in the health care field, were both studying nursing. These two participants had to balance their jobs with studying, but they were also gaining practical experience relevant to their chosen field of study. Kendra was very close to her coworkers, and their encouragement was valuable to her as she continued her course of study. For Paula and Jennifer, returning home frequently to work also gave them a chance to see their mothers. Both Paula and Jennifer described being very close with their mothers, and both said that their mothers were committed to them completing their education.

Three other participants described membership in supportive external communities. Leah, from the Appalachian group, was close to her mother, who had encouraged her to go to college for a long time. She also had family living in Cincinnati who were supportive of her education. Sarah, from the non-Appalachian group, was close to her brother, who was attending college in Ohio. Sarah said that she likes to "go see

him and I show him my work and we actually try to get close to the same grades now." Avery, from the non-Appalachian group, was studying education and tutored at a local elementary school. Although these commitments took time and energy away from academic and social pursuits and the university, they provided valuable support and professional development to the participants, and served to reinforce their decision to attend and complete college.

As a measure of social integration, this study asked about formal membership in university organizations. Ten of the fourteen participants were involved in one or more organizations. Three participants, Kelly from the Appalachian group and Avery and Sarah from the non-Appalachian group, were not involved in campus organizations said that they were planning to get involved on campus the coming semester. Only one participant, Kipp, from the Appalachian region, was not involved in campus organizations and was not planning to get involved in one.

The types of organizations in which the participants were involved varied. The most frequently mentioned organization, to which seven participants belonged, was the NOVA Stars organization, a student organization for participants in the NOVA program. Hannah and Kendra, both from the "around here" group, belonged to an honor society. Johanna belonged to three LGBT support and activism organizations. Paula and Leah belonged to sororities. Samantha, a journalism major, wrote for the student newspaper and the yearbook.

Leah and Calvin were the two upperclassmen in the study. They both belonged to, or had at some point been active in, three student organizations, more than any of the first-year students except Johanna. In addition to being active with the NOVA group,

both were in student organizations related to their majors: Leah in the Communication Studies Student Association, Calvin in the biology honorary for the major he had at the time of the interview, and a music industry organization, from when he was a music major.

There was no pattern that emerged from the type of organizations in which the students participated. Because twelve of the fourteen participants were freshmen at the time of their interview, it is possible that they will join other organizations in the future. Some of the participants talked about wanting to get involved with more organizations in the future. It is noteworthy that eight participants said that they were a part of the NOVA Stars student organization, and of those, five were participating in only that organization. Walpole's (2003) finding that low-SES college students with high-SES peers were more likely to experience socioeconomic mobility suggests that these students may economically benefit from involvement with peers in additional organizations, particularly if the membership is more socioeconomically diverse.

In addition to formal membership in the social environment at a university, Tinto's model describes informal social relationships as having value for retention. All but one of the participants talked about their friends and how those friendships were beneficial to them in college. The NOVA program provided such support for four participants. Calvin, in his ninth semester of college, recalled that the NOVA program gave him a network of friends who helped to support him. Samantha said, "If it wasn't for NOVA, I wouldn't know the people that I know." Kendra and Jennifer received social support from coworkers. Jennifer "hangs out" with her coworkers when she goes home, and Kendra's coworkers have told her to "hurry up and finish" so she can work with them

full time. Five participants talked about their friends as sources of social support.

Kendra's boyfriend is not in college, but she likes that she can vent to him. Hannah has a friend from high school that she still talks to all the time. Gordon said simply, "You need to have somebody to fall back on."

Four participants described friends who provided them with emotional support as they pursued a college education. Kelly was able to elucidate best how two of her friends from high school had been helpful to her as she adjusted to college life:

...they make me want to stay here because I have someone to talk about things and one of 'em's my roommate so I always have someone who I can kind of complain to and stuff about things and that makes me keep going when I don't feel like it.

While the participants in this study overwhelmingly listed family as helpful and were very clear about how they were helpful, most participants identified only one or two friends, if any at all, and only about half of those participants said that their friends provided helpful emotional support.

Four participants identified friends as sources of academic support. Sarah's roommate "makes all A's and makes sure she has all her work done before we go and like really helps because she makes me study, which, I mean, I need help with, so she makes sure that I do those things." Kathryn has an a friend who is two years ahead of her in school who helps her with her classes. Gordon has "made a lot of good friends who are strong in certain subjects that I'm weak at and they're helping me out in math." Peers whose academic strengths compliment the weaknesses of these participants have helped alleviate the stresses related to college-level academics, which makes it easier for these participants to remain in college.

Tinto's model takes into account academic integration as well as social integration. An important component of academic integration is relationships with faculty and staff. While positive interactions with university faculty and staff, both formal and informal, do not guarantee persistence to graduation, lack of such interactions greatly increases the risk of attrition. The participants in this study did not lack interaction with ECU faculty and staff. An important component of the NOVA program is intrusive advising, the main component of which is frequent contact with an advisor who gets to know the student on a personal level, beyond simply approving scheduling decisions. Twelve of the fourteen participants cited one or both NOVA advisors as helpful to them from the time they started college.

Eight participants identified the NOVA program as a source of multiple kinds of academic support. Kendra said that her NOVA advisor was "helpful, like, if I'm deciding what classes to take," in an academic advising role. Sarah and Hannah talked about how the NOVA staff check in with them about their grades. Paula talked about a "class that would help me be successful in college," which included study skills. Gordon talks about how the NOVA program will help him find tutors when he needs one. Jennifer's peer mentor "offers to help me with my homework all the time." The NOVA program provides a wide range of academic assistance to the participants, and the participants each find varying aspects of that assistance important as they pursue their degrees.

The NOVA program was also a source of information about college. The NOVA program provided help through academic advising and peer mentoring. Paula explains that the NOVA program helped her "understand everything I was doing, all my classes, what I was taking, why I was taking it." The participants responded positively to the peer

mentors as well. Kendra said that her peer mentors were there to "help anytime that you needed something, like you wasn't sure of what to do or where to go, they were always there." Kathryn said that her peer mentor has

already been through all the stuff I've been through, so it's kinda like what my family done only she's been here at this college and knows how this college works and everything where other people in my family haven't.

The NOVA program, both the professional staff and the student peer mentors, help the students past barriers such as class registration and answering questions about where on campus they can receive various services and accomplish various tasks. Kelly summed up the support of the program,

The people from the NOVA program, um, the advisors and stuff, you know, they're great at...trying to lead you to someone to help you out with whatever you're having trouble with, and that's important because you know some people are a little embarrassed to ask like myself for help and it's good to have someone who can sort of point you in the right direction when you need it.

The participants had contact with other faculty and staff beyond that of the NOVA program. Gordon's high school art teacher introduced Gordon to an art professor at ECU during an art competition prior to his freshman year. In talking to the art professor, Gordon discovered that she, like himself, was not a good student in math.

Gordon explains,

I was talking to her about my troubles in math and stuff and she explained, you know, that she was horrible at math again and that her ACT scores in math were in the single digits and I thought to myself, well she's a doctor and she scored so poorly in math too, and if you score low in like, a certain subject on your ACT you're going to be put into probation. Well, uh, I told her, she asked me what I was going to get into and I said I wanted to get art education but right now I'm a probationary student and she said, well don't worry about that and whenever it came to orientation, uh, they asked me about my major, and I told 'em that, but I said I'm probationary so I have to wait until I get over this probationary class.

Well, the people at NOVA looked at my schedule and stuff and they said, no, you're not probationary so [the art professor] lifted that for me.

Gordon was the only participant to speak so candidly of his family's lack of knowledge about college and about his need to gain college information from other sources. Gordon utilized the resources that he had available to him to find out what he needed to know about attending college. Leah and Calvin, the upperclassmen, had good relationships with faculty in their respective majors. Johanna, Gordon, and Sarah, all freshmen, were building relationships with faculty in their declared majors and minors as well, which helped to orient them in the new college environment.

Curiously, a stark difference between the place of origin groups emerged when looking at the university faculty and staff that the participants described as helpful. Thirteen participants identified at least one member of the university faculty or staff who was helpful to them in staying in college. However, when separating college faculty from college staff, it becomes clear that while three of the six participants in the Appalachian group identified faculty who were helpful, and two of the four participants in the non-Appalachian group identified faculty who were helpful, none of the participants in the "around here" group cited a faculty member who was helpful to her in staying college.

Beyond this there were no major differences between the place-of-origin groups. One small difference that did emerge was that the participants in the "around here" group talked about fewer people who were helpful to them since arriving at college, than did members of other groups. The "around here" participants focused mainly on the role of the NOVA program in helping them with their college careers and talked less about family and friends than did the other two groups. At least half of the individuals identified as helpful after beginning college by the participants in the "around here"

group consisted of college faculty or members of the NOVA team, whereas the other groups tended to identify more people who were helpful after beginning college, and some had more friends and family listed than college faculty and staff. Students from the "around here" group are able to move more fluidly between home and school, whereas students from the "Appalachian" and "non-Appalachian" groups must actively work to maintain relationships with family and friends living in their respective places of origin. Perhaps because the "around here" participants are more easily able to incorporate old friends and family into their lives, they did not perceive them as being particularly important to persistence in college.

Relationships that are maintained over the distance of many miles, with fewer face-to-face interactions, require different kinds of attention in the form of deliberate phone calls and visits that occur during limited time in the place of origin. For students who did not move away from their respective places of origin, the maintenance of such relationships does not require as much effort. Also, because attending college does not require the student to make the physical move to an entirely different place for the students in this group, the stressors associated with moving away from home are minimized (one participant from this group lived at home; the rest lived in campus housing). Students experiencing such stress may reach out to friends and family for support. Students from the "around here" group do not experience such stress and thus do not need to reach out friends and family to mitigate it.

Additionally, the "around here" group reported receiving academic support and college knowledge less frequently than members of the other two groups. Because these participants did not have to overcome barriers of distance, and because these participants

attended high school in or very near to a "college town," where a high number of people with bachelor's degrees and beyond are clustered, academic support and college knowledge may have been taken for granted by the members of the "around here" group.

Furthermore, members of the "around here" group reported fewer instances of financial support than did members of the other two groups. Because some of these participants live at home, or can return home frequently for meals and laundry, financial support may not be as important as it is to students from farther away, and money and goods may be doled out in small amounts that do not stand out as much in the participant's mind.

Perspectives from the participating upperclassmen.

The upperclassmen participating in this study provide an interesting perspective on the experiences of first-generation students beyond the first year. Both upperclassmen talked about family members that attended college. Calvin's older sister attended college at EKU, and he discussed how she helped him with the application process and answered his questions about college. Leah's mother attended college and after taking a photography class dropped out to pursue photography instead. Leah talks about how her mother wishes she had a degree, and how her mother took her to visit as many colleges as she was interested in visiting. Both of these participants had someone close to them with some knowledge about college helping them through the process. Both participants also discussed how their parents pushed them to pursue college because they (the parents) did not have college degrees themselves, and they wanted their children to have a college degree and the opportunities that a degree confers.

The upperclassmen participants talked about similar experiences when asked about friends from high school that attended college. Leah talked about how she was initially reluctant to attend ECU because "everybody from [my county] goes to Eastern. And everybody from [my county] drops out of Eastern." She later explained that only a handful of the 30 or so of her classmates that went to ECU following high school graduation were still enrolled there. Calvin, from western Kentucky, described a similar situation where some of his friends from high school went to college, but most did not stay.

The upperclassmen found the NOVA program to be important in helping them remain in college. Calvin described it as the source of his motivation to remain in school before he found internal motivation through his major. Leah talked about the supportive nature of the NOVA program and cited all parts of the NOVA team as persons that helped her to remain in college.

CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Family played the most important role in preparing for college for the participants in this study. Every participant talked about at least one family member who helped him or her prepare for college. Examining the responses more closely, we see that parents were identified more frequently. Every participant talked about one or both parents when discussing who was helpful during college preparation. Most frequently, these participants said that their parents provided emotional or motivational support to them as they prepared for college. Other family members were helpful as well. Grandparents received the highest average Likert score value at 5.18, and were mentioned by nine of the fourteen participants. Other family members, like aunts, cousins, and siblings, were also helpful to the participants.

Some participants talked about their parents expecting them to attend college from a young age, or told the participant to go to college so they could have a better future. Parents who take an active role in their child's education are more likely to have a child who attends college (Garg et al. 2002; McCarron and Inkelas 2006). Although this study did not examine the role of the parents in the education of the participant, the responses show that many parents were active in helping their children pursue a college education. Leah talked about her mother driving her to visit various colleges, some a day's drive from their home. Paula's father helped her move into her dorm. Johanna's mother saved up to buy her school supplies. While the parents were not able to create the "college myth" (Davis 2010), they instead created an expectation of college, and these students complied with that expectation.

The other major source of support discussed by the participants came from high school faculty and staff. Thirteen of the fourteen participants talked about high school faculty, staff, coaches and administrators who helped them in some way on their road to college. The participants saw the faculty and staff as important because they had completed degrees themselves, and were aware of the academic aptitude of the participants. The "you can do it" message carried a different kind of weight when it came from individuals that the participants understood could assess them in the context of the demands of college. The high school faculty and staff were also able to tell the participants about college; in effect, build the "college myth" that Davis (2010) describes is so common among continuous-generation college student families. In addition to the encouraging message, the faculty and staff helped the participants from a very practical point of view, by helping them maintain their academic standing in high school and helping the participants with college, scholarship, and financial aid applications.

The basis of Tinto's model of student attrition is rites of passage. The model expects that students break away from their home communities and transition to participation in the university community. The parents and high school faculty and staff, as well as the other helpful individuals identified by the participants (peers, coworkers, and clergy) help to create that transitioning period. By offering support and help, these individuals are implicitly acknowledging that the student must leave in order to complete a college education, and often are facilitating that process. Paula went on a church trip the summer after graduation and her pastor, "got us all ready for college and like, partin' from our parents and, um, just helped a lot that we didn't have to, um, leave and just not know what was expected." When Leah's mother drove her to various colleges, she was

acknowledging that college may take Leah away, but that the distance was an acceptable trade-off for a college education. Although not all parents wanted their children to go far away – Paula's mother regularly drives about eighty miles each way to visit her daughter in college – most were committed to their child's success and wanted their child to graduate.

When examining the responses related to how helpful the various individuals were in preparing for college, we find remarkable consistency in the Likert scale responses. The means of these values ranged from 4 to 5.18. This limited range reveals a weakness in the methodology of the study. When sitting down with the participants, the researcher asked them to identify persons who were helpful to them in preparing for college. In asking the question in this way, responses that may have pointed to weak points in the individual's family, peer, and academic communities were largely omitted. The lowest Likert values were primarily assigned to people who were "supposed" to be helpful but were not, like close family members (parents and siblings) or high school guidance counselors. The full range of high school teachers who had little or no impact on the participant's decision to attend college, of cousins who were ambivalent about their relative's educational choices, these responses were omitted. Further study into this area should revise the methodology to avoid this limitation.

For these participants, many of the individuals who helped them pursue a college degree formed a supportive external community that contributed to their plans to persist to graduation. Tinto describes the forms the external community can take: supportive, and thus contributing the student's success; or pulling and disruptive, drawing the student away from full participation and membership in the university community. Work

commitments and their demands on the time of the student are one such pulling external commitment, family members who place significant demands on the time of the student can be another (Davis 2010). The participant place of origin groups did not greatly differ in terms of the pulling external commitments described. It is difficult to identify which commitments were purely pulling, as well. Kathryn and Kendra, both in the "around here" group, worked jobs related to their academic major. For them, the external commitment was also relevant work experience to put on a resume after graduation. For Paula in the non-Appalachian group, going home to work allowed her the opportunity to see her parents and participate in the supporting community. Jennifer, in the Appalachian group, also went home on weekends to work and see her ill mother. Jennifer was the only participant with definite plans to leave ECU's Richmond campus; she planned to attend a satellite campus in her hometown while her mother recuperated from her illness, and then return to the main campus to finish her studies. (She was required to complete her major at the main campus.) Johanna, also in the Appalachian group, was a part of the LGBT community and considered leaving ECU to transfer to a school in New York, where she could be active in a larger LGBT community and also gain experience in the fashion industry. That Johanna expressed some frustration at the responses of fellow students to her sexual orientation, and was interested in moving to a place that she perceived would be more accepting of her, suggests that she was in some respects being pushed away from the ECU community (and potentially her home community, although she did not speak of it), as well as pulled toward New York. Jennifer and Paula are the two participants who best fit the pulling external commitments portion of Tinto's model as well as the stereotype of the student who returns home every weekend to work and never integrates

into the university community. Jennifer's plan to transfer to the satellite campus may be the first step in altering her educational plans in such a way that she does not complete her bachelor's degree at the main ECU campus. Although Jennifer is from the Appalachian group, the particular circumstances of her decision to transfer closer to home, particularly her mother's illness, suggest that her decision is not representative of all Appalachian students.

Membership in external communities is a force that conflicts with membership in university communities, both social and academic. However, all of the participants talked about social integration, either in formal, organized student organizations on campus, or in informal social relationships with other students on campus. Kipp was the only participant who was not involved in a campus organization and did not plan to get more involved, but he played intramural sports. Paula, the only participant who did not talk about informal social relationships that helped remain on campus, was involved with a sorority. Even Jennifer and Johanna, the two students who were least certain that they would finish their degrees at ECU, were integrated into the university social community, both formally and informally. There does not appear to be a difference in social integration based on place of origin groups.

The final component to Tinto's model of student departure that this study examines is integration into academic communities through relationships with university faculty and staff. Only one participant, Kathryn, did not talk about any ECU faculty or staff who were helpful to her. The other thirteen participants talked about a staff member who had been helpful to him or her, and five participants talked about a member of ECU's faculty who had been helpful to him or her. The curious pattern that emerges is

here is that not one of the members of the "around here" group talked about a faculty member being helpful to him or her, and the only participant who did not talk about EKV faculty or staff at all, Kathryn, is a part of that group. Because two of the five participants who talked about their relationships with EKV faculty were upperclassmen who had more time to cultivate such relationships, having helpful faculty during the first year may not be critically important. What is more, this study did not ask participants to talk about all faculty, merely those who were helpful to them since arriving in college. Because twelve participants were in their first year of college, and five of those twelve in their first semester of college, it may simply be too early for many participants to develop such relationships with faculty.

The differences between the place-of-origin groups are limited within the context of Tinto's model. With a study of this nature, it is difficult to tell which students are the exception and which are the rule. Because there are no stark patterns emerging, this data does not reveal differences between students from Appalachia and from elsewhere regarding social integration at college and student retention.

All of the participants in this study are members of the NOVA program. This allows us to evaluate the program's effects within the context of Tinto's model of student attrition. That the students anticipate graduation suggests it is successful. The NOVA program cannot make the students abandon membership in all external communities, and the supportive nature of many of those external communities in which the participants have membership suggests that doing so may be detrimental to the students. The NOVA program is, however, able to facilitate integration into the social and intellectual communities of the university. To this end, it appears to succeed.

The participants in this study all exhibited integration into the social communities of ECU. Eight of the participants talked about belonging to or planning to join NOVA Stars, the registered student organization affiliated with the NOVA program. Although the participants did not talk specifically about the purpose of NOVA Stars organization, it was in the early stages of its formation at the time of the interviews and it appeared to be a student-driven social organization for participants in the NOVA program that was supported by the NOVA program staff. In addition to this formal social integration, the NOVA program provided opportunities for informal social integration. Calvin, a senior, said that the NOVA program helped him meet people on campus early in his college career, as he was trying to find his place on campus.

The NOVA program also facilitates integration into the intellectual communities of the campus, particularly by building relationships between the program staff and program participants, and by helping the participants find and make connections with other faculty and staff on campus. Leah said of her NOVA advisor, "It's almost like his responsibility to network on campus to all these different departments so whenever one of his students has a problem, he knows exactly who to talk to and it's kind of nice to have a foot in the door there." The NOVA staff help the participants, who are not only freshmen on a large campus but first-generation students who typically have less knowledge of the resources and offices around campus, find who they need to talk to and help the students get the help that they need. The NOVA program is a valuable source of social capital, connecting students with other important actors on campus.

As with all studies, this one suffered from several weaknesses and limitations. The first was already described in the chapter on methods. This study is small and

descriptive. It examines a sample of a population at one school, participating in an intervention program designed to retain first-generation college students. Because of this, the responses of these participants may not be representative of first-generation college students as a whole, although it is likely that there are some similarities.

Additionally, the population is limited with respect to demographics. The study intentionally examined students from only rural areas, to control for consistency in backgrounds and experiences. Students from urban areas have a range of different experiences and opportunities available to them because of their geographic proximity to various cultural centers. Because this study was interested in examining whether Appalachian students were different from students living elsewhere, it made sense to compare students from a rural region only with students from other rural regions. Beyond the rural places of origin, this study suffered from a lack of diversity in race and gender. All participants were white, and only three were male. This lack of diversity was not intentional, but a more diverse sample was not available.

Another limitation of the study was that all participants anticipated completing degrees. This is admirable for the participants in light of the increased economic opportunities that those degrees should afford them. However, the study was not able to examine the experiences of any students who did not plan to complete a degree. Examining only students who anticipated completion does not allow us to see the differences between students who expected to graduate and those who did not.

Along with this limitation, the brief time scope of this study does not give time for follow-up of these students and their progress. A longitudinal study that looks at students from entry into college and follows their educational choices over the longer term would

also allow for this kind of examination of persistence. Although most college student attrition occurs prior to the start of the second year of college, and many studies looking at first-generation college students examine only that time frame, a study that looks at students' six-year graduation rates would provide greater perspective on this population.

This study attempted to control for differences in the students' backgrounds relating to urban versus rural upbringings and the attendant different cultural opportunities by only examining experiences of college students from rural areas. Further differentiation between those who were raised "in town" and "in the country" may shed light on the differences emerging between students of these even more specific backgrounds. A young person growing up in the county seat of a rural county will likely have greater access to people and resources valuable to him or her regarding higher education, and the differences between these students should not be ignored.

Moving forward, there are two main suggestions for educational policy prompted by this study. First, Gordon's and Kendra's narratives suggest that high school students need support when pursuing college if they do not have supportive families. Both Gordon and Kendra had families that were ambivalent about their decisions to attend college. Both also found sources of support that fulfilled a role similar the role that parents played for other participants. Developing a mentoring program in high schools for students in this position, particularly first-generation college students, should increase the likelihood that such students will attend college. Gordon had high school teachers who helped him with paperwork, took him to visit a nearby college campus, and one teacher who kept in touch with him through the first year. Kendra found support through coworkers. Although community mentoring programs may be successful, the convenience of starting

the mentoring in a school, where high school students have daily access to their mentors, is ideal.

Finally, this study suggests that continued programming for first-generation college students, like the NOVA program, will be of benefit to this population. This program provides instruction on the skills necessary for academic success, but the participants in this study did not focus on that part of the program. Rather, they spoke, usually in glowing terms, of the NOVA staff and peer leaders who helped them find a place, academically and socially, on a large college campus. There is value in financial aid for low-income students; there is value in the study skills course that the participants in the NOVA program must take. There is also great value in the work that the program does in helping the students find their social niche and meet the faculty and staff who will help them learn, graduate, and find jobs and placement in graduate programs. This is an important part of the narratives of these students as they tell their college story.

Appendix A: Survey Instrument

Please list people who were important to you in preparing for college, and indicate how important they were in preparing you for college by circling a number to the right of the person's name.

Relationship to person	Not very important				Extremely important	
_____	1	2	3	4	5	6
_____	1	2	3	4	5	6
_____	1	2	3	4	5	6
_____	1	2	3	4	5	6
_____	1	2	3	4	5	6
_____	1	2	3	4	5	6
_____	1	2	3	4	5	6
_____	1	2	3	4	5	6
_____	1	2	3	4	5	6
_____	1	2	3	4	5	6
_____	1	2	3	4	5	6
_____	1	2	3	4	5	6
_____	1	2	3	4	5	6
_____	1	2	3	4	5	6
_____	1	2	3	4	5	6
_____	1	2	3	4	5	6
_____	1	2	3	4	5	6
_____	1	2	3	4	5	6
_____	1	2	3	4	5	6

Please list the people who are important contacts for you, or who you talk to regularly, then indicate how important they are to you by circling a number to the right of the person's name.

Relationship to person	Not very important			Extremely important		
_____	1	2	3	4	5	6
_____	1	2	3	4	5	6
_____	1	2	3	4	5	6
_____	1	2	3	4	5	6
_____	1	2	3	4	5	6
_____	1	2	3	4	5	6
_____	1	2	3	4	5	6
_____	1	2	3	4	5	6
_____	1	2	3	4	5	6
_____	1	2	3	4	5	6
_____	1	2	3	4	5	6
_____	1	2	3	4	5	6
_____	1	2	3	4	5	6
_____	1	2	3	4	5	6
_____	1	2	3	4	5	6
_____	1	2	3	4	5	6
_____	1	2	3	4	5	6

Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. Tell me about how _____ (person from questionnaire) helped you prepare for college.
2. Of the people you wrote down, who are you still in touch with?
3. Did anyone in your family attend college?
 - a. (If yes) How did that affect your decision to go to college?
 - b. (If yes) Did they help you prepare for college? How?
4. Did any of your friends from home go to college, and are they in college now?
5. Did this college help you before you got here?
6. Tell me about the people here at college who make you want to stay in college.
 - a. Who are they – students, college faculty or staff, community members?
 - b. Where are they from?
7. Tell me about any organizations you are involved with.
8. Do you have a job?
 - a. (If yes) Where do you work?
 - b. (If yes) How often do you work?
9. Tell me about the experiences you have had and the people you have met here in college that help you to stay in college.
10. Tell me about things that have happened that have made you want to leave college.
11. Do you expect to finish your degree?
 - a. (If yes) Will you finish it here?
 - i. (If no) Where do you plan to finish it?
 - b. (If no) What do you plan to do?

12. What do you want to do after you finish college?

a. Do you expect that will happen?

Appendix C: Appalachian Counties in Kentucky

Adair	Lee
Bath	Leslie
Bell	Letcher
Boyd	Lewis
Breathitt	Lincoln
Carter	McCreary
Casey	Madison
Clark	Magoffin
Clay	Martin
Clinton	Menifee
Cumberland	Metcalfe
Edmonson	Monroe
Elliott	Montgomery
Estill	Morgan
Fleming	Nicholas
Floyd	Owsley
Garrard	Perry
Green	Pike
Greenup	Powell
Harlan	Pulaski
Hart	Robertson
Jackson	Rockcastle
Johnson	Rowan
Knott	Russell
Knox	Wayne
Laurel	Whitley
Lawrence	Wolfe

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