

Connecticut College

Digital Commons @ Connecticut College

---

Education Honors Papers

Education Department

---

2024

## Access and Equity in Higher Education: The Social Significance of Mentoring BIPOC and FGLI Students

Wendy Olivares

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.conncoll.edu/educationhp>



Part of the [Education Commons](#)

---

This Honors Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the Education Department at Digital Commons @ Connecticut College. It has been accepted for inclusion in Education Honors Papers by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Connecticut College. For more information, please contact [bpancier@conncoll.edu](mailto:bpancier@conncoll.edu). The views expressed in this paper are solely those of the author.

Access and Equity in Higher Education:  
The Social Significance of Mentoring BIPOC and FGLI Students

An Honors Thesis Presented by Wendy Yazmin Olivares  
To the Department of Education  
Advised by Professor Isaac Gottesman

Connecticut College  
New London, Connecticut  
May 1, 2024

### **Acknowledgements**

I would like to express my sincerest gratitude to my advisor Professor Isaac Gottesman who offered me tremendous support and guidance throughout this project. The insights he provided and his words of encouragement motivated me to keep going. We learned a lot about the process together and I am honored to have worked with him.

I also appreciate the input and time that Professor Karen Pezzetti and Professor Sunil Bhatia put into looking over my work and serving as readers for my project.

I am also grateful to Professor Ana Lilia Campos-Manzo and her flexibility to change our class material during times of unrest at the college. Professor Campos-Manzo and my peers in sociology methods played a pivotal role in constructing the methodology with me and I am very grateful for their input and suggestions.

Many thanks to both the Holleran Center Staff and peers who were always available to answer any questions I had and offer a helping hand at every stage of this project. Additional thank you to the Center for the Critical Study of Race and Ethnicity which approved me as a grant recipient numerous times which allowed me to share a small token of appreciation for all my participants.

Y finalmente quiero agradecerles a mis papás, Yazmin Olivares y Edgar Olivares por siempre alentarme a completar las cosas que me propongo. Su valentía y bondad al dar todo por mí y mis hermanas no será en vano y les presento este proyecto como el primer de muchos logros por venir.

**Contents**

Introduction.....	3
Literature Review.....	4
Methodology.....	13
Findings.....	18
Discussion.....	30
Implications.....	33
Conclusion.....	33
References.....	34
Appendix A: IRB Approval Letter.....	39
Appendix B: Interview Questions.....	40

## Introduction

Mentoring relationships are crucial in helping marginalized students of color navigate the complexities of applying, attending, and graduating from selective colleges and universities. There is a lot of unspoken knowledge and information about higher education that is passed on from generation to generation in households where more than one generation has attended college. This lack of information puts first-generation students of color at a major disadvantage. These disadvantaged positions make it difficult for students of color to navigate different spaces and make their inclusion in selective high-education institutions more difficult. There is plenty of research that highlights differences in college degree attainment by race, intergenerational degree attainment, and the social capital that mentoring programs share with student mentees of color (United States Census Bureau, 2022; Rivera et al., 2019; Cavendish et al., 2023).

An aspect that needs further exploring is the experiences that students of color have once they have made it into selective institutions and how they are making meaning of their situations. It is important to highlight and listen to the perspectives of the students who have been admitted to these selective institutions; simply looking at the GPAs or degree attainment rates fails to take a holistic approach that takes into account the nuances in the experiences of the marginalized students.

This research seeks to understand the important role of college mentoring programs for BIPOC and FGLI students.<sup>1</sup> It is also important to note that while being first-generation is an

---

<sup>1</sup> In this study, I refer to racially marginalized communities as BIPOC which stands for Black, Indigenous, People of Color. It is important to note that marginalized groups undergo their own individual struggles and in no way is the term BIPOC trying to conflate their experiences and identities as one. It is more of a unifying title to build coalition and strength for those communities who often have their identity lost in liberation movements. The term FGLI stand for first-generation low-income and it is used to describe college-level students who are from

identity separate from other labels like race, ethnicity, gender, and ability it is still influenced by these aspects. The combination of not having a network to familiarize yourself with navigating college as well as lacking economic resources makes higher education less accessible for people in these communities. This study will highlight the experiences of twenty-one BIPOC and/or FGLI students who have experience with formal or informal mentoring programs and relate it to their experiences at Hill College, a pseudonym for a selective predominately white liberal arts college in the northeast.

This qualitative study was conducted with the goal of understanding the following research questions. First, how do students who participated in first-generation or low-income focused mentoring programs experience selective private liberal arts colleges? Second, what are the collective experiences of students who participated in formal mentoring programs at these private liberal arts colleges? This study finds that mentoring programs are a significant support mechanism for BIPOC and FGLI students. Social capital through mentorship programs grants students opportunities that they otherwise might not have.

### **Literature Review**

What follows is a review of literature of the experiences of BIPOC and FGLI students in the college application and admissions process as well as in their overall college experience.

#### **Access and Disparities by Race**

According to work done by Teranishi et al. (2004) high school students who attend schools with fewer resources and less rigorous academic preparation are more likely to 

---

unprivileged backgrounds and are also the first in their family to attend a higher education institution.

experience inequalities associated with higher education and racial segregation. In turn, this would limit access to four-year colleges and universities. Buckmann's (2021) work makes claims of how higher education has been constantly seen as the driving force that allows common folk to achieve both upward mobility and economic success. By following that logic, if marginalized groups are being excluded from these spaces then the economic gaps between racial groups will remain unchanged. An important factor to consider is that the likelihood of graduation for students is not reliant solely on the admission of students to college but on what colleges they are enrolling in (Baker et al., 2018). Baker (2018) found that the gap in enrollment of Black and White and Hispanic and White students is diminishing but the enrollment of white students in selective universities is still much higher. The reality though is that Black and Hispanic students are enrolling in postsecondary non-degree granting programs which are technically still considered higher education but are not as selective. Simply accepting these numbers as an indicator of a more equal playing field for students of color will continue to uphold the current economic gap between racial groups.

As a means to counter this exclusion of marginalized students, there have been sets of policies, such as affirmative action, which attempt to equalize the admission rates of historically underrepresented groups on the basis of race and gender. As of June 29, 2023, the Supreme Court ruled against allowing colleges and universities to continue using race in their admissions processes. The suspension of this policy will affect the goals of institutions to diversify their student body. After the ban of affirmative action policies in six states including Texas, California, Washington, Florida, Georgia, and Michigan, the enrollment of Black and Hispanic students has fallen at more selective institutions but there has been limited evidence that shows that enrollment of Black students has fallen in public institutions (Backes, 2012). Backes' study

can serve as an indicator as to what can be reflected at the national level. Without much introspection, the selectivity of a school may be seen as a mere marker of prestige or to serve as an ego booster. The reality is that more selective institutions are appealing to students due to their higher financial aid packages, resources, and stronger alumni networks that facilitate the networking needed for the job market they have to encounter upon graduation. When students of color come from marginalized and economically disadvantaged backgrounds they usually do not have access to these opportunities and resources. Selective colleges and universities are essential to serve as a direct door to upward mobility. Attending selective colleges and universities can give disadvantaged students access to networks, resources, opportunities, and communities that they otherwise would have difficulty reaching and belonging to in non-selective universities.

The disparities and gaps in the admissions and degree attainment for students of color go beyond the schools that the students are applying to, these differences can be seen earlier in the academic careers of the students. (Holzman et al., 2020) not only how completing a college preparatory curriculum, taking the SAT or ACT, and applying for college are the sources of differences in degree attainment but they also look at the intersection of all of these factors along with race and income-based differences that are present in college enrollment rates. As pointed out by Holzman, et al., the differences in college readiness are seen to have a direct correlation with race and socioeconomic status. This research highlights that there is a gap in the steps that students are taking in order to get to college. A key solution that Holzman, et al. (2020) highlight is advocating for policies that affect earlier educational factors such as academic qualifications, preparations for college entrance exams, and many other factors that take place even before students graduate high school specifically for students in disadvantaged communities. A key factor to take into consideration is that if state or nationwide policies are instituted instead of



helping students of color they can widen the gap between students of color and their white counterparts if there is no special consideration or assistance that is specifically targeted for students of color. Students of color and overall disadvantaged students need closer assistance that can be better brought in the way of mentoring and direct guidance whether it is through formal or informal means. Without it, any policies will simply reproduce our current state in regards to application, admission, retainment, and graduation rates from selective colleges and universities.

As Cavendish et al. (2023) state, the way to ensure more direct assistance to marginalized students would be to encourage mentor-mentee relationships between students and well-informed adults who can provide them with guidance for college readiness and preparation. These relationships can be either formal or informal mentoring. Formal mentoring relates to the kinds of relationships that are more structured likely coming from a program or foundation with clear objectives, and time frames. Hagler and Rhodes (2018) note that an informal mentoring relationship happens when there is a more organic and natural relationship that arises on its own without being structured or relying on a time frame or objectives. Both of these can serve as the specialized help needed to increase the chances of success for marginalized students of color. This research highlights the role that informal mentoring plays in the educational outcomes of marginalized students. With more formal mentoring students are likely to hear more precise information that will be relevant to them in regards to colleges and universities. With proper guidance, this information and knowledge can turn into actionable items that create elevated student profiles that will make marginalized students more attractive candidates for selective colleges and universities.

In relation to Latine students, Hurtado et al. (2020) found that “differences in college readiness (high school GPA, AP credits) and material resources (Pell grants, student belief in

parents' ability to afford selective colleges) are the main predictors of not only being strategic in the college application process but also result in more selective college enrollment where students' chances of college completion are higher" (paras. 1). This means that marginalized students need interventions that specifically target these factors as soon as possible. Informal mentoring can have the possibility of covering these topics that the students can benefit from achieving or being aware of. Formal mentoring programs with the goal of post-secondary education tend to have a specific curriculum that can cover these topics in more precise ways that can ensure the students are reaching the milestones that can elevate their applicant profiles. Having someone who understands the complexities related to the college application process can make students more comfortable also embarking on this complicated journey. Schwartz (2018) argues that social capital is not equally distributed and first-generation college students face many challenges and having a mentor to help them throughout the process can help alleviate some of the stress and bridge that knowledge gap that more privileged individuals do not face.

### **Intergenerational College Educational Attainment**

Another crucial factor to consider is whether the students are going to be the first in their families to attend institutions of higher education. According to Schwartz (2018) when a student is the first to attend college they are faced with unexpected challenges in an unknown territory and very likely cannot rely on their parental support as they have never been in that position. Research by Fomby and Cross (2018) indicates that by extension, when a parent has attended college or university they have knowledge and tips that they can pass on to their children therefore lessening the burden that the students will have. In regards to burdens, Ma and She (2021) found that there is an association between the perceived barriers that first-generation college students have and their outcome expectations. What is meant by this is that if students

have higher levels of barriers they are more associated with negative career outcomes. Some of the barriers that first-generation students face include social support from their families and social networks. The researchers found no association between their levels of community belonging and career outcome expectations. Ma and She (2021) claim that this is an aspect that should be explored further as many students of color express that they feel “uncomfortable approaching faculty members and instead would prefer to rely on peer network for assistance and advisement”(p. 99). Keeping this in mind, it is a possibility that if students do not have a sense of belonging and connection to their campus community then they are less likely to reach out for help therefore reduce their chances of completing their degree from a selective college or university.

Niu’s work (2015) finds that the sense of belonging that students seek in a college or university may have an impact on how comfortable a student is going to college or university outside of their home state. Students of racial and ethnic minorities show trends of attending college wherever they see themselves reflected in the student body, and white students have higher rates of attending colleges and universities that are outside of their home states. Another important fact highlighted by this body of research is that the students who did end up leaving their home states attended more private four-year selective colleges and universities. Financial aspects and economic disparities in the households of students of color also have an association to whether or not they find themselves in the liberty of attending institutions that are located outside of their home states. On top of race and socioeconomic status, whether a parent went to college or not also has an association with the likelihood of the students attending college outside of their home state.

Further research conducted by Garza & Fullerton (2018) found “that first-generation students who attend colleges at a greater distance from home are more likely to graduate from college with a bachelor’s degree” (p. 164). This information would point to the fact that students may have an easier time assimilating into their new environments when they are further away from home since they do not have to reconcile the differences between their home environment and their new selective or elite college or university. With the additional costs of out-of-state tuition and housing, financial barriers once again will pose a challenge for first-generation students of color in a way that is not presented for non-first-generation white students.

Fomby and Cross (2018) found that whenever a parent attended and completed a degree from a four-year institution the children’s educational degree attainment also increased. In the same study, Fomby and Cross found that students whose parents did attend college had the economic and cultural resources that were needed in order to not only attend college and university but also graduate from these institutions. In their study, Ford and Thompson (2016) found that when individuals attend selective colleges and universities then their children are also more likely to attend selective institutions as well. This cycle will continue to reproduce the admission of students from the same background into selective institutions. By the same token if students from more diverse backgrounds are admitted into these institutions then their future children are likely to have similar aspirations. This information on selective college attendance supports that there are relationships between socioeconomic background and overall access to institutions of higher education. Again, with this understanding in mind, first-generation college students find themselves at a disadvantage when compared to their white counterparts whose parents have been more likely to attend these types of institutions.

On top of there being an association between parents who went to college, there is also an association found between siblings who attended college or university. According to Smith (2020), when youth attend college they are not only benefiting themselves but they are also increasing the probability of their siblings also attending college. Smith further finds that this effect is strongest among youths whose parents do not have college degrees. This study shows that the transmission of knowledge is not limited just to parent-child relationships but also sibling-to-sibling relationships. This information could potentially mean that siblings take on the role that college-educated parents would have taken in regards to orienting and guiding their college applicant. Overall, this once more points to the importance of knowledge sharing. The question is where do students who do not have parents or siblings who attended college receive this information from? More research should be conducted that explores the transmission of crucial knowledge of the college application process to first-generation college students.

### ***Socioeconomic Status and Social Capital***

A person's socioeconomic status and social capital are intertwined as they both relate to gains that are tied to resources and access to privileges. Ashtiani and Feliciano (2018) suggest "that developing enduring mentoring relationships and new social resources rooted in the higher education context may be especially important in facilitating degree attainment for young adults from low-income backgrounds" (p. 439). Once again this shows the importance of social capital in the college application process for students of color from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Dufur et al. (2018) refers to social capital as the connections and resources that facilitate any positive outcomes. In relation to college access, this social capital can manifest through things like networks, access to rigorous classes and activities that are appealing to college admissions offices, and most importantly, untaught knowledge about the college

application process that is transmitted from the parents, counselors or anyone the students seek guidance from. The messaging that the students receive about applying and attending college has an impact on how the students not only view themselves in relation to higher education but also on their chances of getting into college. According to results by Bryan et al. (2018), “college expectations and college-related interactions with their school counselors, teachers, and coaches had a modest impact on students' odds of enrolling in college” (p. 95).

This data touches on what is commonly known as teacher regard which refers to the level of expectations, trust, and aspirations that teachers have and express for their students. Pinchak’s work (2018) shows that when Hispanic or Latine individuals are compared to other racial and ethnic groups they demonstrate higher expectations for themselves as the teacher regard that their educators demonstrate increases. These expectations that teachers set for their students have a positive impact on the way in which students view themselves and their capabilities to apply and get accepted into a selective college or university. If teachers or parents are not able to present this positive regard to their students due to time constraints or other limitations, the positive regard could be supplemented by formal or informal mentors who can encourage the students to reach their full potential and elevate their applicant profile.

### **Mentoring Programs Foster Social Capital**

As noted in previous literature, social capital and the regard that teachers or mentors have on students is very important to continue to foster. Cavendish et al. (2023) note that there are five central themes that assist in the building of social capital and these include: program expectations and experiences, sustaining relationships, near-peer network support, connecting through symbiotic roles, and keeping the legacy going. These factors are important as they continue to

build the necessary tools for students to be successful in not only applying to selective colleges and universities but also receiving a degree from these institutions. The work done by Glass (2023) highlights that there is an association between successful college enrollment and the length of meetings for mentoring programs, mentoring curriculum, and connection with mentors. The current research establishes that mentoring has an effect on the college application and admission rates of first-generation and students of color but there is not much information on how the mentoring experiences affect the lived experiences of the students once they have been able to make it to selective colleges or universities. Additionally, Rivera et al. (2019) states that fostering resilience is another valuable factor that mentoring programs can promote. In order to successfully do this mentoring programs have to focus on the direct needs that the students have, additionally, when the students are able to see themselves reflected in their mentors they increase the confidence that they have in themselves. With a major lack of representation, first-generation college students of color can feel discouraged in their own abilities and rely on others recognizing their potential before they do it themselves. This aforementioned phenomenon should be looked into more.

### **Methodology**

This qualitative study was conducted with the goal of understanding the following research questions: How do students who participated in first-generation or low-income focused mentoring programs experience selective private liberal arts colleges? What are the collective experiences of students who participated in formal mentoring programs at these private liberal arts colleges?

Qualitative interviews were an appropriate method of inquiry into this question because the purpose was to understand the experiences of the participants (Merriam & Tisdale, 2015). All interviews were conducted with students at Hill College (pseudonym), a selective predominantly white liberal arts college in the Northeast.

There were a total of twenty-one interviewees. The interviews lasted on average between forty-five minutes to one hour and thirty minutes. All participants were interviewed once and the questions were broken down into sections that went in chronological order from early and middle school education, high school experiences, high school experiences after involvement in the mentoring program, college application process and mentoring program, college experience and mentoring program, and concluding thoughts where they got to share advice to other BIPOC and/or FGLI students. The questions in the interviews were a collective effort between the researcher and peers from a research methods class in sociology. All participants chose their own pseudonyms.

### **Participant Selection**

The initial participants were identified as part of a campus-wide quantitative survey that had a total of one hundred fifty-five respondents. This survey collected data to understand student's progress towards degree completion at Hill College. The survey collected data on various items, including student characteristics. At the end of the survey the respondents who met specific requirements were asked if they agreed to be contacted to participate in an interview. The qualifying features that marked a survey respondent as eligible included: first-generation status, self identification as BIPOC or low-income individual, and if they participated in any formal or informal mentoring programs. Upon completion of the interview, the participants were asked if they had any recommendations of people in their social circle who



also met the criteria of being part of mentoring programs and identifying as BIPOC or FGLI.

Snowball sampling led to additional participants who were a part of Posse, EMERGE and other informal and formal mentoring programs.

**Table 1. Information on interview participants.**

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	<b>First-Generation</b>	<b>Mentoring Program</b>
Daphne	Female	Latina	Yes	Matthew Gaffney Foundation
Kimberly	Female	Latina	Yes	EMERGE
Lucia	Female	Iranian	No	Private for Pay Mentor
Heidy	Questioning	Hispanic	No	Posse Chicago
Julia	Female	Hispanic	Yes	Big Brother Big Sister of LA College Match
Marcos	Male	Latino	Yes	Posse Chicago Chicago Scholars
Marcia	Female	Black	No	Posse New York Gateway Program
Alex	Female	Hispanic	Yes	Posse Chicago College Prep School
Aurora	Female	Black	No	Posse Chicago
Roxana	Female	Hispanic	Yes	Posse Chicago
Victoria	Female	Hispanic	Yes	EMERGE
Linda	Female	Latina	Yes	MS Alumni Network
Ofelia	Female	Hispanic	Yes	EMERGE
Bryan	Male	Hispanic	Yes	EMERGE
Teresa	Female	Hispanic	Yes	YesPrep School System
Jospehine	Female	Black	Yes	Posse New York
Diana	Female	Black	Yes	Posse New York Teen Activist Program
Kenny	Male	Black	Yes	Posse New York
Marlen	Female	Hispanic	Yes	EMERGE
Alexandra	Female	Black	No	Big Brother Big Sister of NY
Lola	Female	Hisp./Latino	Yes	Posse New York South Bronx United

### **Data Analysis**

Following Merriam & Tisdell (2015), upon completing the data collection period, all interview transcripts were analyzed. The twenty-one interviews were analyzed and thematically coded as a means to highlight commonalities between all of the interviewees. The analysis of transcripts and identification of emergent themes was guided by the research questions and the concept of social capital (Coleman, 1988). The following themes were most present in the transcripts: family, uncertainty, teacher regard, teacher mentor relationships, parental school involvement, early exposure to college, community building, meritocracy, discovering potential, seeking support, and access to resources. These themes were then grouped into larger umbrella themes, as noted in the Findings.

### **Social Capital as a Theoretical Framework**

The major theoretical approach that was used when analyzing data was the concept of social capital. Coleman (1988)

Social capital is defined by its function. It is not a single entity but a variety of different entities, with two elements in common: they all consist of some aspect of social structures, and they facilitate certain actions of actors-whether persons or corporate actors-within the structure. Like other forms of capital, social capital is productive, making possible the achievement of certain ends that in its absence would not be possible. (p. 98)

The data was looked at with a careful approach to highlight networks, support systems, resources, and communities that the participants mentioned or lacked a mention of. Social capital

and mentoring are very closely connected in relation to each other. When formal mentoring takes place the relationship will foster social capital in different ways. For example, a mentor will have the possibility to pass down experiential knowledge to their mentee who's knowledge on topics on higher education can be very limited especially if they are a BIPOC and/or FGLI individual. Additionally, in these relationships, students can learn what it is that they need to be doing in order to elevate their student profiles in order to be the most attractive candidates that they can be for admissions offices of selective colleges and universities. Another social capital factor that mentoring can bring about is access to exclusive networks that can facilitate the navigation of career development. By sharing professional networks mentees can have more access to internships and fellowships that will further elevate their professional and academic profiles and open new doors that can bring them new possibilities that have been exclusionary to people of color or people of other marginalized identities. By fostering these relationships, mentoring serves as door openers for marginalized individuals who normally would not have the same access to resources and opportunities.

Taking this into consideration can provide a valuable approach that helps understand the benefits and functions of social capital in not only the college application process but also enrollment and overall experiences at selective predominantly white institutions. Taking this specific approach allows the research findings to highlight and observe the participant's meaning-making experiences.

### **Positionality**

My positionality as a Latina first-generation college student granted me the possibility to directly connect with the participants. I was afforded the opportunity to ask personal questions regarding their educational experience and the fears and challenges they may have experienced

before and while attending Hill College. The answers and reactions I got to my questions were received without the participants feeling like I was intruding their spaces and instead could be reflected and resonate with me. As a Hill College student myself, I was also knowledgeable in understanding their current experiences as underrepresented students at this institution and found ways to keep the conversation flowing naturally.

I am also an EMERGE fellow. Emerge is a non-profit mentoring program that pushed me to apply to selective schools outside of my home state of Texas. I have had experience going through their curriculum and program, and admire the value that a formal college readiness mentoring program has brought to me. One challenge as a researcher of mentoring programs and also being a participant in one is not allowing my positive feelings and experiences with the organization to affect how I interpret and analyze the statements and emotions that the participants shared on their respective mentoring programs and experiences.

### **Findings**

There were various themes that arose in the interviews. Three major themes will be explored. The first highlighted theme is *networking and making connections*, as the participants expressed that they participated in multiple extracurricular activities that allowed them to make connections with teachers and counselors that connected them to more opportunities related to college applications and admission.

The second theme relates to a deficit mentality that students had either before or during their time as mentees during their respective programs. The participants shared their previous thoughts on their abilities to apply and get admitted to college or university and how their programs helped change that mentality. Related to this is the participants' moments or feelings

where they have been encouraged to achieve more as well as been exposed to diverse opportunities that if it wasn't for their mentoring programs they would have not had. For the purpose of this study the diverse opportunities show up as considering out of state school or exclusive programming.

The last theme included is the community building aspect that the mentoring programs had. The participants talked about their experiences with their mentoring groups, if they had any. This theme has two subsections: (1) organic community building where the programs had minimal intervention in how the participants interacted with one another and (2) structured where the program had specific goals and expectations of the relationship they want the mentees to have with one another.

### **Networking and Making Connections**

The majority of the participants were very active students in their high schools. Their participation ranged from sports, recreational activities, academic clubs, clubs related to activism, and many others. If the participants already were not involved their mentoring programs encouraged them to become more involved students. For example, participant Kimberly who is an EMERGE fellow stated "I have always been academics, academics, academics, and now I am kind of forced to be social. I do not mind it because I am a social person, but the fact that I had to in order for me to get the stuff that I want or need, I have to put myself out there." Kimberly also shared that the activities she participated in she mostly did because counselors or teachers recommended her to get involved. When it was time for Kimberly to apply for EMERGE the mentoring program she recalls that she was not sure what the program was but everyone kept telling her that it would look good on her resume so she applied. Kimberly states that she was hesitant to apply because she thinks she is "good but [she]

does not think she is that good to the level as some peers who were also invited to apply”.

Throughout the interview Kimberly repeats these sentiments of not feeling enough and is grateful that EMERGE allowed her to be in a higher education institution where she “can focus on [herself] and [her] academics. Because [she] would be home trying to care of everyone and not [herself].”

Participant Julia is from California and she was a mentee for Big Brothers Big Sisters, a college match program and a college prep school. Julia notes that she was always involved in school from an early age as her mother needed her to be taken care of while she was working. This trend of being active in school followed her. Julia's high school was focused on college preparation so she constantly heard messages about having to be a competitive applicant because she is from a marginalized background. Julia states the following: “You don't have all of the resources so you need to do a bunch of stuff after school, extracurriculars, Do great in your academics, be in all the honors, be in all the APs so that you can be competitive for college”. Julia attributes her nomination to a very selective program called College Match because her counselor recommended her because of how active she was in her high school. She notes that her counselor told her that she would be the perfect fit for the cohort and she applied, got selected, and was able to receive private SAT preparation for free. Julia notes that she is glad “[she] took advantage of the resources and opportunities that they've given [her].”

Posse Chicago scholar Marcos noted that even though his school was underfunded when compared to the neighboring schools that were not located in immigrant communities he still tried to remain as active as possible. Marcos was heavily involved in the arts, and in band and also did a program in Chicago where he got paid \$5 an hour to participate in extracurriculars as well as the National Honor Society and many other volunteering opportunities. An interesting

observation that he brings up is that the students who were in the AP classes and had similar high-scoring GPAs had similar involvements and similar resumes. He caught the attention of a counselor in his school who called him over the summer in order to get ready to apply for the Posse program even though he saw the scholarship as something that was completely out of his reach. Marcos also states that he really enjoyed the extensive interviews that he had to go through because he feels they prepared him to take on more challenges now that he is in college. While in Posse he says that he feels “like a little kid that messes up and has to have his parents help him.” In this case he is comparing Posse to the parents who could have been able to help him when he makes a mistake. He was fearful of applying to a cultural program and self-sabotaged and intentionally missed the deadline out of fear, someone who works for Posse was able to vouch for him and his character and was allowed to be considered even though he had to submit his application after the deadline. Marcos also says that since Posse encourages its scholars to be leaders on campus he was able to interview and land two on-campus jobs in his freshman year.

Marcia is a New York Posse scholar who is also a mentee from a separate program called the Gateway Program. Her main involvement when she was in high school included the stunt and dance team where she was able to build a relationship with her coach. Her coach was the person who ended up nominating her for Posse. Marcia says that to be in the Gateway Program the students had to reach a certain GPA and not drop below that threshold or else they were at risk of not being welcomed back into the program. Additionally, if anyone from the stunt or dance team were at risk of dropping their grades then they would all help each other out. In this program, they also had assigned days where they were to Dress for Success where they got the opportunity to dress professionally and practice their networking and professionalism while still in school.

Marcia says that they got the chance to participate in workshops to work on their resumes, and how to apply to college and she even recalls one of her friends leading a workshop where they discussed harmful stereotypes in Black and Hispanic communities. Her participation in Gateway and the cheer and stunt teams made it so that her coach considered her for a Posse nomination.

Heidy was a participant and a Chicago Posse scholar who also attended a college preparation school. She comes from a single-parent household where she says she “got a good structure and was able to set her head on good shoulders.” She attributes her good standing and behavior as the facilitators that allowed her to have mentor-mentee relationships with some of her teachers. She is currently in the process of transferring out of Hill College and while at first was scared to tell her mentor of the application she wanted to submit, she ended up having support from them even though she would be missing out on the scholarship and network that Posse provides.

Aurora is a senior scholar from Chicago Posse, like many of the other participants she was always involved in something and kept herself busy while elevating her resume and student profile. She did track and volleyball all throughout high school and she did most of her school’s dual enrollment classes and AP classes that brought up her GPA to be very high. Aurora had a History teacher with whom she fostered a mentoring relationship where she went to this teacher for things beyond just her academics. When it was time to apply for posse she had the support of her counselor and her history teacher. Prior to the extensive Posse interviews, she was able to connect with an alumni from her high school who got accepted into Posse and Hill College. She shared that “at the end of winter break and at the end of summer, there is always like this career networking opportunity that [she] would try to go to”. When asked what was her biggest takeaway from being in Posse she said the following: “Posse really taught me to like put myself



out there and like do things I wouldn't necessarily on my own and being more extroverted or more open-minded to opportunities that like I wouldn't necessarily see for myself".

Participant Linda was the only one who did not participate in a formal mentorship program. She went to a relatively new middle school that took place from 5th to 8th grade and they had a college-focused approach from that early stage. While at this school, she "really started getting introduced to what was next... not just high school, but after high school". Since this school was very new they started putting a lot of effort into building a strong alumni network of students who would come back and connect with the teachers. She said she had her middle school teachers reach out after high school and she keeps in contact with them now that she is in college. She says that all the students were not only willing but also excited to go back. Even though she was in high school her middle school opened up sessions on the weekends to help them prepare for the state exams and once they got the stage of taking the SAT her middle school also hosted free SAT prep classes for their alumni. Linda states that upon graduation "it wasn't a matter of whether or not they would reach out to you." She attributes her strong support system for her confidence in feeling ready to go to college.

Another EMERGE scholar interviewed was Bryan who from very early in his academic career was concerned with attending academically rigorous schools and he "took it upon [himself] to apply and figure out the process" when he was looking for high schools to apply for. He researched, applied, and eventually got accepted into an early college high school where the students got the opportunity to graduate high school with both their high school diploma and an associate's degree. During high school, he was involved in many things including advanced choir, National Honor Society, and an organization that was a brotherhood focused on community involvement and volunteering. In this brotherhood, he was able to look up to his

advisor and principal for mentorship and guidance. At his high school he heard that EMERGE was taking applications and decided to “apply and see what happens.” Now that he is in college he remains connected to EMERGE mostly just as an email recipient and they are able to provide support for internships and jobs with a website they have for their followers to look at job and internship postings.

Josephine is a Posse scholar from New York and mentions that she would initially be involved in after-school clubs just as a way to be social with her friends. By the time she got to high school she states “From [her] freshman year [she] was just doing things in school... to put on [her] resume... cause it’s that college prep mentality.” When asked if she had someone she could look up to for advice and guidance, she said that she had her counselor to look up to and an English teacher who she viewed even as a second mom in school. Her English teacher would check on her to make sure her grades were fine and since she was also a professor at a college near by Josephine always asked her things about college. Her counselor nominated her along with eleven other students for Posse. She recalls feeling very excited and felt good about being nominated since students are only able to apply for Posse if they have been nominated. Josephine states that it felt “nice because it’s someone else kind of advocating for you on your behalf.” She also expressed being even more excited to apply for Posse for the scholarship that would allow her to afford going to college and also wanted to tap into their vast alumni network.

### **Doubt, Broadened Horizons and Realized Potential**

One of the common themes found in the interviews was a deficit mentality that several of the participants had. As Valencia et al. (2002) note, deficit mentality is the perspective that characterizes people’s and in this case students’, shortcomings and failures as their own rather than acknowledging or attributing any of the failures to larger oppressive systems such as

inequitable school systems and curriculums. This sort of thinking showed up when the participants expressed fears about getting into college and limiting themselves to only a few institutions. Additionally, once the participants got involved in their respective mentoring programs they started having more college and career exposure as well as gained more confidence in themselves and their own abilities to get into college.

Daphne is a participant who was involved with a foundation called the Matthew Gaffney Foundation. In this program, she had a mentor who commended her for doing all the activities she was participating in and taking all the classes that she was taking. Daphne states that being in this program helped her realize that “[she] was a bit more well-rounded for college than she thought.” She also stated that by having conversations with her mentor from that foundation, she was able to realize what she was looking for in a school. After being in the program, she also felt comfortable filling out important paperwork like FAFSA and stated that her school just expected her to know how to fill out these foreign documents. Concerning filling out applications and navigating processes Daphne states, “If I hadn’t had this program, it would have been impossible.” Daphne also feels very lucky that before joining her program she already had a lot of credentials and a strong resume but she did not do this with the intention of thinking about college and they were just things she had done out of enjoyment of being involved in something. When asked if she had any advice for her high school self she stated that she wishes she could tell herself that she could do it because at the time she remembers being “anxious and thinking, is this going to work out, am I going to be good enough to do this? I don’t know what I am doing.” This illustrates deficit thinking as Daphne was having doubts about herself and her abilities to apply and attend college.

Kimberly, who was mentioned earlier, described EMERGE as being a very beneficial program because she knew she wanted to go to college. She initially had plans of going to her local college but EMERGE exposed her to so many colleges across the country. Before she even got the chance to start looking at even applying to EMERGE she was daunting her own abilities to be accepted, she stated “I don’t think I am good to the level as other peers that also got selected to apply.” In her interviews, Kimberly feels that “[she] could have tried harder in her application so they could see who [she] really was and not just be chosen out of pityness.” Once she got accepted her mentors in EMERGE insisted on her trying harder in school as she would initially conform to just passing her classes but their mentors told her that she needed to do more than just pass them and affirmed her that she was capable. When asked about her reasoning to have joined EMERGE Kimberly said that it was because she felt like she had no guidance in her school since her counselor was there but could not help her one-on-one like EMERGE could.

Julia and the College Match program she was a part of allowed her to have even more one-on-one support that her school was already offering. In her school, they had a class solely focused on applying to college and they mostly focused on the California schools, but the program that she was a part of was able to fly her out to the East Coast and learn more about colleges and universities in this area. After joining she started viewing colleges differently since she also had just thought about colleges in California and College Match showed her the possibilities that were available to her.

Marcos, who was mentioned before, said “I was too scared to apply to bigger, better schools” when asked if he was involved in choosing the high school that he went to. He also shares that he was very close to not applying to Posse but his high school mentor would constantly call him and check on the progress of his application over the summer. He shared that

once he got accepted into Posse and Hill College “he was afraid to achieve better things but [he] was reinforced [and told] you deserve to take up space... you deserve every bit of resource and deserve to be there just as much as anybody else.”

Marcia recalls that her parents always encouraged her to go to college but was not told how she would accomplish this so he often felt alone before joining any of her programs. Once she joined the Gateway Program they would take her cohort to annual trips to visit colleges and universities outside of New York. She also attended panels where alumni from her program got to share their experiences in college and she got the chance to hear about more schools.

Alex is a Chicago Posse scholar who also attended a college preparatory school that was very strict. She stated that the fact that her school was very strict was actually very beneficial to her because it gave her “a good structure and [she] was able to set [her] head on good shoulders and that there was so much more than just becoming a nurse practitioner in Chicago.” Her school’s curriculum and classes pushed her to look deeply into colleges and even had graded assignments that related to becoming ready to apply for college.

When Aurora was asked if she started viewing college differently after joining Posse she stated that “Posse opened up the idea of applying to a school that in my head were reaches”. In her school, most people applied to state schools and she knew she didn't want to stay in state and did not know where. Before getting into Posse Aurora was “not confident in her ability to go to a really big school or a really good school so [she] was just applying to schools [she] heard from other people.” She says that “Posse made it seem like [she] could literally apply anywhere and like literally go to places like [she] never thought of before.” Hill College used to feel like a reach for her instead of a possibility.

EMERGE fellow Marlen mentioned that going to college was always something in the back of her head and was always mentioned in her household. In her school, she expressed that her overall academic experience in high school felt repetitive and that some teacher's efforts were just not there. Marlen says "The most influential thing I got out of high school was EMERGE". When asked if there was something that impacted her the most about EMERGE she said "I think that they made me believe in myself. I always knew I wanted to go to college but I never knew where to begin, where to look." Marlen never pictured herself or never thought about where she would end up in college and her confidence got better when she applied to a summer program at Duke University where she had the opportunity to stay on campus. Having had this opportunity and being at EMERGE Marlen "started actually sewing and visualizing [herself] in the position of being a college student and potentially being away from home." Marlen also recognizes that her previous ideas of self are not her fault and that "society sometimes teaches you that you are not worth it and that because you are a person of color or do not come from money you think certain things about yourself or you see yourself as not good enough."

Similar to Marlen, Victoria is also an EMERGE Fellow and states that it "raised her confidence a lot in who [she is] and opened her eyes to things she didn't know." She applied to EMERGE without having a clear understanding of what it was except that it served the purpose to help with college and she wanted that because she "did not know anything about applying to college." The more time she spent at EMERGE the more she got to learn about herself, what she was looking for in a school, and getting a clearer picture of everything related to college.

### **Organic Vs. Structured Community Building**

A common theme that arose in the interviews was that of community building. Most of the mentorship programs that were mentioned in the interviews operated with their students

being in cohorts whether from the same schools or similar communities. Some programs allowed for their community building to take place more naturally with minimal intervention and for some the community building was a specific part of their curriculum and goals. Community building in these mentorship areas served to create a bigger support network of students from similar backgrounds to facilitate their support, networking and inclusion goals.

Kimberly felt a moderate connection to her EMERGE cohort. She felt comfortable enough asking her cohort for notes but she refused to study with them “because she felt inferior to them.” Similarly, Marlen says that there were minimal similarities between them and they did not seek each other out outside of the EMERGE-sponsored meetings that they had to attend. Even though Bryan was also in EMERGE his experience with community building was different. He recalls doing several activities that build the foundation of teamwork to help understand better what they wanted to find in a school and such. He also said that the information that he learned in EMERGE he shared with other friends that were not in EMERGE and this “helped [him] build a relationship with other people in [his] high school.”

Chicago Posse scholar Heidi had previous experience with being in a predominantly white high school so she mentioned that she was not surprised by Posse’s emphasis on community building among their scholars. She shared that while in high school the students of color “really stuck together.” In one of her Posse meetings, they discussed the experiences of students of color in predominantly white institutions and she appreciated having these kinds of talks before getting to Hill College. When asked about her experiences with her Posse cohort she said the following: “It was definitely interesting, I say this for the foundation as a whole you can not force ten people to be the best of friends. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn’t.” She also mentioned that there are many different personalities and some people in her cohort are

closer than others and others are more distant. She finished her comments by saying “But at the end of the day, I think if we know someone needs something, we’re going to be there and I think that is the entire point of it.”

Marcos' experience with his Posse has a more positive tone as he describes his Posse to be very sweet people and they were a really “good cushion for like the culture shock that you have going to a white, rich school.” He also mentioned that he knows other cohorts experience intergroup conflict between some posse scholars and that while it has not personally impacted him he has seen it impact others. His last mention of community was that “Posse gave [him] such a sense of security that [he] will be okay... and will have people.”

Marcia's experience with her Posse was not how she expected. She expressed the following: “I thought I would come into school thinking that me and my posse would be like really close and we would just do everything together...that didn't happen which wasn't necessarily a bad thing. I think Posse wanted us to know that we have each other, but you're able to branch out and meet new people.”

On the other hand, there is Alex and her Posse and she said that during Posse's pre-college training, she felt like they emphasized too much that “[they] would be isolated from everybody else and [their] only people [they] would have is [eachother].” Alex took this in disbelief and once she made it to Hill College she said it made sense because her Posse is “the only people [she] knows and is comfortable talking to.”

### **Discussion**

This study seeks to understand how BIPOC and FGLI students experienced their respective mentorship programs and how that has constructed how they view their lived



experiences in relation to social capital. Mentoring programs and the communities that they foster facilitate the entry of marginalized students into higher education institutions. These programs are able to meet their goals by identifying and being selective on the students they admit. These programs selected students who are very committed and demonstrated leadership qualities in their high schools. The interviewees shared that they were very involved in their schools doing plenty of extracurricular activities and taking as many AP, dual enrollment, and higher-level classes that they could. It is through these involvements that many of the participants were able to be noticed by teachers, counselors, and other mentors which pushed them to apply to selective mentoring programs.

Some participants applied to their mentoring programs without having much understanding of what they were applying to and followed what their counselors or teachers suggested. This highlights the importance of students to make connections and put themselves out there. Counselors and teachers were crucial in connecting their students to more exclusive resources and programs that had benefits that they alone were not able to provide. The students had to make themselves known in the respective high schools and this led to recommendations for posse, EMERGE, and other programs. In a way, it took the students to have some social capital to have an entryway into programs that would foster even more social capital for them.

This leaves at a disadvantage students that have major commitments like working or having to take care of other family members. Perhaps students who are just as talented and capable of taking leadership positions and having many involvements are not able to do so because of time constraints and are not being noticed in the same ways that students who have more disposable time. Additionally, some students may not have the same ability to make connections with their teachers and counselors. Whether this be due to neurodivergence,

introverted personalities, or general difficulties making connections with people, these students are more likely to not be considered for these programs.

Additionally, only considering students who have a lot of involvement sets the precedent that BIPOC and FGLI students need to do the most to be noticed and appreciated by higher education institutions in a way that their white and affluent counterparts do not have to. This is not to say that mentoring programs are harmful but they can perpetuate harmful ideologies and even reproduce the exclusivity that wider educational systems cause. Despite this, mentoring programs like EMERGE and Posse are helpful in building students' confidence and pushing them to apply to schools and other opportunities that they initially saw away from their reach. Being in a community with students alike helps them push themselves and see the possibilities that they have.

It is also worthy of noticing that mentoring programs should reconsider the purpose of their community building and assess its efficiency in meeting goals. For programs like EMERGE, their community building focuses on the students helping each other out and look over the fact that some students feel left out by this model due to not feeling up par with the other fellows in their cohort. In the case of Posse, they focus a lot on making a community among their scholars since they will be attending mostly predominantly white institutions. Selecting scholars based on personalities also arises as problematic because it will rule out capable applicants for trivial factors. In the end, some student's personalities will not align with the rest of the cohort.

### **Implications**

This study focuses on the experiences that BIPOC and FGLI students had, future studies should look into studying the achievements and careers that these individuals have access to after graduating. To apply and graduate from a selective college or university is one thing, while the long-term effects and networking that happens in these institutions also vary. This study centers students' experiences were affected by social capital from the moment they were accepted into their mentoring programs and finally being in college. Understanding the long term effects of mentoring programs post-degree attainment can serve to identify what these programs are doing successfully, what are areas of improvement and how colleges and universities step in to meet these students where they are.

### **Conclusion**

Social capital through mentorship programs grants students opportunities that they otherwise might not have. These mentoring programs allowed for relationships between the students' mentees that knew how to navigate the college application process and the college experience itself. The participants characterized their time in the mentoring program as significant as they navigated through networking and making connections, expanding their confidence and views on their abilities and recognizing the community building opportunities they had. This research leads me to conclude that mentoring programs are a significant support mechanism for BIPOC and FGLI students.

### References

- Ashtiani, M., & Feliciano, C. (2018). Access and Mobilization: How Social Capital Relates to Low-Income Youth's Postsecondary Educational (PSE) Attainment. *Youth & Society, 50*(4), 439-461.
- Backes, B. (2012). Do affirmative action bans lower minority college enrollment and attainment?: Evidence from statewide bans. *The Journal of Human Resources, 47*(2), 435-455.
- Bahr. (2009). Educational Attainment as Process: Using Hierarchical Discrete-Time Event History Analysis to Model Rate of Progress. *Research in Higher Education, 50*(7), 691–714.
- Baker, R., Klasik, D., & Reardon, S. F. (2018). Race and Stratification in College Enrollment Over Time. *AERA Open, 4*(1).
- Boatman, & Long, B. T. (2016). Does Financial Aid Impact College Student Engagement? *Research in Higher Education, 57*(6), 653.
- Bryan, J., Farmer-Hinton, R., Rawls, A., & Woods, C. S. (2017). Social Capital and College-Going Culture in High Schools: the Effects of College Expectations and College Talk on Students' Postsecondary Attendance. *Professional School Counseling, 21*(1), 95-105.
- Buchmann, M., Kriesi, I., Bayard, S., Sander, F., & Bundel, S. (2021). Upward Mobility of Students from Lower-educated Families in Stratified Educational Systems: The Role of Social Capital and Work Habits. *Journal of Youth & Adolescence, 50*(3), 391–407.
- Cavendish, W., Perez, D., & Ocasio-Stoutenburg, L. (2023). Lifting as You Climb: Social Capital Development Through Aspirational Peer Mentoring. *Education and Urban Society, 55*(9)

- Coleman, J. S. (1988). Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital. *American Journal of Sociology*, 94, S95–S120.
- Demeter, Dorodchi, M., Al-Hossami, E., Benedict, A., Slattery Walker, L., & Smail, J. (2022). Predicting first-time-in-college students' degree completion outcomes. *Higher Education*, 84(3), 589–609.
- Dufur, Mikaela J., et al. "Does Capital at Home Matter More than Capital at School? Social Capital Effects on Academic Achievement." *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility*, vol. 31, no. 1, 2013, pp. 1–21.
- Elliott, Constance-Huggins, M., & Song, H. (2013). Improving College Progress among Low- to Moderate-Income (LMI) Young Adults: The Role of Assets. *Journal of Family and Economic Issues*, 34(4), 382–399
- Fomby, P., & Cross, C. J. (2018). Parents Who Left College and Children's Postsecondary Educational Attainment. *Sociological Forum (Randolph, N.J.)*, 33(4), 923-949.
- Ford, K. S., & Thompson, J. (2016). Inherited prestige: Intergenerational access to selective universities in the United States. *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility*, 46, 86-98.
- Fruht, & Chan, T. (2018). Naturally Occurring Mentorship in a National Sample of First-Generation College Goers: A Promising Portal for Academic and Developmental Success. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 61(3-4), 386–397.
- Garza, A. N., & Fullerton, A. S. (2018). Staying Close or Going Away: How Distance to College Impacts the Educational Attainment and Academic Performance of First-generation College Students. *Sociological Perspectives*, 61(1), 164-185.
- Hagler, & Rhodes, J. E. (2018). The Long-Term Impact of Natural Mentoring Relationships: A

- Counterfactual Analysis. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 62(1-2), 175–188.
- Holzman, B., Klasik, D., & Baker, R. (2020). Gaps in the College Application Gauntlet. *Research in Higher Education*, 61(7).
- Hurd, N. M., Sánchez, B., Zimmerman, M. A., & Caldwell, C. H. (2012). Natural Mentors, Racial Identity, and Educational Attainment Among African American Adolescents: Exploring Pathways to Success. *Child Development*, 83(4).
- Hurtado, S., Ramos, H. V., Perez, E., & Lopez, X. (2020). Latinx student assets, college readiness, and access: Are we making progress? *Education Sciences*
- Lane, Morgan, K., & Lopez, M. M. (2020). A Bridge Between High School and College: A Case Study of a STEM Intervention Program Enhancing College Readiness Among Underserved Students. *Journal of College Student Retention : Research, Theory & Practice*, 22(1), 155–179.
- Ma, P. W., & Shea, M. (2021). First-Generation College Students' Perceived Barriers and Career Outcome Expectations: Exploring Contextual and Cognitive Factors. *Journal of Career Development*, 48(2), 91-104.
- Martinez, & Deil-Amen, R. (2015). College for All Latinos? The Role of High School Messages in Facing College Challenges. *Teachers College Record* (1970), 117(3), 1–50.
- McCarron, & Inkelas, K. K. (2006). The Gap between Educational Aspirations and Attainment for First-Generation College Students and the Role of Parental Involvement. *Journal of College Student Development*, 47(5), 534–549.
- Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2015). *Qualitative research : A guide to design and implementation*. John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated.

- Niu, S. X. (2015). Leaving Home State for College: Differences by Race/Ethnicity and Parental Education. *Research in Higher Education*, 56(4), 325-359.
- Parikh. (2013). Urban High School Students' Experiences in an Afterschool College Readiness Program. *The Urban Review*, 45(2), 220–231.
- Rivera, H. H., Garza, T., Huerta, M., Magdaleno, R., Rojas, E., & Torres-Morón, D. (2019). Fostering an environment for resilience among Latino youth: Characteristics of a successful college readiness program. *Journal of Latinos and Education*, 18(2), 178-185.
- Schwartz, Sarah E. O., et al. “‘I’m Having a Little Struggle With This, Can You Help Me Out?’: Examining Impacts and Processes of a Social Capital Intervention for First-Generation College Students.” *American Journal of Community Psychology*, vol. 61, no. 1–2, 2018, pp. 166–78.
- Smith, C. M. (2020). In the Footsteps of Siblings: College Attendance Disparities and the Intragenerational Transmission of Educational Advantage. *Socius : Sociological Research for a Dynamic World*, 6.
- Sólorzano, Villalpando, O., & Oseguera, L. (2005). Educational Inequities and Latina/o Undergraduate Students in the United States: A Critical Race Analysis of Their Educational Progress. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, 4(3), 272–294.
- Teranishi, Robert, et al. “Opportunity at the Crossroads: Racial Inequality, School Segregation, and Higher Education in California.” *Teachers College Record (1970)*, vol. 106, no. 11, 2004, pp. 2224–45.
- United States Census Bureau, U. C. (2022, February 24). *Census Bureau releases New Educational Attainment Data*. Census.gov.  
<https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2022/educational-attainment.html>

Valencia, R. R. (2002). “Mexican Americans Don’t Value Education!” On the Basis of the Myth, Mythmaking, and Debunking. *Journal of Latinos and Education*, 1(2), 81–103.

Yukhymenko-Lescroart, & Sharma, G. (2020). Sense of Purpose and Progress Towards Degree in Freshman College Students. *Journal of College Student Retention : Research, Theory & Practice*, 25(1), 187–207.



**Appendix A: IRB Approval Letter****CONNECTICUT COLLEGE**

November 10, 2023

Wendy Olivares  
Connecticut College  
270 Mohegan Avenue  
New London, CT 06320

Dear Wendy,

The Connecticut College Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your research proposal entitled: “*Access & Equity in Higher-Education: The Significance of Mentoring BIPOC & FGLI Students.*” Following this review, the IRB Chair has determined that your research proposal is exempt from further review under the Code of Federal Regulations.

If there are any unforeseen complications with the data collection or any changes to the protocol, please report these, in writing, to the IRB immediately ([irb@conncoll.edu](mailto:irb@conncoll.edu)).

For reference, your project has been assigned Connecticut College IRB #2023.24.17. Best wishes for the successful completion of your research.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jason Nier'.

Jason Nier, Ph.D.  
Institutional Review Board Chair '23-24  
Professor of Psychology

Institutional Review Board | 270 Mohegan Avenue, New London, CT 06320-4196

Phone: 860-439-2330 | [irb@conncoll.edu](mailto:irb@conncoll.edu) | [www.connecticutcollege.edu](http://www.connecticutcollege.edu)

## **Appendix B: Interview Questions**

### **How do students that have engaged in mentoring programs experience college life at Connecticut College?**

This first set of questions relates only to your early and middle school experiences, so please try not to talk about any other levels of education until prompted to do so.

#### **Early and Middle School Education**

1. What are some of your earliest memories of school? Did you attend Pre-K or similar programs?
2. Did you participate in any extracurricular activities in elementary and/or middle school?
3. Did adults around you consider you a good student?
4. Did you consider yourself to be a good student?
5. How would you describe the relationship between your teachers and yourself?
6. How would you describe the involvement of your parental figures in your early schooling?
7. Did your experiences change throughout the years? Did the level of difficulty in school change as you progressed?
8. Was college or career exploration ever brought up in elementary or middle school classes or by teachers/administrators/parental figures?

Thank you for sharing with me your earlier experiences. Now we will be moving forward to talking about your high school experiences or the equivalent institution you attended.

#### **High School Experiences**

1. How would you describe your high school?
2. Were the classes small/large?
3. Could you get individualized help if you needed it?
4. Did your school have a specific focus? Some examples of schools with specific focuses are Early College, Art School, Medical Science, Law and Justice.
5. How would you describe your overall high school experience?
6. Did you consider yourself an involved student? What things were you involved in?
7. How were your peers involved in high school?
8. Did your peers have similar grades than yours?
9. How would you describe your academic standing and grades?
10. How would you describe your social life?
11. Did you have someone you could look up to for advice and guidance?

#### **High School Experience After Involvement in Mentoring Program**

1. How would you describe your mentoring program?

2. How did you hear about your mentoring program?
3. How was your application process for your mentoring program?
4. Why did you join your mentoring program?
5. Did you have to attend any sessions?
  - a. If so, how many a week/month/semester?
  - b. How long were the sessions?
6. How was your experience with your mentor/mentors?
7. How was your experience with your cohort?
8. Did you have any key takeaways from your mentoring program?
9. Was your high school experience different after you joined your mentoring program?

We're going to move on now to your college experience.

### **College Application Process and Mentoring Program**

1. Did you start viewing colleges differently after joining your mentoring program?
2. Were you familiar with the college application process before joining your mentoring program?
3. Did your mentoring program help you apply to colleges?
4. How did you feel when applying to colleges?
5. Was Connecticut College your first choice?
6. What motivated you to apply to Connecticut College?
7. What made you commit to Connecticut College?

### **College Experience and Mentoring Program**

1. Are you still involved with your mentoring program?
  - a. How would you describe this involvement?
2. Did you have any major takeaways from your mentoring program?
3. Do you think your mentoring program prepared you to be in college?
4. Has your college experience been impacted by your mentoring program? If so, how?
5. Did you have any support from your mentoring program when transitioning from your acceptance letter to finally being at Connecticut College?
6. Have you asked your mentoring program for additional support now that you are on campus?
- 7.

### **Concluding thoughts**

1. What would you like to tell your high school self?
2. What advice do you have for other first-gen or BIPOC students?