Been There, Done That:

Peer Coaching and Community Cultural Wealth

by

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ABSTRACT

Peer coaching is an emerging approach higher education institutions are using to increase student success outcomes for first-year students. This study examined how peer coaches use their community cultural wealth with the students they coach and how coaching encouraged first-generation students to access the community cultural wealth they bring with them to college. The theoretical framework guiding this study was Yosso's theory of community cultural wealth. I used a qualitative approach and interviewed five peer coaches and conducted focus groups with 15 first-generation, first-year students who had received coaching. Findings indicate peer coaches used the six dimensions of community cultural wealth with students they coach, including aspirational, familial, linguistic, navigational, resistant, and social capital. Students also reported peer coaching helped them access their community cultural wealth, especially as compared to advising and faculty interactions. Three key differentiators emerged when comparing coaching to other forms of support: relatability, sense of belonging, and self-confidence.

DEDICATION

I dedicate my work to my mother, grandparents, and my aunt. Their sacrifices, hard work, love, and vision for a better future continue to inspire me all these years after their passing. I also dedicate this work to Adam and Ellie. Your steadfast love, support, and good humor kept me going and helped me finish strong. Finally, this work is dedicated to all of the first-generation students I have had the privilege to walk alongside through their higher education journey.

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

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The benefits of higher education are well documented, including higher rates of employment, increased tax revenues from college graduates, increased likelihood of health and pension benefits, higher rates of civic engagement, healthier lifestyles, and more socioeconomic mobility, among others (Baum, Ma, & Payea, 2013). Increasingly, jobs require at least some postsecondary education to ensure an individual can be economically self-sufficient (McCabe, 2000). Indeed, by the year 2020, 65% of jobs will require training or postsecondary education beyond high school (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2014). An often-quoted statistic to illustrate the economic importance of a college degree is that a college graduate will earn a million dollars more than a high school graduate over a lifetime (Pennington, 2004).

As individual economic success and mobility have been connected to postsecondary attainment, colleges and universities have come under increasing pressure to provide pathways and strategies to help students achieve postsecondary goals (Marcus, 2018a). College and university leaders have pursued policies to increase the retention and graduation rates, including transition/orientation programs, mentoring, learning communities, faculty/student interactions, and advising (Spradlin, Rutkowski, Burroughs, & Lang, 2010). One common element among these approaches is establishing a connection between the student and a faculty or staff member at the institution. It is well established in higher education literature that making a connection with an advisor, peer, or faculty member is a positive indicator of undergraduate student success (Kuh, Kinzie,

Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2006). Indeed, Kuh et al. (2006) argued, "The single best predictor of student satisfaction with college is the degree to which they perceive the college environment to be supportive of their academic and social needs" (p. 40). Furthermore, a student's ability to make a meaningful connection with a member of the university community is one important predictor of student persistence (Pike & Kuh, 2005).

One more recent approach colleges and universities leaders have pursued as a student success strategy is coaching (Hayes, 2012; Robinson & Gahagan, 2010). Coaching was initially introduced to higher education when the service provider, InsideTrack, offered it as a means of increasing student retention (Bettinger & Baker, 2011). In the intervening years, various models of coaching have been embraced by hundreds of colleges and universities across the United States, including those using peer coaches. Given coaching is a relatively new service offered to college students, there is considerably less research on its impact on student success outcomes, including retention. Researchers who conducted the most comprehensive study to date indicating coaching is having a positive impact on student success contended additional research is warranted, particularly concerning how the specific characteristics of coaches influence their efficacy (Bettinger & Baker, 2011). This study took up this challenge by focusing on how peer coaches use their backgrounds to help support the first-generation students they coach.

Background of the Problem

In 2014, high school graduation rates hit a record high, with 82% of seniors graduating in 2013-2014, up from 81% the year before (Wong, 2016). This trend, however, has not produced increased enrollments in higher education. Research from the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (NSCRC) indicated, between 2008 and 2013, the percentage of high school graduates who immediately enrolled in college fell 3%, from 69% to 66% (Wong, 2016).

Despite the steady increases in high school graduates over the last 15 years in the United States, the most recent projections have indicated we are poised to produce fewer high school graduates in all graduating classes from 2014-2023 compared to the record high in 2013 (Bransberger & Michelau, 2016). The only demographic group anticipated to grow is Hispanic public high school graduates, who are projected to increase by 50% or more from 2014 numbers to a record high of 920,000 graduates in 2025. Lower numbers of high school graduates will likely continue the downward trend of students enrolling in postsecondary education directly from high school. The United States has also experienced a steady decline in postsecondary enrollments for students over the age of 24 (Bransberger & Michelau, 2016). Combined, these two trends—decreasing numbers of students in the high-school-to-college pipeline and fewer returning adult college students—present a challenge to policymakers and practitioners who are striving to reach state and national postsecondary attainment goals. Colleges and universities are exploring various strategies that might be used to increase retention and graduation rates.

Once in college, students face several challenges on their way to graduation. For students who started college as part of the Fall 2016 cohort, the retention rate—defined as the percentage of students who return to the same college for a second year—was 61.6% (NSCRC, 2018). For undergraduate students attending 4-year universities, the retention rate was higher, with 71.2% returning to the same institution for the Fall 2016 cohort (NSCRC, 2018). Though rates have improved, the overall increase in retention at 4-year universities was only 2.6% since 2011 (Marcus, 2018b). Following a similar trend line, the 6-year graduation rate for students pursuing their 4-year undergraduate degrees was 54.8% in Fall 2010, meaning only 1 in 2 college students graduate with their 4-year undergraduate degree within 6 years (Shapiro et al., 2017). These trends and data present an opportunity for colleges and university leaders to evaluate existing strategies and interventions, and to consider new approaches, like coaching, which is designed to promote student success.

Almost one-third of students entering 2- or 4-year colleges are the first in their families to graduate from college, known as first-generation college students in the literature (Cardoza, 2016). Although first-generation students enroll in substantial numbers, they are less likely to continue on their postsecondary pathway. Three years after first enrolling, the National Center for Educational Statistics reported 33% of first-generation students had left their postsecondary program of study compared to 14% of continuing-generation students (Cataldi Bennett, Chen, & Simone, 2018). Cataldi et al. (2018) define continuing-generation students as undergraduates with parents who have completed at least a bachelor's degree. The same report highlighted a similar gap when

looking at 6-year graduation rates: 56% of first-generation students had obtained a credential or remained enrolled compared to 74% of continuing-generation students (Cataldi et al., 2018).

Some of these gaps may be explained by the many ways colleges and universities presume a level of familiarity with college knowledge, which includes

an understanding of the following processes: college admissions including curricular, testing, and application requirements; college options and choices, including the tiered nature of postsecondary education; tuition costs and the financial aid system; placement requirements, testing, and standards; the culture of college; and the challenge level of college courses, including increasing expectations of higher education. (Conley, 2007, p. 17)

Many students, including first-generation students, may not be familiar with elements of college knowledge. This knowledge, has also been called the hidden curriculum, is defined as "the mix of bureaucratic know-how and sound study skills that can make or break a student's first year in college" (Zinshteyn, 2016, para. 5). Colleges and universities have pursued various strategies designed to teach information and skills essential for a successful college student, including financial aid, student engagement, study habits, and other skills (Education Advisory Board [EAB], 2016). Hundreds of institutions are pursuing coaching as a strategy to support undergraduate students by developing their own programs or contracting with service providers to outsource this service (Hayes, 2012). Coaching is defined as a

one-on-one interaction with a student focusing on strengths, goals, study skills, engagement, academic planning, and performance. The coach encourages students to reflect on strengths related to their academics and works with the student to try new study strategies. Finally, the coach serves as a constant resource for the student to reconnect with throughout college. (Robinson & Gahagan, 2010, p. 27)

Although coaching is gaining traction as a tool administrators use to increase student retention and success, research into this intervention is still emerging.

Research Problem

Initial data and research reveal coaching can have a significant effect on student success (Asghar, 2010; Bettinger & Baker, 2011) and retention (Laden, 1999; Russell, 2009). In contrast to other student support roles like academic advising, tutoring, and counseling, coaching is a relatively new approach still being defined both conceptually and in practice. Coaching models continue to vary significantly with regard to purpose, approach, and function. For coaching to transition from a promising practice to a scalable intervention colleges and universities can use to continue to support student persistence and success, key elements of coaching need to be better understood, especially coaches themselves.

One commonality all coaching programs share is their use of a coach to work with students. With this in mind, a study on peer coaches becomes an important contribution to understand this student success practice. Although there has been significant research into mentors who participate in mentoring programs, similar research has not been

undertaken to study coaches in this context. Given how relatively new the practice of coaching is within higher education, the literature on the practice is relatively scarce. The existing research tends to treat mentors and coaches the same, even though mentoring and coaching are distinct student success approaches. Therefore, research on mentorship and literature on coaches outside of the higher education context, was useful to this study of peer coaches. By distinguishing coaching from mentoring and coaches from mentors, this study helps to differentiate these two student support roles. Additionally, this study brings further understanding to the practice of peer coaching, which is beneficial to the colleges and universities that currently employ it, and those considering adopting coaching as a student success strategy. I hope a greater understanding of the characteristics of coaches can be leveraged by other coaching programs to increase retention and student success outcomes for students. Finally, by focusing on first-generation coaches and students, a growing demographic nationally, I hope this study has applicability to other researchers and higher education institutions seeking to effectively support these students.

Methodological Framework

In this study I used qualitative methods, including interviews and focus groups, to facilitate a closer investigation of peer coaching. To date, the most comprehensive study of coaching in higher education was undertaken by researchers at Stanford, who examined coaching by InsideTrack (Bettinger & Baker, 2011). This study took a quantitative approach and focused on the coaching of nontraditional students conducted by professional coaches who were hired by colleges and universities contracted by InsideTrack. Though the results from this study found coaching was a promising student

success practice, Bettinger and Baker (2011) indicated little was known about the coaches. They suggested further research was needed to understand the traits of coaches "to know if there are specific characteristics of the college coaches which increase their efficacy" (Bettinger & Baker, 2011, p. 20). They further wrote, "We also do not know the specific types of coaching services and the specific actions of coaches which are most effective in motivating students" (Bettinger & Baker, 2011, p. 20).

In this dissertation, I sought to address this gap by examining ways peer coaches encourage students to access their community cultural wealth to achieve student success outcomes. By interviewing coaches and conducting focus groups with students, the results of this study contribute to a greater understanding of the role peer coaches have in promoting student retention and success.

Theoretical Framework

Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) theory of student departure and Astin's (1984) theory of student involvement are foundational works for higher education researchers investigating questions about persistence, retention, and student success. Indeed, Tinto's and Astin's works are among the most widely cited in higher education literature (Milem & Berger, 1997). Scholars have used their work in a variety of contexts within higher education, including research related to orientation programs (Gammell, Allen, & Banach, 2012), learning communities (Hill & Woodward, 2013), summer bridge (Croteau, 2005), and the study of first-generation students (A. S. P. Cabrera, 2014). When examining the persistence of first-generation and underserved students, Tinto's and Astin's research has often been used to illustrate their deficits when compared to

continuing-generation students (Rendón, Jalomo, & Nora, 2004). Recently, however, some scholars have departed from this body of work to question how institutions of higher education play a role in the social and cultural integration of underrepresented and first-generation students:

> First-generation students often come to campus with less institutional knowledge and understanding of how campus bureaucracies work than their continuing-generation counterparts. In order to help these students be successful, institutions, beyond simply providing scholarships, should provide programming and opportunities that help to integrate these students into campus life. (Peabody, 2013, p. 9)

These scholars contend the burden of assimilation and incorporation should not rest solely on the shoulders of students. The roles and responsibilities of higher education institution leaders in creating barriers to retention and student success should also be taken into account (Rendón et al., 2004). Still, other scholars have built entirely distinct conceptual models that explicitly reject the premise students come with "deficits" that need to be fixed and have contended models that rely on those flawed assumptions are incomplete (Harper, 2010; Irizarry, 2009). This notion is particularly important for researchers focused on first-generation students given the prevalence of a "deficit-oriented mind-set" in literature and practice which "will yield deficit-oriented solutions" (Macias, 2013, p. 18).

This study employed Yosso's (2005) theory of community cultural wealth to bring a more robust understanding of how peer coaches influence their students' success.

Although various concepts of capital have been previously applied to education, including elementary (Lareau, 2000), high school (Attinasi, 1989; Freeman, 1997; Monkman, Ronald, & Théramène, 2005; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1999), and access to postsecondary education (DiMaggio & Mohr, 1985), these concepts have been used sparingly in the study of college student retention. Using capital as a framework when examining retention and persistence can further our understanding of student success. Berger (2000) argued:

> Extending this logic to include other kinds of capital (such as cultural capital), it may be that the process of optimizing capital resources is an important influence of undergraduate persistence. Hence a social reproduction perspective may help us better understand how student access to and manipulation of capital resources affects undergraduate retention. (p. 96)

Research has indicated first-generation students, especially those who also come from lower income families, often face a variety of obstacles to accessing social and other forms of capital resources in college (Próspero & Vohra-Gupta, 2007; Saunders & Serna, 2004). Peer coaches represent a significant form of social support that can assist students in integrating into their college environments academically and socially (Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Tremblay & Rodger, 2003). Yosso's community cultural wealth framework was a useful construct to understand the influence of peer coaching on first-generation students, given the connection capital theory draws between meaningful relationships and increasing access, persistence, academic success and motivation (Ceballo, 2004; Farmer-Hinton & Adams, 2006; Hopkins, , Martinez-Wenzl, Aldana, & Gándara, 2013; Nuñez,

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2009; Perna & Titus, 2005; Saunders & Serna, 2004), and research that has indicated peer

coaching and mentoring programs help to increase student achievement, connection, and

retention (Brown & Davis, 2001; Crisp, 2010; Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Hughes & Fahy,

2009).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine how peer coaches access community

cultural wealth to support the first-generation students they coach. Using community

cultural wealth as the theoretical framework, I sought to provide insight into how peer

coaches influence student transitions and success outcomes for the first-generation

students they coach. Qualitative interviews were used to cultivate a deeper understanding

of peer coaches and perceptions of their coaching experiences. Focus groups were

employed to gain insights into students' experiences with coaching.

Significance of the Study

Since coaching is an approach deployed in higher education for less than 20 years,

it is not surprising the research on coaching programs is still emerging. Further research

is needed to understand how coaching supports student success. This study examined a

comprehensive peer coaching program to understand whether this emerging approach to

supporting first-year transition and other student success outcomes for first-generation

students is an effective educational practice that merits wider implementation by colleges

and universities. To date, the limited research undertaken has indicated a lack of

empirical studies on the use of coaching in higher education. By focusing on peer

coaches, a population that has not been afforded sufficient focus, this study extended the

emerging literature on coaching. This study helped connect the practice of coaching in higher education to the theory of community cultural wealth to bring a greater understanding of how coaching supports student success for first-generation students.

Research Questions

The research questions that were the focus of this study were:

1. How do coaches use their community cultural wealth with the first-generation students they coach?

2. How does coaching influence students to access their community cultural wealth?

Participants and Setting

This study focused on the peer coaches hired by the First-Year Success (FYS) Center at Arizona State University (ASU) and the first-generation students they coach. Arizona State University is one of the largest public universities in the United States, with over 62,000 undergraduate students who attend any of four metropolitan campuses (Arizona State University [ASU], 2020). As of Spring 2019, 23,583 students identify as first-generation, defined as neither parent nor guardian having earned a 4-year college degree, tripling the number since 2002 (ASU Now, 2019).

One initiative at ASU impacting a large number of first-generation students is the FYS Center. FYS provides coaching focusing on success both inside and outside the classroom to first-year students, sophomores, and transfer students. Since its inception in 2012, FYS has served 37,788 students with coaching appointments (K Correa, personal communication, June 26, 2020). FYS has taken a scaled approach regarding student

coaching, and the program has been in operation for over eight years, which makes it an appropriate site to conduct this study. Within the context of the FYS Center, coaches are trained in 14 competencies, including the role of the coach, coaching skills, outreach strategies, student retention and success, positive psychology, strengths, VIP service, campus resources and referrals, diverse populations, students of concern/crisis or complex situation escalation, technology/software, reporting and documenting, coaching forms and tools, and FYS policies and procedures. As might be expected, several competencies focus on helping coaches understand and navigate through procedural aspects of university life, including campus resources and referrals, technology/software, reporting and documenting, coaching forms and tools, and FYS policies and procedures. Other competencies help coaches recruit students to receive coaching (outreach strategies), provide resources to students in crisis (students of concern/crisis or complex situation escalation), or understand the training framework of the FYS Center (positive psychology, strengths, VIP service). As will be further described, coaches use the training they receive to support the students they coach on a variety of personal and academic topics.

Data Source

Data for this study came from a series of interviews and focus groups. First, FYS peer coaches were randomly selected to participate in an initial interview at the beginning of the academic year. Second, students who received coaching were randomly selected to participate in focus groups. Finally, the coaches who participated in initial interviews were invited to take part in a second interview at the beginning of the spring semester.

Though the identity of the coaches and students was known to me, their responses were reported anonymously. An application to the institution's Institutional Review Board (IRB) (see Appendix F) was submitted and approved to request the use of these data for research purposes.

<div align="center">**Delimitations, Limitations and Assumptions**</div>

Several delimitations, limitations, and assumptions are important to note within the context of this study.

Delimitations

This study focused on peer coaches from one coaching program at a large, public, research university. Other studies on peer coaching also have used a single institution approach. Though other researchers have used this approach to establish patterns, these studies are limited in their generalizability to other similar institutions (Brownell & Swaner, 2010).

Additionally, although peer coaching involves both coach and student, this study placed greater emphasis on the coach rather than the student. As previously described, most research to date has focused almost exclusively on the students being coached rather than the coaches. This study incorporated two phases of interviews with peer coaches. This study contributes to the emerging literature on peer coaching by focusing on the coaches themselves, in addition to examining the influence of coaching on first-generation students. The perspective of the student receiving coaching was included within focus groups. I hoped these multiple approaches would ensure the various aspects of the coach and student perspectives were incorporated into this study.

Limitations

Self-selection bias is a limitation of this study in a few significant ways. Coaches were randomly selected and invited to participate in interviews voluntarily. Similarly, students were randomly selected and asked to volunteer to participate in focus groups. Given participation in the interviews and focus groups were voluntary, and the fact coaches were hired by FYS after an application and interview process and students elect to receive coaching, it was not possible to use random assignment in this study.

This study focused on a coaching program at a single institution, thus, generalizability of this study is limited to other similar institutions, which creates a threat to external validity. Descriptions of the host institution, general student demographics, coaching program, and student coaches allow other researchers and institutions to make critical comparisons from the program studied to their own.

Finally, although a qualitative approach brought further understanding to the practice of coaching, this methodology was not without its limitations. Researchers who have previously used qualitative methods in isolation for studying coaching often indicated their findings might be limited and require additional studies to validate their results. Specific criticisms of interviews as an observational strategy in quantitative research include that the presence of the interviewer may influence how the participant responds and that they "provide only information 'filtered' through the views of the interviewers (i.e., the researcher summarizes the participants' views in the research report)" (Creswell et al., 2019, p. 218).

Assumptions

Several assumptions underscored this study. First, it was broadly assumed, although coaching has been a relatively new practice, it was worthy of further study. Additionally, I assumed previous studies that use conceptual frameworks that rely on a deficit model are limited in their explanatory power. Also, this study assumes that peer coaching is a subset of academic coaching. While some institutions may use professional staff or contract with outside providers, this study focuses on coaches who are undergraduate or graduate students, also known as peer coaches. Finally, this study presumed employing an asset-based model would bring a new lens to studying coaching that may help bring a greater understanding of this student success practice.

Operational Definitions

Coaching is a student success strategy that uses "a coaching style relationship to enhance student learning" (Barkley, 2011, p. 79).

Community cultural wealth refers to "an array of knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed and utilized by Communities of Color to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression" (Yosso, 2005, p. 77).

Continuing-generation student refers to a student with at least one parent who attended college (Sy, Stuber, Carter, Boehme, & Alpert, 2012).

First-generation college student. There is variability in the literature regarding defining a first-generation student. Definitions include students who:

- Neither parent graduated with a college degree

- Only one parent graduated with a college degree

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- Parents attended college but did not graduate

- Stepparents (or other adults residing in the home) graduated from college, but the biological parents did not (Smith, 2015).

Research by Toutkoushian, Stollberg, and Slaton (2018) indicated regardless of definition used, first-generation students graduate at lower rates than other students. For this study, the operational definition of first-generation college students included students whose parents have not completed a baccalaureate degree.

Student Success. Within the context of higher education, student success can take on several meanings, including measures related to enrollment in postsecondary education, GPA, persistence, retention, time-to-degree, and graduation (Kuh et al., 2006). In this study, I operationally define student success from the perspectives of the coaches and students to have a more focused approach to this concept.

Summary

Colleges and universities pursue a variety of strategies designed to promote student transition and success and to increase the number of first-generation students successfully graduate. With decreasing numbers of high school graduates in the college pipeline, colleges and universities are focusing on improving student success outcomes, including transition and integration for those students who opt to pursue higher education. Peer coaching is one newly embraced approach to promote student success by institutions of higher education. Student success outcomes for first-generation students have been broadly studied in the literature from a deficit perspective, with a strong focus on remediation. More recently, a theoretical perspective focused on an asset-based

approach has been explored by researchers who study student success. This study added this emerging research by examining peer coaching from the lens of community cultural wealth. Though coaching is gaining in popularity, few studies have focused on coaches and students. I used a qualitative approach to study how peer coaches use their internal and external resources for the benefit of students they coach. The results of this study are useful for higher education administrators who are currently using peer coaches and for those who are considering implementing coaching programs.

Organization of Chapters

This study is organized into five distinct chapters. The first chapter focused on establishing an overview of the research topic and a framework for the study. The second chapter reviews the existing literature. The third chapter describes the research design for the study. The fourth chapter reviews the findings of the research. Chapter 5 provides a discussion of the implications of the study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

For many decades, colleges and universities have focused on retaining students into their second year; however, only in recent years have they examined how student success and retention strategies influence specific groups, including first-generation students. Given the increasing number of first-generation students pursuing higher education, it is not surprising practitioners, scholars, colleges, and universities are paying closer attention to this group. Regarding coaching, researchers have contended a stronger alignment between this approach and retention theory is critical to fully define it as a student success strategy (Warner, Neater, Clark, & Lee, 2018).

This literature review is organized into the following categories generated from the FYS training competencies outlined in Chapter 1: student retention; student success; and the coach role and coaching skills. Structuring the literature review around the core training competencies used with the FYS coaches provided a framework to examine the role the coach plays within peer coaching. These specific competencies were selected because they are comparatively less procedural and more substantive than others used with FYS coaches, allowing for broader applicability within the context of peer coaching.

One additional training competency examined was related to supporting diverse populations. Though diverse populations could be defined in many ways, including race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, this study focused on first-generation students. Within the literature and in practice, the definitions of a first-generation college student vary widely (Sharpe, 2017). The operational definition for this study included students

whose parents have not completed a baccalaureate degree. Estimates have suggested up to one-third of all college students are first-generation (Skomsvold, 2014). The services provided by peer coaches are particularly relevant for first-generation students:

> Ultimately, the term "first-generation" implies the possibility that a student may lack the critical cultural capital necessary for college success because their parents did not attend college. While first-generation students are often quite academically skilled and contribute in many ways to a campus community, navigating the tangled web of college policies, procedures, jargon, and expectations can be a challenge. This pervasive "hidden curriculum" can damage the confidence of first-generation students, lead to struggles in belonging, and result in departure. This opens an opportunity for institutions to provide additional support for these students so they may be as competitive and successful as their peers. ("Defining First-Generation," 2017)

Various studies have found first-generation students have lower rates of academic success (D'Allegro & Kerns, 2010; Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004), persistence (Engle, 2007; Ishitani, 2003) and graduation rates (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Pascarella et al., 2004). First-generation students need to graduate at higher rates to improve college attainment (Engle & Tinto, 2008).

Colleges and universities have been focusing on specific groups of students, including first-generation students, in the hopes of improving retention and graduation outcomes. As the first members of their family to attend college, one would expect first-generation students to be particularly well-suited for coaching, since, by definition, they

did not have a parent or guardian to provide information about the college environment.

As researchers and practitioners look for ways to increase student success outcomes for

targeted populations, the literature on retention and first-generation students are linked

and considered together. By having a greater understanding of how peer coaches

influence student success, institutions can further understand the role peer coaches play in

supporting first-generation college students.

<div align="center">**Student Retention and First-Generation Students**</div>

The study of student retention has dominated higher education research for

several decades, making it one of the most widely studied areas of research in the field

(Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011). Some researchers theorize two specific factors

drive the focus on retention in the literature: declines in student enrollment and an

"external push for institutional accountability" (Woodard, Mallory, & De Luca, 2001, p.

55). In this section, I examine the definition of retention and survey its foundation in

higher education literature before turning to more contemporary views, including how the

study of retention has been applied to first-generation students.

It is useful to distinguish between persistence and retention. The National Student

Clearinghouse (NSC) Research Center (2019) defined the persistence rate as "continued

enrollment (or degree completion) at any higher education institution — including one

different from the institution of initial enrollment — in the fall terms of a student's first

and second year" (para. 19). and the retention rate as "continued enrollment (or degree

completion) within the same higher education institution in the fall terms of a student's

first and second year." (para. 18). Hagedorn (2006) noted persistence and retention are

often used interchangeably. However, the National Center for Education Statistics (2012) differentiated the two concepts "by using 'retention' as an institutional measure and 'persistence' as a student measure. In other words, institutions retain and students persist" (p. 6). Since this study focused on the influence peer coaching has on first-generation students at a particular institution, the term retention was preferred instead of persistence. It should be noted, within the literature presented here, this distinction was not always observed, and both terms were used. To more fully understand student retention, broad themes within the literature are examined briefly.

In further examining literature on retention, some researchers distinguish between voluntary and involuntary student decisions to leave college or university (Tinto & Pusser, 2006). A student who feels disengaged from their college experience and chooses to drop out may be considered a voluntary departure. A student who leaves due to external factors, such as personal or familial obligations, could be categorized as an involuntary departure. Researchers have called for a broader inquiry into understanding what motivates a student to stay to help colleges and universities shape their retention programs and initiatives:

It is one thing to understand why students leave; it is another to know what institutions can do to help students stay and succeed. Leaving is not the mirror image of staying. Knowing why students leave does not tell us, at least not directly, why students persist. More importantly, it does not tell institutions, at least not directly, what they can do to help students stay and succeed. In the world

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of action, what matters are not our theories per se, but how they help institutions

address pressing practical issues of persistence. (Tinto, 2006, p. 6)

Studies of retention expanded to include using admissions processes to match student

expectations to their institution of choice, the student decision-making process around

achieving academic goals and the decision to drop out, and the experience students have

as they navigate through the higher education process, among other factors (Swail, 2004).

Efforts to connect students to faculty—particularly those who provide opportunities for

interaction outside of the classroom setting—are viewed as a critical factor: "The

research in this regard is quite clear, namely that the frequency and perceived worth of

interaction with faculty, especially outside the classroom, is the single strongest predictor

of student voluntary departure" (Tinto, 1990, p. 36).

Within retention literature, another prominent theme is student integration.

Student integration theory

is used to explain the extent to which students come to share the attitudes and

beliefs of their peers and faculty and the extent to which students adhere to the

structural rules and requirements of the institution—the institutional culture.

(Wolf-Wendel, Ward, & Kinzie, 2009, p. 414)

Drawing on previous research based on the rites of passage, Tinto (1993) identified three

phases individuals undergo when joining a new group (in this case, when a first-year

student begins attending a college or university): (a) separation from their families, (b)

transition to adopting the new norms of the higher education setting, and (c) integration,

allowing the student to embrace their new environment fully. Tinto further delineated

integration into the social and academic connections students have on campus. Student

engagement in campus life plays a central role in student success (Astin, 1997; Pascarella

& Terenzini, 2005; Pike & Kuh, 2005; Tinto, 2003). Research has indicated students are

more likely to graduate when they increase their commitment to their college or

university, specifically by socially and academically integrating into their campus

community (Gershenfeld, 2014; Jacobi, 1991; Tinto, 1990, 2007). Student feelings of

integration during their first semester can be positively impacted by faculty-student

contact. Contact in informal settings can be especially helpful to students as they

integrate into academic and social experiences (Tinto, 1988). Beyond programmatic

efforts, researchers found the highest retention rates when faculty and staff embraced

retaining students as central to their institutional mission (Tinto, 1999). Researchers

encouraged colleges and universities to invest in the professional development of staff

and faculty to help them to gain and improve upon skills and pedagogical approaches that

address the needs of first-generation students (Engle & Tinto, 2008).

 A theme closely related to student integration is the theory of involvement,

defined by Astin (1984) as referring "to the quantity and quality of the physical and

psychological energy that students invest in the college experience" (p. 307), which exists

along a continuum, with the amount invested varying from student to student. The theory

of student involvement was developed as part of Astin's work studying college dropouts,

where he found most of the reasons students gave for dropping out were related to their

lack of involvement (Aljohani, 2016). Involvement theory assumes the more involved a

student is both physically and psychologically, the more time and effort a student invests

in their educational experience, and the more likely a student is to persist and succeed (Astin, 1999). Though the theory may include academic and social aspects, much of the research on involvement theory focuses on extracurricular activities (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Student characteristics, including skills, effort, and talents and their engagement with their academic environment, including staff, faculty, programs, and student activities, can foster involvement that supports retention and academic success. Some of the engagement opportunities measured by involvement theory are "working on campus, living on campus, engaging with peers, being a member of clubs, and socializing with faculty members" (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2009, p. 411). Their backgrounds and experiences influence how first-generation students integrate and involve themselves in college life. Some first-generation students, especially those who are nonresidential, may view college as a place to visit for limited amounts of time (Jacoby, 2000). Due to a variety of factors—including working and living off-campus—first-generation students are among those who may be going to class and leaving, without participating in student engagement opportunities (Engle & Tinto, 2008). First-generation students tend to work more hours than continuing-generation students and may experience financial issues that make it difficult for them to afford living on campus (Nuñez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998). The combination of these factors influences how first-generation students integrate and become involved on campus.

Other factors that influence social and academic integration for first-generation students are their perceptions about connecting with faculty. Some students feel disconnected from professors due to lower levels of academic and social integration into

the college environment (Nuñez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998) and their perception the faculty may be too busy to be "wasting time" with them (Longwell-Grice & Longwell-Grice, 2007, p.416). Additional qualitative research also supports the finding that, for a variety of reasons including fear, low self-confidence, and lack of knowledge about campus resources, first-generation students may hesitate to reach out for help (Longwell-Grice & Longwell-Grice, 2008). This perception is unfortunate because research indicates first-generation students benefit from mentoring that provides support to help them to achieve better student success outcomes, knowledge of campus resources, and problem-solving to resolve obstacles they may encounter (Leidenfrost, Strassnig, Schütz, Carbon, & Schabmann, 2014; Stanton-Salazar & Dornsbusch, 1999; Zevallos & Washburn, 2014). For those students who predominantly engage in the classroom, faculty can incorporate cooperative and problem-based learning into their curriculum to encourage students to take a more active approach to the learning process and stimulate engagement with peers (Braxton, Strassnig, Schütz, Carbon, & Schabmann, 2000).

Although retention research has had a lasting impact on higher education literature and practice, it has "not yet resulted in a comprehensive longitudinal model of student success that effectively translates our knowledge into practices and policies that institutions and states can follow to enhance student success" (Tinto & Pusser, 2006, p. 4). Researchers have identified several reasons why the theory and research around retention have not translated into a comprehensive model of student success. First, there is a tendency to equate understanding why students leave a college or university with why a student chooses to stay and continue their education (Tinto & Pusser, 2006).

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Researchers and practitioners need to do more to understand these two actions as distinct from one another to gain a complete conception of retention. For example, the reasons a student may decide to leave are well documented, including challenges related to academics, finances, adjustments to college life, and feelings of belonging (Tinto, 2001). The reasons students decide to stay are less understood, which is unfortunate because "knowing why students leave does not directly translated into knowing what to do to help students stay" (Tinto & Pusser, 2006, p. 4). Second, theoretical concepts that cannot be translated into action too often take center stage without identifying the steps college and universities can take to address barriers to student success (Tinto & Pusser, 2006). Although research has helped colleges and universities to understand student involvement and engagement matter, more needs to be done to identify practices that increase student success. Finally, concerning practices that impact retention, areas of focus vary from financial aid to campus climate to specific programming efforts. This variability has prevented researchers from developing "a comprehensive model of action that would allow them to weigh the outcomes of different forms of action and plan accordingly" (Tinto & Pusser, 2006, p. 5).

Evolving Views on Retention

Researchers who study first-generation students have argued early research on retention was incomplete in many ways (e.g. early studies largely excluded these students). Indeed, in his later work, Tinto (2006) acknowledged this gap:

Like any early body of work, the study of student retention lacked complexity and

detail. Much of the research was drawn from quantitative studies of mostly

residential universities and students of majority backgrounds. As such it did not,

in its initial formulation, speak to the experience of students in other types of

institutions, two- and four-year, and of students of different gender, race,

ethnicity, income, and orientation. We were, if you will, in the infancy of our

work. (p. 3)

Integration and involvement theories have continued to evolve since their introduction in

the late 1970s. Scholars have built upon these theories to include student perspectives that

go beyond traditional-age (students enrolling in college immediately after high school

graduation), continuing-generation students.

Early retention research has had a significant impact on the way scholars think

about student success and graduation for all students. This body of work was incomplete,

as it focused exclusively on continuing-generation students. More recent work on

retention has explored how colleges and universities can provide meaningful support that

is more inclusive to specific subsets of students, including those who are first-generation.

Scholars have built upon this work and developed a body of literature on the influence of

students' backgrounds on the way they participate in student life, and their academic

success and retention (Kim & Sax, 2009; Yosso, 2005). Two theories that help provide a

more nuanced view of student experiences are closely examined: identity theory and the

theory of community cultural wealth.

Identity Theory

In addition to their new environment, students in transition are also developing and negotiating their new identity as college students. Theorists who focus on identity contend:

> Identity development begins early in life, and it is uncertain when, if ever, it ends. It is generally agreed that developing an identity is a life-long process; that a basic identity is solidified during adolescence and young adulthood, but as life progresses, it is continually refined. (Alessandria & Nelson, 2005, p. 4)

Within the context of higher education, Chickering and Reisser (1993) contended a critical part of the identity development of students depends on three stages:

> We can say that moving through autonomy toward interdependence involves three components: 1) emotional independence—freedom from continual and pressing needs for reassurance, affection, or approval from others; 2) instrumental independence—the ability to carry on activities and solve problems in a self-directed manner, and the freedom and confidence to be mobile in order to pursue opportunity or adventure; 3) interdependence—an awareness of one's place in and commitment to the welfare of the larger community. (p. 117)

Furthermore, Chickering and Reisser (1993) also argued emotional independence requires students to separate from their families. For first-generation students, this part of the identity development process can be challenging, as they may feel the desire to stay connected to their families while simultaneously embracing their new college environment (Alessandria & Nelson, 2005). Some researchers have found "first

generation students must traverse a greater social and cultural distance than other students to become part of the college community and to negotiate a successful passage through college" (Nuñez, 2005, p. 88). In contrast to previous studies on student development, Nuñez (2005) argued first-generation students tend to renegotiate their relationships with their families instead of separating from them.

As previously discussed, students face a variety of external factors influencing their retention and engagement. Students who decide to continue their undergraduate studies in the face of challenging circumstances "suggests that human behaviour is not simply a reaction to external, objective conditions. Rather, behaviour is the product of the interplay of objective conditions with the particular subjective, internal psychology of a given individual" (Whannell & Whannell, 2015, p. 44). An examination of internal conditions affecting students has led some researchers to apply identity theory to the study of student transition, success, and retention (Baxter & Britton, 2001). Within the context of higher education,

> Identity is commonly understood as one's personally held beliefs about the self in relation to social groups (e.g., race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation) and the ways one expresses that relationship. Identity is also commonly understood to be socially constructed; that is, one's sense of self and beliefs about one's own social group as well others are constructed through interactions with the broader social context in which dominant values dictate norms and expectations. (Torres et al., 2007, p. 577)

As students transition from high school to college, they undergo a process of socialization

where they are learning about their new environment, including values, social norms, and

expectations for success.

For some students, this transition and socialization during their first year of

college can be challenging, as they are navigating many changes:

Entering university involves substantial changes in their living and education

environments. University transition may involve changes in residence, where the

student was previously residing with parents and may now need to reside away

from home for the first time, financial challenges associated with funding their

own living expenses, and changes in the educational environment where the

student is now required to be much more self-directed and self-sufficient.

(Whannell & Whannell, 2015, p. 45)

These changes and adjustments can cause uncertainty for some students, leading to

feelings of dissatisfaction and lower academic performance (Mertes & Jankoviak, 2016).

The transition to college can also lead students to question whether they fit in or belong

in college. Within the college context,

sense of belonging refers to students' perceived social support on campus, a

feeling or sensation of connectedness, and the experience of mattering or feeling

cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the campus

community, including faculty, staff, and peers. (Strayhorn, 2019, p. 4)

A supportive college environment can help students develop a sense of belonging, a

critical part of self-identity (Schwartzman & Sanchez, 2016).

For first-generation students, attending college "represents a significant identity negotiation" (Orbe, 2008, p. 82). Orbe (2008) identified several conflicting dialectics with which first-generation students must contend: (a) individual/social, (b) similar/different, (c) stability/change, (d) certainty/uncertainty, (e) advantage/disadvantage, and (f) openness/closedness. These conflicting feelings are the core of the identity negotiation first-generation students may struggle during their college transition. For example, students may continue to feel connected to their home and families while simultaneously adjusting to their new environments or may struggle to balance the desire to embrace the change that comes with college life with the need to feel the stability of staying connected to their family. First-generation students have multiple aspects within their identities, some of which may be in tension, depending on their experiences.

Unfortunately, some first-generation students feel they need to hide their identities because

> FGC [first-generation college] student status has a negative stigma on many campuses. Making this aspect of his or her identity known to others may result in (mis)perceptions that the student is ill prepared for college-level academics, without substantial educational aspirations, socially or communicatively inept, and less committed to participating fully in the learning process. (Orbe, 2008, p. 92)

Though these misperceptions may have been prevalent for many years within higher education generally, and retention literature specifically, theorists are evolving their

views on first-generation students. Some researchers have argued deficit models fail to fully account for institutional barriers, such as lack of faculty representation, unequal educational funding, and other factors that impact the college environment (Irizarry, 2009; May & Chubin, 2003; Suarez-Balcazar, Orellana-Damacela, Portillo, Rowan, & Andrews-Guillen, 2003).

Community Cultural Wealth

To address this gap, some researchers have rejected a deficit lens in favor of an asset-based approach when approaching underserved students (Jehangir, 2010; Tate et al., 2015). Theories drawn from sociology focused on cultural capital have been applied to the higher education context to understand the visible and invisible advantages individuals experience:

Cultural capital in its simplest form can be defined as an individual's ability to advantage himself or herself in a given context. The term often is used in sociological contexts to describe the tangible and intangible elements that give certain individuals specific social advantages. Although it has been challenged and reshaped by a number of scholars over the years, Bourdieu (1977) is most often credited with coining the term in the 1960s and for developing the concept's foundational principles as the means by which the skills and strategies for success in a particular culture are transferred to an individual based on his or her perceived cultural membership and status. In other words, cultural capital is the means by which individuals are taught how to exist within a particular cultural

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context in order to thrive to the greatest extent possible. (Madyun, Williams,

McGee, & Milner, 2013, p. 71)

In response to approaches centered on a student deficit model, Yosso (2005) developed a

cultural wealth model designed to highlight the strengths, experiences, and talents

students of color bring with them to college. Yosso's model includes six forms of capital:

aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistant. Aspirational capital

focuses on the hopes and dreams students and families have for higher education, even

despite the obstacles they face. Linguistic capital refers to the intellectual,

communication, and language skills students bring with them to their higher education

environment. Familial capital encompasses the strong cultural knowledge, community

and family bonds, and resources that can be leveraged for the benefit of college students.

Social capital refers to peers and social networks students leverage to give them access to

higher education, and the support and resources they need to make their way through

society's institutions. Navigational capital includes the skills students of color use to

navigate through social institutions that were not created with them in mind, including

resilience and individual agency. Finally, resistant capital is the skills and knowledge

students acquire as part of their lived experience encountering and challenging inequality.

Together, these six components comprise the key dimensions of Yosso's theory of

community cultural wealth, as illustrated in Figure 1.
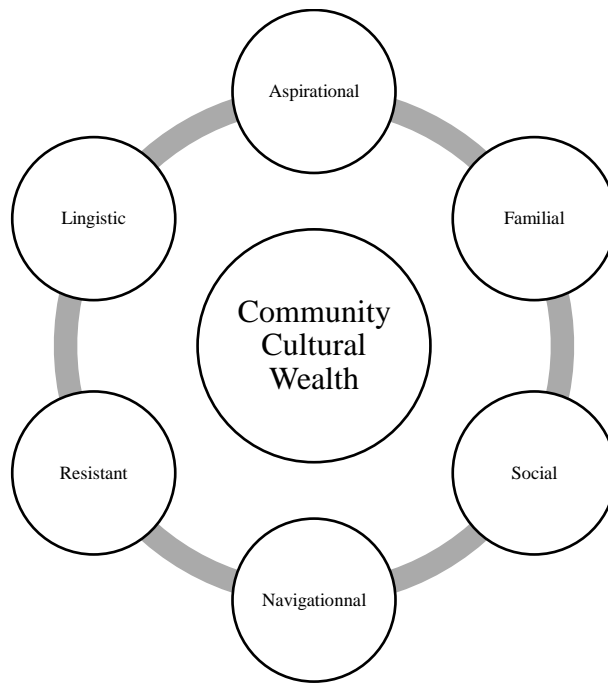
Figure 1. Six dimensions of Yosso's theory of community cultural wealth. Adapted from

"Whose culture has capital? A Critical race theory discussion of

community cultural wealth," by T. Yosso, 2005, Race, Ethnicity, and Education, 8, p. 78.

Though Yosso's theory has been most closely aligned with studying

underrepresented students of color in higher education, the community cultural wealth

framework might also be useful to help bring further understanding to the experiences of

first-generation college students (O'Shea, 2015). Indeed, researchers applying this

theoretical lens to study first-generation students found the "Community Cultural Wealth

framework provided a powerful means to conceptualize how first-in-family students draw

upon existing capitals and also how these capitals are used to enact educational success"

(O'Shea, 2015, p. 70). Scholars examining experiences of first and second-generation

students attending Hispanic-serving institutions used community cultural wealth to bring

further understanding to how "students perceive their family as both a challenge and

source of support, which implies that families are complex systems that both support and provide conflict for students" (Kouyoumdjian, Guzmán, Garcia, & Talavera-Bustillos, 2017, p. 71).

Furthermore, research has indicated there are several forms of capital unique to first-generation and low-income students (Garriott, 2019). First, first-generation students who feel they do not belong in college, compared to their continuing-generation peers, may seek out support from student organizations, faculty, or programs that provide support services for first-generation students (Stuber, 2011). This resourcefulness may be an expression of social and navigational capital (Garriott, 2019). Additionally, first-generation students come to college with high career aspirations, in alignment with aspirational capital (Thompson, Her, & Nitzarim, 2014). Familial capital helps first-generation students overcome challenges on their quest to complete their degrees. Many first-generation students, including noncitizen students, are motivated to complete their degrees by their desire to support their families and communities (O'Neal et al., 2016). Finally, first-generation students "must rely on accumulated knowledge gained from resisting oppressive forces to take action and advocate for themselves and others" (Garriott, 2019, p. 9), demonstrating their use of resistant capital to navigate their college experience.

Recent research indicates first-generation students are using their cultural wealth to overcome challenges and achieve their higher education goals (Garriott, 2020). Moving from a deficit to an asset-based lens requires a shift in the way student support staff conceptualize their role in relation to first-generation students:

We, then, must see our roles as cultural navigators who help students negotiate

higher education successfully. We must see students as actors, agents of their own

destiny in this cultural space. Students bring cultural wealth—not deficits—with

them. Our job as cultural navigators is to see them as glasses or vessels partly full,

not empty. We must help them with a cultural excavation of sorts by working

together with them to dig deep into their cultural repertoires and identify the

wealth they bring to campus and the ways to deploy it in this setting that may be

decidedly new to them. That is what cultural navigators do. (Strayhorn, 2015, p.

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The next section of the literature review focuses on programs and services designed to

increase success outcomes for first-generation students.

Student Success and Retention Programs

Colleges and universities are using a variety of support programs and strategies to

help ensure the success of first-generation students and improve retention (Engle &

Tinto, 2008; Hoops & Artrip, 2016; Tomasko, Ridgway, Waller, & Olesik, 2016).

Although programs and initiatives play an important role in student success, as Tinto

(2003) contended, "the ability of an institution to retain students lies less in the formal

programs they devise than in the underlying commitment toward students which directs

their activities" (p. 7). Researchers have argued colleges and universities must commit to

and prioritize student success and retention programs with financial and human resources

(Engle & Tinto, 2008). Student success outcomes, including retention and graduation,

must be part of an overall strategy that is intentional, embraced, incentivized and

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proactive by faculty staff and students to achieve better outcomes, including graduation rates, for first-generation students (Engle & O'Brien, 2007; Pike & Kuh, 2005).

Part of the strategy some colleges and universities are using includes programs and initiatives that focus on building students' academic skills. Although academic preparation is an essential element of student success, research suggests up to 75% of all decisions to drop out are motivated by nonacademic reasons, which leads researchers to suggest efforts to increase retention should be focused on other parts of the student experience beyond academics (Tinto, 1999). Other factors that have been found to play a role in student retention and success include personal and environmental conditions (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Tinto, 1993). Though not exhaustive, these factors provide a framework to consider widely implemented higher education policies designed to impact retention.

Researchers identified several critical strategies used by colleges and universities to promote the successful graduation of first-generation and low-income students. In 2008, the Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education identified strategies for colleges and universities to pursue to increase retention and graduation rates. Recommendations included:

- Improving academic preparation for college
- Providing additional financial aid
- Increasing transfer rates to 4-year colleges
- Easing the transition to college through early intervention programs, advising, tutoring and peer mentoring

- Encouraging engagement on campus

- Promoting reentry for young and working adults (Engle & Tinto, 2008).

Programs frequently use these strategies for first-generation and low-income students, which provide a variety of services to students before, during, and after students' first years. Colleges and universities have implemented tactics to reduce barriers to student participation in student success programs, including offering flexible hours and services, widely promoting their availability, and reducing or eliminating fees to participate (Engle, Bermeo, & O'Brien, 2006). Research shows students benefit from finding a place where they can connect with peers from similar backgrounds and share what they have learned about navigating the challenges they experience by being low income or first-generation college students (Engle & O'Brien, 2007; Muraskin, 1997). These efforts and others help first-generation students feel more integrated into campus life, which contributes to the likelihood of a student's success in college (Tinto, 1993).

Amongst a myriad of student success programs across the country, a few trends arise as the prominent programs being used to help aid in student retention, such as summer bridge programs, living-learning communities, course-based models. These programs are implemented to help students with study strategies and methods that will assist in their college academic careers, while at the same time applied to aid in the institution's retention (Hoops & Artrip, 2016; Johnson, 2013; Lytle & Gallucci, 2015; Petty, 2014; Tomasko et al., 2016). The literature is expansive and beyond the scope of this dissertation, but to provide context, a summary of the literature on each trend is provided.

Programs and strategies identified in the literature that share similarities with coaching are briefly examined. Indeed, tactics used by these programs were influenced or were foundational to the approach taken by coaching in higher education. Programs reviewed include: transition/orientation, FYS, TRIO, learning communities, early warning systems, advising, faculty/student interactions, and mentoring. These student success programs add additional background to the literature on coaching because of similarities in their approach to supporting success outcomes for first-generation students. Among these approaches, the practice of mentoring most closely resembles coaching and is accorded a more in-depth examination.

Transition/Orientation Programs

Transition/orientation programs broadly cover several efforts, including Summer Bridge, orientation, or any other pre-college enrollment programs designed to help ease the transition to college (Spradlin et al., 2010). Summer high school-to-college transition programs have often targeted low-income and underrepresented students (Garcia & Paz, 2009; Kezar, 2000). Researchers found participation in a summer bridge program predicted a higher first-year GPA and increased the likelihood of student retention (N. L. Cabrera, Miner, & Milem, 2013). The goals of many summer bridge programs include academic and social skill development and encouraging students to build supportive peer and institutional networks that foster academic resilience in students (Garcia & Paz, 2009: Kezar, 2000). Though these programs have been studied to determine their impact on retention and other student success indicators, "empirical studies [of summer bridge programs] have remained largely descriptive and in short supply" (Strayhorn, 2011, p.

142). Orientation programs represent another transition strategy to help students acclimate to the college environment. Tinto's (1999) research revealed the importance of orientation programs in helping students and families navigate the academic and social changes needed to adjust to campus life. Participating in more rigorous orientation programs has been shown to have a positive effect on retention for students (Wells, 2008). The transition from high school to college is a significant milestone for students. Transition and orientation programs can help students feel more equipped to navigate from high school to college successfully.

First-Year Success Programs

For those first-generation and low-income students who decide to leave their college or university, fully 60% of them do so in the first year (Pascarella et al., 2004). As a result, colleges and universities have designed initiatives that seek to offer support to first-year students, which encompass

> a comprehensive and intentional approach to the first college year. It comprises both curricular and co-curricular initiatives. It is the sum of all experiences students have in their first year at college. The 'first-year experience' is far more than a single event, program, or course. (Hunter, 2006, p. 6)

As discussed earlier, summer bridge initiatives and courses, orientation programs and learning communities focused on first-year students have all been proven to make the transition to college smoother by helping students integrate into the academic and social life of college and giving them the skills and knowledge to succeed in their first year (Lotkowski, Robbins, & Noeth, 2004; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 2003).

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Because first-generation students may hesitate to get involved in campus life as they transition to higher education (Terenzini et al., 1994), some colleges and universities make intentional efforts to reach out to students to ensure they feel connected academically and socially. Research also indicates colleges and universities should work to removing barriers to student participation, including reducing or eliminating fees for programs, particularly if they are made mandatory for first-year students (Engle & Tinto, 2008).

TRIO Programs

TRIO Programs, which began with the creation of the Upward Bound Program in 1964 as part of the War on Poverty and the Economic Poverty Act, are a set of federally funded opportunity programs that help low-income, first-generation, and students with disabilities achieve their higher education goals (Council for Opportunity in Education, 2020). Talent Search was the second outreach program established in 1965 as part of the Higher Education Act. In 1968, Student Support Services (SSS) became the third federal outreach program which, by the late 1960s, came to be known as the TRIO Programs (Council for Opportunity in Education, 2020). Even though there are now eight federally funded outreach grants, they are still known collectively as TRIO Programs. Nationally, there are over 3,100 federally funded TRIO Programs (Council for Opportunity in Education, 2020). TRIO provides various services to positively impact access and retention rates for participants (Department of Education, 2020).

TRIO SSS programs serve college students nationwide and are funded by the Department of Education "to provide opportunities for academic development, assist

students with basic college requirements, and to motivate students toward the successful completion of their postsecondary education" via a competitive grant process (Student Support Services Program, 2019, para. 1). To date, one of the most comprehensive evaluations of TRIO SSS examined the effect these programs had on participants after 6 years, tracking 5,800 students, both SSS participants and a comparison group of nonparticipants using a quasi-experimental design (Chaney, 2010). Chaney (2010) found a correlation between the receipt of student support services and improved academic success consistent across all measures of academic outcomes.

Muraskin (1997) examined five exemplary SSS sites drawn from the 30 projects in the National Study of Student Support Services and found successful SSS programs shared the following best practices:

- Project-designed freshman-year experience for most or all participants,
- An emphasis on academic support for developmental and popular freshman courses,
- Extensive student service contacts,
- Targeted participant recruitment and participation incentives,
- Dedicated staff and directors with strong institutional attachments, and
- An important role on campus. (p. 14)

TRIO programs are some of the longest-running interventions designed to impact graduation rates for first-generation and low-income students.

Learning Communities

Over 800 colleges and universities have created learning communities (Matthews et al., 2012). Learning communities have been described as "an intentionally developed community that exists to promote and maximize the individual and shared learning of its members. There is ongoing interaction, interplay, and collaboration among the community's members as they strive for specified common learning goals" (Lenning, Hill, Saunders, Solan, & Stokes, 2013, p. 7). These communities use programming and curriculum to encourage student interaction with faculty and peers to bring more cohesion to the learning process. Tinto (1999) examined various approaches to learning communities that included both residential and nonresidential designs, and those at 2- and 4-year colleges and universities, and found them particularly beneficial for underrepresented student groups. Learning communities vary widely in their structure and approach, with some taking courses from distinct disciplines and pairing them together, to others that coordinate all classes from a given semester around a particular theme (Smith, MacGregor, Matthews, & Gabelnick, 1997). Research has found student participation in learning communities positively impacts GPA, which may positively impact retention (Baker & Pomerantz, 2000).

Early Warning Systems

Early warning systems allow colleges and university faculty and staff to monitor student progress and take steps to offer necessary additional support like tutoring, advising, student success workshops or mentoring (Engle & O'Brien, 2007). While these systems are designed to help all students, they are particularly impactful with first-

generation and low-income students (Karp & Logue, 2002; Mann, Hunt, & Alford, 2003; Volp, Hill, & Frazier, 1998). For early warning systems to promote student success outcomes effectively, a great deal of coordination and sharing of information must occur between faculty, academic and student support staff, and students (Engle & O'Brien, 2007; Pike & Kuh, 2005). Monitoring student progress is particularly important for improving success outcomes for students who may face more obstacles to student success, given first-generation students attend college on a part-time basis at higher rates (Engle & Tinto, 2008).

Transition/orientation, first-year success, TRIO programs, learning communities, and early warning systems share a similar goal: they attempt to provide individualized support for students to help them achieve academic success. These strategies are distinct from other approaches considered in this literature review in that they do not have a 1:1 interaction between a student and a faculty or staff member as the central mechanism for providing student support. However, this element may be incorporated as part of overall programmatic efforts. Similarities shared with 1:1 student success strategies include: (a) taking the backgrounds of students into account to provide specific success support; (b) providing a welcoming environment for all students; (c) bringing similar students together for learning and support; and (d) monitoring student progress on academic indicators including GPA, retention and progress toward degree completion. Student success strategies closer to the model embraced by coaching are briefly considered, including advising, faculty/student interaction programs, and mentoring. Closer attention

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is paid to mentoring as it is most similar to coaching, in the hopes of distinguishing the two approaches.

Advising

Advising uses a 1:1 model to support students, including "challenging and supporting students in making a successful transition to college, feeling a part of their institutions, and achieving their educational goals" (King & Kerr, 2005, p. 320). Research has demonstrated a connection between advising to targeted groups via approaches like specialized advising offices and increases in retention rates (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Braxton et al., 2007). Some argue academic advisors are uniquely suited to meet the needs of college students:

> Because academic advising is situated at the intersection of each student's various educational experiences – from major to general education to experiential learning to co-curricular experiences – an advisor can focus students' attention on their emerging skills in harnessing multiple ways of thinking and knowing, on connecting diverse learning experiences, and on translating skills across various settings. (White & Schulenberg, 2012, p. 11)

When college and university administrators for 2- and 4-year institutions were asked which practices and policies had the most significant impact on student retention, academic advising was the top response (Habley & McClanahan, 2004).

Faculty/Student Interaction Programs

Faculty members play an essential role as the "major agents of socialization" (Pascarella, Terenzini, & Blimling, 1994, p. 31) concerning a student's experience on

campus. Studies have demonstrated the benefits of these interactions, leading to the

recommendation that every student should strive to get to know at least one faculty

member every semester (Light, 2001). This recommendation places the onus on the

student to seek out the faculty member. That seems unlikely to happen when one study

revealed only 20% of students had spoken to faculty outside of the classroom setting, and

75% of students agreed contact with faculty outside of class was minimal (Hagedorn,

Maxwell, Rodriguez, Hocevar, & Fillpot, 2000). Additional research found that only 50%

of college students had ever contacted a faculty member outside of class (Jaasma &

Koper, 1999). Lack of student/faculty interaction is unfortunate because more personal

and intentional faculty/student interactions are beneficial for students in many ways,

including student learning outcomes, integration into college life, and student retention

(Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Milem & Berger, 1997).

Mentoring

To date, studies on mentoring have focused on the following aspects: (a) student

perceptions on mentoring, (b) the mentoring process itself, and (c) the impact mentoring

has on academic performance and retention (Campbell & Campbell, 1997; Crisp & Cruz,

2009). Research has indicated students find mentoring to be valuable (Smith, 2009), and

Latino students in particular report a higher quality student experience and an increased

likelihood of persisting in their third year after participating in a mentoring program

(Torres & Hernandez, 2009). The literature focused on the impact of mentoring on

students more generally finds it has a significant and positive relationship to retention

(Campbell & Campbell, 1997; Mangold, Bean, Adams, Schwab, & Lynch, 2003; Pagan

& Edwards-Wilson, 2003; Salinitri, 2005). Despite these promising findings, in general, the research literature on mentoring programs is not robust and lacks rigor (Patton et al., 2006).

In practice, many individuals can serve in a mentoring role, including faculty, college or university staff, religious leaders, more senior students, graduate students, alumni, and undergraduate peers (Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Zalaquett & Lopez, 2006). In particular, mentoring conducted by faculty members has many benefits for students (Ishiyama, 2007). Mentoring relationships can be formal or informal, variable in duration, and may be intentional or unplanned (Luna & Cullen, 1995). More informal or spontaneous mentoring may not be overseen or sanctioned by the higher education institution and tends to be more focused on a specific goal. For instance, an undergraduate student might ask a faculty member to give them guidance on how to get into graduate school (Campbell & Campbell, 1997). Formal mentoring relationships are likely to be sponsored or sanctioned by the higher education institution and typically are assigned by program staff or someone else outside of the mentor/mentee relationship (Crisp & Cruz, 2009).

In addition to mentoring staff and faculty conduct, several more recent studies revealed increasing trends of using undergraduate students in a peer mentoring capacity (Gershenfeld, 2014). Other peer education opportunities led by college students include tutoring, supplemental instruction, academic advisement, health education, first-year seminars, and coaching (Latino & Unite, 2012). Increasingly, colleges and universities are incorporating some peer mentoring programs or components into institutional student

success and retention strategies, demonstrating peer mentoring has become a national priority and a valued student success practice (Girves, Zepeda, & Gwathmey, 2005).

Although mentoring is gaining support, there is not an agreed upon definition. Jacobi (1991) conducted the first review of undergraduate mentoring literature and identified significant gaps, including little agreement around the definition and practice of mentoring, which encompassed a variety of informal and formal mentoring relationships. Jacobi's analysis also highlighted differences in how mentoring supports student academic success. Though the research on mentoring has grown steadily since Jacobi undertook her foundational review of the literature, it has lagged behind program development and implementation efforts.

More recently, Crisp and Cruz (2009) evaluated empirical literature from 1990-2007 and found "mentoring research has made little progress in identifying and implementing a consistent definition and conceptualization of mentoring, is largely atheoretical and is lacking in terms of rigorous quantitative research designs that allow for testing the external validity of findings" (p. 526). They found over 50 definitions of mentoring as compared to the 15 identified by Jacobi. Mentoring varies from being defined as a specific set of activities employed by a mentor (Campbell & Campbell, 1997), while other researchers define mentoring as a process or concept (Anderson & Shannon, 1988; Roberts, 2000). This lack of a common operational or conceptual understanding of what constitutes mentoring within the literature bears on the question of methodology in a few ways. First, the implications of these definitions of mentoring being in conflict are especially problematic for empirical research, making it difficult to

gain any "clarity about the antecedents, outcomes, characteristics, and mediators of mentoring relationships despite a growing body of empirical research" (Jacobi, 1991, p. 505). Also, a lack of a common understanding creates confusion within the research about what is being measured and what constitutes best practices in mentoring (Merriam, 1983).

Though the research diverges on how to define mentoring, Jacobi's review identified three areas where researchers find some common ground. First, they agreed mentoring includes several types of assistance to help an individual grow and achieve their goals (Ehrich, Hansford, & Tennent, 2004; Johnson & Nelson, 1999). Second, the support offered by mentoring activities can include general forms of assistance, such as career and professional development, role modeling, and psychological support (Brown, Davis, & McClendon, 1999; Campbell & Campbell, 1997; Davidson & Foster-Johnson, 2001). Third, researchers agree mentoring relationships are personal and benefit both the mentor and the mentee (Davidson & Foster-Johnson, 2001; Johnson & Nelson, 1999).

As illustrated in the next section, coaching draws upon some elements of previously discussed student success strategies and takes a comprehensive approach to support students. The next section focuses on describing the origins of the use of coaching in higher education, and its broader use as a student success strategy.

Coaching in Higher Education

Though coaching used to fall squarely within the realm of athletics, the concept has now evolved to relationships outside of strict coach/athlete variety (Barkley, 2011). Other sectors, including higher education, have adapted the concept of coaching to meet

the needs of their constituents. Outside of the athletic realm, coaching seeks to help an individual "optimize personal functioning across multiple domains of life" (Spence & Grant, 2007, p. 187). As distinct from a mentor or advisor, for example, a coach helps an individual to brainstorm strategies to help reach a goal, as opposed to focusing on offering advice (Swarbrick, Murphy, Zechner, & Spagnolo, 2011). One central tenet to coaching is the answer to a problem or challenge lies within the individual, and the coaching process empowers them to use their resources and experiences to find a solution (Grant, 2001, 2012). Conceptually, coaching assumes the individual, with guidance, can find a solution or a pathway to a goal.

Although the practice of coaching is gaining traction in multiple fields, it is not a well-defined term when applied outside of traditional coach/athlete relationships (Wolever et al., 2013). It is useful to look at how coaching is used within the business sector, where the benefits are well documented, to understand the most widely used ideas around coaching (Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson, 2001). Within corporate contexts, coaching has been treated as a remedy to poor performance: "more often reserved for executives whose performance was failing, as a last-ditch effort to salvage their career" (Kappenberg, 2008, p. 6). This perception of coaching is shifting and is generally coming to be viewed in a more positive light. Indeed, the International Coaching Federation (ICF, 2016), which was established in 1995 and has over 20,000 members, seeks to advance the practice of professional coaching. The ICF (2016) defined professional coaching as "partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential" (para. 8). Another form of coaching

that has been embraced is executive coaching, which Smith and Sandstrom (2003) defined as "a facilitative one-on-one, mutually designed relationship between a professional coach and a key organizational contributor" (p.2) and focuses on skill-building, performance enhancement, and career development. Coaching can also be employed with new employees to help them learn the culture of their new company, and with more seasoned executives who receive specialized executive coaching designed to help them excel in their leadership roles (Latino & Unite, 2012).

Though coaching is often conducted by professional coaches, coaching by peers is another approach used with some success (Showers & Joyce, 1996). Peer coaching has been used with executives in the corporate sector, and within education (Grant, Green, & Rynsaardt, 2010; Showers & Joyce, 1996). The coaching of individuals who are at equal levels--as opposed to those where the coach has either authority or experience over the coached individual--is what differentiates peer coaching from other models, including executive coaching (Ladyshewsky & Varey, 2005). In contrast to other types of coaching relationships, peer coaching can be beneficial for participants, as the person receiving coaching may be more open with a peer than they would be with a coach who was in a position of power over them (Ladyshewsky & Varey, 2005). One specific form of peer coaching identified in the literature as reciprocal peer coaching (RPC) was defined as

> A form of co-operative or peer-assisted learning that encourages individual
> students in small groups to coach each other in turn so that the outcome of the
> process is a more rounded understanding and a more skillful execution of the task
> in hand than if the student was learning in isolation. (Asghar, 2010, p. 403)

Research indicated coaching has many benefits, including decreasing stress within the work environment (Grant et al., 2010), and increasing the likelihood of achieving a goal (Grant, 2012; Grant et al., 2010). Additionally, coaching has been shown to decrease anxiety in participants receiving professional training (Grant, 2008). In general, there seems to be consensus coaching focuses on setting goals, encouraging self-reflection, and self-directed learning (ICF, 2016). Given the success of coaching in the corporate sector, it is not entirely surprising coaching is being explored as a student success strategy within higher education.

Similar to literature on coaching within private industry, there is no one single definition of coaching in higher education research. In part, this is because research related to coaching in higher education is still emerging. There are two relevant factors. First, coaching has only begun to gain traction as a student success strategy in higher education. Second, given the variety of approaches used in the practice of coaching, it can be difficult to identify enough similarities to study the strategy systematically. Since coaching is still an evolving approach within this field, I reviewed the literature that sought to define coaching to create a greater understanding of how coaching is viewed within higher education.

In the simplest terms, coaching involves "using a coaching style relationship to enhance student learning" (Barkley, 2011, p. 79). Additional research defines coaching as one-on-one contact focused on the development of students' engagement, academic success, study skills, goal-setting, and overall strengths (Robinson & Gahagan, 2010).

Though the practice of coaching shares some similarities with other student success strategies, how coaches connect with students is a distinguishing characteristic:

> While many colleges and universities already provide some of these services, they usually do so in passive arrangements in which students must seek out the support services they need. What sets the student coaching process apart is the proactive role of the coaches. Coaches do not wait for students to make contact or to request assistance. Coaches initiate contact with their assigned students and take a proactive facilitative role in relationships. Moreover, coaching contacts are designed to be direct and immediate by utilizing primarily cell phone or e-mail contacts. (Dalton & Crosby, 2014, p. 62)

Of particular importance is the proactive approach coaches take involves both verbal and nonverbal feedback and emphasizes social and behavioral changes for the student being coached (Stormont, Reinke, Newcomer, Marchese, & Lewis, 2015).

In general, coaching is an approach that can be categorized as a personalized support strategy, which recent research has indicated can help overcome gaps in students' knowledge about what it takes to be successful in college (Bettinger, Long, Oreopoulos, & Sanbonmatsu, 2009). Personal support has also been found to encourage students to complete critical tasks they might not otherwise complete (Goldrick-Rab, 2010). The role of a coach has been characterized as helping students establish quantifiable goals and learning activities and skills that will help them be more successful (Martinek, 2006). More specifically, Webberman (2011) explained the benefits of coaching for students:

An ongoing partnership to help students produce fulfilling results in their lives.

Through the process of coaching, students deepen their learning, take

responsibility for their actions, improve their effectiveness, and consciously create

their outcomes in life. Faculty members, staff members, counselors, advisors, and

even peers can be taught to become academic coaches, and we are starting to see

many successful postsecondary programs now emerging around the country (p.

19).

Using continuous feedback, peer coaches encourage students to reflect on how their

behavior shapes their academic success (Robinson & Gahagan, 2010; Truijen & Von

Woerkom 2008). Coaches also support and encourage students to improve their academic

skills (Meléndez, 2007).

Coaching, within the context of higher education, shares similarities with adult

and experiential learning theories that are foundational to a student development

approach to higher education:

Learners are autonomous, have a foundation of life experiences and knowledge

from which they are able to generalize, have a readiness to learn and engage in

reflective practice, and the notion that adult learners wish to be treated with

respect. (Grant, 2001, p. 20).

Embracing the student as a learner and valuing the experiences and knowledge they bring

aligns well with how coaching theory conceptualizes a student. Coaching is viewed as an

intervention strategy based on a collaborative approach that motivates students to

improve their academic outcomes by empowering them to take charge of their learning (Barkley, 2011).

Stelter and Law (2010) defined coaching as a process that can be conducted by an advisor, tutor, mentor, or another academic professional to guide a student to develop an appreciation for new forms of knowledge and alternative skill development. Coaching is often not distinguished from other services in higher education literature, including tutoring and advising (Warner et al., 2018). The similarities faculty/student interaction programs and mentoring share with one another are some of the same shared with coaching, leading some researchers to lump coaching, advising, and mentoring into a general category of college counseling (Bettinger & Baker, 2011).

Of all of services offered to students, mentoring and coaching seem to be among the most interchangeable in the literature. Tofade (2010) draws a useful distinction between coaching and mentoring:

> There are several definitions of coaching. Many of them imply that the coach helps the individual being coached accomplish his/her goals much more efficiently than he/she would have alone. The main difference between coaching and mentoring is that coaching deals more with getting desired results by holding the individual accountable to his/her pre-stated goals. In mentoring, there is more giving of advice and instruction and problem-solving with the individual. (p. 1)

Despite their similarities, it is helpful to understand the difference between coaching and mentoring:

A fine but distinct line separates coaching from advising and mentoring. These

distinctions need to be clear for all practitioners. Counselors and advisors in the

institutional setting assist students to navigate the structure and culture of a given

campus, like reviewing college credit and GPAs or helping them choose the right

classes to make the bridge from developmental studies to their first year of

college and, ultimately, to graduation. Coaches, whose role it is to guide students

academically, emotionally, and socially, can be a counselor or an advisor, but they

can also be a math, English, or biology professor. In addition, coaching can help

them look beyond obtaining their degree and into the professional world.

(Webberman, 2011, p. 20)

Even with the distinctions drawn from the literature, coaching and mentoring are closely

aligned, and it is understandable why some researchers and practitioners consider these

practices somewhat interchangeable, conflating them due to either not fully

understanding the difference or for the sake of expediency (Ives, 2008). Table 1 draws

further distinctions between coaching and other forms of academic support.

Table 1

Distinguishing Coaching From Other Forms of Advising

	Coaching	**Other Forms of Advising**
Goal	The goal of coaching is to "facilitate learning, focus and results" (Slayback, 2017).	Advisors often focus on addressing a "specific need and ensuring the student has a plan for meeting that need (such as registration, a degree plan, resources for academic support)" (InsideTrak, 2016).
Method	"Coaching is a co-creative process to determine what success looks like for each individual and takes a	Advisors following a traditional model help students by directing students toward resources and/or

	proactive approach to both short and long-term success" (InsideTrack, 2016). "Strategies used in academic coaching include asking initial assessment questions, using worksheets to practice skills such as time management, and creating an individualized action plan" (McWilliams & Beam, 2013).	recommending next steps; advisors following a more developmental approach help students co-create a plan for action. (InsideTrack, 2016). Advisors help students navigate college requirements by registering them for courses, monitoring academic progress, choosing a major, and offering recommendations when students face obstacles in completing their degree (Johnson, 2017).
Skills	Coaching "refers to skills-oriented learning relationships in which a helping professional is "coaching" a student to improve in areas such as goal setting, time management, and study skills" (McWilliams & Beam, 2013). Other skills gained by coaching include skill-building around communication with professors, building resilience, and recovering from mistakes (Mangan, 2014).	Advisors often focus on helping students understand and build skills related to "curricular issues—what students need to progress toward a career in a particular major" (Mangan, 2014).
Strategy	Coaching seeks to "streamline student services and support" by taking a more integrated approach (Johnson, 2017).	Academic advising is a model used by colleges and universities who have moved away from a faculty advising model to a "centralized professional advising model, whereby professional staff is employed to teach students to plan and manage their educations and guide them through the course-selection process" (McWilliams & Beam, 2013).

It is useful to examine the various ways coaches provide support to students to understand the functional role of a coach. The National Academic Advising Association (NACADA, 2016) identified specific tasks undertaken by academic coaches, including (a) cultivating a personal relationship with the student, (b) helping a student identify and

achieve goals, (c) connecting students to resources for support, (d) encouraging self-awareness and decision-making skills, and (e) increasing student accountability by developing an action plan. Three critical parts of coaching identified by Robinson and Gahagan (2010) include planning or goal setting, self-assessment and regulation, and self-reflection. Coaches serve as a consistent resource for students, helping students develop many additional skills, including goal-setting and study skills while focusing on strengths (Robinson & Gahagan, 2010). Coaching models adopted by colleges and universities include (a) success coaches who help students make "general plans for academic and non-academic improvement" (Barnhart & LeMaster, 2013, p. 4); (b) academic-success hybrid coaches who focus on "additional academic support elements, such as effective study practices and test preparation exercises" (p. 4); and (c) who work with smaller groups and ask an individual to focus on a single goal for the semester.

Approaches to coaching identified in the literature vary, though they tend to focus on providing students with opportunities to build academic skills and connecting students to resources. Generally, coaches work to develop a rapport with the student on mutual commonalties to create buy-in to the coaching process, and listen and communicate effectively to motivate the student (Tofade, 2010). Coaching can emphasize different skills and supports for students, including variations on self-assessment, reflection, and goal setting (Grant, 2011; Robinson & Gahagan, 2010; Tofade, 2010). Self-assessment is often used to begin the coaching relationship and help the student and coach set a baseline for understanding the coaching needs of the student. This process of assessment is used to measure a student's current study habits, level of engagement, and other

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academic skills, and can help speed up the timeframe it takes a coach to get to know a student. Examples of self-assessments used include Learning and Study Strategies Inventory (LASSI), StrengthsQuest StrengthsFinder, True Colors, and the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (Robinson & Gahagan, 2010).

Coaching can also assist students with the development of skills that will benefit them academically, including study and time management skills (Bettinger & Baker, 2013). Grant (2011) identified steps students could take to engage deeper in the learning process, including establishing a goal to help them understand the purpose and expectations of the coaching process, and developing problem-focused thinking, which encourages students to explore the resources they can use to find a solution. In particular, goal setting helps students formulate concrete actions they can take to resolve issue(s) (Grant, 2011). A model that emphasizes empowering students is co-active coaching, which underscores students as responsible for their learning and meeting goals established via the coaching process (Tofade, 2010). This type of coaching encourages students to keep the end in sight by helping them visualize their ultimate goal. Students who received coaching experienced improvement in their self-regulation and other skills related to academic performance (Bonner, 2010). Some researchers advocated specific areas of focus as part of coaching, including helping a student develop academic skills, problem-solving, and building knowledge (Purwa Udiutoma, Srinovita, & Si, 2015). By emphasizing problem-solving, coaching can increase the likelihood students will get more involved in the learning process (Powell & Kalina, 2009).

By asking students a variety of open-ended questions to stimulate conversations that may not happen elsewhere on campus, coaches encourage self-reflection. Examples of questions include: "What has been the most positive experience you've had as a college student?" and "Tell me about a time when you enjoyed doing a class project or assignment. What made you feel engaged in this setting?" (Robinson & Gahagan, 2010, p. 28). Self-reflection can encourage students to move away from focusing on the challenge or problem they are facing to identifying and using their resources to find solutions (Grant, 2011). Coaches encourage self-reflection by asking probing, open-ended questions that lead to reflective thought, and building their self-awareness and confidence by careful listening and reminding the student of their successes (Tofade, 2010).

Researchers have also studied coaching as an intervention that can be targeted for specific students, including those struggling academically (Dilmore et al., 2010). Others encourage coaching for all students as a means of achieving personal and academic goals. These authors found students who receive coaching have more developed reflection and collaboration skills, which leads to increased academic performance (Melendez, 2007). Though coaching can be offered as a standalone service, coaching can be integrated as part of curriculum-related services and used with individual students or with an entire class to enhance academic performance (Barkley, 2011).

Coaching can also help acclimate students to life as a college student. For example, peer coaches can help first-year students adjust to the new expectations that come with transitioning to college. For students who may be unfamiliar with behaviors

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that promote success in college, coaches can help students with improving study skills, connecting with faculty, understanding the learning environment, and being involved on campus (Alkadounmee, 2012). Research finds coaching is particularly useful for first-generation students to help them become familiar with the customs of college life (Hu & Ma, 2010). Coaches provide students with opportunities to engage at the university, including awareness about campus events, academic resources like tutoring, and connections to other students who may also be experiencing a similar feeling of culture shock as first-year students.

Colleges and universities have been looking at the practice of coaching as an opportunity to offer additional support to their students (Hoover, 2011a, 2011b). Some institutions use faculty as coaches (Grant, 2011). Coaching has been used to help faculty modify their teaching styles to help them form healthy working relationships with their Gen Y students within a classroom setting:

> A coaching relationship provides important feedback, support, and challenge to students that allow them to thrive in academics and life. Some evidence has been provided that altering one's approach in the classroom allows for more engaged learners and higher levels of student learning. (Barkley, 2011, p. 81)

Though faculty can conduct coaching, student peers more frequently serve in this role (Hayes, 2012; Robinson & Gahagan, 2010).

While colleges are increasingly using coaching to improve student success outcomes, surprisingly little empirical research exists to support the efficacy of this practice. Research on coaching has suggested it is a support strategy used to improve

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important student success outcomes, like student engagement and academic performance (Robinson & Gahagan, 2010). Within higher education literature, research on the efficacy of coaching is still emerging. To date, the most comprehensive study on coaching in higher education in the United States was conducted by Stanford University, focusing on the company InsideTrack, which specializes in coaching (Bettinger & Baker, 2011). Many colleges and universities outsource their coaching services to InsideTrack, or other similar service providers, instead of institutionalizing their programs. Researchers wanted to test the idea that students may struggle because they have insufficient information about how to be successful academically or lack motivation. Students were randomly assigned to groups who received coaching focused on improving study skills, self-advocacy, goal setting, and other skill-building activities, and those who did not. A random experimental design was used to evaluate 13,555 students in the 2003-2004 school year and again in 2007-2008, across eight different colleges, including public, private, and proprietary institutions. The study tracked and compared the retention of students who received coaching from InsideTrack versus those who did not receive these services. It found statistically significant differences in retention and completion rates, with students who received coaching being 5%-15% more likely to persist as compared to students who did not receive coaching. Also, male students were shown to have a higher receptivity to coaching and greater rates of retention than female students.

Though the research by Bettinger and Baker (2011) is widely accepted as the most thorough study on coaching in higher education in the literature, it is not without its critics. Since InsideTrack is based in San Francisco, coaching was provided to students

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via phone and not face-to-face. Also, some take issue that coaching is outsourced, as coaches are not hired and trained by the home institution. Finally, some found the fact the data came from InsideTrack problematic, given they have a vested interest in ensuring their services are viewed as successful since they are a for-profit company. Bettinger (2011) responded to this concern by explaining the years covered by this data request were selected by Stanford and not InsideTrack, reducing the likelihood they would try to game the system by choosing only favorable years of data for the study.

Additional research on coaching has also shown promising results. Coaching has been shown to be a useful practice for students with disabilities. Studies focused on students with ADHD attending 2- and 4-year colleges indicate coaching can be a highly effective tool in assisting students in managing their daily stress and improving their executive functioning skills, including self-regulation and other skills (Field, Parker, Sawilowsky, & Rolands, 2013). Field et al. (2013) study found students who received coaching earned higher scores on self-regulation questions on the nationally standardized Learning and Study Strategies Inventory (LASSI) and the College Well-Being (CWB) assessment scale than similar students in the comparison group who did not receive coaching. Additional research on a peer-based coaching program designed for students with ADHD or students with disabilities suggested coaching may be an effective strategy for increasing students' self-efficacy and study skills (Zwart & Kallenmeyn, 2001).

Furthermore, researchers studied how coaching impacts students with disabilities pursuing degrees in the science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields (Bellman, Burgstahler, & Hinke, 2015). Bellman et al. (2015) found coaching increased

students' motivation, self-confidence, and resolve to succeed. Also, students reported increased skill development related to study skills, writing, time management, organization, and other student success skills. This study expands upon other research focused on coaching of students with ADHD to suggest coaching may be beneficial for students with a variety of learning disabilities.

Also, studies have shown students who are at higher risk for academic failure benefit from services like coaching, which can narrow academic gaps and strengthen the skills they need to improve academic performance (Bonner, 2010; Hu & Ma, 2010). Early research by Robinson and Gahagan (2010) indicated coaching was effective for students on academic probation. In 2007–2008, of 182 students on academic probation at the University of South Carolina who received coaching, 92% (168) saw improvements in their GPA over one academic year. In 2008–2009, all 218 freshmen on probation in the cohort studied received coaching as part of a mandatory requirement after the Fall 2008 semester, 22 opted to meet a second time with their coach, and 10 students attended three sessions. As a result, the university saw 40% fewer suspended students than had been anticipated. While findings presented by Robinson and Gahagan are limited to two cohorts, the results of their study suggest coaching may be an effective student success practice for students on academic probation.

Even considering these promising early findings, colleges and universities should weigh several considerations when developing academic peer support programs (Latino & Unite, 2012). First, colleges and universities must be intentional about the recruitment, selection, training, and development of students selected to be peer educators. Indeed,

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training and development are important considerations for developing a successful approach to peer education and researchers argue it should be as extensive as training provided to the faculty (Latino & Unite, 2012). Peer educators should be given challenging responsibilities, including providing feedback to students and input in program development. Institutions should also be intentional about the recognition and compensation of peer educators, which may include course credit, scholarships, funds for textbooks, and special incentives like priority registration. Peer coaches should also be allowed to reflect on the learning and growth they experience as part of their roles. Finally, evaluation and assessment should be used to measure the success of peer educators in the following ways: impact on the student served, self-evaluation on the peer educator, and the effect the peer educators have on the overall success of the peer coaching program.

Though coaching is gaining more traction as a student success strategy within higher education, some researchers have raised some concerns about its universal adoption. Dalton and Crosby (2014) argued coaching may appear to be duplicative of student services colleges and universities already provide, including orientation, counseling, mentoring, and study skill development. Also, the cost of coaching may be too high for colleges and universities during the current economic climate facing many institutions of higher education. Empirical, evidence-based research on the effectiveness of coaching is still emerging, making the efficacy of this student service far from certain. Moreover, since coaching has its roots in a variety of disciplines other than higher education, including psychology, leadership, and adult learning, Dalton and Crosby

contend coaching lacks a supporting theoretical framework, making it difficult to transfer the practice to higher education. Finally, some ethical and philosophical questions institutions should weigh before adopting a coaching program include:

> Is student coaching another form of remedial education that may be inappropriate for colleges and universities? Is the introduction of third-party individuals to guide and support the educational success of new students an abdication of one of higher education's essential roles? Is personal coaching another concierge-type student service designed to be a "difference" maker in marketing the institution to prospective students? (Dalton & Crosby, 2014, p. 63)

These concerns may be heightened by the dearth of studies focused on coaching. By furthering the research on peer coaching programs, and more specifically, the peer coaches, this study will help colleges and universities have a greater understanding of the efficacy of this student success strategy.

Coaching draws upon some features embraced by other student success approaches, including an individualized student approach, fostering relationships between students and others on campus, and taking account of both the academic and social needs of students when developing support services. By engaging in these practices, peer coaches can meet students where they are, helping them problem solve and establish goals increasing the likelihood they will achieve critical student success milestones. Now that peer coaching has been examined as a student success strategy, I discuss the proposed methodology for analyzing how peer coaches support first-generation students.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This study used a qualitative approach to examine the ways coaches use community cultural wealth to coach first-generation students and how coaching influences students to access their capital. Qualitative approaches, including interviewing, are essential for understanding a social phenomenon from the participant's perspective (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). This method is also most appropriate when a problem needs to be explored and to hear silenced voices (Creswell, 2007). Additionally, considering the nature of coaching, a qualitative approach may help capture the relationship between the coach and student more effectively: "Interactions among people, for example, are difficult to capture with existing measures, and these measures may not be sensitive to issues such as gender differences, race, economic status, and individual differences" (Creswell, 2007, p. 40). Since perceptions of coaches and students receiving coaching are central to the study, a qualitative approach helped provide further understanding of how coaching supports first-generation students from the perspective of the coaches and the students.

Given peer coaching is still emerging as a student support strategy, the focus on community cultural wealth, and the desire to capture a deeper understanding of the student-coach interactions, a qualitative method provided the most appropriate approach for this study. The following chapter describes the research design, participant selection, data collection, and strategies for data analysis used in this study.

Research Design

The research design for this study has three major components. First, an initial series of one-on-one interviews were conducted with five coaches working for the First-Year Success Center to understand how coaches: (a) view their role, (b) use their skills to help students be more successful, and (c) draw from their personal experiences as part of their coaching interactions with students. Second, focus groups were used to interview 15 students who had received coaching. Finally, the five coaches were interviewed a second time based on an interview protocol developed through an analysis of the first interviews and student focus groups. Both one-on-one and focus group interviews followed a semi-structured approach to provide both structure and flexibility. The goal of both the interviews and focus groups was to encourage participants to share rich and detailed information about their experiences as coaches and students (Merriam, 2009).

Use of Interviews

Qualitative approaches, including interviewing, are essential for understanding a social phenomenon from the participant's perspective (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Interviews are helpful to "understand the lived experience" of the coaches and "the meaning they make of the experience" (Seidman, 2006, p. 9). Furthermore, Warner et al. (2018) explained interviews allow for common themes from the experiences of the coaches to be identified:

> Knowledge is derived from subjective interpretations of objective phenomenon, an epistemological assumption implying that although each person's experience is fundamentally unique, there exist commonalities, or structures, that appear across

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individuals. To uncover these underlying structures, the researcher must collect

first-person accounts and then use an iterative process of reflection to define the

essence of an experience and why it was experienced in that way. This process

allowed us to draw connections between the participants' perceptions of coaching

and what they actually experienced while becoming coaches. (pp. 4-5)

Given coaching is still emerging within higher education research, interviews provide an

opportunity to explore commonalities while still honoring the individuality of each

coaches' experience.

Use of Focus Groups

Focus groups "are advantageous when the interaction among interviewees will

likely yield the best information and when interviewees are similar to and cooperative

with each other" (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019, p. 218). In this case, since all the

students participating in the focus groups were in their first semester of college and

received coaching, commonalities and differences in their experiences with coaching can

be explored.

Concerning the focus groups, it was essential to make sure all students felt

comfortable participating and responding to questions. Strategies were used to encourage

candid responses from participants, including avoiding yes or no questions (Billups,

2012) and encouraging all participants to speak and take turns answering questions

during the focus groups (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Billups (2012) found focus

groups particularly useful when working with college students, as "focus groups with

students can lead to feelings of acceptance and affirmation, and even relaxation, which are all essential conditions for students to speak freely" (p. 3).

Procedure

Figure 2 illustrates the process followed for the analysis of the coach interviews and student focus groups.

Interview #1 Coaches 1-5	• Coaches randomly selected • Protocol developed by examining coaching competencies and interviewing FYS Directors • Analysis of interviews used to develop focus group protocol
Focus Groups	• Three focus groups with 5 students each • Students randomly selected among the caseload of coaches interviewed • Analysis of focus groups used to develop protocol for second coach interview
Interview #2 Coaches 1-5	• Analysis of second interviews used for discussion and conclusions

Figure 2. Process for data analysis of coach interviews and focus groups.

Setting

The setting for this study was Arizona State University, one of the largest public universities in the United States, with nearly 62,186 undergraduate students who attend any of four metropolitan campuses (ASU Facts, 2019). In Fall 2019, the first-year class was comprised of nearly 14,000 first-year students (Rincon, 2019). In addition to being

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the largest class of incoming students, the class of 2019 was also the most diverse, with a 10% increase in the number of students coming from families earning below $40,000 per year and 29% of the class being first-generation college students. As of Spring 2019, 23,583 ASU students identified as first-generation, defined as neither parent nor guardian having earned a 4-year college degree, tripling the number since 2002 (ASU Now, 2019). In addition to their efforts to recruit a diverse class, ASU has also focused many resources on ensuring students are successful once enrolled. Retention rates for first-year students are nearly 86% and almost 88% for Arizona resident students. Indeed, ASU is ranked 9th for First-Year Experience by *U.S. News & World Report* (Faller, 2019).

The First-Year Success (FYS) Center at ASU is one example of the institutional efforts ASU is undertaking to increase student retention and success. As described by the FYS website:

> The First-Year Success Center (FYS) is an award-winning, high-impact, dynamic Center that treats every student like a VIP through a variety of peer coaching services. Success coaching empowers students to thrive both inside and outside the classroom, and it's customized to individual interests, strengths, and needs. Demonstrating how the right person at the right time can change a life, FYS coaches work with students on everything from transition (adjusting to college life) to transformation (realizing potential and dreams). FYS coaches answer questions about college life and provide insider tips and advice on academics, getting involved, finding scholarships, and more. ("FAQs," 2019)

Founded in 2012, the coaches of the ASU FYS staff serve over 5,000 first-year students annually from varying disciplines across the university.

Coaches come from many different colleges and disciplines across ASU and are often leaders within student organizations or other campus activities. As described by the FYS website, coaches are:

> Highly qualified and successful upper division and graduate students, typically with a cumulative average GPA of 3.5 or higher than a 3.0. They are leaders in their colleges and other academic activities. They are connectors to university resources, cheerleaders that encourage and motivate students while keeping them accountable and catalysts who help spur student success by modeling behaviors of a highly successfully ASU student. (2020, para. 15)

The application process to become a coach begins the spring the prior year and is competitive. Students are selected based on their campus involvement, GPA, and an interview process. FYS employs 87 students who are upper-division or graduate students to serve as peer coaches. Coaches work with students, providing coaching on a variety of personal and academic topics designed to help them thrive inside and outside the classroom, including the transition to college, getting involved on campus, study skills, and goal setting. Peer coaches serve over 5,000 first- and second-year students on an annual basis.

Participant Selection

The participants for the study were selected in two phases. In Phase 1, five coaches were randomly selected from among all coaches working for the FYS Center

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during the fall of 2019. Coaches were identified by FYS staff as either first-generation or continuing-generation students. From these two pools, three first-generation coaches and two continuing-generation coaches were randomly selected using Google's random number generator and invited to participate in a 1-hour interview focusing on their experiences as a coach and how they work with first-generation students (see Appendix A). Four alternate coaches, two from each pool, were also identified using the same method, in case the chosen coaches were unwilling or unable to participate. A mix of first-generation and continuing-generation coaches were selected to determine if familial educational experiences influenced coach interactions with students. Including a mix offered useful information about productive coaching characteristics whether familial educational experiences made a difference in coach/student responses or not (in the latter case, knowing first- and continuing-generation coaches fared equally well with the same training would prove valuable). After interviews with coaches and focus groups with students were conducted, no discernable difference between first and continuing-generation coaches was observed, so it was not pursued as a category of analysis. This was a decision made only for this study based on its small sample. Another study that included more interview subjects might find more differentiation between first and continuing-generation coaches.

To ensure confidentiality, all coaches participating in the study were given pseudonyms. Coaches who elected to participate in the interviews included four participants who were in their first year of coaching and one participant who was

returning as a second-year coach (see Table 2). All peer coaches who participated in the study were undergraduate students in their third or fourth year of study.

Table 2

Coach Pseudonyms and Characteristics

Coach Pseudonym	First or Second-Year Coach	First-Generation or Continuing Generation
Chandler	First-Year Coach	First-Generation
Jackson	First-Year Coach	First-Generation
Lucy	First-Year Coach	Continuing-Generation
Meredith	First-Year Coach	Continuing-Generation
Vivian	Second-Year Coach	First-Generation

Coaches were recruited via an email that briefly summarized the study and invited them to participate in a 1-hour interview in-person or via the online platform Zoom (see Appendix E). For the initial interviews, coaches were emailed once in mid-September and again 2-3 weeks later if they did not respond. Interviews were conducted with a mix of participants initially selected, and those who were identified as alternates. All five coaches opted to complete the interviews via Zoom. Interviews were completed by late October 2019. Coaches were notified that they would be invited to participate in a second interview in the Spring.

In Phase 2, students who had participated in coaching were randomly selected to participate in a focus group focused on their experiences receiving coaching (see Appendix B). In total, 15 students and 20 alternates were identified and invited to participate via email (see Appendix E). Focus groups were conducted with a mix of

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students initially selected and those who were identified as alternates. Of the fifteen students who participated in focus groups, twelve students were freshman and three were sophomore students. On average, students had participated in three coaching sessions.

Finally, the five coaches interviewed in the fall were invited back to participate in a second interview towards the beginning of the spring semester during Phase 3. All five coaches agreed to participate in a second interview. Interviews were once again completed using Zoom.

Data Collection

Data for this study came from three sources: (a) two sets of interviews conducted with the coaches and (b) focus groups with the students who received coaching. General, open-ended questions were used to provide participants with the opportunity to share their perspectives. Interviews were conducted over Zoom. Coaches were given the option of meeting in person or via Zoom and all participants opted to meet virtually. Focus groups were conducted in-person. I requested permission from the interview and focus group participants to record the groups for transcription and analysis.

The interview protocol for the initial interviews with coaches, developed by examining the training competencies the FYS Center used, is included in Appendix A. I used the same open-ended guided interview protocol for all interviews, making sure to ask questions in the same order with each participant. Also, I minimized my speaking and interjections during the interview, drawing focus on participants. Finally, I strived to remain neutral and attentive during the interview to put participants at ease. These tactics allowed participants the opportunity to fully describe their experiences as a coach.

The protocol for the student focus groups, included as Appendix B, was generated from the first round of interviews with the coaches. The focus groups brought an understanding of how students experience coaching, including how coaching helps to enhance student retention and success. The protocol for second-round interviews with coaches, included as Appendix C, was developed after analyzing the responses from the student focus groups. The responses from the students were used to develop questions that address the ideas, feedback, and themes identified in the focus groups. Conducting a second interview with coaches helped to provide more detail and understanding about the role of coaches and the practices they use with students, and further reflection on how coaching promotes student success. Areas of focus for the questions included student success, the role of the coach, coaching skills, and diverse populations. Depending on the interview, a few follow-up probing questions were asked to help bring clarity or further understanding to a participant's response.

Coaches were initially interviewed during the fall semester (September-October). Interviews were conducted one-on-one with the coaches using Zoom. Focus groups with students who have received coaching were held in-person at the beginning of the spring semester (January). Finally, coaches were interviewed a second time during the spring semester (February). All five coaches who participated in the initial interview during the fall participated in the second interview in the spring. One coach disclosed they were no longer coaching. The remaining four coaches were still actively working as peer coaches. Figure 3 illustrates the timeline followed for the participant interviews and focus group.

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┌──────────────────┐      ┌──────────────────┐      ┌──────────────────┐
│     Phase 1      │      │     Phase 2      │      │     Phase 3      │
│ Fall 2019 Inter- │  ▶   │ January 2020 Focus│  ▶  │  February 2020   │
│ views with First-│      │ groups with      │      │ Second interviews│
│ Year Success     │      │ students who     │      │ with coaches from│
│ Coaches and      │      │ received coaching│      │ Phase 1 and      │
│ analysis         │      │ and analysis     │      │ analysis         │
└──────────────────┘      └──────────────────┘      └──────────────────┘
```
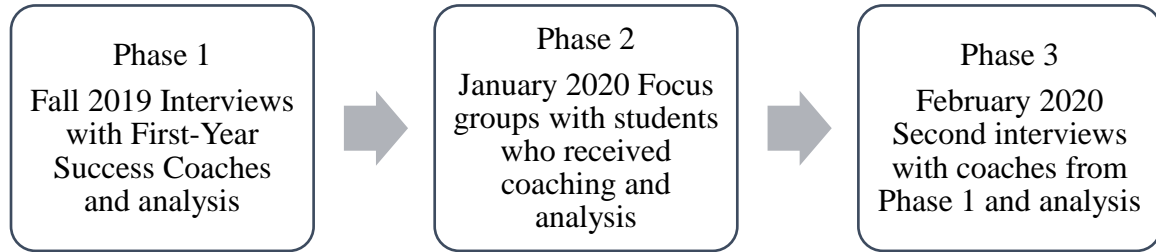
Figure 3. Phases of the data collection and timeline.

Since coaches were invited to interview about their own experience, I hoped they would be interested in participating in the study. However, coaches are full-time students who work and have other demands on their time. Coaches were given a $15 gift card after each interview as an incentive to participate. Students who attend the focus groups were provided with snacks or lunch, depending on the time of day.

Data Analysis Procedures

Ensuring the validity and reliability of the qualitative data collected was an important element of my study. Beyond undertaking an extensive review of the literature focused on coaching in higher education, it was essential for me to understand coaching within the context of ASU's FYS Center. To gain a greater understanding, I reviewed the FYS website and all articles published about the Center, which helped me gain a sense of familiarity with the Center and their coaching model. With this background knowledge, I met with the directors of the Center to ask questions about functions and how coaching works to gain additional context. I also used time with the directors to share potential interview questions and get their feedback. Our discussion also helped inform new questions that I added to my list of interview questions. Additionally, triangulation was also used to help increase validity and reliability for this study. Interviews and focus

groups were used. Five coaches were interviewed twice, once in the fall and once in the spring. In between the two sets of interviews, focus groups with the students who had received coaching were held. Employing both interviews and focus groups with the coaches and students, respectively, allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of coaching.

During the coding process for interviews and focus groups, I read through transcripts at least two times before beginning the coding process to ensure the transcription was accurate and to refamiliarize myself with the interviews and focus groups. To assist with the coding process, I used NVivo qualitative data analysis software. Once I reviewed each transcript, I uploaded and coded them using NVivo.

After each interview and focus group was completed and transcribed, a preliminary exploratory analysis was conducted to gain an overall sense of the data. Coding was conducted using two approaches. First, open coding was used, allowing for general categories to emerge (Merriam, 2009). The open coding process revealed common patterns that emerged from participants' responses within the interviews and focus groups (Saldaña, 2015). Open coding is beneficial because "line-by-line coding forces the researcher to verify and saturate categories, minimizes missing an important category, and ensures relevance by generating codes with emergent fit to the substantive area under study" (Holton, 2007, p. 275). Second, interviews were coded drawing upon Yosso's six dimensions of cultural capital, including aspirational, familial, social, navigational, resistant, and linguistic, to bring further understanding to how coaches access their community cultural wealth when working with students. Researchers using a

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similar approach to coding "using GT [grounded theory] methods with a theoretical framework provided a concentrated investigation of the participants' lived experiences, while also allowed for other themes to emerge" (Mitchell, 2014, p. 9). I used an inductive and deductive approach to coding the data, which allowed for a robust analysis of data received from the coach interviews and student focus groups. Since coaching is a relatively new and evolving approach in higher education, this methodology was appropriate because it helped bring further understanding of the role of the coach as experienced by the coach and the student.

I reviewed the interview and focus group transcripts several times for accuracy, clarity, and understanding. After several iterations of review, common patterns began to emerge. These patterns were labeled with a brief descriptor, also known as a code. I used codes to label and represent a single idea. For example, students who received coaching discussed the need for consistent support to navigate the various challenges they experienced as first-year students. I coded these descriptions as "Support System." Once I initially developed codes, I reviewed them again. I took a pass at grouping together similar codes. Some codes were collapsed into the same code. For example, after reviewing the content within "parents" and "family," I deemed the codes similar enough to be combined into the family code. After similar codes were identified and collapsed together, I grouped similar codes together into broader, overarching groupings known as themes. I then grouped many of the codes that emerged into themes related to the theoretical framework I identified for this study.

Using a theoretical framework to help guide the coding process may seem to depart from the lens of grounded theory. Studies that use grounded theory position the researcher as "the primary instrument of data collection and analysis assumes an inductive stance and strives to derive meaning from the data" (Merriam, 2009, p. 29). However, constructivist grounded theory allows for a theoretical framework to be used while still focusing on participants' experiences, effectively allowing the researcher to "co-create the theory based on their interactions with the participants" (Mitchell, 2014, p. 1). Mitchell (2014) contended all grounded theory is constructivist in some capacity:

> In grounded theory (GT) researchers build theories based on the data collected. Using theoretical frameworks with GT studies would be considered deductive reasoning. Yet, I posit all GT studies use deductive reasoning and are co-created by researchers whether explicitly or implicitly stated or recognized. Researchers initiate studies because they have some interests in, and assumptions about, the topic being explored. (p. 6)

As further described in the findings, data from interview and focus group transcripts provided examples of quotations related to the theoretical framework guiding this study.

Researcher Positionality

To begin, I must acknowledge it is impossible for me to separate my experiences and background from my role as a researcher (Creswell, 2008). As a first-generation college student, my background is similar to some coaches and students who participated in this study. This similarity proved to be helpful in some ways, including placing the researcher and participants on more equal footing:

On one hand, such familiarity may enable better in-depth understanding of

participants' perception and interpretation of their lived experience in a way that

is impossible in the absence of having been through it. However, at the same time,

the researcher must remain constantly alert to avoid projecting own experience

and using it as the lens to view and understand participants' experience.

Knowledge of potential sensitive issues also enables enhancing the collaborative

nature of knowledge produced by "leveling the ground" between the researcher

and the participants. (R. Berger, 2015, p. 230)

Additionally, I must acknowledge there is an uneven power relationship between myself

and the coaches and students I studied. As a doctoral student and an administrator at the

university where I am conducting my study, I inherently have a higher position of power

than the participants within the study. It is worth noting the FYS is not within my area of

supervision.

One way to address this power differential is via reflexivity:

It means turning of the researcher lens back onto oneself to recognize and take

responsibility for one's own situatedness within the research and the effect that it

may have on the setting and people being studied, questions being asked, data

being collected and its interpretation. (R. Berger, 2015, p. 220)

Used effectively, I hope reflexivity helped address the uneven power relationship

between the researcher and the participants and provided a better understanding of

participants in the study.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to examine how peer coaches and first-generation

students receiving coaching access community cultural wealth. I used qualitative

methods, with interviews, to cultivate a deeper understanding of peer coaches'

perceptions of providing coaching and how they use their community cultural wealth

with the students they coach. Focus groups were used to gain insights into the perceptions

of students receiving coaching. This chapter outlines the results from qualitative data

collected through my study. I conducted two sets of individual interviews with peer

coaches, and I held three focus groups with students who had received coaching. The

research questions used to guide this study are:

1. How do peer coaches use their community cultural wealth with the first-
   generation students they coach?

2. How does coaching influence first-generation students in accessing their
   community cultural wealth?

This chapter focuses on findings from data collected by interviews with peer coaches and

focus groups with students who have received coaching, organized by the six forms of

cultural capital outlined in Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth framework. The

five coaches, have been given pseudonyms to preserve anonymity (see Table 2). The 15

students who participated in focus groups are simply referred to as students.

Research Results

Data from interviews and focus groups provided many codes related to the themes linked to the theoretical framework for this study: Yosso's (2005) community cultural framework. The six forms of capital outlined in Yosso's community cultural wealth framework include: aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistant. Each theme was explored using data gathered from coach interviews and student focus groups. After a brief description, example quotations from interviews with peer coaches and students receiving coaching are included.

Theme 1: Familial Capital

For Yosso (2005), Familial Capital refers to "those cultural knowledges nurtured among familia (kin) that carry a sense of community history, memory and cultural intuition" (p. 79). This concept is not limited to those who are related by blood and "may include immediate family (living or long passed on) as well as aunts, uncles, grandparents and friends who we might consider part of our familia" (Yosso, 2005, p. 79). Both students and coaches shared examples of Familial Capital. Within the context of coaching, the theme of Familial Capital included the following subthemes: First-Generation and Sense of Belonging.

First-Generation

As the first members of their families to go to college, students bring the hopes, dreams, and expectations of their families with them. Families support students in a variety of ways, though they may not be able to provide guidance related to navigating life as a college student. Three of the five coaches who participated in the study were

first-generation college students. Both students and coaches discussed families in ways that aligned with research presented in Chapter 2, indicating that "families are complex systems that both support and provide conflict for students" (Kouyoumdjian et al., 2017, p. 71).

Embracing their status as first-generation students helped coaches respond to student needs, often drawing on experiences to help relate to and guide students. Though not all coaches were first-generation students, all coaches had enough training and experiences similar to first-year students to feel connected to the students they coached. Though some first-generation college students may not disclose their status of being first due to negative stereotypes and misperceptions of being underprepared or somehow less committed to higher education (Orbe, 2008), coaches mainly discussed being first-generation in positive ways and embraced sharing their experiences to help students. Coach Chandler discussed the pride families felt for their students, characterizing students as "trailblazers," paving the way for younger siblings to go to college in the future:

> Most of them talk about how since they are the first of their family to go to college and they're kind of like a trailblazer in a way. So, if they're the first in their family to go to college a lot of the times, they're also the oldest sibling. I don't want to make that generalization, because I am a middle child and I'm also the first person in my family to go to college. But they talk about how their family likes posts and they're lifting them up on a pedestal and inspiring their younger siblings as well. A lot of people, a lot of them express concern about financial

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support. Although most of them say that they get a lot of support from their

family in terms of emotional support feeling like they have people to go to when

things get rough, so that's a good thing.

Coaches discussed their familial responsibilities and expectations to help them relate and

problem solve with students. Highlighting the importance of being "first" for First-

Generation students aligns with the literature on identity. As discussed in Chapter 2,

attending college requires first-generation students to negotiate a new identity as a

college student (Orbe, 2008). The tension between certainty/uncertainty and

stability/change are just two dialectics first-generation students must negotiate as new

college students (Orbe, 2008). Coaching seemed to help students be more secure with

their new identities as college students. By framing their first-generation status as an

asset, coaches used Familial Capital to help students view being the first in their family to

go to college in a positive light.

Coaches sharing familial context often encouraged students to discuss support

they felt from their families. They often shared that their families were proud of them for

being the first to attend college and that they were setting a positive example for younger

siblings, and sharing navigational tips so they too could pursue higher education.

Students also shared they appreciated their coach asking about their backgrounds,

including their families. These questions were often interpreted as expressions of care.

Some students reported that these exchanges made them more likely to return for

additional coaching. Coaches also mentioned the importance of conveying care and

concern for students, recalling how they felt isolated at times as students themselves and

how finding someone who cared motivated them to push forward and overcome any challenges they were experiencing.

Coaches and students also discussed the responsibilities students shouldered as part of being the first in their families to attend college. In some cases, those expectations were placed on the students by their families. First-generation students may face pressure from their families on a variety of fronts, including expectations about how they will continue to interact with them. Students came to coaching to learn how to balance their new identities and responsibilities as college students with their familial obligations, which may have included caring for younger siblings, contributing to the household income by working, and being present at home. One issue students discussed during coaching sessions was time management. Students expressed this as an important issue because they wanted to ensure they would have time to study while staying connected to their families. Coaches helped students strategize about how to talk to their families about balancing new-found responsibilities as college students, while still meeting familial obligations. A student shared her coach encouraged her to stay connected to her family:

> First meeting it was all about my background and my family and she was so engaged. I told her how I don't call my mom often cause she, when she called, she's like, you don't call me. And so, she'll remind me like, Oh, have you talked to your mom? And I'm like, Oh God, no, I didn't so that after the meeting I would call my mom like, Hey, checking in. So yeah, just I'm like, it's like she actually cared and would remember these things. So, I was like, oh yeah, I want to come all the time.

Students shared coaches helped them establish boundaries with their family around how often they would call home if they were residential students or how time would be spent at home if they were commuting students.

Though some pressure came via families, some students put pressure on themselves, which aligned with previous studies indicating first-generation students are often motivated by a desire to support their families and communities (O'Neal et al., 2016). For example, one student discussed their desire to pursue a particular major with their coach because it was perceived to be more lucrative. The student expressed that their motivation for pursuing a career in healthcare was the need to provide for family. The student shared that their coach helped them to identify another major that also offered a bright economic future and closely aligned with the student's aspirations.

Sense of Belonging

Coaches and students shared examples of first-generation students struggling with questions about whether they belong in college. Coaches discussed how students often experienced anxiety when they transitioned to college because they did not have a peer who could relate to their experience as a first-generation student. Students also talked to coaches about managing expectations and pressures from their families to be present at home and support household duties. Coach Jackson stated:

> I am a first-gen student myself and I never got a first-year success coach or anything like it. And I think that it made me more anxious. It made me more anxious because I didn't have someone who was my peer. I didn't really have like a person who was of my same age group kind of telling me, hey, it's ok. I mean I

had another student who was helping me out at the time. And luckily, I found her. But if I hadn't found her, I wouldn't have had that support. I think that for first-gen students, especially, it's very stressful because as a first-gen student, your parents don't necessarily understand the struggles of university life. I noticed with a lot of first-generation students their families expect them to be home all the time. Just like they were in high school and things like that. And sometimes that's just not a possibility. So, they get a lot of stress from friends and from family. It just feels like a lot of people don't understand them. And so, they come to coaching and hear, hey look like it's ok, maybe we can come up with something of a schedule. So, everybody is happy to make this work.

By sharing their stories as first-generation students, coaches helped students see others who may have had similar challenges, questions, and experiences. Learning the strategies that helped coaches manage familial expectations also helped students cope with the competing demands of home and school.

Coach Vivian used her experience as an international first-generation student to help coach a student who was feeling overwhelmed with the stress of their first semester:

And then for this semester immediately they set up an appointment with me because they're like, okay, I need to talk. And basically, it was just them saying that they felt so overwhelmed last semester with everything. From balancing classes to working and then making sure that you're still performing well with their classes because of that pressure that they feel as a first-gen to get it right the first time. So, I, myself, I'm a first-generation student and for me, academics has

always been my biggest thing. And so, I'm normally like pushing and going just ensuring that I'm doing well, and so it's just sharing that experience with them. And with that student in particular and just letting her know that, hey, I'm a freshman student too, basically, the first person in my family to go to university outside of my home country in the first place. And what that looked like I was just getting my parents to agree that, hey, I'm going to study overseas. I'm going to need you all to actually let me go overseas to study. My first semester I came in and I was like, it was just all about academics. I am not going to focus on anything else. I'm just going to get it because I have to get it right because my parents are depending on me. My nieces and nephews, who are coming up are looking towards me as a person to shine some light within the family. And while that is, that was my goal coming in and it is still my goal to kind of be that pillar of light to shine some light and say, hey, y'all can do it too. There was still underlying pressure of what if I fail? What is that going to look like? And so, it's kind of sharing those feelings, sharing those thoughts with the students, let them know, hey, it's okay to feel like this and it's okay to have these thoughts.

Beyond being vulnerable and sharing the challenges experienced as first-year students, coaches validated students' feelings. Coaches worked to help students feel less anxiety by normalizing their experiences and reassuring them that they were not the only ones dealing with feelings of uncertainty.

One reason students may feel as though they do not belong within their new college environment is due to the lack of familiarity with structures of support available

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to them. Coach Vivian shared how she helped students to feel a sense of belonging by increasing their understanding of resources available to help them be successful.

So, I share my experiences with what I went through, just to let them know that it's always okay to ask for help, reaching out that hand to say, "Listen, I thought I got this, but I don't actually got it. How can you help me with this?" It's powerful and you get a lot out of it. And so, in sharing my experiences. I think I allow students to kind of realize that they're not alone here at ASU and there's a lot of different avenues and different channels that they can go through to possibly get the help that they might need or just excel and be their best selves here at the University.

Coaches worked with students to make them feel less anxious about seeking out resources that could help them address challenges they might be experiencing. In making these support structures more visible, coaches also helped students further develop self-confidence.

Coaches helped students deal with the pressures first-generation students often face, including fear of failure and the expectations that come with being first. Coach Vivian explained how coaching helps first-generation students with their self-esteem and validates they are doing what they need to do to be successful in college:

A lot of times we'll see first-gen students and they're like, yeah, I'm the first in my family to come to university. I don't really know what I'm doing. And then there's this pressure of succeeding, because since I'm the first one in the family and stuff like that. And so, it's kind of talking it through with them and doing like these

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little activities like their self-assessment to let them know that, hey, you're

actually at a really good spot in the semester right now and with you just making

this decision to actually attend the university is a lot on its own. And that takes a

lot of courage and it's just given them self-affirmations and validation for what

they're doing, but I believe helps a lot with their self-esteem. I know for me self-

esteem was something I struggled a lot with in high school and just having people

to say, hey, you're doing great. Kudos to you for taking this step. That helped a

lot. And so, that's something that I try to do in my appointments as well. If a

student is doing well. I tell them hey, you're doing great. Even something as

simple as just like passing an exam. Celebrating those wins with them builds a lot

of their self-esteem and just lets them know that whatever they're doing, they're

doing it. They're doing good, and they just seem to continue to do what they're

doing.

Coaches were motivated to help students have a positive college experience, especially

when reflecting on feelings of self-doubt they experienced transitioning to college. By

reinforcing students' feelings of self-confidence and injecting positivity into coaching

sessions, coaches help students feel a stronger sense of belonging.

Some students reported developing strong bonds with coaches. A student

compared the relationship with their coach to a familial relationship, similar to an older

brother or sister:

Yeah, my coach definitely like reminded me of like myself with like my little

brother. Like we joked around and we had serious conversations and they were

like that older sister, like for guys, like an older brother. Yeah, for me, I think

their biggest role was just a resource. Even if I wasn't necessarily looking for

resources from them, I could ask them where do I go for this, where to go for that.

Coach Meredith also talked about how coaching helped students feel loved, cared for,

and supported, especially when they encountered challenging circumstances:

It just provides another support and another person who's kind of got your back

along the way, or who's holding your hand, and I think even though we all come

from different backgrounds. At the end of the day, I think most people just want

to feel loved and just want to feel cared for and supported. And so, I think, again,

not only from that concrete of, well, here you go. You can come in and talk to me

and ask me questions, and this that the other. But again, just having someone

who's like hey man, I get it. And I've got your back. We're gonna work through it,

you can do this. It's also it's a really great feeling being on both ends of that

spectrum.

For students and coaches, coaching often fostered a deeper connection that went beyond a

transactional interaction. Instead, students and coaches tended to build strong

professional relationships built on trust and understanding.

Students also shared how coaches helped provide information and support that

was not available to them at home. As the first in their family to go to college, they felt

they could not turn to their family for assistance with the logistics of college. This

guidance was particularly helpful during the transition to college:

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I think for sure because I couldn't ask my sister, I couldn't ask anyone. I had to do the FAFSA by myself. Like no one had socials for me to be like, Oh, what are we doing now? Like so, I mean for them to just be like the support system for sure. Cause like you're basically on your own and it's, it's really sad cause I'm like no one can relate to you. No one can really like tell you oh yeah, for sure you have to do this. Nope, you kind of have to find it all by yourself. And it's not like your parents, even though as much as they want to help you and support you, like they literally can't. You can't explain your homework to them. You can't tell them I'm going through this and this and this because the best that they can say is, I'm sorry. So yeah, I think it really helped me. I can't really ask anyone at home. My parents don't really speak English very well. So, having the resources here was really good. Even applying to college was really hard. And then when I got here, it got a lot easier because there were a lot of resources and people that helped me.

The transition to college can feel isolating for first-generation students. Though they feel love and support from their families, students may be hindered by the new norms of college they are still learning and getting used to navigating. Students reported coaching helped them feel more informed and less alone.

Yosso (2005) contends Familial Capital helps students feel less isolated, which also held within the context of coaching. Familial Capital was present in coaching conversations centered on students' status as First-Generation students and their Sense of Belonging.

Theme 2: Social Capital

Social Capital refers to "peer and other social contacts can provide both instrumental and emotional support to navigate through society's institutions" (Yosso, 2005, p. 79). Yosso (2005) noted that many communities of color have maintained a tradition of "lifting as we climb" (p. 80) cultivating mutual support networks. Another critical element within Social Capital is "reassuring the student emotionally that she/he is not alone in the process of pursuing higher education" (Yosso, 2005, p. 79). By its nature of bringing peers together for support and guidance, coaching aligns closely with Social Capital. The theme of Social Capital includes the following subthemes: Peer-to-Peer Support and Relatability.

Relatability

Relatability is one benefit coaches highlighted. Given proximity in age to the students they coach, Coach Vivian reported students might think of coaches as friends although they are paraprofessional staff:

> Even though we are coaches, we are more so paraprofessionals and not like full on professionals. We do carry ourselves in a professional manner, but we're also students, and so it's kind of good for us to give our students that student perspective of things. And so, I think that is where you'll have students saying that we're kind of your first friends because even though we are conducting ourselves in a professional manner, and we do have some barriers that that can't be crossed, which we actually explain out to our students within our appointments. That's a part of our coaching agreement and the fact that we're able to relate to them

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because we actually have been in their position before. We may not share the same things that you're going through, but the majority of times we have gone through the same things, which is why we were hired as coaches to begin with. So, that in itself will allow that soon to think of us as friends.

Coaches reported that by sharing their experiences and backgrounds, students were able to relate to them more effectively. Personalizing conversations helped students move from perceiving coaches as strangers to supporters.

Coach Lucy reportedly built a rapport with students by sharing some of her background and experience as a student:

So, I will usually start out by being like hey, just so you know that I'm not a stranger. This is who I am. I will share a little bit about where I'm from, how I got here, what I'm studying and how I have a younger brother and younger sister. So, I'm sharing a little bit about like my personal life and a sense of where I'm from. Yes, I will open up If I feel like a student is walking through something that I have already walked through. I will not open up if it's something that I am currently figuring out and walking through myself. Like, if it's a sensitive thing. So, that is definitely something that I will gauge in the interview.

Coaches attributed relatability to improved efficacy during coaching sessions and an increased likelihood that a student would return for future coaching appointments. Coaches noted the importance of withholding challenges they were still going through, and instead focused on the experiences they had already navigated.

Students expressed feeling comfortable discussing issues beyond academics with their coach, in part, because they had also recently experienced similar challenges:

Primarily I chose to go to my success coach because I felt as someone previously said, I just felt very comfortable with talking about any sort of issue with my success coach. And I mean, I have no shame I'll admit it. I had some, I had problems like orienting myself throughout the first month of college. I'm an out of state student, so I was away from my family. I wasn't finding the right balance between academics and friend life and all that. So, I emailed him. I was like, hey can I set up an appointment with you? After I went there and after I left, I, there was a sense of relief because he's like, ok, well I went through that same thing as you did and you need to do this and put a plan together. Putting that plan together really helped. And I, I had it pinned up on my corkboard in my room, and I looked at it the other day. And that plan that I made months ago is effective today. So, it really has helped.

Students reportedly would not be willing to discuss some topics that were deemed too personal, like relationship issues, or embarrassing, like having trouble making friends, with either their advisor or professor. They were willing to open up about these sensitive topics with their coach.

Coaches shared that some students they indicated that although they wanted to come in for a coaching appointment, they were too busy with school, family, and work. These demands on first-generation students' time validate previously cited research indicating that students may spend limited time in their college environment (Jacoby,

2000). Also factors, including working and living off-campus, may limit time students have to be involved in campus activities (Engle & Tinto, 2008). To be responsive to these and other needs, coaches invited students to participate in phone appointments, so coaching conversations could happen when a student was commuting or at home taking care of younger siblings. Many other support activities within the college environment require a student to be in-person. The inclusive approach taken by the coaches helped foster a sense of belonging for students who commute to campus.

Peer-to-Peer Support

By its virtue of being peer-to-peer, coaching encourages students to access their Social Capital. Coaches shared that an essential element of coaching involves reaching out to students with a personal invitation to receive support. By reaching out, the coach expresses care and concern, conveying they are there to help students succeed. Coach Lucy shared how she supports her students:

Because when in even in like normal day life if somebody reaches out to you and they're like, hey, I'm here for you. I want to support you and like cheer you on I would be like, girl, thanks. I think that would be a really great like oh my gosh someone actually cares about me and therefore, boosting a little bit of their self-esteem to like they feel like they can accomplish more because they have someone there with them, whether their family is here or not. They are supported by at least another student, and that makes it even more of a cool relationship because I'm a student too. I have homework too. I'm not just here to like be here for you. I also have my own life too. And I've run into my students on campus and

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it's literally the best. Like, hey, where are you going? Library? Yeah, same. We'll

cross paths and like do the whole student life together.

Coaches often shared common experiences with the students they coach. These shared

experiences can help coaches and students develop strong bonds within a short period.

Students expressed coaches helped them by sharing academic tips that worked for

them when they were in the same courses. For example, students shared that their coach

helped them decide which professors to take, which electives to take, and how to use a

study guide to study for a final exam. Since coaches are also students, they can share

strategies that helped them to be successful. A student shared how a coach helped her

study for an exam:

Well, I can remember like a time where there was like this chem test that was

coming up and it was like the final and it was like the make or break of my grade.

And she was like, well, there's a study guide. And she's like, that's what saved me.

She said you should do that too. And like by having that example, like she went

through it. So, if that's what saved her, it's probably going to save me too if I

study it. So that's definitely what I did.

Coaching provided an avenue for peer-to-peer insider information to be shared with

students. Students shared that their coach provided them guidance and informal advice

not otherwise available. For some first-generation students, these informal learnings

helped fill in the information they might not have had access to through other channels.

Coach Vivian felt a strong connection due to her proximity in age to the students

and the experiences they are going through:

I think a lot of it just has to do with the fact that we're also students were not like

a professional staff who probably hasn't been or they probably don't even

remember what their college experience was because they've just haven't been in

it for so long. But us as coaches we're either a junior, senior maybe a graduate

student. We're so fresh in the game. We still kind of remember what it was like

that being a first year of college because it wasn't so long ago. And then the fact

that as students, we can definitely give the student perspective on a lot of things,

including the different resources that we utilized ourselves or still are utilizing and

also to just the fact that a lot of the times you share the same major is with our

students. So, it's a lot of ok, yeah, I took this class and this is hard. This is what

you may look out for.

Since coaches had recently successfully navigated their way through their first year, their

advice often carried more weight with students. In many instances, coaches were the

same major or were in the same college as the students they coached.

Coaches reported that while some coaching interactions remained transactional or

tactical, with students requesting support to resolve episodic issues (e.g., financial aid

being delayed or studying for a test in a specific class), some coaching relationships went

beyond surface-level conversations. Coach Meredith shared that the relationship between

coach and student can evolve beyond logistical aspects of college life and evolve into one

that more closely resembles friendship:

I had students come in who had very specific motivations and a lot of logistical

questions. How do I study for a test? How do I connect with my academic

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advisor? My financial aid didn't go through, stuff like that. And so, I think right

for that type of student. There's nothing wrong with that. It was a kind of a

transactional relationship. And I do think a lot of my students while they

considered me kind of a confidant, like, that was me being a really good friend for

them. Again, there were other students who came in, who maybe didn't have the

same motivations and just kind of wanted to talk and hear about my experiences

and get ideas for ways that they could shape the ASU experience. And then I

definitely would have I would say more of like a confidant role, you know, not

necessarily a therapist, but kind of like a friend who felt like they were able to

come in and just talk about anything and everything, ask whatever questions they

want and feel really comfortable doing so.

Coaches and students reported that coaches could be perceived as friends, even in the

short-term, until students found their friend group in college. Coaches felt it was essential

to maintain professional boundaries with students while remaining collegial.

Theme 3: Navigational Capital

The concept of navigation refers to "skills of maneuvering through social

institutions" (Yosso, 2005, p. 80). Yosso (2005) argued that academic institutions were

"not created with Communities of Color in mind" (p. 80). Previously cited research about

the hidden curriculum within higher education (i.e., the norms and bureaucracy of college

life) would lend credence that Yosso's argument is relevant for first-generation students,

particularly as they learn to navigate the institution as new college students. Coaches and

students both discussed ways coaching helped first-generation and first-year students

navigate their new higher education environment. Subthemes identified within the theme of Navigational Capital include Transition and Self-Advocacy.

Transition

Some coaches shared they were fortunate to find someone to help them acclimate through the transition to college. Coaches shared coaching is especially helpful to students when they first transition to college. Coaching can help students manage the uncertainty they experience when transitioning from high school to college and making the most of the opportunities available to them when they first arrive on campus. Coach Vivian described how coaching is helpful to first-year students:

> Using peer coaching is super impactful because I'm, as I said before, as a student fresh out of high school coming into the university not possibly knowing what the university structures are like and what university life is going to be like. Honestly, it's just great that peer coaching is something that's being offered to first-year students because it eases them a little bit more into the university, especially because around Welcome Weekend you have all these things being thrown at the student, but they don't necessarily know what these things are or necessarily how to like navigate the system and navigate the entirety of what college is.

Other coaches reported that they did not have anyone in a coaching role and that they had to figure out many of the elements of college life. The coaches who lacked a support student as first-year students shared that they felt scared and stressed having to navigate through various challenges on their own. Even with these different circumstances,

coaches reported that they felt motivated to use their own experiences and the knowledge they acquired through trial and error to help the students they coached.

Coaches related to feeling lost and overwhelmed when they first arrived on campus, having been first-year students recently. Coaches explicitly shared information about those elements of the transition to college they found most challenging. Coach Meredith shared how her experience navigating through the transition to college informs her approach to coaching:

> I had a ton of questions, but sometimes I didn't even know what I didn't know. I didn't know which ones to ask. I didn't have anyone. Again, I had other people but not necessarily in a more coaching setting of just kind of giving me that confidence I needed to put myself out there to acclimate to the whole transition and things of that nature. And it's so funny because looking back, like, oh my gosh, like I really wish I had known this or I wish I had known that. It definitely would have made a difference in my experience.

Coaches are usually only 2 or 3 years removed from first-year students. Students reportedly felt comfortable trusting their coach to help them navigate college life because they were also students and had gone through similar experiences. One found value when their coach shared what not to do:

> I think the reason I appeal to it more was this person has been in college for how long and I'm barely starting out. So whatever experience they have, they can guide me through it and tell me, oh this is what I did. Don't do this. So yeah.

The recency of experience gave coaches a wealth of Navigational Capital to draw from when coaching first-year students. These coaching conversations reinforce previously cited research indicating that coaching can help students understand their new college environment (Alkadounmee, 2012).

Students reported coaching helped them find their way once they arrived on campus immediately after high school. This navigational support was evident to students when they compared their awareness and preparation to their friends who had not received coaching:

I know some, not everybody goes to their coach. I know a lot of people don't even know about their coaches. So, I felt like I was more prepared than most people because I know in my friend group I'm like, oh this event is going on. My first-year coach told me about these things. Or, yeah, she brought more awareness and I felt like I was more prepared than most students since I went to meet with her.

One student compared coaching to a roadmap that helped them navigate through the academic, social, and personal issues new college students experience:

I could say for myself and I would think of many other students. I came as an out-of-state student and it's like, just, it's like that your summer goes straight to college, so your family's gone, siblings and you have to, it's like a new start is what it is. So, for many and including myself, I kind of had this feeling of where do I even, what, like what's my pattern, where do I start, what am I going to do next? So, I really think it does help because when, if for someone who is unsure, uncertain of what to do personally, academically, socially, I'd say it's a great place

to get that, that, that kind of like a, like a roadmap almost. So, I think it really

does help with the first year or even semester for some. I think it really helped me

transition to college life. I also recently moved here. It really helped or like

guiding me in the beginning. I wasn't sure where everything is or where to go or

what to do. So, it really helped with that.

Yosso's conception of Navigational Capital aligns with research presented in Chapter 2

regarding the transition to college for first-year students. Whannell and Whannell (2015)

discussed the changes first-year students must navigate, including educational

environment, financial challenges, and in some cases, where the student resides. Some

students talked about coaching they received in very tactical and practical terms,

including skill-building related to time management, study skills, and accessing resources

like tutoring or advising. Other students discussed more conceptual support they received

from coaches. In either case, students highlighted challenges encountered transitioning

from high school to college and the role their coach played in helping them overcome

some obstacles encountered as first-year students.

Coaching conversations can address adjustment issues students may face when

transitioning to college and help them navigate through a new environment. Coaches

discussed that helping students find their niche and getting comfortable with campus life

was one navigational element of coaching. Through the coaching process, coaches also

support students who are learning to navigate college on their own by listening and

affirming their newfound knowledge. Coach Vivian explained this process:

What would be the point of us coaching, if we just threw the answer at them? The whole idea of coaching or the whole idea of coaching at our Center is that we're being the right person at the right time to change our life in the sense that we want to be that person that can help guide our students. We just don't want to bombard them with things. We just don't want to fling it at them. I keep saying that the students always come in with their answers because let's be frank, a lot of times these students are doing their own research and they know but they just wanted another opinion on it. And so, it's just listening to that and just being like, hey, you already got it. And then sometimes it takes them a minute for them to realize that they actually do. So, it's more of us guiding and not just us telling and also because I just feel like people learn the best from experiences and not more so from me just telling you hey don't do this.

Coaches felt it was important to help students build self-confidence. By acting as a sounding board, coaches provided students with confirmation they were headed in the right direction on various issues confronting them as first-year students.

Navigational Capital is reflected in how students transition to college and how they integrate into their new setting. Beyond the transition to college and the beginning of the semester, students reported coaching continued to help them with ongoing needs as first-year students:

Coaching has helped me in almost every single aspect of college for the most part, like a mini timeline. When I first came here, I had a problem with finding what I want to get involved with. He helps me with that. We went over clubs and

organizations together and everything like that, and he's like pick three of which

ones you are primarily interested in. I had an issue with balancing my diet with

everything. So, the success meetings really helped me with creating or making

goals for myself personally. And they've worked now, I mean, if I look at myself

back from when I first came here in the fall, it's a big difference. So, it has made

me a better overall college student, I would say.

Students continued to use some tools and skills they learned from coaching after they had

successfully transitioned into their college environment.

Self-Advocacy

Students reported the ability to use Self-Advocacy skills to navigate within a new

environment was important during their first year in college. Coaches helped students get

more comfortable asking for help by sharing similar experiences and breaking down the

process into manageable steps:

She talked to me about how it's okay to ask for help. She made it easy. Like she

explained to me her situations, how she was the same way, how I was like she

could relate to me, and she would just make it easy by breaking it up step by step.

My goals weren't like as long-term, but they're like, okay, just try it, at least go

into the room in the meeting next time. Actually try to knock and talk. Literally, it

was just so hard for me to ask for help, but she broke it down and I was able to get

the help.

Students shared that coaches would check back in with them after coaching, which

helped keep them accountable for follow-up on the goals they set. For some students,

coaching served as a gateway, helping provide the encouragement and support to connect to other campus resources and support services.

Coaches reported that sharing their struggles helped students normalize asking for help, and they were more likely to explore the various resources available. Coach Vivian shared:

So, I share my experiences, what I went through, just to let them know that it's always ok to ask for help. Reaching out that hand to say, listen, I thought I got this, but I don't actually got it. How can you help me with this? It's powerful and you get a lot out of it. And so, in sharing my experiences. I think I allow students to kind of realize that they're not alone here at ASU and there's a lot of different avenues and different channels that they can go through to possibly get the help that they might need or just excel and be the be their best selves here at the University.

Proactively reaching out to students was emphasized as an important element of coaching for both students and coaches. A range of other services and resources were available to first-year students. Students reported that multiple contacts and invitations to meet with their coach motivated them to set up an appointment.

Coach Chandler spoke about the coaching process as focused on helping and supporting students to find their way, rather than feeding them the "correct" answer, as contributing to his development as a coach:

You really do let students find their own answers. If you try to lead them when in one way or another, you're acting sort of as a detriment. So that's something that's

definitely been tough to get used to I think for myself mainly because like I'm a

fixer. I like to fix problems. I like to dive right in and try and find the best solution

for everything when really the best solution is for the student to find something

that works for them. And so, I think that's been the major thing that I've learned

and taken away from it as well as just like it feels very casual like when you're

comfortable with it. And when you're comfortable doing it on which is massive

difference from what I felt last time we had a meeting. I've become more

comfortable with talking to people and helping them navigate through this whole

process. And I think that's been like a huge developmental opportunity for myself

as well.

Students were often coming into coaching sessions having researched their questions.

Coaches emphasized the importance of supporting students to seek out and have faith in

their own answers to the many questions they faced as first-year students.

Students shared how their coach encouraged them to access available resources to

help them be successful:

I had them some questions pending that I really wanted to ask them. Like for

example, I wanted to know more about scholarships and study abroad and like

they would direct me to the links or like tell me where the offices are so I can get

more information. I think that by the time that I was admitted, it wasn't

mandatory, it was more like the choice. So, I think I went just because I wanted to

be really prepared for college. As a first-generation student, I didn't know what to

expect and I didn't really like my major. So, I think that just like a mentor or you

don't know where anyone's at really was the guidance that I needed at the time. I

feel the same way. Because I am also first-generation and a commuter, I just

wanted like someone there to guide me or someone I can have to ask questions.

Some students reported that coaching helped fill in gaps of information they felt might be

missing for them as first-generation students. Not knowing what to expect during the first

year was a common concern brought up by several students. Coaching helped alleviate

some concerns because students felt it served as a one-stop-shop for assistance and

connection to relevant resources.

Coaches recalled the stress of uncertainty they experienced as first-year students.

Sharing that they had similar feelings when they started college and are still experience

those same feelings is reassuring for students. Students shared that the resources their

coach shared helped them deal with the stress of the first year:

I think just having somebody to talk to kind of helped. I know my biggest thing

like first semester or first year, I just didn't want to tell anybody that I was worried

that I was stressed, that I always was kind of like scared or like I don't know

what's going on. So, being able to share that with somebody and kind of then

telling them like, hey, like I'm in my third year, I'm going into my fourth year and

I still feel like that. I still get stressed over finals. So, I think kind of having that

confirmation like okay, we were kind of all in the same boat, but there's resources

for you. So, I think that for sure helped.

Expressing uncertainty or vulnerability is challenging for some students. A student may feel like they are the only one who is not adjusting well to college life. By sharing their fears, coaches helped students feel less alone and more open to seeking out support.

Theme 4: Aspirational Capital

Aspirational Capital "refers to the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers" (Yosso, 2005, p. 78). Although parents of first-generation students may not have graduated from college, they transfer hopes and dreams to their children so they might overcome real and perceived barriers to achieving their higher education goals via a "culture of possibility" (Yosso, 2005, p. 78). By focusing on student success, coaching, in many cases, includes an aspirational component. Coaches encourage students to access Aspirational Capital by acknowledging their commitment to overcoming any obstacles in the way of achieving their goal of graduating with a college degree. Students shared aspirations with coaches in a variety of ways. Subthemes that emerged within the theme of Aspirational Capital included: Goal Setting, Self-Esteem, and Motivation.

Goal Setting

Coaches and students reported goal setting often came up during coaching sessions. Coaches used Aspirational Capital in a variety of ways. Coaches frequently shared their aspirations related to achieving a college education with their students. Within coaching conversations, they reported various obstacles encountered as first-year students that they had to overcome to continue pursuing their goals. These experiences were shared to help inspire students to pursue their aspirations. Coaches reported goal-

setting was often part of their coaching conversations. Coaches used their previous experience and knowledge of various resources and campus organizations to help students develop a plan to accomplish their goals.

Students and coaches discussed some tools and techniques of coaching that helped guide these aspirational conversations, including worksheets used to document and track student goals and the accountability of coaches checking back in with students on their progress. Students shared how processes used by coaches helped them set goals and kept them accountable:

> Yes, every meeting was, she had a goal sheet set out and we'd like write it down whatever I was planning for a semester. She's like, you have to have, well not like you have to but like I recommend you have this done by the next meeting. So, I'd always be working towards something constantly and I find it to be a big motivator cause I don't want to let her down.

Hearing from coaches that they had undergone similar challenges as first-year students helped give students motivation to continue pursuing goals. Also, coaches and students discussed the importance of embracing a growth mindset. Students reported having more of a fixed mindset in high school and shared that coaching helped them to try new things and believe in their potential to succeed.

Students reported their coach helped them to set manageable academic goals, even relatively small practices they continue to use in future courses. A student described how this played out in a coaching session:

I think the goal setting was really important because I didn't personally set goals

for myself but whenever I did go to my coach she would remind me like set a goal

even if it's small, like aim to do something. So, I think that was useful. And I try

to do that now cause I still try to make like make goals for myself, so I continue to

use what she told me to do. I definitely use like a lot of the things that she told me

like with goal setting. Like she's, she told me last semester like if you didn't do

well on one thing then aim to get higher, like a higher grade than you did last

time. And I'm using that like now with my history class cause I didn't do well in

like our one essay and I'm like okay, get higher than that one. I don't care if it's a

hundred or if it's 70 as long as it's higher than this one that I know I achieved

something.

Students also reported their coach helped them understand how their academic goals

aligned with preparing for the future:

I think me and my success coach we have the same career goals. We're both in

pre-health. So that was really helpful because she helped me figuring out my

classes and thinking of later for grad school and how to prepare for that.

Goal-setting not only occurred within the context of the coaching session but was also a

practice that students carried forward with them.

Coaches shared the importance of helping students go beyond merely setting a

goal and supporting them to develop a plan to achieve it. Coach Jackson described how

he helped a student reflect on their progress, even when they did not quite achieve at the

level they had wanted:

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So, I think coaching is super important in general because just saying a goal is not

necessarily enough. You have to be making active strides. And so, as a coach I try

to give them little things to do here and there. If you want to join an organization,

maybe kind of explore several organizations and see what kind of club you want

to join. And then maybe after that be like, hey, go to a couple of different club

meetings and see from there. So, I try to give a little bit of like little things here

and there. If I can say go to like three club meetings, that's completely doable.

And I think for students that can be very hard to go, ok, I want to do this now. So,

I think the coaching relationship helps kind of give them a goal. Because

sometimes just trying to pass that class is the goal. And you know, their grade

wasn't as high as they want it to be, but I'm like, look, you know, you did the best

you could. I saw you all semester. This is really tough for you. I saw you do these

things. It's not an A, but it's still a win in my book.

Although some students reported only visiting their coach once, more often students

reported visiting two or more times. These interactions helped foster accountability

between coaches and students, and ongoing skill development.

Coaches reported using various tactics and techniques to help students with goal-

setting, including positive psychology. Coach Vivian described a tool used with students

that helps them visualize a positive outcome:

You write down what your goal is, and then on the flip side of that, you think

about what the best outcome of that goal could be. And then what the worst-case

scenario for that would be. Then you think about what strategies you can

implement to make sure that you're not at that point to make sure that you can

overcome that worst-case scenario. And then the last part of it is how are you

going to feel within that moment that you actually achieve the goal. So that part of

positive psychology is where you have a positive outlook on things since we tend

to focus more so on the negatives and not really the positive, nor celebrate our

wins, per se. So that's one of those activities that I'll use sometimes in my

coaching sessions if my student is kind of having a rough time overcoming

something.

By helping students consider the obstacles in their way and work through the strategies

needed to overcome them, coaching helps students take proactive steps to achieve their

desired outcome.

Self-Esteem

Positive self-esteem is an important element of Aspirational Capital, which Yosso

(2005) has also described as the "culture of possibility" (p. 78). Among the many roles

fulfilled by coaches, serving as a cheerleader is among the most important. For students

to pursue their aspirations, they need to believe in themselves. One important way

coaching helped students pursue their Aspirational Capital was by cheering them on.

Coach Meredith highlighted the importance of using her influence as a peer to build

students' self-esteem and celebrate their successes:

On the other hand, or, conversely, I think that's super beneficial for students to

have particularly from the peer perspective, not only have someone listen to them.

Again, with the First-Year Success Center, you know, give them resources and

connect them to the people they need to if need be. But also, just kind of cheer

them on and make sure they know that they can do whatever they put their mind

to. If it says something as simple as you know, stopping their procrastination habit

with Netflix to, you know, maybe getting a significant scholarship or a job or

something that they feel is a little bit more in line with their success at school, if

that makes sense.

Students also reported their coach helped them build up their self-esteem, which led them

to let go of their fears and take the steps needed to pursue their goals:

Not to sound like a broken record, but like, you know, just how much like self-

esteem she's given me. How she makes me feel like I can do things without

feeling like as scared. I don't know how to explain it. But yeah, like if you don't

take steps to do these things, nothing's going to happen. So, you're just going to be

stuck, and you're like, why are you even bothering being here? I was like, that's

what I like to take away from them. If I'm not going to actually do anything while

I'm here, like why am I here? I feel like that was my biggest epiphany.

Students and coaches reported self-esteem could be difficult for first-year students to

develop and cultivate. Learning to navigate a new environment can leave many students

with questions and self-doubt. Coaches helped reinforce what students had been doing

well and gave them the faith in themselves needed to keep pushing forward.

Students also shared how their coach helped them understand the importance of

acknowledging their accomplishments. One student described how taking time to

celebrate helped them to combat their tendency to undersell what they have achieved:

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Mine was like, don't sell yourself short. Cause like I always downplay every

single accomplishment I've ever like had, she was like, you have to appreciate that

you did that. You did that. I was like, yeah, I did do that. So, I'd always just try to

move on and be like, oh, I'm still a failure kind of thing. So, she'd like helped me

realize that what I'm doing is a good thing and I should understand that.

Embracing personal victories, small and large, helped students cultivate an asset-based

perspective.

Motivation

Students reported engaging in conversations with coaches about what motivated

them to pursue higher education generally, and why they were pursuing particular goals,

among other topics. Students shared coaching helped them feel less alone and stressed

which, in turn, increased their motivation to continue making progress towards their

goals:

I think it just kind of helps you relax. I feel like you just come in feeling tense,

like no one understands what I'm going through. But once you know somebody

else has gone through it and they're doing fine, it's kind of motivation like okay,

just keep going. You're going to get in a good place.

Coaches helped keep students motivated, in part, by providing a significant boost to their

self-esteem:

Yes, it helped yes. I mean like once again, just kept me motivated. Like she was

also like the biggest hype woman I've ever met in my life. She was always telling

me how great I was and I was like, oh, nobody ever tells me that. Yeah, sure. It was really nice for my self-esteem, talking to her.

For some students, coaching helped build up confidence following the uncertainty that came with transitioning to college as a first-year student. With increased confidence, students reported they felt more comfortable taking on new challenges:

Yeah, I think for me, the biggest thing that my coach ever did for me was just giving me my confidence back. It's so scary having the transition and just living on campus. And we would also talk about like roommates and different programs that she's been through. So just the guidance I've gotten from her is so great. She's honestly getting my confidence back cause I really like, I don't know if I should take this class. So, I would be in my head a lot, and she would tell me no, go for it. And I've taken two of her classes that she recommended this semester, and oh my God, I am so glad I did. I'm like, oh, there's no way. I don't know where I would be. I wouldn't even have thought to take it because they weren't on my major map. They were like further down, but she was like, take them on because it's so gray. And I was like, okay. And I did, and I'm so glad I did.

Students reported that coaching helped them overcome fears and made them more open to new experiences.

Coaching sessions often include discussions about a student's mindset. Coach Chandler shared how coaching can help students move from a fixed to a growth mindset, which helps students embrace their potential:

They came into this with a very fixed mindset. So, we gotta change that

perspective. First, we gotta say, well, you want to be more outgoing, but you

haven't recognized what you've done so far. So how do you recognize that? And

so, I think just the process of the coaching session leads them back towards like

having a growth mindset. They say they can't, but they really can. Then you can

go from there. And I think that in that way, it helps them develop more than just

their strengths. It helps with their point of view.

Students also reported coaching helped them grow, especially compared to the mindset

they had in high school.

For me, she really focused on like getting out of my comfort zone cause like I've

always been a really reserved person. I didn't do much in high school because I

was scared of opening up to other people and like doing things that I never done

before and I regret that. But now I'm doing it here and I'm like, I'm so glad that

I'm not back in like a high school mindset and actually doing stuff.

Both students and coaches highlighted their mindset as particularly important during the

transition from high school to college. Coaches helped students embrace a growth

mindset, encouraging them to learn about their new environment and be open to the many

new experiences college has to offer.

A student shared their motivation to pursue what they perceived to be a lucrative

degree pathway. Although they were not enjoying their major, the student felt pressure to

continue with it because of the need to contribute to their family's financial goals. The

student described how coaching helped them identify a new degree pathway, while still balancing their desire to pursue a degree with high earning potential:

> I think that that was one of the things that I was a little bit hesitant to bring that up just because I'm like, I personally have a lot of family problems that like, I don't like to talk about. But when we talked about like why, why are you in the program or what do you want to get out of the program? Cause I was in community health first and it wasn't working out, but I thought that I wanted to be in there. It's just for the money. But they were like, well, why do you need the money? And then being able to like tell them, well I need money because I'm like first-generation, my parents are immigrants. They can't get, you know, like credit scores to buy houses. I have to do everything for them and I have to be the one with the job and things like that. I think being vulnerable, like that was something that I was thankful for when we were talking because then we could determine like, oh ok, like its family-oriented, so let's get you on the right track. Let's do a program that not only is going to get you money but that you actually liked.

This example was one of many where coaches helped students balance competing priorities of pursuing a fulfilling career path while still attending to familial obligations. Students reported that coaches were supportive of their family circumstances and helped them develop solutions that honored their Familial Capital.

Aspirational Capital was brought into coaching conversations by students and coaches alike. Given many of these conversations focused on improvement and were forward-thinking, it is not surprising aspirations would be a central focus.

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Theme 5: Resistant Capital

Within the community cultural wealth framework, Yosso (2005) discussed Resistant Capital as having two distinct elements. First, Resistant Capital is defined as "those knowledge and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality" (2005, p. 80). The second element of Resistant Capital Yosso brought forward involves "maintaining and passing on the multiple dimensions of community cultural wealth" (p. 80). The various examples Yosso (2005) highlighted focus on how families teach children to resist inequality and challenge the status quo. Within the context of coaching, Resistant Capital manifested in two subthemes: Resilience and Strengths.

Resilience

The subtheme of resilience came through coach and student comments on the challenges first-generation students must navigate as the first members of their families to attend an institution of higher education, and the strengths students displayed in overcoming those challenges. Coaches discussed how first-generation students are changing the system by being the first in their families to pursue higher education. By celebrating the importance of being the first in the family to go to college, coaches helped acknowledge the role that first-generation students play as "game-changers" within higher education. Coaching played a significant role in helping students access their Resistant Capital because students remember why they are pursuing higher education, which may help them cultivate a sense of belonging and overcome any obstacles they may encounter. Coach Vivian, a first-generation student, explained:

As a first-generation student coming into university, you're the first of your family to attend a four-year university. A lot of times our parents don't exactly know what it is like going through the application process to get here. When you're here, you don't understand what the workload looks like, know what it is and what is expected of you as a student. Having a coach to kind of walk you through that, to share their experiences, whether their first-gen or their allies of a first-generation student helps a lot because then that allows the students to find their sense of belonging. It kind of drives home the idea that their choice to attend university was right and that they are game-changers. They're changing the system and they belong here. And so, coaching really helps a lot, and this is also speaking from a person's perspective as well. Just having those people to kind of guide you and let you know hey your choice is right, helps a lot and helps you remember what your why is.

Coaches expressed beliefs that increasing numbers of first-generation students were changing the system and helping students feel a sense of camaraderie, kinship, and belonging. They also reported that sharing their experiences and backgrounds with other students helped keep them focused on their "why" and motivated them to continue pursuing their goals. This asset-based view of first-generation students aligns with research in Chapter 2 that rejected a deficit lens when approaching underserved students (Jehangir, 2010; Tate et al., 2015).

Additionally, coaches reported that they using skills and training to help students learn self-reliance and resilience. Rather than trying to solve whatever issue the student

was dealing with, coaches reportedly used powerful questions and "we" language to express solidarity and help the students develop a plan to move forward. Coach Jackson described how he conveyed support and helped students develop a plan to move forward:

We do use powerful questions with what we're doing, and I guess my favorite powerful question is what are we going to do about this? So, it causes the student. I think they come to me to go, ok, can you help me solve my issue? And it's like, I can help you solve your issue, but I'm not going to solve your issue for you. That's not my role as a coach. And so, it kind of pushes it back on them one to, kind of, ok, maybe we can come up with this plan and that would work. But then also the fact that I say we, you know, it's not just them that's going through this. I take it upon myself, and we both go through this and we talked about ok, what can we do to make this better? And that, for me, is my favorite powerful question, just because I like the I guess the I'm not really sure what to call it, but just kind of the way like what I was just saying, kind of, it pushes it back on them, but it also it kind of talks about how we're going through this together.

Students shared their coach helped them understand the importance of self-reliance. They reported coaches encouraged them to practice self-care and take ownership for advocating for themselves:

She would really highlight the importance of taking care of myself and making sure I'm mentally and physically well because that does play a big role in college. How you are yourself. If you're not good, then it's going to start showing in

classes and you're going to start falling behind. So, she was like, just make sure

you stay on top of you. Cause you're your biggest advocate.

As discussed in Chapter 2, in many instances, first-generation students use their

"accumulated knowledge" they have acquired through overcoming challenges to help

themselves and others (Garriott, 2019, p. 9). The peer-to-peer approach embraced within

coaching aligns with Yosso's view of Resistant Capital as maintaining and passing on the

multiple dimensions of community cultural wealth.

Strengths

By helping students recognize, acknowledge, and celebrate the strengths they

bring with them, coaching can also be a form of resistance. First-generation students are

often framed in relation to their weaknesses and for what they lack. Coach Vivian shared

how coaching helps students focus on strengths:

But a lot of the times is just talking to our students and kind of helping them get to

the root of what the issue is to have them realize that hey you've always had the

strength and what you've just always been focusing on the weaker part of it and

you haven't allowed yourself to actually realize that hey, that I'm actually good at

this. I should probably use this for something, or actually I did great on this. Why

am I not celebrating this? Why did I just push it aside? And just said, oh, I still

need to get this done. So, it's just kind of having conversations like that and

celebrating the wins that our students have. Honestly, with coaching I've learned

so much about myself and I kind of self-coach myself sometimes too because I

am also that student who literally just like goes, I get something done. And I'm

like, check done. What's the next thing I need to get done? And so, I never really

allow myself time to just like sit and be like dang, girl. You did that, you know,

and it's just also sharing that with my students.

Students reported their coach helped them to overcome feelings of self-doubt and remind

them of their strengths. These coaching conversations helped students feel less anxious

about accomplishing their goals:

I would always feel relieved because I am a warrior and I'm such an anxious

person, so it's like, oh, I need to be doing something or I'm not on track. So, she

would just remind me like, no, you're good. And then what goals, especially doing

the goals thing and looking at it weekly instead of like, oh, this is what I want at

the end of the semester. Or like, she was like, you're in your first year. Like

literally chill, you're fine. You have a long ways to go. And so just a sense of

relief. Like I got this every time.

By sharing their challenges with acknowledging their small wins, coaches helped

students see the value of celebrating milestones on the way to the final outcome.

Focusing on strengths also helped students reject a deficit perspective when it comes to

working on their goals.

College is not the only context where students must practice some forms of self-

advocacy. Students expressed difficulty balancing the new demands of college life with

familial expectations and responsibilities, including caring for siblings, working to

contribute to household income, and being present at home. Coach Vivian shared how

she used strategies that worked with her family to help their first-generation students

navigate through similar difficult conversations and advocate for themselves:

> So just kind of having those conversations and then also to one of the things that
> student, in particular, brought up was just that the different responsibilities that
> she had within the family, as well on top of college. Sitting down and talking with
> her once more. How can we get you to have this conversation and have it in such
> a way where your family, your parents are able to understand that? Listen, this is
> no longer high school. This is college and it demands a whole lot more out of me.
> And being as I have to work to help fund by myself through school. Do you think
> it's possible to cut back on some of these responsibilities? Do you think it's
> possible for maybe me not getting up to take my siblings to school? Maybe I can
> pick them up afterwards? But getting them to school in the morning might not be
> possible. Do you mind like handling that? It's kind of like talking about stuff like
> this and generating ideas on how you can have separate conversations. I think it's
> really important because a lot of times as first gen students we have a whole lot of
> other stuff going on. There's already that pressure of getting it right. And then
> there's probably some familial expectations as well to have what you need to get
> done. I think that kind of discourages having conversations with parents and just
> going until we get burned out. A lot of times we see our first gen not returning
> and stuff like that, just because of all that's going on. So that's kind of how us as
> coaches help, bridging that gap between them and their parents in helping them to

have those conversations with them as well. So that was kind of my experience

with one particular student.

Students worked with coaches to brainstorm solutions and think through how to engage

in conversations with their families. By working with their coaches, students learned how

to use their Self-Advocacy skills to strike a healthier balance between their academic and

personal obligations. Though Yosso (2005) conceptualized Resistant Capital as being

used against societal structures, I believe it is relevant for first-generation students in the

context of negotiating the push and pull of college and family life.

The theme of Resistant Capital emerged through coach interviews and student

focus groups via the subthemes of Self-Advocacy and Strengths. These subthemes align

with the example Yosso (2005) used of Latina mothers who teach their daughters to

"valerse por si misma (value themselves and be self-reliant)" (p. 81).

Theme 6: Linguistic Capital

Linguistic Capital is defined by Yosso (2005) as "the intellectual and social skills

attained through communication experiences in more than one language and/or style" (p.

78). Linguistic Capital also values the storytelling traditions students bring with them,

including "stories (cuentos) and proverbs (dichos)" (Yosso, 2005, p. 79). Of all forms of

community cultural wealth, I expected Linguistic Capital to be the least prevalent in the

data. Neither students nor coaches spent much time reflecting on language or linguistics

during our conversations. During focus groups with students, a few mentioned their

parents did not speak English and the limitations that posed on getting assistance with

processes like FAFSA or their homework. Neither students nor coaches went into great

detail regarding the language spoken within students' homes. I suspect this might be because coaching sessions are almost exclusively conducted in English, even though some coaches and students are bilingual. However, focusing on the elements of Linguistic Capital beyond language, including communication skills and storytelling, helped me understand the role it plays within the coaching context. With this interpretation in mind, I focused my analysis regarding Linguistic Capital on what students and coaches shared about the language of higher education. Within this theme, the following subthemes were observed: College Life, Relatability, and Powerful Questions.

College Life

One way coaches used their Linguistic Capital was by communicating their learnings about college life with their students. Students and coaches validated research cited in Chapter 2 focused on college knowledge and the hidden curriculum of higher education. As described by Conley (2007), many colleges and universities assume students are familiar with the various elements and processes of higher education, including college applications, financial aid, placement tests, college culture, and the increased academic expectations and demands of college coursework. These various elements of college knowledge have been characterized as the "hidden curriculum" of higher education, defined as the unwritten rules and bureaucracy that first-year students must learn to navigate to be successful (Zinshteyn, 2016). In many ways, academic peer coaching was designed to uncover many elements of college knowledge and the hidden curriculum for first-generation first-year students.

Students shared engaging in coaching sessions helped shed light on various academic topics and affirmed their preexisting knowledge, especially when they first arrived on campus and before they found a peer group. Even when topics focused on things students already knew, coaching sessions were still deemed valuable:

> I think that it really did help me just by like me already knowing the stuff that she was telling me. Except for like the program stuff like the academics. Even though like most of the time I was like, ok, I understand. Kind of like it wasn't as valuable, but personally to me, I felt like even having someone to talk to once you like enter college the first sessions that I went to after a while, I mean I kind of like stopped going because I understood what I needed and it wasn't as valuable to me at that time. But coming from a high school that like you never thought that you were going to go to college. It like really helped to even like have someone to talk to. Cause like again, like there's no one really in the beginning and until you find like that friend group and until you find your people in your classes like I think that you need that type of support. So, it did help.

Students and coaches shared many coaching conversations related to helping students transition successfully from high school, understand their new environment and grow accustomed to the culture of higher education.

Coaches shared the importance of having conversations with students on a variety of academic topics, including courses, professors, and study tips. A peer-to-peer perspective helped Coach Meredith share unique insights about her academic experiences as a student:

I think really having it from the peer perspective is great. Like we can we can sit and talk about you know, specific classes all day. We can talk about statistics all day. And what that class covers and this that and the other. But right, it makes a difference when I'm able to say, hey, you know, I took statistics and the professor's really great. He's a really reasonable guy. You know maybe he always starts class with a joke, be able to give that kind of first-hand experience. Like why is at least with me like I am very direct and upfront and so when people would ask me things. Again, like, you know, how did you like this major? How did you like this class? You know, I would tell someone like ok, so in the essence of full transparency, like accounting and finance weren't my favorite. I think I had awesome professors. I would try to make my answer really well rounded, and then I would follow it up saying, but just remember that I'm a marketing and management major. And so I know that you know those classes aren't my favorite because that's just not my personality type or that's just not my end goal or something that I personally find interesting. But it doesn't mean that you can't find a lot of great joy in that class. Things like that, or you know how, how can I best study for this class and you know, be able to give first-hand experience of oh, you know, this professor of seems really scary, but I really challenge you to go to his office hours and just shake his hand and introduce yourself. He's going to really appreciate that he'll remember that and it will totally change your experience within that class.

Coaches and students underscored the importance of sharing first-hand information drawn from the recent, personal experience of coaches. One particularly relevant example shared by students and coaches related to attending office hours. Students discussed their reticence to attend office hours with their coach. Coaches explained the purpose of office hours to students and shared their experience engaging with professors. Students reported that without the encouragement of peer coaches, they would have been unlikely to attend office hours. Those students who did visit their professors shared their discomfort in discussing certain topics of a more personal nature with them.

Coaches indicated students often came to their session with the solution to the challenge that was confronting them. By using tactics like active listening, Coach Vivian helped students access their own insights and knowledge to find solutions:

When the students are actually talking to us or asking us a question most times or restating things, the answer to their problems well, I don't like using a word problem, per se, but the answer to whatever concerns they have is actually within the statements that they gave us. And so that is why it's important for us to actively listen because then we can pinpoint that and then allow the student to know that, hey, you actually know what you're doing so. By all means, like, don't feel as if you ain't got it or anything because you do actually got it. And so most of it for us coaching is just to help guide our students and not really like just unload stuff on them if that makes sense.

Coaches highlighted the importance of students telling their stories, asking them questions, and providing a space for students to be vulnerable. This distinction between

coaching and mentoring underscores the discussion in Chapter 2. Mentoring interactions and relationships seem to focus on the mentor utilizing their experiences to help instruct, or at a minimum, guide the student towards a particular path or outcome; in contrast, coaching is more focused on individual accountability (Tofade, 2010).

Relatability

One element several coaches identified as important was their ability to relate to their students, which enabled them to have conversations about more sensitive and personal topics. Both coaches and students highlighted differences within the coaching role as compared to the roles of advisors (or other professional staff) and faculty. While acknowledging the influential role advisors play in guiding students with course selection, scheduling classes, and ensuring students are on track academically, Coach Lucy differentiated the support she provides students from that offered by other professional staff:

> So, we're more able to be kind of on their level, but just slightly above their level. It's like, we know a little bit more, but we can help you with the logistics and what you actually need help with. You can't necessarily open up to an academic advisor or other pro staff about like you love life. And that's definitely something. One of my students is, like, I want to take this class, or I want to take 18 credits, but also my boyfriend's long distance and I want to go visit him a lot. And I was like, yo, bro, not a good idea. I tried that. It didn't work. You need to be realistic about how you're spending your time and then just take a class over the summer at home when you're with him.

Coaches used their recent experiences as first-year students to gain credibility with students and make them feel comfortable opening up about topics beyond the academic context.

Students shared they felt empowered talking to their coach because they could relate to their experiences as students, and discuss topics of a more personal nature, especially as compared to their academic advisor. Students also felt closer to their coach than faculty members:

> Well, the fact that they embraced that, they reached out to me was like someone, like they actually wanted to listen to me. I could tell they wanted to hear from me. So, and professors would never like, I don't know, I just wouldn't feel comfortable talking to my professor about like my personal life. Yeah. Same thing with like the advisor. It's more for like, like what classes you should take. I'd rather than like what I'm feeling about those classes if that makes sense. Yeah, I agree with that I went to see my advisor a couple of times. So, she's really nice. I get to go see her, but I feel like with the success coach, it's somebody closer to my age. So, we like talk about the same, similar experiences and they're also a student here too still. They're like in it still. So yeah, I think it's just like the closer we are, the closer bond.

Coaching seemed to appeal to students, in part, because they felt at ease talking about a range of topics spanning personal and academic realms. While acknowledging the importance of connecting with their advisors and professors, students seemed to focus those conversations on academics.

Coaches highlighted reasons students sought out coaching, including wanting to understand and benefit from their experience as college students and being vulnerable enough to ask questions they might feel uncomfortable asking in other settings. Coach Meredith stated:

I think honestly that's probably why so many of my students met with me in the very beginning, just because they were like, well, you know, I guess it can't hurt right there's another person who kind of wants to give me the time of day. I had students come in who had very specific motivations had a lot of logistical questions right how do I study for a test, how do I connect with my academic advisor, my financial aid didn't go through, stuff like that. And so, I think for that type of student there's nothing wrong with that. It was a kind of a transactional relationship. And I do think a lot of my students they considered me kind of a confidant, like, that was me being a really good friend for them. Again, there were other students who came in, who maybe didn't have the same motivations and just kind of wanted to talk and hear about my experiences and get ideas for ways that they could shape their college experience. And then I definitely would have I would say more of like a confidant role, you know, not necessarily a therapist, but kind of like a friend who felt like they were able to come in and just talk about anything and everything, ask whatever questions they want and feel really comfortable doing. So that's one of the things I really appreciate about the Center. But again, having someone from the get go right as you're walking on campus in August, say, hey, I just want you to know that I'm here for you. And I'm really

excited for you to do great things this year. I don't care how cool a freshman tries

to be; they are vulnerable as heck and for a lot of people. That's a really good

feeling to have someone just kind of be there for them.

By communicating they were here for students within the first few days they were on

campus, coaches reinforced their support for students. Some students came to coaching to

"check out" what they had to offer. Others came with particular needs or questions. In

either case, coaches were able to use their experience and training to help support their

students.

Coaches also shared experiences having difficult conversations with students,

some of which required referring students to additional resources, including counseling

services. Coach Meredith explained:

So, a lot of it for me was just bringing in personal experiences all the time. I've

had a lot of students come in being first-gen, some of them saying, hey, this

college thing is so much better than I expected. And then I can also remember

distinctly one student who I think I had called randomly one day, like maybe just

going through my portfolio to check in. And I clearly got him at a time where he

was a little bit in his feelings on the phone, and he essentially said like, I really

don't know what I'm doing. Like I, you know, feel like I know how much support

here. My parents aren't really helpful, and they're trying their best. I feel like I'm

just here for them. And so that definitely brought up a lot of different

conversations. Again, I consulted a lot of people about it. And I think in the end.

The student needed a little bit more assistance from a professional that I could

handle. Not that you know we weren't there at the Center to help them, but I think

he did end up going frequenting the ASU counseling has specific kind of like

open forums or open sessions for first-generation students so they can all come

together and really kind of talk and share their feelings and their experiences. And

so that was one thing that I thought was really cool. I didn't know about until I'd

kind of talked to the student and subsequently other staff and coaches to kind of

learn about this. I think kind of once he was able to sit in on those sessions and

feel like again. He was really talking to people who are presently going through

the same things as him he's feeling a lot better about being here.

As part of the training received by coaches, they learn about the many campus resources

available to students. In addition to training and experiences, coaches also come to rely

on one another and the professional staff overseeing the First-Year Success Center as

unfamiliar questions or issues come up. The coach, in this example connected with their

coach network to help address the issues their student was experiencing, resulting in the

student participating in a support group for first-generation students.

Powerful Questions

Coaches used a variety of coaching techniques when meeting with students. One

strategy used by coaches was asking students powerful questions. As described by the

coaches, these are probing questions that come from carefully listening to the student and

following up with a question specifically designed to initiate a more in-depth

conversation. Coach Vivian discussed how she used powerful questions:

So, it's kind of asking those questions of, like, okay, so why are you interested in this already. Where does your passion lie? What got you into this? What is your why of being here in college? And so, it's more of like kind of like being on the back side of it. Not the forefront because the student is always first. So, I'm just kind of guiding them to those answers that they already have. So yes, I do use powerful questions when I'm coaching. It varies per student because everyone is different. One of the more common ones that I use, I think, is impactful on the student is when I sit them down and I ask what is your why? What got you interested in this particular major? Why is it that you wanted to attend college? What are you looking to get out of your experience here at ASU? What are you looking to get out of your bachelor's degree once you've completed it? What is your next step? What is it that you want to accomplish in life? It kind of sounds invasive asking those questions in a sense, but they're powerful in the sense that it really gets the student thinking and it allows them to see that their choices that they made. They made it because of them. And they made it because it's something that being want to do post undergraduate level and so forth. So those are the kind of questions I asked. I really see some impact coming out of it where the students are concerned.

Coaches used powerful questions to help facilitate deeper conversations with students. This technique was useful when students were experiencing challenges or feeling discouraged. Reflecting on their "why" helped keep students focused on their end goal, even despite any obstacles they were trying to overcome.

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Powerful questions were also useful to coaches when talking to students about their goals. Coaches reportedly used powerful questions to help students narrow down and make goals actionable. Coach Chandler described how this approach helped coaches to listen to their students and dive deeper into the information shared:

Students come in with like really grandiose goals. A lot of times, sometimes they're like, I want to maintain a perfect GPA, or I want to get an internship. A couple of these goals are going to be pretty steep. So, the first question I always ask is why is it important to you that this happens now? And sometimes they'll come in and they'll want to pile on a bunch of goals. So, they'll come in and they'll say ok, I want to get this, this, this, and this done and it's overwhelming even for me to look at. So, one of the most powerful questions we ask is having them kind of narrow it down a little bit. Which of these is most important to you? Why is it most important to you? I'm just asking questions based on what they give us. I think one of the first powerful questions I asked every appointment is how their day is going, and usually they say good or ok. But then I ask what makes it good or ok? I'm like what has happened in your day that has made it good? What has happened in your day to make it ok? How can we turn that ok into a great or an excellent? I'm just all-around asking questions to dive deeper on specific questions that have been helpful.

Coaches used powerful questions with students in a variety of contexts. In some instances, they helped students to reflect on their goals. Other times, coaches used powerful questions to foster a deeper conversation with a student.

Although students and coaches may not have spent a lot of time discussing languages spoken at home with their families, what they shared regarding College Life, Relatability, and Powerful Questions aligned with the theme of Linguistic Capital.

Summary

The data gathered from coach interviews and student focus groups indicated that community cultural wealth provides a robust framework to conceptualize how first-generation students draw upon their knowledge and resources to advance their educational goals (O'Shea, 2015). Findings in this chapter help bring a greater understanding of how peer coaches draw upon their community cultural wealth to support the students they coach. Students and peer coaches shared several examples of how coaching helps support first-generation students to be more successful.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Colleges continue to use a variety of approaches to support first-generation students and increase overall retention rates (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Hoops & Artrip, 2016; Tomasko et al., 2016). First-generation students are less likely to be retained than their continuing-generation peers (RTI International, 2019). Coaching is one approach, gaining traction in higher education, to provide one-on-one support to help first-generation students achieve their academic goals. Some unique characteristics of coaching include the use of peers rather than staff or faculty as the primary staff offering support, the informal nature of the peer-to-peer interaction, and the focus on student transitions and integration into college.

Academic coaching is a promising practice, as evidenced by findings from a comprehensive quantitative study by Bettinger and Baker (2011), who found the approach to have a significant positive effect on student success. Bettinger and Baker focused on the impact of coaching on students, but they also recommended further study on the role coaches play. This study took up that challenge. Building upon additional research focused on the influence of peer-to-peer support, the purpose of this study was to examine how peer coaches help first-year, first-generation students access the assets they bring with them to college. Specifically, Yosso's (2005) concept of community cultural wealth was used as the theoretical framework for this study to understand how coaches help first-generation first-year students be more successful.

This discussion continues to draw upon the community cultural wealth framework, focusing on three insights about peer coaching and first-generation students, relatability, self-confidence, and sense of belonging. These elements help distinguish peer coaching from other types of student support, principally academic advising and faculty interactions. After this discussion, the remainder of the chapter will review implications for theory and practice, limitations, and recommendations for future research.

Relatability

This section highlights three findings connected to the relatability of coaches to their peer students: (a) both students and coaches felt relatability was a significant element for the students' well-being, (b) peer coaches leveraged their recent experiences to relate to students, and (c) peer coaches serve as a gateway to help students unlock new campus relationships with advisors and faculty. While meetings with advisors and faculty were valuable for specific tasks, students did not find these institutional individuals as relatable as peer coaches.

Students and coaches consistently shared the importance of relatability to the coaching relationship. Coaches discussed how relatability influenced coaching conversations in several ways. Although relatability was explicitly highlighted within the context of linguistic capital, the concept of relatability was represented in all six forms of capital. Coaches highlighted the importance of connecting with students "at their level" and sharing recent similar experiences as first-year students. For example, coaches shared their proximity in age and familiarity with the challenges first-year students face helped students feel more connected to their coach during the first session and incentivized them

to continue coaching beyond the first meeting. Relatability was also an important way coaches helped first-generation students access their social capital. Students reportedly felt more comfortable discussing their concerns with their coach as compared to other staff or faculty members. This relatability held true even for more personal challenges a student may be experiencing, including relationship and adjustment issues. Since coaches had recently experienced similar challenges, first-year students reported they were more open to seeking help from their coach. Students and coaches highlighted relatability as an essential element of coaching conversations.

The most important finding about relatability underscored the importance of how coaches served as connectors to campus resources for first-generation students. Coaching creates an opportunity for coaches to share insider knowledge of campus resources with students from a peer-to-peer perspective. Relatability allows coaches to serve as a gateway for students to connect to campus resources and develop relationships with staff and faculty, steps both associated with student success. The peer-to-peer aspect of coaching was important to students for two reasons. First, coaches had almost immediate credibility with students because they had recent experience as first-year students. Connecting with a coach who recently experienced what it was like to transition to college and had to learn how to navigate their first semester gave students a sense of comfort. They reported being willing to engage in coaching and discuss more sensitive matters (e.g., difficulty with transition, finding their new friend group, relationship issues), which some students shared they would only discuss with their coach. Second, students felt less intimidated connecting with a peer as compared to faculty and staff.

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Students also shared their coaches "greeted them with open arms," creating a positive and welcoming atmosphere. This initial positive experience led students to feel like they could come back and talk to their coach "about anything."

By sharing their experiences and making the process to access essential campus resources more transparent, coaches often served as the gateway for students to connect to their advisor or professor. Students and coaches highlighted the importance of referrals that came from coaching conversations. Some students expressed fear or uncertainty about connecting with an unfamiliar resource. For example, some students indicated they were not sure their situation rose to the level of visiting their professor about an academic concern or going to counseling to talk about a personal issue. Students seemed more open to engaging with specific resources, including faculty, counseling, and advising, if recommended by their coach. Once students raised issues to their coach, the coaching conversation often focused on the value of engaging the additional resources, previous experience coaches had with the resource, and the specific steps students would need to take to access the resource. In some cases, beyond merely referring a student to a resource, coaches walked students to the office to encourage them to seek out the support needed to resolve the issue discussed during the coaching session. Coaches also reported the importance of referring students to other campus resources, primarily when students discussed issues better suited to be addressed by an advisor, counselor, or professor during coaching sessions.

Consistent with the research on advising, students reported receiving valuable guidance from their advisors, especially when it came to selecting classes, understanding

major requirements, and discussing career plans and other academic support. Previously cited research indicates advising is an important element for students as they transition to higher education (King & Kerr, 2005) and develop emerging skills as new college students (White & Schulenberg, 2012). Though students held advisors in high regard for their expertise and advice, students expressed reservations about relating with their advisor as compared to their peer coach, particularly when linked to topics of a less academic and more personal nature, characterizing advising as "strictly business." Another student shared the informal nature of coaching appealed to them as compared to advising:

> Yeah, I think that the lack of formality is what really helps because you could be like, no, like tell me like for real, should I like do this or not? Like is it really that hard? I think that's what you can't tell an advisor.

Students appreciated the ability to drop by the FYS Center and make an appointment any time compared to finding time with their advisor who frequently seemed busy supporting many other students. Coaches provided visible, timely, and relevant support for students. This support may come via coaching conversations focused on discrete challenges students are working through, (e.g., how to access financial aid, connect with their advisor, or study for a test) or ongoing coaching when students establish longer-term relationships with coaches over multiple sessions. Interestingly, finding is it did not matter whether a student had one or multiple coaching sessions. In either case, students reported feelings of relatability towards their coach.

Although not explicitly related to advising, students also discussed counseling as a resource. Students recognized counseling might be an option for them to deal with a variety of social-emotional and mental health challenges. In some instances, they expressed reticence in going to see a counselor, stating their concerns did not rise to the level that would warrant seeking out mental health resources. When discussing advising and counseling, students seemed to compartmentalize those supports as useful under specific conditions, such as getting registered for courses with an advisor or when experiencing signs of severe distress, as in the case of counseling. The informal nature and easy access to coaching seemed to drive some first-generation students to initially connect with their coach more openly on a broader range of topics.

Concerning faculty interactions, both students and coaches reported struggling to relate to their professors at times, especially when connecting with them outside the classroom. This finding aligned with previously cited research, indicating few students have interactions with faculty members outside of the classroom (Hagedorn et al., 2000; Jaasma & Koper, 1999). Students reported feeling uncertain about interacting with faculty members outside of the classroom. Office hours are a primary channel for first-year students to connect with their professor outside of class. Students shared they did not fully understand the purpose of office hours. Yet, as previously highlighted research indicated students should strive to get to know at least one faculty member each semester (Light, 2001), and office hours visits often facilitated deeper connections between a student and professor.

Coaches helped students understand the value of office hours in a few different ways. First, coaches shared their positive experiences as first-year students attending office hours and getting to know professors. They revealed faculty members often played an important role in helping guide them toward major-specific courses and continuing to offer support after the conclusion of the course. These findings validated research from Chapter 2, indicating faculty/student interactions help support students' socialization to college life, retention, and learning outcomes (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Milem & Berger, 1997; Pascarella et al., 1994). Students indicated once their coach communicated the value of office hours, they were much more willing to interact with their professor outside of the classroom setting. When comparing coaching to faculty interactions, it is easy to see why students initially would see their coach as more relatable given their near-peer status, proximity to the first-year experience, and insider knowledge about college navigation. By sharing their insider knowledge about office hours with students, coaches were able to leverage their social capital to help students and encourage them to maximize the opportunity to develop professional relationships with faculty members.

Relatability is particularly salient for first-generation students. As "trailblazers," first-generation students may not have anyone in their household or network, helping provide guidance and insider information about their transition to college. Research indicates colleges and universities should adopt specific strategies and programs that strive to ensure first-generation students feel integrated into their new environments (Peabody, 2013). Researchers argue the burdens of assimilation and adjustment do not rest solely with first-generation students; instead, higher education institutions should

play an active role in the social and cultural integration of students (Rendón et al., 2004). Coaching is one strategy institutions can adopt to help first-generation students successfully transition and feel more integrated into their college environment.

Sense of Belonging

This section delineates five insights related to sense of belonging and coaching: (a) belonging is essential for student success; (b) coaches maximize sense of belonging for students by drawing on their training; (c) students report that peer coaches helped them cultivate a sense of belonging; (d) advisors contribute to a sense of self-efficacy regarding administrative tasks for students, but fail to cultivate an overall sense of belonging in the same way coaches do; and (e) although interactions with professors can help students experience a sense of belonging, proactive steps should be taken to increase the likelihood that students will engage with the faculty.

Colleges and universities have adopted various programs and initiatives designed to help first-year students transition to their new higher education setting including orientation, summer bridge, learning communities, and other programs briefly described in Chapter 2 (Lotkowski et al., 2004; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 2003). These and other programs are designed to help students navigate the academic and social changes that need to be made to adjust to campus life (Tinto, 1999). Fostering a sense of belonging is vital because "students who do not feel like they belong rarely stay in college" (Strayhorn, 2019, p. 2). Also, students who have a positive sense of belonging "earn better grades, are retained at higher rates, and adjust to college more easily than their peers who do not feel as if they belong" (Strayhorn, 2015, p. 60). Colleges and

universities must be intentional in their strategic efforts to ensure better outcomes for first-generation students, including retention and graduation rates, and faculty and staff must play a proactive role (Pell Institute, 2007; Pike & Kuh, 2005). As will be discussed in greater detail, coaches cultivate a sense of belonging with students more effectively than either advisors or faculty.

The challenges experienced by first-generation students during their transition and the first few months on campus can impact a student's sense of belonging. As previously discussed, higher education has a culture that is not always transparent to incoming students. For first-generation students, the transition to college can be challenging due to the "hidden curriculum" of higher education ("Defining First-Generation," 2017), which includes the level of understanding presumed about the various bureaucratic processes, jargon, and other norms of higher education. This hidden curriculum can be particularly challenging for first-generation students who may not have access to family, friends, or other members of their network who can help demystify the unwritten rules of higher education. By helping students acclimate to and navigate through their new environment, peer coaches can help students strengthen their sense of belonging, leading to better social, academic, and retention outcomes.

Helping students finding their sense of belonging was an essential element of coaching. Given its importance for first-generation and first-year students, coaches receive training on sense of belonging and incorporated specific tactics and conversational elements into their coaching sessions. Sharing personal details about their experiences as first-generation students and their families helped coaches to cultivate a

sense of belonging with students. Coaches were often motivated by their experiences of feeling isolated and having trouble adjusting to a new college environment to try help foster a sense of belonging with their students. This finding aligns with research indicating that incoming first-generation students exposed to stories from students of diverse backgrounds were more likely to meet with professors and had better outcomes related to mental health and student engagement (Stephens, Hamedani, & Destin, 2014).

Coaches highlighted commuter students as a group with challenges regarding sense of belonging. Nationally, the majority of students fit into the category of students who do not live within college/university-owned housing (Newbold, Mehta, & Forbus, 2011). Research indicates that commuter students tend to have additional familial responsibilities, work longer hours, and are less likely to be involved on campus (Holloway-Friesen, 2018). Coach Chandler shared some of the challenges faced by commuter students:

> For my commuter students. I feel like a lot of them are questioning whether they belong. And that's something that's been we've been emphasizing for the past few weeks now. What does it mean to belong? How do you find a sense of belonging at ASU? How do you get involved with the campus community when you live 20 minutes away? Well, for students in housing, like since I live on campus they're going to focus more a lot of the times on different things. How do I join a club which could be a big challenge for someone right versus a student that has to drive twenty minutes. How do I get back to campus after I go home for the day?

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Planning all of that stuff, it looks different for each of them, but I think it has a

similar impact.

Coaches helped commuter students problem solve and develop coping strategies to deal

with the challenges they may experience, including travel time and time management. By

exploring solutions with students, coaches helped commuter students cultivate a sense of

belonging.

Students also reported coaching helped them with sense of belonging. Feelings of

isolation during and immediately following their transition to college left some students

struggling with sense of belonging. Students shared that coaching conversations helped

them feel less anxious and isolated, validating previous research indicating the support

students receive helps them cultivate a sense of belonging within their new college

environment (Schwartzman & Sanchez, 2016).

Students highlighted various ways coaches helped them feel part of their college

community, including social support. Students talked about how important it was for

them to connect with their coach, especially until they found their "friend group." As

students felt more comfortable with their navigational skills as a result of coaching, they

reported embracing their sense of belonging within their campus community. Once

students felt more comfortable in college, they worked with coaches to seek out resources

that would help them be more successful. By helping students get more involved, deepen

their connection to campus, and feel as though they are cared for, coaching helps students

develop a stronger sense of belonging. Given that lack of belonging is one reason that

influences students to leave (Tinto, 2001) and that a supportive college environment

helps students feel like they fit in (Schwartzman & Sanchez, 2016), it is not surprising cultivating a sense of belonging was important to both students and coaches.

Sense of belonging was not as prevalent for students when they talked about their advisors. Unlike coaching, students did not share examples of how their advisors explicitly addressed or cultivated a sense of belonging during their advising appointments. Academic advising is at the center of students' educational experiences, including their major, co-curricular activities, and the development of new college knowledge and skills (White & Schulenberg, 2012). Also, advising is particularly important for diverse student populations, supporting their integration into the campus community and retention (Frost, 2003). Students and coaches seemed to situate this advising within a specific transactional context. Students described the utility of advising in terms of course selection and meeting academic requirements. Although important to help students master various required administrative tasks, advising did not cultivate a sense of belonging in the same way that coaching did. When describing advising, students focused on the specific academic support and knowledge they received. While this support was deemed valuable and helpful, students did not equate the skills and knowledge they received during their advising sessions as contributing to their overall sense of belonging. With coaching, students conveyed they felt a stronger sense of belonging throughout the process. Students felt valued and cared for by being invited to participate in coaching. Coaches helped students gain confidence within the context of the coaching conversation, either by their coach affirming their preexisting knowledge or by getting connected to resources or information. Finally, students felt a sense of

belonging after their coaching session was complete due to (a) resolving the question or issue they discussed with their coach, (b) experiencing accountability and follow-up from their coach after the appointment, and (c) feeling more connected to the campus community.

Students and coaches also discussed sense of belonging in relation to interacting with faculty members. Coaches reported students often expressed hesitation to connect with their professors outside of the classroom setting. Previously cited research indicates students who do not perceive themselves to be successful might hesitate to connect with professors, in part, because they do not want to waste their time (Longwell-Grice & Longwell-Grice, 2007; Nuñez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998). Students expressed uncertainty about going to office hours because they were not familiar with the location of their professor's office, or they did not know what they would talk about once they got there. Students often did not know where their professor's office was in comparison to their classroom. Although this information is available from the syllabus or course management system, the separation of classroom and office for faculty work differs from high school, where most teachers' classrooms are their offices.

Coaches helped students overcome their uncertainty about what to discuss with professors during office hours by strategizing about what kinds of questions and topics to cover. Coach Chandler recalled a coaching conversation where they encouraged a student to connect with their professor:

> Let's talk about how you can approach this conversation with your professor to make sure that you have a productive conversation. And so, we planned out a

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bunch of different questions and then the student went right after our meeting and

talk to this professor. So, I think it's just having this this person that is a peer. We

went through the exact same struggle less than four years ago, so like we know

what's going on. We know that anxiety that you feel and just having that one

person. We were their first friend that you can confide in and be like, what should

I do? How do I do this? I think it means a lot to them.

By breaking things down into manageable steps and being vulnerable about their

struggles, coaches helped students gain the confidence they need to feel comfortable

moving forward. Once coaches and students have the opportunity to connect with their

professors, they often reported feeling more engaged in their classes and confident about

their major.

Though coaching is instrumental in helping students cultivate their sense of

belonging with faculty members, based on the findings of this study, faculty members

could do more to address the hidden curriculum of office hours. First, faculty should

ensure all students know where their offices are located on campus. Second, to make the

purpose of office hours explicit, faculty should list their hours of availability on the

syllabus and should also describe the purpose in class. Faculty should strive to ensure

available office hours align with student availability to the extent possible and offer

additional opportunities for individual appointments when they do not. Adopting digital

technologies like Zoom would also help students who have familial or work

responsibilities or those students who commute to campus to take advantage of more

opportunities for faculty/student interactions.

Self-Confidence

This section advances several key claims regarding the role of self-confidence in peer coaching: (a) self-confidence is critical for student success in higher education, (b) peer coaches establish wide-ranging self-confidence for their student, and (c) advising and faculty interactions often provide students with self-efficacy (i.e., confidence in their ability to complete administrative tasks), but do not foster holistic self-confidence that students report receiving from peer coaches.

Coaches and students reported coaching helped students cultivate self-confidence. As they navigate through the hidden curriculum and other challenges during their transition to college, first-generation students may suffer decreased self-confidence ("Defining First-Generation," 2017). Lower rates of self-confidence can lead some students to avoid reaching out for help (Longwell-Grice & Longwell-Grice, 2008). In this context, self-confidence refers to "students' confidence in performing academic tasks" (Crisp, Taggart, & Nora, 2015, p. 8). Students shared that coaching helped them feel more confident during, and immediately after, transitioning to college. Coaches helped increase self-confidence by reinforcing students' preexisting knowledge, taking a strengths-based approach, celebrating their victories, and helping students feel valued.

Though first-generation students are often characterized by the gaps in their knowledge and experience (Harper, 2010; Irizarry, 2009), several coaches shared students often came to their coaching sessions already armed with the answers they needed. Rather than providing answers to questions or issues students raised, coaching often affirmed students' preexisting knowledge. Coaches indicated techniques, like active

listening, helped them hear and value the solutions students brought with them to the coaching sessions. The use of powerful questions also helped coaches to have deeper conversations with students. These techniques aligned with research highlighted previously, demonstrating the importance of using open-ended questions to encourage self-reflection and motivate students to have enough faith in themselves to find solutions (Grant, 2011). By actively listening to students' stories and questions, coaches used powerful questions to help get beyond surface-level conversations and unlock latent skills they already possessed. While sharing their own experiences with students, coaches were careful to stop short of telling students what to do. One coach shared, if they were to tell students "the answer," they would be doing a disservice to students by not letting them problem solve and develop navigational skills to arrive at a solution. Coaches shared students often did research and came to the coaching appointment with well-thought-out questions and, in many cases, the answer to their question. In this circumstance, the role of the coach was to listen and affirm students' knowledge and resourcefulness. Students shared they are often simply looking for a second opinion, for someone to tell them they are on the right track. These communication strategies and others helped students gain the confidence they needed to move forward with next steps to achieve their goals.

Another way coaches encouraged students to increase their self-confidence was by focusing on their strengths as first-generation students. By encouraging students to focus on strengths rather than weaknesses, coaches help students adopt an asset-based mindset. Coaches urged students to celebrate what they were good at and their progress on accomplishing their ultimate goal. Students reported focusing on their strengths helped

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them build their self-confidence, pause to reflect on their progress, relieve their anxieties, and commit to continue pushing forward.

According to coaches, essential elements of coaching involved encouraging students to celebrate when they succeed and to get back up when they stumble. Students recognized the importance of this element of coaching, with one student declaring her coach was the "biggest hype woman I have ever met in my life." Students also reported coaching helped them to build self-confidence as they transitioned from high school to college, a critical component to helping them embrace the "culture of possibility" (Yosso, 2005, p. 78). By supporting students to work through challenges, answering questions, and recognizing their accomplishments, coaches helped students reduce their uncertainty about their new environment.

Coaches contacted students several times to offer coaching, check-in, and offer words of encouragement via email and phone. These contacts are part of an overall outreach strategy by the FYS Center. Students were contacted monthly by coaches to invite them to participate in coaching. These multiple contacts were well received by students, who indicated hearing from their coach made them feel someone at the institution cared about them and helped them develop self-confidence:

> It was just an open door like I had, it was just shutting myself out a lot and she
> just made me like see all everything in a different way. It definitely helped me
> like open up a little bit more cause like when I first showed up to my first
> appointment, I was like really like shy and timid. And then I was like, I don't need
> to be scared of talking to other people. Like it's not that big of a deal. So, it

definitely like helped me open up as a person and be accepting of like, okay, I can

talk to other people and not worry about things.

Coaches also associated contacting students as expressions of care and support for their

students. They indicated these contacts were a meaningful, visible gesture to signal to

students they were available to offer support and encouragement. This finding affirmed

previous research indicating a distinguishing characteristic of coaching is the proactive

nature in which coaches reach out and work to establish relationships with students

(Dalton & Crosby, 2014).

Concerning advising, students and coaches focused on ways advisors helped build

students' understanding of academic and college requirements. Students reported

advising helped them build self-efficacy, defined as "beliefs about one's ability to

successfully execute a behavior required to produce a certain outcome" (Ramos-Sánchez

& Nichols, 2007, p. 8). Coaches were quick to distinguish their role from that of an

academic advisor. They referred students to their academic advisor to discuss the

administrative questions and concerns more appropriately addressed in an advising

session. Advisors play an important role in skill-development related to academic and

curricular issues, including advising students courses needed to fulfill degree

requirements, monitoring academic progress, and providing career guidance (Johnson,

2017; Mangan, 2014). For first-year students to embrace their self-efficacy, they need to

learn administrative policies and procedures, including major and degree requirements,

how and when to apply for internships, and other skills gained through working with an

advisor. Students with higher levels of self-efficacy about the academic expectations of

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their institution were more likely to indicate that they had a positive experience as a first-year student. This finding aligned with research indicating that students with higher levels of self-efficacy have better outcomes related to college adjustment (Ramos-Sánchez & Nichols, 2007).

Students and coaches also shared how faculty interactions influenced students' self-confidence. Fear and anxiety were common feelings expressed by students and coaches when recalling their experiences when they first came to college. For many students, office hours provide an opportunity to get to know their professors on a personal level, outside the classroom setting. Though office hours are listed on the syllabi of virtually all courses, students may still feel intimidated to take advantage of them. One student described the anxiety she experienced visiting her professor during office hours:

So, you walk into an office where there's no one you know. I also felt that the questions I had were stupid. I felt like they're going to tell me like seriously, it's that simple. Right now, I'm taking organic chemistry, so when I go to office hours, I don't know how to formulate my question for you to try to help me. So, that kind of pushes me away. So, I think that's a big thing. It's just like, I don't know how to approach you in what I'm like trying to get help for. So, I think that I avoid it and feel like I was like wasting their time sometimes. I went in for like a lab report and I was like, well, I just want to sure is this ok? And she looked over and she's like, it's perfectly fine. There's stuff you need to do. I was like, Oh, well, I came in here for nothing I guess and I feel, I apologize. I'm sorry I wasted your like your time right now. She's like, well, that's my job. I'm supposed to help you.

Oh yeah, that kind of is your job. But it is very dependent on the instructor. Some

of them like, like I feel totally fine going to see them. There are other ones that I

will avoid it until like you're my last resource kind of thing. So yeah, it just

depends on them too and their attitude.

Although the student had a positive experience visiting her organic chemistry professor,

in other instances, she did not feel welcomed to office hours, coming to view them as a

last resort for support. As previously described, coaches shared the benefits of office

hours, which included a deeper understanding of course material, career guidance, and

development of a long-standing mentoring relationship with their professor. By sharing

their positive experiences, coaches helped students to not only understand the benefit of

office hours, but they also helped students understand they were worthy of receiving

support from their professors. Students reported that after visiting with their coach, they

were more likely to go to office hours and have a positive interaction with their professor

during their visit.

Self-confidence is a crucial element to cultivate for first-generation students.

When students feel uncertain, they can experience imposter syndrome, the feeling they do

not belong, especially compared to their continuing-generation peers (Cokley et al.,

2017). Previously cited research indicates fear and lack of self-confidence can lead first-

generation students to hesitate to reach out for help (Longwell-Grice & Longwell-Grice,

2008). Students' willingness to connect with a peer over a faculty member may be tied to

their feelings of self-worth and perceptions their professor may be too busy to be

"wasting time" with them (Longwell-Grice & Longwell-Grice, 2007; Nuñez & Cuccaro-

Alamin, 1998). Students shared they were more willing to be vulnerable, share personal information, or ask questions with a peer than with their academic advisor or professor. By encouraging students to focus on strengths, coaching helps students develop their self-confidence and embrace new opportunities for learning and growth (Robinson & Gahagan, 2010).

Implications

The research conducted in this study has implications for theory and practice. Each is considered in the following sections.

Theory

Concerning to the implications for theory, I share two findings. First, my research led me to agree with previous scholars, who argued that deficit theories are incomplete. Second, concerning Yosso's (2005) theory of community cultural wealth, although the model was initially developed with students of color in mind, I agree with scholars who have also found it applicable for first-generation students.

As previously discussed, scholars have often discussed first-generation students in light of what they lack, especially as compared to continuing-generation students (Peabody, 2013). Because they are first in their families to go to college, first-generation students have often been written about in light of their deficits, including institutional knowledge and how to navigate the bureaucracy of higher education. Not all scholars have taken this view. Rather than putting the onus on first-generation students to mitigate their deficits, some scholars have taken an institutional perspective, looking to the role higher education plays in helping students integrate into their new educational

environment (Rendón et al., 2004). Additionally, some scholars have argued research based on a deficit lens is incomplete (Harper, 2010; Irizarry, 2009). Instead, they advanced an asset-based perspective that embraces first-generation students and the experiences and knowledge they bring with them (Jehangir, 2010; Tate et al., 2015). As detailed in Chapter 4, students brought a wealth of assets along the six dimensions of community cultural wealth that are instrumental for first-year college students. Assets that can be recognized and leveraged through peer coaches who share similar experiences and perspectives. Rather than taking a remedial approach, coaches inspire students to access their cultural capital, preexisting knowledge, and skills and celebrate their victories, large and small. Students reported that coaches were often the first and, at times, the only institutional representative validating their strengths as first-generation students. The many examples of how first-generation students used coaching to help access their capital provided strong corroboration of Yosso's framework, and for the argument that asset-based models better account for how higher education institutions should position supports for first-generation students.

Yosso's (2005) theory of community cultural wealth has been a substantial contribution to the literature that applies an asset-based lens to students of color. This model has highlighted the strengths, experiences, and talents students of color bring with them to college. Though Yosso's work has centered students of color, other scholars have adapted the community cultural wealth model and applied it to other communities of underserved students. In particular, community cultural wealth is a useful theory for understanding the experiences of first-generation students (O'Shea, 2015). In using

Yosso's theory for this study, my research validated O'Shea's (2015) finding

"Community Cultural Wealth framework provided a powerful means to conceptualize

how first-in-family students draw upon existing capitals and also how these capitals are

used to enact educational success" (p. 70). Researchers who have applied community

cultural wealth to their work with first-generation students have found the forms of

capital within the model are applicable (Garriott, 2019). In examining the six forms of

capital within the context of peer coaching, I found many useful applications of the

theory to bring further understand how coaches access their cultural capital and how they

encourage first-generation students to use the cultural capital they bring to college. The

examples cited in this study provide further validation of the applicability of Yosso's

cultural community wealth framework to studies focused on first-generation students.

Practice

This study has applicability to other colleges and universities for two reasons.

First, coaching is a student success strategy being adopted by several institutions. Second,

this study focuses on how coaching influences the growing demographic of first-

generation students. I have five recommendations for those institutions launching a peer

coaching initiative or for those looking to improve their existing peer coaching program.

First, coaching from peers who have recent experience with college is helpful for first-

generation students. Second, hiring peer students who are motivated to support their

fellow students can help the efficacy of a peer coaching program. Third, peer coaches

carry a heavy load and need to be supported by professional staff. Fourth, marketing and

communication strategies should be tailored to meet the needs of first-year students. Finally, comprehensive training is an essential element of a successful coaching program.

More colleges and universities have started to offer coaching to students as part of their retention and student success strategies (Hayes, 2012; Robinson & Gahagan, 2010). Based on this study's findings, practitioners looking to implement a coaching program should consider using a cadre of peer coaches to support first-generation students. First, relatability played a significant role for both coaches and students. Coaches reported accessing their cultural capital with students in several ways. By having been first-year students recently, coaches leveraged their insider knowledge about getting involved on campus, courses, resources, study skills, professors, and other key elements of college life for the benefit of their students. Coaches also shared their experiences with students to help convey understanding and solidarity. Students shared they felt more comfortable bringing up sensitive or more personal topics with their coach than they did with staff or faculty. Proximity in age between coaches and students provided informational and socio-emotional benefits for first-generation students. Although only three of the five coaches interviewed were first-generation students, all five were well versed in the challenges students confronted as first-year students, including sense of belonging, resilience, self-confidence, college knowledge, and other important issues. Coaches cited the ongoing training as playing a significant role in using their experience but also to understand various theories (e.g., sense of belonging) and techniques (e.g., asking powerful questions), to help them offer comprehensive support to students.

Peer coaches also enhanced the motivations of the first-generation students they coached. Coaches expressed their commitment to student success in a variety of ways. Coaches reported students came to coaching sessions many times with research about the issue or challenge they were confronting, or students revealed they already had an answer in mind in the course of the coaching conversation. In these situations, coaches fulfilled the role of building their student's self-confidence by affirming their preexisting knowledge. Coaches also embraced an asset-based perspective when coaching students. Students often came to coaching sessions with a strong commitment to achieving their higher education goals. In some cases, students shared fears or uncertainties related to their experience as a first-year student. Students indicated the affirmation and accountability they received from their coach helped build their self-confidence and break down their overarching goals into more manageable steps. All coaches who participated in interviews seemed motivated and passionate about supporting their students.

Coaches shared various coping mechanisms they used to deal with carrying the load of student concerns: (a) relying on each other to problem solve various issues, (b) practicing self-care, and (c) leaning on the professional staff at the FYS Center to help deal with student issues beyond their expertise. Continued support via training opportunities was another factor highlighted by coaches, which helped them feel equipped to support students. During the study, one coach shared they were no longer employed as a coach, citing the stress of the job as a factor. This student indicated although coaching was a rewarding experience for them, it was not without its toll.

Coaches often created meaningful and complex relationships with students that were taxing to maintain. The level of trust students shared with their coaches is a sign of success. Once these relationships have been established, they require dedicated institutional support to help coaches maintain healthy boundaries with students and maintain their own emotional well-being. Practitioners who seek to establish a peer coaching program should make an effort to ensure they build a supportive environment to help peer coaches thrive, which will ultimately benefit the first-generation students they serve.

Coaches used marketing and outreach strategies to connect with their students. As part of the FYS outreach and marketing strategy, peer coaches reached out to students monthly via email and phone. Coaches also tabled at various student engagement fairs and events, and presented about FYS in select classes. Students reported these contacts made them feel like their coach wanted to talk and listen to them. Although some students reported the number of contacts influenced them to make an appointment for coaching, other students reported that the informal nature of the messages left by coaches appealed to them. For example, a coach might send an email or leave a voicemail telling the student they were thinking about them, wishing them well, and inviting them to check-in. Students also expressed appreciation that, after their coaching appointment, often coaches followed-up on their conversation, inquiring how their test went or if they ended up joining the student organization they were exploring. Beginning in the 2020-2021 school year, coaches will have the capability to engage in two-way texting with

students. Whatever method a coach used to make contact, students reported they were motivated to respond because the overture was timely, personal, and informal.

Finally, one important component colleges and universities must address when establishing a peer education program is providing extensive training and development, as comprehensive as offered to a staff or faculty member (Latino & Unite, 2012). FYS coaches have been trained on 14 competencies: the role of the coach, coaching skills, outreach strategies, student retention and success, positive psychology, strengths, VIP service, campus resources and referrals, diverse populations, students of concern/crisis or complex situation escalation, technology and software, reporting and documenting, coaching forms and tools, and FYS policies and procedures. Though elements of training focus on procedural or transactional components, including documentation and understanding coaching processes, a substantial portion of training has focused on more complex competencies grounded in student success theory and practice. In particular, coaches highlighted the depth of information they received, characterizing it as going beyond the surface level and helping them advance their overall understanding of common issues first-year students face. For example, Coach Meredith discussed the level of depth related to the diverse populations competency:

> One of my favorite parts was what we did on just inclusivity and positive
> psychology. So inclusive, it obviously not just at the surface level of, you know,
> working with a diverse student population and, you know, making sure everyone
> feels welcome. But we dug a lot deeper into that to really to be able to understand
> the very many different paths that one can take to get to ASU and while they're at

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ASU. I thought that was really interesting. My time as a First-Year Success coach

really opened my eyes to just how different everyone's ASU experiences have

been. And, again I think they did a really good job setting that expectation from

the beginning.

Annually, coaches receive 100 hours of training, with 40 hours at the beginning of the

year and 60 hours of ongoing professional development. Coaches must also pass a

competency-based exam before they are permitted to work with students. The initial and

ongoing training received from the FYS Center was well-regarded by coaches who

characterized it as comprehensive and transformational.

Limitations

As with any study, there are several significant limitations to note. First, this

research focused on one program at a large public university. The generalizability of this

study may be limited to other similar institutions. By sharing descriptions of the host

institution, general student demographics, the coaching program, and student coaches, I

hope researchers and administrators take my findings and develop effective peer

coaching programs or make key comparisons to improve existing programs.

A limited number of students and coaches participated in this study. Five coaches

participated in two interviews each and 15 students participated in focus groups. All

coaches employed at the time were divided into two groups (first-generation and

continuing generation), and random selection was used to identify three first-generation

and two continuing generation coaches. Students who received coaching in the fall

semester were invited to participate. Although students and coaches provided robust data

during interviews and focus groups, the small number of participants in the study is a limitation.

Finally, while coaches and students shared relevant data and examples, indicating coaching helped first-generation students, other interventions could also be helping students. All data indicating coaching helped first-generation students were qualitative and self-reported by students and coaches participating in coaching. Their willingness to participate could signal their belief in the efficacy of coaching. Coaches and students who declined or were not invited to participate in coaching could have had neutral or negative views or experiences with coaching not revealed in this study.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study reveals several important avenues for future research. First, given the findings of this study, continued research on peer coaching and peer coaches is warranted. Coaches and students shared rich examples and stories that indicate the positive influence coaching has on first-generation students. This study validates previously cited research indicating colleges and universities must be intentional about the recruitment, selection, training, and development of students they select as peer coaches (Latino & Unite, 2012). Additionally, interviews with coaches underscored previous findings highlighting the importance of training and development when establishing a successful peer support program (Latino & Unite, 2012). This study did not explore the training program used by the FYS Center. A study that looked more closely at the training program would bring understanding to practitioners seeking to establish a peer coaching program. Given how little research has been conducted on peer coaches,

additional studies could shed light on how institutions can maximize the efficacy of their

coaching programs for the benefit of first-generation students. Since this study was

qualitative, additional quantitative research could surface insights into the efficacy of

coaching for first-generation students. Survey research would be useful to gain insights

from larger groups of first-generation students. A random control trial or quasi-

experimental design could demonstrate the efficacy of coaching on student success

factors, including student involvement, GPA, retention, and graduation for both first-

generation and continuing-generation students.

Finally, by using Yosso's (2005) community cultural capital as the framework,

this study provides further validation of the theory's applicability beyond students of

color. Other scholars have indicated Yosso's theory is helpful in contexts related to first-

generation and low-income students (Garriott, 2019; O'Shea, 2015). After applying the

six forms of capital to the peer coaching context and analyzing the resulting data, these

categories help provide further understanding of the lived experiences of first-generation

students. I hope this study, and others like it, encourage scholars who have relied on

deficit models to reevaluate their previous research to consider adopting an asset-based

lens. Scholars should also consider using Yosso's community cultural framework to help

inform future studies on first-generation students to acknowledge and celebrate the

resilience and strengths these students bring to college.

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APPENDIX A

FIRST INTERVIEW WITH COACHES QUESTIONS

First Interview with Coaches Questions

1. How long have you been a peer coach?

2. Why did you decide to become a coach?

3. How do you define your role as a coach?

4. What strategies do you use to help students be successful?

5. What are the skills you use most frequently when coaching and why?

6. How did you develop the skills you use when coaching students?

7. Do you share information about your personal experience and/or background with the students you coach? Why or why not?

8. How does coaching help support diverse student populations?

9. Do you think coaching is especially important for first-generation students? Why or why not?

10. Do the students you coach share anything about their families with you? If yes, can you share some examples?

11. Do students talk to you about their hopes and dreams? If yes, how do you think coaching helps students with their goals?

12. Does coaching help students connect to their peers? If yes, why do you think so?

13. Can you share an example of a time when you referred a student to a resource? What impact, if any, did it have on the student?

14. What personal characteristics or strengths do you think help you when coaching students?

15. Can you share an example of a time when you referred a student to a resource? What impact, if any, did it have on the student? (navigational capital)

16. Is there anything else I haven't asked you about that you think would be helpful to share?

APPENDIX B

STUDENT FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

Student Focus Group Questions

Question	Purpose/Code
How did you find out about coaching?	General; Navigational; Familial; Social
What motivated you to seek out coaching?	Aspirational; Navigational; Familial; Social; General
What is the role of a peer coach?	Social; Navigational; General
Why did you decide to go to coaching as opposed to talking to someone else like your advisor or your professor?	Social; Navigational; General
What kinds of things did you and your coach talk about? a. Sub-questions: Campus resources? Getting involved? Time management?	Navigational; Linguistic; General
Did you talk about goal-setting with your coach? If yes, what types of goals did you establish?	Aspirational; General
In the course of your conversation with your coach, did you talk about your family? If yes, can you share a little bit about that?	Familial; Aspirational;
What was one "aha" question your coach asked or insight they shared?	Social, Navigational; General
How did you feel after your coaching appointment?	General; Aspirational
What did your coach suggest you do after your coaching appointment? Did you do it? Why or why not?	Navigational; Social
Did the coaching you received help you? Why or why not?	Navigational; Social
Do you think coaching helps students with their transition to college and/or their first-year experience? Why or why not?	Navigational; Social
Do you think coaching helps first-generation students? Why or why not?	Navigational; Social; Familial

What is the most valuable thing about coaching?	Resistant, Navigational; General
Is there anything else about coaching that I haven't asked about that you would like to share?	General

APPENDIX C

SECOND INTERVIEW WITH COACHES QUESTIONS

Second Interview with Coaches Questions

1. Since we last talked in the fall, what do you now know about coaching that you did not know then?

2. What have been some of the most common issues students raised during their coaching sessions with you?

3. Can you talk to me about the training you receive as a coach? What have been some of the most helpful aspects/topics to you within your role as a coach?

4. Several students talked about their coaches as their first friends on campus. Can you talk to me about how coaches fulfill this role and what you think this means to students?

5. Have students talked to you about their experience going to faculty office hours or advising? Why do you think they seek out coaching when these options are available?

6. Some students characterized their coach as their primary source of information about college life. Do you think coaches serve this role for students? Can you share an example?

7. Do you think coaching impacts a student's self-esteem? Why or why not?

8. Do you talk to students about being first-generation and/or their family? Can you share an example?

9. Some students talked about how they identified with their coaches or felt connected to them. What do you think makes coaches relatable to students?

10. Do you think coaching helps students fix their weaknesses or access their strengths? Can you give me an example?

11. Is there anything else I haven't asked you about coaching that you would like to share?

APPENDIX D

COACH INTERVIEW EMAIL RECRUITMENT TEXT

Coach Interview Email Recruitment Text

Hello,

I hope your semester is off to a great start! My name is Sylvia Symonds and I am a doctoral student in the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College (MLFTC) at Arizona State University (ASU). I am working under the direction of Dr. David Garcia, a faculty member in MLFTC. We are conducting a research study on peer coaching and first-generation students. The purpose of this study to better understand peer coaching, both from the perspective of coaches and the students who receive coaching. You are receiving this message because you are eligible to participate in our research study. Participation is voluntary and choosing not to participate will not affect your standing with the university. This study will involve two 60-minute interviews, one in the fall and one in the spring. If you choose to participate, you will be asked to meet either in-person or via Zoom. You will receive a $15 Starbucks gift card for participating. If this sounds like an opportunity you would be interested in, please reply to this email for more information or feel free to call/text us at 480-352-3828.

Thank you for considering this opportunity!

Sylvia Symonds

Doctoral Student

Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College

APPENDIX E

STUDENT FOCUS GROUP EMAIL RECRUITMENT TEXT

Student Focus Group Email Recruitment Text

Hello,

I hope your semester is off to a great start! My name is Sylvia Symonds and I am a doctoral student in the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College (MLFTC) at Arizona State University (ASU). I am working under the direction of Dr. David Garcia, a faculty member in MLFTC. We are conducting a research study on peer coaching and first-generation students. The purpose of this study to better understand peer coaching, both from the perspective of coaches and the students who receive coaching. You are receiving this message because you are eligible to participate in our research study. Participation is voluntary and choosing not to participate will not affect your standing with the university. This study will involve one 60-minute focus group. If you choose to participate, you will be asked to meet in-person at the ASU Tempe campus. You will receive a $10 Starbucks gift card and lunch and/or snacks for participating. If this sounds like an opportunity you would be interested in, please reply to this email for more information or feel free to call/text us at 480-352-3828.

Thank you for considering this opportunity!

Sylvia Symonds

Doctoral Student

Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College

APPENDIX F

IRB HUMAN SUBJECTS APPROVAL

EXEMPTION GRANTED

David Garcia
Division of Educational Leadership and Innovation - Tempe
-
David.Garcia@asu.edu

Dear David Garcia:

On 8/14/2019 the ASU IRB reviewed the following protocol:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title:	Peer Coaching and First-Generation College Students
Investigator:	David Garcia
IRB ID:	STUDY00010437
Funding:	None
Grant Title:	None
Grant ID:	None
Documents Reviewed:	• Symonds Interview Consent 8.11.19.pdf, Category: Consent Form; • Form-Social-Behavioral-Protocol Symonds 8.11.19.docx, Category: IRB Protocol; • Email Recruitment Interview Coaches 8.11.19.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials; • Email Recruitment Focus Group 8.11.19.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials; • First Interview with Coaches 8.11.19.pdf, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions); • Second Interview with Coaches 8.11.19.pdf, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions); • Symonds Focus Group Consent 8.11.19.pdf, Category: Consent Form; • Focus Group Questions.pdf, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions);

The IRB determined that the protocol is considered exempt pursuant to Federal Regulations 45CFR46 (2) Tests, surveys, interviews, or observation on 8/14/2019.

In conducting this protocol you are required to follow the requirements listed in the INVESTIGATOR MANUAL (HRP-103).

Sincerely,

IRB Administrator

cc: Sylvia Symonds
        Sylvia Symonds