

Navigating Higher Ed: The Importance of Mentorship, Social Capital, and Resources in Transitioning to Higher Education

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Abstract

Research has shown that first generation students of color are more likely to drop out of college than their non-first generation and white counterparts because of disparities like access, social capital, and support systems. The purpose of this research project was to create a support system that would serve as a sanctuary of success for first generation high school students as they begin to navigate higher education. This project consisted of group sessions on financial aid and scholarship support, choosing a school and major support, as well as professional development support. Findings illustrate the importance of individualized support, sanctuaries of success, and intrusive advising. Through intrusive advising, higher education institutions can provide individualized support to their students. Further, the spaces where this individualized support occurs have the potential to turn into sanctuaries of success, and these sanctuaries of success can cultivate the social capital and individualistic institutional norms needed to succeed in higher education. All in all, these findings speak to how intrusive advising can be a step forward to closing achievement gaps like retention and graduation rates, specifically in First-Generation students.

Introduction

My first encounter with higher education was through my older brother. In 2014, he graduated from high school and enrolled at St. Mary's University. This was perhaps my family's biggest milestone since immigrating to the United States in 2002. My parents moved to the U.S. with hopes of offering us a brighter future than they could in Mexico. They had both dropped out of high school and entered the workforce in their early teens, so when the opportunity presented itself, they decided to immigrate to the United States. My parents came to America in hopes of their children accomplishing the American Dream, so when my brother was the first in our family to graduate from high school and enroll in college, they were ecstatic.

My parents didn't make much, but they gave up everything to make tuition and allow my brother a shot at the American Dream. Only a semester after my brother had matriculated, he found himself having to leave. At the time I didn't know why, but I was heartbroken. How did my brother, who was smart, capable, hardworking, and dedicated, find himself having to leave? It didn't make any sense. It wasn't until I found myself applying to college – in 2016 – did he disclose what had happened. Because my parents were only able to cover so much of the remaining tuition balance, he found himself working part time to make monthly tuition statements. At first, he didn't mind, he liked working and not completely depending on our parents. The problems arose when his classes – he was majoring in bioinformatics – started to move too quickly. He began struggling to understand the curriculum, and when he met with academic advisors, he was told to either change majors or get a tutor.

With having to make tuition payments, not only could he not afford a tutor, but he also didn't have time to meet with one either. Stressed about making his monthly tuition payments, worrying how he was going to pass his classes, as well as not wanting to disappoint my parents,

he found himself overwhelmed and it didn't take long for him to crack. When his final grades came out, they revealed what he already knew, and soon after received a letter discussing academic probation. The news broke my parents. How could their child who they had given everything to, who they had moved to the United States to offer more to, who they had invested their savings in, have fallen through the cracks? It didn't make any sense. It wasn't until I found myself going to college that I started to understand everything my brother had gone through.

Far too often, First Generation college students fall through the cracks. My brother's story is one of millions; first-generation students are 26-27% more likely to drop out of college in their first year than non-first-generation college students (Stebbleton et al., 2014.) This is because higher education institutions are designed for white, affluent, and middle-class students from college-educated families which makes it difficult for First Generation students to overcome the institutional barriers they face in navigating higher education. The lack of academic, peer, economic, and institutional support are all contributing factors to the low retention rates of first-generation students.

The problem at hand is that higher education institutions are failing in assisting their first-generation students to successfully transition to college and making them feel like they belong. By failing to do this, First-Generation Students find themselves exiting higher education at alarmingly high rates. What is even more alerting is that this could be avoided by providing their students with academic, peer, economic, and institutional support. It is important for higher education institutions to support their students in the ways mentioned above because it allows for an increase in retention and satisfaction rates, both of which contribute to the socioemotional and academic wellbeing of their First-Generation and disadvantaged students. Further, by providing

support and resources to First-Generation students, higher education institutions would actually be working as a great equalizer and closing achievement gaps.

As a predominantly white institution (PWI), Clark is no different from most institutions in failing to properly support its students of color who are First Generation college students in transitioning into and completing their college education. Research has revealed that First Generation students make nearly 23% of all college students and are projected to make 30% by 2060. However, six years after matriculation 43% of First-Generation Students drop out, 60% of whom dropped out in their first year (Stebbleton et al., 2014).

The research demonstrates that the first year is crucial for First Generation students, which is why Michelle and I – both First Generation and Latinx students –decided to create a course for First Generation students called: Navigating Higher Ed, to address the issues they face in matriculating and assimilating to higher education. Navigating Higher Ed intended to address these issues by providing a space where students can build community with other students from similar backgrounds who want to help them succeed and where they can openly discuss the challenges they face in higher education. We recruited students over the fall semester and our course took place during the winter session. Students were asked to fill out a google form to assess what they needed the most support in to help further guide us in ways in which we would assist them.

Through the Navigating Higher Ed course, we were able to address the transition to college, built connections with them, and addressed the challenges they experienced. Sessions revolved around financial aid and scholarship support, choosing a college and major support, and professional development support. We also held a session for Dynamy Youth Academy where we did a scholarship workshop and answered questions students had about college. Sessions

were conducted by Michelle and I, along with two other Clark seniors who had interest in connecting with seniors in high school, wanted to take a course during the winter session, and were interested in our project. Sessions usually lasted 50-60 minutes, with only the last session going over and lasting nearly 2 hours. All sessions took place virtually.

Our project was designed to explore how support group(s) fosters a sense of belonging and agency in students and thus, makes them more likely to pursue higher education. We asked the following questions with prompts:

1. What is the experience of First-Generation students as they start to transition to college?
2. What do First Generation students identify as the support most needed when thinking about college?
3. Do high school seniors have support systems in place to follow them when they transition to high school? If so, what do these support systems look like?
4. How does the support network for high school seniors affect how they think about higher education and sense of belonging on a college campus?

We initiated this project because higher education institutions fail millions of students, specifically First-Generation Students, every year (Stebbleton et al., 2014). As the number of First-Generation Students continues to increase, it is important for higher education institutions to change and provide adequate support and resources to one of their most vulnerable populations. Not addressing the disproportionate college dropout rates in First Generation students creates and sustains or perpetuates discriminatory practices of higher education institutions. We hope this finished project will bring awareness to the issues that students - specifically First-Generation Students – face. We hope that after we graduate, our project will be continued by other students and expanded to support other marginalized first-generation

racial/ethnic groups. Most importantly, we hoped to show the participants we worked with that there is always someone that they could lean on, and that together anything can be accomplished.

Review of the Literature

Graduation rates among disadvantaged students are disappointingly low, First Generation students (FGS) are four times more likely to drop out than non-FGS (Stebbleton et al., 2014.) As indicated above, six years after matriculation, 43% of FGS had dropped out, of which 60% dropped out during their first year (Stebbleton et al., 2014.) These rates demonstrate that higher education institutions are failing to retain FGS. A population that – according to the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) – made up 45% of the student population. This results in nearly 20% of all college students exiting higher education within six years of matriculation, all of whom are First-Generation. This is a problem because – for many of these students – higher education is their only way of achieving social mobility, yet higher education is weeding them out at disappointingly high rates. This is able to occur because First-Generation and disadvantaged students are not getting access to the same resources and opportunities as their non-First-Generation counterparts.

In “Social Equity: It’s Legacy, Its Promise,” Guy and McCandless (2012) identify equality as sameness which means that everyone is given access to the same things in terms of quantity. Whereas equity is the process of adhering to individuals’ specific needs, which involves giving more resources to groups who have been historically marginalized so that they are able to truly have the same opportunities. Equity is important because groups who have been historically marginalized continue to be held back by discriminatory practices that – although outlawed – continue to have drastic effects on education and opportunity.

Individuals have similar educational background; race continues to play a drastic role in how people live their lives. This is seen through infant mortality rates, job-call backs, earnings, homeownership, etc. African Americans – in the US – have 2.3 times the infant mortality rate

than whites (USDHHS), are less likely – by 36% – to get call backs than whites (Quillian, 2020), earn 87 cents for a white man’s dollar (African American women earn 66 cents for a white man’s dollar) (Miller, 2020), and are nearly 30% less likely to own their home (Lerner, 2020). All these disparities illustrate how it is very unlikely from children from different social groups to have the same, or even similar, lives even when they go through the same or similar schooling. Equity is specifically important in higher education because after overcoming so many institutional and structural barriers, the last thing disadvantaged students should have to worry about is even more barriers.

As Banks-Santilli (2014) state “if education is truly equalizing then why do so many first-generation college students remain disadvantaged?” (p.2). The answer is simple, FGS remains disadvantaged because higher education institutions refuse to create and/or lack programs that directly address their needs. Florida State University – according to Carey (2008) – has the smallest gap in graduation rates (3%) when compared to similar institutions; this is because FSU has programs dedicated to ensuring the success of their disadvantaged students. Their most popular program – CARE – works with a group of student’s years prior to their acceptance to FSU to ensure they have the resources to tackle higher education, and when they are admitted they offer them a variety of resources so that they never feel like something is inaccessible to them (Carey, 2008,).

Programs like CARE should be the rule, not the exception, in higher education. Programs like CARE are telling their students that they matter and that they will have support along the way, which makes them feel a sense of belonging at their college and university. When students do not have programs like CARE, they not only feel they do not have the support, but they are also less likely to feel like they belong. Far too often universities talk about being committed to

helping their students succeed and put student success – specifically the success of disadvantaged students – behind “fostering faculty excellence, improving research capabilities, and increasing graduate enrollment as major goals in the chancellor’s strategic plan for the university” (Carey, 2008, p.11). Florida State’s program is categorized into “intrusive advising,” which is defined as:

Typically involves some combination of recommended or required advising sessions for students on a regular basis a predetermined set of goals to be accomplished in advising sessions; and the dual objectives of a) increasing the motivation and academic success of students and b) reducing attrition from the college or university (Schwebel et al., 2008, p. 28)

Further, intrusive advising is meant to encourage, not force, students to seek support. This allows students to connect with their advisors and create a connection where they are able to not only talk about classes and advising, but also discuss “critical topics such as career development, major selection, goal development, college success strategies, and most important, for this population of first year students, adjustment and transitional issues” (Schwebel et al., 2008, p.31). This support program aims to change the attitudes associated around advising as a barrier students need to get through to register for classes “rather than an opportunity to maximize their potential for success in college” (Schwebel et al., 2008, p.30). Schwebel et al., talk about intrusive advising in terms of academic advising, but the same strategies of advising could be used in connecting students to counseling and other resources on college campuses.

It is important to note that although intrusive advising “involves some combination of recommended or required advising sessions,” (Schwebel et al., 2008, p. 28,) students often face no repercussions if they do not attend recommended advising sessions, they simply will continue

to receive communication of these advising sessions, hence the intrusiveness, until they decide to attend advising or choose to continue not to. Some intrusive advising that has required advising sessions do have repercussions for students who do not attend advising sessions. FSU's CARE program has a center that offers study spaces and tutoring that "students are required to attend for at least eight hours per week - 10 if their grades begin to slip. If they do not complete the required number of hours, they can't register for their next set of classes." (Carey, p.28, 2008.) This illustrates how intrusive advising can look intrusive in various ways and each approach can have different responses and results.

Universities with offices centered around student retention, success, and enhancement ensure that their specific needs are being met. FSU's CARE program is arguably the most successful program, but other universities such as Washburn University, The University of Southern Mississippi, and West Carolina University are also making efforts to ensure student success. One thing that the literature has not looked at are programs run by other students. This project examines such a program and considers how such student-to-student peer run programs can help eliminate the graduation rate gap and increase the satisfaction of students. Having a student run program would be helpful because it would allow students to connect with one another without there being a power dynamic like there is between student and university personnel. This project will attempt to address the importance of students creating "sanctuaries of success" (see below) for other students, these spaces will allow for students to create social capital – which is defined as network-based resource(s) (Pinxten & Lievens, 2014) – and interact with other students who either have been in a similar position or are currently in the same position. Further, the informality of peer run sessions will put less pressure on students who decide to seek support, since there is no mandate by the university

Conceptual Framework

In constructing our conceptual framework, the concepts that become the most salient for us in investigating the research are Bourdieu's concept of capital - specifically social capital - and Brooks' concept of sanctuaries for success.

Social Capital

The concept of capital: social, cultural, and economic was first introduced by Bourdieu in the 1980s. Bourdieu argues that individuals have different positions in society based on three forms of capital: social, cultural, and economic capital. (Pinxten & Lievens, 2014). This means that the more of each capital an individual has, the greater capacity that individual has in navigating the systems that maintain social inequality. For the purpose of this praxis project, I am utilizing a specific focus on social capital, and how having social capital is effective for first-year students. That being said, Bourdieu defines social capital as a network-based resource (Pinxten & Lievens, 2014). This means that the more social networks an individual has, the more resources they have available. Having more resources available – especially in one's transition to higher education – is crucial.

Bourdieu's concept of social capital says that those with more social connections (capital) have more access to more networks, and these networks are then used to access resources. First Generation Students – specifically those who identify as a minority – have little to no networks and resources when they arrive at college. This lack of social capital - as Stebleton et al. (2014) discuss - leads FGS to feel like they do not belong on college campuses and leads them to exit higher education institutions. This leads us to Brooks' sanctuaries for success.

Sanctuaries of Success

Brooks' (2012) concept of sanctuaries for success is defined as places where students of color are able to create a sense of belonging and acceptance with other students of color (2012). Belonging and acceptance is created by the "reciprocal relationship between a person or group with the environment. Individual values reflect the shared values of individuals within an environment and environment reflects the values of the individuals within it" (Brooks, 2012, p.136). These spaces become sanctuaries because in attending predominantly white institutions, it is an inherent result that students of color feel alienated and underrepresented.

In "Alienation of ethnic minority students at a predominantly White university" Loo and Rolison (1986) discuss how a lack of representation for ethnic minorities results in low satisfaction and alienation on college campuses from minority students. They found that, a majority of both ethnic minority and white students believed that minority students faced greater social cultural difficulties on campus than white students did. Two major differences for this were given: [1] first, the cultural dominance of white, middle-class values on campus pressuring minority students to acquire white, middle-class values and to reject their own, and [2] second ethnic isolation resulting from being a small proportion of the student body. (Loo and Rolison, 1986, pp.64-65)

This means that the cultural dominance and ethnic isolation resulted in ethnic students being less satisfied with their college experience because they experienced social cultural differences that their more affluent and/or white counterparts did not. These differences resulted in 37% of ethnic minority students reporting feeling socially isolated on campus, and 25% feeling like they were not integrated (Loo and Rolison, 1986, p.64). Their findings illustrate how ethnic minority students feel alienated and underrepresented at predominantly white institutions

and support the importance of having sanctuaries of success where they can connect with own ethnic subculture(s).

We draw on these two concepts to create our support network for high school seniors as they transition to college. Our support network aims to create a sanctuary for success for these students that allows them to create the social capital they need to be successful in college. Creating a sanctuary allows students of color to connect with other students of color in an effort to expand and build on their “network-based resource(s),” (Pinxten & Lievens, 2014) which contribute to building social capital. This is done by allowing students to have a space where they do not have to adhere to the “individualistic institutional norms [that] are often incongruent with the interdependent cultural orientations of first-generation and working-class students (Garriott, 2017, p.433). Thus, the sanctuaries of success addresses not only the sense of alienation that Loo and Rolison explain, but it also becomes a space for fostering the social capital that is needed when inevitable crises emerge. Hence, we sought to build the sanctuary of support to foster greater social capital.

Methods

Methodology

The research approach we took in conducting our research was Participatory Action Research (PAR.) PAR consists of participation and action from both the researchers and participants, this means that those being 'studied' also have a say in how the research is executed and formed (McIntyre. 2007).

For our project, this means that we allowed participants to reflect and respond on topics that are important to them and make the overall project more relevant and enjoyable. As seniors, our need for a sanctuary will not be as great as those of our participants. In making this project PAR, we are allowing our participants to lead the discussion as they see fit and bring up/address issues that are salient to them. In conducting PAR, McIntyre found that when given responsibility and the opportunity to shape projects, participants are more involved because it is something they want to do rather than something imposed on them.

In doing PAR, we drew on various qualitative methods including conducting closing interviews, collecting field notes, and audio recording our weekly sessions. Our weekly sessions responded to the needs of our participants, and they had the final say on how they wanted each session to look like. Interview questions were determined by us - Michelle and Deisy - and aimed to understand more about our students and their experiences both in the transition to college as well as in the program. Further, interviews allowed us to see the impact of our intervention.

Epistemological Stance

Our rationale for doing a PAR Project was that the needs of students change, and it is not up to us - as researchers - to determine what our participants need. Further, by allowing them to

decide, we did not make generalizations about what they need. Through field notes, audio recorded sessions, and interviews we were able to interpret what students say through different methods and data types. This will be discussed more in depth in the data collection section.

Additionally, we relied on interviews because while we have audio recordings and field notes of our weekly sessions, in the end, we wanted to engage the students with our goals of the project and get their understanding and interpretation of how effectively we met them. Rather than just observe, we engaged in dialogue with the participants so we could make interpretations alongside people participating in our project.

Site

As Latinx First Generation College Students we feel strongly about Latinx success and mobility. As we reach the end of our undergraduate degree, we feel it is necessary to address the issues so many Latinx FGS face when they transition to college. This led us to come up with a six-week course called: Navigating Higher Education. Clark University has a program called ‘Student Support Network’ (SSN) through its office of Counseling and Personal Growth. The program is intended to teach students how to be support systems for their peers. However, this program has no follow up for students to use what they learned and help others. Our hope is to take the skills we learned throughout the SSN and through our college experience to support high school seniors as they transition to college. We believe that the intervention must be extensive, which is why our course will equate to a half unit. The hours required for a half unit will allow us sufficient time to create a sanctuary site and address the needs of our students. Further, as we spent more time in college we had more questions, which is why we decided to make our project PAR. Having an adaptable curriculum allows for our participants to express their needs as they

see fit and get the most out of our support network, further an adaptable curriculum allows us to bring in guests to guide us to our end goal.

Positionality

As seniors and college students, our relationship with the participants varied from insiders and outsiders. Our intersecting identities as First-Generation students and minoritized students (LatinX) allow us to connect with them, but our age, year, and status as researchers made us outsiders. Our relationship was one of both co-designers and co-researchers. We were co-designers in the sense that they determined what they needed help with, and we brought in the resources we saw fit. We were co-researchers because we allowed them to take a lead in our praxis project and shape our research.

Participants

As mentioned prior, our praxis project will be a support network for high school students who are seniors transitioning to college. That being said, some demographics that are important for this project are:

- Race and Ethnicity
- Relation with higher education: Non-First-Generation students/ First Generation students
- Legal status: immigrants/ refugees/ US citizens
- Native Language
- Residence: Out of state/ in state/ international/ permanent resident/ DACA
- Age: All of our participants were high school seniors (aged 17-18)

As seniors at Clark University who facilitated a support network for high school seniors at Claremont Academy, we recognize that there was a power differential at play. We attempted to tackle this matter by building a connection and bond with the participants when starting our

program. We wanted them to feel as comfortable as possible for them to be able to express what they felt they needed most help on and be able to ask questions on things they did not know. Our lived experiences were helpful in guiding our participants in what they hoped to get out of our course. This will be discussed further in the findings section.

Data Collection

We collected data through four different methods: surveys, voice recordings, field notes, interviews. A survey was sent out to students who showed interest in our winter session course through a google form that asked students the following questions.

1. Are you first gen? (First in their family to go to college)
2. Which racial/ethnic group do you identify with?
3. What do you need the most help with right now?
4. What is something you want to learn from this class? Can be anything related to college.
(e.g., personal statements, choosing a major, applying for scholarships, etc.)
5. Do you want to meet once a week for 2 hours, or twice a week for 1 hour?
6. Can you meet during the scheduled times? If you can't meet during the scheduled time, when are you available?

Responses to these questions allowed us to get an idea of what our sessions would focus on and how we should structure those based on the intersecting identities of the students we were working with. After surveys, we began collecting data through voice recordings. We recorded most (4) of the sessions, with one of them not being recorded because the scholarship prompt we were working on was personal to the student and it did not seem appropriate to record, and with one accidentally not being recorded fully - my battery died and only recorded the first couple of

minutes. Voice Memos were also created as a type of field notes as a way for me to be able to get everything that was going through my head without getting sidetracked or forgetting as I wrote field notes. Key segments to each session recording and voice memos were identified and transcribed.

These voice recordings and voice memos guided our six field notes that included the objective of our session, a summary of what happened, how we felt it went, and what our next steps were. Field notes were taken both digitally and handwritten. Field notes varied from half a page to a full page depending on the session and were always taken after our sessions were over.

Interviews followed a semi-structured interview protocol where we asked our participant about her views on pursuing a higher education degree, how she felt about our intervention, and her overall hopes for life and school. We - Michelle and I- conducted interviews at the end of our sessions and they were audio-recorded. A mixed qualitative approach allowed us to have different types of data to analyze rather than just one. This allowed for less gaps in the research and less misinterpretation. Consent forms were signed by all participants mentioned in this paper.

Data Analysis

Our data was analyzed and coded for markers like rapport, vulnerability, college, stress, comfort, and aspirations. We coded for these markers because we felt they encompassed our sessions. Further, I felt that these markers signaled and illustrated what the literature described sanctuary of support represented. By using these markers to code the data I intended to see how creating a *sanctuary of support* for high school students that allowed them to create *social capital* they need to be successful in college.

We focused on session voice recordings and memos as those more clearly illustrated the markers mentioned above whereas interviews allowed us to see the satisfaction the student had with our intervention, suggestions for future steps, and their overarching feelings towards college.

Findings

The Findings Section is broken down into five subsections [1] Covid and Mobility, [2] Time, Timing, and Intrusive Advising, [3] Staging an Intervention, [4] Creating a Space, and [5] Individualized support. The first subsection addresses some of the issues we faced with lifting our project off the ground and the importance of mobility in doing work focused on supporting youth. The second subsection discusses time in terms of the time we actually spent with FGS and what we did in that time, and timing in terms of to the point in time where our support actually occurred (first year/first semester) and introduces intrusive advising. The third subsection focuses on the work we did and how we lifted our project off the ground. The fourth focuses on creating a makeshift sanctuary of support when everything was virtual. And the fifth and final section speaks to the importance of individualized support when offering support to FGS.

Covid and Mobility

Our project was initially conceived of as a support network for incoming first-generation college students at Clark. Our project intended to offer a sanctuary space to these students and provide them with resources as they navigate their first semester of higher education. Because of a lack of response to our outreach, our project shifted to supporting high school students as they finished high school and found themselves transitioning to higher education. This shift allowed us to discuss with First-Generation high school students how to apply for scholarships, choose a major, choose a college, answer questions they have about higher education, etc. Our team was in contact with Claremont Academy and were able to relay information about our project to seniors, we then were able to also get in contact with Dynamy Youth Academy and also hold an information session for them on scholarships and navigating higher education.

Through Claremont Academy we were able to recruit six students to be part of our project, two of which ultimately attended our session, and one which stayed all throughout. Our project ran throughout the Clark Intersession (January 4th - February 12th) and we extended it for another week, for a total of eight weeks of support sessions. On week five we met with the youth in Dynamy Youth Academy and offered a session on writing scholarships and answered questions they had about college. Our project changed a lot since we first planned it out, and we were ultimately not able to reach the number of students that we hoped for. However, we still felt satisfied with the support we were able to offer and found meaning in being able to learn the do's and don'ts of creating a support network for high school students.

Time, Timing, and Intrusive Advising

When we first started staging our senior project, we focused a lot on time and timing, in which time referred to the time we actually spent with FGS and what we did in that time, and timing referred to the point in time where our support actually occurred (first year/first semester). The literature we reference pointed to the first year of college being crucial for FGS, with FGS being four times more likely to drop out than non-FGS (Stebbleton et al., 2014.) Six years after matriculation, 43% of FGS had dropped out, of which 60% dropped out during their first year (Stebbleton et al., 2014.) This demonstrated a need for intervention for FGS within the first year, this led us to plan our senior project to begin recruitment in July. Before the start of the semester, we hoped that starting a few weeks before the semester would allow us to answer questions and build a rapport before the school year actually started. Further, we had hoped that this would allow for a seamless transition of participants into their first semester to college and, as mentioned, have that pre-existing rapport that would allow us to provide resources and support as things came up in their first semester.

However, because of IRB delays we were not able to start recruiting as early as we wanted to and ended up getting approval in the first 2 weeks of the semester. This left us doing recruitment around mid-semester. Our recruitment consisted of emails and posts on social media. We reached out to three staff at Clark that we felt would help and contribute to our recruitment, those staff were the interim director of the first-year experience program, the director for diversity and inclusive excellence, and the director of multicultural and First-Generation Student support. We reached out to these specific individuals because we felt that their offices and roles were tied directly with the students we wanted to interact with.

The interim director of the first-year experience was supportive of our project and we met to discuss how we should approach our project. Similarly, the director for diversity and inclusive excellence supported our project and shared recruitment materials with his network. In addition to this, we posted recruitment materials on Facebook groups, primarily the Facebook group for the freshman class and the university Facebook group. Even with these efforts, recruitment was not where we wanted. We had students reach out and wanting to also provide support, but not any students wanting support. The late start, we feel, definitely left us at a disadvantage and resulted in us not being able to successfully recruit students. This, however, should not have come as a shock. The literature we had looked at had indicated that this would more than likely be the case, discussing how

First generation students indicated needing but not using [mental health] services at a higher rate than non-First-Generation students. The most frequent reasons reported included that the location was inconvenient (84.5%), that had never heard of it (80.4%), the hours were inconvenient (77.8%), and they did not have enough time (76.1%).
(Stebbleton et al., 2014, p.13.)

Although the support network was not specifically about mental health, it did focus on addressing the “unique counseling needs related to academic functioning, adjustment to college life, and family-of-origin issues” (Stebbleton et al., 2014, p.8). This relates back to FGS students not having the social capital to be successful in college, specifically referring to not usually having access to networks and resources. Our support network intended to fill those gaps and create a sanctuary space where their sense of belonging would grow, and - ultimately, have a positive effect on the participants' social and academic performance and their retention rates.

After a failed recruitment, we decided to pivot and shift our project to an intercession course. We felt that my offering it as a half credit, students would have an incentive to sign up and that recruitment would be successful. Similar to our first recruitment, we had students who wanted to support but not any that needed support. This led us to a collaborative approach where we decided to welcome other seniors to our project and assist us and shift our audience to high school seniors. We intended to also offer high school seniors with a college credit, but due to the winter session being short as is, the add/drop period did not allow us sufficient time to set up the students with that college credit. However, we were still able to recruit six students, four of which filled out our original survey, two who showed up to at least one session, and one of who stayed all throughout.

Two of the five students that showed interest gave us reasoning for not being able to continue. One of them mentioned that a program she was in was supposed to come to an end, but it was extended, and she was no longer looking for additional support. The other students had mentioned having work conflicts prior to our first meeting, but he mentioned that it would likely be more of a delay (10-15 minutes) rather than missing entire sessions. These students work schedule ended up changing and no longer had enough availability to be part of our sessions. We

followed up with the other three students at least three times and one mentioned forgetting but still being interested, but still did not attend the next session. In doing this, we were left wondering how we could have ensured that a larger number of the students that we originally recruited (six) followed through.

This led us to intrusive advising. Intrusive advising has been effective in Florida State University's (FSU) CARE program, their intrusive advising followed students from high school through college and allowed them to get support even if they did not feel like they needed it (Carey, 2008). This type of intrusive advising often comes in both individualized and group support, but individualized support allows students to freely ask questions and receive answers instantly, something that would not be possible without intrusive advising (Donaldson, 2016, p.34.) Intrusive advising creates spaces where FGS can develop the individualistic norms needed to be successful in college. These norms allow students to feel more comfortable and/or form relationships with faculty and staff which allow them to ask questions more openly than they would have prior to forming these relationships. Further, this type of advising focuses on students' interest, is offered at various times, and has had a positive response from students, Donaldson et al. (2016) state how students felt that "this question-and-answer exchange contributed to the personalized experience because students could control some of the topics discussed," (p.34).

Ultimately, this enforced the importance of not only our support network, but an overall intervention for FGS in which they are offered support in critical periods. Although the literature can point to what is assumed to be a critical period (Stebbleton et al., 2014), that time is not the same for all students. Offering a variety of different support services could be helpful so that when students do find themselves in need of help, they can easily access it (Schwartz, 2018) Intrusive

advising compels FGS to develop a network of support before they need it. If FGS wait until they realize the need for the social network, as did my brother, it will be too late. The intrusive advising project detailed by Schwebel et al. (2008) created a protocol that involved a series of three steps occurring during the 3rd, 4th, and 5th week of a 15-week semester for new students.

Schwebel et al. describe the process below:

During the 3rd week of the term, students in the group who had not yet arranged an appointment with their professional advisor were sent an Email inviting them to do so. Second, during the 4th week of classes, students who had not yet arranged an appointment were telephoned by administrative support staff, who reminded the student to schedule an advising appointment and who would set an appointment upon the students request. Third and finally, during the 5th week of classes, the advisors themselves called all students who had not yet set an appointment. (p. 29)

The variation of outreach makes this unique, rather than it looking like a mass email or a scripted call. This intrusiveness by various parties sends a message to students that the university, staff, and faculty care for them. Pairing intrusive advising with other resources, not just advising, allows students to have knowledge about the various resources available to them in a way that is accessible and seems sincere. Further, intrusive advising can help identify the moments in which students are in distress and connect them with resources and ensure they are getting the support they need when they need it through another series of intrusive advising. Although this might get repetitive and annoy students, it's not much different than the mass emails students are receiving. Students might not see the importance of advising, counseling, support centers, etc. at first but “they could be more likely to seek services if they can see a

direct, tangible positive outcome of using services, such as meeting personal achievement goals” (Stebbleton et al., 2014, pp.17-18).

Framing interventions as a positive outcome and a way to meet personal achievement goals helps eliminate the stigma often associated with mental health and counseling services (Garriott, 2017). In addition, it helps lift a weight off of FGS who too often find themselves searching for support after an unanticipated crisis creates the need and then they are left to turn to family members and their limited network of peers who might not have the answers they are searching for. Stebleton et al. (2014) discuss how “many of the students stated that they did not feel welcome or comfortable approaching faculty members or institutional agents but instead sought out information from friends and family members” (2014, pp.9-10). Although there is no way to guarantee that intrusive advising will seem welcoming or comfortable to all students, it will allow students to build the social and cultural capital needed when navigating higher education.

One approach that might help for students who might not feel welcomed or comfortable with one-on-one meetings with counselors or advisors is relying on and connecting with student-led clubs and programs. Stebleton et al. (2014) discuss how Active Minds, which focuses on raising mental health awareness through peer dialogue among college students, and other peer mentoring initiatives can serve as a way for “counselors [to] get actively involved with these [and] to help offer workshops, facilitate groups, and promote services at monthly meetings” (p.18). Although there is no guarantee these approaches will work, by simply doing these higher education institutions will be doing more than many of them currently are doing to support their FGS.

Staging an Intervention

Staging an intervention consumed a large amount of our senior project and support network. A significant time went into deciding who to recruit and when to recruit them. We originally planned to recruit incoming First-Generation college students at Clark University over the summer and start a support network and create a sanctuary space once the semester started. However, we were not successful in this approach. Although we do not have a definitive reason for why our program was not of interest to first year First Generation students at Clark, our reasoning lies in the research and remote learning. Stebleton et al., (2014) identified location, familiarity, hours, and time as the four reasons why students who reported needing support, did not seek it.

These reasons, combined with remote learning, have led us to the following interpretation: With the COVID-19 Pandemic educational institutions transitioned into a remote learning environment where students were able to delay having a traditional start to college and instead spend their first year at home. Although students were still starting school, their needs were very different because of the unnatural nature of the pandemic. Garriott et al. (2017) state: “first-generation student status is a stigmatized identity within higher education, where individualistic institutional norms are often incongruent with the interdependent cultural orientations of first-generation and working-class students” (2017, p.433). Remote learning has had an effect on the individualistic institutional norms college usually has. A delay in moving to campus, which often means moving away from home, has allowed students to continue having their interdependent cultural orientations. This delay could be a reason why incoming First-Generation students at Clark did not search for support nor volunteer in a support project that we

had developed. That being said, location, familiarity, hours, and time, then, did not matter because students were not searching for support in ways they would in any traditional year.

After an unsuccessful recruitment, we reworked our intervention to support other groups and adjust to the different time we were staging our intervention. We ultimately ended up having our support network during Clark University's winter session and opened it up to high school seniors. We recruited students through email where we mentioned the logistics of our support network, we also mentioned that the support network intended to cover the following three topics:

1. Choosing the right college - Majors, Extra Curriculars, Location, Financial Aid
2. The role of social capital and cultural capital in higher education
3. Identity and positionality in higher education

This yielded us six responses and led us to send out a google form where we asked the following questions:

1. Are you first gen? (First in their family to go to college)
2. Which racial/ethnic group do you identify with?
3. What do you need the most help with right now?
4. What is something you want to learn from this class? Can be anything related to college.
(e.g., personal statements, choosing a major, applying for scholarships, etc.)
5. Do you want to meet once a week for 2 hours, or twice a week for 1 hour?
6. Can you meet during the scheduled times? If you can't meet during the scheduled time, when are you available?

This form was sent out with the intention of ensuring what we would cover addressed the needs of the students and that we were being conscious of their time, as university students we

were on an extended break, but they had high school classes as usual. We had four responses to the google form and, unintentionally, were able to find students that met some aspects of our original recruitment. Responses to the form are broken down here: 75% of students were FGS, all students belonged to an ethnic/racial minority (75% were Hispanic/LatinX, 25% has a mixed race/ethnicity), responses for 4 and 5 were similar and included scholarships (75%, how to succeed in college (50%) and choosing majors (50%). Students also indicated wanting to meet once a week for 2 hours rather than twice for 1 hour. One student indicated that they could not meet during the scheduled time.

After the google form, we scheduled to meet the following Thursday, and followed up with the student who could not meet during the scheduled time to work something out and agreed to meet on Wednesdays, but the student ultimately could not make it. They mentioned that they had been looking for additional support because the National Honors Society they were in was coming to an end - which is why they signed up for our support network - but the program they were in ended up offering them support through college students and she no longer needed outside support.

With one student down, we sent out the invitation and zoom link to the other 3 students who had filled out the link as well as the other 2 who had signed up but not filled out the google form. When the first meeting came, we had two students show up: Noemi and Camilo. Camilo had mentioned that he would be a bit late because he had work and got out at 7. In this first session we set forward a plan for the next coming weeks and asked students questions about their interests, scholarships they were looking at, and questions about the colleges they were looking at. A week later, Camilo informed us that his work schedule was changing, and he no longer could make it to our support network. We tried to connect with the other 4 students and were

able to communicate with some successfully, but ultimately Noemi was the only one that followed through. This led us to reflect on what we wanted to do moving forward, what type of space we wanted to create, and what we wanted to accomplish in the short amount of time we had.

In addition to weekly meetings with Noemi, we were able to partner with Dynamy Youth Academy and offered a session on writing scholarships and answered questions they had about college. In talking about scholarships, we covered four sections:

1. Range: Focus on scholarships that are local since there are less people that qualify for those which means there is less competition in comparison to big scholarships that require a lot, have a lot of applicants, and only have few awardees.
 - a. Applying to various small scholarships versus Applying to one big scholarship (Dell Scholarship, HACU, HSF, etc.)
2. Qualifications: Ensuring you meet all the qualifications. If a scholarship requires a major be sure it is something you want to go into because the scholarship could get revoked if you change the major. If you are unsure about a major, apply to scholarships that are open to all majors, do not take the risk and find yourself doing something you do not enjoy because you'll lose your scholarship otherwise.
3. Personal Statements: When writing personal statements, do not write about the first things that come to mind. If it is the first thing you thought of someone else probably did too. You do not want your responses to sound like everyone else's.
4. Review: Have at least two people review your responses to make sure it reads well, is free of grammatical errors, and is a compelling story. It might be hard to have someone else read these since they are such personal responses, but it is needed.

For the FAQ college edition, the questions the high school students asked were the following:

1. What is the most difficult obstacle you have faced being a first-generation student?
2. Was there something about Clark that made them want to choose Clark over the other schools they were applying to?
3. How approachable are your college professors? How do you pick your classes? Do you consider the professor and what people tell you about them or not?
4. Are college classes as flexible as it really seems? Do you have free time to have fun?
5. Was the transition from high school to college an enormous change academically? Or is it similar to high school?
6. Were you introduced to internship programs? If not, how do you look for and find an internship?
7. How did you end up with your majors?

The process of creating an intervention was difficult and extensive but proved to be effective in addressing the needs of the students we came across. Intervention sites “focus on the development of skills to cultivate social capital and on-campus connections during the transition to college” (Schwartz, 2017, p.1), which was one of the underlying goals for our support network. By creating a space and providing individualized support to the students we reached, primarily Noemi, we were able to learn and develop the individualistic institutional norms within higher education such as seeking support and utilizing support systems in place.

Creating a space

After successfully staging an intervention, we were left with creating a space where the students we reached felt like they were able to open up to us about their lives, interests, and

aspirations. Creating a space proved to be difficult because there was no real physical space as everything was done virtually through zoom. After nearly a year of virtual learning, burn out and zoom fatigue - which is defined as “tiredness, anxiety, or worry resulting from overusing virtual video conferencing platforms” (Wiederhold, 2020, p. 437) were affecting us all. We wanted our space to be different than what Noemi and Dynamy Youth Academy were used to, which ultimately meant that we were giving them control but at the same time requesting something from them in return.

From the start, we allowed Noemi to decide what she needed support with and allow us to help her as she underwent each of these areas. I refer to these as areas of intervention, the three areas of intervention we underwent were: financial aid and scholarship support, choosing a school and major support, and professional development support - this mainly focused on writing skills, resume building, and connecting Noemi with resources we thought would also be helpful. Once our areas of intervention were determined, building rapport with Noemi came easy. We often wondered if the college student to high school student ratio (4:1) would affect how we interacted with each other, but that did not prove to be an issue. Having 4 of us allowed Noemi to have 4 different sets of eyes as she wrote her scholarship responses, worked on her resume, and debated on where to go to college. Further, although 4 of us (the college students) had an interest in education and were familiar with each other, we each had different interactions with youth and college which allowed for different things to come up.

This proved to be useful on several occasions, when brainstorming on scholarship responses Michelle and I were able to reflect on being English language learners, others work experience with the Career Development Center allowed Noemi to get support with resumes, and so on. Our space, although virtual, was one where stress was minimal, there was back-to-back

rapport, and smiles. This was made clear through both the overall flow of the sessions and individual moments where we would stray away from the topics on hand to share about other things going on in our lives. In our sessions, there was rarely a moment of silence, we always were working on scholarship responses and offering our feedback. Noemi would also email us regularly, so it was easy to stay in contact with her as things were happening. Some instances of comfort with one another are below:

Session Five:

Deisy: "Did you do anything exciting this last week?"

Noemi: "Not really, just homework? You?"

Deisy: "Yesterday I went to the movies - well I was supposed to go to the movies and when I was about to walk in my little brother called me and he's like 'who's picking me up?' and I'm just like???? 'What do you mean who is picking you up?' and he tells me that my older brother didn't pick him up and I got so scared I thought something had happened to him - because he's gotten run over before - so I had to leave the movies and go pick him up."

Noemi: "What happened to your older brother?"

Deisy: "He thought I was picking him up! Because I told him I was leaving [the house] and he thought I was going to pick him up. And then he fell asleep, so he didn't get my little brother's calls. And here I was thinking he was dead."

Noemi: "What happened to him the last time? You said he got ran over"

Deisy: "Oh! Yeah, when I was in high school my mom didn't show up to an award ceremony and my dad showed up instead and I was really confused because he doesn't go to those types of things. And then when I asked where my

mom was, he was like ‘you don’t know? She’s in the hospital’ and I was freaking out and crying and he didn’t say anything else and then he tells me to calm down and that Manny [my older brother] was hit by a car when he was riding a bike. But like my dad didn’t give us any details so I thought he was dead. So, when he didn’t answer me yesterday, I got PTSD.”

Noemi: “Oh no, did he get hurt badly?”

Deisy: “He broke his arm, he had a cast on for a while but nothing too drastic.”

Noemi: “That’s good”

In this session I started off by sharing an unfortunate series of events I had experienced the prior day, something that usually occurs at the start of our sessions. I felt comfortable enough to share with Noemi what had happened the day prior and why I reacted the way I did, and she felt comfortable asking me questions about my brother's accident. This speaks to the back-to-back rapport we had going on.

Session Six:

Noemi: “What are you eating?”

Deisy: “A cupcake! But it is too sweet, can we take a break? I need water”

Noemi: “Yes, of course, go get water.”

Deisy: Steps out to get water and returns

Noemi: “What type of cupcake is it?”

Deisy: “It’s a turtle chocolate cupcake. I usually get this one, but it is way too sweet today for some reason. What’s your favorite cupcake?”

Noemi: “I like funfetti. But I’m more of a brownie person”

Deisy: “I get that, I like funfetti too. And yeah, brownies are good! Ok, you ready to get started?”

Noemi: “yeah”

In this session we chatted about trivial things like cupcakes, the ability to talk about trivial things speaks to our virtual space being stress free. We always took a bit of time to catch up, but we also acknowledged that our time together was short and took advantage the most we could. Further, in our closing interview, when asked whether she felt our support network was a positive experience, Noemi responded: “I think it was really positive because I got to like hear like the voice of the of college students and I got help with scholarships and also got answers to questions I had,” This illustrates how our sessions were a positive space where Noemi felt that she could talk with college students about things she needed support with and at the same time ask questions about what it is like going to be in college, which supports that we were successful in creating a makeshift sanctuary for success, which Banks-Santilli defines as spaces that help “students of color help feel a sense of belonging and acceptance that counteracts the alienation they may experience ,” (2014, p.5.)

This means that our makeshift sanctuaries for success included both vulnerability and trust, as well as listening and supporting one another. Noemi was vulnerable and trusted us in sharing her journey to the United States, her life growing up with a single mother, her grandmother's journey with cancer, and so on, and we listened and uplifted her voice. We also shared instances of our lives and struggles. I talked about my brother's accident, him dropping out of college, and how I have spent most of my time in college stressing about money. Michelle talked about mental health, and how sometimes in college you have to put academics aside and take care of yourself because at the end of the day “school is never going to leave, it’s always

going to be there”¹ but your health won’t. Our space was small and short-lived, but I think it was something we all needed at that time.

I classify our space as makeshift because the literature addresses sanctuaries of success as physical spaces where students are able to step away, something that with a virtual environment is not possible. Our virtual space had interruptions and was fast paced, these are things that are not common in sanctuaries for success that are meant to help students cultivate a sense of belonging. Further, our makeshift space had a mission and time constraints, which are other things sanctuaries for success do not usually have. Regardless of this, we were able to cultivate a relationship with Noemi pretty quickly, after our first two sessions we began sharing things happening in our life outside of our space - some of which are shared above - and we found ourselves wanting more time and offering support beyond the scope of our project. Lastly, our space highlighted the importance of individualized support, which will be discussed in the following section.

Individualized Support

Creating a space was a challenge in the sense that we were constantly adjusting our project to be able to make it happen. We went from targeting incoming First-Generation Latinx students at Clark, to First-Generation Students at Clark, to First-Generation High School Seniors in the Worcester Public Schools. This constant back and forth took a lot of time and proved to be challenging, but once we overcame this challenge, we found ourselves searching for more ways to make our intervention and support the most effective we could. Our support network was originally rooted in groups and group dynamics, revolving around theories of social capital. As mentioned in the conceptual framework section, Bourdieu defines social capital as a network-

¹ This quote was taken from a conversation that occurred after closing interviews

based resource (Pinxten & Lievens, 2014). This means that the more networks an individual has, the more resources they have available. Having more resources available – especially in one's transition to higher education – is crucial for navigating new and unfamiliar systems and overcoming barriers that occur. In creating our support network, we focused on creating our own network-based resources to share with one another. By focusing on this, we failed to acknowledge two things: (1), the support we were offering was time consuming and hard to do in group dynamics; and (2), our support focused on scholarships, choosing between schools, and financial aid. These are all things that are deeply personal to a lot of students, which meant that group dynamics might not be ideal.

That being said, because our support network mainly focused on one student (Noemi) we did not realize why group dynamics were not ideal. Our first encounter with this was during week four. This week Noemi had asked if a friend could join our group; we agreed but did not really know what to expect. Noemi's friend, Violeta, listened as we worked with Noemi through her scholarship responses. Because we did not know Violeta and she did not bring any material she had prepared that we could support her with, we did not really know how to interact and engage with her. Violeta listened in and nodded for almost the entire duration of our one-hour weekly session. As we wrapped up working on scholarships and moved to working on resumes, I messaged Violeta and let her know I was going to put her in a breakout room with me. I did this after feeling it was awkward that she was just listening in, and I wanted to acknowledge that we were not going to have time to offer her similar individualized support as we had offered Noemi.

In the breakout room, I talked with Violeta about the type of support we offer Noemi and how we built up to it: finding scholarships, looking at prompts, brainstorming, drafting, editing, etc. Violeta mentioned that she liked the back-and-forth talk as we worked on Noemi's

scholarships responses and that she is also working on some scholarships herself. I brought up that Michelle and I have other times blocked out and if she finds herself wanting support, we can help with that. After that, we both returned to the main zoom room where Brett was leading Noemi through a resume workshop. Brett had experience working with resumes from his previous job in the Career Service Center at Clark, so he offered to lead Noemi through a resume workshop.

This specific interaction brought about the importance of individualized support and spaces where students can be vulnerable and share things that they might not be open to sharing with other students that they interact with on a more regular basis. Our role, as researchers and facilitators, merged into one of an advisor that Noemi could reach out to when in doubt. This also led me to intrusive advising, which is a combination of both recommended and required advising that are present as a way to increase academic motivation and success as well as increasing satisfaction with advising and, ultimately, increase retention (Schwebel et al., 2008). Intrusive advising could have been helpful when recruiting students and was an underlying phenomenon used in our support network.

Our space was not intrusive in the sense that Noemi chose to be part of our support network and be actively involved every week, but we did recommend for her to do certain things for each session, and we would send reminders to her the day before that we were meeting, this ensured that we made the most of the time we had available. Although this might not seem intrusive, these were things that Noemi did not ask for, but we provided her with regardless. Our support network was not required for Noemi, but it was recommended. On the other hand, Dynamy Youth Academy was both recommended to students, and once a part of the program, they were required to attend sessions.

The metrics of intrusive advising can prove to be helpful when trying to create spaces for students at different stages in their life to ensure that they are getting the support they need, when they need it. Intrusive is defined as something that is not welcomed or something that is unsolicited. To assume that communication to students outside a normal classroom, group, or social dynamic is unsolicited, is wrong and puts students at risk for low sense of belonging and, in turn, results in low retention rates. Higher Education Institutions have more to lose by not being intrusive, than they have to gain.

Conclusion

This project went through several ups and downs, from changing the obstacles we encountered because of the pandemic, to continuously changing and adapting our intervention to ensure it fit our target population. Along the way, we learned that although literature can point to critical periods in First Generation Students' journey to and through higher education, it is impossible to stage and implement a flawless intervention. In essence, it made sense that our first interventions did not work out as we planned. Interventions are messy, hectic, and take time to stage. We spent a large amount of time planning and staging our intervention, but that time was ultimately wasted because, back then, we did not know who we were staging an intervention for. This speaks to how difficult it can be to provide First Generation Students with the support they need. How can we stage an intervention for students we do not really know anything about?

The literature can point to things that First Generation Students might need, but they do not offer a one-size fits all solution because one does not exist and, for a long time, I thought it did. I thought that we could make it work and although our shortcomings could be attributed to several other things - the pandemic, remote learning, IRB delays - we went into this project hoping to find that solution and expecting things to fall into place as we went. This project illustrated those interventions for First Generation Students need to be more intrusive and extensive. This reality helps explain the struggles we faced recruiting FGS as our project assumed students would welcome and reach-out for our project. But we learned that FGS are often not aware of the supports that they may need or are fearful of seeking out supports.

Limitations in this paper include the COVID-19 Pandemic and Virtual Learning, Time, and familiarity. The COVID-19 Pandemic resulted in a shift to online learning that made the intervention we originally planned difficult to implement, which is why our intervention

occurred remotely. Doing this type of intervention remotely and not being tied to a physical space made it difficult to get our project off the ground and establish a presence and space that we could work with and invite peers into. That being said, time is also a limitation in this study. As we faced delays due to both the pandemic and IRB, the time we had to implement our project was cut short. In our closing interview, Noemi mentioned how starting earlier could help because it meant we could help with “college applications and all that stuff”. Had time not been a constraint, and had we reached this targeted population earlier, this could have occurred. Lastly, as a new project we had to overcome not being a familiar presence at Claremont, specifically with high school seniors. Although our original interest was high, at the end only one student followed through. Being familiar with the schools, or an outside organization like Dynamy Youth Academy, could have been helpful when recruiting.

For future projects looking to build off of our work, we suggest partnering with an organization or being in direct contact with schools to ensure a significant number of students. Starting the intervention at the beginning of their academic year could also be helpful to allow for consistency and longevity when supporting high school students. In addition, although a virtual setting posed its challenges, a hybrid approach would be helpful for students who live off campus, commute, or have other commitments that prevent them from being on campus when sessions are being held. Lastly, a combination of both individual sessions would be useful for students. Group sessions would allow students to interact with each other and build social capital, and individual sessions would ensure that their individual needs are being met.

Banks-Santilli asks a crucial question: “If education is truly equalizing then why do so many first-generation college students remain disadvantaged?” (Banks-Santilli, 2014, p.2.) Higher education institutions have the ability to provide students the social mobility to exit

intergenerational cycles of poverty but fail too efficiently do so. FGS remain disadvantaged because higher education institutions do not prioritize the creation of programs that directly address their needs. We are not asking higher education institutions to have all the answers, we are asking them to care. Carrey talks about how “the most important thing a college can do to help students graduate is often to ask more of them, not less, and provide them more in return in the form of better practices” (Carey, 2008, p.8).

The intervention of Schwebel et al. (2008) explored was simply emailing and or calling students until they set an advising appointment with their faculty adviser without there being an ulterior motive (e.g. registration status) in an effort to allow students to connect with faculty and discuss “critical topics such as career development, major selection, goal development, college success strategies, and most important, for this population of first year students, adjustment and transitional issues” (p.31). If this approach was taken by more higher education institutions, and as discussed in my finding sections, higher education institutions would gain more than they would lose by being intrusive.

By being intrusive, higher education institutions would be able to retain more of their students and be one step closer to closing the achievement gap rather than contributing to it. By being intrusive, higher education institutions would allow students to form meaningful connections with faculty and staff and those meaningful connections could be critical when students find themselves in situations of distress. By having that support and connection in place, students are adapting to the individualistic norms of higher education and building their social and cultural capital. By doing this, higher education institutions would encourage students to seek information and support when they are in need. By providing support when they are in need, higher education institutions would be more welcoming to students and raise their sense of

belonging at these institutions. By being intrusive, higher education institutions are showing that they care.

Our intervention was not intrusive, but we did not know then that intrusiveness meant so much, but I wish we had. Then we could have known that it is challenging for First Generations Students to seek support, especially when they do not know those who are offering support. We should have known because that used to be us. It is hard to compel students who overcome so many barriers that when they arrive at higher education institutions, they just want to blend in. I should have known because that used to be me. I would have found the intrusiveness annoying, but I would have done what was being asked of me and I would like to think that other First-Generation Students would do the same. So, I leave higher education institutions, specifically Clark, with one closing question: what is stopping you from being intrusive?

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