

Running head: HOW FIRST-GEN. RURAL YOUTH NEGOTIATE COLLEGE-GOING

POSTSECONDARY PATHWAYS: HOW FIRST-GENERATION RURAL  
YOUTH NEGOTIATE COLLEGE-GOING

by

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Postsecondary Pathways: How First-Generation Rural Youth Negotiate College-Going.

Thesis directed by Associate Professor Dr. Ben Kirshner

There is a long tradition in college access research suggesting that low-income parents without college diplomas are either unable to help their children or do not value college education. Additionally, these studies tend to neglect the experiences of rural students. I attend to these issues by drawing on Cultural/Historical Activity Theory and using two sets of interviews with 26 first-generation, rural students to complicate the current understanding of postsecondary pathways.

This study found that parents and school personnel provided a variety of college-going supports. Although supports differed, both articulated a “College at All Costs” Discourse, which posits a certain set of rational choice assumptions about students’ post-secondary options. The tenets of this Discourse advocate for students to make whatever sacrifices necessary to attain a college degree.

In order to understand students’ final decisions, the second phase of my analysis focused on the thirteen seniors. Of these seniors, nine scaled back their plans from either a 4-year to a 2-year institution (n=6) or from an out-of-state to an in-state (n=3) institution, two students persisted in their plans, and two students’ shifts were not measurable. This study highlights tensions between the “College at All Costs” discourse and locally situated factors tied to students’ family relationships and finances.

Although students articulated ambitious post-secondary goals in the first round of interviews, as graduation neared, most students’ post-secondary plans shifted to account for these

tensions between their family practices and the messages articulated in the “College at All Costs” Discourse. The two students who persisted in their plans had differing experiences than their peers. These students were not exposed to the same parental concerns with feasibility and they both had a positive family history of college-going.

This study is significant in recognizing the ways that the “College at All Costs” Discourse contradicts family practices and blocks honest discussion about what makes sense for a particular student in relation to her or his family. This leads students to change their post-secondary decisions late in their senior years, which may be preventable by including parents’ voices and recognizing family practices earlier in the process.

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **Literature Review**

Policymakers and education foundations argue that a bachelor's degree is vital for both individual socioeconomic mobility and national economic competitiveness. This has led to a push by many to promote the number of young people attending and graduating from college. The Lumina Foundation for Education, for example, has pushed for what it terms "Lumina's Big Goal," which calls for 60% of the population to hold a "high-quality postsecondary degree or credential" by the year 2025. President Obama also called for an increase in the number of college educated citizens in our country. In Obama's first speech to a joint session of Congress, Obama asked every American:

to commit to at least one year or more of higher education or career training. This can be community college or a four-year school; vocational training or an apprenticeship. But whatever the training may be, every American will need to get more than a high school diploma. (Feb, 2009)

The President continued, stating that by 2020 his goal was for "America [to] once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world."

This push for college is important because for decades there have been tremendous disparities in access and graduation for certain groups, namely based on demographic factors such as race, ethnicity, income, and parental education. Any discussions about strategies to increase access needs to acknowledge and understand these disparities in college access.

## Higher Education Enrollment Disparities

Evidence from current research shows the extent to which access to higher education is impacted by specific demographic factors. These factors include family history, income, race and ethnicity, and location and are commonly found intersecting. This intersectionality can be due to some causal relationship between variables. For instance, a student's low-income background may be attributed to their parents' low educational achievement. The intersectionality may also be due to several factors impacting a students' experience, such as being a low-income student from a rural area. In this section, I will examine the correlations between the most predominant individual demographic factors recognized in the literature and association with access to college.

**Income.** Several studies have found that income level is associated with students' likelihood of enrolling in a university, as well as the level of education that they will eventually attain. The 2010 College Board Advocacy and Policy Center Report used data from the 2009 National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) to illustrate the relationship between income and educational attainment (Baum, Ma, & Payea, 2010). This report found that 80% of high school graduates whose families had incomes over \$88,230 were likely to enroll in a university, whereas only 55% of graduates from families making less than \$19,000 were likely to enroll.

Not only were low-income students in Baum et al.'s (2010) study less likely to go to college, but Baily, Davis Jenkins, and Leinbach (2005) found that the types of institutions they enrolled in were also unequal. During the 2007-2008 school year, 40% of college-enrolled students from low-income families (<\$40,000) enrolled in a two year public college, whereas only 17% of college-enrolled students from upper class families (>\$120,000) did. And while it was more likely for students from low-income families to enroll in a two year program, it was

less likely for them to eventually transfer and attain a bachelor's degree. Of students starting in a 2-year college, Bailey, Davis Jenkins, and Leinbach (2005) found that 15.2% of students from the highest income quartile would go on to graduate with a bachelor's degree, whereas only 6.2% of students in the lowest income quartile were likely to do so.

**Parental education history.** Another predictor of academic achievement is whether the student is a first-generation college student, meaning that the student's parents do not possess a bachelors' degree. The 2010 College Board Advocacy and Policy Center Report (Baum, Ma, & Payea, 2010) examined graduation rates of students enrolled in flagship universities, controlling for GPA, SAT, ACT scores, residency status, race and ethnicity, gender, university, and family income. The researchers reported that first generation students were 10% less likely to graduate from a flagship university within six years than their peers with college educated parents. Similarly, using data from the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS 88), Baily, Davis Jenkins, and Leinbach (2005) found a disparity in the types of universities students enroll in, finding that over half of all first-generation students were enrolled in a two-year institution (57%) in comparison to less than a quarter of their peers whose parents had graduated from college (23%).

**Race and ethnicity.** Students of color, especially those identifying as Black and Latino, are also likely to have lower levels of educational attainment. The 2010 College Board Advocacy and Policy Center report found that in 2008 it was more likely that White students (70%) would enroll in college within a year of high school graduation than Hispanic (62%) or Black (56%) students.

In examining this statistic, it is also important to keep in mind that this report was comparing the enrollment rates of students who graduated high school. When dropout rates are

accounted for, the disparity between Black and Hispanic students and White students is further widened. The U.S Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics (2012) found that Black and Hispanic student dropout rates were 8% and 15.1% (respectively), in contrast to only 5.1% for White students.

Furthermore, like first generation and low income students, there is also an inequity in the types of institutions that students of color enroll in. Baily, Davis Jenkins, and Leinbach (2005) found that 55% of Hispanic students enrolled in two year institutions in comparison to 38% of their White peers.

**Rurality.** Rurality is defined in several ways. The majority of studies accounting for rurality define it based on population size. For instance, Legutko (2008) defined rural places as counties having populations of 200,000 or smaller. Similarly, Ali and Saunders (2006) defined their rural students as being from a town with a population of roughly 2,700. In some cases, population was used to define specific types of rurality. For example, Doyle (2009) described different levels of rurality, ranging from small rural villages (300-600), medium rural villages (600-900), and large rural villages (900-1200). More thorough definitions also exist, often in relationship to population and geography. For instance, the U.S. Department of Education, National Center of Education Statistics (2009) revised their definitions in 2006, using both population and distance from a larger city as proxies. Similarly, Howley (2006) used a survey that employed Beal codes, which classified counties as metropolitan and nonmetropolitan, and by population size. At other times, rurality was left loosely defined or undefined. For instance, the participants in Dees' (2006) study self-identified as living in a rural/Appalachian setting, but further information was not provided. Similarly, Hodges and Barbuto (2002) interviewed 49 seniors living in rural settings, but did not define their criteria for calling a setting rural.



Although the definition of rurality varied across the literature, all studies pointed to a substantial underrepresentation of rural students in post-secondary enrollment, despite similar levels of aspiration. Hu (2003) used 1988 NELS data and found that college aspiration was similar across regions, with 28.2% of rural students, 30.8% of urban students, and 32.9% of suburban students aspiring to go to a four year university. Similarly, despite similar levels of aspiration, Gaertner (2011) found that when holding the common indicators of college access (class, parental level of education, and race) constant, rural students were only 72% as likely as non-rural students to enroll. This pattern is similar to Provasnik's and colleagues' (2007) findings in their report by the National Center for Education Statistics, which examined college enrollment for 18 to 24 year olds. These scholars found that significantly fewer rural students were enrolled in 2004, with only 27% of all rural 18-24-year-olds enrolling in colleges or universities, in comparison to their peers from urban (37%) and suburban (37%) contexts enrolling.

### **Dominant Assumptions of Students**

The above data show that disparities exist in college access and retention across family history, income, race and ethnicity, and location, but they do not offer explanations for these disparities. Scholars tend to recognize the roles of two common factors as barriers to college access: 1) financial aid and the ability to pay and 2) college knowledge. Studies recognize the role of financial aid and one's ability to pay the high cost of college as major barriers to college access. Studies focusing on college knowledge largely examine the knowledge that students have about the steps they need to take to get to college, such as PSAT or college essays.

There are many explanations for why these two factors are such large barriers to students' college-going. For instance, the influence of students' abilities to pay for college has been

explained by studies examining institutional policies, family values, knowledge about the process, and cost-benefit analyses. Although there are a variety of reasons given to explain the influence of specific factors, the majority hold specific assumptions about students. These assumptions of students can be found in Perna (2002) and Gildersleeve's (2010) taxonomies for understanding the dominant frameworks in college access. These two assumptions that underlie college access work are: 1) students as rational decision makers and 2) students as products of their environment. In this section, I will describe these assumptions and the ways that they are reflected in practice.

**Students as rational decision makers.** One underlying assumption in Perna's (2002) and Gildersleeve's (2010) taxonomy of dominant frameworks is that students are rational decision makers who lack the information necessary to make well-informed decisions about college. This assumption suggests that, as rational decision makers, students evaluate the costs and benefits of their decisions. This cost-benefit approach in research can be seen in Brown and colleagues' (2009) study that examined the impact of community on rural youth and found that youth in Appalachia saw college as economically disruptive to their ability to help support their families financially.

Current research that holds this assumption that students are rational decision makers tends to view college access as a linear pipeline and looks for "leaks" in the pipeline at each phase. The assumption then follows that when provided with the information necessary to make a decision, students will choose to go to college. Thus, programs work to provide students with the information to make those well-informed decisions.

For instance, Domina Thurson (2009) found that "both targeted outreach programs and school-wide outreach programs operate on the assumption that students' educational aspirations

are the key link between their social background and their eventual educational attainment” (129). Further, Bloom (2008) asserts that “the focus of almost all of the programs, then, is on individual-level barriers: attempting to raise college aspirations and to provide the kinds of college-going social and cultural capital to which first-generation students may not have access” (2). More directly, Gandara and Bial (2001) found that the 23 of the 32 programs they assessed had college advising components; financial advising components; or a combination, and almost half of the programs offered assistance with college applications. For instance, Upward Bound offers ACT and SAT test preparation, college enrollment advising, financial advising, and assistance with forms and college applications.

**Students as products of their environments.** Another assumption about students emphasizes the role and impact of socialization with family, peers, and school personnel in the college enrollment process. This research often suggests that because under-represented students do not come from “college-going” cultures, they lack the values, strategies, cultural capital, and identities necessary to support college access. This assumption about students attempts to explain the impact of relationships on college enrollment.

For instance, Thayer (2000) found that first-generation students were often unprepared for the college setting and social environment that was foreign to their friends and family. This often left them less knowledgeable than their traditional peers around issues of time management, college finances, budget management, and the bureaucratic operations of higher education. Similarly, Collier and Morgan (2007) used a social capital lens and found that first-generation students often possessed a lower level of knowledge about college and the process of access.

Programs that hold this assumption of students as products of their environment provide students with the cultural capital they may lack at home, thus providing them with the strategies, social capital, and identities they view as necessary to support college access. Often, this comes in the form of providing aspects of what they consider to be a “college-going culture.” For instance, Schultz and Mueller (2006) suggested that effective programs promoted college attendance, built self-esteem, provided role models, provided social skills development, and provided cultural activities. Gandara and Bial (2001) also found that programs commonly provided counseling, personal enrichment, social integration, and mentoring.

### **Deficit Thinking**

The prevalence of these two assumptions of students as rational decision makers and products of their environment is problematic in that it creates a simplification of students and the issue of college access. While these assumptions about students can explain some aspects of student decision making, they are oversimplifications that can lead to deficit thinking. The assumption that students are rational decision makers holds that students are independent decision makers who may lack the information necessary to make a decision about college. The assumption that students are products of their environments holds that if their families are not from college-going cultures, they lack the values, strategies, cultural capital, and identities necessary to support college access.

Assumptions about students focusing on what students and their families lack, lock the field of college access into a damaging deficit perspective framework. Valencia (1997) explained that deficit thinking accounts for disparities in achievement by focusing on individuals and their families, rather than on systems and histories of inequities. Within college access literature, the deficit framework uses differences in the lives of under-represented students to explain the

disparity in access, often examining what families lack in specific skills, college knowledge, values, and capital that hinders the student's ability to access a college education. This deficit thinking lens is not new to the world of education. Valencia explains that of the various conceptual frameworks that have been advanced to explain school failure among low-income minority groups, the deficit thinking theory has held the longest currency among scholars, educators and policymakers. Although there are several explanatory variants of this model, the deficit thinking paradigm as a whole posits that students who fail in school do so because of alleged internal deficiencies (such as cognitive and/or motivational limitations) or shortcomings socially linked to the youngster- such as familial deficits and disfunctions (xi.)

Given the long-standing history of deficit thinking within education, it should not be surprising that this has become a common approach in understanding and attending to disparities in college access. Although I have painted deficit thinking as straightforward and a process of blaming the victim, it is important to recognize the adaptive and dynamic ways in which it emerges.

Valencia (2010) explained this process deficit thinking in detail in *Dismantling Contemporary Deficit Thinking: Educational Thought and Practice*. The first step in the process is when a problem is identified as not just an isolated incidence but as a social problem. He explained that often current practices contributing to this social problem go unexamined because they are so entrenched within the current system of education. He continued, explaining that that a study is conducted to understand the difference between “the disadvantaged” and “the privileged” students, which is problematic because these differences are often viewed as the explanation for the problem. For instance, first-generation status is a difference between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students, but has also become an explanation of access

issues. Finally, Valencia explained that an intervention is created to correct for the deficiencies of students and their families.

Under this framing, the disparity in college-access is often remedied by trying to teach, or fill, students and their families with the skills, college knowledge, and capital that they are lacking. This view of students and their families as empty vessels ready to receive knowledge is in line with the traditional practices of education, and what Freire (1968/2006) referred to as the banking model of education. It is perhaps also because the banking model is so prevalent in the current system of education that it seamlessly flows into the everyday practices of college-access programs, thus further reinforcing the deficit views of these students and their families.

In the “effective outreach programs” reviewed by Schultz and Mueller (2006), the researchers found that although less than a third of the programs included a parental component, these programs also had the strongest evidence for effectiveness. These programs provided college information to parents and taught them to support their children’s education.

Similarly, of the programs Gandara and Bial (2001) reviewed, over half of them included parental components. Some of these were superficial activities, such as signing a contract to support their child’s participation in the programs. Other parental components were more in depth, including training sessions in how to monitor homework, maintain communication and discipline, issues of adolescent development, and counseling sessions to understand academic options.

### **Implementing a Non-Deficit Framework of College Access**

A small contingent of scholars has purposefully worked to dismantle deficit views of students and their families prevalent in college access literature. In doing so, they have provided a complicated and multi-dimensional view of families and the contributions that families make to

the college-going process. These scholars include Kiyama (2010), and Cecilia Rios-Aguilar (2012) who take up a Funds of Knowledge framework, and Gilersleeve (2010), who takes up a College-Going Literacy framework.

**Funds of Knowledge.** Kiyama (2010) and Rios-Aguilar and Kiyama (2012) used a Funds of Knowledge framework to combat a deficit perspective to college access, both theoretically and empirically. Funds of knowledge are the “historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being” (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992, p. 133). In accounting for these bodies of knowledge and skills, this framework privileges the active role, knowledge, and expertise families have in college access. Recognizing these funds of knowledge, often left unrecognized and unvalued within the broader educational system, highlights the positive impact families have on their children’s educational trajectories and the important role they play in college access.

Rios-Aguilar and Kiyama (2012) argued that while current scholarship on college access has focused on what students are lacking and what they need, these studies and practices have not resulted in increased college enrollment or completion rates among minority students such as Latina(o)s. These scholars reasoned that “incorporating a funds of knowledge approach to study the transition to college among Latina(o)s will improve our understanding of power and equity in educational opportunity” (7). Improving understanding of power and equity in educational opportunity moves studies away from a deficit view which blames students and families for low college attendance and moves the academic gaze towards a examining the impact of systemic inequities.

Similarly, Kiyama (2010) argued that programs need to recognize and draw on families' funds of knowledge and that parents need to realize their resources. By parents understanding their own funds of knowledge, Kiyama argued that they can access their own experiences in order to help their children succeed; moreover, a funds of knowledge approach enables parents to develop the confidence to help their children navigate the college process. Using interviews with 27 parents, Kiyama underscored the educational ideologies of families, providing insight into the educational philosophies, processes, and aspirations that they held. The findings suggested that families' ideologies often served as positive influences and that the college process was often constructed in nontraditional ways. For instance, students gained aspiration for college through activities with their parents, such as singing a college's fight song or watching a football game. Through these examples, Kiyama highlighted the ways that parents positively influenced their children's college-going plans through their history and experiences.

**College-going literacy.** Gildersleeve (2010) worked to decrease deficit thinking by changing the framework that he used to examine college access from one focused on the individual student to one focused on the activity, by way of "[complicating] the ways that the field of higher educational opportunity is understood" (33). To do so, he argued that college access should begin to be viewed as college-going literacy. Gildersleeve (2010) drew on an expansive model of literacy, advanced by new literacy studies (Gee, 1991; New London Group, 1995; Street, 1984/2003), calling for college-going to be understood as a social practice and learned activity. He argued that a college-going literacy is

one in which students' understanding of the messages they receive about post-secondary opportunities is put into action by their own repertoires of practice that stem from their



personal backgrounds and experiences toward the object of higher education opportunities and a desired outcome of college attendance. (37)

He explained that when access is viewed in terms of a literacy practice, “higher education opportunity encompasses not only local habits, practices, and values, but also the contexts of those cultural artifacts and the structural conditions by which they are bound” (33). Gildersleeve defines college-going literacy in the following three facets: reading, critical reading, and writing. He equated reading with the student’s ability to recognize the social context of, for instance, a college pep-rally as having meaning. Critical reading was equated with the ability to decipher what further steps could benefit a students’ personal objective of college admission. And writing was equated to the action a student took toward the objective of college. This college-going literacy framework complimented Gildersleeve’s (2010) critical lens that recognized and called into question the “racist, nativist, sexist, and classist practice of education that society has developed over time” (34).

In examining college-going as a literacy practice, Gildersleeve also drew on a Cultural Historical Activity Theory framework, which changed the object of analysis from the individual to the individual’s activity within a system, which allowed him to examine the cultural practices around migrant students’ college-going literacies. Gildersleeve stated that “conceiving culture as a category of identity often promotes deficit perspectives of cultures, perpetuating the devaluing of traditionally marginalized students’ experiences” (38). Thus, by making the cultural practices around college-going literacies the focal point, “students’ culture is the meaning made from their experiences within their communities— experiences that have acquired value over time” (38). He explained that thinking of college access as a learning activity gives precedence to participation in the activity, how opportunity is organized, and the goals.

In examining families using this college-going literacy, Gildersleeve described the impact of families on students' post-secondary decisions. Using ethnographic methods and an activity system conceptual framework, he described the active role families played in college access by examining the participation families had in their children's college-going trajectories, such as assisting with their student's course-work, applications, financial aid, resources, and aspiration development.

### **Contributions of the Current Study**

While scholars such as Valencia, Rios-Aguilar, Kiyama, and Gildersleeve have worked against deficit notions of the family by empirically documenting the active and beneficial roles of the family in college access, the majority of this literature has focused on Latina(o) students and families and has focused on families living in non-rural areas. Currently, work that counters a deficit approach has focused on college access in urban and suburban settings, often neglecting the differing experiences of rural youth. This funds of knowledge and college-going literacy research is invaluable in understanding students and the family. This study adds to this literature in two important ways. First, I examine the college-going experiences of students and families from rural areas. Second, the majority of studies have focused on either the role of outreach programs on college enrollment or on the role of the family. Few have examined the interaction between the role of the family and the role of outreach programs on students' college plans. My study accomplishes this by examining the interaction and contradictions between the practices and Discourses of outreach programs and families.

## **Conceptual Framework**

### **Cultural Historical Activity Theory**

By operating under the guiding notion that all learning is socially oriented and culturally and historically mediated, the CHAT framework shifts the unit of analysis from an internal and individual process to activity systems in which individuals and groups participate (Engeström, 1987). In shifting the unit of analysis from the individual to the context, CHAT has afforded me the ability to combat deficit notions of youth and families, recognize the role of historical mediation, provide a framework for looking at activity, and examine tensions within and between activity systems.

**Combating deficit notions of youth and families.** In shifting the unit of analysis from the individual to the context, this framework privileges the interrelated nature of both subjects and objects, recognizing that when the subject or object are focused on separately, one's analysis lacks a holistic understanding of learning and development (Kaptelinin & Nardi, 2006). This shift in the unit of analysis moves research away from simply looking for knowledge and values that underrepresented youth (and their families) lack to research that seeks to understand contexts that mediate students' pathways to college.

Moving from an investigation of the individual to an investigation of the activity systems students participate in allows for the investigation of non-dominant activity systems that are generally unrecognized. In accounting for these non-dominant activity systems, CHAT recognizes and privileges the active role of the historicity of practices and knowledge stemming from family's repertoires of practice (Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003).

In this study, I look to complicate the traditional explanations of disparity in access by moving past a focus on students and families to examining the larger socially, culturally, and

historically mediated contexts the students participate within, and the ways that these contexts afford and constrain students' post-secondary decisions. Understanding the ways these contexts mediate students' post-secondary decisions allows me to look for contradictions within students' experiences.

Thus, this CHAT framework moves the study away from viewing a single parental message as either being good or bad, to being socially, culturally, and historically contextualized. This contextualization shifts the study from blaming students and parents for decisions to not attend college towards one that understands that these decisions are constrained and enabled by historically and culturally mediated factors.

**Recognizing the role of history.** The CHAT framework is beneficial in recognizing that context is situated historically. Engeström and Sannino (2010) explained that activity systems take shape and get transformed over time, and that problems and potentials that exist and arise can only be understood in relation to their own history. Thus, the history of objects, theoretical ideas, and tools have all shaped the activity system. Accounting for the role of history recognizes the histories of practices and knowledge that have shaped practices, specifically within the activities of the family. This is beneficial in understanding college access and students' post-secondary decisions as it brings history to the forefront of the analysis.

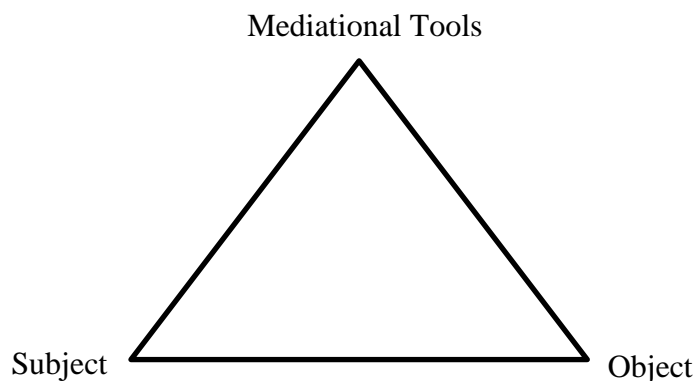
Furthermore, history (old knowledge) is never obliterated, and new knowledge never fully replaces old knowledge (Cole and Subbotsky, 1993). Rather, this knowledge is preserved, to be recalled under the right circumstances. Findings in this study will demonstrate the perseverance of family histories in light of attempts to replace these experiences with knowledge around college access and enrollment.

This is important in understanding the contradictions that students face. While students are often told the importance of college to their futures and provided with guidance to get them there, recognizing that new knowledge never fully replaces old knowledge is important in understanding the decisions students make. The “old knowledge” they have around college-going may contradict the “new knowledge” they receive in college outreach programs.

**Providing a framework to look at activity.** CHAT provides a useful framework to look at activity and mediation. By providing acknowledgement of the role of mediation, context, and culture, Vygotsky, Leont’ev, and Engeström have revolutionized the way that human behavior is understood, moving analyses from individuals in a vacuum to examining the activity in context.

**Vygotsky.** Coming out of the Russian School of Psychology, mediation was introduced by Lev Vygotsky as a reaction to behaviorism. Vygotsky (1978) argued against the commonly held behaviorist notion of stimulus → response, suggesting instead that all acts are mediated by cultural tools. Thus, he created what is now seen as a first-generation activity theory model (Engeström, 1987). This model is beneficial in recognizing not just the relationship between the subject and the object, but the role of mediational tools in this relationship.

*Figure 1. Vygotsky’s first-generation activity theory model*



**Leont'ev.** Leont'ev added to Vygotsky's work on mediation, suggesting that to understand the actions of an individual, one must understand the broader objective of the whole activity. This whole activity, he argued, was more important than the individual action (1981). To demonstrate this, he used the example of "The Hunt." In this example, Leont'ev explained that during a hunt, a beater's job would be to chase animals the group was hunting away from where they were and towards a larger group of hunters. By simply examining the action of the beater without context (a member of the hunting party scaring prey away from himself), the purpose of their job would be missed. However, in understanding their job in relation to the broader objective of the whole activity, the beater's purpose becomes more apparent.

**Engeström.** Engeström (1987) added to Vygotsky (1978) and Leont'ev's (1981) theories by accounting for both the systemic and historical influences on activity. Arguing that the unit of analysis should be an activity system, Engeström argued for a dialectical notion of activity. This recognized not only the influence of the environment on the individual, but also that the individual is a co-producer of societal and cultural developments. In order to incorporate psychological, cultural, and institutional perspectives in analysis, Engeström expanded the original triangular model of activity to account for not only the subject, mediating tools and object, but also the division of labor, community, and rules. The expanded triangle provides a way to examine the interactions between the components of the activity system, by recognizing the social, historical, and cultural mediation within the activity system.

Engeström's (1987) expanded triangle provides a good visual and conceptual base in which to understand the activity systems that impact college access. This is shown in Figure 2. Here, I will define the six aspects of the expanded triangle.

Subject- The subject is the individual whose agency is taken as the starting point of the analysis (e.g., an aspiring student).

Object- The object is the core purpose of every productive activity. It is what the subject aims for, works towards, and is realized over the course of activity. The object is the “raw material” or problem space in which the activity directly shapes into an outcome.

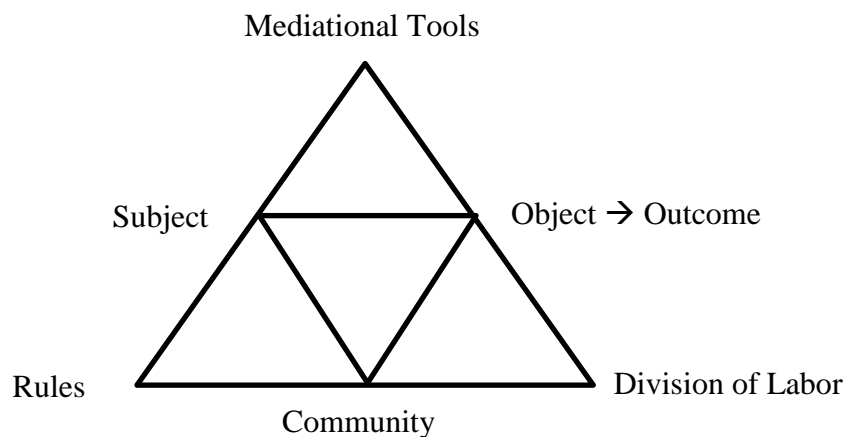
Mediational Tools- Mediational tools include tools and signs. Psychological tools (language, counting, writing, etc) require reflective mediation and consciousness of one’s procedures, whereas technical tools (physical tools such as hammers and pencils) do not require this reflective mediation.

Community- People or groups whose knowledge, interests, and goals shape the activity.

Division of Labor- How the work in the activity is divided among the participants in the activity. For instance, who does what task or who does what amount of the workload.

Rules- Rules include both formal and informal laws, rules, and norms. These laws, rules, and norms are not static, but may differ based on the subject (for instance, based on gender, race, or class).

*Figure 2. Engeström’s expanded triangle.*



Engeström's addition of community, division of labor, and rules accounts for the multivoicedness of activity systems, recognizing that an activity system is always a community of multiple points of view, traditions, and interests (Engeström & Sannino, 2010). The division of labor accounts for the different roles participants take and are given, and how these roles are historically influenced. Multivoicedness also recognizes that activity systems themselves carry multiple strands of history, and are engraved in artifacts, rules, and conventions. Thus, activity systems are never objective entities, but always carry the subjective intents of a specific body of participants.

Recognizing multivoicedness is important in understanding postsecondary decisions and college access as students often interact with several people and receive several messages around their options after high school. In understanding that there are several historically influenced roles, this study of college access moves the analysis from the information students and families receive from their teachers/counselors/etc. about college-going to an analysis that also includes the voices and influences of their family and sees these as valuable.

**Contradictions.** The CHAT perspective also provides a way to look at contradictions arising within and between activity systems. Contradictions are not the same thing as problems or conflicts. Rather, Engeström (1987) views contradictions as historically accumulating structural tensions within and between activity systems. Such contradictions generate disturbances and conflicts, and can also generate innovative attempts to change the activity; addressing these contradictions is the source of change and development. As students participate within multiple activity systems with varying rules, communities, divisions of labor, mediational tools, and overall objects, they are likely to encounter contradictions within and between these activity systems.



Engeström (1987) identified four levels of contradiction between and within activity systems. The first was a primary inner contradiction *within* each constituent component of central activity. For instance, this may be a contradiction in the division of labor within a single activity system. The second was a contradiction *between* constituents of the central activity. An example of this is if there was a contradiction between the rules and the division of labor. The third contradiction is *between* the object/motive of the dominant form of the central activity and the object/motive of a culturally more advanced form of the central activity. For instance, this may occur when teachers are given a new set of standards that they need to use when teaching. While these standards may be formally implemented, they may be resisted by the old general form of the activity. The fourth type of contradiction Engeström recognized was *between* the central activity and its neighbor activities. For instance, this may occur when practices in the home contradict practices in the school.

It is important to look for these contradictions to understand structural tensions that exist. These tensions complicate traditional understandings of students and families from marginalized backgrounds and provide new ways of understanding the disparity in college access. Recognizing contradictions also provides places for expansion, which is discussed further in the conclusions and recommendations chapter.

In understanding college-going as a single activity system, I examine contradictions between constituents in the division of labor and rules. Whereas most studies focus on schools as the primary vehicles to prepare marginalized students for college, I seek to understand the role of schools and family in supporting college-going. Doing so allows me to understand family-based rules which may otherwise be ignored, as well as contradictions that may arise. In examining these division of labor the college-going activity system and the contradictions that arise, I hope

to provide a nuanced understanding of college-going, complicating the current understandings of family roles in college access and college choice.

### **Discourse**

I use Jim Gee's (1999) theory of Big-D Discourse to expand on the CHAT framework. Big-D Discourse is defined by Gee as a view of discourse that combines language with other social practices within a specific Discourse community. Because Discourse is produced in social context and practice, it can never be viewed as neutral. Take for example Gutierrez and colleagues' (1995) account of a teacher who is attempting to bring current news into the classroom by giving his students a current events quiz. He began by framing the first question as an "easy ones" and claimed that "it's on the front page of today's Los Angeles Times." This teacher, by assuming his students engage in the middle class cultural practice of reading the Los Angeles Times and claiming that the question is "easy" indicated a value judgment on what "knowing" is. Thus, the teacher's discourse mediated what counted as "knowing" in this context.

While CHAT provides a framework suggesting what aspects of an activity to examine, Big D Discourse provides a way to understand specific forms of mediation. I am using Big D Discourse as a way to understand tools and rules that mediate students' decisions. College access researchers tend to focus on explicit rules and factors, such as college knowledge and standardized test scores, to examine barriers to college access. I, however, draw upon Big-D Discourse to understand how college-bound students, their families, and school personnel discuss the college-going decision making process.

Examining the ways that college is discussed allows me to understand not just the explicit rules (such as standardized tests and financial aid) that influence students' access, but also how discussions around college create invisible and implicit barriers to students' access to college.

Understanding these things allows me to make visible unexamined assumptions and beliefs around college-going that mediated students' decisions.

In this study, I will seek to describe how this Discourse around college-going guides students' college-going plans and the ways that they influence the way that students describe their own college-going and decisions around college. I will also use Big-D Discourse to make visible contradictions in students' college-going plans and the decisions that they ultimately make.

### **Research Questions**

The study is organized to address the following central research questions:

- What types of support and college messages do first-generation, low-income, college-bound youth receive and reproduce?
- What kinds of tensions and contradictions do students face in their post-secondary decisions? How do students navigate these?
- What kinds of family-specific factors appear to predict variation in post-secondary pathways for study participants?

## CHAPTER TWO

### Methods

The aim of this study is to understand factors that mediate the college trajectories of first-generation, low-income, rural high school students who elected to participate in a College Preparation outreach program. In order to understand how students make sense of their experiences, I utilize ethnographic field work and interviews with a sample of 26 focal students. In order to understand broader patterns of college decision-making in the College Prep (CP) population, I administered a survey to 150 participants from the same CP program as the focal students.

### Background

I met Carl, the director of the CP program through volunteer work with a subset of CP's students. Early on, Carl provided me with opportunities to gain practical experience by allowing me to observe Saturday Clinics (where students and parents come to gain more insight about college process), teach a college preparation course to seniors during the summer program, and coordinate the logistics of the summer program. During my work with the CP program, Carl became my mentor and gatekeeper for much of my research. These programs are difficult to access given the vulnerable population of students that they serve. He introduced me to the CP program in Forest County and it was due to his support that I was able to gain access to them. With his recommendation, I was also able to gain access to survey two other CP programs in the state.

### Setting

**Forest.** Forest is located in Colorado, west of the metro-region of the state, and was home to many well-known ski resorts. Although known as a tourist destination, I am defining

Forest as a rural area based on Legutko's (2008) definition that it has a population under 200,000. Legutko (2008) used this definition of rural to examine the number of rural students who planned to go to college over the years of 1995-2005. Based on the U.S. Census Bureau of 2010, Forest's population was roughly 28,000 (U.S. Census Bureau: State and County QuickFacts, 2012). The towns that make up this county are also defined as rural using U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2009) definition, accounting for both population and distance from an urbanized area.

Forest touted a highly educated population, with 95% of its population having graduated from high school, and 50% of its population holding a bachelors or higher (in comparison to 35.9% in Colorado as a whole). The region as a whole was economically diverse; polarized between the wealthy and the low income working blue collar jobs in the service industry. While Forest's per capita income was slightly over \$35,000 and fewer than 10% lived below the poverty level, the high cost of living skewed statistics on poverty, and Forest had a higher level of economically struggling households than the statistics accounted for.

Roughly 20% of this population was under 18 in 2010. Racially, the county was predominantly white (90%), with 1% being African American, 1 % being Asian, and 15% being Hispanic or Latino (\*the researcher stated that these percentages exceed 100% because "Hispanics may be of any race, so also are included in applicable race categories"). Similar to Howley's (2006) research on rural areas and connection to place, much of this population (80%) lived in the same house for a year or longer. Below is Table 1, which compares these statistics with the overall Colorado census data.

Table 1

*2010 Census Bureau Statistics.*

	Forest	Colorado
2010 Population	28,000	5,116,796
Percent of Persons under 18 (%)	18	24
Race		
White (%)	90	81
Black (%)	1	4
Asian (%)	1	3
Hispanic/Latino (%)	15	21
Foreign Born (%)	12	10
Language other than English spoken at home (%)	15	17
Education		
High School grad (age: 25+) (%)	95	89
Bachelor's degree or higher (age: 25+) (%)	50	36
Living in same house 1 year or longer (2006-2010) (%)	82	81
Per capita income in past 12 months (2006-2010)	36,000	30,000
Median household income (2006-2010)	69,000	56,000
Persons below poverty level (%)	7	12

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\*data retrieved from: U.S. Census Bureau: State and County QuickFacts. (2012)

**Forest High School.** Forest High School closely neighbored a two year community college, Local Community College (LCC). The high school itself was academically rigorous, offering Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) programs, as well as

college-level courses through LCC. Along with a rigorous course options, the school also touted a strong graduation rate.

In 2009, Forest High had a student body that consisted of roughly 77% white and 21% Hispanic students, and according to the Colorado Department of Education (Colorado Children's Campaign, 2012), Forest graduated roughly 85% of all students in 2012. Although graduation rates were high, they were not equitable. Forest graduated 94% of the white students and 100% of Asian, Black, and Native American students, only 52% of the Hispanic population graduated.

**College Prep (CP).** I chose the College Prep (CP) program located in a small 4-year college in Colorado because it worked with a group of underrepresented students (first-generation, low-income, students of color, rural) who demonstrated an aspiration to go to college. CP required a commitment from both the students and their families, which provided a group of students who not only aspired to college, but were also taking steps to get there. This commitment was important, as it enabled me to examine the post-high school decision making of students who planned to go to college.

## **Participants**

Roughly 220 students between 8<sup>th</sup> grade and 12<sup>th</sup> grade participated in the Forest CP program, and of these students, 35 juniors and seniors participated in the two week intensive summer institute at CU-Boulder. In order to participate in PCDP, students needed to have a minimum GPA of 2.75, be a first-generation college student (neither parent has a 4-year degree), attend a target high school or middle school, and have parents who will actively partner and participate in Saturday Academies (college preparation seminars). Students also need to meet one of these criteria: a) be a member of a one-parent family, b) be the eldest child in their family with an interest in going to college (with the assumption that he/she will pass the information on

to their siblings), or c) have a strong desire to continue onto higher education. All eligible students must have gone through the application process, which required an application and recommendation letters from a counselor and teacher, as well as an interview. The number and group of participants used for each stage of data collection can be found in Table 2.

Table 2

*Participants and Research Phases*

	Short-Term Ethnography	Interview I	Interview II	Survey
CP Forest	35 juniors and seniors	6 sophomores, 7 juniors, and 13 seniors	6 sophomores, 7 juniors, and 13 seniors (from Interview I)	150

### **Data Collection and Recruitment**

I have designed a mixed methods study and organized it into two sequentially related parts: a qualitative case study and a quantitative survey study (Ivankova, Creswell, & Stick, 2006). I used ethnography and interviews to understand the different Discourses and barriers students experience and how they may manage contradictions that arise. These findings informed the follow-up round of interviews and the creation of survey items. In this mixed methods sequential explanatory design, I used four data sources that directly related to each other. These included a short-term ethnography, two rounds of interviews, an essay questionnaire, and a survey.

### **Ethnographic Research and Interviews**

I drew on three data sources to understand students' experiences: 1) ethnographic field notes, 2) initial phase of individual interviews, and 3) follow-up phase of individual interviews. The data sources were all informed by prior analyses. For instance, I used the findings from the ethnography and initial interview to inform the creation of the follow-up interview.



I completed a pilot study in June 2012, for which I received IRB approval (found in Appendix A). The consent forms are in Appendix B, the assent forms are in Appendix C, the letter of IRB approval is in Appendix D, and the recruitment script is in Appendix E.

In June of 2012, I took ethnographic field notes during the CP Summer Institute. During the school year, I interviewed students. There were two distinct interview phases which took place at Forest High. The initial interview phase occurred between November and December, with a small number of interviews in February. The follow up interviews all occurred in May, around the time seniors had made their final decisions. Table 3 outlines the data collection method, participants, and dates of data collection. The surveys were administered in June of 2013.

Table 3

*Data Collection Timeline*

Dates	Data Collection	Participants Involved
June 2012	2-Week Mini-Ethnography	CP-Forest Summer Institute Participants (n=35)
Nov-Feb 2012/2013	Round #1: Initial Phase of Individual Interviews	CP-Forest focal students (n=26)
May 2013	Round #2: Follow-Up Phase of Individual Interviews	CP-Forest focal students (n=26)
June 2013	Survey Data	CP-Forest students (n=150)

**Short-term ethnography.** During the two week intensive summer program for juniors and seniors, I stayed with the students on campus as they took rigorous courses that prepared them for the classes that they would take in the upcoming fall semester. Although I worked to engage with them through the social aspects of the program in a non-authoritative position (I was not a PM or a program coordinator), part of my responsibility to the program was to teach the

Senior Seminar class. The Senior Seminar class overviewed everything the seniors would need to do in the following school year- choose a college, enroll in a school, apply for financial aid and scholarships, choose a residence hall and become active in retention organizations.

Although teaching the class put me in a position of authority, I worked to minimize any authority when outside of class. I often walked back with the students, engaging in more light hearted discussions to distance myself from my role as “the teacher.” Outside of class, the only time the course was brought up was if a student had a question about an assignment. As I think back about my participation, I feel that my participation can be summarized by a student’s statement at the end of the program, “You’re weird... You aren’t a student, and you aren’t a PM, and you aren’t a director. You’re just a tag-along.” As he told me this, I realized that the title fit me perfectly: Hannah Jones, Resident Tag-Along.

The most common time I used to “tag-along” was during down times. I lived in the residence hall with the students, ate meals with them, joined them during free time and study time, and participated in other program-wide activities. While building rapport with the students, I was also asking questions about their experiences. For the most part, the students all appeared eager to talk to me and describe their future plans. Some even confided their concerns, asking for my advice.

Over the course of two weeks, I gained rapport with a particular group of girls. They became so comfortable with me that they invited me to a game of “truth,” and asked me about any “epic party” experiences. As I teetered on the edge of “staying cool” (trying to not draw attention to the unexamined authority I held as an adult) and providing some important safety advice, I realized that I had fallen into somewhat of a “big sister” role. Although I was frequently invited to meals and told about the current gossip, they often looked to me for advice on college.

I also believe that at times the students worked to look competent in their knowledge about college. The value of trust that I was granted by this group of girls allowed me to not only ask questions about their future plans, but also provided insight into other aspects of their personal lives that were relevant to their college decision making.

During “off times” when the students were in class or after they went to bed, I typed up field notes. Although I started the first day with my steno pad and pen, I soon realized it was a burden and appeared to make the students uncomfortable and less willing to talk or would become distracted by what I was writing (often they would look at the note pad as I wrote). Thus, I made mental notes of major topics covered, and then quickly made my way back to my laptop after the students and I parted ways.

**Individual interviews.** In total, I interviewed 6 sophomore, 7 juniors, and 12 seniors. These audio-recorded, semi-structured, formal interviews lasted anywhere from 20-45 minutes in a quiet space (such as a classroom, a back office, or the library) in Forest High School. Focal students were chosen based on experience with them during the summer institute or by a nomination from the CP staff, while also keeping race and gender in mind. I chose to interview a large number of seniors because they were the closest to graduation and their plans would be fairly concrete by the spring.

***Round 1: Initial phase of individual interviews.*** The initial phase of interviews began on October 31 and went through February. The majority of interviews occurred in November and December, but because I added six additional underclassmen (sophomores and juniors) to balance out my senior-heavy sample of focal students, the final six interviews occurred on January 25 and February 18.

The focus of the first interview was to understand students' experiences and plans after high school. There were five types of questions that I asked. The first related to experiences about growing up in a rural place and what the students liked and disliked about the area. The second focused on high school plans, such as what the student wanted to do when he or she graduated, when and how they first learned about college as an option, and where they were planning to go. The third set of questions asked about the types of support students received, and how this impacted their plans to go to college. The fourth set of questions focused on where students saw themselves a year or two after college, asking where they wanted to live, whether they saw themselves starting a family, and what type of career they saw themselves having. The fifth set of questions asked students to describe the importance of college to them, what concerns they had, and how they handled those concerns.

***Round 2: Follow-up phase of individual interviews.*** The follow-up interviews all occurred in May of 2013. The scheduling of these interviews was more efficient given that I now had rapport with these students and had their contact information, and because I had built rapport with the school and better understood the scheduling system.

This second, spring interview was influenced by the responses from the fall interview. The predominant purpose of this interview was to understand whether students' plans changed, and if so, the reason for these changes. There were three types of questions. The first set asked why the students' plans had changed or stayed static. The second set asked the impact of distance, starting broadly and then moving towards more specific questions. The third set of questions asked the students about the support they received, and if anyone had suggested an option other than a 4-year college, and whether or not this impacted their decision.

### **Data Analysis of Ethnographic Findings and Interviews**

My data analysis consisted of an iterative process in which I moved between seven steps: 1) look for bias, 2) become acquainted with findings, 3) code broadly, 4) revise coding structure, 5) create a table, 6) create memos, and 7) check for validity. Because this was an exploratory study, I used the findings from one aspect to influence the creation of another. Further, as I added more data, I began to use the new information and patterns to inform my understanding of previous coding structures. Due to this recursive quality of analysis, I am treating these steps separately for clarity. However, in reality each of these steps informed each other.

In general, I began by looking for bias that I possessed. Then, I read the findings to get a sense of the broad patterns that existed. After that, I broadly coded the findings, using open-ended codes. Next, I revised the coding structure to attend to more precise patterns. The final major step (although also occurring iteratively) was to check for validity. Throughout this process, I implemented tables and memos to help clarify, and verify, the patterns I was seeing.

### **Recognition of Bias**

Given that this was an exploratory study in which I entered with assumptions, it was necessary to locate where I held bias in order to be able to look for disconfirming or unexpected evidence. Locating bias is necessary since what observers tend to see and report is often a function of their experiences and positionality in the world they live in (Takacs, 2002). I began the task of looking for bias during the creation of the interview and survey questions.

While it is important to recognize our bias, Gadamer (1975) and Kirshner et al. (2013) argued that bias is not necessarily a negative thing that researchers should aspire to remove. Instead, these scholars argued that we need to learn to manage it. LeCompte and Goez (1982)

supported this idea of managing bias, stating that assuming a position of neutrality can lead to a number of distortions and has the potential to lead to detachment and hostility by informants.

I assumed that all participants in a college preparation program would matriculate into a 4-year university. I discovered this assumption during interviews, when students began to tell me about their future plans. In order to manage this bias, I added a question to the survey asking what students wanted to do when they graduated from high school, allowing students to answer this open-ended question in case they joined CP for a reason other than college access.

The second assumption I held was that students would experience tensions between their home lives and their college aspirations. I believe that this assumption stemmed from my discussions with students over the summer who described their parents' lack of support for their plans. I realized that this was an assumption as students began to explain their parents' deep engagement at multiple levels of the college access activity. Upon this realization, I created the interview question "What does your family think about you going to college." By leaving it open-ended, I was able to capture the variation in students' perceptions of support.

The third assumption was that distance would be a factor that rural students would cite in their decision-making. I believe that this assumption also stemmed from discussions with students over the summer. Although many students expressed the importance of distance in their decisions, many students suggested that distance was not as large factor influencing their decision, and that they would be willing to move far from home in order to get a good education. In order to keep my assumptions in check, I foregrounded the emic perspectives of the participants during the qualitative portion of the study, and then tested this hypothesis using comparative statistics from the survey.

The fourth assumption that I carried was that parental support of college was a linear construct. I believed that parental support would be either “high” or “low” and could be measured based on the activities that parents participated in with their children and the messages that they sent. Additionally, I assumed that practices such as checking homework demonstrated stronger parental support than messages that their child should go to college. I also thought that messages suggesting other alternatives to enrolling in a 4-year university (such as a community college or military) demonstrated lower levels of parental support than messages supporting enrollment in a 4-year university. I found that this was misguided as I started analyzing the data and seeing more complicated patterns in parental support.

### **Becoming Acquainted with the Data**

In order to become acquainted with the data, I read through each of the data sources (field notes and interviews) a number of times to understand the data, look for emerging patterns, and look for contradictory patterns. When I began to see patterns or contradictions, I would often put these into a short memo or begin a spreadsheet in order to examine these trends or contradictions at a later point in time.

For instance, as I began to read through the data, I saw that students frequently explained that college was important to them as it was the pathway to a “better life.” Although I had expected that students would explain the importance of income as a reason to go to college, I found that students often explained a “better life” in relationship with the struggles that they and their families had experienced. A pursuit for a “better life” thus related to not having these struggles when they become adults. As this pattern emerged, I briefly discussed it in a memo and created a table to begin to paste students’ explanations of a “better life” into.

### **Code for Broad Categories**

The next step was to begin to code for patterns I saw emerging. Given that this process occurred after I had begun to look at my own bias, I was concerned about other types of unrecognized bias I may have been holding. Because of this, I used broad and open-ended codes which allowed me to code confirming and disconfirming evidence. While I expected that many of these codes would be later refined, this initial coding was broad and open-ended. For instance, although the initial phase of becoming acquainted with the data suggested to me that parents would be either supportive or unsupportive, I coded broadly for “parental support,” capturing “parental support for 4-year college” and “parental support for alternatives.” This proved beneficial to my study in helping to keep me from slipping into a deficit view of parents. The Codebook can be found in Appendix I.

### **Revise Coding Structure**

The practice of coding for broad categories and typing up interview transcripts led me to find more categories emerging. The emergence of these categories led me to need to frequently update my coding structure. This included adding codes I hadn’t accounted for, combining codes, and refining/re-defining codes. In some cases, patterns emerged that I hadn’t accounted for. In other cases, as I coded more I realized that some codes should be combined, that they were asking the same thing. For instance, in examining parental support, I saw that I could refine this into three categories: endorsement of college, academic support, and support in college-related tasks. Further, I found that quotes I coded as “Spring Interviews: explanation of institution choice” I also tended to code as “reasons students changed plans from fall to spring” interview. As I looked more closely at the data, I realized that the majority of students were changing their plans and that these codes could be combined into “shifts in students plans.”



Another way that codes were refined was in creating a hierarchal structure. For instance, the initial broad code of “parental support” could be split into three smaller, more precise codes. As I looked at the data coded “parental support” I saw three unique categories emerge. The first was “parental endorsement of college” which suggested that parents told their child that college was important. The second was “parental academic support” which recognized the academic assistance students received from their parents around grades and homework. The third code was “parental support for college-related tasks” which recognized parents’ assistance in tasks around college, such as accompanying students at college fairs and going on road trips to visit colleges.

### **Spreadsheets**

I used spreadsheets to help me examine the predominance of patterns that I saw emerging and to separate patterns from products of my bias. For instance, I examined whether parental support for college existed, or if I believed that it was a highly occurring pattern because my bias caused me to remember the few cases it occurred.

In order to make the spreadsheet, I listed all of the students’ names in the far left column and then used each column to the right to paste segments of interview transcripts for various codes. Not only did this allow me to do a frequency count to examine the prevalence of patterns, but it also allowed me to examine relationships between patterns. For instance, it allowed me to see whether grade was related to students’ responses around specific factors influencing their decisions.

The spreadsheet also highlighted contradictions within participants. Because I pasted transcript segments in a column, I found that often I would paste more than one segment for each student. When more than one transcript segment occurred for a participant, I was able to see the

relationship of those. This process really highlighted contradictory transcript segments, which allowed me to examine them further.

### **Memos**

In order to gain a more in-depth understanding of the patterns and to look for relationships within and between patterns, I created a number of short memos. Some of the memos were rough sketches of patterns I was seeing, which included a short prose of the pattern emerging and some examples to support and disconfirm these patterns. Other memos were more detailed and included both how the pattern fit into the theoretical framework, connected to the prior literature, or related to the findings.

These memos helped me to create concise arguments. Because these memos were meant to be short, they forced me to be clear in my explanations of the patterns. They forced me to slow down and think about the patterns emerging. I also found that the memos helped me to understand connections with other patterns I was seeing. Frequently, as I wrote a memo I would recognize the relationship between the argument I was making in one memo and patterns that I saw emerging in other areas of data analysis.

### **Tables and Figures**

Tables and figures were also beneficial in clarifying my thinking. Because I needed to visually explain relationships, I became more concise in my explanations. I frequently used tables and figures when I was having trouble explaining relationships. Once it was illustrated clearly, I found that I could more concisely understand and explain my findings. For instance, figures allowed me to visually explain the relationships I saw between a number of factors. Figure 4, allowed me to visually explain the relationship between family history and

success/failure in college pursuit. Drawing this up allowed me to then write a memo about these relationships, something that I had been struggling to do.

Tables were also beneficial in helping me understand patterns. For instance, Table 5 “changes in seniors’ college plans” helped me to understand the shift in students’ plans from the fall interview to the spring interview, and the factors influencing that decision. Whereas I had recognized that there were a large number of students scaling back their plans, it wasn’t until I incorporated the reasons for their changes that I began to see patterns.

### **Validity**

In order to increase validity for the qualitative data, I often used the follow-up interviews as a member check. A member check is an important tool in which the researcher checks to see if the analysis matches the respondents’ experiences (McDermott et al., 1978). I would often frame a pattern that emerged in the initial interview during the follow-up interview to check for understanding. When students’ experiences did not align with the pattern I saw, I would ask follow up questions to understand the incongruence.

### **Use of CHAT to Analyze Data**

After I collected and began to analyze my data, I decided to use a CHAT framework because I felt that I needed a more precise way of describing some of the contradictions that I was seeing. I began by using Engeström’s expanded triangle as a guide to organizing my data analytically and make these contradictions visible. This was beneficial as it prompted me to understand the relationship between the division of labor between the school and the home.

In early phases of analysis, I thought that I was looking at two competing activity systems (school-based and home-based), but as I began to further understand the data, I recognized that because they had the same object (post-secondary education access) they could be more

productively understood as competing divisions of labor within the same activity system. In understanding the two types of division of labor that were emerging, I began to see implicit norms from family practices influencing students' decisions, such as staying close to family. Understanding these norms, I began to see contradictions in parents' messages, helping me to understand the "College at All Costs" Discourse.

### **Analytic Limitations**

A limitation to this study was that I held a narrow scope of the activity system and did not give a large amount of attention to institutional and historical influences on college access, such as admissions and financial aid policies, politics, or histories of enrollment patterns. Although I understand the importance of examining institutional and historical influences on college access, I felt that it was important to begin my study by focusing and amplifying the more locally specific aspects of the activity system. This is important in two ways. First, it helped me to understand the local experiences of the students I worked with, which informs the future research that I will do. This future research will tie together the local experiences that I have found with historical and institutional influences that influence college access and college-going decisions. Second, I wanted my study to be directly applicable and accessible to what practitioners were doing, with the goal of providing practitioners with immediately actionable recommendations.

While narrowing the scope was a purposeful move, it did create a limitation on the study. It shifted my research away from examining the broader activity system and the role of historical and institutional influences on college access, such as governmental policies. I hope to attend to this limitation in my future research, which is outlined in the recommendations section. I have also provided recommendations to administrators and policy makers in response to current literature and findings from this study.

## **Survey Data Collection and Analysis**

### **Survey Construction**

The survey was initially constructed to measure three constructs related to how youth were thinking about college: perceived messages around the importance of attending college, perceived messages around the importance of academic success, and the role of distance in college decision-making. I measured perceived messages rather than examining actual parental messages since the students were the respondents. These concepts were taken from early stages of the coding process and developed into a construct map to facilitate item development. The construct map can be found in Appendix G.

Using the construct map as a guide, I designed several items to measure different dimensions of these constructs. The majority of items were dichotomous and had the response options of “true” or “false.” Given the large number of factors potentially impacting college decisions, there were several items to measure each outcome space on the continuum outlined by the construct map. In addition to having items mapped to each level on the construct map, I included six multiple choice items. These items were placed at the beginning of the survey to measure students’ initial responses to the questions before they were given questions designed to relate closely to their own experiences. The goal of this was to see if students’ initial response to a multiple choice question would match the outcome space that their responses indicated.

The final survey instrument included 38 items in total: twelve items to measure the three levels of perceived college messages, twelve items to measure the three levels of outcome spaces for perceived academic messages, and fourteen items to measure the four levels of the construct around perceived importance of distance. The full survey can be found in Appendix H.

**Sampling framework.** The survey was administered in May 2013 to all 150 Forest High School students participating in the CP program, including the 26 focal students. Table 4 illustrates the number of participants by grade. Overall, there were roughly similar numbers of students at each grade level.

Table 4

*Number of Survey Respondents by Grade*

	<b>Participants</b>
<b>Freshmen</b>	n= 46
<b>Sophomores</b>	n= 30
<b>Juniors</b>	n= 44
<b>Seniors</b>	n= 30
	N= 150

I chose to survey this group of high school students because they all met the requirements for the CP program and were all rural students. It was important that they were in the CP program as I wanted to understand the experiences of students who were taking concrete steps to go to college. Further, it was important to me that the students were from the same school, so that I could begin to examine the generalizability of my qualitative findings.

I surveyed all of these students during the school day in their school. I made an effort not to administer the survey to students during instructional time, so the majority of survey administration took place during homeroom, off periods, and lunch time. I met with each student before administering the survey and explained that its purpose was to help me understand their experiences and help future students like them.

**Survey administration.** The surveys were handed out in paper form. The survey packets included a consent form, a scantron response sheet, and the actual survey. Students were asked to fill out the consent form first, and then to fill out the scantron response sheet. I asked that the students not fill out the scantron response sheet information section, but simply start on the questions. I also asked them to not write on the survey questionnaire, as those would be re-used.

I asked all students to fill out the survey, including those who do not give assent or consent. This was done to eliminate pressure for those who chose not to participate and to decrease the distractions for those who chose to fill out the survey.

Later, I went through each of the packets to check for three things: 1) consent, 2) clear response marks and 3) the integrity of the survey question form. The first thing I checked for was whether the student provided consent. I shredded the surveys of those who did not give permission to use their responses as part of my study. For the packets with consent, I separated the consent forms from the scantron to protect anonymity. I then examined each scantron to ensure that the answer response marks were clear. I re-filled out scantrons which were done in pen, cleaned up stray marks, or darkened in light marks so that the machine would be able to scan properly. Finally, I checked the survey question forms for marks, so that a students' previous answer would not bias or impact another students' responses. If I found marks, I carefully filled in all response options and then erased them all, so that it was further unclear what the response was.

### **Survey Data Analysis**

As I became more familiar with the data, I recognized that the survey constructs were not as clear as I had initially hypothesized. I thought that the items used to measure each outcome space would build on the other, with students who agreed to the top levels also agreeing to lower levels of the construct. As I became familiar with the data I found that this was not the case and that the constructs were more complicated than I had expected. The qualitative findings suggested that students received several messages around college, distance, and academics, that these messages were at times in contradiction with each other, and that the construct map that I had initially created was not sufficient to capture these relationships.

Despite this, a number of the items I had created were still relevant to my qualitative analysis. In particular, two sets of items addressed topics that were similar to findings in the interview data: 1) perceptions of parental support for 2- vs 4-year institutions and 2) perceptions of the influence of distance on college-going decisions. I used “perceptions of parental support for 2- vs 4-year institutions” to examine whether students reported consistent parental messages in support of two-year institutions stayed consistent throughout their high school career, or if the messages changed as they approached graduation. I used students’ “perceptions of the influence of distance on college-going to decisions” to examine whether perceptions varied systematically with age. I discuss these in more detail in the findings chapters.



## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **THE PUSH FOR MATRICULATION INTO A 4-YEAR COLLEGE**

Participants in this study all self-selected into a College Preparatory Program designed to support students' goals of matriculating into a 4-year institution. In interviews, these students showed aspiration and motivation in their college-going plans and discussed the large support system that helped them to reach their goals of matriculating to college. This support system included a division of labor between school-based support and parental support, which I discuss in the first section of this chapter. Although the type and delivery of support differed in some ways, in other ways they overlapped. I address this overlap in the second section. Specifically, both school personnel and parents participated in a "College at All Costs" Discourse. I define this Discourse through five tenets used by teachers, parents, and students to describe how students should make post-secondary plans: 1) college as the norm, 2) college as a worthwhile investment, 3) students need to fulfill their academic potential at all costs, 4) the sacrifice will force students to grow, and 5) Community College as an undesirable option.

#### **Division of Labor**

In their discussion of support, students made a clear distinction between the division of labor that adults took in supporting their post-secondary plans, describing the support that they received from school-based personnel and their parents. Engeström (1987) described division of labor as a reference to the ways that participation and work in an activity system is divided among participants. School-based personnel provided opportunities to help students gain interest in college, information about the steps they needed to complete, and support in completing those steps. These opportunities and support were often presented in classroom based activities through presentations and worksheets. In contrast, students tended to describe their parents' support as less information focused and more informal. Parents provided support in their

endorsement of a college education, academic involvement, and involvement in college-related tasks. In this section, I will describe the division of labor students talked about in their interviews.

### **School-Based Support**

Many students described receiving a high level of support for their college-going plans from adults in their schools such as their CP coordinator, Mackenzie, and their teachers. The majority of students acknowledged the role of the CP program in supporting them for college. When I asked students where they tended to get assistance for college, eleven of the twenty-six cited the CP program, five cited Mackenzie, and one cited both Mackenzie and the CP program. Students who cited the CP program explained that it provided them with information that their parents were unable to provide, such as the process that they needed to complete to be eligible to matriculate into a college. Students also described the academic support that they received which was usually in the form of formal activities such as grade checks and tutoring.

Mackenzie was described by students as the authority in college-going information, such as financial aid and the college application processes. Students described Mackenzie as someone who they and their families could turn to for help in navigating these foreign procedures. For instance, Jenny explained how the CP program helped her family to understand a process her parents had never experienced, and how the program “helps clarify what needs to happen.”

Yeah. Honestly, I think that the College Prep program is the best thing to happen to me as far as like going to college. ‘Cuz like, without Mackenzie’s help, me and my parents would be totally clueless about what to do. ‘Cuz we’ve never done anything like that before, and my parents never went through that. So like, the CP program like is really like, helps, helps clarify what needs to happen. You know, it helps like point out step by

step and to try to like break it down and make it easier and like support you in any way that they need to.

Students described receiving support to complete the steps necessary for enrollment and financial preparation to college, such as ACT preparation and financial aid, in classes held by CP during the school day. For instance, Ana described classes that she took that helped her gain support for and information about the ACT and financial aid.

H: Okay, so then, what things do colleges and like, high schools do to help you go to college do you think?

A: Well, like the CP program, they, like Mackenzie, has like bonus classes. I think you know that though.

H: Mhmm

A: Yeah, I feel like those are helpful.

H: Okay.

A: Because like I signed up for them and like with ACT prep and everything.

H: Nice. Are those? When are those?

A: They're during homeroom.

H: Okay.

A: Yeah.

H: 'Cuz I know she did like the senior one. I didn't know she did more for you guys.

A: Mhmm. Yeah, she's having like a financial aid one and

H: Awesome.

A: And a bunch of other things, which I think is really helpful.

Students also described receiving academic support from CP and Mackenzie in the form of tutoring and grade checks to ensure that they would be academically prepared to enroll in the universities they chose. For instance, as Jane described the support she received, she explained that CP and Mackenzie benefited her academically by providing tutoring and the pressure to have good grades.

H: Is there anything that maybe helps like, maybe anything that high schools or colleges do to help like you to go to college?

J: Mmmm, no. Well in this school, we have everything. We have Mackenzie.

H: Oh yeah?

J: Yeah.

H: What does, like what does she do or how does that help?

J: She like, everyone, there's tutoring after school.

H: Oh yeah?

J: And she helps out, like helps us a lot.

H: Nice.

J: She put like, she pressures us to get our grades up.

Additionally, five of the twenty-six focal students described being exposed to college through school activities, such as elementary school projects and matriculation into middle school

### **Parental Support**

Although many students said that their parents were unable to help with the logistical, formal tasks of college preparation, such as ACT preparation or writing a college essay, they described the importance of the parental support that they received in other areas of their college

preparation. For instance, when I asked Tammy how her parents supported her, she responded that although they didn't "really know what they're doing 'cuz they never went" they still pressured her to go.

Like, just how they're always pressuring me to go to college and like helping me figure everything out. They're kinda like my second Mackenzie, except they don't really know what they're doing cuz they never went. But, I mean, they try which is nice. And they're always supportive.

Students explained to me that their parents endorsed the importance of going to college, were involved with their academic success, and discussed college options. This parental support often happened in more informal settings than school-based support, and was often closely linked to the experiences and goals of the family.

**Parental endorsement of college-going.** In many cases, students explained that their parents endorsed the importance of going to college for their futures. These endorsements emphasized the significance of college to both the students' future and to the family.

For instance, when I asked Jenny how she first heard of college, she explained that since she was young, her parents gave her the message that she had to go to college because it would make her life easier and that she could do what she wanted in the future.

We were always really poor, and like we always, that was like my parents' biggest thing. Is in order to succeed in this world, like the reality is you have to go to college. You can still succeed without college, but it's gonna be way harder. You're gonna have to work a lot harder as opposed to going to college and doing the work in the first place in order to do what you want. Because now my dad like kicks himself in the head every day because he hates his job, you know. So he like always told me to like, in order to do what you

want in life, you're gonna have to go to college.

Students also described their parents endorsing college by emphasizing the importance of college to their family. For instance, when I asked Nacho if he had ever received support for post-secondary options other than college, he explained to me that his family viewed Johnson & Wales as more prestigious, “special university” and that his attendance would “be really big on behalf of our family.”

N: No, they're very supportive of me going to Johnson and Wales, especially 'cuz it's a university and all the, all of our family members who are going to college, is like one of them going to university and they're really proud of him.

H: Okay.

N: So, to go to Johnson and Wales, a special university like that,

H: Yeah.

N: Would be really big on behalf of our family.

H: Okay.

N: It would like help us represent and everything like that.

Valentina also described her parents' support for college and the significance that it held in her family. She explained that she didn't want to disappoint her parents like her brothers had and that it was important to her family that she attended college because others didn't have the opportunity because of immigration status.

H: Why is it so important for you to go to college, and maybe not them [brothers]?

V: Mmm just cuz I saw like how my parents ummm they were like disappointed and they suffered. 'Cuz like my brothers, they didn't even graduate high school.

H: Mmm, okay.

V: Yeah, and so I just saw the disappointment in my parents. And for me, I was like I don't wanna, 'cuz right now I mean they have jobs, but it's in construction, and they could have done better. Like I tell myself, I, I don't wanna end up like that like working at Target for the rest of my life, for example.

H: Mmhmm

V: So ummm and then when I tell my parents about college, I see how happy they get. And they're always like "Yeah, I'm so happy for you, you're going to be our first" and they kinda like show off to the other, to our family. 'Cuz being Hispanic, you, it's just kind of, like in our family, most of my mom's brothers and sisters and my dad, neither of them have papers and neither did their kids so they didn't go to college and so they like just like telling people that at least one of their kids is gonna go to college.

H: Mmhmmm.

V: I just see like how happy they are so.

**Parental academic support.** When I asked students how their parents supported their college-going goals, they commonly indicated that their parents' academic involvement influenced them. Students described three types of parental academic involvement as supportive: interest in grades, interest in homework, and interest in overall academic decisions.

Students described their parents stressing the importance of receiving high grades in their classes. For instance, Fabian explained to me that his father pushed him to do well in school and threatened to not let him work if his grades became unsatisfactory. Fabian stated, "Like, he thinks education is number one priority. Like he won't even let me work if my grades are low.

He told me, 'I'm going to tell your boss not to put you on the schedule if I see that your grades drop.'"

Students also suggested that having their parents check, help with, or offer to help with their homework was beneficial. For instance, Isabel explained that although her mother couldn't help her with homework, her mother was supportive by offering to help, and this often led Isabel to remember homework that she would have otherwise forgotten to finish.

I: Yeah, she, well, she always asks me, you know like "do you have homework"? Or like "what do you need help on?" and she tries even though she, sometimes she doesn't know my material. She just looks at it and she's like "Ope, never mind then. You can do it. You got it." but like, she actually at least tries to help me. And umm, yup, she's always checking on me, and how I'm doing.

H: Do you think that's changed like, if, your probability of doing homework?

I: Yeah, cuz I'm really forgetful. So then I would like, I, I would never, like when I get home, I know some things that I need to do, but I never look at my planner to see what I wrote down. My mom's like "Do you have any homework?" and I'm like "Oh my gosh, I should check that."

Another student recognized the impact of her mom's involvement on the courses that she took. Tammy explained that her mom's involvement pushed her to be more academically prepared for college and that she would not have taken advanced courses otherwise.

T: They're [parents] always like, my mom definitely stays on top of me with my grades. Which is nice because if she didn't they probably wouldn't be as high as they are now.

H: Okay.



T: Cuz like, I'll be the first to admit it, my GPA is not where it should be, because I'm lazy and I'm not in as advanced classes as I should be because I'm lazy, which is bad but it's true. And I think that the only reason that I'm taking so many classes at LCC [*Local Community College*] this year is definitely because my mom was like "This is really the best option. You need to do it" and like, me taking hard classes and passing them wasn't an option anymore, it was like "You do this or you're grounded forever." (laughs).

**Parental support in college-related tasks.** Despite suggesting that their parents were uninformed about the steps they needed to take to attend college, students commonly described the support their parents gave them with other college-related tasks, such as helping them to understand college options and starting college funds.

When I asked Jenny to describe the type of parental support she received from her parents, she explained that her mom helped her look at future college options and helped her to choose a university. Jenny described a fall break road trip that her mom and her planned to go on to visit a number of local universities.

J: Well, they've started like, let me think of something. Like my mom and me have been planning a college road trip, where we're gonna go to look at the colleges. Coming up to, in November.

H: Wow.

J: Umm so that has helped a lot.

H: And is it just uh, just uh Western State you're looking at?

J: No, we're gonna go see Western, we're gonna go see Gun, err not Gunnison, bwah, Western, Fort Lewis, and Adams State down in Alamo. They're all like

pretty small schools, so we're gonna go just like tour them and like talk to the new teachers and stuff.

Mandy's parents were also involved with helping her to understand her future college options. When I asked her about parental support, she explained that her parents went with her to look at different universities during a college fair, and helped her understand the financial feasibility of different schools.

H: Do they [parents] support you in any other ways?

M: Umm, they like, umm, when I went to like some of the college fairs, they like helped me go through. And were like "oh, this is what you need, this is like do-able, like this isn't like the do-able, you can't, you aren't going to be able to afford to go here" and stuff and,

H: Okay. So there were some schools that they said were too expensive?

M: Mmhmm. But they were like mainly like, Hawaii.

Juanita described her mom's involvement with her future college-going plans. She explained that her mom was involved by going to meetings and in discussing career options that would fit her.

H: So, can you tell me ways that they support you in this?

J: Like, umm my mom, well she's been the one that's been involved. Like when there's a meeting at school about colleges, financial stuff and everything, she always goes and she is always keepin' up with my grades and asking me what I wanna study and like she, like when I tell her like "I dunno, I'm so confused, I dunno what I wanna study" she actually gives me ideas.

H: Of what?

J: Of stuff that I can like look into.

Economically, parents also showed support by starting college funds. For instance, Joannah and Alej's families both started college funds for them. Joannah told me that her family "had a college fund for a while and we don't any more, but that's okay (*laughs*). Just restarting it." Similarly, Alej told me that her family opened a college fund the year before when she was a freshman to help her pay for college.

### **Conclusion**

Overall, students described a clear division of labor between school-based support and parental support. While each provided similar support (such as academic support or support in college-related tasks), the type and delivery of support differed. Students described the support that they received in school to be around college enrollment practices and information, which prepared them for the ACTs and college applications. Teachers and Mackenzie delivered this information in a formal school setting, often involving classrooms and presentations. Students described the support that they received from their parents as being more centered on post-secondary options. Rather than focusing on eligibility information, parents tended to discuss the importance of college, the importance of doing well in school, and different options that their child had. Parents provided this support informally, often drawing from the family's own history and goals.

### **"College at All Costs"**

Although there was a very distinct division of labor between the teachers and Mackenzie at school and parents, they all shared what I term a "College at All Costs" Discourse. Gee (1999) defined Big-D Discourse as a culturally driven view of discourse. By combining language with other social practices, this view of Discourse examines common ways of discussing certain

topics within a community. Identifying these common ways of discussing topics as a Discourse helps to make explicit the assumptions embedded within them.

The “College at All Costs” Discourse reflected messages that students received from teachers, college outreach personnel, and parents. It was also reflected in students’ articulations of their college choices. During my interviews, several patterns emerged about college and decisions around college. These underlying assumptions and statements around college and decisions around college suggested several tenets to the “College at All Costs” Discourse. These tenets included a belief that: 1) college was the norm, 2) college was a worthwhile investment, 3) students needed to fulfill their academic potential 4) sacrifices were an opportunity for growth, and 5) Community College was an undesirable option. While every individual member of the community (Mackenzie, each teacher, each parent, and each student) did not take up all of these tenets, together they define the “College at All Costs” Discourse and reflect underlying assumptions about college-going.

### **College as the Norm**

One of the tenets that the “College at All Costs” Discourse held was that college should be the next step in students’ plans after high school. Both schools and families reproduced this Discourse. In schools, it was reproduced in a formal setting, such as in the classroom. For instance, Valentina described how her elementary school worked to normalize college as the presumed next step after high school by explaining the role that college had and where it fell on their future educational trajectories.

V: Umm for sure like my dream since I’ve been little is to go to college. And seeing a successful college life.

H: Okay, since you were little?

V: Yeah.

H: Do you remember how you came to that?

V: Umm just cuz in school, I used to go to Forest Valley Elementary, and umm all the teachers would be like "well, after high school" they would tell us "elementary, middle school, high school, and then college" and then they would say "college, well that's where you learn to be a teacher or that's where you learn how to be a doctor." So like when we were little everyone wanted to be a teacher or a doctor, you know?

Ana also described the way teachers normalized college as something available to hard working students when she matriculated into middle school, explaining middle school as a stepping-stone to college. Rather than simply another step in the educational process, college was given a high status and was equated with success.

H: So then, umm, when did, do you remember when you first heard about what college was? Can you tell me a story? When did you learn about college?

A: I feel like it was in like fourth grade. Like or, like maybe end of fourth beginning of fifth because they [school] were like "Well, you're starting to prepare to go to middle school. And that's a stepping stone to your future to college. You have to start taking things more serious. The past years were a joke basically and now you have to really be committed or you're not going to succeed.

Students' parents also articulated this tenet of the "College at All Costs" Discourse and suggested that college was "just a normal life experience." When I asked Hernando how his parents supported his plan to go to college, Hernando explained to me that they supported the experience as something "everybody gets."

H: Can you tell me how they [parents] support it?

Hrndo: They support it 'cuz they know that a lot of people go to a four year and that's a good education, four year school.

H: Okay

Hrndo: And also because it's just a normal life experience that everybody gets.

Some students explained to me that college was not just viewed as a “normal life experience” in their families, but as an experience that they were expected to get. When I asked Ana about her parents’ support of college, she told me that her parents told her that going to college was her only option after high school and that they had told her she didn’t have a choice in the matter.

Like my dad, like, recently was starting to talk about me being a senior next year and he's like [*mock gruff voice*] “Well you have to start thinking about your colleges.” And I was like “Well, what if I don't wanna go to college?” like joking around. He's like “No, you have to go to college. You don't have a choice. You're not gonna mess up like me and your mom did” cuz they never went to college.

Students received messages from their teachers and their parents that normalized college. These messages articulated a discourse that suggested that college was the next step in students’ lives after high school, and in some cases, it was suggested that college was the only option available.

### **College as a Worthwhile Investment**

Another tenet of the “College at All Costs” Discourse was that all students should go to college because it is a worthwhile investment in their futures. Part of this assumption was that although college may be expensive, students have access to several ways to pay for it (such as

loans and scholarships). And because college is worthwhile, once students graduate they will be able to pay off any loans that they needed to take out.

Students articulated many aspects of this tenet. College as being “worth it” was a statement that emerged several times across students’ interviews. For instance, during an interview in the fall, Jenny discussed a number of concerns she had around going to college, such as cost, campus size, and leaving home. When I asked her to tell me what she would tell a friend who was having those concerns, especially around the expense, she articulated a “College at All Costs” Discourse by explaining that college was an investment in the future and would be “worth it” even if she remained in debt until age thirty-five.

Finances. It's do-able. Like no matter what, even if you have to pay off college for until you're thirty five, it's gonna be worth it because you're doing what you want, and it's an investment in your life. Like it's not like you're investing in stock, it's not like you're investing in a car. You're investing in a life decision, you know, this is like your life path that you're trying to direct. And if it takes a little money, then it, so be it. That's reality. Everything takes money these days.

One way that the students viewed college as being “worth it” was from a monetary standpoint. When I asked Chad why he wanted to go to college, he cited statistics that suggested that a bachelor’s degree would allow him to access high paying jobs.

H: Umm, and so how did you decide to go to college anyway? Like what was it?

C: Umm people just influenced me so much, saying I’ll be able to make it and do what I want in life if I go to college, if I receive my education, that's, that's my ticket to success.

H: Okay. Which people?

C: Just uh, like family members and then the community around me.

H: Okay, so pretty much everybody's telling you that?

C: Yeah. And then a lot of statist, statistics have shown that you need at least a Bachelor's or something just to get jobs reaching above like \$60,000 a year.

H: Okay.

C: Very basic necessities that you need as an adult.

This explanation that Chad articulated overlaps with messages communicated by the federal government and major American foundations such as the Lumina Foundation. The Lumina Foundation found that during The Great Recession from 2007-2010, job security was related to education level. During this time, 5.6 million jobs requiring only a high school education were lost and 1.75 million jobs requiring an associate degree or some college were lost. This was in comparison to an 187,000 increase in jobs requiring a bachelor's degree or higher. The US Census Bureau also advocated the economic benefits of a college degree. The US Census Bureau's 2002 Special Studies Report documented that employees without a high school degree made an average of \$23,400 per year; high school graduates made an average of \$30,400 a year; and those with a 4-year degree made \$52,200 a year (Cheeseman Day & Newburger, 2002).

The assumption that students would be able to pay for college in the present was also articulated during interviews. Students stated that there were several options available to pay for college, such as loans, scholarships, and grants, and that because of these options, financial concerns should not be a barrier to a student's plans to attend college. This logic can be found in Jenny's explanation of how a friend could pay for college.

Like you can come up with the money, no matter what though. Whether the school helps



you or whether like local people help you, or your family helps you. It is do-able. Like, you can do it. That's probably what I would say.

Additionally, students articulated a belief that once they secured a job after college, they would be able to pay off any loans or debt. For instance, when Jose told me about his mom's suggestion to go to the local community college in response to the high cost of tuition, he explained that he didn't believe that money would be a barrier to him. Although he told me that he didn't know how he would be able to pay for tuition, he explained that he anticipated that if he got into a good school he would either obtain scholarships or loans to pay for it, and would be able to pay off any debt after college.

J: Uh, my mom encouraged me to go to community college, and I'm like, "stop talking" (laughing)

H: You were like "stop talking"?

J: Yeah.

H: Why was she, how did she encourage you to go to community college?

J: Because of the money, of, ah, I'm like "don't worry, I know if I get into a good school, I'm gonna get scholarships. And if not, I'll just get loans and I'll pay them off like somehow, but I'm gonna pay 'em off."

Students received messages articulating the benefits going to college would have on their futures and the financial support available. They also articulated these messages themselves, citing statistics about the influence of a college degree on income and unemployment, suggesting that they were knowledgeable of the types of financial assistance available.

## Reaching One's Full Potential

Teachers, parents, and students articulated another tenet of the “College at All Costs” Discourse by suggesting that students needed to take advantage of the best educational opportunity available to reach their full potential. Further, a moral aspect emerged that suggested that students and parents should be willing to make sacrifices in order to take advantage of the best educational opportunity.

Articulation of the importance of taking advantage of the best educational opportunity can be seen in Maggie’s account of a conversation that she had with her teacher. Maggie, an academically high achieving senior, described her teacher’s insistence that she go to the “best school” she could, and that this would be “worth it.”

Umm the only push I got from a teacher, this is my English teacher, she's the IB [International Baccalaureate] coordinator, director of the program and stuff, umm, and she's kind of the type of person like, you know, she went to Oxford or something, and she's always the type of person with like her and her opinion, money doesn't matter. You should go to the best school you can. And, she just has that mentality about it. And umm, when I was, when I would tell her like "Oh, I'm considering either Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD) or Santa Fe" she'd always push me toward SCAD, 'cuz she knew it was a better school, you know, and even when I was still considering Santa Fe, and I'm like "well, it's so much cheaper" yada yada, and she's like “Really Maggie, like you need to do this. It's worth it, it's worth it.”

This tenet of the “College at All Costs” Discourse was also found in students’ own articulations of their future plans. In the fall, when I asked students what schools they were considering, their descriptions centered on the quality of the school or the program in which they

wanted to enroll. For instance, when I asked Isabel what schools she was considering, she described how her reasoning was based on the quality of the medical program.

H: Okay, umm do you have a particular school in mind?

I: Umm, CU Denver.

H: CU Denver?

I: Or Metro.

H: Were you? Yeah, you were there! When we went to CU Denver, nice. Is that, when did you choose that?

I: I kinda chose that before we, ummm, this summer.

H: Really?

I: When I heard about umm, the medical program that they have, that it's really good. So then I wanna go into umm, to be a PT, Physical Therapist.

Joannah's decision was also based on a reputation of having a good program. Joannah told me that she wanted to go to Penn State because her teacher went there and she had been told that it had a good athletic training program.

H: Umm, okay, so then, you were thinking Penn State, now where are you thinking? Why did you choose, why did you decide not Penn State?

J: I don't know. Just Penn State has a really good athletic training program and the teacher that teaches athletic training in this school went to Penn State so I think that's maybe the reason why I chose, I wanted to go there.

Students also articulated a willingness to make sacrifices for the sake of a good education. In many of my discussions with students, I would ask them about the role of their concerns (either in reference to earlier in the same interview or in a prior interview) on their

plans for college. Students responded by describing how that sacrifice (based on the concern) would be worth making for a good education. For instance, in our first interview, Chad described how much he enjoyed living in a rural area. He explained, however, that he understood that he would likely need to leave his rural haven in order to pursue college, stating “I like this environment more [rural]. I mean, if I was to go to college, I’d make the sacrifice of living in a city or a lesser environment so I can get my education.”

Other students also suggested a willingness to make similar sacrifices. For instance, when I asked Christian about his concerns with distance, he articulated a “College at all Costs” Discourse by suggesting that he would be willing to go anywhere if he “got to learn what [he] needed to.”

H: Okay. Would you have chosen one of those schools if it was further from home?

C: Probably, yeah.

H: So, if it was five hours or ten hours or twenty hours?

C: I would probably.

H: You would still go to Wyotech regardless of the distance?

C: Yeah.

H: Really?

C: Yeah.

H: Okay.

C: As long as I got to learn what I what I wanted to, what I needed to learn, then I'd be.

Similarly, when I asked Isabel about the role of distance in her decision, she responded that although it “would be difficult” she would be willing to move “if it’s a good school.”

- H: Okay, so umm, when you were thinking about the colleges you were going to attend, does like distance from home matter at all?
- I: Umm, not really. Not anymore. I feel like once you go off to college, you're kind of on your own, kind of meant to be more independent. And it's like kinda, I mean I, distance, I don't know. It doesn't really matter just because of what I wanna do. What I really wanna end up doing and, yeah.
- H: Okay. So then if, so you picked two schools that are fairly close, like within three hours I'd say.
- I: Three hours, yeah.
- H: So, if, say, there was a school that was, that you could get into with your grades and things like that, and that was really nice, how far would you be willing to move? Like would you be willing to go to, say, New York?
- I: Yeah, definitely.
- H: Yeah?
- I: Like another state? I, I would love to. I mean, it would be difficult but, if it's a good school, if it's what I'm looking for.

Parents also articulated a willingness to make sacrifices so that their children could take advantage of the best educational opportunity. Two students that I interviewed indicated that their mothers were willing to move with them to whatever college they chose. For instance, when I asked Pam how her mother was supportive, she explained that her mother was going to move with her to wherever she went to college.

H: Okay, that makes sense. Can you tell me how your parents are supportive? Can you give me examples?

P: Well, my mom wants to make sure that umm I apply to schools that I want to go to and she's willing to move with me.

H: Wow.

P: Umm to any place that I decide to go to.

Marta also articulated a similar type of sacrifice from her mother. When I asked if she would miss her mother, she said that her mother was willing to move with her.

H: Okay umm, do you think, cuz you said Arizona, do you think you'll miss your mom?

M: No, because she move with me.

H: She'll move with you?

M: Yeah.

H: That's great. Is she willing to move anywhere in particular?

M: No.

H: No? She's going to move wherever you go?

M: Yes, she think.

Teachers, parents, and students articulated a push for students to take advantage of the best educational opportunity available and to be willing to make sacrifices to do so. Students described being willing to sacrifice where they, and their families, lived for a good education, suggesting a moral dynamic to the tenet.

## Growth through Sacrifice

As well as viewing sacrifice as worthwhile for the opportunity to obtain a good education, the “College at All Costs” Discourse also suggested that sacrifice would also lead to new experiences which would provide the opportunity for students to grow and develop. For instance, Jenny described receiving messages from Mackenzie about the experience she would gain by leaving home to go to college rather than by staying at home and going to community college. She explained that she was Mackenzie told her the freshman experience was something she wouldn’t be able to get back, and that she would miss out on that experience if she went to Community College. In this passage, she discussed how she wanted to have “the college experience” and the “freshmen” experience.

- J: But, like, cuz I've debated going to Community College too, like that was my other option that I was thinking, but I kinda like, if I'm gonna have to pay for my student loans in the end, then I want like the college experience. If I'm going to pay for it, at the end of the day, then I want the experience of like going off to college and like living in the dorms and doing all the college stuff you know? That was like a big influential part of my decision to like apply to a 4- year and really like go for it as opposed to just slacking off senior year and just doing community college next year.
- H: And that changed, like ‘cuz this summer you went from thinking big, a big school like CU, right?
- J: Yeah, and then I like went there and the culture shock and all that stuff like changed my mind, like "No, I think I need to go to a smaller school"

H: Yup. And then, you, at the end of the semester, you were really pushing towards Community College, right?

J: Yeah cuz like, I've been talkin' to my parents a lot, and like, they're trying to coax me into Community College so that I'll stay home, cuz they don't want me to leave. But, like, I really like the whole, this particular semester of high school, like with all of the applying for colleges and like talking to Mackenzie and all of that, it's really changed my mind 'cuz I can always transfer out of the university back to Community College. You know, like I can never get that freshmen year back, if I was to do my freshmen and sophomore year at Community College, I can't like get that same freshmen year feel, you know, back so that's kinda like, it made my decision.

Similarly, Chad articulated this tenet, stating that adults told him that being uncomfortable would lead to personal growth. When I asked Chad why he began to look at out-of-state institutions, he told me that adults encouraged him to “explore places that you’re not comfortable in. So like, it’s just like, yeah, it shaped them as a better person.”

### **Community College is an Undesirable Option**

Another tenet of the “College at All Costs” Discourse frequently articulated was that community college wouldn’t let the students reach their potential and that it was an undesirable option. During interviews, students described the messages that they received from their family members articulating this undesirability for community colleges. For instance, Pam explained the moral value that Community College held by explaining that she didn’t want to go to community college because her family “looks down upon that.”



P: Well, I dunno that's really stressful because I do have to pay for college by myself. Ummm and now that college is super close, like I'm kinda lost on what I'm gonna do. Umm, like I don't really wanna go to a community college because a lot of my family looks down upon that.

H: Okay.

P: Like even my aunts and uncles have said like "Oh community college, that just makes you a loser. Like you need to go to university,"

Chad also articulated this tenet of the "College at All Costs" Discourse by explaining to me that while "nothing's wrong" with attending a community college, his family had set "higher expectations" for him.

Umm, I don't know. All my cousins are pretty prestigious in their schools. Like, a couple lawyers, a couple doctors and all spent a long time in school as well as my grandpa and grandma and, it's just, like unsaid, and it's not like you wanna go to community college or something. I mean, nothing's wrong with that, there's just, there's higher expectations if that makes sense.

Valentina also described receiving negative messages in regards to attending community college from her family. She explained that her father didn't think that community college was "college," and that he wanted her to go to a "big" school.

V: Umm, my dad didn't really like Community College. He doesn't, like in his eyes, he doesn't really consider it a college.

H: Yeah?

V: Yeah so he's like,

H: Why's that?

V: I don't, he's, probably cuz like, he doesn't feel like it's like university or college, he doesn't really know about the classes they offer there and everything, so he told me I had to go to like a big school.

Students' families articulated the tenet that community college was an undesirable option. Students expressed receiving messages about the moral value of going (e.g., community college “makes you a loser”), and about the overall worth of the quality of education that community colleges offer.

### **Summary**

Overall, school personnel, parents, and students articulated the “College at All Costs” Discourse. In doing so, they reproduced and supported its tenets that suggested that college was the normal step after high school; college was an automatically worthwhile investment; students needed to fulfill their academic potential at all costs; sacrifices would force students to grow, and community college was an undesirable option. In discussing these tenets, the underlying assumptions around college-going become apparent, which allows for one to analyze and critique these assumptions empirically.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter describes the many ways that parents, schools, and the CP coordinator pushed students towards 4-year college opportunities. In describing the types of support that they received, students described a division of labor between school-based support and parental support. The school-based support that students received tended to be delivered in a formal school setting, centering on information about academic eligibility, financial assistance, applications, and ACTs. The support students received from their parents centered on the importance of college, the importance of being academically successful, and understanding post-

secondary options. Parents delivered this support informally, drawing on the family's goals and history. The high level of parental support challenges the deficit assumptions in literature that suggest that parents either do not have the knowledge to provide students access college (students as rational decision makers) or that these college-going environments do not provide the support necessary for students to learn to value education (i.e., students are products of their environments).

Despite the distinct division of labor between school-based personnel and parents, school-based personnel and parents both articulated a "College at All Costs" Discourse. This "College at All Costs" Discourse reflected patterns in the way that college and decisions around college were discussed.

Given that these students had self-selected into a college access program, received support for college at school and from their parents, and received and articulated the "College at All Costs" Discourse, one can reasonably assume that these students would enroll in a 4-year institution after high school. These perspectives on college, however, are vulnerable to competing factors, which I will discuss in the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **COLLEGE DECISIONS**

This chapter analyzes the enrollment patterns of the thirteen seniors in the study, shifts in their college-going plans, and factors influencing those shifts. Despite receiving strong parental support and receiving and articulating a “College at All Costs” Discourse, as graduation approached, seniors began to scale back their plans from 4-year to 2-year institutions or from out-of-state to in-state institutions. As the seniors described the shift in their plans, they articulated locally situated factors that mediated their post-secondary decisions.

Locally situated factors are factors that are contextualized in students’ experiences, such as the pull of home or concern with finances. In contrast to the “College at All Costs” Discourse, which held a generic understanding of students’ experiences and pathways, locally situated factors acknowledged variation and contextualized these experiences.

Students most commonly drew on locally situated factors related to distance and money to explain their shift in plans. In telling me the influence of distance on their plans, students said that they had recognized the importance of coming home, the reality of moving, the impact on their families, and the influence of their parents. Students described the influence of money on their plans by explaining that they couldn’t rationalize the additional expense of going out-of-state, wanted to save money for the future, were mindful of the impact of cost on their families, and did not want to lose their current jobs.

Although the majority of students scaled back their plans to account for these locally situated factors, two students did not. These two students, Chad and Maggie, recognized the influence of money and distance on their decisions and yet persisted to enroll in out-of-state 4-year institutions. In looking for patterns to understand why these two students’ plans persisted in the face of locally situated factors, two explanations emerged. First, Chad and Maggie had

different experiences with parental concern for feasibility. Chad did not receive negative messages about feasibility from his mother, and while Maggie did, her father ultimately supported her decision. Second, both Chad and Maggie had grandparents who had graduated from college. These were the only two students who had family members who had successfully completed college, and they discussed the role of this on their decision making.

### Scaling Back Plans

During my interviews in May with high school seniors, it was evident that several students' plans had shifted. Although all of the seniors persisted with their plans to enroll in further post-secondary education, eleven of the thirteen seniors adjusted their plans to account for locally situated factors. Table 5 describes the change in students' plans, as well as the factors students identified as the motivation for the shift in post-secondary plans.

Table 5

#### *Changes in Seniors' College Plans*

Name	College Plan (Interview 1)	College Plan (Interview 2)	Change	Reason for Change
Juanita	Out-of-State, Public, 4-year	International, Public	N/A*	Grades, Near Extended Family (Distance)
Jenny	Unsure	In-State, Public, 4- year	N/A**	Feeling
Pam	International or Out-of State, 4- year	In-State, 2-year	Scaled-Back	Cost, Distance
Marta	Out-of-State, Public, 4-year	In-State, 2-year	Scaled-Back	Parental Influence, Cost
Nacho	In-State, 4-year	In-State, 2-year	Scaled-Back	Parental Influence, Cost
Hector	In-State, 4-year	In-State, 2-year	Scaled-Back	Cost, Distance,

				Parental Influence
Aaron	In-State, 4-year	In-State, 2-year	Scaled-Back	Distance, Size, Sports
Christian	Out-of-State, Private Automotive School	In-State, 2-year	Scaled-Back	Cost, Distance, Parental Influence
Valentina	Out-of-State, 4-year	In-State, 4-year	Scaled-Back	Cost, Distance, Parental Influence
Seth	Out-of-State, 4-year	In-State, 4-year	Scaled-Back	Cost
Tammy	4-year (Private In-State, or Public In-State or Out-of-State)	4-year, In-State	Scaled-Back	Cost, Distance
Maggie	Out-of-State	Out-of-State	No Change	None
Chad	4-year, In-State	4-year, Out-of-State	Enhanced	None

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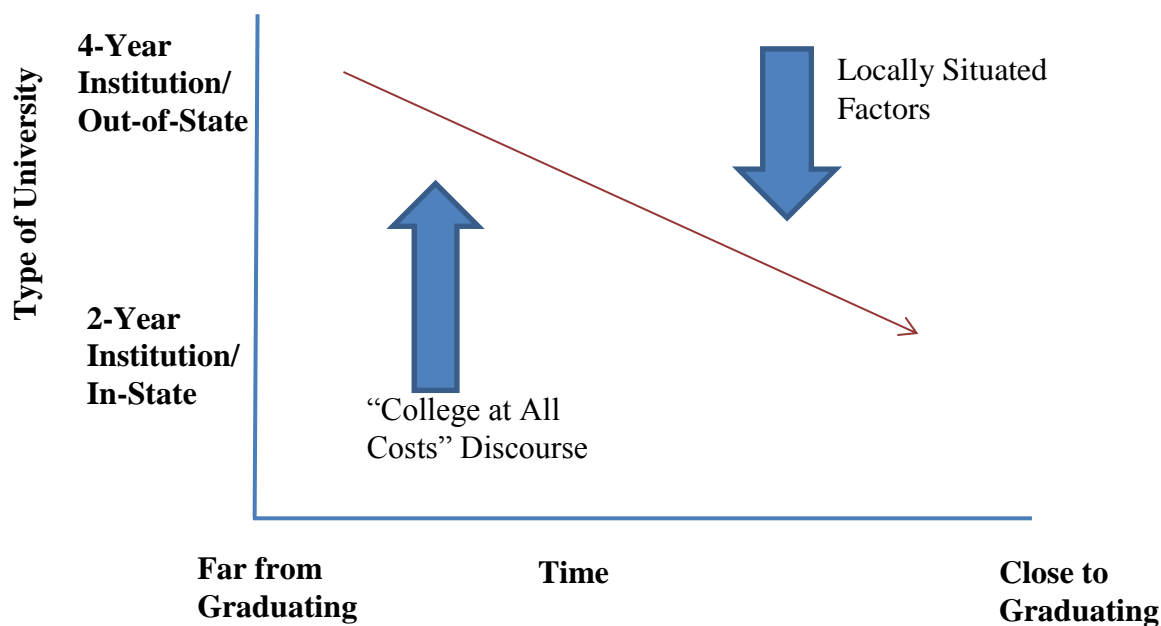
*\*While this was a university outside of the country, prestige cannot be assumed as it was not discussed. Decisions for going were largely based on having family close.*

*\*\*Jenny's plans were fairly sporadic during her senior year, from considering the local 2-year to going to a 4-year out-of state.*

Locally situated factors led nine students to not just adjust, but to scale their college-going plans back. Six of the thirteen seniors scaled back their plans from a 4-year to a 2-year institution, and three seniors scaled back their plans from enrolling in an out-of-state to an in-state university. This suggests that as graduation neared locally situated factors became more compelling for the seniors, and that they began to consider pursuing other post-secondary options to manage the tensions between going to college and locally situated factors. This relationship between closeness to graduation, type of university, and decision-making criteria ("College at All Costs Discourse and locally situated factors) can be seen in Figure 3, which illustrates that as

students moved closer to graduation, locally situated factors affected the type of post-secondary education.

*Figure 3.* Relationship of time, factors, and type of institution.



### **Locally Situated Factors**

Two of the most commonly articulated locally situated factors were distance and money. Although these were raised as concerns in the first interview as well, at that time they appeared less compelling or persuasive to the students than the “College at All Costs” Discourse. Recall that students discounted their own concerns about distance by saying that they would be willing to move for a good education and that it would be “worth it.” Further, students such as Jenny and Chad countered their own concerns about distance by endorsing the idea that the experience of moving away would help them grow. Concerns with money and cost of college also tended to be overlooked by students as part of the investment into their futures, and something that would be “worth it.” Students articulated a “College at All Costs” Discourse by suggesting that the loans

they took out now would be worth it in the future, and that their future jobs would be able to pay off those loans.

As graduation neared, however, these concerns took a larger role in the students' planning and became more salient in deciding their post-secondary plans. In telling me about the influence of distance on their plans, students explained that they realized that they wanted to be able to come home, that they weren't ready to move, the impact of moving on their families (or the impact of their families moving with them), and that their parents wouldn't let them move that far from home. Money was also an issue that came up, with students stating that they couldn't rationalize the additional expense of out-of-state tuition, wanted to save money for the family, and wanted to keep their current jobs.

**Distance.** Students described the concerns that developed around the necessity of moving away from their families. In many instances, the concern with distance appeared to be a proxy for a concern with maintaining relationships. For instance, Jenny discussed the influence distance had on her decision. She explained that she had considered a school in Montana, but that the distance had influenced her decision. She described the importance of having the ability to come home for a weekend if she needed emotional support.

I really considered moving, like going to MSU over in Montana. Like they were a big contender with me when I was coming down to my final decisions, and so they're a good ten hours, 11 hours away, maybe even more actually. Umm, but that definitely was like one of the reasons I didn't want to go there, that and out of state tuition, but, you know, oh well. Umm, but I liked the idea that if I'm like having a really bad week, then I can just drive home you know and hang out with my parents and then like come back to, you



know, I don't want to say reality, but like, come back to college and stuff.

Pam described a drastic change in her plans, with her plans shifting from matriculating to a University in Alaska or England, to now staying in Forest and going to the local community college. When I asked her what shifted her plans, she explained that staying in the area would allow her to keep her jobs and that she was just “not ready to leave yet.”

Yeah. I dunno, I realized that I was taking this place for granted. I guess. Like, being in Forest, like, with skiing and everything, I'm really passionate about skiing. And I wanna get really good at it, and so, being like right there, and I have two really good jobs. I dunno, I just, I'm not ready to leave yet.

Marta also described the importance of distance to her mother. She explained that while her mother said she was willing to move with her, it was important to stay in the area so her mother, who spoke limited English, could continue to work.

M: I wanna stay close

H: Yeah? Why did you want to stay close?

M: Because I, my mom uh, is my support.

H: Okay

M: So I stay with her always (laughs)

H: Okay

M: Yeah, so.

H: Okay. So then, umm, did your, your mom cares about the distance from home that you're, that LCC is? Or that you go to?

M: No.

H: No?

M: She say if, if, umm, far away, she says she's going with me but

H: Okay

M: But I need to think because her, she doesn't speak English

H: Uh huh

M: So, she have a work here.

Valentina also suggested that she was going to stay closer because of her parents. She explained that she planned to stay so that her parents could retire.

H: So, umm, how does distance matter as far as like your folks retiring and all of that?

V: There is, it's just like a cultural thing, I would say. 'Cuz my, umm, the way I was raised is like family always like stays together. And like my dad always said, since I was little "Where ever you go, we're gonna go"

H: Oh

V: And I was like, "Well Dad, it's my time to uh (*laughs*) kinda leave and grow up" and he just, he was like, "Well if you leave, we won't retire for like maybe another five years because we don't wanna leave you on your own." And I was like "Well you guys have been working so much that I'd rather stay here, that way you guys can retire." And like all my family is like in Colorado, like my brothers, they all stayed less than an hour away from my parents. I'm just like, "well."

Students not only changed their plans to accommodate their parents' needs, but at times parents made a decision around a specific option. In some cases, parents responded to the concern of being separated from their children by removing the option. In this conversation,

Christian describes how his parents vetoed the option to leave home and enroll in a school in California.

C: So, I'm, I wanted to go to California, to a school, to the Wyotech school there.

H: Yeah?

C: But they [parents], they were like "No, it's too far away"

H: They said no?

C: They were like "It's too far away, we want you to be close"

H: So they told you that?

C: Yeah, they're like "We don't want you to go that far," I mean, it's not like they don't want me to go to like, the schools thing, it's just like too far away from them.

Despite the "College at All Costs" Discourse that students articulated, suggesting that they should be willing to move for a good education and that moving would help them grow, as graduation neared, distance became a more influential factor in their plans. Distance not only had an impact on their futures, but also on their families' futures.

The interview data suggested that proximity to graduation was related to students' prioritizing distance from home in their decisions. Second semester seniors were more likely to cite distance as an important factor in their plans than younger students. In the fall interview, seniors tended to respond like all of the other students, but in the spring interview they tended to describe how their plans had shifted in response to concerns around distance.

**Financially oriented.** Students also explained that money influenced the scaling back of their post-secondary plans. Eight students used money to explain their shift from considering an out-of-state school to enrolling in an in-state school, or from considering a 4-year school to enrolling in a community college. Students told me that they couldn't rationalize the addition

expense of out-of-state tuition; they wanted to save money to help their family, or wanted to be able to keep the job they had.

Some students couldn't justify paying the additional cost of out-of-state tuition. For instance, although Set described how he wanted the opportunity of attending an out-of-state university, ultimately he enrolled in a local state school because of the cost.

S: Like, if I go to Western Washington, the environment will be just like here. It'll be pretty much outdoor stuff and that would be awesome. And it'd be out-of-state, which is what I wanna do.

....

S: No my, I mean the only thing is, uh paying for it.

H: Paying for it?

S: Yeah, out-of-state tuition is a lot more.

H: Mhmm.

S: Just, you know, it sucks though. Like I'm gonna go, I'll probably end up going in-state, but if I can get a bunch of scholarships then, send me out-of-state. I will go out-of state.

H: Really, cuz it sounds like you made this, you've been talking about how much you want to go out of state, now you're saying you'll probably go in-state? like

S: Yeah, I really wanna go out-of-state, like I want, that's what I want but you know, if it can't happen, then it can't happen. I'll try to make it happen.

In a follow up interview, Seth confirmed that he chose to stay in Colorado for college because of the cost. He explained that "Yeah, I wanted to get out of state but I can't afford it so I'm bummed. Going to Fort Lewis."

Tammy also described the impact of money on her decision. When I asked why she chose the University of Colorado- Colorado Springs over Arizona State University, she explained that Colorado Springs was more affordable than going out-of-state and would allow her to keep her job.

T: Well, I just, I really like ASU. But Colorado Springs is closer to home and I like them equally as much. So I figured Colorado Springs is cheaper, it's closer to home, so

H: Okay.

T: Yeah, and if then, if I wanna transfer somewhere else for grad school I can, but I figured that the first two years it would be better to be closer, so.

H: Okay, that makes sense. Why do you think it'd be better to be closer for your first couple of years?

T: Well, just 'cuz I know that I'm keeping my job up here also.

H: Mhmm.

T: So it'll be nice to be able to come here and make money still sometimes and if I wanna come home I can. And just having that, and I have some family down there too, so.

Valentina explained that her motivation for staying in-state and not going to New Mexico was related to her parents' retirement. As I have discussed previously, Valentina's parents prioritized staying close as a family; leading led Valentina to scale back her plans from going to New Mexico to staying in-state. She explained that this decision had a lot to do with helping her family save money.

Umm, just 'cuz my parents are deciding to retire pretty soon, and I don't wanna have to

like move to a different state and like pay all that, while they should be saving up their money and also, like, financially, Mesa was like the better choice.

Students also explained being influenced by the opportunity to pay a lower tuition to save money. For instance, Pam explained that going to the local community college would allow her to keep her jobs and save money. Similarly, Hector described the financial motivation for Community College as being the ability to save money, both because of the lowered costs per credit and by living at home and continuing to be supported by his family.

Hctr: I just started thinking about it more [community college] when I got this, like some scholarships, and I just started thinking more about money, you know. ‘Cuz ah, my parents don't have a lot of money they can probably give me, so I just, I just started thinking about it a lot more and I mean the idea of going to Community College for at least a year is really good cuz they have, they have umm a lot of college classes or credits that can transfer into a lot of colleges. Especially Metro State and stuff.

H: Okay

Hctr: And umm, well yeah I mean, it's not a bad idea either, so

H: Right. Okay, so you're thinking of starting there, and then transferring, and it's just for the money?

Hctr: Well yeah, yeah, cuz I'd save a lot of money on housing, food, cuz I'll still live with my parents.

Money was a factor that influenced eight students' post-secondary education plans.

Students explained that they scaled back their plans because they couldn't justify the additional

expense, wanting to save money to help their family, wanting to save money for their own futures, or not wanting to give up a current job.

### **Persistence of the “College at All Costs” Discourse**

Despite scaling back their plans from a 4-year university to a 2-year community college, or an out-of-state to an in-state institution, students tended to justify the change in their decisions by drawing on the tenets of the “College at All Costs” Discourse. In their explanations of why they scaled back their plans, a common story emerged. After telling me the locally situated factors that shifted their plans, students would describe the high quality of the institution they had chosen. Additionally, students explained this shift as a temporary response to locally situated factors, such as distance or cost by describing their eventual plans to transfer.

Many students who scaled back their plans explained not only the locally situated factors that influenced their plans, but also why they had shifted to a particular institution. For instance, Pam’s decision to go to the local community college contradicted her previous statement about the prestige and quality of a community college, in which she stated that community college made her “a loser.” As she described her reasoning for going to LCC (Local Community College) the following fall, however, she cited that going to LCC wasn’t due to a lack of ability on her part, and that Alaska and Denver University accepted her as well. Rather, she explained, her shift in plans was related to the finding that LCC was “in the top best umm community colleges” and she would also be able to “save money.”

P: I’m choosing LCC because it’s here, and it, and I mean, I did research on it, it’s like in the top best umm community colleges.

H: Right

P: And just, you know, save money instead of going to like a university. 'Cuz I got accepted to Alaska, and I got accepted to DU.

H: Congratulations, that's huge!

P: Yeah, but I just, I don't have the money to go to DU right now, you know, 'cuz it's fifty seven thousand a year.

Seth also highlighted the academic benefits of his decision. During my interview with him in the spring, Seth explained how plans changed from going out-of-state to a local university. As he described his new college plan, he told me about the benefits of the school, such as the unique major that the school offered.

H: So is there anything besides money that kinda changed your mind?

S: Umm, no, I mean, I dunno, this, and a, this Adventure Education major itself was just awesome, so

H: Yeah? Okay.

S: I'm really excited to just do that.

Jane also explained that part of her reasoning for going to the local community college was because of the improvement of the program. She explained her decision as a way to “take advantage” of the low cost of a good education.

H: Okay, so it's close. Umm, so what else, why else would you consider Community College? Or why are you thinking about it?

J: I don't know, and I guess that their program has improved a lot over the couple of years, so I dunno. I don't know why not, so might as well take advantage of something that is close to home and less expensive than something else might be.

H: Something else like?



J: Like a four year college in a different state.

Many students also described plans to eventually transfer to a 2-year institution.

Valentina explained that she had already been accepted to New Mexico, but was scaling her plans back temporarily in response to her parents' retirement. She told me that despite scaling back her plans, she was planning to eventually transfer to her dream medical school in New Mexico.

H: So where have you decided to go? Or have you decided yet?

V: So I decided to go to Colorado Mesa University.

H: Nice

V: In Grand Junction. Annnd I'm thinking about transferring, 'cuz I also got accepted to University New Mexico in Albuquerque. I was thinking about transferring maybe my second year over there.

H: Okay

V: Just cuz, I dunno, that's where my dream medical school is also.

Christian also described the impermanence of his decision, explaining to me that while he is going to Junior College to save money, he will eventually go to Private Automotive to reach his academic potential.

C: I mean I still, I still wanna go but I mean like the thing that it's a lot of money and so like, and like the differences is like the money cuz it's cheaper to go to Junior College than to, to Private Automotive School, so I just pretty much chose to go to Junior College instead of Private Automotive School.

H: Okay.

C: And what I plan to do is actually, if I, once I finish at Junior College, probably just go to Private Automotive School for what I want to do. For like customization and, and stuff like that. Just do that.

Tammy also changed her plans from an out-of-state university to an in-state university due to concerns with distance and cost. She, like her peers, suggested that this was a temporary decision. Rather than planning to transfer in a year or so, however, she planned to eventually attain that out-of-state experience by “transfer[ing] somewhere else for grad school.”

In summary, students frequently described the reasons that they chose another institution by highlighting the academic quality of the program or by clarifying that the shift in their plans was temporary and that they were eventually going to attend the university they first cited.

### **College Decision-Making Reported in Surveys**

Survey data were used to triangulate and glean more meaning from the interview data. One of the major findings of the interviews was that a majority of students scaled back their plans from the fall to spring interviews, describing these changes as a response to locally situated factors in their lives. This suggests that as students neared graduation, locally situated factors became more salient and students scaled back their plans to account for these factors.

Given the interview data, I hypothesized that parental support for a 2-year or a 4-year institution would also change as students approached graduation and that seniors would be more likely to receive messages in support of 2-year institutions. I examined a construct I termed “perceptions of parental support for 2- vs 4-year institutions,” which measured students’ perceptions of their parents support for of 2-year institutions or 4-year institutions. I selected three items that measured this construct. These were phrased as true and false statements, with answers of “true” suggesting support of a two year, and “false” suggesting support of a four year.

- Item 8: When discussing what I am going to do after I graduate high school, my parents usually suggest that I go to a two year college instead of four year college.
- Item 22: When discussing what I am going to do after I graduate high school, my parents think it is a smart decision for me to go start at a two year college and work to save money.
- Item 26: When discussing what I am going to do when I graduate high school, my parents have suggested that it is a better decision for me to go start at a two year college than a four year college.

The construct of Perceptions of Support for 2- vs 4-year Institutions had an alpha of .53, which was fairly low. This suggested that 53% of the variability in scores was caused by true differences and that the standard error of measurement was 47%. Thus, the reliability of the items' response scores was low.

Table 6 illustrates the aggregate averages by grade. This was important as it allowed me to compare seniors' responses in contrast with their peers.

Table 6

<i>Parental Support for Two Year College</i>	
Freshmen	23
Sophomores	33
Juniors	29
Seniors	36

\*Figures expressed in percent agreement

The scores suggest that overall there was no obvious pattern in students' responses, suggesting that students' exposure to messages supporting 2-year institutions were consistent over time. In contrast, students did show a shift in their plans. This suggests that parental messages supporting 2-year institutions only became salient as graduation neared. Given the low reliability, however, these findings should be used with caution.

This chapter also found that students used concerns with distance and money to account for their scaled back plans. Concerns with distance were centered around relationships, and concerns with not being able to come home, the reality of moving, the impact on their families, and constraints that their parents put on their decisions. Students' concerns with money revolved around the need to save money, the impact of the cost on their family, and ability to keep a current job.

I used the items in the survey to examine whether this pattern held, and whether seniors responded to items about "perceptions of influence of distance on college-going decisions" differently than their younger peers. The surveys were given in May, which allowed me to measure the responses of second semester seniors against other students.

I also chose a set of items to measure students' perceptions of the influence of distance on college-going decisions" to measure students' perceptions of the impact distance had on the higher education institutions they were considering. I selected three items to measure this construct, each were true and false statements, with answers of "true" suggesting strong impact of distance, and "false" suggesting low impact of distance:

- Item 11: Distance from home is the deciding factor in where I choose to go to college.
- Item 20: How far from home I go to college is more important than the college I go to.
- Item 39: My parents care how far away from home I go to college.

Table 7 illustrates the students' agreement with the items by grade. Juniors indicated a much lower level agreement to the items than their sophomore and freshman peers. Seniors did not indicate a substantial difference in responding than their freshmen and sophomore peers.

Table 7

<i>Percent Placing High Value on Distance</i>	
Freshmen	42
Sophomores	43
Juniors	21
Seniors	47

\*Figures expressed in percent agreement

These survey findings did not support the interview findings that suggested that distance became a more salient factor in students' college going plans as they approached graduation. With the exception of junior year, there was not a large difference in the seniors' responses in contrast to other grade level responses. Thus, the interview and ethnographic findings that seniors were more likely to be concerned with distance were not reflected in the survey results.

While these survey data may be useful in understanding the experiences of a larger pool of students, the results should be used with caution. I used Cronbach's Alpha as a tool to estimate the reliability of the items' response scores. The construct of *Perceptions of the Influence of Distance on College-Going Decisions* for rural students by grade had an alpha of .73, suggesting that although the items accounted for 73% of true scores, the standard error of measurement (SEM) was 23%. Although this number is acceptable, it is important to recognize that it means that roughly a quarter of the variability was due to error.

One explanation of why age-related patterns in the survey responses did not match patterns in the interviews could be that the items in the survey did not measure what they were intended to measure. Given findings of the pervasiveness of the "College at All Costs" Discourse, I hypothesize that the items I created in the survey were not able to disentangle students' decisions from the "College at All Costs" Discourse. For instance, I feel that it is possible that even if a student had changed his or her plans because of distance, he or she may have justified this change in plans with explanations fitting more closely to the "College at All

Costs” Discourse, and responded to the survey items that distance did not have a large impact on their decision.

Another explanation is that the interview sample was not representative of the program participants. It is possible that the stories of the students I interviewed were outliers in relation to the broader College Prep program. I discuss implications of this divergence of results in the Discussion chapter.

### **Outliers in the Interview Sample**

While money and distance were described as factors in students’ post-secondary education decisions, not all students scaled back their plans in response to the presence of these factors. Of the thirteen students interviewed, two didn’t have set plans and so charting their movement wasn’t possible, nine scaled back their plans, and two students (Maggie and Chad) persisted in their initial plans. Although Maggie and Chad voiced concerns with money and distance from home, they each persisted in their plans to attend an out-of-state 4-year institution.

In attempting to understand this difference in trajectories, I observed two patterns. First, Maggie and Chad both had different experiences with parental concern for feasibility than their peers. Second, both Maggie and Chad also had grandparents who had graduated from college, giving them positive histories of college-going.

### **Presence of Locally Situated Factors**

Although both Maggie and Chad experienced concerns with distance and money, both of these students persisted in their post-secondary educational plans. Although Maggie was concerned about the cost of college and understood that she could graduate nearly debt free at Santa Fe, she ultimately chose to persist in her plans to go across the country to the much more prestigious and expensive Savannah College of Art and Design. Similarly, Chad expressed

concern with the distance that he would be from home and his ability to maintain those relationships, and yet persisted in his plans to go to a 4-year, out-of-state university.

Money was an important factor in Maggie's decision, which she referred to in both her fall and spring interviews. She initially referred to the influence of money on her decision in telling me about a conversation with her IB Coordinator, who pushed her to go to Savannah College of Art and Design despite her concern with the cost. This concern with cost continued through her spring semester, until she visited Santa Fe. In this passage, Maggie described how she made her decision and the role of money in that decision.

M: Umm yeah, and so, you know, I kinda went there [Santa Fe] and I just, I didn't really, I didn't like it. And umm, and I kinda like sat down for a while and by that point I had so like just narrowed down to one of, either Santa Fe or Savannah. And Savannah is significantly more expensive, you know. Like over the course of the three years I'm there, because I get to skip a year, because of my IB [International Baccalaureate] credits, over the course of three years I'm there, it's gonna be like thirty-two thousand dollars that I'll need to pay. Umm, which I guess isn't bad in comparison to a lot of different schools. Like that, that's the cost of a year and a half at CU, you know? Umm, so anyway, I umm, basically thought about it and I thought if I wanna bother going to college at all, it might as well be a really good education. And SCAD [Savannah College of Art and Design] is a pretty renowned, well known, you know, highly advanced art school. So

H: Savannah College of Art and Design?

M: Mhmm. So I've decided to go to Savannah, Georgia.

Similarly, locally situated factors were also concerns for Chad. Chad was concerned about the distance from home and his relationship with his family. For instance, in discussing the factors influencing his college choice, Chad discussed a concern with his ability to maintain both physical and relational connectedness with his family. He explained that he was already “thinking ahead” and worried about both the commute and staying in touch with his family.

H: Do you have any hesitancies about leaving for college? You said you wanted to stay in state for the money, but are there any other things?

C: I dunno. Just the commute to, like back to my old life, like what it...

H: So you're worried about the commute? Or about the ability to stay in touch with your family?

C: Well, I don't wanna be too far that it, it's gonna it takes so long to have a drive back to here.

H: Right.

C: Just thinkin' ahead too.

Despite these concerns with distance and money, neither Maggie nor Chad's plans were scaled back. In trying to understand factors that separated Maggie and Chad from the others who scaled back their plans, two factors emerged that appeared to mediate student movement in college decisions from the first to the second interview. The first pattern was that messages students indicated receiving from their parents about feasible college options appeared to have an influence on the type of school in which they ultimately chose to enroll. The second pattern was the influence of family members' experiences with college on student decisions around where to enroll.



### **Parental Concern with Feasibility of Options**

In describing factors that influenced their decisions, students explained that their parents' initial concerns with feasibility influenced the impact that locally situated factors had on them. In fact, five of the ten students who changed their initial college plan cited that they were influenced by their parents' concerns with feasibility. Further, four of the five students who ultimately adjusted their plans to attend the local community college cited parental concern with feasibility as a factor in their decision. In contrast, Chad and Maggie didn't discuss having these experiences. Chad never discussed hearing concerns from his mom about the feasibility of a 4-year institution, and while Maggie's father did express concern with feasibility, he ultimately supported her decision.

It is important to disentangle parental concerns around feasibility from parental messages about college. Many parents sent contradictory messages around college-going. For instance, Valentina explained to me the importance her parents placed on going to a good college. She was the student I cited earlier who believed that her father didn't consider a Community College a college. She also explained that her father told her that college was expected, telling me that "My, my, my dad's always the one that's told me like, you, you're only options are going to school and that's it."

However, Valentina also received messages from her parents about their concern with the feasibility of college, which contradicted these previous quotes. When I asked her about messages that she received, she told me that her father had suggested that given the cost of college, she should go to a community college instead of a university.

H: Okay. So do you ever have, cuz it's expensive and your dad's helping you pay for it you said, do you ever hear anything not supportive or bad about just going to college?

V: Well, my dad, he always talks about just money-wise he's all like, he just doesn't want me to take out grants or loans. So he's always just saying "Maybe there's community college you can go to instead of a big university."

When I followed-up with her in the spring, despite being accepted, Valentina had decided to postpone her plans to attend the University of New Mexico. She explained that because her parents were retiring, she didn't want to go to an out-of-state school that would be more expensive, but that she was planning to attend later.

H: So where have you decided to go? Or have you decided yet?

V: So I decided to go to Local University [in-state]

H: Nice

V: In [small town]. Annnd I'm thinking about transferring, 'cuz I also got accepted to University New Mexico in Albuquerque. I was thinking about transferring maybe my second year over there.

Other students also recognized the impact of their parents' messages around feasibility on their post-secondary education plans. Many of the students described the impact of their parents on their final decision. For instance, Hector explained how his mother's suggestion that he had previously ignored ultimately influenced his decision.

H: Yeah, you were looking at Metro [In-State]. I'm trying to remember back. So where are you planning now?

Hctr: Well, I thought about it more, and my mom kinda talked me into it. About the idea of going to LCC, for maybe a year or two. But I'm thinking of just going for a year.

H: To LCC?

Hctr: Yeah. And take the pre-requisite classes. Get those done with, and then transfer to Metro State or CU of Denver. I'm still not really sure which of those.

H: Okay. So how did your mom talk you into it?

Hctr: Umm, well she told me from a while ago maybe just to go to LCC, but I didn't think much about it.

H: Mhmm.

Hctr: And then later I just started thinking about it more when I got this, like some scholarships, and I just started thinking more about money, you know. 'Cuz ah, my parents don't have a lot of money they can probably give me, so I just, I just started thinking about it a lot more and I mean the idea of going to LCC for at least a year is really good cuz they have, they have umm a lot of college classes or credits that can transfer into a lot of colleges. Especially Metro State and stuff.

While parental messages that suggested a concern with feasibility appeared to increase the salience of locally situated factors such as money and distance, it is important to note the parental messages around feasibility that Chad and Maggie received. Chad never discussed his mom being concerned with the feasibility of college. Even though he expressed concern about the distance from home, he still planned to go out-of-state. Maggie, however, did express her father's concern with feasibility. She expressed how her father was concerned with her moving far away and the cost of going:

So that was always my big thing with Savannah, it's like, you know, I, 'cuz my dad would always talk about, well Santa Fe is so much cheaper, and I was always thinking well, you go to college to get a job, and Savanah's better for that, you know? Like at Savannah you have a better chance of finding a really good job right off the bat. So

anyways, so at first he would just never entertain the idea, and I think, I know that he's pretty much accepted it now, 'cuz after I initially, 'cuz I was in Santa Fe with my, er, in Santa Fe with my grandma my aunt, and I went and visited the school and I called him and told him about it, I'm like yeah, I'm pretty I'm just gonna go to Savannah, 'cuz I don't like it here. Like he argued with me again, like with that phone conversation, and then by the time I got back, it's like, he never really said anything negative about it again, he was kinda always just like "Yeah" and ha, like talking about how we're gonna move out there, er, how he was gonna help me move out there and that kinda thing, so, I think he's pretty much over it.

Although Maggie discussed her father's concern with the distance and the cost, she said that didn't push back on it after she returned home from the college visit. Further, she explained that while it wasn't her father's top choice, he was beginning to support her decision and discuss visiting her with her aunt:

He wanted me to go to Santa Fe really bad, but I think after I kind of like explained why I didn't want to and why I really thought that Savannah was the better choice, and he had kinda like, accepted it and stopped trying to argue with it or whatever, umm, I mean, he's fine about it. Like I think he, you know, like I don't, it's not like my family's not gonna miss me or anything, but I, he's gotten excited about it in a way too. You know, he talks, like my aunt talks about doing a road trip out there and my dad talks about like, going out there to do this one trail or something that starts in Savannah, I don't know, so.

Although Maggie said that her father's feelings weren't a large factor in her decision, she brought him up a number of times. While her experiences were similar to other students who had

parents who expressed concern with the feasibility of moving far away for college or the costs associated with going to college, Maggie's experience differs in that her father eventually supported her decision to enroll in the college she wanted to attend.

Overall, students suggested that their parents' concerns with feasibility influenced their decisions. The two students who were outliers, however, and didn't scale back their plans described receiving different experiences. Chad explained that his mom hadn't discussed concerns about feasibility with him, and while Maggie's father had concerns, he ultimately supported her when she made her decision.

### **Family History**

Another factor that differentiated Chad and Maggie's experiences from their peers was a family history of college-going. Although Chad and Maggie both had concerns with locally situated factors, their family history with college-going appeared to influence their ultimate decision and persistence in a 4-year, out-of-state university.

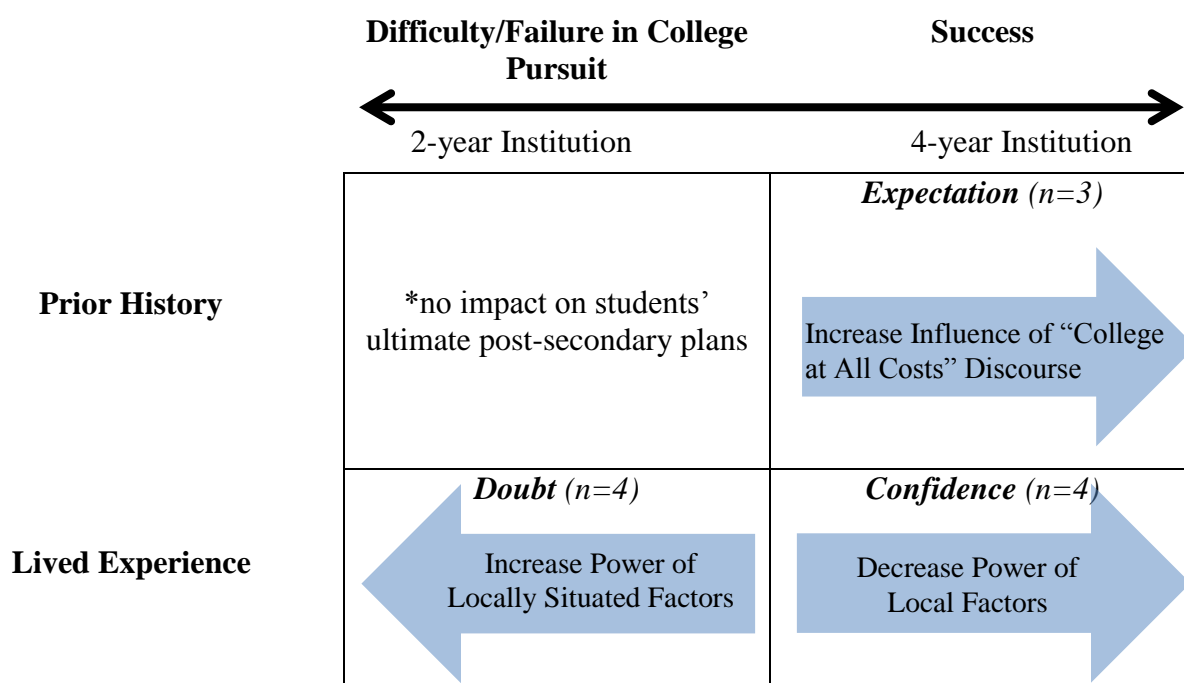
In describing their future plans, students drew from their family histories. Since the students I interviewed were in a college access program for first-generation high school students, very few of them had family members that had gone, or were going, to college. During interviews, students who had family members who had gone to, or attempted to go to, college discussed the impact of that on their own plans.

Students explained the influence of three types of family history with college going. Having a family member from a previous generation (such as a grandparent) successfully complete college tended to lead to students experiencing and exhibiting expectation in their own plans for college, which appeared to strengthen their resolve to go to a good college. Students described that having a family member who was currently and successfully going to college strengthened their confidence in their own college plans. And finally, students who had a family

member who they had watched fail in their college-going pursuits (such as a sibling or a cousin) tended to create doubt in their own college plans. These relationships are illustrated below in Figure 4.

The only experience that did not appear to influence students' future plans was to have a family member from a prior generation (such as a parent or grandparent) fail in their pursuit of college. Having a family member with this experience tended to simply feed into the "College at All Costs" Discourse, but have no impact on students' ultimate plans.

Figure 4. Influence of family history.



**Expectation.** Because these students were all part of a program for first-generation, low-income college-bound students, it was uncommon for a student to describe a family member who had successfully gone to college before they were born. In fact, only Maggie and Chad had grandparents who had already completed college. Having a family member who had already gone to college worked to increase the influence of societally informed Discourses, which worked for pushing them towards a more prestigious type of college. Both Maggie and Chad

described the impact of having grandparents who had gone to college as being one of expectation, which pushed them towards college.

This feeling of “expectation” can be illustrated through Chad’s explanation of his grandfather’s influence on his future educational goals. Chad described the impact of his grandfather having graduated from college on his family’s expectations for himself, explaining that his grandfather had “kinda already said” that he was going to college after high school, and that this was something that his family had also accepted.

H: Umm, and so, if we use, if you don't mind I'd like to switch gears and hear about how, what your family, family and friends think about college.

C: Umm, it's kinda already said that I'm, I am going to college.

H: By whom?

C: Uh, my grandfather

H: Your grandfather?

C: Yeah. And he really, he was a doctor, a surgeon, and he really pushes education on us.

H: Okay.

C: We accept it. I mean, we know it's a good thing and it'll get us places.

H: Who's we?

C: My family. My brothers and I, we all plan on going through college.

While Maggie’s father did not initially appear to support her plan to go to college, she said that her relationship with her grandparents helped to motivate her to continue. Because of her relationship with her grandparents who had gone to college, Maggie said that she was able to compare her grandparents’ experiences and lifestyles against her father’s. Maggie had the

support of her grandparents, who had both graduated from college, providing her with a “college expectation” and she described college being “the way you are supposed to.” Maggie illustrates this feeling of expectation on a societal level. In this passage, she described her grandparents’ financial stability and how they did “things the way you’re supposed to,” which framed going to college as the normative next step after high school.

M: You know, I don't, I don't know exactly why I side with my grandparents more. Like I think if I think about it logically, I'm like, well my grandparents do really well. Like they own their own house and they like they have nice things and they're happy and like they did their career and they retired and like they did it the way you're supposed to. And my dad is encouraging me not go, and he dropped out, and he had a kid at nineteen and like he's been in a really like, we've never like been financially secure. But I don't think like that ever crossed my mind when I was young.

H: mhmm

M: Umm, I don't know. I think I've just always like had a lot of respect for my grandparents.

H: Okay

M: Not to say I necessarily don't have that for my dad but, like, I like, for me I just hold my grandparents in a really high esteem, I guess.

**Confidence.** Students described having a family member who was currently attending college as reinforcing their own confidence in going to college. Chad described having family members who currently attended college. This appeared to also positively impact his enrollment plans:



Yeah. I mean, like I wanna do well and I don't wanna, it's kinda weird cuz like in their eyes, there's like a certain level, I mean, it's not like preppy or like high achievers, it's just like a family thing, so, you wanna go to a more prestigious school and do well. It's just kinda expected in what, what you sh, would do with your life. It's what you make it so where you go to school can absolutely help.

Other students also voiced the impact of having a family member currently attending college. For instance, Juanita explained to me how she had heard that “most” people drop out during their first year of college, but that her cousins presently attended college. Her cousins’ success in college caused her to question what she had heard, and to view finishing college as a foreseeable possibility in her future:

Like, I've heard that not many, that most people, their first year they always drop out and stuff like that. But my cousins, like, they go to school and this is like their third year and they haven't dropped out or anything and they're just like, "oh, it's actually pretty cool. It's nothing like high school, like you study what you wanna study. It's a lot better and more flexible, and like more flexible, even though you have more homework."

**Doubt.** Whereas Chad and Juanita experienced their cousins’ successful pursuit to finish college, not all experiences were supportive. A more common experience that students shared was watching a close family member fail to attain a college degree. Having a sibling or cousin not succeed in their pursuit of college appeared to create a feeling of doubt in students.

For instance, when I asked Alej where she wanted to go to college, her decision to go to school in state appeared related to her brother’s experience with not going to college.

A: And, I dunno. Kinda considering that my brother kinda wanted to go to California and he didn't go because we didn't have enough money.

H: Mhmm,

A: So, I just kinda like want to stay here. And like, kinda pay less.

H: So that it doesn't, so the same thing doesn't happen?

A: Yeah.

H: Okay.

A: So like I still have the opportunity of going.

When I asked her what happened, she explained although the university had accepted her her brother, something happened during the process that she didn't understand, but that impacted her brother's plans to go to college.

Umm, well he like did the application, like got cards and everything. And like the letters, but then they like didn't approve the, I dunno, they didn't approve something in it, and it ended up being too much money and then, yeah.

Although Alej discussed her plans to attend a more affordable, in-state university because she didn't want to have the same experience as her brother, her brother's experience also appeared to influence her confidence in her ability to go to college in general. Later, when we discussed this again, she described how although she wants to be a psychologist, she is also considering beauty school as an option "if a college doesn't work."

H: Okay, so then where are you thinking about going?

A: What do you mean?

H: Like what school? Have you thought about any yet?

A: Mmm mmm not yet. I have no idea.

H: No? Okay. Did you your thinking change after the field trip we went on?

A: Ummm

H: In March? Remember how we went to like Otero and

A: Yeah, well I liked Otero 'cuz of their like kinda beauty but (laughs) I dunno, I just kinda really wanna shoot for psychology.

H: Okay

A: So yeah, but I'm, I'm thinking if, that if a college doesn't work, I feel like umm that could be an option.

Ana had a similar experience. Her older sister went to college in New Mexico and had to drop out because of the cost. This not only impacted Ana's belief around her ability to be successful in college, but it also impacted her parents' expectations. In the following conversation, we see the impact of Ana's sister on her parents' aspirations for her.

A: Mhmm, like my older sister. She is a sophomore in college now. But she went to New Mexico.

H: Oh, wow.

A: And that was like really hard on my parents and like there was like a whole bunch of issues, so she had to come back. So my parents are like a little,

H: Like issues?

A: Like with scholarships and having to pay and everything.

H: Okay

A: So my parents don't want me to go too far.

H: Cuz they think the distance was part of her issues?

A: Mhmm. Yeah, they're like "Well, she wasn't prepared to go that far and we don't think you'll be as prepared either."

H: Okay, how, what do they mean by prepared?

A: Like in terms of like financial and then just emotional. Because she always called and she was always homesick. And,

H: Okay.

A: And they were really like missing her a lot. I think it was more of them not being prepared.

### **Summary**

Parental concerns with feasibility and family history around college-going appear to be factors that differentiated Chad and Maggie's experiences from their peers. Although both Chad and Maggie expressed concern with locally situated factors, their unique experiences with parental concerns with feasibility and successful family history around college-going both influenced their persistence to attend a 4-year, out-of-state university.

Although students didn't directly recognize the influence of parental concerns with feasibility and family history as factors influencing their decisions (like the locally situated factors of distance and money), students' descriptions suggested that these factors influenced students' responses to locally situated factors. For instance, despite a concern for distance and money, Chad and Maggie both recognized the role of their grandparents' successful history in influencing their plans.

### **Conclusion**

Despite parental support and students' endorsement of a "College at All Costs" Discourse, as students near graduation, they begin to draw from locally situated factors, such as money and distance, to mediate their post-secondary decisions. In interviews, students attributed their scaled back plans to these locally situated factors. Students described the impact of distance on their plans, citing the impact of being able to come home, of needing to move, the impact on

their families, and of their parents' desires on their decisions. Students also described the importance of money on their plans. Students expressed not being able to justify paying a higher out-of-state tuition, wanting to save money for their families, and not wanting to lose their current jobs.

However, while money and distance were described as determining factors in many students' post-secondary education decisions, their impact wasn't consistent. Two of the thirteen seniors, Maggie and Chad, persisted in their initial plans to enroll in a 4-year, out-of-state university, despite concerns with money and distance. These two "persisters" differed from their peers in receiving more consistent messages from their parents and having a family member who had graduated from college. This later family connection contrasted with students who had siblings or cousins who struggled in college. Negative experiences of family members in college led students to voice doubt about their future post-secondary plans.

In addition, with regard to types of college, the survey data suggest that seniors were only slightly more likely to respond that their parents were supportive of a 2-year institution than a 4-year institution, suggesting that parental messages around institution type were consistent over time and that these messages became more salient to students as they approached graduation.

Similarly, survey results also diverged from interview results related to the importance of distance. Seniors were no more likely to attribute importance to distance than younger students. Again, this mismatch may be due to the pervasiveness in the "College at All Costs" Discourse influencing survey responses. It may also be because the interview sample was not representative of the program participants. In either case, both sets of data should be considered more closely.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

In this study I have addressed two weaknesses in the college access literature that limit its utility for access programs: the strong reliance on deficit-orientated explanations and the lack of studies focused on the college-going experience of rural youths. This study has drawn on CHAT to document the experiences of first-generation, rural students and has attended to the contradictions between the “College at All Costs” Discourse and the family practices around college-going.

The rural, first-generation, low-income students participating in the College Prep program described receiving strong college-going support from the adults in their lives. In explaining the types of support they received, a division of labor emerged between the adults who helped them at school and their parents. This division of labor not only included different types of support but also different ways the support was provided.

School personnel, such as teachers and the CP coordinator, explained the steps necessary to enroll and apply for financial aid and helped students to fulfill those steps through tutoring and workshops. This was done through classroom activities and were commonly presented through presentations and worksheets.

Parents also played important roles in their children’s plans for college. They endorsed the importance of going to college, were actively involved in their children’s academics, and talked with them about college trajectories, such as choosing a major or starting a college fund. Parental support was often given informally, such as when students arrived home from school or during conversations about their future plans.

Although students' accounts of support suggested a division of labor between adults at school and adults at home, students reported each providing similar messages, which I have termed "College at All Costs" Discourse. This Discourse mediated the ways that students discussed their college-going plans and decisions. There were a number of tenets to this Discourse including: 1) college as the norm; 2) college as a worthwhile investment; 3) students need to fulfil their academic potential at all costs; 4) the sacrifice will force students to grow; and 5) Community College as an undesirable option.

Students also articulated this "College at All Costs" Discourse. In explaining the reasons for their post-secondary plans in the first round of interviews, students suggested that their post-secondary decisions were based on quality of school and that regardless of their concerns around distance or money, the sacrifice would ultimately be worth it to their futures. The students suggested that they needed to sacrifice these things in the short term to both fulfill their academic potential and to experience personal growth. Further, students made it clear that going to the local community college in their town was undesirable and would stunt their abilities to fulfill their potential or experience the personal growth that corresponds with going to college.

This combination of support and "College at All Costs" Discourse appeared to create a strong college-going environment for students. Students had support to reach their plans from their parents, teachers, and Mackenzie. Students also described holding high ambitions for their post-secondary futures, suggesting that they, too, bought into the "College at All Costs" Discourse.

Despite their ambitions and the support they received to attend a 4-year institution, nine of the thirteen seniors scaled their plans back. Six seniors scaled their plans back from enrolling in a 4-year institution to enrolling in a 2-year institution, and three of the seniors adjusted their

plans from attending an out-of-state institution to attending an in-state institution. Not only did their plans change, but the factors that they drew on to explain their post-secondary plans also changed. Students began to draw on locally situated factors in their lives, such as money and distance, which acknowledge and contextualize students' experiences. This suggests that as graduation became more concrete, locally situated factors in their lives became more salient to their decisions.

These locally situated factors related to distance and cost tended to be framed in the context of their relationships to family or the family economy. Concerns with distance often related to concerns about maintaining relationship and support. Financially-oriented concerns were related to concerns around the higher cost of going out-of-state or going to a four-year institution and the impact it would have on their families.

There were two students—Chad and Mary—who persisted in their 4-year college plans despite voicing similar concerns related to distance and cost. Chad voiced concern about moving from his family, but ultimately decided to go to out-of-state. Similarly, Maggie voiced the concerns her father had around her moving across the country and her own concerns about the expense, but ultimately persisted in her plans to leave for college. In both cases, what distinguished these students from the others was that their parents either didn't question, or stopped questioning the feasibility of college and had more successful family histories with college. Chad and Maggie were the only two students in the program who had grandparents who had attended college. In discussing the role of their grandparents on their college plans, these students both suggested feeling a sense of expectation. Chad also had a cousin who was currently doing well in college which described as influencing his thoughts about college.



While having relatives who had gone to college appeared to support students' plans for college-going, having relatives who did not finish college appeared to constrain students' ultimate plans. Students who had cousins or siblings who were unable to finish college often articulated doubt in their post-secondary plans. While none of the students describing this family history were seniors, in their interviews this group of students tended to be much less influenced by the "College at All Costs" Discourse, and they were more likely to describe college plans that recognized the role of locally situated factors. These students often described plans that would help them not reproduce the failures or struggles of their siblings or cousins, or create alternative plans in case college did not work out for them.

Overall, it appears that although students valued and bought into the "College at All Costs" Discourse around higher education and were strongly supported by teachers, other locally situated factors influenced their decisions. These locally situated factors, such as distance and cost, were often discounted by the "College at All Costs" Discourse and became salient only as the students approached graduation. Not all students, however, were impacted in the same way by locally situated factors. While the majority of students scaled back their plans in response to these locally situated factors, two students persisted in their plans to attend out-of-state four year institutions. In understanding these students' experiences and histories, two factors appear to differentiate their experiences from their peers'. One factor their peers experienced that they did not was parental concern with feasibility. The other factor that Chad and Maggie experienced that their peers did not was that their grandparents had gone to college, creating a successful history of college-going and a feeling of expectation.

The survey results around the construct of parental support for 2-year institutions suggest that, unlike students, parents' support of types of post-secondary institutions did not change over

time. This suggests that while students had consistently received these messages, the messages didn't become salient to students until they arrived closer to graduation.

It is important to note that the survey results about the impact of distance did not align with these qualitative findings. The survey results suggest that there was not a large difference in the responses of seniors and younger students. There are a number of reasons that the survey results did not align with qualitative findings. The first is that the survey items may not have been measuring the same set of beliefs and perspectives as the interview questions. It could be that the students were responding to the survey by invoking the “College at All Costs” Discourse, which would explain why seniors did not respond differently than their younger peers. The second explanation of this difference is that the interview sample was not representative of the range of attitudes in the survey sample.

Despite the lack of support between the survey and interview data, the interview findings should not be dismissed. The interview data was much stronger and more reliable than the survey data as I formed relationships with students and used follow up questions to clarify confusion. Second, if it is true that the interview sample is not representative of the survey sample, the tensions and contradictions that the interview sample articulated are still important and merit consideration.

### **Discussion**

The findings in this study suggest the perniciousness of the “College at All Costs” Discourse. Although the “College at All Costs” Discourse encourages a broad swath of students, many of whom might not otherwise consider college, to pursue higher education, this Discourse is based on a set of criteria that carry class-specific assumptions about family, mobility, and what a “good life” is. The “College at All Costs” Discourse carries a set of middle class assumptions

that conflict with the priority that some first-generation, low-income, rural families place on staying together; it also disregards the role of scarce resources in decision making. For instance, Pam described how her mother was willing to move “anywhere” Pam chose to go to college so that they could stay close. Similarly, Valentina explained her change of plans as being related to her family’s value on being “close-knit” and how she didn’t want her parents to have to move to where she chose to go to college.

I believe that disregarding these family practices created blind spots in honest discussion about what makes sense for a particular student in relation to her or his family. This is problematic in three ways. First, it discounts the influence that locally situated concerns have on students. For instance, the “College at All Costs” Discourse overlooks many of the locally situated concerns, suggesting that there is always a way to pay for college and that students should be willing to go anywhere for the best opportunity possible. In doing so, students often neglect these concerns until right before graduation.

Second, I believe that ignoring locally situated factors led students to make hasty decisions about where they were going to matriculate. For instance, a number of students told me that their parents suggested that they begin at 2-year institutions, but that they ignored these messages until right before graduation. These plans to matriculate to a 2-year institution then occurred 3 months before graduation, often changing the prior plans students had made for years previously. For instance, despite planning to attend New Mexico University for 4 years, Valentina decided to attend a local university 3 months before graduation.

Finally, I believe that because the “College at All Costs” Discourse created a blind spot for honest discussion, students were unable to discuss non-traditional pathways to a 4-year degree such as through 2-year institutions with school personnel. In some cases, this was

perpetuated by adults, such as Maggie's teacher, who used the "College at All Costs" Discourse to combat her concern with the cost of tuition. In other cases, it appeared to create a blind spot for students to even consider the impact of these locally situated issues on their college-going plans.

Given the "College at All Costs" Discourse suggested that 2-year institutions were undesirable, students appeared less likely to view these as actual options that they should consider. Thus, non-traditional pathways to college were not discussed until after students chose to change their plans.

While I recognize that the "College at All Costs" Discourse is most often used to help underrepresented students pursue college, I believe that the negative outcomes outweigh the benefits. I also believe that these benefits of supporting students to college can be attained without these negative consequences. In this section, I provide a number of recommendations for college access program facilitators, college access researchers, and administrators and policy makers.

Before I move on to recommendations, however, I want to recognize other scholars who make a similar argument about current Discourse in the field of college access. Scholars such as Noddings (2011) and Glass and Nygreen (2011) have brought attention and critique to what they have termed a "College for All" Discourse that is also pervasive in college access. Similar to the "College at All Costs" Discourse, the "College for All" Discourse is a tool used to support marginalized students in their plans for college and assumes that matriculating into a 4-year institution is the best post-secondary decision.

Despite these similarities, these are two distinct Discourses, one centered on who should go to college and the other centered on why type of college and what sacrifices students should

make. The “College for All” Discourse argues that ALL students should attend college, in contrast to the “College at All Cost” Discourse which argues that the value of college outweighs any sacrifice and pushes for matriculation into a 4-year university.

These discourses also have to different critiques. Whereas I argue against pushing students into one defined college trajectory (rather than providing non-traditional pathways), Noddings (2011) and Glass and Nygreen (2011) argue against the push for college in general. Noddings (2011) suggested that our country cannot sustain the number of jobs that people with college degrees want. Glass and Nygreen (2011) expanded on this, stating that it will be people of color who are least advantaged by the college for all push, with low income, African American and/or Latina/o students most likely to take out loans to pay for college. Not only are they more likely to take out loans, but they are also more likely to borrow greater amounts and less likely to graduate. These authors thus call attention to the systemic issues in college access that are enhanced by the “College for All” Discourse. In response to these systemic issues, the authors argue that the hierarchy between intellectualism and manual labor needs to be removed and that our society needs to respect and support different pillars in a lifelong learning approach.

Given these scholars’ critiques of the “College for All” Discourse and recommendations, it appears that they and I are using slightly different, although not necessarily contradictory, frames to understand college access and inequities. While these scholars provide some important insight and recommendations, these recommendations do not address the specific features of the “College at All Costs” Discourse, which suggests that students should go to the best school possible and be willing to sacrifice anything for educational opportunity. Rather, the following recommendations I present are based on my study and the finding of the “College at All Costs”

Discourse, aimed at providing students with opportunities to successfully graduate with a bachelor's degree.

### **Recommendations**

The recommendations I present are informed by notions of expansive learning (Engeström, 1987). As activity systems change, contradictions between and within activity systems can cause participants to question and deviate from the established norms. Doing so may support the creation of a new activity to help mediate the contradictions, leading to the addition of more objects and the creation of new activity, and can lead to wider possibilities.

This study calls for the expansion of the College Access activity system in order to increase college access to underrepresented students and acknowledge locally situated factors. Given this, I provide recommendations in three areas of college access: 1) college access programs, 2) college access research, and 3) administration and policy. My recommendations for college access programs are to integrate the needs of families into programs and to prepare students for whatever path of post-secondary education they choose. My recommendations for college access research are to better understand the role of family history in students' college-going needs and to shift our focus from parental support to parental concerns with feasibility. My recommendations for policy are to lower tuition by providing greater state support for higher education, examine institutional supports that can help successful 2-year to 4-year transfer, and revise policies that reflect "College at All Costs" assumptions.

### **Program Design and Supports**

**Integrating parents.** There is a long tradition in educational research that pathologizes low-income parents or parents without college diplomas, suggesting that they are either unable to help their children access college, or that they do not value college education. As discussed in the

literature review, of the few outreach programs that did include a parental involvement component, the majority of them used it to teach parents how to support their child's education (Schultz & Mueller, 2006; Gandara & Bial, 2001).

Contrary to stereotypes about parents without college degrees, my study shows that parents took many actions to support and influence their children's post-secondary plans. These findings also suggest that parents were aware of the importance of college to their child's futures, and that parents endorsed and communicated elements of the "College at All Costs" Discourse.

Further, although students in the study described their parents as providing emotional support and motivation, this study has illustrated that parents are much more involved than that. Parents were active participants in students' college-going activities, endorsing the importance of college, actively being present in students' academics, attending college fairs and discussing options, and starting college funds.

Parents were also aware of the locally situated factors that impacted the feasibility of their child's post-secondary plans. In understanding the barriers to college, such as distance and cost, parents often expressed these concerns and suggested alternative options to their children early on. However, these suggestions were often overlooked by students until close to graduation, when the students changed their college-going plans.

Because of parents' large participation in students' college pathways, college access programs need to integrate parents as collaborators and experts. I am arguing for the role of program coordinators to shift from being viewed as the "expert" in students' future trajectories to being viewed as a resource for parents and students can to go to support in their plans. Rather than having program coordinators provide all of the information students and their parents need to know to apply for college, parents and students should decide what future pathway is the best

for their family practices and use the program coordinator to inform the steps that need to be taken. In shifting the role of coordinators, family practices and locally situated factors can be explicitly recognized and discussed. This will allow all of the barriers that impact students' decisions to be understood by all parties involved and in so doing, together all parties can work to navigate these barriers, drawing from the multiple knowledge sources each participant holds. This will move college access programs from a deficit perspective of parents and family knowledge towards a funds of knowledge perspective that respects and encourages parental input.

**Non-traditional pathways.** First-generation, low-income, rural students are disproportionately more likely to enroll in 2-year institutions than their traditional peers and less likely to eventually graduate with a bachelor's degree (Baily, Davis Jenkins, and Leinback, 2005). Further, Tinto (2002) found that among two year college entrants, of the 24% who were identified as "prepared" only one third eventually earn their bachelor's degree. Of those students identified as "poorly qualified" (57%), only 2% went on to earn a bachelor's degree.

These statistics are distressing in light of the finding that six of the thirteen seniors in this study shifted their plans from enrolling in a four-year to enrolling in a two-year institution. Of these students, only one discussed changing plans for a 4-year to a 2-year because of lack of academic preparation (with the goal of becoming more fluent in English), suggesting that the others were academically prepared to enroll in a 4-year program. The majority of these students explained this shift in their plans to enroll in a 2- year as a temporary decision that would allow them to navigate locally situated factors.

In order to equip students to fulfill their plans to graduate with a bachelor's degree, I believe college access programs need to recognize non-traditional pathways to a 4-year degree.



Currently, college access programs push students towards 4-year institutions. Additionally, conversations exploring non-traditional pathways to a 4-year degree are often overlooked, dismissed by the “College at All Costs” Discourse as undesirable options. When these discussions of non-traditional pathways are blocked, students who choose non-traditional pathways often do so in a hasty manner in response to locally situated factors. For instance, this study found that the decision to start at a 2-year institution was often made within 3-4 months of graduation.

For some families, however, starting at a 2-year institution is the most beneficial option, and perhaps an option they will choose even without the support of a college access program. When these pathways aren’t discussed, students are unprepared to transfer to a 4-year degree in a cost-effective and efficient way. I argue that students and families need to understand these non-traditional paths to a bachelor’s degree and understand the steps necessary to transfer; common factors experienced by students who do not transfer; and how to seek assistance and advocate for transfer students’ needs.

## **Research Directions**

**Family history.** Current research that recognizes family history with college-going tends to focus on the role of parental experiences with college-going on students, often suggesting that first-generation college status predicts a lower probability of earning a bachelor’s degree. This study has complicated this relationship in examining the influence of other family members on students’ college decisions. Two of the first-generation students in this study who had grandparents with bachelor’s degrees illustrated the impact this family history had on their future plans. The findings suggested that those who have family members who were successful in their college pursuits were more likely to persist in their college plans. However, as this study

discussed only two students with this experience, more research needs to be done in this area to strengthen the claim.

Additionally, this study also suggests the influence of having a sibling or cousin who had unsuccessful experiences with college on students' trajectories. While literature on influences of college choice and going often examines the experiences of parents in relation to students' trajectories, the influence of siblings' and cousins' experiences are left unexamined. The findings in this study, however, suggest that the feelings of doubt students feel in their own trajectories is in relation to watching a sibling or cousin's unsuccessful attempt at a college degree. More scholarship in this area is necessary to further understand the relationship between family history and students' college-going trajectories.

**Shifting parental support to parental concerns with feasibility.** The findings in this study suggest that parental support is not a linear construct that can predict students' post-secondary plans. In the initial stages of this study, I believed that the construct of parental support was linear. In this respect, I believed that parents either supported or did not support their child going to college. For instance, I assumed that support could be measured by messages comparing 2-year and 4-year institutions and academic support. However, as I began to make sense of the data, I saw that these constructs were categorical, rather than linear. Thus, these constructs of parental support were invalid in using classical testing or item response theory. In this study, parental concerns with feasibility have proven to be a more accurate measure of student enrollment, especially in light of the "College at All Costs" Discourse.

This finding that parental support is not linear provides strong implications in understanding college access, especially in light of the many college access surveys look for causal relationships between parental support (academically and in plans for college) and

students' trajectories (US Dept of Education's High School Longitudinal Study, 2009; Ad Council, 2006). Given my findings, my recommendation is that rather than measuring parental support, surveys need to take into account parental concerns with feasibility.

Additionally, shifting the focus from parental support to parental concerns removes the focus from a value judgment about parents to barriers that impact students' ability to go to college. Examining parental support for college puts a value judgment on the role of parents. Parents who are low in the construct of supporting their child's ambition for going to college are often demonized and viewed as barriers to their child's success. In contrast, when the construct measured is parental concerns with feasibility, the measure recognizes the practices of the family and the knowledge that parents hold. Further, accounting for parental concerns with feasibility also provides a way to measure barriers that students, who are often surrounded by a "College at All Costs" Discourse, overlook.

**Increase sensitivity of survey items.** In line with the qualitative findings that suggest that discourse and decisions around college are complex and at times contradictory, it is important to design survey items that can capture and account for these complexities. It is important to recognize the role of time in surveying students, as well as the types of Discourses that the questions may prompt. While none of the students in the speak-aloud suggested that they were confused by the questions, it is possible that they answered in a specific way given the ways items were asked and were not aware of other meanings the item could have taken up. This could help to explain the low levels of reliability and the lack of support the survey provided my qualitative findings. I believe that items more sensitive, with the ability to disentangle responses from the "College at All Costs" Discourse need to be created.

## **Administrators and Policymakers**

As mentioned in the limitations of my study, I narrowed the scope to more local college-going actions. Despite this narrowed scope, the findings from this study speak to broader institutional recommendations. There are a number of policy recommendations that I feel are necessary in reference to the findings. These include issues around the current focus in policy on financial support, transfer support, and current policies.

First, I want to argue that the current focus of policy on loans, grants, and financial aid, are influenced by and reproduce the “College at All Costs Discourse.” These policies focus on how students make use of these loans, grants, and aid, placing the problem of financial access onto the students and their families. Although the current work on making loans and grants accessible and understandable is important, policy needs to begin to decrease tuition by providing greater state support for higher education.

Second, it is important to recognize this study’s finding of the large number of 4-year college-eligible students who scaled back their plans from a 4-year institution to a 2-year institution, but planned to later attend a 4-year institution. This finding is important in light of the current literature that describes a difficult pathway to college, in which there are high levels of 2-year institution enrollment rates for under-represented students in relation to disproportionate access to 4-year degrees (Bailey, Davis Jenkins, & Leinbach, 2005).

Give this, it is important to examine institutional supports that can strengthen this transition from a 2-year to a 4-year institution. This needs to happen on all fronts. Although I have already mentioned the importance of program coordinators providing non-traditional pathways to a 4-year degree, 2-year institutions and 4-year institutions need to work more closely to make the transition clear and transparent for students. For instance, students should be

provided with “bridge” classes that help to support successful transfer and matriculation into a 4-year institution. They should also be able to work with an advisor to map out how they can use the time they are in a 2-year institution to successfully prepare for transfer.

Finally, I am arguing that grant funding and program policies should be revisited. Because the goal of many of these programs is to increase access to 4-year institutions, some of these programs measure success by the number of students who matriculate into a 4-year institution and discount those who matriculate into a 2-year institution. Given that success rates are often tied to funding, this leads many program organizers to push students towards only one pathway to college, which in light of this research may be detrimental to students’ outcomes.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have examined the Noddings (2011) and Glass and Nygreen’s (2011) critique of the “College for All” Discourse that suggests that the push for college is detrimental to students. They go on to recommend that the hierarchy between intellectual jobs and manual labor needs to be done away with, and rather, school counselors should prepare students for whatever career they are interested in. I argue with their critiques; their recommendations make the field of college access susceptible to falling into further segregation between middle class and marginalized students. Instead, I argue that college should be viewed as a feasible option for all students. But the way that this support for college access is currently practiced is problematic. The “College at Costs” Discourse is based on a set of middle class assumptions that often overlook and disregard the family practices of rural first-generation students.

Thus, informed by notions of expansive learning (Engeström, 1987), I provide a set of recommendations to both practice and research within the field of college access. I recommend that college access programs need to integrate the needs of the family into programs and that

non-traditional paths to a 4-year degree need to be recognized. My recommendations for college access research are to examine the role of family history in students college-going trajectories and to shift the focus from parental support to parental concerns with feasibility.

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## Appendix A

Institutional Review Board  
 563 UCB  
 Boulder, CO 80309  
 Phone: 303.735.3702  
 Fax: 303.735.5185  
 FWA: 00003492

23-May-2012

Initial Approval - Expedited

Jones, Hannah  
 Protocol #: 12-0212  
 Title: Exploring college identity development and identity negotiation in rural youth  
 Dear Hannah Jones,

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) has approved this protocol in accordance with Federal Regulations at 45 CFR 46. You must use the IRB approved informed consent form when obtaining consent from subjects participating in this protocol.

Initial Approval Date: 23-May-2012

Expiration Date: 22-May-2013

Associated Documents:\* recruitment script- total; 12-0212 Parent Permission- Forest Total (23May12); Protocol; 12-0212 Consent

Form Group C - Admin (23May12); recruiting script- interviews; 12-0212 Parent Permission- Summer (23May12); 12-0212

Protocol (23May12); 12-0212 Parent Permission - UCD (23May12); 12-0212 Assent- Total (23May12); 12-0212 Assent- UCD

(23May12); 12-0212 Assent- Summer (23May12);

Number of subjects approved:1007

Review Cycle: 12 months

Expedited Category: 7

\* To find the approved documents log into eRA, open this protocol, expand the Management folder, and click on the Versions subfolder.

Regulations require that this protocol be renewed prior to the above expiration date. The IRB will provide a reminder prior to the expiration date, but it is your responsibility to ensure that the continuing review form is received in sufficient time to be reviewed prior to the expiration date.

Changes to your protocol must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval prior to their implementation. This includes changes to the consent form, principal investigator, protocol, etc.

All events that meet reporting criteria must be submitted within 10 business days from notification of the event. Any study-related death must be reported immediately (within 24 hours) upon learning of the death. The IRB has approved this protocol in accordance with federal regulations, university policies and ethical standards for the protection of human subjects. In accordance with federal regulation at 45 CFR 46.112, research that has been approved by the IRB may be subject to further appropriate review and approval or disapproval by officials of the institution. The investigator is responsible for knowing and complying with all applicable research regulations and policies including, but not limited to, Environmental Health and Safety, Scientific Advisory and Review Committee, Clinical and Translational Research Center, and Wardenburg Health Center and Pharmacy policies. Approval by the IRB does not imply approval by any other entity. Please contact the IRB office at 303-735-3702 if you have any questions about this letter or about IRB procedures.

Douglas Grafel  
IRB Admin Review Coordinator  
Institutional Review Board

## Appendix B

**UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER  
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY**

**Study Title: Exploring College Identity Development and Negotiation in Rural Youth**

**Principal Investigator: Hannah Jones**

**Key Personnel:**

Name	Role	Department	Phone Number	E-mail
Hannah Jones	Principal Investigator	Education: Learning Sciences	715-520-2138	<a href="mailto:Hannah.jones@colorado.edu">Hannah.jones@colorado.edu</a>
Ben Kirshner	Faculty Advisor	Education: Learning Sciences	303-492-6122	<a href="mailto:Ben.Kirshner@colorado.edu">Ben.Kirshner@colorado.edu</a>

**Your child's participation in this research study is voluntary.** Please think about the information below carefully. Feel free to ask questions before making your decision whether or not your child may participate. If you decide your child may participate, you will be asked to sign this form and will receive a copy of the form. Signing this form will indicate that you have been informed about the study and that you give permission for your child to participate in this research. Once you provide your permission, your child will also be asked to provide his or her assent to participate. Your child may not participate in the study unless BOTH you and your child agree.

**Purpose and Background**

The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of college-bound students from rural areas. I plan to examine the people and experiences that have shaped/ are shaping their interests in college, as well as the difficulties that they have/are going through. This information will be useful in helping shape what those who work with students like your child (teachers, College Prep staff, and other researchers) know, thus helping them better serve these youth.

**Study Tasks and Procedures**

Your child is being asked to participate in this study. I am asking...

- For his or her participation in a survey in the fall
- For his or her participation in an audio-recorded interview.

**Duration**

- The survey will be handed out during a College Prep (CP) activity and will last about 15-20 minutes.
- The interview will occur during the school day for 30 minutes, twice during the year (once during both the fall and the spring.)

### **Risks and Discomforts**

There are no foreseeable risks for participating in this study.

### **Benefits**

There are no immediate benefits if your child participates in this study. However, the participation could provide a benefit to future students like your child, as well as to the people who run these programs.

### **Confidentiality**

We will make every effort to maintain the privacy of your child's data. To protect his or her anonymity, we will assign a pseudonym to anyone who is publicly mentioned, such as any papers or presentations based on this research. Any paper copies of information will be kept in a locked cabinet in a locked office. Any electronic information will be encrypted on a computer.

There are some things that your child might tell us that we CANNOT promise to keep confidential, as we are required to report information such as:

- Child abuse or neglect
- A crime your child or others plan to commit
- Harm that may come to your child or others.

Other people, such as research staff may ask for access to the information, to make sure that the research is done safely and legally. Sponsors, government agencies or research staff sometimes look at forms like this and other study records. Organizations that may ask for access to the data are:

- Office for Human Research Protections or other federal, state, or international regulatory agencies
- The University of Colorado Boulder Institutional Review Board
- The sponsor or agency supporting the study: College Prep

### **Compensation**

Your child will not be paid to participate in this study.

### **Participant Rights**

Your child's ability to part in this study is your choice. You may choose for him or her to either take part or not take part in the study. If you decide to allow participation in this study, your son or daughter may leave the study at any time. No matter what decision you make, there will be no penalty to you or your child in any way. He or she will not lose any of your regular benefits. We will tell you if we learn any new information that could change your mind about being in this research study. For example, we will tell you about information that could affect your child's health or well-being.

*For questions, concerns, or complaints about this study, call Hannah Jones (715-520-2138)*

*If you have questions about your rights as a research study participant, you can call the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB is independent from the research team. You can contact the IRB if you have concerns or complaints that you do not want to talk to the study team about. The IRB phone number is (303) 735-3702.*

### **Signing the Consent Form**

I have read (or someone has read to me) this form. I am aware that my son or daughter is being asked to be in a research study. I have had a chance to ask all the questions I have at this time. I have had my questions answered in a way that is clear. I voluntarily agree to allow my son or daughter to be in this study.

I give H. Jones permission to use ONLY the marked information in her published papers, dissertation, and at professional conferences:

- ☐ Survey
- ☐ Audio-Recorded Interview
- ☐ Field notes
- ☐ I DO NOT give permission

I am not giving up any legal rights by signing this form. I will be given a copy of this form.

Name of Participant (printed) \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Parent or Guardian (printed) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Parent or Guardian \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**UNIVERSIDAD DE COLORADO EN BOULDER**  
**CONSENTIMIENTO PARA PARTICIPAR EN UN ESTUDIO DE INVESTIGACIÓN**

**Título del Estudio:** Explorando el Desarrollo de la Identidad Universitaria y la Negociación con la Juventud Rural

**Investigadora Principal:** Hannah Jones

**Personal Principal:**

Nombre	Papel	Departamento	Número de Teléfono	Correo Electrónico
Hannah Jones	Investigadora Principal	Education: Learning Sciences	715-520-2138	<a href="mailto:Hannah.jones@colorado.edu">Hannah.jones@colorado.edu</a>
Ben Kirshner	Asesor de la Facultad	Education: Learning Sciences	303-492-6122	<a href="mailto:Ben.Kirshner@colorado.edu">Ben.Kirshner@colorado.edu</a>

**La participación de sus hijos en este estudio investigativo es voluntario.** Por favor piense bien sobre la información que aparece a continuación. No dude en hacer preguntas antes de tomar su decisión aunque no participe su hijo/a. Si decide que su hijo puede participar, le preguntarán que firme este formulario. Usted recibirá una copia del formulario después de firmarlo. En firmar este documento, se indica que entiende toda la información sobre el estudio y le da permiso a su hijo para participar en esta investigación. En cuanto suministre su permiso, se le pedirá el consentimiento de participación para su hijo/a. Su hijo/a no podrá participar en el estudio a menos que tengamos el permiso de padre/s y hijo/a(s).

### **Objeto y Fondo**

La meta de este estudio es para entender las experiencias de estudiantes a punto de ir a la Universidad que vienen de áreas rurales. Planeo examinar la gente y sus experiencias que han dado forma a / están formando sus intereses en la Universidad, así como las dificultades que han / están experimentando. Ésta información será útil en ayudar a moldear la sabiduría de las personas que trabajan con estudiantes como sus hijos/as (maestros, personal del programa College Prep, y otros investigadores), así ayudandoles mejor servir a la juventud.

### **Tareas del Estudio y Procedimientos**

A su hijo/a se le pide participar en este estudio. Estoy preguntando...

Por su participación en una encuesta en el otoño

Por su participación en una entrevista grabada en audio

### **Duración**

La encuesta será repartida un sábado durante el programa de College Prep y durará entre 15-20 minutos.

La entrevista será durante las horas de la escuela por 30 minutos, dos veces durante el año (una vez en el otoño y la otra en la primavera).

## **Riesgos y Molestias**

No existe ningún riesgo ni molestia previsible por participar en este estudio.

## **Beneficios**

No hay beneficios inmediatos si su hijo participa en este estudio. Sin embargo, su participación podrá beneficiar otros estudiantes como su hijo en el futuro, así como las personas que administran programas como College Prep.

## **Confidencialidad**

Haremos todo lo posible para mantener la privacidad de los datos de su hijo. Para proteger su anonimato, asignaremos un seudónimo a cualquiera que esté mencionado públicamente, tal como artículos y/o presentaciones basados en la investigación. Cada oja del reporte será encerrada en un gabinete dentro de una oficina de la facultad. Información electrónica se cifrará en una computadora.

Hay varias cosas que su hijo/a nos puede decir que NO PODEMOS mantener confidencial y que estamos obligados a reportar. Información tal como:

- Abuso o negligencia infantil
- Un crimen que su hijo/a u otros planean cometer
- Daño que le podrá llegar a su hijo/a o a otros

Otras personas, tal como la facultad de investigación, pueden pedir acceso a la información para asegurar que el estudio está hecho seguro y legalmente. Patrocinadores, agencias del gobierno o la facultad de la investigación también pueden revisar formularios como este y otros registros del estudio. Organizaciones que pueden pedir acceso a esta información son:

La Oficina para Protecciones de Investigación Humana o otras agencias reguladoras federales del estado o internacionales

La Junta de Revisión Institucional (IRB) de la Universidad de Colorado en Boulder

Los patrocinadores o agencias que apoyan el estudio: College Prep

## **Compensación**

A su hijo/a no se le pagará por participar en este estudio.

## **Derechos del Participante**

Es la decisión de su hijo y de usted por tomar parte en este estudio. Puede elegir si su hijo/a participa o no en el estudio. Si permite a su hijo/a participar, el/ella podrá despedirse del estudio a cualquier momento. Su decisión no tendrá pena de ningún modo por irse antes. No perderá ninguno de sus beneficios regulares del programa. Le informaremos si aprendemos cualquiera información nueva que podría cambiar su opinión acerca de su participación en esta investigación. Por ejemplo, les avisaremos de información que podrá afectar la salud o bienestar de su hijo/a.



Preguntas, preocupaciones, o quejas sobre el estudio? Por favor llamele a Hannah Jones (715-520-2138)

Si tiene preguntas sobre sus derechos como participante en un estudio de investigación, puede llamar a la Junta de Revision Institucional (Institutional Review Board, IRB). La IRB son independientes del equipo y el estudio. Puede ponerse en contacto con la IRB si tiene otras preocupaciones y/o quejas que no prefiere dirigir hacia el equipo del estudio. El número de telephone de la IRB es (303) 735-3702.

### **Firmando el Formulario de Consentimiento**

Yo he leído (o alguien me ha leído) el formulario. Yo soy consciente que me están pidiendo la participación de mi hijo/a en un estudio de investigación. Yo he tenido la oportunidad de hacer todas las preguntas que tengo a este momento. Todas mis preguntas fueron contestadas claramente. Voluntariamente doy permiso a mi hijo/a para participar en este estudio.

Yo le doy permiso a H. Jones usar SOLO la información indicada en sus artículos publicados, tesis doctoral, y/o conferencias profesionales:

Encuesta

Entrevista grabada en audio

Apuntes del programa College Prep

NO DOY permiso a mi hijo/a participar en este estudio

No pierdo ningunos de mis derechos legales por firmar este documento. Entiendo que me darán una copia del formulario después de firmarlo.

Nombre de Participante (escrito) \_\_\_\_\_

Nombre de Padre o Guárdia (escrito) \_\_\_\_\_

Firma de Padre o Guárdia \_\_\_\_\_ Fecha \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix C

**UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER  
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY**

**Study Title: Exploring College Identity Development and Negotiation in Rural Youth**

**Principal Investigator: Hannah Jones**

**Key Personnel:**

Name	Role	Department	Phone Number	E-mail
Hannah Jones	Principal Investigator	Education: Learning Sciences	715-520-2138	<a href="mailto:Hannah.jones@colorado.edu">Hannah.jones@colorado.edu</a>
Ben Kirshner	Faculty Advisor	Education: Learning Sciences	303-492-6122	<a href="mailto:Ben.Kirshner@colorado.edu">Ben.Kirshner@colorado.edu</a>

**Your child's participation in this research study is voluntary.** Please think about the information below carefully. Feel free to ask questions before making your decision whether or not your child may participate. If you decide your child may participate, you will be asked to sign this form and will receive a copy of the form. Signing this form will indicate that you have been informed about the study and that you give permission for your child to participate in this research. Once you provide your permission, your child will also be asked to provide his or her assent to participate. Your child may not participate in the study unless BOTH you and your child agree.

**Purpose and Background**

The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of college-bound students from rural areas. I plan to examine the people and experiences that have shaped/ are shaping their interests in college, as well as the difficulties that they have/are going through. This information will be useful in helping shape what those who work with students like your child (teachers, College Prep staff, and other researchers) know, thus helping them better serve these youth.

**Study Tasks and Procedures**

Your child is being asked to participate in this study. I am asking...

- For his or her participation in a survey in the fall
- For his or her participation in an audio-recorded interview.

**Duration**

- The survey will be handed out during a College Prep (CP) activity and will last about 15-20 minutes.
- The interview will occur during the school day for 30 minutes, twice during the year (once during both the fall and the spring.)

### **Risks and Discomforts**

There are no foreseeable risks for participating in this study.

### **Benefits**

There are no immediate benefits if your child participates in this study. However, the participation could provide a benefit to future students like your child, as well as to the people who run these programs.

### **Confidentiality**

We will make every effort to maintain the privacy of your child's data. To protect his or her anonymity, we will assign a pseudonym to anyone who is publicly mentioned, such as any papers or presentations based on this research. Any paper copies of information will be kept in a locked cabinet in a locked office. Any electronic information will be encrypted on a computer.

There are some things that your child might tell us that we CANNOT promise to keep confidential, as we are required to report information such as:

- Child abuse or neglect
- A crime your child or others plan to commit
- Harm that may come to your child or others.

Other people, such as research staff may ask for access to the information, to make sure that the research is done safely and legally. Sponsors, government agencies or research staff sometimes look at forms like this and other study records. Organizations that may ask for access to the data are:

- Office for Human Research Protections or other federal, state, or international regulatory agencies
- The University of Colorado Boulder Institutional Review Board
- The sponsor or agency supporting the study: College Prep (CP) Program

### **Compensation**

Your child will not be paid to participate in this study.

### **Participant Rights**

Your child's ability to part in this study is your choice. You may choose for him or her to either take part or not take part in the study. If you decide to allow participation in this study, your son or daughter may leave the study at any time. No matter what decision you make, there will be no penalty to you or your child in any way. He or she will not lose any of your regular benefits. We will tell you if we learn any new information that could change your mind about being in this research study. For example, we will tell you about information that could affect your child's health or well-being.

*For questions, concerns, or complaints about this study, call Hannah Jones (715-520-2138)*

*If you have questions about your rights as a research study participant, you can call the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB is independent from the research team. You can contact the IRB if you have concerns or complaints that you do not want to talk to the study team about. The IRB phone number is (303) 735-3702.*

### **Signing the Consent Form**

I have read (or someone has read to me) this form. I am aware that my son or daughter is being asked to be in a research study. I have had a chance to ask all the questions I have at this time. I have had my questions answered in a way that is clear. I voluntarily agree to allow my son or daughter to be in this study.

I give H. Jones permission to use ONLY the marked information in her published papers, dissertation, and at professional conferences:

- ☐ Survey
- ☐ Audio-Recorded Interview
- ☐ Field notes
- ☐ I DO NOT give permission

I am not giving up any legal rights by signing this form. I will be given a copy of this form.

Name of Participant (printed) \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Parent or Guardian (printed) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Parent or Guardian \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**UNIVERSIDAD DE COLORADO EN BOULDER**  
**CONSENTIMIENTO PARA PARTICIPAR EN UN ESTUDIO DE INVESTIGACIÓN**

**Título del Estudio:** Explorando el Desarrollo de la Identidad Universitaria y la Negociación con la Juventud Rural

**Investigadora Principal:** Hannah Jones

**Personal Principal:**

Nombre	Papel	Departamento	Número de Teléfono	Correo Electrónico
Hannah Jones	Investigadora Principal	Education: Learning Sciences	715-520-2138	<a href="mailto:Hannah.jones@colorado.edu">Hannah.jones@colorado.edu</a>
Ben Kirshner	Asesor de la Facultad	Education: Learning Sciences	303-492-6122	<a href="mailto:Ben.Kirshner@colorado.edu">Ben.Kirshner@colorado.edu</a>

**La participación de sus hijos en este estudio investigativo es voluntario.** Por favor piense bien sobre la información que aparece a continuación. No dude en hacer preguntas antes de tomar su decisión aunque no participe su hijo/a. Si decide que su hijo puede participar, le preguntarán que firme este formulario. Usted recibirá una copia del formulario después de firmarlo. En firmar este documento, se indica que entiende toda la información sobre el estudio y le da permiso a su hijo para participar en esta investigación. En cuanto suministre su permiso, se le pedirá el consentimiento de participación para su hijo/a. Su hijo/a no podrá participar en el estudio a menos que tengamos el permiso de padre/s y hijo/a(s).

### **Objeto y Fondo**

La meta de este estudio es para entender las experiencias de estudiantes a punto de ir a la Universidad que vienen de áreas rurales. Planeo examinar la gente y sus experiencias que han dado forma a / están formando sus intereses en la Universidad, así como las dificultades que han / están experimentando. Ésta información será útil en ayudar a moldear la sabiduría de las personas que trabajan con estudiantes como sus hijos/as (maestros, personal del programa College Prep, y otros investigadores), así ayudandoles mejor servir a la juventud.

### **Tareas del Estudio y Procedimientos**

A su hijo/a se le pide participar en este estudio. Estoy preguntando...

Por su participación en una encuesta en el otoño

Por su participación en una entrevista grabada en audio

### **Duración**

La encuesta será repartida un sábado durante el programa de College Prep (CP) y durará entre 15-20 minutos.

La entrevista será durante las horas de la escuela por 30 minutos, dos veces durante el año (una vez en el otoño y la otra en la primavera).

## **Riesgos y Molestias**

No existe ningún riesgo ni molestia previsible por participar en este estudio.

## **Beneficios**

No hay beneficios inmediatos si su hijo participa en este estudio. Sin embargo, su participación podrá beneficiar otros estudiantes como su hijo en el futuro, así como las personas que administran programas como PCDP.

## **Confidencialidad**

Haremos todo lo posible para mantener la privacidad de los datos de su hijo. Para proteger su anonimato, asignaremos un seudónimo a cualquiera que esté mencionado públicamente, tal como artículos y/o presentaciones basados en la investigación. Cada oja del reporte será encerrada en un gabinete dentro de una oficina de la facultad. Información electrónica se cifrará en una computadora.

Hay varias cosas que su hijo/a nos puede decir que NO PODEMOS mantener confidencial y que estamos obligados a reportar. Información tal como:

- Abuso o negligencia infantil
- Un crimen que su hijo/a u otros planean cometer
- Daño que le podrá llegar a su hijo/a o a otros

Otras personas, tal como la facultad de investigación, pueden pedir acceso a la información para asegurar que el estudio está hecho seguro y legalmente. Patrocinadores, agencias del gobierno o la facultad de la investigación también pueden revisar formularios como este y otros registros del estudio. Organizaciones que pueden pedir acceso a esta información son:

La Oficina para Protecciones de Investigación Humana o otras agencias reguladoras federales del estado o internacionales

La Junta de Revisión Institucional (IRB) de la Universidad de Colorado en Boulder

Los patrocinadores o agencias que apoyan el estudio: College Prep

## **Compensación**

A su hijo/a no se le pagará por participar en este estudio.

## **Derechos del Participante**

Es la decisión de su hijo y de usted por tomar parte en este estudio. Puede elegir si su hijo/a participa o no en el estudio. Si permite a su hijo/a participar, el/ella podrá despedirse del estudio a cualquier momento. Su decisión no tendrá pena de ningún modo por irse antes. No perderá ninguno de sus beneficios regulares del programa. Le informaremos si aprendemos cualquiera información nueva que podría cambiar su opinión acerca de su participación en esta investigación. Por ejemplo, les avisaremos de información que podrá afectar la salud o bienestar de su hijo/a.

Preguntas, preocupaciones, o quejas sobre el estudio? Por favor llamele a Hannah Jones (715-520-2138)

Si tiene preguntas sobre sus derechos como participante en un estudio de investigación, puede llamar a la Junta de Revision Institucional (Institutional Review Board, IRB). La IRB son independientes del equipo y el estudio. Puede ponerse en contacto con la IRB si tiene otras preocupaciones y/o quejas que no prefiere dirigir hacia el equipo del estudio. El número de telephone de la IRB es (303) 735-3702.

### **Firmando el Formulario de Consentimiento**

Yo he leído (o alguien me ha leído) el formulario. Yo soy consciente que me están pidiendo la participación de mi hijo/a en un estudio de investigación. Yo he tenido la oportunidad de hacer todas las preguntas que tengo a este momento. Todas mis preguntas fueron contestadas claramente. Voluntariamente doy permiso a mi hijo/a para participar en este estudio.

Yo le doy permiso a H. Jones usar SOLO la información indicada en sus artículos publicados, tesis doctoral, y/o conferencias profesionales:

Encuesta

Entrevista grabada en audio

Apuntes del programa College Prep

NO DOY permiso a mi hijo/a participar en este estudio

No pierdo ningunos de mis derechos legales por firmar este documento. Entiendo que me darán una copia del formulario después de firmarlo.

Nombre de Participante (escrito) \_\_\_\_\_

Nombre de Padre o Guárdia (escrito) \_\_\_\_\_

Firma de Padre o Guárdia \_\_\_\_\_ Fecha \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix D

### Recruitment Script

Hi Everybody!

My name is Hannah, and I'm a graduate student at CU –Boulder. I was a first-gen college bound student like you in high school and now I'm working on my PhD at CU. I worked with the College Prep summer program this year, and am wondering if I can have you participate in part of my study?

The purpose of my study is to understand the experiences of college-bound students like you. I plan to examine the people and experiences that shape your interests in college, as well as some of the struggles you have. This information will be useful in helping those working with College Prep, and similar programs, better understand their students, thus helping them better serve their students.

However, in order to participate, I need you to read over the consent form. Please look at the top of the paper. I need both of these back from you, even if you choose not to participate. Please be careful to check each box that you are willing to participate in, and recognize that the last box denies all consent or assent.

In order to take the survey, I need you to answer to the best of your ability these questions about their experiences. I realize that there are quite a few questions. However, these are about YOUR experiences and should not take longer than 20 minutes to fill out. Also- please make sure you re-paper clip the scantron form AND your consent form together. I am simply keeping these together until I can tell if you have consented or not. If you do not consent, I will simply throw away your scantron. Also, please do NOT write on the survey questionnaire itself, as I am hoping to re-use them for the sake of the environment.

Currently, I am handing out these forms. Are there any questions? Please raise feel free to contact me if you have any questions. Thank you again for your time!



## Appendix E

### Fall Student Interview Protocol

#### Interview Format and Overview:

Hi \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you again for being willing to come in and talk to me about your experiences and future plans. The purposes of this interview are to learn about your thoughts and experience as a first generation student.

I would love to hear your stories and experiences as they relate to your plans for after high school. I may ask you to give me examples or clarify things you say, to make sure that I understand exactly what you mean.

There are a few ground rules that I'd like to put in place:

- There are no right or wrong answers. Please tell me whatever is on your mind, the good and the bad. You are the expert and I'm hoping to learn from you. Also, you should feel free to ask me if you don't understand the question.
- You can stop this interview and leave at any time.
- If, during the interview, you say anything about someone hurting you, then I will have to tell someone else about it.
- Lastly, this interview is confidential. Confidential means that what you say is not public information. I won't use your name in anything that I write up to share publicly.

I would like to tape record this discussion. This allows me to concentrate on talking with you and not on taking notes, although I will sometimes write things down. I will hold onto the tapes, and I will erase them when my study is finished and everything I report will be anonymous; I will not say who said what. Is it okay with you for me to tape this conversation?

Do you have any questions for me before we start? Please state your name and the date.

## Questions

### Past and experiences in Forest

1. Your questionnaire says that you have lived in Forest County for X years.
  - a. Tell me about your move to Forest County. What was that like?
  - b. What were the similarities and differences from where you live now?
2. I'd like to understand more about growing up here in Forest - What is it like?
  - a. How is it similar or different to Boulder or Denver?
    - i. What do you (most) like about living in Forest?
    - ii. What do you (most) dislike about living in Forest?

### After High School Plans: College and Leaving Family/Community

3. Can you tell me what you would most like to do when you finish high school?
  - a. How did you come to that decision?
4. If college is part of the plan:
  - a. When did you first hear about college? (Get a story)
5. Do you have a particular college in mind?
  - a. Can you tell me how you chose this place?
  - b. Any concerns? What do you think will be hard about going to college?
    - i. Was it important to you to be close to home? (or away from home)?

### Parent, family, and community support

1. How does your family and friends think about you going to college? (Get examples)
  - a. If "supportive"/ good- how are they supporting this decision?
  - b. If "not supportive"/bad things or mixed- what do you think will happen? What is causing you to still plan to go to college?

### After college plans

2. Describe what you want to be doing in 5 years
  - a. Work
    - i. What job do you want to have?
    - ii. Can you tell me more about how you chose that career?
    - iii. Does this require you living in a particular type of place?
  - b. Family
    - i. What will your family look like? Kids? Married?
  - c. Do you picture yourself living in a small or large place?
  - d. Do you picture yourself ever moving back to Forest?

### Purpose for college

3. I remember reading that you had some hesitance about college in your personal essay. Can you tell me more about that? What makes you hesitant about going to college?

4. How do you deal with those worries?
  - a. Imagine a friend who is thinking about college but is worried about leaving home. What advice would you give her or him?
5. Despite these things, why do you want to go to college? Why is it important to you?  
(insert story of Tom being unsupportive and saying it would be easier to learn a trade and make money sooner... if this happened to you, what would you say?)
6. What barriers, if any, keep students like you from going to college?
7. What things can high schools or universities do to help students like you go to college?
8. Do you have anything you would like to add?

## Pre-Interview Questionnaire

1. Name \_\_\_\_\_
2. Date \_\_\_\_\_
3. In terms of ethnic group, how would you describe your ethnic or racial background?  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. How long have you lived in Forest County? \_\_\_\_\_
5. How old were you when you moved to Forest? \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix F

### Spring Student Interview Protocol

The main objective is to learn three things:

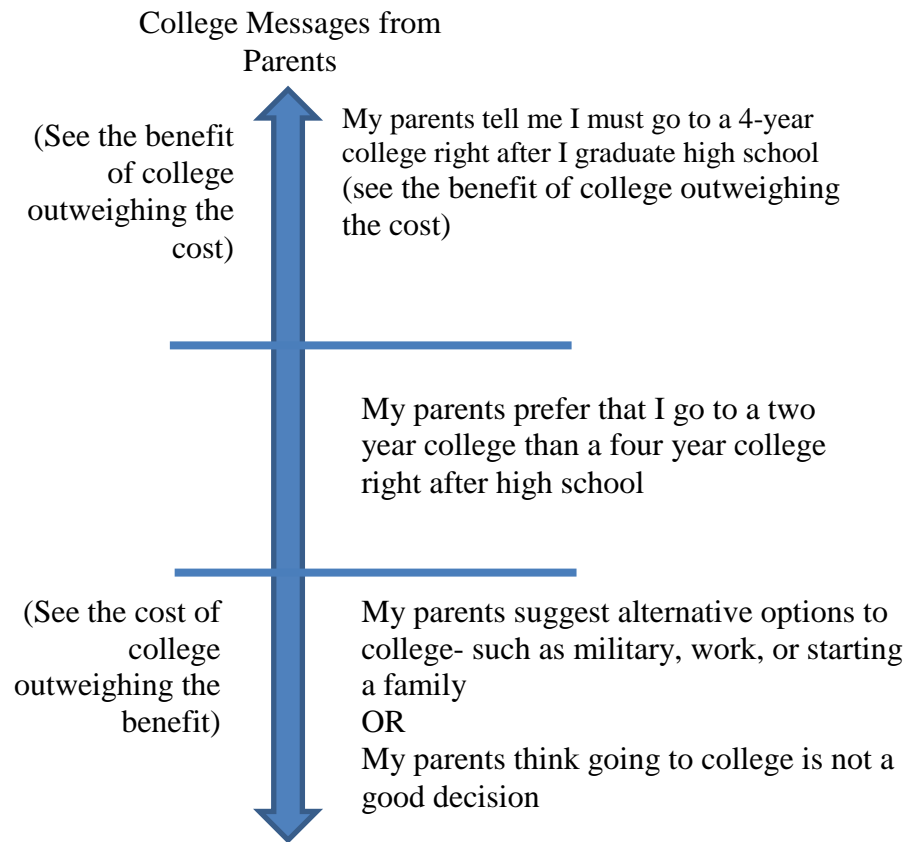
1) Choice of College: Did your decision of where to go change since our first interview? Can you tell me where you are thinking about college these days?

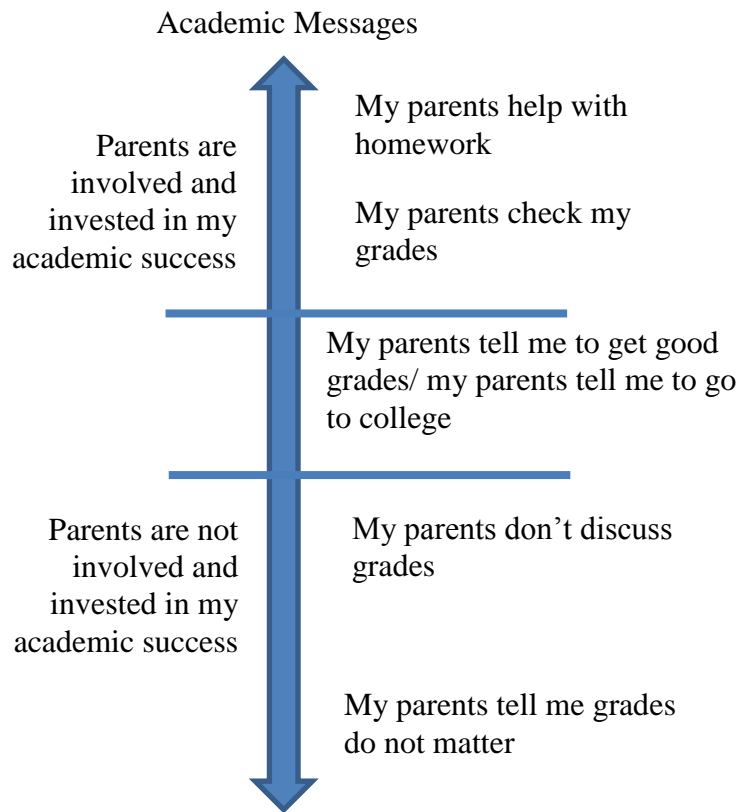
Then follow your if then matrix below

- a. If the student's decision on where to go to college changed from the first interview:
    - If I remember correctly, last time we talked you mentioned X. Does that sound right to you?
    - It sounds like your thinking has changed. Can you say more about that? (or "how that happened?")
    - What is it about X that made you not want to go there? Or what was it about Y that made you want to go there?
  - b. If the student's decision did not change:
    - If I remember correctly, last time we talked you mentioned X. Does that sound right to you?
    - So it sounds like you've been pretty consistent in your thinking. Can you say more about that?
    - Did you look at any other schools since we last talked?
    - What was it that made you want to go to X?
- 2) Impact of Distance:
- a. When thinking about colleges you might attend, does distance from home matter to you? Please tell me about how it matters.
  - b. Would you have chosen X if it was further/closer to home?
    - If YES: how far would you have been willing to move?
    - If NO: Can you say more about why you'd prefer not to go out of state? Was cost a factor? Did in-state tuition play a role?
      1. If it wasn't for the cost, would you have gone farther from home?
  - c. Did your parents care about the distance from home of your college? What did they want? How did you figure this out? (Did they tell you or you just knew?)
  - d. How far did your parents want you to go?
    - If they were happy with how far you moved:
      1. Did their request on how far to move impact your decision? How?
    - If they were unhappy with how far you were going:
      1. Did this impact your decision?

2. How did you decide to still go farther/closer from where they wanted?
- 3) Navigation: Did any of your friends encourage you to think about options other than 4 year college, such as a full time job or a two year college or something else? Did anyone else – like your parents or a teacher or counselor?
- a. If yes-
    - Please tell me about it.
    - Did you feel torn about what to do? How did you decide?
    - How did it impact your decision? Was it difficult?
      1. Yes- why?
      2. No- why?
  - b. If no-
    - So would you say that most everyone in your life supported your effort to go to 4 year college? How did they show this to you?
      1. How did they support you?
      2. Was it difficult to decide to go to a four year university?
  - c. Has anyone ever told you contradictory things- for instance, you should go to college, but then later told you it isn't important?

## Appendix G







Distance: How important is distance from home?

Distance from home is the largest factor in choosing a college

- Distance from home is the deciding factor in where I choose to go
- How far from home I go to college is more important than the college I go to
- My parents tell me I have to go to college close to home

Distance from home is an important factor in choosing colleges

- If I got a large enough scholarship, I would be willing to go anywhere
- I would change my mind on where I was willing to go to college if I really liked the college

Distance from home is a factor in choosing a college, but not the largest

- Distance is important to me, but there are many other factors that I am looking at when choosing a college
- I have considered distance, but I feel it won't really impact me when I get to college

Distance from home is not an important factor in choosing a college

- Distance from home is not really a factor I have considered in choosing a college
- I don't really care about distance from home- there are many other factors that are much more important

## Appendix H

1. How important is it to your parents that you go to college?
  - a. Very important
  - b. Somewhat important
  - c. Not important
2. How important is distance from home in your decision on where to go to college?
  - a. Very important
  - b. Somewhat important
  - c. Not important
3. Do you talk with your parents/guardian about going to college?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. Not Sure
4. In your ideal world, how close or far would you live from home when attending college?
  - a. Live at home
  - b. Under 3 hour drive from home
  - c. 3-7 hours' drive from home
  - d. 8-12 hours' drive from home
  - e. Over 12 hours' drive from home
5. How important is it to your parents that you do well in school?
  - a. Very important
  - a. Somewhat important
  - b. Not important
6. Are you more likely to attend an in-state or out of state 4-year college, or have you not thought about it yet?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. I haven't thought about it yet

**True or False: Please respond to the following questions with TRUE (A) or FALSE (B)**

7. It would take a lot for me to change my mind and go to a school closer or farther than I am comfortable with.
8. When discussing what I am going to do after I graduate high school, my parents usually suggest that I go to a two year college instead of four year college.
9. I am looking at only schools that are close by.
10. My parents are involved with my education.
11. Distance from home is the deciding factor in where I choose to go to college.
12. When discussing what I am going to do after I graduate, my parents often suggest that going to college is not the best decision for me.

13. My parents and I discuss what I learn in school.
14. How close or far I am from home is the least important factor influencing my decision where to go.
15. My parents think I should go to a 4-year college so I can make more money.
16. My parents tell me that getting good grades will help me have a better life.
17. My parents do not think that it matters how well I do in school.
18. My parents tell me grades do not matter.
19. My parents think that going to a 4-year college after I graduate high school will give me more opportunities than starting at a 2-year college will.
20. How far from home I go to college is more important than the college I go to.
21. My parents think going to a 4-year college right after I graduate high school is the best decision for my future.
22. When discussing what I am going to do after I graduate high school, my parents think it is a smart decision for me to go start at a two year college and work to save money.
23. How close or far I am from home is not really a factor I have considered in choosing a college.
24. My parents and I discuss my grades.
25. Distance is definitely an important factor, but there are also other important factors will help me decide how close or far I live from home.
26. When discussing what I am going to do when I graduate high school, my parents have suggested that it is a better decision for me to go start at a two year college than a four year college.
27. My parents and I do not discuss my grades.
28. My parents tell me to get good grades.
29. My parents think that any financial sacrifice is worth getting a 4-year college education.
30. I care about how close or far my home is from the college I choose, but there are many other factors that are more important to me.
31. I have considered how close or far I am from home, but I feel it won't really impact me when I get to college.
32. I don't really care about how close or far I from home when I go to college.
33. My parents ask about what I learn in class.

- 34. My parents and I talk about my homework.
- 35. My parents tell me I have to go to a 4-year college right after I graduate high school.
- 36. It wouldn't take much to change my mind on how far or close from home I'm willing to go to college.
- 37. It is important to live at home so I can help my family.
- 38. My parents feel that college will not help me have a better life.
- 39. My parents care how far away from home I go to college.
- 40. My parents tell me that I need to get good grades to go to college.
- 41. My parents don't care how well I do in school.
- 42. If I got a large enough scholarship, I would be willing to go anywhere.
- 43. My parents think I need to go to a 4-year college so I will have a better life
- 44. When discussing what I am going to do after I graduate from high school, my parents often suggest alternatives to college- such as joining the military, starting a full time job, or starting a family.

### **Demographics**

- 45. What College Prep program are you in?
  - a. Forest
  - b. Other
  - c. Other
- 46. How long have you been part of College Prep?
  - a. 1 year
  - b. 2 years
  - c. 3 years
  - d. 4 years
  - e. More than 4 years
- 47. What grade were you in this 2012-13 school year?
  - a. Freshman
  - b. Sophomore
  - c. Junior
  - d. Senior
  - e. Other
- 48. What is the primary language spoken in your home?
  - a. English

- b. Spanish
  - c. Other
49. Gender
- a. Male
  - b. Female
50. Race/Ethnicity (please only choose ONE- there is another question below to choose a second
- a. White/ Caucasian
  - b. Latino(a)
  - c. Black/ African American
  - d. Asian
  - e. American Indian
51. Race/Ethnicity (please only choose ONE- there is another question below to choose a second
- a. White/ Caucasian
  - b. Latino(a)
  - c. Black/ African American
  - d. Asian
  - e. American Indian

## Appendix I

**Definition****Example from the Data****“Division of Labor”**

The different roles parents and teachers take in helping students on their paths to college.

**Parental Support**

The endorsement for college, academic support, and support in college related tasks that students cite receiving from their parents.

Like, umm my mom, well she's been the one that's been involved. Like when there's a meeting at school about colleges, financial stuff and everything, she always goes and she is always keepin' up with my grades and asking me what I wanna study and like she, like when I tell her like "I dunno, I'm so confused, I dunno what I wanna study" she actually gives me ideas.

**School-Based Support**

The information and support for college that students cite receiving from school personnel.

So like, the CP program like is really like, helps, helps clarify what needs to happen. You know, it helps like point out step by step and to try to like break it down and make it easier and like support you in any way that they need to.

**“College at All Costs” Discourse**

The dominant discourse around college going suggesting that 1) college is the norm, 2) students need to fulfill their potential and go to best 4-year institution possible, 3) college is worth all sacrifices, 4) sacrifices will help students' development, and 5) community college is undesirable.

**College is the Norm**

College is the next, expected step students will take after high school

Umm just cuz in school, I used to go to Forest Valley Elementary, and umm all the teachers would be like "well, after high school" they would tell us "elementary, middle school, high school, and then college" and then they would say "college, well that's where you learn to be a teacher or that's where you learn how to be a doctor."

**Students need to Fulfill their Potential**

Students need to take the best opportunity available by enrolling in a good 4-year institution.

Umm the only push I got from a teacher, this is my English teacher, she's the IB [International Baccalaureate] coordinator, director of the program and stuff, umm, and she's kind of the type of person like, you know, she went to Oxford or something, and she's always the type of person with like her and her opinion, money doesn't matter. You should go to the best school you can. And, she just has that mentality about it.

**College is Worth the Sacrifice**

The concerns students have about college (money, distance from home) will be worth a college degree in the end

Like no matter what, even if you have to pay off college for until you're thirty five, it's gonna be worth it because you're doing what you want, and it's an investment in your life. Like it's not like you're investing in stock, it's not like you're investing in a car. You're investing in a life decision, you know, this is like your life path that you're trying to direct. And if it takes a little money, then it, so be it. That's reality. Everything takes money these days.

**Sacrifices will Help Students Develop**

The sacrifices students face will make them into better people

When I asked Chad why he began to look at out-of-state institutions, he told me that adults encouraged him to “explore places that you’re not comfortable in. So like, it’s just like, yeah, it shaped them as a better person.”

**Community College is Undesirable**

It's just, like unsaid, and it's not like you wanna go to community college or something. I mean, nothing’s wrong with that, there's just, there's higher expectations if that makes sense.

**Locally Situated Factors Shifting Students’ Plans**

Family practices that contradicted the “College at All Costs” and often led seniors to scale back their initial fall plans.

**Financial**

A concern with the high cost of tuition and an attempt to save money (related to them individually and their families)

Umm, just ‘cuz my parents are deciding to retire pretty soon, and I don't wanna have to like move to a different state and like pay all that, while they should be saving up their money and also, like, financially, Mesa was like the better choice.

**Distance/ Family Related**

Concern with the impact on family relationships.

I really considered moving, like going to MSU over in Montana. Like they were a big contender with me when I was coming down to my final decisions, and so they're a good ten hours, 11 hours away, maybe even more actually. Umm, but that definitely was like one of the reasons I didn't want to go there, that and out of state tuition, but, you know, oh well. Umm, but I liked the idea that if I'm like having a really bad week, then I can just drive home you know and hang out with my parents and then like come back to, you know, I don't want to say reality, but like, come back to college and stuff.

## Differing Experiences of Persisters

Not all students experiencing locally situated factors scaled back their plans. These were two experiences that appeared to differentiate them from their peers.

### **Parental Messages of Feasibility of a 4-year/ Out-of-State Institution**

Parental messages around the feasibility of attending a 4-year or out-of-state institution.

Well, my dad, he always talks about just money-wise he's all like, he just doesn't want me to take out grants or loans. So he's always just saying "Maybe there's community college you can go to instead of a big university."

### **Family History with College-Going**

Family members past successful or unsuccessful experiences with college-going.

Like, I've heard that not many, that most people, their first year they always drop out and stuff like that. But my cousins, like, they go to school and this is like their third year and they haven't dropped out or anything and they're just like, "oh, it's actually pretty cool. It's nothing like high school, like you study what you wanna study. It's a lot better and more flexible



## Appendix J

	Rural		
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Ques. 7	148	.53	.501
Ques. 8*	149	.83	.381
Ques. 9*	145	.62	.487
Ques. 10	150	.83	.374
Ques. 11*	150	.38	.486
Ques. 12*	147	.95	.214
Ques. 13	149	.66	.476
Ques. 14	149	.54	.500
Ques. 15	150	.60	.492
Ques. 16	147	.91	.285
Ques. 17*	146	.95	.228
Ques. 18*	148	.97	.163
Ques. 19	148	.60	.491
Ques. 20*	148	.84	.364
Ques. 21	148	.66	.477
Ques. 22*	150	.56	.498
Ques. 23	149	.57	.497
Ques. 24	149	.86	.349
Ques. 25	149	.60	.492
Ques. 26*	146	.72	.451
Ques. 27*	148	.84	.364
Ques. 28	148	.96	.198
Ques. 29	146	.71	.457
Ques. 30	150	.73	.444
Ques. 31	150	.68	.468
Ques. 32	149	.49	.502
Ques. 33	149	.66	.476
Ques. 34	147	.63	.484
Ques. 35	148	.36	.483
Ques. 36	150	.55	.499
Ques. 37	146	.45	.499
Ques. 38*	148	.87	.336
Ques. 39*	148	.26	.442
Ques. 40	150	.91	.282
Ques. 41*	150	.93	.250
Ques. 42	150	.81	.391
Ques. 43	148	.61	.490
Ques. 44*	144	.76	.426

\*reverse coded