The essence of a college summer bridge program: Voices of program participants who completed college

Makeda K. Turner

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The Essence of a College Summer Bridge Program:
Voices of Program Participants Who Completed College

by

Makeda K. Turner

Dissertation

Submitted to the College of Education
Eastern Michigan University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
Educational Leadership

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December 7, 2016

Ypsilanti, Michigan
Dedication

Thank you God for the blessings you have bestowed upon me! This doctoral dissertation is dedicated to my grandmothers, Gabrielle Smith and Elgie Sanders, two strong Black women who did not have the opportunity to obtain an education beyond the fourth grade. To my parents, Ronald and Loretta Sanders, who instilled the importance of education in my life; and to my husband, Nye Turner, children Nye II and Mya, and my brothers, Shamar and Omar Sanders. I love you all!
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Thank you to my husband for being so loving and supportive. You and the kids are my everything! Thank you to my children for their encouragement and telling me “you can do it Mommy!” Thank you to my parents, my mentee Lauren Jordon, my friends --Danielle Dunn-Davis, Dr. Naimah Wade, LaDreka Karikari, Dr. Koyonne Mims, and Sis Vivian Banks for baby-sitting my children when needed throughout this process and/or being a sounding board. You have been key factors in this journey. I LOVE YOU ALL DEARLY!

Thank you to the leadership team and my hard working co-workers in the Comprehensive Studies Program. Thank you Dr. Harold Waters for allowing me to conduct this study. Thank you Dr. Dwight Fontenot for your academic guidance and tremendous support throughout this process and reminding me that “you is smart, you is kind, and you is important.” I would not have made it without you. Thank you to all the participants of this study, I could not have done it without you!

Thank you to my classmates, Ebony Spearman for pushing me to keep going and helping me get through our qualitative research class. Thank you to the two-time Olympian Jeff Porter
for helping me get through our quantitative research class and for the weekly check-ins/
motivational phone calls.

I was a high school B student and college C student who fought my way through every
educational path. I never thought I could achieve this great accomplishment with my grades and
standardized test scores, but I am a testimony!
Abstract

In efforts to address college attrition and retention concerns, particularly as they relate to underprepared, underrepresented, and first-generation students, a few colleges and universities have created and implemented transition programs for first-year students such as summer Bridge programs (SBPs). SBPs are designed to assist students with transition challenges, enhance academic preparation, and help them achieve equal footing with other students. The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of participants in a summer Bridge program developed and implemented by a public Research I Institution in the Midwest. Participants had graduated from the university and were at the time of interview either employed or working toward an advanced degree. Purposeful sampling was used to identify seven participants who had participated in the SBP during the summers of 2008, 2009, and 2010. Two research questions guided this study:

1. How do participants in one SBP describe their experiences in the program?
2. How do they feel those experiences contributed, if at all, to their academic success throughout their college career and following graduation?

A multiple case study approach was used to explore the experiences of college graduates who participated in an SBP and reveal experiences that may have contributed to the participants’ academic and professional success beyond college graduation. The feelings, attitudes, and beliefs of seven participants of the SBP were examined through semi-structured interviews. A cross-case analysis revealed thematic constructs of the SBP that are indicators of individual student success. The themes that emerged and are discussed in the study were transition to college, confidence, community, relationships, diversity, and support. Recommendations drawn from study findings are offered to higher education staff and administrators interested in starting or improving summer Bridge or similar programs.
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Key transitions and indicators of student success

Conceptual model of this study

Transitions and indicators of student success of summer Bridge program participants
Chapter 1: Introduction

Over the years, the development of initiatives aimed at providing equal access to higher education and increased diversity on college campuses has increased. Although such efforts are important, access to a college, education does not necessarily translate into attainment of a degree. First-year students from impoverished high schools with limited resources may be academically disadvantaged compared to students from affluent high schools with many resources. Underprepared students have faced many obstacles to success once in college (Wathington, Pretlow, & Mitchell, 2011). Strayhorn (2011) argues that studies continue to show that a large number of high school graduates lack the basic skills necessary for success in college; they are academically un- or underprepared. In efforts to address attrition and retention concerns particularly as they relate to underprepared, underrepresented, and first-generation students, colleges and universities have created and implemented transition programs for first-year students such as summer Bridge programs (SBPs; Kallison & Stader, 2012; Sablan, 2014). SBPs assist students with transition challenges, enhance academic preparation, and help students achieve equal footing with other students (Kezar, 2000). Although the focus of the programs may vary depending on missions and goals, Bridge programs typically involve the academic and social aspects of college (Kezar, 2000; McCurrie, 2009). They give students a head start for the fall semester and to pair students’ educational experiences with institutional experiences (College Parents, 2015; McCurrie, 2009).

Background

Access to higher education. The history of higher education portrays a system for the elite, excluding individuals based on gender, race/ethnicity, religion, and/or social class (Eckel & King, 2004). The twentieth century marked a pivotal time for economic and social change, with
higher education becoming more accessible to the middle-class, women, and minorities (Eckel & King, 2004; Kezar, 2000). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported a total enrollment of 17.7 million undergraduate students in 2013–2014. According to the NCES (2011), there was a 48% increase in first-time freshman enrollment in degree-seeking institutions from 1995 to 2009. It is projected there will be an overall 11% increase in first-time freshman enrollment between 2009 and 2020. Post-secondary education has also become more accessible. NCES (2011) projects a 25% enrollment increase among Black students and a 46% enrollment increase among Hispanic students, but a 1% enrollment decrease of American Indian/Alaska Native students between 2009 and 2020. Students in families with low-socioeconomic status are taking advantage of opportunities to seek post-secondary education. The Digest of Education Statistics (2013) reported that 50.9% of low-income students enrolled in college in 2012. These changes in the history of higher education have provided a positive outlook for many.

Summer Bridge programs. Events such as the Civil Rights movement lead to an increase in support programs like SBPs (Kezar, 2000). The target population of these programs may vary; however, many are for students of color, first-generation, and/or low-income students (Kallison & Stader, 2012). These programs help to ensure the transition to college is as smooth and seamless as possible. The components of SBP often focus on building community, academic support, college-readiness, academic workshops, and peer mentors/advisors. There are currently many forms of SBPs within colleges and universities around the country. For example, the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) invites first year incoming students to participant to their six-week, residential SBP, the College Summer Institute. The program fees cover tuition for courses taken for credit toward graduation, housing and meals, and other student fees. The University of California Berkley’s SBP has been hosting first-year students since
1973. Currently, between 350–400 first-year students are on campus for six weeks, enrolling in courses that count for college credit. Participation fees cover tuition, room and board, textbooks and supplies, and campus costs. In contrast, the Ohio State University’s Young Scholars–College Success Program is free for participants, but courses are not credit bearing; since 1988, academic and personal enrichment workshops during the three-week program to approximately 19 participants. The University of California Santa Cruz’s free, one-week residential Bridge program selects approximately 35 participants to take non-credit courses to aid participants with the skills to be successful in the fall term.

**History of the university’s program.** The SBP at the university in this study has been in existence for many years (see Appendix A for an overview). The idea of the program originated with the director of the Learning Skills Office (W. Collins, personal communication, February 15, 2016). In 1975, the Learning Skills Office created the SBP to equip primarily in-state, minority students from inner-city high schools with a solid foundation for success in the fall term. Approximately 50 participants joined the program to strengthen their academic skills in reading, critical thinking, writing, mathematics, and study skills. Participants took three credit-bearing courses: English 125, Math 103, and CSP 100. An introduction to computing workshop (CS 198) began in 1997 to familiarize participants with the university's technological environment.

Today, the university SBP is a 7-week living-learning community program designed for a select group of approximately 250 high-achieving first-year students from groups considered underrepresented in the university (the program brochure found in Appendix B). The goals of the program are to strengthen academic skills through foundational courses, provide personalized advising and instruction, acclimate students to the university’s academic rigor, establish a
supportive and diverse environment, shape students’ personal and social adjustment to the campus environment, and expose students to campus resources. Although some SBP participants are perceived as developmental and/or remedial students (Sablan, 2014), the university’s Bridge program is not designed for students needing remediation remedial/developmental courses are designed to help students catch up and fill in the gaps and often do not count for credits toward graduation (College Parents, 2015). The entire course load of 8–9 credits in the university’s Bridge program will count toward graduation. The tuition-based program offers intensive academic preparation and highly individualized academic advising. Participants currently take a college writing course (English 125 or Writing 100), a mathematics course (Math 103), and a first-year reading seminar (CSP 100). All three credit-bearing courses appear on the student's official transcript. A mandatory 2-hour supplemental instruction workshop for writing and math is in the students’ weekly schedule. Each student has an assigned academic advisor in the SBP who will serve as their advisor for the duration of their academic career at the university. Advisors provide guidance on course selection, career planning, progress towards fulfilling degree requirements, and academic socialization. Residential peer advisors (current upper-class students) work within the program as mentors to SBP participants. Approximately 12–14 upperclassmen live within the residence hall with the participants; they also serve as assistants for the reading seminar course.

During the first week of the program, participants go through a series of orientation seminars and begin attending classes. Participants receive information from the program administrators, staff and peer advisors, campus new-student program staff, and financial aid staff. By the second and third week of the program, participants will become a little more acclimated with the campus and the expectations of course work and attend several social
functions developed by the program staff. In the fourth and fifth week of the program, participants experience what their first midterm exam in mathematics will be like. By the sixth and seventh week of the SBP, participants will be preparing for the SBP closing ceremony and moving out of the residence hall. Participants register for fall classes and should be equipped with the tools and resources for academic success. (See Appendix C for SBP weekly schedule.)

Students who participate in the SBP are selected by the university’s undergraduate admissions office. These students are admissible to the university. They may be first-generation students, come from low socioeconomic status backgrounds, and/or come from underrepresented/underserved high schools or neighborhoods. Similar to the selection criteria of the Educational Opportunity (EOP), Special Transitional Enrichment (STEP), and TRIO Programs, the SBP takes into account low-income and/or, first generation status, lower than average high school GPA, and test scores (Villalobos, 2014). Admission to the SBP is not conditional and is not optional: The SBP is mandatory for students who wish to attend the university.

**Problem**

Programs to help underprepared students gain access to college have been around since the 1800s because of the increase of “common men,” women and blacks in higher education (Kezar, 2000). More research exploring the effectiveness of a program through the eyes of a program graduate is essential. Strayhorn (2011) found that SBPs positively and significantly influenced students’ academic abilities. According to Wathington and colleagues (2011), most studies have only viewed the effectiveness of a single program and have not assessed student progress beyond the Bridge program. Sablan (2014) found research on the attitudes of students toward an SBP and their satisfaction with the program. Previous studies have not examined
effectiveness of the program in terms of launching a college experience that leads to degree completion (McCurrie, 2009). There is also a lack of data assessing the experiences of student participants of SBP as they relates to academic and professional outcomes after college graduation. Providing examples through case analyses of students who participated in an SBP, attained a baccalaureate degree, and now have a successful career may begin to fill in the gaps of research on transition programs.

**Purpose**

Although SBPs are short, however, they do introduce underprepared first-year students to college (McCurrie, 2009). Retention experts developed SBPs to address some of the challenges experienced during the first years of college (McCurrie, 2009). The purpose of this study was to investigate experiences within the SBP that may have contributed to the participants’ academic and professional success beyond college graduation. The study reveals if and how graduates who participated in the SBP perceive the program's impact on their college career and beyond. Strayhorn (2011) argues that research on SBPs lacks depth; providing insight into the world of participants of an SBP who have gone on to earn a baccalaureate degree may be helpful to higher education administrators who coordinate SBPs and academies interested in developing an SBP.

The results of the study sheds light on the profiles and backgrounds of students that attend the university's SBP. Although Bridge programs are diverse in design and vary by institution (McEvoy, 2012), a stigma is often placed on students who participate in such programs because they are perceived as being academically inept and at a high-risk of not completing college. Despite this, a study conducted by Strayhorn (2011) showed positive results regarding a student’s academic self-efficacy when he/she participated in a Bridge program. a key component of academic success and student development.
This study contributes to the literature because of its direct focus on student experiences and outcomes of participants who attended an SBP and went on to complete a baccalaureate degree. There has been some research on academic outcomes of SBP participants (Ackerman, 1991; Ami, 2001; Buck, 1985; Evans, 1999; Gold, 1992; Strayhorn, 2011; Wathington et al., 2011; Wolf-Wendel et al., 1999); however, few studies have looked at college persistence beyond SBP participation (Douglas & Attewell, 2014). However, Garcia (1991) and Murphy (2010) conducted studies that predicted retention and graduation rates; however, the lack of comparison analyses utilizing control groups to predict attrition and graduation rates has rendered results inconclusive (Kezar, 2000; Sablan, 2014). This study provides an analysis of SBP participants' experiences within a single program who have matriculated to completion of their degrees, generating qualitative data, which may capture, better than quantitative data, students' perceptions while examining key features of a program (Sablan, 2014). The results may be helpful in highlighting characteristics that add value to research on program implementation.

**Significance of Study**

There is a need to update and improve the current scope, methodology, and framing of SBP research (Sablan, 2014). Dey and Austin (1993) question the development and application of methods used to assess a student’s success in higher education. Capturing student voices and experiences provides evidence to compliment traditional retention measurements and impart thematic understanding of what causes SBP students to persevere to degree completion, both of which are significant contributions to the research literature. Data that pinpoint specific components of the SBP that were significant to participants’ academic careers will help improve SBPs. This study also illustrates the importance of community, networks and personal
relationships outside the classroom within an academic setting, and the ways networking contributes to SBP graduates' academic success. Gaining an understanding of the multiple academic support models that sustained the SBP participants is also significant.

**Delimitations**

The targeted setting of this proposed study is one public Research I institution in the Midwest. This study will include analysis from one particular SBP. The study did not include analysis and experiences from various SBPs.

The proposed qualitative study was based on interviews of participants who:

- were participants in the university’s SBP in the years of 2008, 2009, and 2010;
- graduated from the institution; and
- are currently employed in a degree-related job and/or are continuing their education.

SBP participants who are currently enrolled in an undergraduate, degree-seeking program, and have not completed an undergraduate degree are not be interviewed. Only individuals who fit the designated criteria were interviewed.

**Limitations**

The limitations of this study include potential researcher bias, since the researcher is employed by the institution where the research was conducted, and has ties with the institution's SBP, and some participants were previously advised by the researcher. Additionally, as a qualitative study limited to one SBP, findings cannot be generalized to all SBPs or participants within an SBP.

**Definition of Terms**

**Minority(ies)**—Black, Hispanic/Latino(a), American Indian/Alaska Native
Participants—Respondents to the study who had participated in a SBP

Summer Bridge Program (SBP)—Summer college program designed to assist incoming freshmen transition to the college environment academically and socially

Transition Program—A program designed to help students transition from primary school to secondary school; program may be affiliated with federal funding

Underrepresented—First-generation, low SES and/or minority students

Guiding Research Questions

This qualitative study was guided by two research questions:

1. How do participants in one SBP describe their experiences in the program?

2. How do they feel those experiences contributed, if at all, to their academic success throughout college and to career attainment following graduation?

Conceptual Framework

Upon reviewing the literature, the conceptual framework used to help understand and inform this study includes transitions and indicators of individual student success drawing from a multilayered model. The longitudinal process highlights 10 indicators that fall under four main categories (Perna & Thomas, 2008): (1) educational goals and academic preparation for college; (2) college access; (3) college academic success; and (4) enrollment in graduate school and/or career success (Perna & Thomas, 2008).

Perna and Thomas (2008) prepared a report for the National Postsecondary Education Cooperative’s Symposium on Student Success in November, 2006 that introduced the development of a conceptual model for understanding student success aimed at decreasing gaps in success among underrepresented students. Student success research by the Social Science Research Council has pointed out the need for more conceptual and reflective approaches to
explore the multiple pathways toward college access, retention, and postsecondary attainment (Perna & Thomas, 2008). To address this need, Perna and Thomas (2008) posed an overarching conceptual framework to help guide policymakers, practitioners, and researchers in the development, implementation, and evaluation of programs designed to improve student success. The model helps to develop an understanding of specific student outcomes; however, it should serve as a tool to generate a deeper understanding of the student success process for different groups of students.

Perna and Thomas’ (2008) approach to creating this framework considered the perspectives of four disciplines: economics, psychology, sociology, and education. These disciplines have the attention among discipline scholars, as they relate to indicators of student success. Economic theory explains the ways students make decisions to invest various resources in postsecondary education. Psychological theories describe how students’ attitudes, motivations, and goals shape their behaviors. Sociology includes functional, critical, and interactional theories to describe social capital that advantages some students while disadvantaging others. Education draws on theories and frameworks across disciplines to examine various indicators of student success (Perna & Thomas, 2008).

Within the context of these four disciplines, researchers define student success by identifying 10 indicators of educational attainment that represent four key transitions in a longitudinal, operationalized process to educational attainment shown in Figure 1. The first transition describes college readiness; the second is college enrollment; the third is college achievement; and the fourth represents post-college achievement.

Perna and Thomas (2008) operationalize student success as completion of one of the 10 indicators established based on state grading results from the National Center for Public Policy
and Higher Education’s accountability grading systems. Perna and Thomas's 10 indicators are educational aspirations, academic preparation, college access, college choice, academic performance, transfer, persistence, post-BA enrollment, income and educational attainment. The decision to operationalize student success using the 10 selected indicators stems from the inconsistent accountability measurements of learning outcomes per state (Perna & Thomas, 2008).

![Figure 1. Key transitions and indicators of student success.](image)

Perna and Thomas' (2008) model assumes that student success is a process that begins with college readiness, moves on to college enrollment, college achievement, and concludes with post-graduate and work experiences. The four indicators exclude other aspects that may identify a “successful” student, such as preparation before high school, choice of major, and choice of career. Academic and social college preparation interventions such as transition programs and summer Bridge programs may aid in building student success. By adopting the Perna and Thomas' transitions and indicators model and inserting “summer Bridge program” as an additional transition, the SBP can act as a moderator between college enrollment and college achievement. The term “moderator” comes from the social psychology research of Baron and
Kenny (1986) clarifying how variables may account for changes in behavior. The SBP can influence and strengthen college achievement (Baron & Kenny, 1986). The addition of the summer Bridge program as a moderator in this study's model may advance theory and research by identifying practical ways to improve student success more effectively, as well as providing evidence of other indicators of student success (Perna & Thomas, 2008).

Figure 2 displays a proposed conceptual model of this study, including the movement through student success transitions.

Figure 2. Conceptual model of this study.
Adapted from Perna & Thomas Transitions and Indicators of student success (2006)
Chapter 2: Review of Literature

This literature review explores the history of higher education as related to college readiness and access, the history of summer Bridge programs (SBPs) and similar transition programs, and previous research related to SBPs. The goal is to discuss the most recent research available on SBP and report on the absence of recent research relevant to this study. In particular, this review seeks to provide a synthesis of the various methodologies used to study SBP and to understand the benefits from those methods.

Historical Perspectives: Access to Higher Education

Higher education in the United States is based on both the British and German educational systems and highly influenced by elite philosophical theories (Eckel & King, 2004). Based on colonial societal views, the sole purpose of education was for ministry and professions, in other words, for men only (Weinstein & Harcleroad, 1983). Many individuals were denied access to higher education based on class, gender, religion, and race. Although the nineteenth century was not a pivotal time for inclusion related to diversity and access, there were events that marked positive progress toward change in higher education. According to Weinstein and Harcleroad (1983), advocacy for allowing women to attend public colleges emerged in the 1830s, and several colleges for women, including Georgia Female College and Mary Sharp College, were established.

In the United States, the Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890 opened doors for individuals to gain access to education. The Morrill Act of 1862 provided land grants to states to develop educational institutions to teach practical education in agriculture and mechanics (Morrill Act History, n.d.). The 1890 Act provided persons of color access to higher education, requiring each state to remove race as criteria for admission; this act also initiated historically Black
colleges and universities (HBCUs). These initiatives paved the way for advancements in higher education in the twentieth century.

Major developments within the twentieth century created greater equity in education. In an effort to make college admissions uniform, Nicholas Murray Butler founded the College Board in 1900, which developed standardized examinations for college application (HEA Report, 2005). The 1919 Wisconsin Bonus Act, which provided bonuses for veterans of WWI, also provided a foundation for the GI Bill. In an effort to ease the transition into civilian life for veterans, the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944 (the GI Bill) was implemented (HEA Report, 2005). This bill provided money so veterans could go to college and led to an increase in college enrollment for underrepresented groups. As college access expanded, more students considered academically unprepared enrolled in college (Sablan, 2013); support programs introduced in the 1960s helped these new populations succeed in college (Kezar, 2000; Sablan, 2013).

The development and implementation of the Higher Education Act (HEA) of 1965 by President Lyndon B. Johnson provided many opportunities for academically qualified students (HEA Report, 2005). President Johnson pushed the federal government to lead in changes in access to higher education by providing a helping hand to all students. The bill has multiple sections. Part A of Title IV of the HEA focuses on the development of transition programs to encourage disadvantaged youth to go to college.

As part of HEA, Upward Bound was the first program developed in 1964 under the Economic Opportunity Act; a second program, Talent Search, was added in 1965; and a third program focusing on Student Support Services (TRIO) was added in 1968. Later programs included Educational Opportunity and Veterans Upward Bound in 1972, Training Program for

Today, many programs still operate under the HEA of 1965. Research has found that transition programs have aided many students from Grades 6 through college graduation (U.S. Department of Education). For example, Upward Bound and Talent Search projects have served close to 1 million students, and GEAR UP and other federal programs have served over 1.2 million students (DTI Associates, n.d.). The HEA has been very beneficial in creating opportunities for disadvantaged students, and the success of the programs tied to the HEA has influenced the development and implementation of other transition programs such EOP, STEP and SBPs, which provide access and support for underrepresented students.

**Historical Perspectives: College Readiness and Transition Programs**

The evolution of the HEA of 1965 led to access to student support programs designed to provide tools and resources to ensure academic success among underprepared and underrepresented students. The University of Arizona’s (UA) New Start Summer Program (NSSP), developed in 1969, was one of the first Bridge programs (Cabera, Miner, & Milem, 2013) designed to help racial minority, low-income, and first-generation students (Cabera, Miner, & Milem, 2013). Today, the 6-week program is open to all first-year students to help them develop the skills to successfully navigate college. A quantitative analysis conducted on the UA NSSP, included survey data from participants in 1993–2009, assessing its impact on first-year students. The researchers found that the NSSP was successful in helping underrepresented students transition into UA, but not first-year retention.
Readiness and Transition Program Effectiveness: Influential Studies

Evans (1999) conducted a study on the SBP at Florida Community College, an intervention program for minority students. The six-week program provided selected minority high school graduates the opportunity to strengthen their academic and social skills in order to meet admissions requirements and increase graduation rates. Conducting a comparison analysis of program and non-program students provided Evans with data that illustrated the programs’ success. Results of the research were not groundbreaking; however, there were interesting outcomes. Evans found no significance for first or subsequent year GPA; however, the retention rate of program participants was higher than non-program participants: Only 14% of program participants left the college without completion, compared to 21% of non-program participants. These results indicate that participation in the intervention program helped prepare minority students to persist in community college.

In the more recent research, Wathington, Barnett, Weissman, Teres, Pretlow, and Nakanishi (2011b) studied of eight summer Bridge developmental programs in Texas. The eight programs, placed in two-open-admissions, four-year institutions and six community colleges, enrolled recent high school graduates in the summer of 2009 and were followed through the 2010–2011 academic year (Barnett et al., 2012; Wathington et al., 2011b). This SBP was similar structure to most SBPs in providing academic courses and extensive access to academic support staff. The programs all had four common components: academic support, accelerated classes, college awareness, and a stipend. Four of the developmental summer Bridge programs were course-based, while the other four were freestanding programs, which meant they were not based on any specific course. Instead, students received instruction on basic skills (Wathington et al., 2011b). The experimental design of this study measured the effects of
the developmental programs through two randomized groups and found that participation in the developmental summer Bridge programs encouraged more students to attempt and pass more college-level courses in math and writing, but participation had no effect on enrollment rates. Evidence was inconclusive in determining if the program would have benefited a student who was less likely to attend college. In addition, due to the four components embedded in the study, it was not possible to assess elements of each program that promoted positive student outcomes.

Increasing access to college and retention among underprepared students is an essential outcome for an SBP. Through intensive instruction and structured activities, Bridge program faculty and staff try to create environments that provide a foundation for college success. McCurrie (2009) attempted to define the meaning of a successful summer Bridge experience, looking at program administrations, instructors, and participants, and examined how those experiences influenced programmatic change. McCurrie evaluated the 4-week summer Bridge program at Columbia College Chicago designed for students that lacked academic and social readiness to gain admission in the college. The program's goal was that upon completion students would demonstrate academic readiness in reading, writing, and social behaviors. Although the research found that students who participated in the summer Bridge program stayed through the first semester at higher rates than students who did not participate in the program, this association disappeared after the first semester, perhaps due to an inability to successfully transition from basic-level to college-level course work. McCurrie (2009) argues assessing a Bridge program and finding significance is difficult due to variations in curriculum and activities.

Instruction within an SBP prepares a student for college-level course work. McCurrie's (2009) study found that instructors did not feel the English course properly remediated students
and revised the English course in 2006 to introduce students to a more challenging college-level reading and writing curriculum. Results showed that students felt more prepared for college writing and felt an increased understanding of college-level expectations after this change. Based on written feedback from a student on track to graduate and a student who did not make it past the first semester, McCurrie discovered that most students felt the Bridge program was challenging but beneficial. McCurrie feels the voices of students provide an important perspective that policymakers and administrators often ignore.

Many studies using surveys have examined college transition among SBP participants to assess academic and social engagement (Ackerman, 1991; Buck, 1985; Garcia, 1991; Gold, 1992; McCurrie, 2009; Strayhorn, 2011; Wolf-Wendel, Turtle, & Keller-Wolfe, 1991). Walpole and colleagues (2008) collected longitudinal data to determine students’ aspirations and academic and social activities and analyzed academic performance by comparing students who participated in the program with students that did not participate in the program. The results showed that many students had high aspirations to complete the summer program and go on to obtain advanced degrees (Masters, MD, JD or PhD) despite being first-generation college students. Reviewing academic performance, participants’ GPA was consistently in the low-to mid-C range in fall of 2003 and spring of 2004. Although participants received passing grades, more than half of the students reveled they received a failing grade during the semester; however, a grade of B was the mode. Having knowledge of campus resources and utilizing those resources may play a key role in academic success. Those who had participated in the Bridge program reported taking advantaged of appropriate campus resources. Being involved in clubs and organizations was not reported, although student engagement has been found to be an important factor in academic success (Walpole et al., 2008). Feedback from Bridge students
indicated they were successfully engaged academically and socially, in addition to passing most of their courses. Overall, Walpole et al. (2008) added to evidence that Bridge programs are important for the retention of underrepresented students.

Transitioning from high school to college can be an overwhelming experience. Acclimation to the culture and social aspects of college is an important factor in student success and can affect motivation. Strayhorn (2011) conducted a study on the effects of participating in a summer Bridge program that measured participant’s social and academic self-efficacy, using a sample of historically underrepresented students. The study was based on Perna and Thomas’ (2008) multilayered model of student success, measuring academic and social outcomes. A two-phase, mixed-methods design was used to obtain pretest and posttest survey data, with an optional follow up interview. Results showed that student’s social skills after the Bridge program were slightly higher, although results were not significant; however, students’ academic self-efficacy and academic skills significantly improved after participating in SBP and there was a positive association with grade point averages at the end of fall semester. Strayhorn suggests that underprepared, low-income SBP students with high academic self-efficacy will perform better academically than those with low self-efficacy.

Ackerman (1991) examined the effects of an SBP on underrepresented low-income students’ academic, personal, and social development, using a two-phase evaluation of the University of California, Los Angeles’ (ULCA) SBP. Unlike many SBP participants in previous studies (Evans, 1999; Gold, Deming, & Stone, 1992; McCurrie, 2009; Wathington et al., 2011a), the participants in this study gained full admittance into UCLA. The six-week program consisted of first-year freshmen and transfer students. To determine if the student development goals of the summer program were accomplished, a questionnaire was administered. Ackerman
discovered that participants felt moderately adjusted both academically and socially after participating in the summer program. Close to 70% of Ackerman's participants indicated that the fall term was more difficult than the summer Bridge term; however, they felt the program adequately prepared them to participate in the classroom. Ackerman also found that, despite a decline in the average GPA of participants from the summer term, the mean cumulative GPA of all participants for summer, fall, and winter semester was 2.49. Well over 90% of the freshmen and transfer participants continued into the third quarter, which is higher than campus-wide persistence rates among underrepresented students. Ackerman asserts that the results of this study clearly indicate SBPs can help underrepresented, low-income students transition into and persist through college.

Degree attainment is the ultimate determinate of success (Murphy Gaughan, Hume, & Moore, 2010). Many SBPs were designed to increase the retention and graduation rates of underprepared and/or underrepresented students. Little research has been done on degree attainment among SBP participants (Buck, 1985; Douglas & Attewell, 2014; Murphy et al., 2010). Douglas and Attewell (2014) attempted to assess the effectiveness of SBPs by analyzing national data from transcripts and data from a multi-campus community college system. They employed statistical methods to correct for selection biases and to predict participant persistence over a 6-year span. Results indicated that summer Bridge participants prosper more in key educational outcomes than similar students who did not participate in a program. SBP participants were significantly more likely to enroll their second year of college and out-performed non-program participants by 2 grade points. SBP participants passed more academic courses and had a statistically higher chance of graduating than non-Bridge students.
Murphy et al. (2010) focused on the likelihood underrepresented students in science and technical disciplines would graduate after participating in an SBP. To create a robust evaluation, the study assessed multiple influential factors such as race, gender, socioeconomic status, high school GPA, test scores, and advance placement credits to determine whether participation in an SBP was associated with a better probability of graduation. Participation in an SBP was found to be highly related to the likelihood of graduation. Women and students with higher socioeconomic statuses were found to be more likely to graduate than men and students with lower SES. Consistent with Murphy et al. (2010), high school GPA and advanced placement credits were positively associated with college graduation; on the other hand, test scores were not positively associated with graduation.

Retention of students and degree completion of underrepresented students are major areas of concern, and many aspects of SBPs are designed to address them. The studies in this section show that SBP participation improves student retention and the probability students will attain a degree completion. In conclusion, the literature reviewed revealed that participation in an SBP can improve access to higher education, social and academic preparation, and degree completion for participants. The literature also shows the importance of SBPs for underrepresented and low-income students. The literature review provided a solid foundation to guide the direction of the proposed study, which was designed to address gaps in the research relative to elements within a program that may positively affect student success outcomes. There is a lack of research involving Bridge participants lived experiences, and contributing factors to degree attainment. This study helps determine programmatic factors within an SBP that may encourage positive and effective changes within Bridge programs.
**Conceptual Model: Influential Studies**

The work of Perna and Thomas (2008) has been used by several investigators to examine college student success (Taylor, 2015; Nuñez & Kim, 2012; Strayhorn, 2011; Roksa, 2010). These studies examined college access, college entrance, and the academic success of programs designed particularly for students of color. Outcome measures often included college enrollment, persistence, bachelor’s degree attainment, and other institutional performance measurements. This review examines the most seminal of these studies by content area.

**College Access.** Taylor (2015) conducted research on how dual credit enrollment may or may not have influence on college access and college completion amongst low-income high school students of color. Utilizing a quasi-experimental approach, Taylor drew from Perna and Thomas’ college choice portion of the model, in addition to Rawls’ (1999) Theory of Justice to provide a foundation of educational policy and practice (Taylor, 2015). Taylor gathered data of the high school student class of 2003 in Illinois from the Illinois Educational Research Council and from the National Student Clearinghouse for college enrollment and completion records from fall 2001 through fall 2010.

In the analysis, Taylor (2015) found that dual credit students were 34% more likely to enroll in college and 22% more likely to complete college compared to non-dual credit students. Students of color, who were dually enrolled, were 26% more likely to enroll in college and 14% more likely to complete college compared to non-dual enrolled credit students of color (Taylor, 2015). Similar to students of color, low-income, dual credit students were 30% more likely to enroll in college and 16% more likely to complete college than low-income, non-dual credit students (Taylor, 2015). According to Taylor (2015), the results of the study provided useful analytical framework to dual credit participation while examining the many factors that impact
dual credit selection and potential outcomes. The model was used to guide the researcher in determining independent variables to generate the propensity scoring such as academic achievement and academic and career expectations.

**College Readiness & Enrollment.** Nuñez and Kim (2012) examined how college enrollment patterns of Latino students may be influenced by the individual student, the school, and the state utilizing a multilevel statistical framework. In the quantitative study, Nuñez and Kim provide a comprehensive look at the influences on Latino students’ college access by focusing on three units of analysis: student-level characteristics, high school characteristics, and state-level factors (Nuñez & Kim, 2012).

Utilizing the college choice portion of the Perna and Thomas model as groundwork, the researchers identify three main levels of influence on college access: individual; high school; and social, historical, and political context (Nuñez & Kim, 2012).

Nuñez and Kim’s (2012) study revealed that college enrollment predictors were most significant at the student level for Latino students, rather than the school or state level. Other findings found that Latino females were more likely to enroll in college than Latino males, and parental influences have significantly large positive effects on college enrollment among Latino students (Nuñez & Kim, 2012). In viewing the school-level and state-level characteristics, Nuñez and Kim’s (2012) research shows that there is a negative association with four-year enrollment and schools with higher levels of free lunch recipients. They also found that teacher education can have an effect on college enrollment. Schools with more teachers with graduate degrees have greater odds of students attempting four-year enrollment than schools with smaller levels of teacher that have graduate degrees (Nuñez & Kim, 2012). These results provide
evidence that Perna and Thomas’ model addresses the college enrollment of Latino students’ using high school and state level criteria.

A study to examine factors that affect Latinos’ enrollment in Hispanic-serving institutions (HSIs) was conducted by Nuñez, Sparks, & Hernández (2011). Data collected from the U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics was used to explore the characteristics of community college students, comparing students in HSIs versus non-HSIs (Nuñez, Sparks, and Hernández, 2011). Perna and Thomas’ model was used as a structure to understand and evaluate the factors that related to Hispanics’ enrollment in community colleges and HSIs (Nuñez, Sparks, & Hernández, 2011).

The research of Nuñez, Sparks, and Hernández (2011) confirmed the importance 2-year HSIs for Latino students’ and students from underrepresented backgrounds as it relates to access to higher education. The research also suggests that HSIs plays a key role in access to higher education to non-White community college students (Nuñez, Sparks, & Hernández, 2011). Compared to 2-year non-HSI students, Nuñez, Sparks, and Hernández (2011) found that students attending HSI are more likely to transfer to a 4-year institution. The study results raised questions concerning whether Perna and Thomas’ theory properly speaks to factors such as demographics and family influences of Latino students regarding college choice (Nuñez, Sparks, & Hernández, 2011). The research calls for a deeper understanding of how such theories should be or can be integrated into the processes of college choice.

**College Achievement.** Strayhorn (2011) conducted a study on summer Bridge program participants at a highly selective, research-extensive, predominately White institution (PWI) that attempts to understand the multiple pathways individuals succeed in higher education. The purpose of the study was to measure the effect of participating in an SBP. The student sample
consisted of 55 entering first-year students that participated in a required 5-week precollege SBP. The study was based on Perna and Thomas’ model that shaped student success, measuring academic and social outcomes. A two-phase (pretest/posttest) mixed methods design was used to collect data from this sample of participants. An optional follow-up interview was conducted to explore statistical findings. A larger study consisted of both quantitative and qualitative elements. There were several basic assumptions about student success that informed the model to Strayhorn’s study, which include the following: multiple theoretical approaches provide a fuller understanding of constructs of student success; student success is shaped upon many factors within the context of academic and social outcomes; differences of student success lie within group behaviors, individual traits, and academic histories such as race/ethnicity, sex, and social economic status (Strayhorn, 2011).

Comparing pretest and posttest data, Strayhorn (2011) found that mean of students’ academic self-efficacy at the end of the program was significantly higher than that prior to the program. The pretest and posttest comparing the students’ sense of belonging results indicated the mean was slightly higher than the mean of students’ sense of belonging prior to the program. The mean of the students’ academic skill at the end of the program were significantly higher than the mean academic skills prior to the program. Students’ social skills were slightly higher than the mean social skills prior to the program. The results show that high school GPA was most strongly and positively related to SBP participants’ first semester GPAs. This result affirms the assumption that student success is a longitudinal process of movement through critical transitions from college readiness, college enrollment and college achievement (Strayhorn, 2011).
Post-College Attainment. With more focus on graduation rates and accountability pressures on institutional performances, Roksa (2010) explored the role of state characteristics in facilitating student success in higher education. Perna and Thomas’ four levels—college readiness, college enrollment, college achievement and post college attainment—are used to examine the state characteristics and polices related to student outcomes in higher education in this study. The data used for the analyses are based on a study the Postsecondary Education Transcript Study, a component of the National Education Longitudinal Study 1988–2000 (Roksa, 2010). In the two-step process, Roksa (2010) examined how the distribution of enrollments in 2-year versus 4-year public institutions is related to bachelor degree completion of students attending 4-year institutions.

The results of the study suggest that the more students that attend community colleges in the state, the higher the probability of bachelor degree completion (Roksa, 2010). This showcases the importance of gaining a deeper understanding of how student outcomes are related to state context and the distributions of enrollment in public higher education (Rokas, 2010). In contrast, the state context results revealed that size matters, the larger the size of the community college, the lower the probability of students attending a 4-year institution, and the more community college students that enter a 4-year institution, the higher the probability of not completing a degree. There was no relation between state environment and degree attainment of 4-year versus 2-year entry. The findings imply the need to reflect holistically about student success (Roksa, 2010).
Chapter 3: Methodology

This qualitative study used a multiple case study approach to explore the experiences of college graduates who participated in an SBP in order to better understand the potential long-term effects of the SBP experiences on college graduates. The researcher examined the feelings, attitudes, and beliefs of multiple participants of an SBP through semi-structured interviews. The goal was to gain a deeper insight and understanding of the human experiences of attending an SBP (McCracken, 1998; van Manen, 1990). The design of the study was guided by the work of Robert E. Stake an expert in multiple case study qualitative analyses.

Research Design

The multiple case study approach displays commonalities across each case that enables an understanding of what Stake has called the “quintain” central to the multiple case study approach (Stake, 2006, p. 39). Stake (2006) defines the “quintain” (pronounced kwin’ton) as “an object or phenomenon that focuses the study…in multi-case study it is the target collection…the quintain is the arena or holding company or umbrella for the cases being studied” (p. 6). The researcher was able to explore differences within and between cases (Baxter & Jack, 2008). According to Greene and David (1984), a multi-case design must be explanatory, meaningful, and comparable. Based on the intended research, an instrumental, multiple case study helped describe the lived experiences and commonalities within the phenomenon (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Creswell, 2013; van Manen, 1990). The “quintain” in this study was identified as attending an SBP and graduating from college (Creswell, 2013). The results of interviewing individuals who have experienced the SBP described “what” the participants experienced and “how” they experienced it (Creswell, 2013). The use of an instrumental, multiple case study played a supportive role in facilitating the understanding of the SBP (Baxter & Jack, 2008).
**Validity and Reliability.** Proper steps were taken to demonstrate the credibility of this qualitative study (Creswell & Miller, 2000). As the researcher, it was important to gather data properly in addition to, reporting the analyzed and interpreted findings appropriately. Merriam (1998) argues:

> Regardless of the type of research, validity and reliability are concerns that can be approached through careful attention to a study’s conceptualization and the way in which the data were collected, analyzed, and interpreted, and the way in which the findings are presented. (p. 199)

Merriam (1998) contends, “Reliability in a research design is based on the assumption that there is a single reality and that studying it repeatedly will yield the same results” (p. 205). This is possible in traditional experimental research; however, it is not in qualitative research (Merriam, 1998). In qualitative research, there are many interpretations of occurrences, so there is no benchmark of repeated measures nor established reliability in a traditional sense (Merriam, 1998). The use of a structured research design and data analysis method addressed potential concerns regarding validity and reliability.

**Triangulation.**

Creswell (2013) recommends “multiple strategies for validation when studying one’s own organization or workplace” (p. 151). Two main strategies were utilized: triangulation and clarifying researcher biases. Information was collected through multiple methods, such as the departmental online advising file, program brochures, departmental memos, and other pertinent historical documents. In addition, interview transcriptions helped enhance validity (Creswell, 2013). Data sets, such as high school and college GPA, and personal background information was collected from the departmental online advising file.
**Researcher Bias.** Many biases can arise if the researcher does not disclose personal connections to the study. Identifying personal experiences and the background of the researcher, controlled for any “biases, prejudices, and orientations that may have shape the interpretations and approach to the study” (Creswell, 2013 p. 251). As an employee of the university, in addition to working for the organization in which the SBP is housed, the researcher fully addressed subjectivity. Strategies utilized for validity and reliability, in addition to controlling for researcher bias, was a journaling process. After each interview, the researcher recorded personal thoughts and reflections in a journal to reflect upon familiarity with the organization and how the researcher makes sense of the data. The researcher was fully aware that the interactions with the organization and participants may cause issues of power and risk (Creswell, 2013). The use of multiple validation methods eliminated the risk of issues such as this arising and ensured accuracy and insight (Creswell, 2013).

The researcher has been with the university for over 11 years, working within the office of undergraduate admissions, and various departments across the academy. The researcher currently works within the university’s summer Bridge program as a professional staff member. Being in this role, the researcher recognized educational characteristics within SBP participants that were similar to her own experiences. To control for validity and reliability, the researcher wrote a reflective passage to process her own educational experiences and emotions presented throughout this study.

**Procedure**

**Identifying Sample Population.** Table 1 displays the effort made to identify sample population of the case studies that represent students of 2008, 2009, and 2010 cohort years.
Table 1.

*Summer Bridge Student Demographics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>(%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Enrollment</strong></td>
<td>214</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>221</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Females</em></td>
<td>144</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Males</em></td>
<td>70</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethnicity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>African American</em></td>
<td>125</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Asian American</em></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Caucasian</em></td>
<td>36</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Latino/a</em></td>
<td>30</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Native American</em></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Other</em></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>In-State</strong></td>
<td>175</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Out-State</strong></td>
<td>39</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In order to achieve the goals of this research, the sample population of interviewees for this study had participated in the university’s SBP, graduated from the university, and been employed and/or were continuing their education at the time of the study. Creswell (2013) suggests that participants should be able to adequately articulate the lived experience. This study used the commonly expected norm 6-year graduation or fewer rate timeline to define eligible participants. Interviewees for this study participated in the SBP during the summers of 2008, 2009, and 2010. Purposeful sampling was utilized to better understand the experience of SBP participants (Creswell, 2013). Access to participants was gained through personal connections at the university. With the assistance of the department’s associate director, 23 former Bridge participants were identified that fit the study’s perimeters and sample population of the 2008, 2009, and 2010 cohorts. These former Bridge participants had been in contact with a member of the department within the last year, and graduated with at least a 2.5 GPA. The former
participants were broken into three tiers to determine who would be contacted to participate in the study. The first tier (8) of former participants had been in contact within the last three months, the second tier (8) had been in contact within the last 6 months, and the third tier (6) had been in contact within the last year.

After research approval (see Appendix C), an email (see Appendix D) was sent to the first tier to acquire the targeted sample population to participate in study. Six out of the eight agreed to participate in the study and were interviewed within the course of two months. Although the targeted participant’s response was between 5 and 10 cases, upon further consideration, based on the data gathered during interviews, the researcher wanted to gain perspective from another male participant. The two males in Tier 2 were sent an invitation email, which only one responded to within two weeks. Seven cases participated in this study (see Tables 2 and 3), providing diverse perspectives of the 2008, 2009, and 2010 cohorts.

After reviewing fundamental literature on qualitative research (Creswell, 2013; McCracken, 1998; Seidman 2006; Stake, 2006) the preferred sample size for this study was a minimum of 5, but no more than 10 respondents. According to Creswell (2013), five cases are sufficient for a multiple case study. A focus on administering in-depth interviews to provide powerful stories to a smaller number of participants was executed (Creswell, 2013; Seidman, 2006).
Table 2

Participant Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SBP Cohort</th>
<th>Residency Status</th>
<th>High School GPA</th>
<th>Estimated Family Income</th>
<th>Family Background</th>
<th>Ethnic Group</th>
<th>First Generation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leslie</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>In-State</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Two Family household, African American</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trisha</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>In-State</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Single parent household, Caucasian</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexis</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>In-State</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>25-50K</td>
<td>Two Family household, Latino</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brandon</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Out-State</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Divorced Two Family household, African American</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>In-State</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>&gt;100K</td>
<td>Single parent household, Latino</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maurice</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>In-State</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>25-50K</td>
<td>Single parent household, African American</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Megan</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>In-State</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>&lt;25K</td>
<td>Single parent household, African American</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>SBP GPA</th>
<th>Cum. College GPA</th>
<th>College Degree</th>
<th>Year Degree Conferred</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leslie</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>Psychology BA</td>
<td>2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trisha</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>Psychology BA</td>
<td>2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexis</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>Psychology BA</td>
<td>2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brandon</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>History BA</td>
<td>2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>Sociology BA</td>
<td>2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maurice</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>Economics BA</td>
<td>2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Megan</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>English BA</td>
<td>2012</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One recorded, approximately 90-minute, one-on-one interview was conducted with the seven respondents. In efforts for respondents to “reconstruct their experiences, anything shorter than 90-minutes is too short” (Seidman, 2006, p. 20). In efforts to make the interview process as seamless as possible, one interview was the best fit for the study.

Keeping in mind the goal of the central research question to explore the experiences of SBP participants as it relates to student success, several open-ended questions was asked (see Appendix F: Interview Protocol). With efforts to grasp the full experience of the respondents, the proposed research questions were as follows:

1. How do participants in one SBP describe their experiences in the program?
2. How do they feel those experiences contributed, if at all, to their academic success throughout their college career and following graduation?

The intent of the proposed questions was to successfully draw from the respondents’ experiences to tell an accurate story (Colazzi, 1978). The interview protocol was piloted with a former SBP participant before beginning the interview to assess the potential responses of participants. In the pilot, the researcher took notes on responses and was able to determine the way in which the former participant processed the questions within interview protocol. The researcher discovered the questions within the interview protocol were understood by the former participant based on
the responses. The positive reactions to the questions during the pilot provided a sense of affirmation and confidence to the researcher.

**Data Analysis**

In an attempt to accurately articulate the transcribed data, the researcher applied a cross-case analysis to support valid inferences from the multiple cases (Greene & David, 1984; Stake, 2006). Stake (2006) provides three different procedures to follow in the cross-case analysis process: Track I: Emphasizing Case Finding, Track II: Merging Case Findings, and Track III: Providing Factors for Analysis. With the desire to focus more on the commonalities across the multiple cases, not an individual case, Track II: Merging Case Finding of Stake’s cross-analysis procedure was best suited for this qualitative study. The procedure is as follows:

1. Read all the respondents transcriptions to make sense of them.
2. Upload data into qualitative software.
3. Use worksheet 1 to compile key findings and theme-based assertions (see Appendix G).
4. Numerically sort and merge the findings case by case.
5. Study the content of clusters and create titles for merged findings.
6. Take note of the best 4–8 merged finding titles.
7. Sort the merged findings in order of importance for understanding the SBP theme by theme (high, medium, low).
8. Develop multi-case assertions.
9. Input final assertions into Worksheet 2 (see Appendix H).
10. Organize the data for a final report using Worksheet 3 (see Appendix I).

The qualitative software tool MaxQDA was used to analyze the data for reoccurring themes.
Once Procedure 4 (numerically sort and merge the findings case by case) of Stake’s data analysis process was complete, the researcher discovered the reoccurrence of several themes that were similar among all the cases. The researcher was also able to identify one participant that had a contrasting experience, which provided new data to the study. This occurrence alerted the researcher that no other interviews were needed to gather more data; therefore, the seven participants sufficed the study. According to Fusch and Ness (2015), if one has reached the point of no new data, or no new themes, one has reached data saturation.
Chapter 4: Research Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of summer Bridge program (SBP) participants at a Research I institution in the Midwest and to see how those experiences may have played a role in their undergraduate career, as well as beyond their completion of a baccalaureate degree. With efforts to grasp the full experience of the participants, the following research questions guided the study:

1. How do participants in one SBP describe their experiences in the program?
2. How do they feel those experiences contributed, if at all, to their academic success throughout their college career and following graduation?

This study was based on interviews of seven participants who:

- were participants in the university’s SBP in the years of 2008, 2009, or 2010;
- graduated from the institution;
- are currently employed in a degree-related job and/or are continuing their education.

The next section will introduce the seven cases and the themes that emerged from the individual interviews. The final section will discuss the cross-case findings materialized across all the cases.

Case Study: Leslie

Leslie was happy to share her college experiences. The day of the interview, she opened the door with a big smile and her arms opened wide for a hug. Leslie’s mother was there visiting Leslie and her husband, but she had left before the interview. Leslie is a 26-year-old “clinical social worker” who completed her Master of Social Work degree in 2013. She currently works at a local hospital’s orthopedics department. Most of her work entails counseling patients who have elected or planned surgery from various injuries or ortho-trauma patients who have
experienced injuries in accidents. Leslie works to set up rehabilitation arrangements for patients after surgery. She also serves as an on-call social worker once a month for the maternal child department. Ultimately, Leslie “would like to ideally work with children in a children’s hospital.”

**Early Education.** Leslie made it clear during her interview that education was very prominent in Leslie’s childhood. Growing up in the inner city, with both parents in the household and two older brothers, Leslie attended small schools throughout her early educational career; however, middle school and high school were much larger environments. Leslie explained:

And then for middle school…well I left that school and then I went to Paul Robeson for seventh and eighth grade and that was different, that was a big transition because Nataki [previous school] was really small. It was really intimate and Paul Roberson was really big and the kids [were] a little bit different, like it was a different transition. But it was different in a sense that it was larger, and it was different in a sense where I had to get to know people all over again. I was used to being in the same classroom with these students for the last seven years, so that was a huge transition, and then went straight to Cass, and loved Cass!

**High School.** Leslie went to Cass Technical High School in Detroit. Transitioning from to a smaller environment was a different experience for Leslie, yet she was still able to find community by her involvement in swim and track. Leslie reflected:

High school was fun, I had a ball. I consider myself to be an extrovert, outgoing, so I didn’t have a hard time transitioning to high school. A lot of people I went to
middle school with, we all went to Cass so I knew people it wasn’t awkward being the only person in class like it was in middle school so that was easy. I quickly became close to people that was on the track team, the swim team, so overall I think I had a great school experience.

Being involved in sports was a great contribution to Leslie’s high school experience. She stated:

Swimming was a big part of my life. I started swimming when I was five so, we were a part of the Y, we were a part of other like local African American-based swim teams. I could have swum in college, but I didn’t want to because it was not fun anymore, and I was not trying to practice twice a day every day and have it take over my life. So that was that.

Thinking ahead about her college experience, Leslie recognized that being a part of a college sports team meant more commitment. It could also potentially put a strain on academic performance. Being aware of these factors, she decided to focus on college access without athletics in mind.

There was an unspoken expectation that college was the only next step after high school for Leslie. She explained:

It was always a no brainer, like going to college was like going to high school after middle school. It was never an option, it was never like “what am I going to do after high school?”

Leslie was surrounded by very positive individuals:

I was influenced by I would say my parents and then my social group too, all my friends were applying for college, everybody I went to high school with was applying for colleges.
Applying to a top tier institution such as the university in this study, Leslie was nervous about getting accepted:

I was intimidated because [the university] is really a huge university and I was also intimidated because I really honestly in high school didn’t think I was going to get into [the university], so it wasn’t until meeting [admissions representatives] that I kind of got a boost of confidence.

In high school, Leslie was a good student overall; however, her ACT scores were a little lower than some of her classmates: “A lot of people were getting like 25, 26, 27’s and I was barely maintaining a 20 ACT, 21 ACT.”

**Admission to College.** When Leslie was admitted to the summer Bridge program (SBP) at the university, she described how she felt:

I was really intimidated and kind of scared to go to [the university] because looking on paper I didn’t, in my opinion, I didn’t qualify. So I think when I originally got into Bridge it kind of had that perception like Bridge is for people that need this extra boost so originally I was like kind of thinking [it has] a negative connotation towards it. “Did I get accepted based on these premises of me not having like a certain ACT score?” Or so I kind of thought at first that’s what it was, I don’t know, something I needed to kind of make sure I was on the same level as other students.

She reacted to the required program’s admission decision with mixed emotions:

At the time, I was like “what is Bridge, why do I have to go to school in the summertime?” you know “why is this a requirement?” So at the time I did not want to go because I wanted a break, well you got a little break and then you went
straight through in the summertime so at the time I did not want to go just because
I wanted that time off.

If Leslie planned to attend the university, she knew she had to attend the SBP. Like many
students who find they have to attend the program, Leslie expressed concerns about not having a
break, which is a common response.

**SBP Experience.** Despite her doubt and reservations about starting college in the
summer, Leslie understood the goals of the program. She explained:

I knew what the Bridge program was for. I knew what it was all about. It’s pretty
much a boost to get you acclimated with the campus, with the classes, with the
workload so I knew that.

When Leslie got to campus, she was greeted with familiar faces from high school. Leslie’s voice
perked up, “a lot of people came from Cass, so I knew a lot of people.” Finding community was
something Leslie never struggled with, so college was no different than her early childhood
experiences. She connected with many peers, faculty, and staff members on campus and built
very meaningful relationships. Leslie reflected upon the connections made in the program: “the
same people I had those relationships in Bridge, are the same people I am still in contact with
now.” Building community within the program was essential to Leslie’s acclimation to the
campus environment.

**Resources.** Through her exposure to campus resources early in the college career, Leslie
made sure she took advantage of many opportunities offered as a college student. The academic
advising office was one resource that Leslie utilized often. This resource was more than just a
place to discuss academic challenges, or to schedule classes. It was an inviting place where
Leslie felt safe and supported. Leslie described the connections made with program academic advisors:

I really gained relationships before the fall semester started. You have a smaller group of people that you were able to go to, like the advisors about different questions versus, you know, going to the [general advisors] where you had so many different other students that they’re working with. So, I like the intimacy of it. It’s like a smaller school within a big university. So that helped me picked classes. It helped me figure out my major and things like that.

In the SBP, Leslie was able to connect with multiple advisors that worked with the program. She felt the SBP advisors were able to support her better than the university’s general advisors. Leslie added:

I can remember like [off] the top of my head, people that stood out that was there all four years. [They] helped me make decisions, and helped me figure out my schedule, and what worked best for me. And how to maneuver through [the university] in a steady way.

It is evident that the advising office was an important resource that was memorable to Leslie.

Another resourceful person that stood out from Leslie’s SBP experience was her math instructor. She stated: “I think the way she was able to teach and the way she was able to explain things, I feel like that stood out to me the most.” Leslie then began to expounded:

I feel like her personality and her passion, and her dedication towards math or the program in general just automatically played a role on other students. You went into her class and you felt like somebody truly like cared for you! She took the time to do one-on-one tutoring, you know, tutoring in the evenings, tutoring on
Saturdays, like she made her schedule fit your schedule so you could really succeed not only in the Bridge program but at [the university] overall.

Leslie clearly articulates the resources gained within the program were essential assets in the fall term, and throughout her college career.

**Academics.** Leslie was grateful for the academic contributions the SBP made in her college career at the university. Although Leslie was a little nervous to attend such a rigorous institution, she did not allow her fear stop her academic performance. Academically, she established a strong GPA early. Leslie shared:

I feel like being a part of Bridge really gave me that boost of confidence that I needed to be at this huge university and this huge predominantly White university as well being the only Black kid in class and having to maneuver and figure out that, and different identities I feel like it was helpful in that sense.

Gaining the confidence early by performing well academically proved to Leslie that she belonged at the university. It provided her the reassurance that she can compete with her peers who appeared to be more prepared academically on paper. In addition, Leslie felt the program helped to ameliorate her feelings of being the only person of color in classroom settings.

**Social.** Leslie felt she had an advantage over some of her high school friends that attended the university but did not participate in the SBP. Leslie shared:

Socially, you got to go to different parties on campus. You got to learn about different extra curricular activities, so you got to do a lot of stuff that you wouldn’t normally do with the fall semester, so you got exposed to things early.

Leslie was appreciative of the early exposure to campus. Participating in the SBP helped her experience both the academic and social aspects of college life in the summer. Leslie shared her
thoughts regarding the program: “I feel like it helped me understand how to balance social life and how to balance academics at the same time.” Devoting the right proportion of time in each area is important in one’s life. She reflected and giggled:

It's funny, like before I started Bridge I didn’t want to start. But, then when we finished Bridge and we started the real semester those that weren’t a part of Bridge were like wishing they did come to Bridge cause everybody already knew each other.

With campus being more relaxed during the summer term, students have the opportunity to enjoy campus in a less hectic environment. SBP students are able to learn the campus and build community with one another. Leslie gave an example:

You already knew everybody. You already knew how to get around campus. You already knew how to go to different places, verses somebody else that had a 3-day orientation. So, that’s when I realized the true benefits of Bridge. When I actually started the full semester and a lot of people that didn’t to Bridge, missed out on those intimate experiences.

Even though Leslie’s interview suggested that there was a sense of stigma placed upon students who participated in the program, she clearly found there is great value in the experience. Connecting to campus earlier displays that SBP participants have a sense of assurance. This often leaves non-SBP participants who come from similar high schools aspiring for that same sense of affirmation.
Key Themes

Positive Influences.

The company one keeps can influence us in you more ways than we can image. Leslie always surrounded herself with positive people who strived to do great things. Just like her, many of Leslie’s friends participated in clubs, organizations, and/or sports teams:

We were involved in high school! We were a part of extracurricular activities, so being around a peer group that was doing the exact same thing that I was doing.

Leslie attributes her desire to seek higher education to her parents and her peers:

I can imagine if I wasn’t around those people, I’m pretty sure that would [have] influenced me to maybe do something different. But, because I was around people that were interested in going to school, going to college that was pretty much a no brainer that I was going to go to college.

Another social group that was a positive influence for Leslie was a high school group called Delteens: “It was an organization at the time, it was Southfield alumni chapter for Delta Sigma Theta.” This group exposed Leslie to valuable opportunities. She shared: “I was really exposed to different leadership roles and then we went on a college tour to a lot of the HBCU’s.” This encouraged Leslie to join the organization on the college level at the university.

In the college setting, Leslie’s peer groups were positive influences when it came to academics and studying. Leslie stressed how the SBP environment forced a bond:

You study with your friends! If nobody else understood what was going on, you all went to the undergraduate library. [We even] studied together in the dorms. So, I think that was kind of—when you’re around the same people every single day from morning to sun down you can’t help but to get close.
Leslie expressed the many ways in which people that are great influences in her life have surrounded her. Leslie’s parents provided the foundation of what positive support should resemble. Leslie’s involvement in extracurricular activities, in addition to attending a college-ready school, encouraged friendships with productive peers. Those relationships then continued throughout college.

*Confidence.*

As it relates to Leslie’s academic experience, she felt the SBP “contributed because I started off with a GPA, it gave me a boost of confidence--cause I was really intimidated.” Leslie lacked confidence in her academic preparedness for the university. The SBP helped build her tenacity and change her mind set. Leslie admits her study skills were not strong. She talked about studying in high school compared to college:

In high school, I didn’t study. You know, I studied but it wasn’t like in high school I went to a library and sat down for 4 hours at a time and really studied for an exam. I feel like I could come home, study for an hour or two, write a paper last minute and still do fine. But when I got to [the university] I realized like you gotta go to the library. You gotta sit down [and] study, if you don’t understand you need to go get counseling or get a tutor. So, I didn’t really study until I got to college.

Leslie quickly realized the lackadaisical behaviors from high school did not go over well in the college setting. She understood that in order to be successful, a student must put the time into studying and seek out supplemental instruction for re-enforcement.

*Intimate Community.*

Leslie made many connections throughout college; however, the strong sense of community was
prominent through her SBP experience. She acknowledged how faculty and staff worked hard to make the SBP participants feel supported as one community. Leslie talks about how despite having separate groups of friends, there is still a special affinity: “we all had a connection, we all had our small group of friends, and then it was like the Bridge kids clique.” The students develop a bond that is sometimes carried throughout a lifetime.

Within the SBP, Leslie recognized the program’s advisors were an essential part of the community. She became very acquainted with the advising office and visited frequently. Leslie provided a detailed example of how the office was a vital resource in the community:

I feel like the CSP [Comprehensive Studies Program (advising office)] was so intimate and small. The resource in general of being able to walk in, and talk about things that you may not have felt comfortable talking to someone that couldn’t identify with a lot of your issues. That resource in general, seeing another Black advisor, or another Black student, or you know someone you can talk to that has experienced a lot of things they’ve experienced already. To give true, genuine advice was a great resource in itself. [When] I went to one of the [general] advisors before, (Leslie pauses to gather her thoughts) it just wasn’t the same as CSP, it wasn’t the same intimacy, it wasn’t the same experience overall, it didn’t seem genuine.

From a student’s perspective, Leslie communicates the importance of seeing professional staff that she could relate to personally. Leslie felt she could be herself with the CSP advising office. In comparison to her experience with the general advising office, the CSP office was more authentic in their approach to advising.
**Transitioning to College.**

Successful college transition can be difficult for many students. Adjusting to the college culture academically and socially can be challenging. The SBP provides students the ability to acclimate to campus early. Leslie was very pleased with the outcome of her SBP experience: “My expectations were met because I started with at 3.5 GPA, [and] I knew the campus front to back.” Leslie felt she was able to obtain a “good GPA” by taking a lighter workload in the summer term. This allowed Leslie to adjust to well academically.

The size of a college campus can be very intimidating. Having the opportunity to learn how to get around on campus before most first-year students was rewarding. Leslie described the benefits of coming to campus early:

> I loved it! I got to learn the campus cause the university has a huge campus, learning how to catch the bus, commute back and forth, be independent on my own, and getting a step ahead.

Leslie was proud to develop independence on her own. Being able to learn the campus allowed Leslie to adjust well at the university.

**Case Study: Trisha**

Trisha’s interview was the day before the last day students could drop a class without receiving a withdrawal on their transcripts. Needless to say, the office was busy and filled with students waiting for advice from advisors. Trisha waited patiently in the lobby area of the office amongst all the craziness for this researcher, who was serving as one of the advisors. As she was being called in for her interview, a current student ran into the office requesting assistance regarding a class he wanted to drop. After the advisor/researcher had helped the student with the mini-crisis, Trisha was finally able to come in for her interview. She jumped up from the
chair with a big smile and her arms extended, showing an understanding of the demands of an academic advisor’s responsibilities. Trisha works within a hospital as a project manager in the Department of Urology. She also co-leads diversity and equity initiatives within the health system working with projects that promote diversity within the organization. In December 2015, Trisha received a Masters of Social Work degree in management of human services, with a specialization in health care. She looks to move up the career ladder by obtaining a managerial position in the near future.

**High School.** As an only child, Trisha had many responsibilities growing up. She shares, “I was an only child on my Mom’s side; my Dad had two sons prior to me, so I have two half-brothers.” Trisha’s parents divorced when she was young. Trisha and her mom lived with her grandmother, whom she cared for during the evenings while her mother worked. Trisha provided more detail:

I actually took care of her because she was disabled. My mom worked third shift, and I would stay with my grandmother and take care of her like during the evening and night time, and then go to school during the day.

After Trisha’s grandmother passed away, she continued to maintain the home while her mom worked nights. With the pressures of taking care of home, Trisha was still able to do well in high school: “I go all A’s! I don’t know, like I never got anything else.” Trisha does admit she did not attend a challenging high school:

It definitely wasn’t tough I would say. I don’t feel like the teachers were necessarily as dedicated to our learning experience, and some of them were definitely not as qualified to be like teaching kids who want to go to college.
Despite the lack of rigor, Trisha had aspirations to attend a competitive college, so she worked to excel in all areas. Trisha was involved in multiple sports in addition to extracurricular activities:

[In] high school I played a lot of sports. I was defiantly involved. I tried to get involved in like every single thing that I could because I knew I really wanted to go to college, and I wanted to go to a good school, so I just stayed involved. I played volleyball. I worked in a group called Teens Against Poverty where we went out into the community and helped families. I was in the National Honors Society. I just really kind of excelled!

**Admission to College.** Trisha was always thinking toward her future. She wanted to attend college and make a better living for herself. She explained:

I wanted to be different than a lot of people I went to school with because most of them just stayed in the area, got married, or had a lot of kids even when we were in high school. I just didn’t want that kind of lifestyle, ‘cause I had seen the cyclical pattern of families, even my own. I’m the only one in my family to go to college aside from my brothers. I’m a first generation [student], and actually, it’s really ironic ‘cause me and my brothers are the only ones on both side of the families that has gone to college.

Trisha’s two older half-brothers and her grandmother were very positive influences when it came to educational aspirations. Trisha looked up to both her brothers who attended great intuitions. Trisha said her grandmother “always made sure I was succeeding, and I felt like she cared about me and wanted me to do well.” For that reason, Trisha felt obligated to make her grandmother proud. Trisha shared, “after she [her grandmother] passed I just took it as, I really need to make her proud no matter what.” When it came down to going to college, Trisha had to decide
between a school that offered a full ride and a more competitive school that did not offer a full ride. Due to both parents losing their jobs while Trisha was in high school, this was an economic concern. She explained, “when the economy kind of went down, luckily I was able to get into [the university] and I got a lot of financial aid which was great!” In receiving a great financial aid package, Trisha was provided the opportunity to obtain her goal of attending the more competitive school.

When Trisha was admitted to the university and found out she had to attend the SBP, she debated attending:

At first I didn’t think that I would like Bridge, just because I felt like it was forced. I was like “this is stupid, they’re making me go to this program and if I don’t—then I’m not going to the school! What if I fail this program or something, then what to do I do?”

As stated earlier, Trisha was a 4.0 student in high school, so she questioned why she had to attend the SBP. She describes how she felt: “like maybe my grades weren’t good enough, or like I didn’t have enough experience in a big city, I just didn’t know.”

Trisha heard things regarding the SBP that were not very positive that made her feel unprepared. For example, “I heard a lot of like stereotypes that like---Bridge is for those people who maybe shouldn’t have necessarily gotten in or something.” Being from a rural part of the state, another stereotype Trisha heard was “kids from an [urban city] [go] to the Bridge program, why were you in it?” The program is often mistaken as one that is designed for students of color, so often majority students and their families make this assumption. Despite the reservation, Trisha decided not to listen to all the negativity: “I
thought about it and I think I called and just talked to somebody about what the program entailed, and I decided to still stick with it.”

**The SBP Experience.** Trisha thought her summer was going to be ruined due to all the terrible things she heard about the program prior to coming. She explained, “I don’t know if I had the highest expectations [of the program] because I kind of heard that it was just a lot of like planned activities, and your whole summer before going to college was going to be ruined.” She heard “you couldn’t go home on the weekend, and it felt like you were kind of being babysat.” Once she arrived on campus she discovered “it was okay if people went home as long as they told somebody, you weren’t forced to be here.” Although Trisha was misinformed about the summer experience, she did understand the value of staying on campus on the weekends. She stated, “it kind of made more sense, cause there were a lot of activities and things going on.” Overall, Trisha shared, “there are some bad stereotypes, but I think it [the program] was the best thing, my expectations were exceeded from the program.”

Coming from a diverse environment, Trisha had expectations that college would have the same amount, or more diversity. She shared:

> I went to a really, really diverse school. We [did not have] a really big Asian population, but definitely a very large Hispanic population, African American [and] obviously White, cause I was there, but it was really, really diverse.

In her experience with the SBP, Trisha felt “Bridge [had] a lot of diversity.” However, in the fall term, Trisha did not have that same experience. Trisha shared her expectations:

> I thought “oh like [the university] is very diverse, I’m going to love it there, I’ll feel at home!” Because I grew up in a very diverse community and everything, and then I got here and it’s just like, it was completely [opposite].
Without the diverse experience within the SBP, Trisha would not have seen examples of diversity within university.

**Resources.** Although Trisha was skeptical of the SBP prior to arriving on campus, she soon realized its benefits. She stated, “the program definitely [provides] a lot [of] resources for people.” One of the resources Trisha talked about during the interview was the resource of her academic advisor:

The program aligned me with [my advisor] [that] I kept throughout college. I think when [you] decided on [a] major you were supposed to go your main advisor. But, I still [went] back to [my advisor], just to ask [their] opinion on things cause [they] were one of the first people that I really built a trusting relationship with for academics.

The relationship built between Trisha and her academic advisor during the summer term was valuable. Instead of seeing her advisor within her major on a regular basis, Trisha continued to see her general advisor for support through her college career.

The early exposure to campus resources was helpful to Trisha. Having the opportunity to learn the campus, and having knowledge of available resources are important to the transition of a student. Trisha pointed out, “I think that was definitely something being able to know where the library was or like computers, or the fishbowl [computer lab].” With the summer term being shortened, Trisha wished she had the opportunity to be exposed to more student organization and/or groups on campus. She provided an example:

I kind of wish I would have been involved in more groups on campus. I don’t think we really talked about that much in Bridge. It would have been nice to kind of have like a group or something I was involved in [during SBP] like exposure to
student organizations but sooner. Or even like I know after we finished the program, offering a kind of program for like Bridge kids going forward to get together and talk about things we might be struggling with. But, I don’t know if people would have taken offense to that at the time.

Finding ways to connect the SBP students to the campus can be very instrumental to their transition.

**Academics.** Academically, Trisha admitted that the classes in particular were not as memorable; however, she did discover that classes within the SBP were more challenging than she expected:

I honestly don’t really remember a lot from the classes themselves, I just know that the math was a lot harder than I thought it was going to be. That was one thing that I remembered. And math was actually my favorite subject until I came here.

Often students have experienced performing at the top of their classes during high school, and are then surprised when they begin taking college level courses. Although Trisha didn’t remember the details of the class, there was one faculty member that was memorable during the SBP experience. She shared, “I loved my English teacher, I took him for like two more semesters. I like him, I thought he was really good.” Students that participate in the SBP are sometimes given the opportunity to take their SBP instructor’s classes in the fall term which provides continuity. Another course that contributed to Trisha’s passion for social justice was the college success seminar. She shares what she remembered, “we talked a lot about social issues and things like that. I think that probably initially sparked my interest and pursuing that [social issues] throughout my undergraduate career.”
Social. Socially, the SBP experience was a major part of Trisha’s college transition. Without the relationship she built throughout the program, she may have gone back home: I met all my friends in the Bridge program, and I continue to be friends with them throughout, so I think it definitely contributed. I probably would have dropped out because I didn’t feel like I had any friends, or really connect with anybody my freshman year.

As stated earlier, Trisha struggled with the lack of diversity within the university after leaving the SBP in the summer term. She shared:

When I got into like actual school [in the fall] [I thought] “where is the diversity?” I just saw like a lot of discrimination and people like talking about it and feeling like they were being like judged and everything. I just took a lot of sociology classes in undergrad, and we’d talk about race and diversity, and I actually said it in class. I said “I felt like coming here was like a wrong step.” It was not the diversity that I was looking for.

Trisha also experienced isolation in the fall within her residence hall. Trisha shares an experience from her freshman year:

My freshman year I lived on north campus in a single, which I didn’t even ask for a single, in an all-German hall. I was the only one who spoke English, and it was the worst experience ever! I remember thinking, I probably would have dropped out after that year if I hadn’t made those friends and kind of like learned about the campus and everything before.

The lack of diversity within the classroom and her residence hall, paired with the rude comments regarding other diverse groups caused Trisha to regret her decision to attend the university. If it
were not for her diverse summer experience on campus, she would not have made it at the
university. Those very summer experiences persuaded Trisha to study topics around the social
sciences. Trisha shares her overall feelings:

> Like I said before, I think it was the best decision I could have made, and I
couldn’t picture my life without it now. I don’t know where I would be. I know
everybody doesn’t have the best experience.

**Key Themes.**

*(Admission selection)*

In a holistic review there are many factors that are taken into consideration in the admissions
process. A student’s academic performance within high school, personal essays, letters of
recommendation, socioeconomic status, geographical area, and educational background are a
few components that are used in making this decision. Throughout the interview Trisha
expressed concerns multiple times on how she was selected for the program. The admission
letter was not helpful. “The wording on the letter was kind of interesting,” stated Trisha. She
continued:

> I automatically thought of the worse, like “Oh my gosh! My grades are not good
enough, something is not good enough for me not get accepted into the university
[in the fall].”

Even after years of completing her undergraduate degree, and graduate school, Trisha was still
questioning her admission decision to the SBP. In a firm voice she projected:

> I’d like to know how they actually choose who [goes] to the Bridge program. Like
really, because I read the letter and there are a lot of factors that play into [it], but
why me and not somebody else? Who chooses!
The lack of clarity about the selection process, and the wording of the letter she received, caused Trisha to feel she was inadequate, and clearly it haunted and confused her even years later.

**Negative Stereotypes.**

The many negative stereotypes Trisha heard about the program contributed to the criticism of her admission decision. She shared, “there were so many like negative comments constantly about it.” Trisha stated she heard “a lot of kids from [urban city schools] are usually the ones that get into the Bridge program.” This did not match her demographic background, which encouraged skepticism of the decision. She described how she felt about the statement:

> I guess you could look at [the] positive way. Kids that might not have had an opportunity to come to the university were able to get in, and get out of [urban city] and come to the university. But at the same time it kind of seemed that it was stereotyping them, and putting them into this program that they might not have needed. Maybe they were well adjusted to college and didn’t need to go to Bridge.

**Transitioning to college.**

The college transition experience has multiple factors. Trisha describes what components stood the most about the program.

> I think being able to explore the campus. And [going] to a big party [that] I never [experienced] before and kind of getting a feel of what it would be like during the school year. I think also getting to know a lot of people from around the state and out of state. Really I hadn’t made any friends outside of like my city so that was really another big component.
Learning the campus, attending campus events, and meeting new people are all aspects of the student life experience as it relates to college transition. Trisha shared:

Looking back, it was the best experience I had throughout college because I made all my friends in Bridge which I still have today. I live with one of them, and my other group is all Bridge people as well.

Lack of diversity.

Trisha was used to being in very diverse environments during most of her early education. Going to college she was looking forward to continuing that experience. When Trisha arrived back to campus in the fall after participating in the SBP, she was disappointed in the lack of diversity on campus, in addition to derogatory comments regarding race related topics. The positive encounters Trisha had within the SBP helped put things in perspective. She shared:

I think it also helped when I was in classes, and we were discussing different diversity topics and being able to use the experience of Bridge as kind of an example of where diversity is really encouraged while at the university.

During the fall term, in spite of feeling as if diversity was not encouraged at the university, Trisha used summer Bridge as positive reinforcement. The SBP set the foundation of diversity within the university.

Case Study: Alexis

Alexis walked into the office with a big smile on her face. She was excited to be back on campus and to visit the advising office. Her interview time was earlier in the morning, so Alexis stayed the night with her younger brother, who is now a student at the university. Alexis is a paraprofessional for English language learners (ELL) and volleyball coach at her former high school. With a growth in the ELL field, Alexis is planning to obtain further English as a second
language (ESL) certification. She has been encouraged to take on more leadership roles within her job in addition to going back to school. Alexis is currently researching graduate programs in education that are flexible for working professionals.

**Early Childhood.** Alexis was born to natives of Mexico who live in an urban city. She is the oldest of five children. Although both parents were in the household, earlier on, money was limited. She shared, “my father had to work two, sometimes three jobs to support us at home.” With her father working most days, that forced him to spend most of his time away from home. She continued:

Growing up, we only had [my mother] around all the time. My dad was almost never around, he was always tired from work, he would leave early in the morning, come [home] really late, so we never really got to see him so much.

As the oldest, Alexis would often help her mother around the house. Alexis’ father became a truck driver, and their financial circumstances became better. She adds, “after he paid off his semi truck, we [then] were more financially stable at home.”

At an early age, Alexis was exposed to higher education. She visited the university on a field trip, not knowing at the time it would be her alma mater some day. She recalls that experience:

In eighth grade, we had a fieldtrip here to [the university], we went to the [student] union. I remember it, and I was like, “Wow, It’s so nice here, it’s a really nice campus.” But, I didn’t think about it too much until like, whoo, later.

This shows the positive influence early college exposure and access has on young people.

**High School.** Alexis described high school as “the fun part.” Her high school was predominantly Hispanic with “a few white people and a few black people.” Alexis made sure to
make school her main priority because she knew she was going to college. It was the influence of her mother and the early exposure to college that encouraged her to do well. She recalled:

As young as I can remember my mom always told me, “you need to go to college, you need to be independent, you can’t depend on anyone.” So, my mom always put that in my head so I’ve always said, “okay, I’m going to go to college. I don’t know where, I don’t know how, but I’m going to go.”

Alexis talks about her early years of high school:

So freshmen year, I went to school and I did good. I did my homework. I did my class work. I did decent on my test. I always said, “that was my priority, school.”

With school, I also did sports, but school always came first. If I [had] to study, I [would] study. Then, if I had time, I would do what I had to do for sports.

Sports was a big part of Alexis’ high school experience. She participated on multiple sports teams, such as volleyball, track, and soccer. With her involvement in so many extracurricular activities and the rigor of sophomore year, Alexis had a hard time staying motivated to maintain straight A’s. She shared, “sophomore year was a little hard. I got my first C, and I cried! It was horrible, [and] my mom was upset.” Alexis was having a difficult time with her English and Geometry classes, in addition to managing her time between sports, academics, and chores at home. Despite her challenges, Alexis knew she couldn’t give up. Alexis’ mother always encouraged her to go to college. She was often viewed as a good example to her younger siblings. This inspired Alexis to keep doing well in high school.

My mom always used me as an example for my brothers and my sister. [Her mother said] “You need to be like your sister, she’s getting good grades, she helps
me, she’s doing sports.” So they needed to be an all-around kind of person. I knew that I had to be that example for them.

With family depending on her, Alexis performed very well academically her junior year of high school: “That was like one of the best years I had. I had like 4.0s throughout the whole year.” By senior year, Alexis had many options for college because she earned good grades. “I applied to nine different schools and I got into all of them.” Alexis was excited she was admitted into one of her top schools as a first generation student.

**The SBP Experience.** Alexis was really excited “to move to see how the campus is like.” The cost of the program, in addition to being away from home was her parents’ only reservation. She explained:

The only concern was that I’d be here by myself, which is a parent’s biggest fear. Then we started to ask questions about if the program was going to be paid for? Then we found out that they would pay with a grant to help us pay for it [the program]. That is when my parents definitely encouraged me to go.

Alexis felt even more encouraged when she found out a few of her classmates were going to the university. She stated, “It was only four of us that got invited, or applied and got into [the university].” It was reassuring to have a few familiar faces attending the program.

**Resources.** In the SBP participants have a community of individuals that help students with their transition to college. The program has peer advisors (PA) that live within the residence hall, and serve as resident advisors. Alexis spoke very highly of the PAs she came in contact with during her time in the SBP. Alexis felt her two PAs stood out the most due providing her with personalized attention and support. She shared:
It was just nice to have them there to like chat, kind of like big sisters. They were just like watching [out] for you, and it was nice to have them there for that.

The group of PAs also coordinated social events for the SBP participants. Alexis shared a memorable event:

There was [an] event that they [PAs] had that [was about] stuff that was happening around the dorm. With everyone being young and doing stuff that they probably shouldn’t have, and then having the PAs hold the whole [event]. All the girls [were] invited to talk about this. Guys [were] going to talk about this [too] separately. It’s like you would think that they wouldn’t need to talk like that. But, it was nice that the PAs were telling [us] like “hey, why are you doing this! You [girls] should value yourselves you know, you’re young, intelligent, beautiful young women.” It was just nice to have that, to like have them telling you this.

Alexis appreciated the program’s response to particular occurrences within the residence hall.

In the college setting, the class sizes are much larger than many high schools. The program prides itself in providing small class sizes for students. Alexis talked about why this resource stood out:

Smaller class sizes that weren’t too big, especially during the summer because, in the fall it was like 300 kids in the lecture and you’re just like “where am I supposed to sit, how do I fit in? When am I supposed to talk to professor, if at all?” I was pretty shy, [I felt] like they probably don’t want like 500 people in their office hours and stuff like that.

Providing Alexis with the option of smaller classes in the fall was very helpful. This allowed her to continue with the feel of a smaller setting from the SBP.
Academics. Academically, Alexis appreciated the opportunity to take classes during the summer term, in addition to resources for those classes. Alexis stated:

I really did like that, we had the classes, and they count [them] toward the credits that you need to graduate, so that was a really good thing. Having the tutoring sessions definitely [also] helped.

Taking classes and earning credits towards graduation can help a student establish a grade point average in the summer term. Alexis explained the benefits: “It was nice to have a good GPA to start with, and then just build from [there], instead of starting from the bottom.”

As it relates to academics, connecting with her academic advisor during the SBP was beneficial. Alexis does admit her regret in not visiting as often; however, her advisor helped in multiple ways:

[The program] definitely contributed [academically]. Even though, I didn’t come as frequent as I should have to see my advisor, I did come and I did receive help [in] figuring out what I want to study. Kind of helping me like “Oh, well maybe [take] this, [see] if this might work out.” Intro classes especially your freshman year, definitely trying first year seminars, smaller class instead of being in all the big classes with like 500 kids in it. Just having someone who can help me figure out where I want to kind of go. Like, “maybe you might be interested in this, try this out.”

Selecting a major of study can be challenging for students. Alexis trusted her advisor’s suggestions to try classes that may spark her interest. She also utilized her advisor to help make decisions. She shared:
If I was in a tough situation with like grades, “Should I stay in the class, should I withdraw, what should I do with that kind of thing?” Definitely helps, because I was like “I don’t know what to do, where to go, or do anything.” Just having someone to talk to that knows. [To say], “You know you can do it. You should push through.” Just having someone definitely help advise you.

Although Alexis felt she did not visit her advisor enough, she was aware of the most crucial moments her advisor’s advice was needed.

**Social.** “The people, like the students,” really stood out in Alexis’ SBP experience. She enjoyed meeting new people, in addition to learning new things about others experiences. She stated:

> Even though we were all in the same boat, we were all from different areas, so that was really nice to have people from not just only [urban city], but from other different cities, and to see what their experience was like in high school. It’s nice to have them share their experiences.

Learning from others experiences allowed Alexis to be “more open minded.” She was able to see how everyone is not the same in their way of thinking.

> I was just very conservative; it was nice to hear what other people had to say. In the fall, I would try different things, try to get to know different cultures too!

That’s what I really liked. It was interesting to see different cultures here, because you hear about it but you don’t really see them, or you don’t see what they practice, or what they are doing.
After the SBP, during the fall, Alexis noticed a difference socially. Growing up in a majority Hispanic environment then coming to a predominately White institution was an adjustment.

It was just not like, there’s just a bunch of Hispanics here. The majority here is White, so that was kind of shocking for me going from where I was the majority to being like a minority again. That was like, wow, shocking to me.

Despite feeling like a minority within the atmosphere, Alexis was able to adjust pretty well with the help of the SBP, and the Hispanic/Latino population. Having friends from high school attend to program was significant for Alexis socially. She explained:

It definitely helped out because I made most of my friends at the program, and it’s really hard to make friends. So, definitely those friends really helped! Then, I was also really close with one of my high school friends. I wasn’t that close to her in high school but after we were in the program [SBP].

Through her early introduction to the campus, Alexis was able to find community. Despite the feeling of being a minority on campus, she loved meeting new people from various cultures. Alexis was able to build relationships with people who provided support academically and socially throughout her college career. She shared her overall:

It’s nice to have a program where it’s small. You have other students from different places who also kind of need this, so that they can be successful throughout their four years in college, instead of just coming and being shocked about everything…and not doing so good, and then having to build your GPA from the bottom.
Key Themes.

Support.

Alexis referred to multiple aspects of how support was displayed throughout her college experience. There was support within the SBP from peer advisors, friends, and from her academic advisor. Alexis talked about how difficult it was to find that support from others outside of the program. When she tried to make friends with classmates, however, it wasn’t genuine: “Everyone [was] just like “Oh, I’m here to study and that’s it. I’ll use you as a study buddy, and then bye!’ That’s [what] happened to me.” If it weren’t for the authentic friendships made within the SBP, she would not have felt supported by classmates. She shared:

Even if we didn’t hang out all the time [my friend would say], “Oh hey let’s just grab a bite to see how you’re doing, or oh hey let’s just hang out for little bit, or study together.” So, definitely those friends really helped.

She found having support from friends helped socially and academically. She continued to share:

It was always nice to have at least them [friends from SBP], even the other students around. Having that support group, especially when you leave from home, because that’s one of the first things that you miss from that [home]. It’s like “who am I going to talk to?” [You] kind of make more friends, and like have support here, so definitely having that, the support.

Even in her current line of work, Alexis finds herself reflecting upon her SBP experiences and how it relates to the support to her students:
It’s like, a lot of the students see me as like a big sister. I feel like I'm kind of a PA to them. I didn’t [know] that would happen but it’s like I'm kind of that middle person between the teachers and the students.

She encourages her students to work hard, and have aspirations of college. “I’m kind of pushing the kids to want more, like ‘you guys need to go to school, you need to go to college,’ not just be like, ‘oh I can’t do it.” This type of support was given to Alexis by her academic advisor. When classes were tough, she was able to receive encouragement from her advisor.

*Community.*

With a group of friends also attending the SBP, she was able to have a sense of community. Coming from her high school environment, in addition to attending the SBP where she was the majority then becoming the minority, in the fall term, was tough. However, Alexis was able to find community with other Hispanic/Latino students at the university. She described her experience:

I was kind of a little frightened, because all of a sudden, it’s like all these people from different races and then just being a small tiny group. All the Hispanic Latinos, they kind of all stuck together. We have our friends from different races but kind of, they just always come together. That was kind of nice to at least have that group too, and then a lot of them were also first gen [generation] so that was nice.

Feedback regarding classes, and which instructor to take for certain classes was also shared amongst the community. She provided an example:
[Information such as] “I took this class and it was kind of difficult, this is what the professor was like.” So, we kind of helped each other out, even though we were the minority, we kind of all came together again so that was really nice.

**College Transition.**

A crucial social aspect of transitioning to college is adapting to the culture of the university. The SBP is designed assist with the transition to college. Students realize very soon that the culture of their hometown and high school are much different than the university, and soon appreciates the SBP opportunity. Alexis described how she felt when moving for the SBP:

> When we came here, I was terrified out of mind. Well, we were only 18, all these people are moving in, they’re all grouping us together. I did notice that it was a lot of minorities that were in the program, but I don’t see that as something that can hold you back. It’s like you could use that to your advantage like ‘maybe I am [a] minority, I do need help. I’m glad they’re giving me the help.

Another important aspect is getting to know people that are culturally different. During the SBP, Alexis found herself becoming less shy and more open to interacting with others. She shared how her experience encouraged her to be more open minded instead of making assumptions about others. She shared a moment:

> [I would] ask [fellow program participants], “I'm just kind of curious, why are practicing [a type of religion], can you explain because I have no idea?” Kind of being nice about [it], instead of just [thinking], “Oh, I'm going to assume that everyone who is like this [a particular group], is going to be like that [a particular way].” A lot of people are like that [make assumptions about others] I feel, and
that’s sad to hear! But, I just kind of opened my mind to that [different things], I was more open-minded!

The experiences in the SBP allowed Alexis to grow socially as a student, and become more informed about other cultures.

**Case Study: Brandon**

Brandon’s interview was the first one conducted via FaceTime, Apple software used for video conferencing. With this being the first experience, there were small technical difficulties before the interview began. Brandon joked and laughed charismatically about the technical difficulties, then proceeded with the interview. Brandon is currently prepping to take the LSAT while working part-time at a non-profit organization and coffee shop in Illinois. After graduation, Brandon worked for the university’s career center as a career advisor; however, he decided to go back home to be with his family after multiple deaths over the course of several years. Brandon wanted to be closer to family and focus on applying to law school.

**Early Childhood.** Brandon “was born and raised on the south side [in an] all Black neighborhood.” Having both parents in the household, making a living off good paying jobs, Brandon and his younger brother’s life changed when his parents divorced at the end of elementary school. During that time, Brandon’s mother was laid off and there was an extended period where things were tough financially. Brandon shared:

It was just different for us, us being me and my brother because we were used to both [parents] being in the house, and then my dad moved with his sister. And, when he moved in with his sister, me and my brother had to basically share a bed in his sister’s house, whenever we went over there. So, that was like seven years. And, he would sleep on the floor, because we only had one room in his sister’s
house. We kind of just got used to not having a lot, just making a lot out of a little, or making the best out of a little.

Despite the trying times, Brandon attended tuition based schools throughout high school via scholarships.

**High School.** Brandon’s high school was very diverse; however, academically it could have been a little more challenging. Brandon did well in high school, and had somewhat of a rigorous schedule by taking advance placement classes. Brandon felt college was always an option for him early on in life. He stated, “I knew I was going to college from when I was kid, when I was a young child I didn’t really know how then, I knew I was going.” Brandon’s mother and maternal grandmother obtained bachelor’s degrees, and his grandmother obtained a master’s degree, so college was important. He shared:

> Academics meant a lot to my mom and grandma. And, growing up with them around, given their background, and how much they cared about academic related pursuits, I knew that I was going to go to college. I just didn’t know where.

With Brandon having aspirations to attend college, he was excited when he was admitted to the university. Brandon shared how he felt:

> I was just happy that I was accepted to [the university]. And it was weird because I didn’t really know what [the university] was all about. I just, I got accepted, I was in!

After being admitted, Brandon’s first thought was, “‘I might be able to run track!’ I knew the track coach there, and he knew about me on how well I’ve done in track in high school.” As a top hurdler in high school, Brandon was considering running track at the university, however not for an athletic scholarship.
The SBP Experience. As an out-of-state student, Brandon did not know what to expect from the program, and was unfamiliar of the university culture. He stated:

I didn’t have the support of the resource, or the access to somebody who went to [the university] from my high school, or I mean many people who went to [the university] from high school.

Being one of the only students to attend the university from his high school, Brandon had to figure things out on his own. Once he arrived on campus and discovered the commitment of being a student athlete, all consideration of running track changed. He stated, “I realized how hard it was to balance academics and sports.” Brandon was honored to be accepted to the university, and decided to focus solely on his academics.

Resources. The resources within the SBP that stood out to Brandon where the evening workshops, and the people involved within the program. Brandon described the workshops as “an accountability factor.” Within the SBP there are mandatory writing and math workshops that are facilitated by course assistance to assist with writing skills. The workshops provided Brandon the opportunity to keep up with class work, and focus on his academics rather than participating in unproductive activities. He expounded:

It’s just an extra accountability factor, those workshops. It’s a loose sense of resources, but those workshops to me were a resource [that] helped me complete my academic requirements. And, they aided me in my social development at [the university], because I was interacting with students, which is what I would [have] ended up doing throughout the rest of my [university] career.

Being surrounded by such a support environment was a good feeling for Brandon. He said this was a major resource of the SBP. He shared:
Really for me, the best resources are people that I know want to see me do well.
And, there were people around me who genuinely wanted to see me do well.
And, not only do they want to see me do well, they did not want to see me be a
slacker. Those two components of the people in Bridge, were very important for
me. They held me accountable from my actions, people in Bridge, held me
accountable for my action. Like, sometimes in the fall there’s nobody there to
hold you accountable for your actions.

Brandon was able to appreciate the importance of being surrounded by encouraging,
positive individuals. In addition, the program helped with Brandon’s transition to college.
Being an out-of-state student, the program allowed him to learn campus. He explained:

I liked being able to get to campus early, just so I could kind of ease in a little bit.
I knew what was going on around campus, I knew what I liked, where I liked to
go, some easy places to go, that was comforting as well. It kind of helped me
adjust, especially being an out-of-state kid. It wasn’t as overwhelming when I
came, as overwhelming in the fall, because I came in Bridge.

Having the opportunity to get acclimated to campus made the transition to fall term less stressful
for Brandon.

Academics. Following the steps of his mother and grandmother, Brandon strived to
obtain his college degree. With organization and hard work, Brandon was able to perform well
academically. He was able to maintain a good GPA all throughout college, which opened doors
for many opportunities to be involved on campus. Brandon shared:

It was good to get a GPA under my belt, I finished Bridge with a 3.84[GPA]. So
that was good, it kind of help, like that 3.84[GPA] kind of gave me, I would say,
more of an incentive to continue to achieve at a higher level at [the university],
because I started out at a high level. So, it helped me, in the fall I got a 3.8 [GPA] again. I think a lot of that has to do with Bridge. [It was] because of the relationships that I developed, the confidence, and the sense of myself that I developed through the Bridge Program. [I] realize where I could go for resources during the Bridge Program, like those weekly meetings, different opportunities for kids on campus, [and] different small student organizations.

Brandon expressed that the program was very helpful in developing his confidence academically, in addition to exposing him to different resources that assisted with academic success.

**Social.** It was through Brandon’s social interactions in high school, in addition to early exposure to campus that allowed him to adjust to the culture of the university. Brandon was able to network and form great rapport with multiple individuals throughout the university: “It [Bridge] just gave me a more secure sense of myself as far as my ability to develop relationships,” stated Brandon. From his diverse experience within high school, Brandon felt he had the ability to relate to everyone, particularly if they were a participant of the SBP. He shared:

> Because we were all contributing, like pursuing the same common goal, and we all struggled together, we all excelled together. If you strip away race from it, we are pretty much doing the same thing, you know, we have different values, but we have different experiences that brought us to this point. We can all find a common goal to pursue together, and that kind of helped me socially.

Socially, the SBP also exposed Brandon to other students of color. Attending a predominantly White institution can be a cultural shock for some students of color. Brandon expressed:
If I didn’t go to Bridge, then I don’t think that I would have known that there were
African-American kids out there who I could relate to, or not even just African-
American kids, any race.

Finding a group of students one can relate to, is crucial in the transition to college.

**Key Themes.**

**High achiever.**

Brandon has been a high achiever all throughout secondary school and college. It was the
academic foundation set within the SBP that leverage him academically. That allowed him to
graduate with a good GPA from the university. He explained:

> I graduated with a 3.65 [GPA], with a degree in history, and a minor in African
> American Studies. I didn’t get a grade lower than an A minus my junior year, or
> senior year. Like all A’s, and A minus. But all of that goes back to what I learned
> in Bridge.

Brandon was very proud of his academic achievements. He clearly feels the SBP equipped him
with the support and confidence to be successful at the university. Brandon talked about a time
he experienced a death in his immediate family, and as a result, his GPA dropped a little. He
found the motivation to continue to do well:

> When I went from the 3.8 [GPA] to 3.3 [GPA], I had more of an incentive to get
> back up, because of the fact that I knew that I just completed not only one, but
two semesters of a 3.8 [GPA]. It’s like, “you can turn this thing around again you
know.” So, it was just like a constant reminder that I could achieve at a high
level. It was also like a safety net type thing. My safety net was the GPA that I
had from Bridge academically.
Despite the challenging time, Brandon was able to find the strength to continue to excel academically, and it was SBP that provided that foundation.

**Relationships.**

Being an out-of-state student, Brandon was happy he was able to find a sense of community within the university. Brandon was able to make friends in the SBP, who connected him with other non-SBP students. He explained the value of those friendships.

> I had a couple of really good friends. I knew I had friends that I could call on, to just hit up and just talk to, you know people who would reach out to me if they wanted somebody to talk too.

Brandon really connected with the staff and faculty that worked within the SBP. Those relationships included peer advisors, academic advisors, and instructors. He shared:

> I was able to foster such good relationships, as far as the relationships with my advisor, my relationship with [other advisors], [my English instructor], that’s still my boy. You know, just my relationships with some of the Bridge kids was good. My relationships, with like the university at large.

The importance of those relationships helped during difficult times: “My safety net was my relationships with the kids from Bridge socially.” He explained that it was the individuals associated with SBP that supported him and helped push through. He shared:

> I could always fall back on those relationships. It’s like a safety net, if I ever got like lost, you know. Those were the things that all contribute to my academic success after Bridge, because I had a safety net.
**College transition.**

As stated, the transition to college for a student who lives out-of-state can be more critical compared to an in-state student. Brandon’s overall experience in the SBP exposed him to resources that aided in his social and academic success within his college career. Brandon shares his overall feelings about the SBP:

First of all, Bridge was the greatest thing that ever happened to me at [the university]. Not because, of the academic footing that I gained through that program. I learned what [the university] was like academically, or what it was like to pursue in a future in academics at [the university] through Bridge. I learned what it was like to pursue a future at [the university], through academics in Bridge. And it was good because, it was a small environment it was good, because it was a diverse environment. It was good because, I could look around, and know that everybody around me was pursuing the same goal.

It is evident that Brandon thought very highly of his experiences within the SBP. He shared personal stories that allowed him to connect and thrive throughout his college career.

**Case Study: David**

David is a busy man! It is apparent that work consumes much of his time. After a few rounds of phone tag, David’s interview was scheduled in mid-April. David’s interview began 30 minutes after the scheduled time, due to traffic and technical difficulties connecting to Google hang-out. Despite the stressors of the morning, David was very understanding and ready to share. David finished up his master’s degree in higher education this year, and he works as an academic advisor at his hometown’s local university. He helps undecided students select a major, in addition to working with select first-year students invited to participate in a transitional
program. David’s desire to work in higher education stems from his early experiences as an undergraduate student. In working with college students, David often refers to elements of his SBP experience as a model to better serve his students. He continues to work to guide his current students in a positive direction.

Early Childhood. At a young age, David’s parents divorced, which opened up doors for David to move-in with his father and step family by middle school. As a dedicated delivery worker, David’s father remained involved in his education by ensuring David was enrolled in the right classes in junior high school. David recalled:

I actually remember my dad having to fight in middle school! I have a stepbrother, and my stepbrother was placed into like the advance math in middle school, and advance English, and I wasn’t, so we had to fight to get me into those classes.

This involvement provided David access to upper level/honors classes in high school. He shared, “that I was probably a pretty crucial plan in my academic career, in terms of access to resources.” David recognized how important the change in middle school affected his academic experience in high school.

High School. David’s high school environment was very diverse; however, there were some challenges. David explained:

High school was very much one of those traditional inner city high school experiences. A lot of social things going on, environmental things, we had a lot of issues with like gangs and stuff. My first couple years, teachers [were] coming in and out, we had a lot of substitutes at times.
As a student athlete, he felt his grades were pretty good, although he recognized he could have worked harder. College was the expected next step for David although he was first generation. He stated:

I think there was the academic piece, so the idea that you just go to college. That’s just what you’re supposed to do, and my dad, he always kind of reinforced it.

That was kind of the expectation, even though my dad went to CC [Community College] for a few years.

By his senior year of high school, David was considering playing sports in college. College was surely the next step for David; however, he was looking at other avenues of college access. He shared, “my dad was looking at a couple smaller schools.” David had done well in high school, and also felt he had options to continue with sports. This gave him the validation that college was the next step. He expounded:

It’s been reinforced, by the fact that I was doing well in school. Like, “you know you’re doing good at school, so keep doing what you’re good at, you go to college!”

David took a chance in applying to the university. He knew he was a good student, but he felt he didn’t fit the profile of the university. He stated, typically “people from [his] school don’t usually go to [the university].” So when David was notified he got into the university and had to attend the SBP he had several emotions. He remembered vividly “not wanting to do it!” Then he viewed it as a “pretty unique opportunity to take advantage of.” David thought of this being an opportunity to “try out for football.” Finally, he felt offended. He explained:

I remember wondering why I got in [the program]. So, I think I remember being offended! When I read [the letter], I think it said your admission is determined by
your completion of the program. I remember thinking, it’s like a test. The whole summer is like a test. Get in, [if] you can pass the classes, then we will let you in. But, we don’t think you can! So, we’re going to let you go through this program and kind of go from there.

The way in which the SBP was advertised to David made him feel the university did not have confidence in his academic abilities. This feeling made David not want to participate in the program.

**The SBP Experience.** David put all of his negative feelings of the program aside and decided to attend the SBP. His thoughts of playing football at the university changed in order to focus on academics. David was aware of the university’s academic expectations, so he was determined to work hard at the university. He reflected, “I came in with the mindset that, I knew of [the university’s] reputation, so I needed to try my hardest. I came in and kind of dropped that lazy attitude.” He was ready to put in the work to be successful at the university.

David shared his appreciation of the program:

They’re trying to give us an honest chance. Trying to see what we can do. Trying to give as an opportunity to get acclimated to what it’s like to be a student, a college student period, much less a student at [the university] [being] able to deal with those types of responsibilities and things.

**Resources.** The SBP provided resources that allowed David to navigate the university with ease. David talked about how the supplemental instruction for the classes was a great resource that helped with his academic confidence. He shared:

I’ll say, the most impactful ones for me in terms of helping me develop, were actually the like study session, after classes. Particularly for math, I remember
going and studying. Math is a tough thing; it can be difficult for a lot of people. I remember going, and you know being in a group working out stuff, and then, I remember like if there were concepts that I understood and was doing well with, I was able to like then help other students do it.

It was the workshops that provided structure for David to study, and continue to learn the material in a supportive and comfortable environment. David’s math instructor also helped:

Math was that subject I was most nervous about, but being able to work with him [math instructor], being able to see the time that he took, and I think his understanding of the nature of the Bridge Program was important.

As stated before, the university has a great deal of individuals that are involved in the SBP community. One department that is involved in a portion of the program is the university’s financial aid office. The financial aid office has a liaison that works within the academic advising office twice a week. Participants of the SBP had access to the financial aid representative, and avoided having to walk across campus to ask a question about their financial aid package. David felt this resources was very helpful. He recalled, “I remember going to find that person when I had a question about financial aid.” David discussed implementing this resource in the office of his current job.

**Academics.** It was the early exposure to college courses during the SBP that equipped David with the confidence and support needed to perform well academically: “I think the biggest thing it did was just instill confidence.” The program contributed to David’s academic development as a first year student. This is the type of confidence students need transitioning to the college setting. David shared:
It helped show me that “Hey you can handle like the work load!” I can remember studying for tests, and I remember the first paper I got back. I didn’t do well. I was nervous at first, but then we got the chance to redo it, just do some edits. Then as my paper progressed, it got better.

David showed resiliency by not giving up after the feedback of his first paper. He did not give up, and allow the low grade define his ability.

Social. Socially, David was able to learn campus and develop a core group of friends that were very supportive. David shared:

I met my roommate. Great kid, he’s one my friends still until this day, actually our next roommate was our hall mate [within the SBP]. We really had that connection. He knew people, so before we knew [it], we had a great social group out of nowhere. And, throughout the whole time, I remember we spent so much time together, in class, and then study tables.

David’s initial introduction to the campus through the SBP provided him with a sense of ease and comfort. David continued:

It definitely just helped to make it [the campus] feel comfortable. It helped me feel a lot more connected to campus, or just the people on campus. Who we get to share those experiences with, talk about sharing successes with without the fear of being stereotyped.

This shows that the SBP helped David build a strong community where everyone supported one another, socially and academically: “Socially, it was the best experience I had, and fortunately for me academically it was as well.”
Key Themes.

Confidence.

David referenced his increased level of confidence as a result of participating in the program in several instances. Coming from a high school where not many students are admitted into the university placed a tremendous amount of pressure on David. Participation in the program ignited David’s true academic abilities. David said, the SBP program reinforced confidence, and self-efficacy on improving and feeling better about my abilities to do well. Especially at [the university] cause I’ve got people from home saying that’s a pretty tough school to go to, and I was like “I know, but I’m there [at the university] so let’s make it happen.”

With his community back at home showing a little bit of doubt, David had to work hard to show he could succeed at the university. David discussed the benefits of the program:

For me personally it was a good experience and I was able to see the impact of having it [SBP]. Seeing what could happen to a kid who thinks they can’t go to that school [the university], or thinks they may not be able to fit in, or succeed there. And so, it really just helps improve again that kind of self-efficacy, I can do this, I can do it well.

Community.

The program really provided David with the opportunity to build long lasting relationship, in addition to forming a community that was essential throughout his college career. It was the relationships with friends from the program, and with his math instructor that made David feel he belonged. He talked about his math instructor:
I think he understood. He knew what it kind of felt like to be a Bridge student. He didn’t treat us any differently, but he also was sure to give us the help that we might have needed. But I think his general understanding of that, made us feel comfortable with him, and kind of develop that trust which allows the learning to kind of happen.

The relationships built with his roommate, and then being connected with other participants to form a core group of friends within the program helped with multiple aspect of David’s college career:

It kind of help to know that because of the close relationships I had with my roommate, and [other] friends, there are people who are experiencing similar things that I was having a hard time of figuring out. I remember we all got together to study for math. People are there, people are studying, you know having trouble with math, but it’s just nice to know that you’ve got a certain people who share similar characteristics with you, that you feel comfortable and that you can then express those concerns.

Although David had reservations in the beginning, he now understands the benefits of the program, and recognizes how it has transformed his life.

**Case Study: Maurice**

Maurice walked in the office with a smooth and calm demeanor. He was able to come in on his day off to conduct the interview. He also planned to connect with a few people on campus since he was in town for the day. Maurice currently works in the automotive industry as an accountant for an automotive supplier. However, he may be headed to another local automotive
company to work in manufacturing management very soon. He stated, “I’m not sure exactly how Bridge influenced what I do now, but it’s very clear that Bridge has helped me reach this point.”

**Early Childhood.** Maurice was born and raised in the inner city, Maurice had a pretty “normal childhood.” His mother worked hard to raise he and his two younger siblings as a single mother. He shared, “My family, we weren’t rich but we were, you know, okay. We weren’t struggling by any means. So, that was a contrast to everyone that we know.” Although, Maurice’s immediate family was good financially, he found that was not the case for many of his close friends and family. Maurice’s mother “instilled dedication” within her children, which pushed Maurice to work hard in school.

**High School.** Maurice was always a good student overall, yet he was often too social during class and sometimes too relaxed when it came to class work. Maurice attend Detroit Technology High School, a subset of Pershing High School, which was funded by Bill and Melinda Gates. By the time Maurice’s freshman year of high school, most of the funding had run out, which forced the school to utilize “state funding.” As a result, “the curriculum dropped from even one, or two years prior to me,” Maurice shared.

While attending his local high school, Maurice breezed through the curriculum established for the underfunded building. Maurice admitted he could have worked a little harder. He often settled for B’s, without much effort in classes in which he could have received A’s. The only extracurricular activity Maurice participate in during high school was the national honors society; however, it didn’t seem rewarding. He shared, “you didn’t really do [anything], [but] talk about achievements and goals. He continued, “I didn’t find them [academic programs] to be, really useful.” Due to lack of funding, the school was often limited which forced Maurice
to seek other activities outside of school. Maurice worked most of his time throughout high school. He explained:

I was never heavily involved in the student organizations in high school, and I believe the main reason why is because there were no tangible results. So, I didn’t see the point. I spent my last two and a half years of high school just working, 30–35 hours at a grocery store. I was able to maintain like at 3.6 GPA barely trying, and mostly working.

Although Maurice worked many hours, he was able to retain good grades in high school with minimal effort.

The influence of Maurice’s family and football encouraged him to attend the university. At a young age Maurice admired the university’s sports program, and would watch football games with his uncle and grandfather. His family was very supportive, although they could not relate to the experiences of attending a 4-year institution. Maurice shared:

My mother was a huge influence, my grandparents as well. None of them went to college. I was the first generation college student, and the first generation college grad. They pushed me, but at the same time, because no one around me had that experience, they couldn’t prepare me.

With the pressure of being the first to attend college, Maurice did not shy away from the challenge of attending a top tier institution. He stated:

When I got a little bit older, and started to understand what I wanted to pursue in college, [the university] made even more sense. It was relatively close to home, [and] wasn’t as expensive compared to some out of state schools that I looked at.
It just made sense academically and financially for me, and luckily, I was able to get in, in March of 2010.

When Maurice was admitted into the university’s SBP, he was excited, yet he felt his grades and test scores were not sufficient for the university’s standards. He described:

I was happy! Statistically speaking, I probably was in the upper 10% of students at DPS [city public schools] but, with my ACT scores, overall GPA, if you just look at pure numbers, I shouldn’t have gotten into [the university], pointblank period! So, when I got [the] letter, I was just happy even though I understood that it was not an outright acceptance to [the university].

Even though Maurice was at the top of his graduating class, there were still thoughts of not being good enough for the university. This opportunity was “my one shot, I'm going to make most of it,” stated Maurice.

**The SBP Experience.** Maurice was ready to do whatever it took to be successful at the university. Not knowing much about the SBP within the university, he, “didn’t expect anything” from the “acceptance program.” Although Maurice did not know much about the program, he understood it was “necessary” in order to be on the same playing field as his peers. When Maurice arrived to the program, he was aware that his high school lacked the resources of other schools, which put him at a disadvantage. He explained:

I came from a school that economically and academically speaking, was not at the level of a third of incoming [university] freshmen from a suburban school, out of state school. They were much more prepared. They weren’t necessarily smarter than me, but they were more prepared, they have a lot more exposure to certain
aspects of academia. Strictly being where I was from, I just didn’t have those resources available to me.

Maurice recognized the disparities in the educational system, and how that affects access to higher education.

In the context of an underprepared student, Maurice appreciated how the program served as a great preface to the university. In contrast, the program did not provide a full picture of what the university would be like once the program was over. He shared:

I think it serves a purpose, a great purpose for kids who, come from backgrounds that are less fortunate than the typical [university] student. So, I feel Bridge did a great job of [being] a small introduction into what college was going to be like.

But at the same time, it wasn’t a holistic introduction.

Maurice felt the program did not accurately represent the university’s student body population, which was a major adjustment. He stated:

It’s a culture shock coming here. It didn’t fully prepare me for everything that was going to come in the fall. [Coming] from, this predominantly black environment, you’re thrust into a world where you’re not just the minority, you’re the super minority. So that’s a big adjustment for a lot of kids. This is the first time that a lot of us are away from home, and away from our biggest support system.

Despite the missing pieces, Maurice appreciated how the program has contributed to his life. He shared:
I got a lot more out of it, now that I look back on it. When I was in it, I didn’t think it was as influential and as critical to my success [at the university], as I realized now that I’ve graduated.

**Resources.** With the challenges of adjusting as a student of color, Maurice was grateful of the program’s connection to people. Being able to build relationships with multiple individuals was very helpful to Maurice’s transition to college. Maurice was able to build relationships with friends, faculty, and staff members within the university. He specified, “I feel like Bridge was good for me, in terms of building relationships. Getting to know people professionally, as far as advisors and professors, also building close relationships with friends.” The relationships Maurice built within the program were valuable, and he continued to stay connected over the years.

The math lab resource with the program was very influential. Being a student who rarely sought out help, or needed help academically, the atmosphere provided Maurice with a sense of comfort. He explained:

I really liked math lab! [The math instructor] was always there to help, and she had upperclassmen who were also there, who helped us with our Math homework. That was a really good resource, [and] that was something that [was] available in the fall. Personally, I was a student prior to coming to [the university] [that] didn’t need a lot of help with anything. So, a good way for me to feel comfortable with going, and seeking out help from other people on campus. I feel like that was something that I took from her, and from the program, and used that for the rest of my career here at [the university].
Academic. Academically, Maurice felt the program “contributed greatly.” Maurice had a unique experience from other students in the program. He participated in another program within the university’s business school that was simultaneously running during the SBP. Maurice was one of a few SBP students that participated in the business school’s program, designed to help students enter into the business administration degree program. Maurice talked about the combined experiences:

I feel like I had, this dual system of, a cheat sheet of how to navigate through [the university] over the next four years. I feel like Bridge focused a lot on the relationships with students and faculty, whereas [the business program] taught me a lot more about the, the rigors of academia.

The SBP helped with the social aspects of academics; however, could use some improvements. Maurice shared, as far as the academics, I feel like it can improve on preparing the students for the rigors that are going to come in the fall. Despite this feeling, Maurice felt both programs complemented his college career. Having this two-fold experience equipped Maurice with the ability to approach academics with confidence. He continued:

They both kind of molded me early on, to act a certain way, [and] attack classes in the certain manner. Both had a huge impact on how I interacted with people in other classes, and other professors. I think they set up a really good foundation for me to understand what I would have to do to graduate.

Social. The social aspect of the program played a major role in Maurice’s college experience. “Some of my closest friends, I actually met in Bridge.” The program served as a great opening to college life. Maurice appreciated the interactions with the students and having the opportunity to learn campus during the summer. Yet, Maurice would have liked to have a
more accurate picture of the campus culture and atmosphere. After the SBP, the campus looked quite different from what Maurice experienced during the summer. He explained:

I feel like in some ways, it prepared me for the interaction with other students of color, and other students of program, but when it came to interacting with students at the university as a whole; in general, it kind of failed. Because, 95% of the students aren’t here, most of them aren’t around, it’s the summer time.

Even though Maurice wanted a more comprehensive introduction to the university, the program’s peer advisors (PA) played a key role in socialization to the university. The PAs provide Maurice with a glimpse into student life at the university: “It made it easier to integrate, the PAs help [to] guide us. So, it was great for interactions and introductions to social programs, [and] student run the organizations.” The PAs served as mentors to Maurice.

**Key Themes.**

**Introduction to campus.**

Coming from an underserved educational background, Maurice was thankful for the program’s introduction to the university. From a social aspect, the SBP exposed Maurice to the culture of an academic community. As an individual who worked independently, Maurice built relationships through the SBP network. He explained:

I wasn’t someone who ask for a lot of help, [or] needed a lot help from people but over the course of four years at [the university] studying economics, you’re going to need a lot of help. You have to swallow your pride a little bit, and ask for it. I feel like Bridge was great with introducing us to [being] comfortable [with] coming to people, because that wasn’t something that I was comfortable with prior [to coming here].
Supportive community.

Maurice was able to build a strong community around him that was supportive to help guide him through his college career. Maurice had great relationships with faculty, staff, and peers which aided him in his success at the university. He stated, “I feel like, relationship building was probably the one thing that I feel like mattered the most to me out of Bridge.” Maurice described:

I will say in all seriousness, my advisor was a great support system for me here, and just a steadying voice, when things were challenging for me. We didn’t always agree on what I should do with my academic career. I remember we had a few conversations about dropping economics, and I was hard headed but it all worked out. I always valued [my advisor’s] opinion on a lot of things from pledging fraternities, to girls, to school, to literally life. Probably from Bridge, I'm thankful for [my advisor] the most, for just being honest. [The advisor was there] to be my advisor, not my life coach. I'm appreciative of that.

Maurice found support from instructors within the university, who provided more than just academic assistance. He shared:

I feel like I developed a lot of professional relationships through Bridge, like with my [business program] mentor, who’s a professor at the [Business] school. [My mentor is] another person who I got more than just academic advice, I got life advice from [my mentor]. [My math instructor] was another one, [although they were] the cause of a lot of stress and anger. [My math instructor] was somebody who was very supportive, and good to have in your corner. Even when I wasn’t
[enrolled] in [a math] class a couple times, I went to [my math instructor] for math things.

The upperclassmen within the SBP who served as PAs within the program were influential in Maurice’s college experience. Maurice built relationships with a few PAs, and they all were great support systems. He expounded:

My PA was one of the reasons why I decide to go ahead and stick with economics. I saw a lot of things that [my PA] was doing, and the versatility of the degree. That’s what kind of cemented for me [what] I was going to follow when I didn’t get into [the business school] my sophomore year.

In all, Maurice’s SBP experience allowed him to gain relationships and build a supportive environment which contributed to the transition into college and beyond.

Case Study: Megan

After 30 minutes of searching for midday campus parking on a cold yet sunny winter semester day, Megan was still willing to meet for her interview. She was waiting patiently in her office’s conference room, surrounded by windows and a clear view of the campus parking lot and adjacent buildings. Megan’s big smile was very inviting and welcoming, despite our 40-minute late start. Megan works at a university as a marketing and outreach coordinator within the department of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science. She has a master’s degree in communications from Emerson College. Megan is responsible for all the marketing and outreach efforts, which includes coordinating college programming and other events.

**Early Childhood and Education.** Megan grew up in a town about a half-hour away from the university. She has a twin brother, and two older siblings. Megan’s childhood was a
“little tough” “it was just I guess hard because I felt like we had to grow up really fast.” She described her background:

I grow up with a single parent household with my dad, because my mom passed away when I was two. Growing up, we were a low income family, and I grew up living [in] an apartment. I would describe my childhood, I would say complicated and simple at the same time. My dad wasn’t really involved emotionally. He was there because he didn’t work, but he wasn’t really involved in our lives, so it’s kind of, like we’re doing things by ourselves. Since my brother is 11 years older than me, he was sort of like a parent figure.

Megan’s oldest brother provided parental guidance from afar after he went off to college. He showed Megan and her sibling that education was essential to progressing in life. She shared:

He kind of instilled [education] in me and my siblings, so I feel like we were able to push ourselves because of him, and sort of try to get good grades in school, in elementary school, in middle school. It really helped, and growing up I was really into school. I really liked to learn and so, I got good grades.

**High School.** With the inspiration of her older brother, Megan did well throughout the early years of school. She admits there was a lack of motivation in high school.

In like elementary school and middle school, I was like on honor roll and stuff.

And then high school was kind of like, I really don’t care that much. But I was still getting good grades, but not as good as before.

Although Megan was not as driven at times, that did not stop her from being involved in extracurricular activities and taking advance placement (AP) classes. She was determined get into a good college. Megan shared:
I always had a mentality in high school that I wanted to succeed. I was always involved in a lot of things, student council, yearbook, band, [and] basketball. I tried to do all these things to occupy my time. I definitely wanted to try to go to a good school.

Megan enjoyed her diverse high school environment. As a public school, it was not an outstanding school academically; however, it did offer AP and honors classes. Although Megan was one of the only students of color in the classroom, she felt supported. She described:

In my high school, it was pretty mixed, when it comes to ethnicities. It was just kind of like everybody sort of got along, so that was really cool. Our school wasn’t really considered like a good school per se, but there were like AP classes and stuff. I was always [in] those higher classes, there were only a couple Black people in there, but it was still a good environment.

**Admission to College.** When it came time to applying for colleges, Megan applied to a few school out of state, and finally decided on the university, which was close to home. The influence of her older siblings, and her home environment encouraged her tremendously. She shared, “I knew I needed a degree to actually not be broke. I didn’t want to be poor anymore because it’s so stressful. The only way to make that happen was to go to school.” Megan was determined to attend a good university, she was happy to be admitted into the SBP, but had some reservations. She shared her hesitation:

I was excited, and kind of iffy too just because I was like, ‘why do I have to go to the summer program?’ I felt like my grades were pretty okay. I felt like I really
didn’t need to go to it. I felt like, I could succeed without the extra push. But I was excited to go to college, and [the university] is a great school.

Megan really wanted to go to the prestigious university but felt she did not need the extra boost. She was familiar with the SBP, and became even more skeptical of the admission decision.

I knew about the program before I applied. I was thinking, “Are they just accepting me because I’m Black, and they need more Blacks to get in or what!” But I want to do it anyway, because I want that [the university] degree. It was like excitement, but I don’t know, feeling bad, [like] I was inadequate in some way.

Megan strongly questioned the decision. Megan felt her race and socioeconomic circumstances was the main reasons for being admitted into the SBP. She elaborated:

How do they make this decision? What could I have done to make it into [the university] without going to the Bridge program, what else did I need to do? If I would have gotten a 4.0, would I still have to go to the Bridge Program, is it more so about grades or my race. I don’t know, because there’s so many factors I feel like that goes into it.

Even with suspicion of her selection for the program, Megan decided to attend because it was such a great opportunity.

The SBP Experience. Before Megan arrived to campus, she had a clear understanding of the resources SBP was designed to provide incoming first year students. She was ready to take classes, learn campus, and be a regular student at the university.

I knew that I would have to take classes, and I knew that they wanted to have like the real college experience. So, I honestly was just expecting to live that real college life, have a roommate, go to classes.
Megan was looking forward to a structured college life within the SBP, but she was a bit surprised in the amount of freedom the program provided to students. This put Megan in a compromising situation where she felt it was the program’s responsibility to keep the students focused solely on academics. She shared her experience:

Bridge was really interesting, because I felt like there was like a lot of partying going on. In high school, I didn’t really party, I would go out like every once in a while. Once I got to Bridge, it like escalated so much. I felt like it was less about like academics, even though they say that it was more like preparing you for college, and more than about just having fun. I really did have a lot of fun, but I felt like it really didn’t prepare me for the real college experience.

Megan was disappointed her experience was not centered around the academic aspect of the university, which forced her to put more energy into the social aspect. She blamed the SBP for her academic struggles throughout her college career:

I think of it like a bad start for me. I couldn’t like, get [it] together throughout my four years, until the last semester. I wondered if I would have started as a regular freshman, if my grades would have been better or worst or what. I probably would have studied more and, have that time to really focus on that rather than going out.

Megan had aspirations to major in communications at the university. However, her GPA was not high enough to get into the program. This forced Megan to spend money on a master’s degree. She shared:

I think maybe if I would have [gotten] better grades from the start, I would [have] gotten into the communication program. I wouldn’t have to get my masters
degree. I don’t know if that’s a good or bad thing. Now I have all this debt from grad school, I don’t know, it’s hard tell.

Despite the accomplishment of obtaining a master’s degree, Megan place some condemnation toward the SBP.

Another shock to Megan during the program was the inability to work. Megan had worked throughout her high school career, and was looking forward to working as a college student. Megan shared:

The first thing I ask is, “Can I have a job while I’m in Bridge?” And they were like, “No!” I was like, “Wait what?” Not having that adult experience just kind of surprised me, I wasn’t expecting that.

Megan was planning to work throughout college to cover additional expenses, and have extra spending money. She thought coming in the summer term would allow her the opportunity to begin working during that time. Little did she know, the program did not allow students to work while in the program.

**Resources.** The program provided a space for Megan to build relationships and gain many friends. Being exposed to campus early provided Megan with a sense of comfort as a first-year student:

“I felt like I made a lot of friends, and I have this group of friends that were there when I actually started freshman year, which is great.” Megan appreciated the programs’ peer advisor, who were there to help with the transition to college, and serve as a resource. She stated, “it was nice to have those peer advisers, who we go to, and ask whatever we wanted to, it was nice to have that.” Megan felt the peer advisors within the program played a key role in her SBP experience. She was happy to have them as a resource during the program and beyond. She explained:
I guess it’s like knowing that they were there to help you, and it was nice to they were minorities too, most of them. So, they can relate to some of your issues. I feel like a lot of peer advisors actually kept in touch with Bridge students afterwards. Since a lot of people were friendly, it was good to [have the ability] to reach out to them after Bridge was over.

The program’s instructors and teacher assistants were also a great resource that Megan found very useful. She felt they were very helpful, and were very supportive. The professors and TA’s from the classes communicated to the students they will always be there to like help you when you need it, [which made it] a little bit easier. The professors were there to help you, after hours if you need it.

Another resource Megan pointed out was the advising office. Although Megan did not like her assigned advisor, she sought help from other advisors within the program. She was grateful she could use other advisors as a resource. She explained:

I like the advisors too! [They were a] resource, all the comprehensive studies advisors. I think it was nice to know that they were there, even though my advisor, I never talked to, I didn’t like him.

**Academics.** Academically, Megan did not feel the classes were useful to her academic transition. Megan did appreciate that she was receiving academic credit toward graduation. She stated:

I feel like some of the classes that I took, didn’t have anything to do with what I wanted to do in the end. I knew I didn’t want to do anything with math, or anything [the other classes] we had to take.
She continued, “the good part was, you did get credits that rolled over into your transcript. That was a benefit.” Megan was not expecting the difficulty of her classes: “I felt my classes were difficult, and that kind of gave me an idea of what [the university] classes were like.” The classes within the SBP gave Megan a taste of the university’s rigor, in addition to the peer pressures of college. She struggled with staying focused on her classes at times:

It was really hard to like focus, because so many things going on. Everybody just wanted to have fun all the time, it was like less about studying. So I felt like that kind of affected me, because I was like influenced by that, and I just wanted to be free and just have as much fun as possible. Because of that my grades weren’t that good starting off.

Taking classes in the summer term was fun, however a large amount of material was covered in a short time. Megan had to establish discipline, and develop effective time management skills in order to keep up with the face pace environment. She shared, “it was summer, and there was a lot of work in [a] little amount of time, [you] really have to learn time management at that point.” Megan realized the program forced the students to be busy for a reason. Juggling academics and student life as an undergraduates can be difficult. Megan continued:

[The program] kind of did prepare me for undergraduate life, getting a sense of how difficult it will be. They would always say to us, ‘you really have to manage your time, because we’re making you do all these other things, and go to class to show you what it really is going to be like. You have organizations to go to, and other events.’ So, that did make sense. That’s really how it was like, being involved in other things and trying to do school at the same time.
**Social.** The program invited a sense of community, which made it easy to develop friends within the program. Developing friendships before the fall term contributed to Megan’s social transition to college. She explained:

Because I already had a group of friends, it was really easy to meet to people because we were around each other all of the time. So, it was really easy to just find a few friends, and just keep that going. That definitely helped my social life, it was nice.

The community of the SBP introduced Megan to other students of color on campus. This was very helpful in the fall term, being a minority in class. She explained:

Just knowing people before starting school was nice, just knowing black people. When I actually started, I was not expecting to like, be in a class [with] 100 people, and there [would] be two black people. So, that definitely helped just knowing people who were like you.

There were mandatory planned outings within the program, and Megan was not very fond of the events at all. She never wanted to attend the events: “I didn’t have the freedom to do what I want to do.” She continued, “sometimes I feel like it was a waste of time. That time could be spent doing homework. I just feel it was unnecessary, and that they should have like made it optional.”

**Key Themes.**

**Relationships.**

The SBP provided Megan with the chance to build relationships with multiple people within the community. She was able to develop great friendships that carried on for years. Even after many years, Megan has been able to maintain some of those relationships. She stated, “there are
a lot of people from Bridge that I still talk to today.” Megan also gained a friend through her peer advisor: “I was really close with one of the peer advisers, she was like more like a friend than anything else.” Those very relationships were very influential to Megan, and she was thankful for the support they all provided.

**Party environment.**

As stated earlier, Megan had a lot of fun in the SBP. Being immersed in this party atmosphere, placed a large amount of pressure on Megan academically. She often witnessed classmates, and some peer advisors making bad decisions. She described:

I feel like there was this energy in Bridge where everyone was free, and just wanted to go to as many parties as possible. There was always a party like every day, and so since a lot of my friends were just going out, I’d just go out too. There [was] a lot of underage drinking of course, like bad influences. Then the peer advisers they were like good, but they were also young too, and they were partying with us. So, it was weird like to just have that divide. Then, there would be like rumors [of] the peer advisors hooking up with some of the Bridge students. It was so much drama going on.

Megan’s expectation of college was very different than what she experienced in the SBP. She was not ready for the freedom.

**Support.**

Megan talked about the feeling of support she felt throughout the program from PAs, faculty, and staff. Academically, she shared how the instructors, and course assistants made it easy to ask for help. She stated, “they were there to help you, and just having that resource there was like really good. In terms supporting her transition to college, peer advisors were helpful.
Megan stated, “the peer advisors, they were like good at acclimating me into the college environment when it came to like any question that I had.” Overall, Megan was very honest about her experience within the SBP, some of those experiences were positive, and some were not so positive.

**Cross-Case Findings**

As guided by Robert E. Stake, an expert in multiple case study qualitative analyses the next section reveals the cross case finding. In reviewing all seven cases and the themes within each case, several common themes emerged across the cases.

- Reactions to Bridge
- Community
- Racial Diversity
- Relationships
- Transition to College
- Support
- Confidence

**Reactions to Bridge.** All the participants expressed some type of reaction when notified of their admission decision to the university. The initial response of receiving the SBP admission letter involved mixed feelings from participants. The admission letter raised several questions for the cases, yet, the main question was, is this good news, or bad news? Some former Bridge students conveyed excitement and happiness. However, several expressed feelings of disappointment, confusion, and academic self-doubt.

Maurice and Brandon were thrilled they got admitted to the university, despite having to attend in the summer. Maurice stated, “I was happy! So, when I got that letter, I was just happy
even though I understood that it was summer Bridge.” Brandon was not aware of the SBP as an out-of-state student; he was just eager for the opportunity to attend the university. He explained, “I didn’t know what to think, I was just happy that I was accepted to [the university].” Alexis was also very happy about attending the program, but her high school college advisor did not think she needed the program. Alexis recalled the conversation with her high school advisor after having received the letter from the university:

She [high school college advisor] [said], “Do you want to do it, or do you not want to do it? I think you’re good enough that you don’t have to do it.” I [said] “But I kind of want to do it, because I want to move to see how the campus is like.” I was pretty excited about it. She was kind of iffy about it.

The wording in the admission letter gave Alexis’ high school counselor the impression the program was optional. The message in the admission letter was unclear to Alexis and her high school advisor.

The language in the admission letter also sent Leslie, Trisha, David, and Megan conflicting messages, especially related to academic inadequacy. Leslie shared, “When I originally got into Bridge, it kind of had that perception like Bridge is for people that need this extra boost. So originally, I was kind of thinking, [there was] a negative connotation towards it.” Trisha spoke about the admission letter: “The wording [in] the letter was kind of interesting, because it made me feel like maybe my grades weren’t good enough…I automatically thought of the worse.” David did not appreciate the letter’s message. He stated, “I remember being offended, when I read it. I think it said, your admission is determined by your completion of the program.” Even though Megan was elated about attending the university, she felt a sense of deficiency. Megan shared how she felt: “it was like excitement, but I don’t know, feeling bad, I
was inadequate in some way. Each participant shared the good, bad, and indifferent feelings about their initial reaction to the SBP initially generated by the letter from the university.

**Community.** The evidence that the SBP established a strong community amongst its program participants was clearly articulated in every interview. Brandon summed up the SBP community, and the relationships formed within the program by saying, “I knew I had friends that I could call on.” In gaining friendships and building relationships within SBP, Brandon formed a strong community that surrounded him throughout his college career: “My safety net was my relationships with the kids from Bridge socially.” He continued, “those were the things that contributed to my academic success after Bridge, because I had a safety net.” Being a part of a community encourages relationship building. Megan talked about her social experience: “I already had a group of friends, [which made it] really easy to meet to people because we were around each other all of the time.”

Leslie loved the bond she developed with the SBP students: “We all had a connection, we all had our small group of friends, and then it was like the Bridge kids clique.” She explained, “when you around the same people every single day from morning to sun down you can’t help but to get close.” Leslie focused on the intimacy of the community and how having a small community matter in a college environment as it relates to academic support. Leslie spoke about the advising office, and how comfortable she felt walking in the office: “I feel like the CSP [Comprehensive Studies Program (advising office)] was so intimate and small.

David compared participating in the SBP to a special organization. He told a story about meeting an individual who participated in the university’s SBP many years prior. David shared:

It was [a] friend of my supervisor. We were at dinner, and he went to [the university], but he was a Bridge Kid. [He said], “Oh, I did Bridge too,” I [said],
“Oh really? Okay, I did too.” And so it’s kind of funny to see that camaraderie as well, even people I don’t know. And so it’s kind of cool to have that it’s almost like being at a frat.

After the SBP concluded, Trisha wanted to interact with the SBP community. She felt having a structured extended program might have been helpful to participants. She suggested, “offering a kind of program for Bridge kids going forward to get together and talk about things we might [have been] struggling with.” Trisha recommended an opportunity for SBP participants to discuss shared experience, and support one another. Alexis appreciated the SBP community, and the resources the program provided its participants. Alexis explained:

Instead of just throwing us out there, to see if we sink or swim kind of thing, we still [had] [people from the SBP] around, we [had] our PAs, we had our advisors, we had all the other kids, to see what it might be like in the fall.

**Racial Diversity.** The theme of racial diversity is characterized as the advantage of having more equitable representation of multiple underrepresented groups in and outside of the classroom. The participants conveyed the benefits of being able to interact with a critical mass of students that look like them. Being a minority, Alexis discussed how finding community was important. Alexis found community through other Hispanic/Latino students within the SBP. Because she came from a small supportive community in high school, the university setting was much different from what she experienced in high school. The SBP helped her to discover a sense of community and support from other students within the program. Alexis stated, “all the Hispanic Latinos, they kind of all stuck together. That was kind of nice to at least have that group, and then a lot of them were also first gen [generation], so that was nice.”
The SBP offered these students a racially diverse classroom setting, and based on their interviews, at least some students expected the same level of diversity across the university. Megan and Brandon, however, expressed astonishment at the lack of Black students on campus after they left the program and began taking classes in the regular university setting. Megan shared how she appreciated meeting other students of color before the fall term:

Just knowing people before starting school was nice, just knowing Black people because when I actually started I was like, “ugh there is like no one [other Black students] around.” It’s like, it was really weird. I was not expecting to be in a class where 100 people, and there would be like two Black people. So, yeah, that definitely helped just knowing people who were like you, that was just nice.

Brandon felt the SBP introduced him to other Black students at the university, in addition to other students with shared commonalities. Brandon explained:

If I didn’t go to Bridge, then I don’t think that I would have known that there were African-American kids out there [at the university] who I could relate to, or not even just African-American kids, any race. Another thing, I didn’t realize that [there were] some non African-Americans, like Caucasians, and Hispanics I can still relate to you.

Leslie and Maurice discussed how the SBP introduced them to Black staff within the university. The advising office was a resource within in the community that Leslie appreciated as it relates to racial diversity. She shared, “[the] resource in general, seeing another Black advisor, or another Black student, or you know someone you can talk to, that has experienced a lot of things already.” The SBP exposed Leslie to other people of color. As a Black student, Leslie valued the interactions with other Black students and staff within the university. Maurice
found the interactions with the program’s peer advisors valuable. He shared, “I definitely feel like [the SBP] made it easier to integrate and interact with people of color. Because, you have the older students, the older, mostly Black students who were the PAs who help guide us, and give us advice.”

Coming from a diverse background, Trisha embraced the racial diversity showcased in the SBP. She stated, “Bridge [had] a lot of diversity!” After the SBP, Trisha immediately recognized a shift in racial diversity on the university’s campus. She stated, “It was not the diversity that I was looking for.” Trisha was not expecting the campus to look so different from her SBP experience. In the fall term, she recalled asking herself, “where is the diversity?”

Trisha witnessed negative behavior that made her question the decision to attend the university. After the SBP Trisha stated, “I saw a lot of discrimination.” Trisha was saddened by the negative comments made about racial diversity as it related to the SBP. She shared, “I heard that Bridge is just for diversity, to kind of bring diversity into the university. It almost was like a negative thing.” During a sociology class discussion about racial differences, Trisha stated, “I felt like coming here was like a wrong step.”

Despite Trisha’s disappointment about her post-Bridge campus experiences, Trisha cherished the diversity within the program. Trisha viewed the SBP as an exemplar of diversity within the university setting. She explained:

I was in classes, and we were discussing different diversity topics. [I was] able to use the experience of Bridge as kind of like an example of where diversity is really encouraged, while at the university. Because there were so many negative comments constantly about it [Bridge] so, it was good to be able to use that example.
As a participant of the SBP, Trisha was able to discuss her experiences first-hand in classes. This provided her the leverage needed to dispel some of the pessimistic judgments regarding the program.

**Relationships.** The opportunity to cultivate various relationships with peers and professionals within the university was a clear message throughout all the interviews. Trisha, Megan, Leslie, and Alexis all shared enthusiastically how they were able to develop close relationships that were very influential during their SBP experience; they appreciated those relationships much more, after the SBP. Trisha stated, “It was the best experience I had throughout college, because I made all my friends in Bridge, which I still have today.” It was the relationships developed within the SBP that motivated Trisha to persist through college. Trisha explained, “I probably would have dropped out because, I didn’t feel like I had any friends, or really connect with anybody my freshman year.” Megan shared, “It was really easy to just find a few friends, and just keep that going. There are a lot of people in Bridge that I still talk to today.” The relationships formed within the SBP were very influential to Leslie. She shared, “The same people I had those relationships in Bridge, are the same people I am still in contact with now.” Alexis develop most of her friend in college in the SBP. She stated, “those friends that I made were the only ones, throughout the whole four years. Alexis continued, I was also really close with one of my high school friends, I wasn’t that close to her in high school, but after we were in the program [together] we were [closer].”

Maurice valued the relationships the most from his SBP experience. He stated:

I feel like Bridge was good for me, and in terms of building relationships. Getting to know people professionally, as far as advisors, and professors, but also building
close relationships with friends. Some of my closest friend I actually met in
Bridge and you know around that time.

Maurice expounded, “I feel like I developed a lot of professional relationships through Bridge. I
feel like, relationship building was probably the one thing that I feel mattered the most to me out
of Bridge.” In all, each participant revealed they made very close friendships within the SBP
that have lasted throughout the years.

Transition to College. The SBP gave participants a preview of the campus both
academically and socially. Five out of the seven participants directly provided examples of how
the program played a key role in their transition to college. Brandon and Maurice discussed how
the program helped with them transition to college academically. Brandon stated, “I learned
what it was like to pursue a future at [the university] through the academics in Bridge.” Brandon
established a strong academic foundation within the SBP, which allowed him to sustain a solid
GPA throughout his college career. Maurice also became comfortable with seeking resources
during his SBP experience. The program gave Maurice the courage to seek out help when
needed from peers, faculty and staff: “I feel like Bridge was great with introducing us to [being]
comfortable [with] coming to people, because that wasn’t something I was comfortable with
prior.”

Trisha and Alexis discussed how the SBP helped them with the social aspect of
transitioning to college. Trisha appreciated “being able to explore the campus” and “getting a
feel of what it would be like during the school year.” Trisha enjoyed attending college programs
and events that summer, in addition to meeting students from other states. Alexis appreciated the
opportunity to move on campus earlier. She felt that really helped ease her transition socially.
Leslie communicated how the SBP helped her transition to the university’s educational environment both academically and socially. Leslie was proud to overcome the feeling of intimidation and not being good enough to do well academically at the university. Leaving the program with a 3.5 GPA was a great accomplishment. She summed up her transition: “I got to learn the campus, cause the university has a huge campus, learning how to catch the bus, commute back and forth, be independent on my own, and getting a step ahead.”

Support. Several of the participants revealed the SBP provided support from multiple components of the program. Alexis and Brandon found support from their friends within the SBP. Alexis established a group of friends who she could study with and hang out with during down time. She felt “having that support group, especially when you leave from home” was very helpful. Brandon developed strong relationships with individuals from the SBP. He stated, “I have a couple of really good friends. I know I had friends that I could call on to just talk to.” Both developed valuable, authentic relationships with other program participants.

Maurice and Megan found support from the faculty and/or staff within the SBP. Maurice discussed support from his academic advisor and math teacher. Maurice shared, “my advisor was a great support system for me here, and just a steadying voice when things were challenging.” Maurice’s math instructor was “very supportive.” Being an economics major, the support from his math instructor was very helpful: “Even when I wasn’t [enrolled] in [a math] class a couple times, I went to [my math instructor] for math things. Academically, Megan felt supported by the faculty and course assistants within the SBP. She stated, “they were there to help you, and just having that resource there was really good.” The SBP peer advisors were also helpful to Megan, and provided support in many ways. She shared, “the peer advisors were good at acclimating me into the college environment.”
David revealed how the SBP provided a supportive community during his college career. David discussed the academic support within the community.

I remember we all got together to study for math. People are there, people are studying you know having trouble with math, but it’s just nice to know that, you’ve got a certain [group of] people who share similar characteristics with you, that you feel comfortable [with], and that you can then express those concerns.

It was the support from friends, faculty, staff, and peer advisors of the SBP that provided academic encouragement through the college career.

**Confidence.** The SBP helped to build the confidence to perform well academically within of several participants. A few of the participants disclosed a lack of confidence in their academic ability before attending the SBP. Before attending the program, Leslie feared the perceived academic rigor of the university. As a result of attending the program she felt more equipped to compete academically. “I started off with a GPA, it gave me a boost of confidence—cause I was really intimidated.” David also expressed slight doubt before attending the program. People back home fed into David’s self-doubt, however participating in the SBP helped tremendously. It helped to bolster “confidence, and self-efficacy on improving and feeling better about my abilities,” stated David.

Brandon on the other hand did not have the same feelings as Leslie and David coming into the university. As an out-of-state student, he was not as privy to the university. Brandon did feel his high academic performance within the SBP provided him the confidence and motivation to persist. This was very important during a challenging time during his college career. He shared:
It was just a constant reminder that I could achieve at a high level. It was also like a safety net type thing. My safety net was the GPA that I had from Bridge academically.

The program also provided Alexis and Maurice with the assurance to succeed. Alexis shared, “It was nice to have a good GPA to start with, and then just building from there instead of starting from the bottom.” Maurice gained confidence to seek out help when needed, which provided a sense of motivation. He explained, “I feel like Bridge was great with…making us comfortable coming to people…it was a good way for me to feel comfortable with going and seeking out help from, other people on campus.

Summary. This chapter introduced seven individual participants (Leslie, Trisha, Alexis, Brandon, David, Maurice, and Megan) and themes that arise within each participant. Common themes (Reactions to Bridge, Community, Racial Diversity, Transition to College, Support, and Confidence) were then discovered across each case. This displays an understanding of the common occurrences of summer Bridge program (SBP) participants, and how those experiences may have played a role in their undergraduate career and beyond completion of the baccalaureate degree. Although each of the participants revealed commonalities among one another, each participant had very different experiences within the SBP.
Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The development and implementation of the Higher Education Act (HEA) of 1965 by President Lyndon B. Johnson provided many opportunities for academically qualified students access to higher education (HEA Report, 2005). The HEA of 1965 created access to student support programs designed to provide tools and resources to ensure academic success among underprepared and underrepresented students. Summer Bridge programs (SBPs) were created by this act. This qualitative study used a multiple case study approach to explore the experiences of college graduates who participated in a SBP. The feelings, attitudes, and beliefs of seven graduates who participated in the university’s SBP in the years of 2008, 2009, or 2010, graduated from the institution, and are currently employed in a degree-related job and/or are continuing their education were analyzed through semi-structured interviews.

The goal of the study was to gain a deeper insight and understanding of the human experiences of attending a SBP (McCracken, 1998; van Manen, 1990). The design of the study was guided by the work of Robert E. Stake an expert in multiple case study qualitative analyses. This collective case study was analyzed within each case, and across all cases (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The purpose of this study was to explore and describe the experiences of summer Bridge program participants, and to reveal how their experiences may have played a role in their undergraduate career and beyond completion of the baccalaureate degree using a variety of data sources, including interview transcriptions, departmental online advising file, program brochures, departmental memos, and other pertinent historical documents (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The following research questions guided the study:

1. How do participants in one SBP describe their experiences in the program?
2. How do they feel those experiences contributed, if at all, to their academic success throughout their college career and following graduation?

Summary of Findings

Collecting data that provide thematic understandings of elements that aided SBP students in persevering toward degree completion is a very significant contribution to the research literature. Gaining an understanding of how the multiple academic support models sustained the SBP participants, from the lens of a student, is very significant. The findings in this study help those who operate SBPs understand how the experiences within a SBP can influence one’s college and post baccalaureate career. Providing examples through case analyses of students who participated in a SBP, attained a baccalaureate degree, and now have a successful career may begin to fill in the gaps of research on transition programs. This study intentionally focused on the student’s experience within the SBP in addition to their reflections about outcomes beyond their summer participation. Keeping in mind the goal of the central research question to explore and describe the experiences of SBP participants as it relates to student success, this section will discuss the findings through the lens of the research questions.

Research Question (1) How do participants in one SBP describe their experiences in the program?

The SBP Experience.

Overall, six out of the seven participants described being very satisfied with their SBP experience. This was not surprising because on previous studies evaluating the satisfaction of one program found that participants were satisfied with their SBP experience (Ackerman, 1991; Buck, 1985; Garcia, 1991, Gold, 1992). Many participants did admit they did not want to attend, or felt they did not need the program. However, all were happy they were admitted to the
university. The initial admittance letter received from the admissions office might have fueled the skepticism of the participants. The use of proper terminology within the SBP initial admission letter is imperative in communicating a positive message to potential participants. This was clearly disclosed by several of the participants. Despite the reservation of attending the program, most participants felt the program was very valuable in their acclimation into the university socially and academically. Ackerman (1991) discovered participants felt moderately adjusted both academically and socially after participating in the SBP.

In contrast, only one participant, Megan, expressed not being satisfied with her overall SBP experience. Megan felt the program had a negative effect on her academic skill, which contradicts Strayhorn’s (2011) findings. Megan felt she did not need the program for academic acclimation. She also felt the program was not very beneficial as it related to classes that would prepare her for her intended major; however, she described that it did serve as an aid socially in meeting new SBP friends at the university. Megan attributed her inability to perform at a high level academically within the university to her experience within the SBP. She shared, “I think of it like a bad start for me. I couldn’t, get [it] together throughout my four years, until the last semester.” She felt she was never able to gain proper footing academically due to her academic performance within the SBP; in turn, she was unable to major in communications as intended. Megan stated, “I think maybe if I would have [gotten] better grades from the start, I would [have] gotten into the communication program.” Overall, the findings show that most of the participants in this study were satisfied with their SBP experience. Despite Megan’s lack of satisfaction, the program did, in fact, result in the retention and persistence toward graduation of all the participants.
Another important factor that surfaced was mixed reactions to the SBP. It was the initial admission letter to the program, which generated both joy and defeat among the participants. Their blended emotions brought about many questions regarding academic ability, and queried if being admitted to SBP was good news, or bad news? In spite of the qualm regarding the program in the beginning, many participants found the program to be one of the best experiences. It is imperative to assess the message being sent to participants and their families. The communication being sent to SBP participants should emphasize all the attributes and benefits of the SBP.

*Academic Experience.*

Within the 7-week SBP, each participant took three credit-bearing academic courses: college writing, mathematics, and a first-year reading seminar. It was evident the math course, and the supplement instruction workshops for math and writing were influential to the participants. Maurice cherished the SBP math class and his instructor for training him to be an economics major. Brandon and David appreciated how the workshops exhibited supportive, positive learning in a group setting. Brandon developed an appreciation for being held accountable by classmates in the writing workshops. David’s confidence in math was reinforced during the workshops, as he helped fellow classmates with difficult course material. The rigor and expectation of the courses within the SBP inculcated the desire to excel academically, and provided confidence to compete within the university. McCurrie (2009) uncovered that SBP students had an understanding of college-level expectations, such as David. Strayhorn (2011) revealed that confidence and academic motivation are key components to academic success. All of the participants discussed how the instructors within the program were very influential, and showed passion for the success of each participant. The SBP math instructors were recognized
the most during this study for exhibiting dedication to the students’ success. It is apparent that
the math course in the program was the most memorable. Wathington et al. (2011b) found that
having the opportunity to form deep relationships with instructors within a program helped to
shape a student’s experience.

Two participants, Leslie and Brandon, discussed how their academic success within the
SBP not only provided assurance, but it set a tone for academic success throughout their college
career. Strayhorn (2011) affirmed academic skill at the end of the program significantly
increased prior to participation in a SBP. This is in contrast to studies that have shown that
participation within a SBP does not always have a significant influence academically
(Evans, 1999; Wolf-Wendel et al. 1999). All the participants indicated appreciation for having
the opportunity to take classes early that count for credits toward graduation. The idea of
gaining credits a semester before their peers who were non-participants was very encouraging.
This places SBP participants one semester a head of non-participants. In Barnett’s (2012) and
Walpole et al.’s (2008) studies, SBP participants earned lower credits toward graduation.
Barnett (2012) found that SBP participants succeed at a slower pace than peers. This showcases
that participation in credit-baring SBPs are more beneficial student’s progress toward graduation.

Social Experience.

This study revealed that all seven participants felt participation in the SBP contributed to their
transition to the college setting. The immersion in the culture allowed them to learn campus and
university norms. Successful transition is critical the first-year of college, where it joins a
student’s home and collegiate environment (Inkelas, Daver, Vogt, & Leonard, 2007). Trisha’s
experience in SBP was very influential to her transition to college. She explained, “I remember
thinking I probably would have dropped out after [my first] year if I hadn’t made friends, and
learned about the campus [in SBP].” In addition, each participant expressed great value in developing long-lasting relationships with friends, faculty, and staff associated with the program. Leslie, Trisha, David, and Megan each were still currently connected with the friends they made within the SBP. The development of multiple relationships aided the participants in cultivating a sense of belonging and connectedness to the university. Alexis definitely felt a sense of belonging: “I made most of my friends at the program, and it’s really hard to make friends.” Although Strayhorn (2011) did not find a significant increase in a student’s sense of belonging or social skills after participating in a SBP, these findings indicated a positive effect on connectedness after participating in a SBP.

A few of the participants recalled social events and/or programs that were memorable, which were coordinated by the programs peer advisors. Alexis recalled an event where the peer advisors discussed self-worth with all the female participants. In fact, five of the seven participants acknowledged the benefit of having peer advisors within the program, in addition to how that interaction contributed to the social transition to the university. Megan confirmed, “I was really close with one of the peer advisers, and she was like more like a friend than anything else, they have such a big influence on whatever we did.” Maurice shared his experience of influence: “My PA was one of the reason why I decide to go ahead and stick with the economics.” The peer advisors were another factor of the program that provided support to the participants in the program. Inkelas and colleagues (2007) reviewed a number of studies and found that interactions with peers were significantly associated with a smooth transition to college (Austin, 1993; Inkelas & Weisman, 2003; Newcomb, 1962 studies).
Research Question (2) How do participants in one SBP feel those experiences contributed, if at all to their academic success throughout their college career and following graduation?

**College Career.**

All participants except one, discussed in the previous section, felt the SBP contributed to their academic success throughout their college career. Multiple factors emerged within the participant’s academic and social experiences as contributors of academic success through the cross case analysis. Those aspects within the academic experiences included academic self-efficacy and support. Components within the social experiences included community and relationships. Transition to college was an element in both the academic and social experience.

The participation in the SBP provided the motivation and assurance needed to be successful throughout the college career and beyond. This supports Stolle-McAllister (2011) findings regarding SBP participants and its increase in academic-self efficacy. In addition, it confirms that SBPs develop a sense of academic self-efficacy amongst its participants. Academic self-efficacy is grounded in Bandura’s theory, and is defined as an individual’s confidence in successful academic performance (Sharma & Nasa, 2014). Strayhorn (2011) concluded that SBP participants with high academic self-efficacy perform better academically. Leslie, Brandon and David all expressed that the program instilled academic self-efficacy during their SBP experience. The program gave Leslie “a boost of confidence,” proved to Brandon that he “could achieve at a high level,” and showed David that “I can do this, I can do it well!” Each performed at a high level academically all throughout their college career.

Academic resources mentioned were specific to academic advising, which included discussion around classes, career exploration, and support services provided by advisors. In
terms of seeking resources, Maurice felt “Bridge was great with introducing us to [being] comfortable [with] coming to people.” The development of trusting relationships with program staff is essential in the successful navigation of a student’s college career (Engle, Bermeo, & O’Brien, 2006). Walpole et al. (2008) found that SBP participants felt comfortable and were able to seek out services when needed compared to non-SBP participants. The introductions to staff and faculty within the SBP were beneficial to the participants, and provided reliable resources, which could be utilized all throughout college and beyond.

Table 3 in Chapter 3 shows data about each participant, such as SBP cohort year, GPA, college degree, and year degree conferred. The national college GPA at 4-year colleges and universities has increased from 2.52 in 1950 to 3.11 in 2006 (Newlon, 2013). Four of the seven participants earned a GPA above a 3.1 GPA after the completion of the SBP. The average SBP GPA among all seven participants was a 3.32, which is above the reported national average. Each participant received a baccalaureate degree within at least 4 ½ years from their first entering term. This showcases that participation in the SBP does not elongate the college career of SBP students, as argued in Walpole et al. (2008). Douglas and Attewell (2014) and Murphy et al. (2010) found that SBP participation increases the chances of graduation among underrepresented students. The average cumulative GPA of all seven participants upon graduation was a 3.05, which is comparable to the national figure.

**Following Graduation.**

In terms of contributions following graduation, six of the seven participants indicated the SBP contributed to their post-college success. Table 4 shows college achievement data on each participant, and now includes post-college attainment information, such as post graduate, and/or
career activities. The participants in this study expressed how the program contributed to their post-college endeavors. Trisha shared:

I always thought I’d probably do something in psychology. But I think just really being exposed to things that I was [exposed to] in Bridge. We talked a lot about social issues and things like that. I think that probably initially sparked my interest, and pursuing that [psychology] throughout my undergraduate career, and then graduate school.

Brandon shared:

The Bridge Program has a direct link to everything, indirect or direct. It contributes to everything I do right now. My first job out of college was a career adviser, and the reason why I was even at the career center is because of my Bridge PA job in 2012.

Maurice was not able to pinpoint direct contributions following graduation; however, he felt the program had a great impact. He stated, “I'm not sure exactly how Bridge influences what I do now, but it’s very clear that Bridge has helped me reach this point.” Leslie was able to connect her interest in graduate school to the SBP. She added, “[when] I was applying to the social work program [an academic advisor] helped me sharpen up my essays. I think that helped, and influenced me to apply for the social work program.”

All the participants are pursuing their desired line of work. Four of the seven participants have obtained graduate degrees, and two others are planning to attend graduate school in the near future. The participants indicated that exposure to the SBP experience, as a whole was the key factor that contributed to the success beyond graduation. To summarize, the program participants mentioned components of the program such as learning the importance of
diversity, building relationships, immersion in a supportive environment, and contact with
campus resources which has influenced the post-college success.

Table 4

*Participant Post-College Attainment*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SBP GPA</th>
<th>Cum. College GPA</th>
<th>College Degree</th>
<th>Year Degree Conferred</th>
<th>Post-College Attainment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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Discussion

The conceptual framework used to understand and inform this study proposed transitions and indicators of individual student success, which draws from a multilayered model, developed by Perna and Thomas (2008). The longitudinal process displays ten indicators that fall under four main categories of transition: College Readiness—educational aspirations and academic preparation; College Enrollment—college access and college choice; College Attainment—academic performance, transfer, and persistence; Post-College Attainment—Post BA enrollment, income, and educational attainment, which provides a general understanding of the student success process (Perna & Thomas, 2008). This researcher positioned the SBP in the model as a “moderator” between College Enrollment and College Attainment, creating opportunities to acquire skills and knowledge that may better insure student success. A detailed illustration of the Perna and Thomas (2008) conceptual model and the model developed by the researcher can be found in Figure 2 in Chapter 2. This framework served as an anchor for this study to interpret student success. (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

As the study progressed, and the researcher analyzed participant interviews and other data, she found it necessary to modify the original conceptual framework. Figure 3 highlights an updated model of the Perna and Thomas (2008) conceptual framework with modifications based on the findings and conclusions of this study. The final framework was modified to include the collective themes that emerged as the study developed (Baxter & Jack, 2008). With the understanding of SBP participants’ experiences, and the Perna and Thomas model of student success, the following indicators of student success were added: Transition to College, Confidence, Community, Relationships, Diversity, and Support. The thematic experiences of SBP participants are direct interpretations of student success indicators that may influence and
strengthens the relationship between college achievement and post-college attainment (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

The model assumes that the SBP facilitates a participant’s transition to college by building confidence, community, diverse relationships, and support. One of the main objectives of the university’s program is to strengthen academic skills through foundational courses, and to acclimate students to the university’s academic rigor (SBP Goals, 2008). Other objectives of the university’s program are to provide personalized advising and instruction, establish a supportive and diverse environment, shape students’ personal and social adjustment to the campus environment, and expose students to campus resources (SBP Goals, 2008). The next section will discuss the emerged themes as it relates to the student success model, in addition to how it aligns with the goals of the university’s SBP.

**Transition to College.** According to most participates in this study, participating in the SBP did eased students’ transition to college both academically and socially. This both agrees with and disconfirms Strayhorn’s (2011) findings that only academic skill is influenced by participation in SBP and social skills are not influenced. As indicated within the interviews,
participants within a SBP gain knowledge about the academic infrastructure needed to succeed within the university through the classes offered within the SBP. Taking college-level courses aligned participants with university faculty who promoted personalized support in a high performing academic environment. Faculty within the SBP, established a comfortable classroom setting, which also fostered academic self-efficacy. A high sense of self-efficacy increases a student’s willingness to invest time in their learning, and helps them recover more quickly when facing difficulties (Sharma & Nasa, 2014).

Socially, participants were introduced to the campus culture and norms. David and Maurice both felt the SBP contributed greatly to their social experience. David shared, “It definitely just helped to make it feel comfortable. It helped me feel a lot more connected to campus, or just the people on campus.” Maurice stated, “I feel like in some ways it prepared me, for the interaction with, other students of color, and other students of program.” Leslie shared:

Socially, you got to go different parties on campus. You got to learn about different extra-curricular activities, so you got to do a lot of stuff that you wouldn’t normally do until the fall semester. So you got exposed to things early.

Another aspect to consider in order having a successful transition in a college setting is learning how to juggle academics and non-academic activities. Leslie expounded:

I feel like it [SBP] helped me understand how to balance social life, and how to balance academics at the same time, because we were doing both [social and academics]. Even though we were talking only two classes, it was still an adjustment cause it was college courses, so the work load was heavier.

This shows that the university’s SBP was able to meet their goal to shape students’ personal and social adjustment to the campus environment, and expose students to campus resources.
Confidence. According to Sharma and Nasa (2014) environmental interventions can improve self-efficacy. The SBP experience equipped several of the participants with the confidence and motivation needed to persist in an academic setting. With the exception of one, the participants in this study gain confidence upon successful completion of the SBP that seemed to carry them throughout their college career. Brandon shared, “the Bridge Program gave me the confidence to know that I could excel at [the university] academically.” David stated, the biggest thing it did was just install confidence, it helped show me that [I could] handle the work load.”

All of the participants completed the summer term in good academic standing by earning at least a C average or above, which displayed successful completion of the SBP. Table 3 shows that each participant in this study earned above a C average upon completion of the SBP. With the profile of many SBP participants demonstrating a sense of unpreparedness, several of the participants doubted their academic ability to succeed before attending the university. The successful completion of the program increased their confidence in the ability to perform at the university’s standards. That gain in self-confidence is important. It supports Strayhorn’s (2011) findings that high academic self-efficacy result in better academic performance. For example, many participants felt the program introduced the next level math course. This showcases that the university’s SBP objectives strengthened the academic skills of the participants in this study.

Community. Contributions to participant’s personal and social adjustments to the campus environment were created by interactions with program peer advisors and other program participants. The program peer advisors were supportive of the participants, and served as major resources within the program. The interactions with peer advisors were very useful and authentic. This connection with peer advisors carried on after the program. Megan shared:
I feel like a lot of peer advisors actually kept in touch with like Bridge students afterwards, and so since a lot of people were friends, or friendly it was good to be able to reach out to them after Bridge was over.

Living in the residence hall with program participants created access to a reliable resource. The responses of all the participants in this study revealed that the SBP displayed the development of supportive, long-lasting friendships with other program participants. In the program’s structure as a living-learning community, where students take courses, attend activities, and live together, students spend lots of time together forces a connection. Students in learning communities form their own self-supporting groups overtime that extends beyond the classroom (Tinto, 2000). Leslie shared, “[we] all went to the undergraduate library, and studied together. When you [are] around the same people every single day, from morning to sun down, you can’t help but get close.”

Relationships. Participants’ heightened social skills allow for the development of meaningful, long-lasting relationships among peers, program faculty, and program staff. According to Suhr (1980), building social and academic support systems such as establishing relationships with advisors, faculty, and other students are essential to success at an institution. Participants in this SBP study established a supportive environment as relationships evolved with faculty, academic advisors, peer advisors, and other program participants. All of the participants developed relationships with faculty, academic advisors, peer advisors, and other program participants that have lasted over the years. Trisha stated, “[I] made all my friends in Bridge, which I still have today, I live with one of them, and my other group [of friends are] all Bridge people as well.” The professional staff was very helpful, and displayed true passion for the
success of its students. That resulted in the development of confidence and trust in the program’s academic advisors and faculty by the participants. David shared:

I think he [my math instructor] understood, he knew what it felt like to be a Bridge student. He didn’t treat us any differently, but he also was sure to give us the help that we might have needed. I think he’s just general understanding of that, made us feel comfortable with him [and] kind of develop that trust which allow that learning to kind of happen in that year.

Maurice stated, “I developed a lot of professional relationships on through Bridge.” Brandon spoke about his relationships: “I was able to foster such good relationships-- with my advisor, [other advisors], my [English instructor], that’s still my boy! [In addition, the] relationships with some of the Bridge kids was good.

The program created an environment where students could develop and maintain relationships. David talked about his experience:

I always had people I could call even [from] other residence halls during the school year, who I could talk to and say, ‘Hey, what’s going on?’ It helped, because of the close relationships I had with like my roommate and friends like that.

Trisha, David, and Maurice provided examples of how the university’s SBP met its objective. The relationships with faculty and staff cultivated personalized advising and instruction.

Diversity. One of the key finding in this study was related to the theme of diversity. With most of the participants coming from mainly homogenous high school environments and communities, the diversity within the SBP, according to the participants, was both obvious and important. Several suggested that their interactions with program peers from diverse
backgrounds created rich class discussions among program participants. According to Light (2001), a student’s learning is enhanced when both ethnic and racial diversity are embraced, and this seemed to be true for the individuals in this study. Alexis explained how the SBP classes taught her to appreciate learning from others:

We did a lot of sharing in our CSP class [first year reading seminar], having other people share their experiences, definitely made me more open minded than I was before coming in. So, in the fall [and] the whole four years, I would just kind of listen, try different things, [and] try to get to know different cultures.

The program showed Brandon that he could find connections with other races. He shared:

If I didn’t go to Bridge, then I don’t think that I would have known that there were African-American kids out there, who I could relate to, or any race, like Caucasians or Hispanics. [I realized], even though you’re not African-American, I can still relate to you.

The participants then expected the same diverse environment in the fall as in the summer within the SBP. According to most participants, they were quite shocked in the differences between the summer and the fall setting. Trisha expressed:

I felt like when I came here [to the university] it was [going to be] very diverse. I thought [I was] going to love it [and] I’ll feel at home, because I grew up in a very diverse community. Bridge [had] a lot of diversity, but then when [the fall came, I thought] “where is the diversity?” I just saw like a lot of discrimination. It was not the diversity that I was looking for!

Both Maurice and Megan conveyed how the university’s student body was much different in the fall compared to the summer. Maurice shared, I feel like it [Bridge] is good, because it’s a
culture shock coming here. If you’re from [a] predominantly black environment, and you're [thrown] into a world where you’re not just the minority, you’re the super minority. Megan reflected:

There were benefits [to Bridge], it was nice knowing Black people because when I actually started, there is no one [other Blacks] around. It was really weird. I was not expecting to be in a class [with] 100 people, and there [would] be like two black people [in class]. So, that definitely helped, just knowing people who were like you, that was nice.

The introduction to a diverse environment within the SBP proved to be valuable to the participants of this study.

**Support.** The SBP is a supportive educational environment that provides personal and academic encouragement to participants. Building a supportive climate on campus is essential to student retention (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Many of the participants discussed the feeling of support from faculty, advisors, and other program participants. David shared an experience:

There are people who [were] experiencing similar things that I was so having a hard time of figuring out you know I remember we all got together to study for math. People are there, people are studying, [and] having trouble with math, but it’s just nice to know that you’ve got people who share [the] same characteristics with you, [and] you feel comfortable.

It was the availability of the professional staff members within the program after the program that provided participants with a sense of support throughout their entire college career. This support included academic, personal, and professional, which concurs with the findings in Stolle-McAllister (2011). Maurice spoke to this: “my [academic] advisor was a great support system
for me here… my math professor, she was somebody who was very supportive, and good to have in your corner.” Leslie talked about the support of her math instructor:

I feel like her personality, and her passion, and dedication towards math, or the program in general, just automatically played a role on students. You went into her class and felt like somebody truly cared for you. She took the time to do one-on-one tutoring, tutoring in the evenings, tutoring on Saturdays, she made her schedule fit your schedule so you could really succeed not only in the Bridge program, but at [the university] overall.

A supportive learning experience was created, which encouraged participants to work hard in the course, and seek help when needed. Stolle-McAllister (2011) found, participants’ exposure to faculty expectations of performing well in a course include, asking questions, visiting office hours, and that seeking assistance was helpful. The evidence provided through the interviews in this study supports the Stolle-McAllister (2011) findings.

**College Achievement and Post College Attainment.** The results of the collective case study findings provide vivid descriptions of the experiences within the SBP that contributed to participants’ success in college and beyond. The thematic constructs of this study (transition to college, confidence, community, relationship, diversity, and support) did seem to influences SBP participants’ academic performance, transfer, and persistence within college achievement. Then, the same constructs seemed to influence SBP participants’ post B.A, income, and educational attainment within post-college attainment. David summarized how the SBP has influenced his current career:

It [SBP] plays a pretty major role for me because of the success I had in it [SBP].

If I hadn’t done well in it, it very well could have been the thing that steered me
away from education. So for me fortunately, it was a good experience and I was able to see the impact of having it, seeing what could happen to a kid who [thought] they can’t go to that school, [who thought] they may not be able to fit in, or succeed [here]. Then, take them in to somebody who says, [you] can. [You] can have all these things, [you] can do all these things, there are people here who can help me do that. And so, it really just helps improve again that kind of self-efficacy, I feel like I can do this, I can do it well! It [SBP] really does help, I see now having increased my education. You see the opportunity that this program gives to students and to the university, because it’s bringing in a population of students that the university doesn’t get enough of. So, it’s serving as a resource to not only the students but the service in the university, and the other students on campus. I trace it back to my work in student affairs now. It always serves as my reference. I think, “what happened in Bridge, What were some of the thing that [were] important to me, And how can I replicate, How can we figure out how to do that for our students too?”

According to the cross case analysis, interactions with faculty, advisors, program peer advisors, and other program participants contributed to an environment, which built confidence, community, diverse relationships, and support among SBP participants. It was evident that the themes emerged in this study work interdependent of one another to create the SBP experience. Often times, the difference between a student staying and leaving college come down to positive interactions with forms of social support in advising (including faculty and peer), counseling, and mentoring (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The relationships with individuals in this supportive and
diverse community were key factors in the transition to college, and academic success of participants of a SBP in college and beyond.

**Implications of Study**

The results of this study revealed that participation within a SBP contributes to a student’s academic success throughout their college career and beyond. The SBP in this study created an educational community in a supportive context that developed academic self-efficacy among students who come from underrepresented and underprepared backgrounds. It is the confluence of the components—faculty, academic advisors, peer advisors, and other program participants within a supportive community—which increases academic self-efficacy, and in turn, influences academic success throughout college and beyond. This section provides suggestions for SBP leaders and students who are both key stakeholders in the operation of SBPs.

**Implications for Higher Education Practitioners.** This study illustrates the importance of developing an educational community that creates a supportive and motivational environment to help students persist through a college setting, an understanding essential to administrators, and/or leaders of summer Bridge programs in higher education. Administrators and university leaders should keep the end in mind, as they build a program that produces graduates of higher education institutions who are able to achieve their goals. Understanding the value of relationships and the connections established within the SBP, and fostering a supportive academic community all throughout college and even beyond is important. For example, Brandon established relationships with academic advisors, instructors, and peers. He stated, “I could always fall back on those relationships. It’s like a safety net, if I ever got like lost, you know. Those were the things that all contribute to my academic success after Bridge.”
Administrators and leaders should hire faculty and staff who are able to develop authentic connections with SBP participants. In addition, trainings around building relationships and connecting with students should be provided for all faculty and staff working within the SBP.

**Recommendations for SBP Administrators and Leaders.**

- *Make certain the message in the admission letter is clear, spelling out the program expectations, highlighting the positive attributes for students.*
  Students and their families, and high school counselors/administrators did not clearly understand the requirements of the program. For example---Is it required or optional, is this remedial, and is there a cost associate with the program? Provide a letter that clearly outlines the requirements and expectations of the program to admitted students and their families, and to the high schools. Highlight all the benefits of the program by showcasing testimonials from former participants and graduates.

- *Make certain the language in the admission letter is positive, utilizing words that do not suggest deficiencies.*
  The wording within the admission letter made participants feel inadequate to attend the university. The admissions letter should include positive and uplifting words that make future participants enthusiastic about spending their summer in college.

- *Acknowledge and address the myths and stereotypes associated with summer Bridge programs, and its participants.*
  There are negative stereotypes associated with summer Bridge programs such as it is only for students of color, the classes are remedial, and it is similar to summer camp. To demystify the negativity, the program can develop a recruitment video with actual summer Bridge participants who represent the diversity within the program. Current
students and alumni can provide testimony’s that highlight all the positive attributes of the program.

- **Create a community that allow students to bond and develop diverse relationships with program peers, faculty, and professional staff associated with the program.**

  The development of diverse long-lasting relationships can be very meaningful for many participants. Designing structured projects, activities, and workshops that are both educational and social will help form connections that are organic.

- **Integrate students in non-summer Bridge courses.**

  By taking course with only summer Bridge program peers, participants felt the program was too structured. Allowing participants to select one non-summer Bridge course would provide participants with a sense of empowerment and responsibility as a real college student.

- **Prep participants for the realities of the racial and ethnic make-up of the university’s student body population by implementing a workshop/course into the program’s curriculum.**

  Participants felt life after the summer Bridge program was very different. To reduce the sense of culture shock within the fall term, the program should develop a lesson plan to address this within the curriculum.

- **Help participants understand the differences in the level of support from non-summer Bridge faculty.**

  The program’s faculty provide a sense of support that may not be duplicated with non-summer Bridge faculty throughout the college career. This also can be addressed within the curriculum to help students understand the differences and expectations of faculty.
**Implications for SBP Participants.** Interviews with SBP participants uncovered and described the experiences of SBP participants within this study. The data collected revealed multiple aspects that SBP participants should understand. The meaning of being invited to a SBP is not a bad thing. In fact, being invited to attend a SBP proposes that participants will have a greater opportunity to achieve graduation and other post-college accomplishments such as income and graduate school. Participants’ increase their level of academic confidence needed to succeed through college. As a SBP participant, one is exposed to a diverse community of scholars, which fosters a heightened sense of learning. The experiences within the SBP demonstrate the outcome of long-lasting relationships that have continued over-time. For example, Trisha shared, “I made all my friends in Bridge which I still have today. I live with one of them [now], and my other group is all Bridge people as well.” In all, attendance in a SBP influences college achievement, and post-college attainment.

Results of the study, displays how multiple support models sustain SBP participants by focusing on the direct experiences and outcomes of participants within the SBP who completed a baccalaureate degree. Having an understanding of the immediate experiences of SBP participants, and how those experiences contributed to student success can increase persistence and graduation rates among SBP participants. This information is helpful for practitioners who wish to improve the educational outcomes of SBP participants and/or participants of a SBP.

**Recommendations for SBP Participants.**

- *Build relationships with program peers, faculty, and advisors.*

Take the time to develop a positive community that includes individuals from various groups. This community should provide a supportive surrounding all throughout college
and beyond. In happy moments there will be individuals to celebrate with you, and in challenging moments there will be individuals there to comfort you.

- *Welcome the interactions with diverse groups.*
  
  Being exposed to diverse groups can allow one to be more open-minded, which can produce a well-rounded individual. Learning how to play well in the sandbox with others is essential to one’s social development. This will be useful in all career fields.

- *Utilize your relationships built with faculty and advisors throughout college and beyond.*
  
  Use your resources on campus, which include the people you meet within the community. Keep in touch throughout college, and even beyond if permitted. This could be helpful when you need a letter of recommendation for graduate school, or a reference for a job.

- *Embrace being a summer Bridge scholar, and summer Bridge community.*
  
  Be proud of who you are and how your experiences have developed you personally. Being a part of a summer Bridge community is a special, members only society. This sense of confidence is helpful when telling your story.

- *Learn to balance academics and social life; do not party too much!*
  
  Remember the main reason you are in college, and that is go gain an education. It is important to stay focused and motivated to perform well academically. This should be useful when looking toward the goal of graduation.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

There is little to no empirical data on SBP participants who have graduated. More research is needed to uncover what ways the program affects students through the college career
and through graduate school. It is recommended to extend this study to include a larger sample size to create a richer dataset that may improve our understanding of the specific contributors of student success. For example, collecting qualitative data from at least five SBP participants from each cohort of 2008, 2009, and 2010 and graduated from the university. Those graduates can then be compared to five SBP participants that participated in the program in 2008, 2009, and 2009 but did not graduate from the university. This comparison will explore similarities and differences between both groups of SBP participants to determine areas of improvement. It would be helpful to also understand other constructs of student success, and what caused students not to complete college after being provided specific tools and resources for success. This comparative study will showcase teaching that can be learned from the non-completions SBP participants. In addition, this could also introduce a study solely on non-completion SBP participants.

The participants in this study completed college in 4–4 ½ years. This raises the many thoughts of how SBP may have an impact of degree competition among other Bridge programs. A quantitative study on Bridge participants, degree completion, and time to completion across several participant cohorts; in addition, multiple SBP across institutions would provide a robust and rich study that will display actual degree completion data. This study would contribute greatly to the literature on retention and persistence.

Expanding the study to include research of the program as an organization may provide key elements that display the importance of community as a supportive context. Collecting qualitative data from program administrators, faculty, staff, and peer advisors involved in the program can reveal how personal relationships within the educational community are fostered. This would help an organization understand specific ways faculty and staff within the program
devote time to the social aspects of the SBP such as developing relationships, building community, and embracing diversity. Having a deeper understanding can help when developing trainings for staff in addition to recognizing desirable characteristics the program should look for when hiring new staff.

Another recommendation is to conduct a longitudinal study, which follows SBP participants from the start of the program through graduation. A qualitative and quantitative study could produce rich data that provides a deeper insight of the experiences of SBP participants that are more recent. Conducting the study as the student is experiencing the program will produce accurate results of occurrences, and reduces the chances of inaccurate interpretations from the researcher. In addition, the longitudinal study can expand 2 years’ post-graduation to allow program participants to easily identify distinct contributions to post-graduation success. While this study does contribute to the literature of SBP studies as it relates to student success, richer insights have yet to be revealed.

Conclusion

Students are most likely to succeed and persist in academic environments that provide supportive academic and social educational communities (Baxter & Jack, 2008). This study explored the experiences of participants within a SBP at one public Research I institution in the Midwest. Those experiences revealed key contributors that influenced participants’ academic and professional success beyond college graduation. The findings illuminate multiple aspects of a supportive educational community as indicators of student success.

The results of this study indicated that the formula within this SBP works, and it works well! The participants in this study represented millions of students who may be seen as low-hanging fruit by top-tier institutions. These SBP participants were able to persist through
college, despite the negative perceptions of underprepared, underrepresented, low-income students who attend a predominantly White, Research I institution. A voice was given to the SBP participants within this study. Their voices communicated, “I am good enough! I am smart enough! I do belong here! I can be successful! I can be a college graduate of a top research one institution! I can go to graduate school! I can obtain a good job!” The thematic constructs revealed in this study showcases the strengths of the SBP and how those constructs influence student success. This SBP created a supportive living-learning community that fostered a sense of belonging within the institution among the participants. Being able to attend a SBP that introduced other students that either looked like them, and/or they could relate to was comforting and necessary for persistence. Most participants in this study determined that their experiences in this particular SBP aided them with the tools to be successful.

The study took a comprehensive look at the historical aspects of college access as it relates to SBPs and similar transition programs. The research design of a multiple case study approach was to gain a deeper understanding of experiences of SBP participants, and how those experiences strengthened one’s academic success throughout college and beyond. Multiple insights of the experiences of SBP participants were uncovered. This study produced evidence-based thematic understandings of what leads SBP students to persevere toward degree completion. As a result, the recommendations are significant to the contribution of existing research on SBP programs.
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Oxford University Press.


Nuñez, A., Sparks, P., & Hernandez, E. (2011). Latino access to community colleges and


## Appendix A. Summer Bridge Program Overview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Year Program Began</th>
<th>Length of Program</th>
<th>Program Components</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
<th>Program Cost</th>
<th>College Credit Received?</th>
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<td>Ypsilanti, MI</td>
<td>1988</td>
<td>3 - Weeks</td>
<td>English, Mathematics, Reading and Writing</td>
<td>40</td>
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<td>1988</td>
<td>3 - Weeks</td>
<td>Mathematics, English, Psychology Enrichment, College Success Workshops</td>
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<td>2012</td>
<td>8 - Weeks</td>
<td>Courses designed to improve academic skills and strengthen student responsibility</td>
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<td>1973</td>
<td>6 – Weeks</td>
<td>Academic Writing, Critical Reading, Quantitative Thinking, and Personal Wellness</td>
<td>350-400</td>
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<td>1 - Week</td>
<td>Writing Preparation, Mathematics Review, Academic Success Workshops</td>
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<td>1975</td>
<td>7- Weeks</td>
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Sources:

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University of California Los Angeles - http://www.newstudents.ucla.edu/csi.htm
University of California Santa Cruz - http://eop.ucsc.edu/content/Bridge
University of Michigan -
https://www.lsa.umich.edu/esp/studentprograms/summerBridgeprogram
University of Tennessee Knoxville - http://studentsuccess.utk.edu/ut-lead/
Wayne State University - http://apex.wayne.edu/summer_Bridge.php
Appendix B. Program Brochure

Overview

The Comprehensive Studies Program (CSP) is an academic and cultural enrichment program designed to complement academic coursework. Students work closely with faculty mentors and peers to explore a wide range of topics, pursue academic interests, and develop leadership skills. CSP offers a unique opportunity for students to engage in academic, social, and cultural activities outside the classroom. The program is open to all students, regardless of major, and is designed to enhance their educational experience and personal growth.

History

The origins of the CSP can be traced back to the early 1980s. The program was established to provide a more flexible and individualized academic experience for students. Originally, the program offered courses in a variety of disciplines, including the arts, sciences, and humanities. Over the years, the program has expanded to include a wide range of activities and opportunities for students to engage in academic, social, and cultural pursuits.

CSP Today & Admissions

CSP is open to all students, regardless of major, and is designed to complement academic coursework. Students work closely with faculty mentors and peers to explore a wide range of topics, pursue academic interests, and develop leadership skills. CSP offers a unique opportunity for students to engage in academic, social, and cultural activities outside the classroom. The program is open to all students, regardless of major, and is designed to enhance their educational experience and personal growth.

CSP Services

CSP Services are available to all students, regardless of major. Services include academic advising, career counseling, and financial aid. The program also offers a range of extracurricular activities, including seminars, workshops, and social events.

Academic Advising

Academic Advising is available to all students. Students are encouraged to meet with their academic advisors regularly to discuss their progress and academic goals. The program also offers a range of extracurricular activities, including seminars, workshops, and social events.

Admission Requirements

The program is open to all students, regardless of major. Students are encouraged to meet with their academic advisors regularly to discuss their progress and academic goals. The program also offers a range of extracurricular activities, including seminars, workshops, and social events.

Advising Office Contact

The program is open to all students, regardless of major. Students are encouraged to meet with their academic advisors regularly to discuss their progress and academic goals. The program also offers a range of extracurricular activities, including seminars, workshops, and social events.

Advising Office Contact

The program is open to all students, regardless of major. Students are encouraged to meet with their academic advisors regularly to discuss their progress and academic goals. The program also offers a range of extracurricular activities, including seminars, workshops, and social events.
CSP Services (continued)

Other Services

Support for Student Groups The Academic Assistance Center offers a variety of services designed to meet the specific needs of student groups. These services include tutoring, writing workshops, and study skills seminars. Additional services include career development, job placement, and networking opportunities.

The Summer Bridge Program

The Summer Bridge Program is a competitive program designed to prepare students for the demands of college. The program is offered at three different campuses: the University Center, the University of California, and the University of Southern California. The program is open to all incoming freshman students who meet the eligibility criteria. The program is designed to help students develop the skills and knowledge necessary for success in college. Participants in the Summer Bridge Program attend classes, work with mentors, and participate in a variety of activities designed to enhance their academic and personal development. The program is designed to help students transition from high school to college and to provide support and guidance as they begin their college careers.
Appendix C. Research Approval

RESEARCH @ EMU

UHSRC Determination: EXPEDITED INITIAL APPROVAL

DATE: February 22, 2016

TO: Makeda Turner, MA, EdS
    Eastern Michigan University

Re: UHSRC: # 870726-1
    Category: Expedited category 7
    Approval Date: February 21, 2016
    Expiration Date: February 20, 2017

Title: The Essence of a College Summer Bridge Program: Voices of program participants who competed college

Your research project, entitled The Essence of a College Summer Bridge Program: Voices of program participants who competed college, has been approved in accordance with all applicable federal regulations.

This approval included the following:

1. Enrollment of 10 subjects to participate in the approved protocol.
2. Use of the following study measures: Interview Protocol
3. Use of the following stamped recruitment materials: Invitation Letter
4. Use of the stamped: Informed Consent form

Renewals: This approval is valid for one year and expires on February 20, 2017. If you plan to continue your study beyond February 20, 2017, you must submit a Continuing Review Form by January 21, 2017 to ensure the approval does not lapse.

Modifications: All changes must be approved prior to implementation. If you plan to make any minor changes, you must submit a Minor Modification Form. For any changes that alter study design or any study instruments, you must submit a Human Subjects Approval Request Form. These forms are available through IRBNet on the UHSRC website.

Problems: All major deviations from the reviewed protocol, unanticipated problems, adverse events, subject complaints, or other problems that may increase the risk to human subjects or change the category of review must be reported to the UHSRC via an Event Report form, available through IRBNet on the UHSRC website.

Follow-up: If your Expedited research project is not completed and closed after three years, the UHSRC office requires a new Human Subjects Approval Request Form prior to approving a continuation beyond three years.

Please use the UHSRC number listed above on any forms submitted that relate to this project, or on any correspondence with the UHSRC office.

Good luck in your research. If we can be of further assistance, please contact us at 734-487-3090 or via e-mail at human.subjects@emich.edu. Thank you for your cooperation.
Sincerely,

Jennifer Kellman Fritz, PhD
Chair
University Human Subjects Review Committee
## Appendix D. Summer Bridge Program Schedule

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<th>Time/Day</th>
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Appendix E. Invitation Email

Dear Former SBP Participant:

My name is Makeda Turner and I am a doctoral candidate at Eastern Michigan University. My dissertation study is focused on the Summer Bridge Program (SBP), which you attended. I am seeking participants in the SBP who have earned baccalaureate their degrees and are currently employed and/or continuing their educations in graduate school. As your educational success is a major accomplishment, and you are a graduate of both the SBP and the university, I am inviting you to share your experiences in the SBP and your undergraduate career. Participants in this research study, will be asked to engage in a 90-minute face-to-face interview with the researcher about their experiences in the SBP and their undergraduate career. Please respond to this email directly if you would like to participate in this study. If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact me at mturne35@emich.edu. Thank you in advance for your participation.

Best,

Makeda Turner
Appendix F. Interview Protocol

1. Tell me about your childhood, where you grew up, and what your high school was like.

2. What influences contributed to your decision to go to college?

3. Tell me about your experience in the SBP. What did you think or feel when you were invited to the program? What did you expect from the program and would you say your expectations were met - or not?

4. How do you feel the SBP contributed, if at all, to your academic experience at the university?

5. How do you feel the SBP contributed, if at all, to your social experiences at the university?
   a. What components of your SBP experience stood out most?
   b. What resources of your SBP experience stood out most?
   c. Who are the people from your SBP experience that stood out most?

6. How do you believe participating in the SBP may have influenced what you find yourself doing now, following your graduation from college?
Appendix G. Worksheet 1. A Map on which to make Assertions for the Final Report

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And so on for the remaining Cases

A High mark means that the Theme is an important part of this particular case study and relevant to the theme.
Appendix H. Worksheet 2. Multi-case Assertions for the Final Report

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Appendix I. Worksheet 3. Planning the Multi-case Final Report

Planning Assembly of the FINAL REPORT

Main Topics

Page Context pages Issue: Issue: Issue:

Single mention Topics Quotes, Impressions: