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The Unheard: What College Readiness Means to TRIO Parents

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Abstract

Researchers have been intrigued for years about the attitudes and opinions of counselors and students on the subject of college readiness. As of the date of this writing, no research looks into the parents' opinions of low-income, first-generation college students on what college readiness means to them. Given the fluid definition of the term and the consensus among scholars that parents greatly influence decisions about going to college, the inquiry seemed fitting. Results show that while parents would adopt a definition widely used by scholars such as Conely (2008), parents consider readiness to include good decision making, maintaining family ties, and certain economic responsibilities.

Keywords: low-income, first-generation, parent involvement, college readiness, transitioning

Student affairs professionals are particularly concerned about student development and college readiness maturation (Patton et al., 2016). Many universities have opted to develop first-year programs to benefit low-income, first-generation college students so that transitioning students can optimize their success in college. This student demographic comes with unique perspectives on college and differs from their upper-middle-income counterparts in how they view what it takes to successfully transition to college. While first-generation students show up to class and live on campus alone, they are accompanied by the well wishes, values, and expectations of the parents who sent them off to obtain the four-year degrees their parents have not been able to attain thus far. Despite their first taste of independence, these young men and women are still heavily influenced by their parents' concerns, desires, and expectations.

Studies have repeatedly shown that the idea of considering post-secondary education, deciding on the right institution, and ultimately attending college were all influenced by their parents to a significant degree (Bartoszuk & Yerhot, 2019; Bourdieu, 1986; Chapman et al., 2018; Chlup, et al., 2018; Gordon & Cui, 2012). Despite the large body of literature that has well established this fact, very few researchers have asked, "How do the parents of low-income, first-generation students define college readiness?" As of the date of this writing, the researchers of this project have not found a single study that investigates that question.

Literature Review

A review of the literature shows that since the 1990's researchers have inquired about the issues that low-income, first-generation college-bound students face (Holcomb-McCoy, 2010; Ishitani, 2003; Le et al., 2015; Terenzini, et al., 1996). Many of these inquiries have studied parental involvement and its effectiveness. Over the years, the insight provided by such inquiries has proven to be useful guidance to practitioners. Counselors and college advisors leaned into the validity of such findings and began to reach out to parents to involve them in the college search and application process. As a result, the industry experienced a rise in post-secondary enrollment and attainment by this population over the last several years (Le & Faxon-Mills, 2016). However, reaching out to parents does not always mean that all parents are reached (Tierney, 2002). One study shows that Latino families were not reached even though literature was sent home with the children (Chlup et al., 2018). Counselors were left with the feeling of having successfully communicated but, in reality, failed to inform the parents they intended to reach. In other cases, reaching out means parents are told about college readiness activities, but the frequency is very low (Holcomb-McCoy, 2021) and content quality is lacking (Novakovic et al., 2021). This disproportionately negatively affects low-income students who would be the first in their families to attend college (Novakovic et al., 2021). The 2010 Holcomb-McCoy study reported that counselors host informational sessions regarding college readiness matters once a year for juniors. Fewer than 50% of those same counselors sent notifications to parents. In the recent Novakovic et al. study (2021), less than 50% of counselors feel adequately trained about the college readiness process, even though they view it as very important. These numbers deserve the attention of school administrators and TRiO programs are given that low-income, first-generation students report looking to their counselors for guidance on college readiness (Bartoszuk & Yerhot, 2019; Chapman et al., 2018; Chlup et al., 2018; Novakovic et al., 2021).

Furthermore, only about half of the counselors (51%) who participated in the Novakovic study believed they were adequately prepared to use data to inform their practice, even though they believe it is very important. Tierney (2002) concluded years earlier that while data supports parental involvement as the most predictive factor in students deciding to go to college, schools do not seem to be using this data to inform their practice. He stresses that "parents frequently have pointed out they would spend more time on educational activities if teachers gave them advice about what to do." This is virtually impossible given they infrequently have contact with colleges and universities (Tierney, 2002).

Despite the rise in college enrollments and degree attainment among low-income first-generation students since the inception of TRiO programs, this paper aims to fill one glaring gap in the literature, which is the lack of knowledge among scholars regarding parental perceptions, expectations, concerns, and attitudes about what

it means to be college-ready. This paper will argue that parents believe their children must be academically, mentally, emotionally, and parentally ready to succeed in college.

The prevailing implicit posture in the literature is that low-income, first-generation students' parents do not know which questions to ask. In other words, since they are not college-educated (Holcomb-McCoy, 2010), they do not have an opinion or preferences. This attitude is unspoken but real given that the opinion of this demographic has never been sought before. This presumptuous disposition among practitioners and researchers is evidenced not only by the lack of literature that explores the question in a meaningful way but also by ignoring the fact that while many TRiO students have parents without a four-year degree, a fair amount have some college if not an associate degree (Pell Institute, 2020). In 2012, the undergraduate population was 139% larger than in 1970 (Quinn et al., 2019). In 1972, 79% of high school seniors were potentially first-generation college students. At that time, neither parent had college experience at all. In 2017, that number dropped to 59%. This would mean that counselors and college advisors must not operate under the same assumptions used 50 years ago when low-income, first-generation meant that parents had no college experience at all in many cases (Contreras et al., 2018). Today, since more parents have at least some college education, one would expect those parents to have an opinion on what college readiness looks like to them. However, those parents with no college experience also have an opinion on geographical preferences, the academic and social climate, culture, safety, and other things. There is a major disparity among low-income students in that they represent a large number of first-generation students, although more people have at least some college (The Pell Institute, 2020).

It is a given that academic readiness is the primary focus for most parents and their college-bound children when preparing for college, regardless of social class or socioeconomic status. However, the aforementioned areas of parental concern are overlooked, unknown, or undervalued by those in the profession that demand attention if low-income, first-generation students are to improve their chances of not only persisting but attaining a four-year degree within six years of graduation (Zarifa et al., 2018) and with their degrees see a change in socioeconomic status as well as a change in social class. Bourdieu's theory (1987) is applied later to understand how class and socioeconomic status differ. An examination of the literature reveals that several domains are of particular interest to parents of low-income children as personal determinants for college readiness.

Time Management

Effective time management and knowing how to prioritize tasks have long been viewed by researchers as pro-academic behavior that indicates college readiness (Byrd & Macdonald, 2005; Duncheon, 2021; Reid & Moore, 2008; Strayhorn, 2013). Strayhorn writes that "time spent studying" is a positive predictor of his three readiness measures which are grade point average, 12th grade National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), standardized math score, and highest 12th-grade math level. Strayhorn (2013) correlates effective time management with good study habits and higher test scores. For many first-generation students, effective time management is not a skill that receives much attention (Byrd & Macdonald, 2005). This can be a problem because students from this demographic tend to work to pay for college expenses. As a money-saving strategy, they stay home rather than live on campus (Zarifa et al., 2018). Not only does this approach result in undermatching the student to a college more suited for their abilities and goals (Lopez Turley, 2009), but it puts them at risk of leaving their studies before attaining a bachelor's degree (Bozik, 2007).

Transitioning to College

According to Schlossberg's theory, a transition is "any event or non-event which results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions and roles." It is only seen as a transition by the one experiencing it. (Anderson et al., 2012). In other words, if changes occur and the student does not see it as significant, then it is not a transition. For Schlossberg transitioning from high school to college is an *anticipated transition* (Anderson et al., 2012).

Knowing what to expect before arriving at college is a privilege second-generation students have through their parents that first-generation students do not. Second-generation students can talk about what college is like

from a parent who has experienced it (Chapman et al., 2018). These nuanced conversations give students depth of understanding and insight so that they know what to expect upon arriving on campus for the first time. Because many first-generation students stay at home and hold jobs, they have limited access to campus and student life activities that foster relationships that improve retention (Pell Institute, 2020).

Emotional/Mental Health

The parents of first-generation students have slightly different worries from those of second-generation students (Patton et al., 2016). Parents are concerned about their children speaking up for themselves. While they may not anticipate clinical depression, they know their children better than student affairs professionals do and worry that their children may begin to face struggles that cause them to give up or not speak up on important matters (Bartoszuk K & Yerhot, 2019; Chapman et al., 2018). These fears stem from concerns about fitting in on the college campus and can have psychological consequences (Patton et al., 2016). Depression in adolescence and early adulthood continues to be underdiagnosed for many reasons (Weitkamp et al., 2016). One reason is that what is deemed “normal” behavior for adolescents and young adults could be indicators of depression. One of the dangers of never or misdiagnosing depression is that it is often associated with negative economic outcomes, including unemployment in later adulthood (Fergusson et al., 2007). First-generation students are at greater risk of depression when they do not feel like they fit into their college environment (Patton et al., 2016; Sanford, 1967). Upper-middle income and low-income parents expressed concerns about their students being a good racial/ethnic fit for the institutions at which they study (Chapman et al., 2018; Karp et al., 2004). Richman and Jonassaint (2008) found that “recent exposure to race-related stress can have a sustained impact on physiological stress responses for African Americans.” In the context of college readiness, it behooves parents to research the climate and culture of the college community before applying. Academic stress is commonly self-reported among college students; however, it should be noted that research indicates that “the first onset of depression is often preceded by major life stressors” (Pascoe et al., 2020).

Social-fit/Maturation

An individual’s social class can determine how and if a college-bound student accesses college (Patton et al., 2016). According to Sanford’s theory, *differentiation* is when students view themselves as unique and *integrated* and as part of a group (Sanford, 1967). He further posits three developmental conditions to interact with one’s social environment: readiness, challenge, and support (Sanford, 1966). A student cannot exhibit certain behaviors until ready. Readiness comes due to maturation, or the environment is seen as beneficial. The amount of challenge a student can handle is correlated with the amount of support the student has. The greatest support is from parents and family members. Here, Schlossberg warns about minoritized groups feeling marginalized. Feelings of marginalization may be temporary for first-year students but more permanent for minority groups (Patton et al., 2016; Fergusson et al., 2007). In either case, such feelings could lead to self-consciousness, irritability, and depression. Schlossberg posits five areas of feeling that one “matters”: *attention*, the feeling of being noticed; *importance*, feeling cared about; *ego-extension*, feeling that others are proud of one’s success or feels that others empathize with their failures; *dependence*, a feeling of being needed; and *appreciation*, the feeling that others appreciate one’s efforts (Schlossberg, 1989). To fit in or feel socially accepted. Some students turn to socially risky behaviors (Vaughan et al., 2021).

Substance abuse and safety

The parents of first-generation students have similar worries to those of second-generation students. Parents are concerned about campus safety and the ability of their children to make difficult decisions in the face of peer pressure, substance abuse, and sexual assault (Chapman et al., 2018; Vaughn et al., 2021 see also (Karp et al., 2004). Also, many first-generation parents do not have the opportunity to visit the colleges where their children will attend if the school is in another state (Chapman et al., 2018). Those who can send their children to cities or states where there is family so that the family member can look after their child (Chapman et al., 2018).

Economic Responsibilities

More and more students, young and old, are opting to work while studying (Bozik, 2007; Carnevale et al., 2015; Reid & Moore, 2008). This rise in working college-age students correlates with the parents of low-income first-generation students who expect their college-going children to participate economically in maintaining a home, college education, or both. While students may have great intentions to work and pay for college, they are at greater risk of dropping out (Cahalan et al., 2022). This is especially true if they work while living at home. To go a step further, this group is more likely to leave college if they work over 30 hours per week (Bozik, 2007; Zarifa et al., 2018). Living on campus and working reduces this risk (Bozick, 2007).

Institution Proximity

For most parents of first-generation low-income students, the college of choice is the best option nearest home. This is known in the literature as the “*geography of opportunity*” (Lopez Turley, 2009). This is normally done because of the distrust of leaving the state (Lopez Turley, 2009). Parents are uncomfortable because they know little about out-of-state schools. Parents do not consider how detrimental this can be to their children in the long term. Students who stay near home because of parental fears of going away find they may be under-matched academically (Bartoszuk & Yerhot, 2019; Lopez Turley, 2009). This means that while it is true that they have enrolled in a nearby college, they could have been enrolled in a college or university more suited to their educational needs and objectives. However, attainment rates are higher among first-generation students who go to college 4-5 hours away. Students who lived near home but on their own saw better grades than those who lived with their parents (Garza & Fullerton, 2018). In the literature, there are at least five primary reasons parents of first-generation, low-income children tend to keep them close to home rather than allowing them to go away. The first and most common reason is economical (Chapman et al., 2018; Lopez Turley, 2009; Lopez Turley, 2006). For others, it is based on feeling their child has not reached an adequate maturity level for going away from home (Lopez Turley, 2009). Next is the desire to keep family close and family values intact (Lopez Turley, 2006). A fourth reason is safety concerns (Vaughan et al., 2021). Finally, it is simply not having done enough to learn about other colleges outside of their immediate surroundings that may satisfy the academic, social, and safety requirements (Chapman et al. 2018). These concerns among parents of low-income, first-generation college students are not very different from upper-middle-income parents (Karp et al., 2004). Karp and colleagues interviewed 30 upper-middle-income parents. Nearly all of these parents (28 of 30) had bachelor’s degrees, and 25 fathers and 13 mothers had graduate degrees. Of the 30 families, four were Asian, two African American, and one Hispanic. Their students were all headed to four-year institutions. Karp’s findings show that parents, regardless of socioeconomic class, share the same sentiments when it comes to their students going away to college. Besides the tendency of upper-middle-income students to apply to four-year colleges, one notable difference is that the parents of low-income, first-generation students are less likely to negotiate going to college 2 or 3 hours away (Lopez Turley, 2009).

Separation (the parental struggle)

How far students want to go in their studies seems to be mostly determined by mothers in low-income, first-generation families (Bartoszuk & Yerhort, 2018; Newton & Sandoval, 2015; Chlup et al., 2019). Not all students contact their parents regularly when they move away from home, and for some parents, not knowing makes them uncomfortable (Bartoszuk & Yerhot, 2019). This disconnectedness has various causes. For some, it is a matter of priorities and time management; for others, it may be rooted in family dysfunctionality (Bartoszuk & Yerhot, 2019). Communication with parents while students are away focuses mostly on the student’s well-being and maintaining family connections. (Bartoszuk & Yerhot, 2019). Regardless of their four-year degree, foreign-born parents, like the parents of low-income, first-generation students, are far more likely to insist on their children staying in the same city to study (Karp et al., 2004; Garza & Fullerton, 2018).

Positive Academic Behaviors

Students staying in their parents' homes and dropping out has more to do with the interruptions at home than the living conditions (Garza & Fullerton, 2018) or as Strayhorn (2013) states, a lack of "grit." Students need dedicated times and places to study (Tierney, 2002). They must demonstrate academic behaviors that will give them positive outcomes, such as attending class, studying skills, self-awareness, and perseverance (Strayhorn, 2013). Conley (2008) posits that a part of college readiness is having an "array of learning strategies and coping skills that are quite different from those they developed in high school." The researchers of this study adopt the definition of college readiness suggested by Conley and will expand upon it:

College readiness can be defined as the level of preparation a student needs in order to enroll and succeed, without remediation, in a credit-bearing general education course at a post-secondary institution that offers a baccalaureate degree or transfer to a baccalaureate program. *Succeed* is defined as completing entry-level courses at a level of understanding and proficiency that makes it possible for the student to consider taking the next course in the sequence or the next level of course in the subject area. The college-ready student envisioned by this definition is able to understand what is expected in a college course, can cope with the content knowledge that is presented, and can develop the key intellectual lessons and dispositions the course is designed to convey. In addition, the student who is ready for college will be able to understand the culture and structure of post-secondary education and the ways of knowing and intellectual norms of this academic and social environment (2008).

Conley offers a clear definition of college readiness which has been lacking among academics because of the fluidity of the term (Strayhorn, 2013).

The Current Study

Identifying the expectations of the parents of first-generation, low-income students, understanding what being "college-ready" means to them, and comprehending how they view their role in the process of readiness is the objective of this study and will, in turn, expand on Conley from a parental perspective. Considering that not all well-to-do or privileged parents know how to navigate the college readiness maze, the study's relevancy is seen even more given that those of this demographic are least likely to have access to such information. Even though they may have college degrees themselves, the privileged spend thousands helping their children find the right college fit (Sun & Smith, 2017).

Sun and Smith point out that "elite parents rely on individuals they perceive as experts to establish 'bridges' between their social worlds and the academic worlds that appear to be beyond their control" (2017). By contrast, low-income parents rely on the expertise of TRIO and similar programs to bridge a similar gap for the same reasons (Le, Mariano, & Faxon-Mills, 2016). Sun and Smith refer to bridging the social world of the elite to that of academia, which begs the question, "what is a social class." Often social class and socioeconomic status are used interchangeably. However, a distinction exists between the two. At a basic level, socioeconomic status refers to objective areas such as household income, occupational status, and education. In a related but nonetheless distinct way, social class can be understood as being more subjective and socially constructed. It is a more fluid concept regarding relationships and the role of power one has given their surroundings (Zandy, 1996). Two people may view themselves as middle class but have different socioeconomic statuses (Sanders & Mahalingam, 2012; Zandy, 1996). This would explain why the elite may see themselves as deserving of entry. Yet, they are part of a different social class than those in academia and need to pay for college admissions readiness for their children.

This privileged mindset which acts on its beliefs, starkly contrasts with the beliefs of underprivileged TRiO parents, though from a different socioeconomic status, may not seek out expertise but are just as deserving of

access to the same academic and social class (Zandy, 1996). TRiO practitioners may tell parents of low-income students what their roles should be when educating their children (Gordon & Cui, 2012); however, parental perceptions of what “college readiness” means to them, their level of involvement, and feeling that their desires are being considered by their college-going children and the institutions have never been formally studied (Gordon & Cui, 2012).

Researchers find the definition of college readiness lacking because it does not recognize that the college-going experience is multi-faceted. It is mostly encouraged by parents, economically provided for by parents, and ultimately achieved by their support. Universities admit they need parental intervention to help with things such as drinking, hazing, violence, and other destructive behaviors as children enter what researchers call *emerging adulthood*. Research has shown this to be the case even among low-income, first-generation students. Students rely on their parents for the financial and emotional support or the interventions they need to attain a four-year degree. A working definition of what it means to be ready for college must include the definition set forth by those in academia. Still, it must be forged with the desires and expectations of the parents of the students. This is because students make a contractual agreement with their parents when selecting a college. Parents and students must agree at a certain level before the child is handed off to a college or university. Parents need to feel that their students will be safe.

Methodology

This paper will explore identifying parental college readiness expectations based on 15 surveys and seven interviews of Higher Education Consortium of Metropolitan St. Louis TRiO parents. They have expressed interest in their children pursuing post-secondary education.

Higher Education Consortium of Metropolitan St. Louis

In 1962, a group of college and university Chancellors and Presidents from the St. Louis metropolitan area sought better collaboration through discussion on issues that affect higher education institutions and provide a representative voice for metropolitan St. Louis higher education. From that meeting, the Higher Education Coordinating Council of Metropolitan St. Louis (HECC) was formed and incorporated in 1964. HECC is the Higher Education Consortium of Metropolitan St. Louis (HEC).

The organization offers the community three TRiO Educational Opportunity Programs: Educational Talent Search, Upward Bound, and Educational Opportunity Centers. These serve participants in the greater St. Louis metropolitan area, which includes five-surrounding counties. HEC TRiO programs provide services to over 859 middle and high school students and over 4,400 adults annually.

The method for identifying those surveyed was to look at all three programs, Educational Talent Search (TS), Upward Bound (UB), and Educational Opportunity Centers (EOC), and use program databases, Blumen for TS and UB and Student Access for EOC to identify participants for the surveys and subsequent interviews. The selection criteria used are parents with a junior or senior high school child who plans to attend college or have a child who has started their first year of college, first-generation, low income, email address, phone number, and status are currently active. The two academic years in focus were 2020-2021 and 2021-2022.

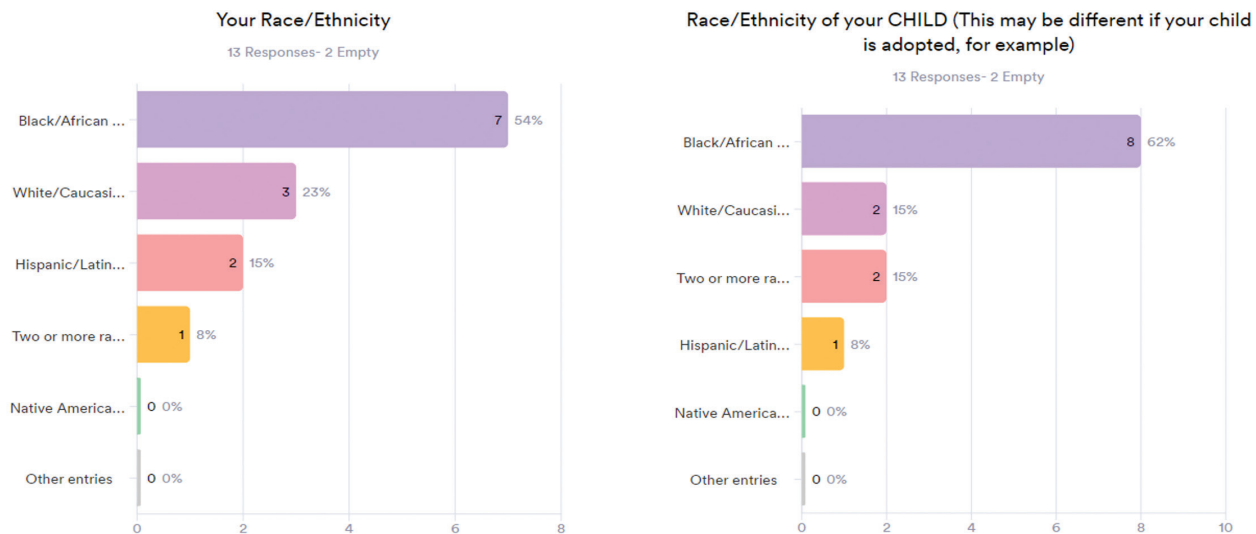
The number of eligible candidates was 1,927 for all three programs. Bulk emails and text messages were sent to all candidates. The process was repeated the second day and a few days later using the same method along with phone calls.

Cohort Year	Educational Opportunity Centers			Educational Talent Search			Upward Bound		
2020-2021	Texts Sent	—	480	Texts Sent	—	186	Texts Sent	—	N/A
	Emails Sent	—	178	Emails Sent	—	91	Emails Sent	—	19
2021-2022	Texts Sent	—	181	Texts Sent	—	126	Texts Sent	—	N/A
	Emails	—	492	Emails Sent	—	173	Emails Sent	—	1

Fifteen participants submitted responses. Those submissions were checked to make sure they met the criteria. Those that did not were eliminated. For example, a parent responded “yes” to “would you like to be considered for an interview.” Still, their college experience was that they had a bachelor’s degree, making them ineligible for this research. Out of the fifteen submissions, seven agreed to an interview.

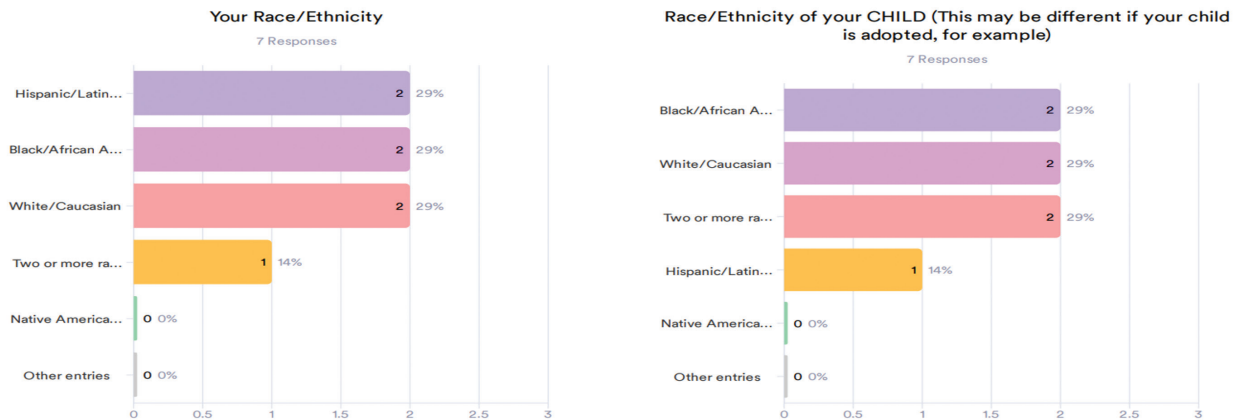
The parent’s Race/Ethnicity for the fifteen responses is 54% of Black/African American, 23% White/ Caucasian, 15% Hispanic/Latino of any race, and 8 % of two or more races. Student’s Race/Ethnicity for the fifteen interviewees were 62% Black/African American, 15% White/ Caucasian, 8% Hispanic/Latino of any race, and 15% of two or more races. (See figure 1 below).

Figure 1



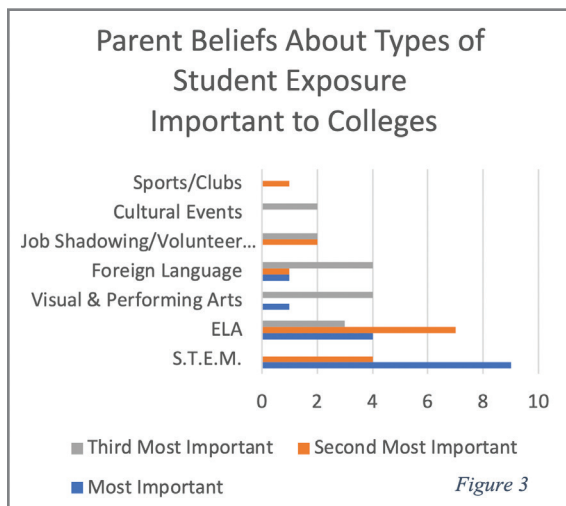
Black/African American, 29% (2) White/ Caucasian (1 is white Middle Eastern), 14% (1)

Hispanic/Latino of any race, and 29% (2) are two or more races. (See figure 2).

Figure 2

Academic Findings

Those interviewed are all married women except two. Of those two, one is divorced, and the other is a widow. Of the married women, two are separated, and three live with their spouses.



The researchers explored parents' beliefs about what they viewed as important for academic readiness and what they perceived colleges deemed as important. The domains discussed in the survey and subsequent interviews were 1) Academic Readiness, 2) Social Readiness, 3) Emotional Readiness, 4) Geographical Readiness, 5) Parental Readiness, 6) Economic Readiness, and 7) Institutional Readiness. These charts represent parent perceptions of what colleges would like to see students exposed to during their high school careers. Figure 3 illustrates what parents see as necessary for success in college. Most parents view exposure to S.T.E.M. and English Language Arts as the two most important areas required for college readiness. This finding not only confirms what practitioners assumed to be true, it further suggests that while TRiO parents realize the

importance of focusing on these areas for college admissions, historically first-generation, low-income students do not get the exposure to higher-level math and ELA classes that their second-generation counterparts enjoy.

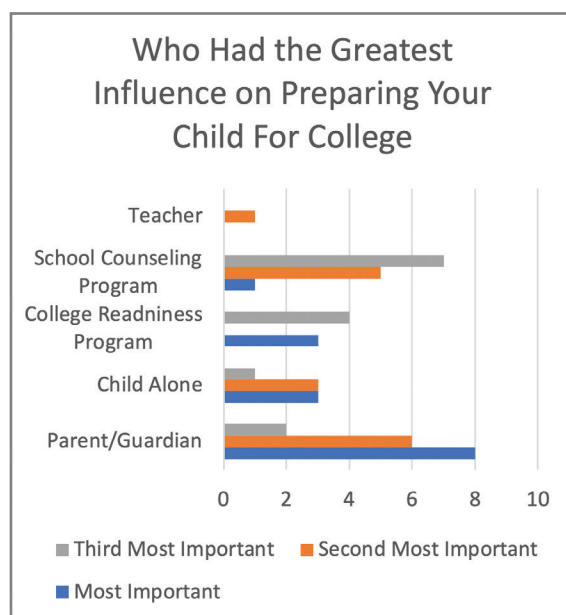
This is also significant because as Tierney (2008) points out, parents are willing to get involved with helping their students with college readiness. While teachers do not have the constant communication with colleges and universities that counselors and college advisors have, TRiO Talent Search and Upward Bound should consider creatively and strategically involving parents in activities that would encourage parents to talk to their children about striving to enroll in higher-level math and ELA coursework. Studies overwhelmingly support parental expectations serve as external motivators for children. The parents in this study see themselves as the primary reason their children go to college (see figure 6). Practitioners should leverage this knowledge, and the influence parents have by engaging parents in these key academic areas. For example, research skills, reading, time management, and writing are all associated with success in college. Equipping parents to create a home culture of reading and writing and offering creative ways to incorporate reading, research writing, and study skills into the TRiO curriculum will increase the probability that their children will attain a bachelor's degree within six years. Parents of Talent Search and Upward Bound Trio students could be encouraged to access services from

Educational Opportunity Centers. Students who see their parents engaged in academic work are encouraged to do the same (Perna, 2015). Bella has an adopted son who is a senior in high school. She passed the HiSet and is currently enrolled in college. She says:

I am a first-time college student myself. I think he sees how hard I work trying to maintain a work-study balance. He sees how hard I work and I think that is having a huge influence on him and it's making him like want it verses me making him....Because at the beginning we first started discussing college, this is like when he was a sophomore, it was more of 'um I want to go to the Marine Corp' that's kinda what he had his sights set on for the longest even before I adopted him. It was kinda the route that he wanted to go in. 'I just want to go to the Marine Corp. I will think about college afterwards'. That was around the time I enrolled in college and he started to see how I do things, how I manage my schedule and everything and I think that had an influence on him because at some point during his junior year he said, 'yes I want to enroll into a college' without me having to say anything.

Unconsciously, Bella created a home culture of higher education, and her son soon adopted the same train of thought. Bella goes on to say that her son is currently taking college courses during his senior year.

Of those parents with juniors and seniors interviewed in the study (4), only one parent could remember her student's ACT score or even whether or not they took the test. This suggests that parents are uninvolved with preparation for the test. Informing parents about how they can set expectations at home around standardized test-taking will encourage students to do more to prepare. This is critically important given that some colleges and universities still use standardized tests to determine scholarship offers (Strayhorn 2018; Strayhorn 2014). Parents ranked ACT/SAT second highest in importance only after good grades, regarding what characteristics they believe are important to colleges. This ranking further suggests that parents want their students to do well on these tests even though many universities are becoming test-optional.



Effective time management is associated with college readiness (Strayhorn, 2014). Parents repeatedly cited concerns about their child's management of time:

Gabriella — “she needs more time to complete assignments. She does not feel supported with her disability.”

Bella — “He doesn't speak up to ask for help. He waits 'til the last minute to do everything. He even completes assignments and does not turn them in.”

Aaliyah — (daughter's name) needs to learn to say “no” to some stuff so that she has time to complete the most important things. She and I talk about this all the time. She is constantly running, running, running”

Serenity — “He always waits until the last minute”

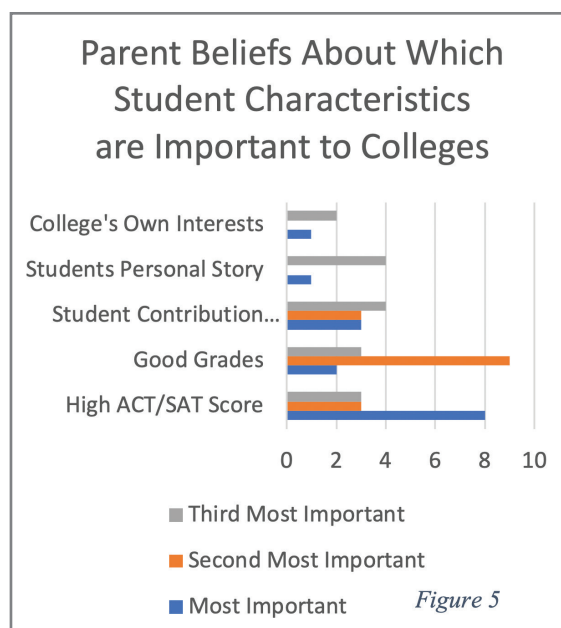
Quinn — what (daughter's name) does is wait until two or three days before the assignment is due to start working on it. She gets them in, but barely.

Time management is one of the other academic behaviors cited by researchers to indicate post-secondary academic success. Others include attending class regularly, self-awareness, study skills, and “grit.” That is being

able to persevere through difficult moments to attain a four-year degree (Strayhorn, 2013).

One salient point mentioned by Gabriela is that Trio programs should consider making parents feel welcome to participate by offering promotional materials in their home language and by hosting parent informational sessions that give parents specific guidance regarding college readiness in the parents' language. This would make parents feel included, appreciated, encouraged, and informed enough to motivate their children.

Gabriella — “Inform parents in a series of workshops on college readiness, not just one message. They will not remember everything you said. Also, do the same for the children. If it is part of their regular school day and taught regularly, they will remember and be prepared for when they go to college. Suicide is real (name of university) where my daughter goes has already had two suicides this year. They need to know about bullying, drugs, and alcohol temptations before they get to college. Hispanics are used to going to class (in college) and then home. Here you live on campus. Drugs, suicide, and bullying should be addressed during the school year.



Social/Emotional Findings

The theme that was most prevalent in this study was social/emotional. Parents are worried about their child's emotional readiness for college. This worry translated into decisions such as keeping their children close to home to go to college. Still, as stated earlier, parents are unaware of the impact this has on their children and the likelihood they will graduate within six years. Five out of the seven mothers interviewed expressed concerns about their children not fitting in or dealing with peer pressure. When asked: “How do you rate your child's overall ability to make difficult decisions regarding peer pressure, choosing friendships, romance, and behaviors while in college, with one being not at all able and five being very able?” Only 27% of participants scored their children as very able.

The seven parents interviewed in this study began grooming their children for college from a very young age by placing them in the best possible schools within the district where they lived. Two had transferred their children to private schools, three had transferred their children to suburban schools, and two remained within the target schools served by their TRiO program. Two of the mothers interviewed have spouses that work in educational institutions—one for a suburban public school system and the other for a local four-year university. Even with giving their children the best possible academic opportunities, they fear that their students are not ready for the social responsibilities that come with moving on to post-secondary education:

Bella, “I’m worried because he used to hang with the wrong crowd. He does not really speak up for himself. He will have his work done, and may forget to turn it in.”

Alyia, “I wonder if we coddled her too much. We won’t know until she gets out there and starts doing things on her own. I was shocked to hear her speak up for herself at a recent meeting at her school”

Serenity, “I don’t want him to encounter something and it’s so difficult that it makes him want to give up and drop out”

Gabriela, “Exposure brings temptation. At home they are protected from things that could tempt them. In college they have more freedom. Now, I’m worried because now she is vaping

trying to fit in with these cheerleaders. She is stressed because her classes are also very hard, and she has an IEP, and the school is not helping her. She also has a boyfriend now who she wants to be with in another state.”

Ana, “I may have protected her too much by putting her in private school. Those kids were snobbish and she never made friends there. Now, I want her to make friends at college because she doesn’t really have any friends. I think she should join a club or something. She doesn’t push herself and I feel guilty because of our home environment. Her dad and I are getting divorced.”

Ana has one daughter who has dropped out, and the other is a first-year college student who has considered it.

Ana — “(daughter’s name) quit going and now (2nd daughter’s name) is thinking about quitting too. She doesn’t feel successful. She goes to class and comes home. The only class she likes is photography because she likes art.

This data is consistent with the literature, regardless of socioeconomic class. Parents are concerned about their students being influenced by behaviors that slow down or even hinder graduation.

Only 60% of parents said they believe their children are very comfortable (5 out of 5) or mostly comfortable (4 out of 5) fitting in with faculty/staff and peers based on race, gender, religion, or political views. And only 53% of respondents believe their child is very able (5 out of 5) or mostly able (4 out of 5) to balance a social life with academics.

Every parent interviewed said their child waits until the last minute to complete assignments or projects. This is a habit that Tierney (2008) cites as one that can cause problems for first-year students because they are bringing high school habits into the college classroom. Nearly half (47%) of the parents in this study rank their children 3 out of 5, with five being able to meet deadlines regardless of their stress/anxiety. No parent scored their child as very able to meet deadlines. 54% of parents scored their child either a 4 out of 5 (27%) or 5 out of 5 (27%), with five being very stressed.

Geographical Findings

While parents ranked their children as being able to adapt to college relatively easily, this seems to be associated with the desire for students to stay local rather than leave. Nine out of 15 parents elected to have their children study in the same city; five chose to have their child study 3 hours or less away, and one selected to study abroad. Of the seven parents interviewed, all but one have plans to study locally. The one parent, Quinn, who is allowing her daughter to leave and has an associate degree, visited three universities with her daughter in the state, her daughter participated in an out-of-town college tour to 5 universities, and she also visited two universities with her high school:

Quinn — “She was not hearing anything I had to say about going to school locally. She knew she wanted to attend an HBCU and that is where she is going.”

Aaliyah — “Dad said no immediately.” I am a little more flexible. We went to visit a school (unnamed) about two hours away in a small town. I asked her, ‘you wear natural hair, where are you going to go around there to get your hair done or the products you need’ We all agreed that local is better for her.

Serenity — “if one day he wants to go to another state or country I would support him”

Gabriela — “we knew she was going to (school name) because dad works there, and we don’t have to pay tuition. But she lives on campus, so she has her freedom. In (country of origin) we don’t ‘go away to college. That is something you do here.”

Bella — “If he wanted to go to another state, I would support him”

Serenity, Bella and Gabriella are parents who were born in other countries and are accustomed to going to school while living at home. It is customary to live at home until married; this is true across the socioeconomic spectrum citing Karp, Holmstrom, and Gray:

Mother — Because I was just too attached to him in terms of what are the systems in this country, what are the customs in this country...In Brazil students stay home until the day they get married. They even continue living together after they get married. In Brazil the people don't travel as much, they don't move as much, they don't disintegrate as much. You can have two, three generations of family in the same city and they all spend weekends together. The cultural differences between Brazil and the United States are a major issue (2004).

Nonetheless, TRiO parents should know that higher attainment rates are associated with going away to college. Six-year attainment rates drop dramatically when students live with their parents (Garza & Fullerton, 2018). This can be mitigated when living in the same city but separate from parents.

Economic Findings

The parents in this study are mostly willing to help their children pay for college; however, it is not surprising to see parents in this study lean heavily toward keeping their students close to home for college. 10 out of 15 parents expect their children to have some economic responsibility at home while in college. This is in keeping with the literature that shows parents of low-income, first-generation students expect, to some degree, that their children be prepared to participate economically at home while they seek their degrees. All parents except Bella and Quinn said that it is important that their children play an economic role to learn responsibility while in college.

Grace — “She will need to pay something non-college related just so that she can learn the responsibility of being on your own.

Aaliya — “she is going to have to participate in work-study because dad and I can't do it alone

Serenity — “He is responsible for his car note and insurance. Other than that, we leave him alone so he can focus on his studies.”

When asked, “How would you rate your concerns overall about your child's college experience, with one being NOT WORRIED at all and five being VERY WORRIED?” 66% of parents said they were mostly worried (4) or very worried (5). These worries were the sum total of the areas discussed in the interviews. For parents, these areas need to be addressed in addition to the academic goals they have for them to feel that their students are college-ready.

For the parents of low-income, first-generation Trio students, in addition to the definition given by Conely, college readiness means premature maturation in terms of at least some level of economic responsibilities. Readiness means having the maturity to manage social and academic relationships and the self-awareness necessary to recognize when extra support is needed when faced with peer pressures, stress, and feelings of belonging. For those living at home and going to college, readiness means knowing how to deal with interruptions and separate home life from college life.