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Decriminalizing Academia: Black First-Generation Community College Students in Unsatisfactory Academic Standing

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DECRIMINALIZING ACADEMIA: BLACK FIRST-GENERATION COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS IN UNSATISFACTORY ACADEMIC STANDING

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ABSTRACT

DECRIMINALIZING ACADEMIA: BLACK FIRST-GENERATION COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS IN UNSATISFACTORY ACADEMIC STANDING

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Community colleges serve as critical access points to higher education for Black students. However, current outcomes suggest that Black students are not being properly served in America's community colleges. Although well-meaning institutional leaders often create policies and programs aimed at improving success rates for students from marginalized backgrounds, too often, the voices of those directly impacted by the policy are not considered. Consequently, little is known about the lived experiences of Black first-generation community college students, especially those in unsatisfactory academic standing. The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of Black first-generation students on academic warning (commonly referred to as *academic probation*).

Data were collected through two one-on-one semi-structured interviews. The participants in the study were nine Black first-generation students enrolled at one suburban community college in the northeastern United States. A review of literature relevant to the inquiry revealed a knowledge gap concerning the lived experiences of Black first-generation students in unsatisfactory academic standing at an institution that has decriminalized its language surroundings its unsatisfactory academic standing policy.

Utilizing intersectionality as its theoretical framework, the analysis of the data led to the identification of five themes. The themes are: (a) familial influence is a motivator, (b) underutilization of campus resources, (c) feeling like a failure, (d) academic warning as a second

chance, and (e) language matters. The findings from the present study offered institutional leaders and practitioners ways that they can each be proactive in their approach to closing the current equity gap between Black students and their non-Black peers.
Keywords: academic probation, academic warning, Black first-generation students, community colleges

This research is dedicated to my loved ones who are no longer here physically. I hope that I have made you proud.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Since the early twentieth century, community colleges have served as community-based institutions of higher education (Vaughan, 2006). According to the American Association of Community Colleges (2022), 39% of undergraduate students in the United States are enrolled at a community college. Rooted in a commitment to expanding access to higher education, students of color, students from families with low income, and students who are the first in their family to attend college have historically been overrepresented on America's community college campuses (Ma & Baum, 2015). To meet their mission of being open-access, community colleges must be prepared to meet the needs of students regardless of their race or other demographic information. However, current outcomes suggest that Black students are not being properly served at community colleges. According to a recent Chancellor's report from the California Community College System, 63% of Black community college students did not earn a credential or transfer within six years (California Community Colleges Black and African American Advisory Panel, 2020).

According to Research Triangle Institute International (RTI; 2019), nearly 25% of undergraduate students have parents without any postsecondary education. Unfortunately, these same first-generation college students are twice more likely to drop out of college than their continuing-generation peers (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). Although students who are Black and students who are the first in their family to attend college each face their own set of challenges, the compounding challenges faced by occupying both social identities may place Black first-generation college students at a greater risk for attrition.

Students in unsatisfactory academic standing are commonly referred to as being on *academic probation* (Arcand & LeBlanc, 2012; Barouch-Gilbert, 2015; Hamman, 2018; Tovar & Simon, 2006). Following the headlined racialized violence against Black individuals across the United States and the growth of the *Black Lives Matter* movement, many institutions of higher education across the country examined language that could be considered stigmatizing to students of color, including language surrounding policies for students in unsatisfactory academic standing (Bryant, 2020; Steele, 2022). The process of decriminalizing something considers the social harm of labeling it as criminal (United States Department of Justice, n.d.). Research has shown the social harm faced by students after being labeled as on academic probation (Barouch-Gilbert, 2015; Brady, 2017), especially students of color who may feel that the term feeds into a stereotype of criminality (Bryant, 2020; Steele, 2022). For the purposes of the present study, wherever possible, the term *academic probation* was decriminalized and referred to as *academic warning*. Like academic probation, academic warning refers to an institutional sanction assigned to students whose grade point average (GPA) falls below 2.0 on a 4.0 scale, the minimum GPA to graduate (Barouch-Gilbert, 2015; Schudde & Scott-Clayton, 2016; Yeaton & Moss, 2020). It is possible that community colleges can do more to improve outcomes for Black students who are the first in their family to attend college. However, without insight into the lived experiences of these students, efforts made by community colleges may prove futile.

Utilizing in-depth semi-structured interviews, the present study explored the lived experiences of nine Black first-generation students in unsatisfactory academic standing at a suburban community college. Not only are Black first-generation community college students marginalized within higher education, but they are also underrepresented in scholarly research.

Most of the research related to Black individuals as college students has been gender-specific (Turner, 2011; Wood & Turner, 2010). The study adds to existing research as it took place in a setting using decriminalized language to describe students in unsatisfactory academic standing. The findings from this study generated by commonalities in participants' lived experiences should inform retention efforts aimed at cultivating equitable outcomes for Black and first-generation students.

Background of the Study

This topic is timely given the current equity gap facing Black community college students with regards to degree completion. The present study falls under the backdrop of an increased focus on the social responsibility of institutions of higher education following headlined racialized violence and injustice faced by Black individuals across the United States. Additionally, the study follows the 2023 Supreme Court ruling of race-conscious admissions to colleges and universities being unconstitutional, making the future of access to higher education for students from historically marginalized backgrounds unknown. Most of the existing literature pertaining to Black and first-generation students as college learners focuses on their deficiencies (Pèrez et al., 2017), or promotes racist discourse that Black students are inferior (M. T. Williams, 2019). Scholarly inquiry into student success often does not consider how students define their own success, nor the varied goals students have for pursuing a postsecondary education (York et al., 2015). This non-holistic view of student success adds to the difficulty both researchers and practitioners face in improving inequities in higher education. The background of the study will explore some of the history as well as the present state of: (a) Black students in college (b) Black college students who are the first in their family to attend college; and (c) unsatisfactory academic standing.

Black College Students

Recently, colleges in the United States have experienced a dramatic decline in Black student enrollment. Perhaps exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, the years 2019-2021 saw a 23.5% and 15% decline in community college enrollment among Black men and women respectively (Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, 2022). Black women currently outperform Black men in higher education, as according to recent data from the United States Census Bureau (2019), in 2018 25.7% of Black women between the ages of 25 and 29 held a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 18.6% of Black men in the same age group. As earning a college degree can provide upward economic and social mobility for Black students (Elu et al., 2019), there has been significant scholarly attention to both the internal and external factors that perpetuate the achievement gap among Black students.

In discussing the internal considerations facing Black college students, the role of internalized gender socialization should not be discounted. Differences in socialization between Black men and women begin as early as birth (Wallace, 2007). According to scholars of Black family studies, Black women are socially and culturally expected to show strength and suppress emotions (Castelin & White, 2022; Jones et al., 2021). On the other hand, although Black men are also expected to be tough and not display emotion, they are also expected to be decisive, independent, and assertive (Ratliff, 2014). This might explain why although Black men experience rates of anxiety and depression similar to other racial and gender groups, they are significantly less likely to utilize campus counseling resources (K.D.A. Williams et al., 2023). These societal expectations may also impact how Black men and women perceive themselves as learners. For example, earlier research by Bukoski and Hatch (2016) found that Black men linked educational success with *manning up*, and by not doing well in school, they had failed as a

man. Interestingly, more recently, research has shown that Black men have become okay with showing vulnerability and caring, especially through bonding with other Black male peers (Bass, 2019; Brooms, 2019; Smith, 2023).

Much of the scholarly discussion surrounding the external factors in opposition with Black student success relates to their experiences on campus. For many Black students attempting to earn a college degree can be a traumatic experience, due in large part to the deeply rooted systemic racism in America's higher education system (T. Williams et al., 2022). From as early as the enrollment process, Black students can be faced with exclusionary institutional policies. For example, according to Vandal (2018), 70% of Black students attending a community college and nearly 50% of Black students attending a four-year institution are placed into at least one developmental course in their first year, signaling to these students that they are not prepared for college and are viewed through a deficit-minded frame of thought.

The systemic racism in higher education goes beyond the enrollment process. In addition to exclusionary academic policies, many Black students experience microaggressions from both their faculty and peers (Pusey-Reid et al., 2022). These environmental microaggressions appear through pressure to conform, cultural biases in courses, and a lack of representation (Mills, 2020). Black students attending a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) have indicated feeling that non-Black students perceive their presence on campus as a threat, subsequently leading non-Black students to be afraid of engaging with their Black peers (George-Mwangi et al., 2017). Although Minority Serving Institutions (MSI) may be thought to be a refuge for Black students, Black students can still perceive anti-Blackness at Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) through overrepresentation of White personnel in power, and a lack of culturally sensitive support (Pirtle et al., 2019). The effects of a hostile campus climate have both physical and mental

consequences for students. According to Tausen et al. (2023), in 2020, following the murders of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd, as well as other highly visible attacks on Black individuals, Black students reported heighten levels of race-based trauma. Although many college presidents wrote open letters condemning the inequitable treatment of Black people, some letters were perceived as vague and conservative (Meikle & Morris, 2022). Campus racial climate has implications for mental health, as Black students may be more likely to report higher rates of positive mental health when they perceive their campus as welcoming to racial minorities and first-generation students (Leath et al., 2021).

First-Generation Students

Although there are varied definitions as to who is considered a first-generation college student (Toutkoushian et al., 2021), for the present study, first-generation students were defined as students of whom neither parent has earned a level of education higher than a high school diploma or its equivalent (Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998). According to the Postsecondary National Policy Institute (2021), first-generation students are more likely to enroll in community college, come from high schools of lower academic rigor, rely on financial aid, work part-time while taking college credits, and enroll in fewer credits each academic term.

When enrolling in college, first-generation students are often met with new language (institutional terminology and jargon) that may be confusing. Consequently, many first-generation students may not be aware of campus policies or resources aimed at their success, leading to feelings of isolation (Marine-Nin & Gutierrez-Keeton, 2020). Like Black students, first-generation students also experience microaggressions on campus. According to Ellis et al. (2019), these microaggressions take various forms and include microinsults from faculty and academic advisors that demean their first-generation student identity. As students who hold more

than one marginalized identity may experience higher rates of psychological distress than others (Hayes et al., 2011), a significant amount of scholarly attention has been focused on the experiences of first-generation students of racial minority. For example, first-generation students of color may experience *achiever's guilt* and exhibit depressive-like symptoms, impacting their academic performance and putting them at risk for unsatisfactory academic standing (Covarrubias & Fryberg, 2015).

Unsatisfactory Academic Standing

Students in unsatisfactory academic standing are often misjudged as unprepared for college-level coursework or unserious about their academic journey. This view places the onus on the student and does not acknowledge student success as a shared responsibility between the student and their institution. Research shows commonalities exist among challenges faced by Black and first-generation students (Mcdossi et al., 2022), suggesting that perhaps many Black first-generation students fall into unsatisfactory academic standing due to a lack of awareness of campus resources, a consequence of being poorly integrated into their institution.

It is estimated that 25% of students are placed on academic probation at some point in their educational journey (Hamman, 2018; Tovar & Simon, 2006). Unfortunately, being placed on academic probation may reduce a student's chances of graduating by 40% (Bowman & Jang, 2022). Being labeled as academically deficient may lead to students feeling embarrassed (Barouch-Gilbert, 2015) or like a failure (Arcand & LeBlanc, 2012). Institutions of higher education have relied on a variety of interventions to remedy unsatisfactory academic standing such as academic advising (Butler, 2016; Miller et al., 2019; Vander Schee, 2007), success courses (Bowering et al., 2017; Mellor et al., 2015), and peer-mentoring (Arcand & LeBlanc, 2012; Blankenship et al., 2020; Burke-Leòn et al., 2019; Yomtov et al., 2017).

Following the political and social unrest in the United States in the preceding few years, in Fall 2021, the research site at which the present study took place engaged in a review of institutional language thought to be unwelcoming to students. Having concluded that the term academic probation was overly punitive and confusing to students and acknowledging that Black individuals experience higher rates of police brutality than their White peers (Anderson et al., 2021), the research site changed the name of their unsatisfactory academic standing policy from academic probation to academic warning effective Fall 2022. At the research site, prior to Fall 2022, students were placed on academic probation for either: (a) earning a grade point average below the established satisfactory threshold or (b) not achieving a designated rate of successful completion of attempted credits. The designated rate of successful completion of attempted credits was aligned with the research site's definition of Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP), the rate of completion needed for students to maintain their eligibility for financial aid (Schudde & Scott-Clayton, 2016). In greater detail, students with less than 31 earned credits were required to successfully complete 50% of all attempted credits, while students with 31 or more earned credits were required to successfully complete 66% of attempted credits to avoid being placed into unsatisfactory academic standing. Although the GPA criterion requirement remained the same, the new academic standing policy removed the rate of completion criterion.

Theoretical Framework

Originally introduced by feminist theorists (Collins, 1991; Crenshaw, 1989, 1991), intersectionality is defined as the confounding effects of social identities such as race, gender, class, and other differences that exacerbate disparities (Miley et al., 2016). The present study employed intersectionality as its theoretical framework, as it acknowledges that multiple social identities such as race, gender, and first-generation status are interconnected and operating

simultaneously; leading to experiences of privilege, oppression, and marginalization (Carbado et al., 2013; Crenshaw, 1991; Trahan, 2011).

There has been a growing interest in intersectionality among higher education researchers and practitioners (Byrd et al., 2019; Duran, 2021; Jones & Abes, 2013; Simien, 2019; Willis, 2015). However, even prior to Crenshaw (1989), scholars of higher education have explored the ways in which students' multiple social identities influenced their experiences while in college (Astin 1970; Pascarella, 1985; Tinto, 1975). Literature has demonstrated that being unconscious to the multiple social identities occupied by students may minimize institutional experiences such as racism (Harper, 2012). Understanding intersectionality as a theoretical framework is important to the study of Black first-generation community college students, as Black students remain stigmatized in higher education by both gender and race. Intersectionality as a theoretical framework centered the role of power and privilege in higher education and informed the present inquiry into the lived experiences of similarly socially situated students in unsatisfactory academic standing.

Statement of the Problem

For many years, the United States has relied on a college-educated workforce to maintain its position in the competitive global economy. Ergo, the current rate of decline in Black student enrollment at our nation's community colleges presents a threat to the financial stability of our country. As open access institutions, community colleges typically enroll students from a wider range of academic preparedness as compared to institutions with competitive admission. Students who occupy multiple minoritized identities may experience higher rates of psychological distress than those who do not (Hayes et al., 2011). If being labeled as academically deficient can affect a student's sense of belonging, and affect how they are placed

into classes, and with the knowledge that students from multiple minoritized identities experience higher rates of stress, it seems plausible that Black students who are the first in their family to attend college and are in unsatisfactory academic standing, are at high risk for attrition. The following reflection may lead those with an interest in Black student success to wonder: What are the lived experiences of Black first-generation students in unsatisfactory academic standing?

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of Black first-generation students on academic warning (commonly referred to as *academic probation*), while enrolled at a suburban community college in the northeast United States. Academic warning (as conceptualized by the research site) is defined as an academic standing for students whose overall grade point average (GPA) falls below a 2.0 on a 4.0 scale. As Black students remain underrepresented among community college degree earners, the perspectives shared in the present study should inform institutional policies and practices aimed at their success.

Research Question

The following research question guided the study:

What are the lived experiences of Black first-generation community college students in unsatisfactory academic standing at an institution using decriminalized language?

Professional Significance

As public institutions of higher education continue to compete with other public entities for funding (Barr & McClellan, 2017), institutional leaders should remain cognizant of factors impacting the financial stability of their institution. According to Gonzalez (2022), placing

students on academic probation can lead to a significant loss in revenue for institutions of higher education. Although there have been numerous studies on students in unsatisfactory academic standing, the present study addressed the knowledge gap related to the lived experiences of Black first-generation community college students at an institution using decriminalized language in its academic policies. In June 2023, the Supreme Court ruled race-conscious admissions as unconstitutional, potentially increasing the access gap to higher education for Black students (Akhtari et al., 2024). As a racial group initially denied access to higher education, the perspectives offered in the present study by Black first-generation community college students should inform institutional policies and practices aimed at their success. The findings from the present study have the potential to offer new insight into reasons community colleges are failing to provide equitable outcomes for Black students.

Although there is a considerable amount of research focused on Black students as college learners, a criticism of both research on Black students and institutional efforts aimed at their success is that they are deficit-focused (Goings, 2016; Harper, 2010). The present study is significant, as it valued the multiple social identities occupied by Black first-generation community college students and the intersectionality of these identities, helping to move away from a deficit- minded inquiry. Although previous studies have explored Black students as community college learners, most of the literature is focused solely on one gender. This is dangerous and excludes the voices of students who are gender-non-binary or agender. The present study invited students of various and non-gender expressions. The study being inclusive has the potential to not only offer new insight into the disparity in outcomes among Black students and their non-Black peers, but also into the disparity in outcomes of Black students across various gender expressions.

The goals of policies targeting students in unsatisfactory academic standing may vary across institutions. However, the present study has the potential to offer recommendations for systemic actions that institutional leaders can take to ensure that students, faculty, and staff recognize academic warning (commonly referred to as *academic probation*) as an opportunity to benefit, not punish students. Additionally, the findings from the study should better position institutional leaders, stakeholders, and researchers in their understanding of the needs of a critically important student population: Black students who are the first in their family to attend college.

Overview of the Methodology

Although numerical data offered by quantitative studies provide insight into the scale of an issue, qualitative data provide insight into an issue's depth. As the primary goal of the present study was to find commonalities in the meanings that participants gave to their lived experience of being Black, first-generation, and on academic warning, the study utilized a phenomenological approach to its qualitative method of inquiry (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Vagle, 2018).

Data were collected through two one-on-one semi-structured interviews with nine participants. Individual interviews can provide an environment free of judgement (Hines, 2019), and speaking about their experience can be therapeutic for participants (Birch & Miller, 2000). The interviews used open-ended questioning to allow me to ask follow-up questions when necessary to gain greater insight into how participants made meaning of their experience with the central phenomenon under investigation for this study; being Black, first-generation in college, and in unsatisfactory academic standing while attending a suburban community college. Prior to data collection, approval for the study was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at

the research site (see Appendix F) and the Human Subjects Review Committee from the College of Education and Professional Studies at Old Dominion University (see Appendix G). For the present study, the specific location of the institution and its name were not shared. Instead, a pseudonym (East Coast Community College; ECCC) was used.

The present study utilized a criterion-based purposeful sampling mechanism. Students who demonstrated interest in the study completed a confidential and brief demographic and criteria matching survey to confirm that they met the selection criteria. Using informed consent, all students who met the selection criteria were invited to participate in the study. Additionally, all prospective participants received information about the purpose of the study, the risks involved with participating, as well as information regarding compensation for participating. The target sample size for the study was 9-10 participants. All interviews were conducted on Zoom and were recorded to retrieve audio and visual data. Participants were instructed that their cameras needed to be on and were assured that in no way would their name, image or likeness be published. Additionally, participants were assured that the visual data would be used solely to take note of any relevant nonverbal behaviors. The initial interviews lasted (on average) approximately one hour. The goal of the initial interview was to better understand participants' background as well as investigate the emotional, social, and academic experiences of being a Black first-generation community college student on academic warning. Prior to the second interview, member checking occurred to ensure that what was produced from the verbatim transcript is what they said. Member checking is a part of the ethical relationship between researcher and participant, keeping the participant's involvement at an appropriate level (Naidu & Prose, 2018). The purpose of the second interview which was approximately 30 minutes, was

to gain insight into meanings gathered in the first interview, and to provide any clarification if needed.

The data analysis process was guided by transcendental phenomenological methods (Sohn, 2017; Vagle, 2018). Audio recordings, visual data, and verbatim transcripts were the primary data sources used in the analysis. Prior to data analysis, I participated in a bracketing exercise to better understand and set aside my own presumptions about the phenomenon under investigation (Moustakas, 1994). Data were analyzed to find patterns of meaning (Vagle, 2018). These patterns of meaning were referred to as themes and turned into descriptive data explaining how participants experienced the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

Delimitations

The first delimitation is that the present study was focused on first-generation students attending one suburban community college in the northeastern United States. As such, the findings may not be representative of other first-generation community college students in other settings. Second, the study is delimited to students whose racial identity includes Black. A final delimitation of the study is that it is focused only on students currently enrolled in a degree-seeking program.

Definition of Key Terms

The following is a list of key terms used in this study:

- *Academic Warning* (commonly referred to in literature as *academic probation*): An institutional sanction assigned to students whose grade point average (GPA) does not meet the minimum academic requirements of the college (Yeaton & Moss, 2020).
- *Anti-Blackness:* The human race's structurally embedded degradation of Black people and communities through imagining Blackness as inherently negative, needing to be

policed and/or neutralized, and as outside of the realms of humanity (Coles, 2019).

- *Black Students*: Students in the United States who identify as having African ancestry (African American, Afro-Caribbean, African immigrant; Wilchins & Gilmer, 2014).
- *Community College*: A regionally accredited institution of higher education that offers an associate degree as its highest degree (Vaughan, 2006).
- *First-Generation Students*: Students with neither parent having a level of education higher than a high school diploma or its equivalent (Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998).
- *Intersectionality*: Confounding effects of factors such as class, culture, race, ethnicity, and other differences that exacerbate disparities (Miley et al., 2016).
- *Microaggression*: Hidden messages of racism and prejudice in everyday verbal and nonverbal communications (Miley et al., 2016).
- *Non-binary:* An adjective describing a person who does not identify exclusively as a man or a woman. Non-binary people may identify as being both a man and a woman, somewhere in between, or as falling completely outside these categories. While many also identify as trans*, not all non-binary people do. Non-binary can also be used as an umbrella term encompassing identities such as agender, bigender, genderqueer or gender-fluid (Human Rights Campaign, 2020).
- *Privilege:* A condition that occurs when membership in some cultural groups confers differential and preferential status (Miley et al., 2016).
- *Power*: An individual or group's access to information and societal resources that allows them to choose actions from many possibilities and act on these choices (Miley et al., 2016).

- *Rate of Completion:* The percentage of course credits completed. Rate of completion is typically calculated by dividing a student's overall completed credits by the number of credits attempted (Brochet, 2020).
- *Social Identity:* An individual's sense of self based on their own group membership(s) (Tajfel, 1979).
- *Suburb:* A metropolitan area that lies outside of a city limit (Lewis-McCoy, 2018).
- *Transgender:* An umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or expression is different from cultural expectations based on the sex they were assigned at birth. Being transgender does not imply any specific sexual orientation (Human Rights Campaign, 2020).

Chapter I Summary and Organization of the Study

The first chapter of this doctoral dissertation provided background for the defined problem by briefly reviewing relevant literature. An examination of literature suggests that there is a knowledge gap related to the lived experiences of Black first-generation community college students in unsatisfactory academic standing at an institution using decriminalized language. The present study is significant as it offers insight into a critically important student group in their own words, using intersectionality as its theoretical underpinning.

This doctoral dissertation is organized into five chapters. The chapter that follows provides an expanded review of literature relevant to the study. Chapter III provides an outline of the research methods used for the study. Chapter IV describes the findings of the study. Finally, Chapter V discusses implications and recommendations for further research based on the study's findings.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Black students who enroll in community colleges typically come from the lowest income quartiles within their racial group (National Postsecondary Student Aid Study [NPSAS], 2018d), making community colleges a critical opportunity for economic mobility, particularly for Black students. However, little is known about the lived experiences of Black first-generation community college students, especially those in unsatisfactory academic standing. The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of Black first-generation students on academic warning (commonly referred to as *academic probation*) while enrolled at a suburban community college in the northeast United States. The following review of literature begins with a brief discussion of power and privilege, as well as an overview of intersectionality as a theory. The chapter then continues with a historical overview of community colleges before highlighting scholarship related to Black students, students who are the first in their family to attend college, and unsatisfactory academic standing.

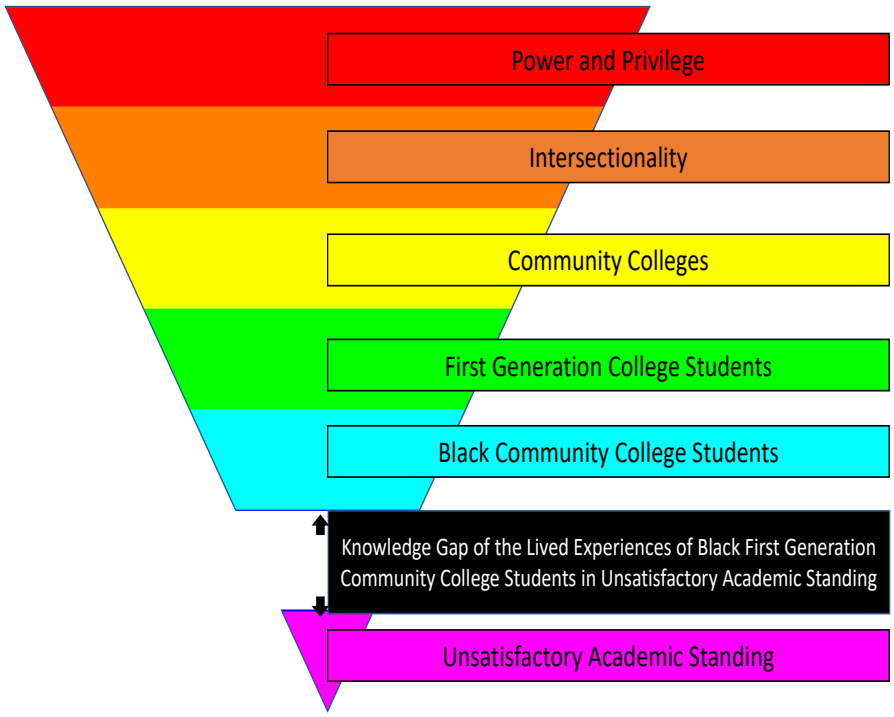
Method of the Literature Review

Searches for peer-reviewed, scholarly literature were conducted primarily through Old Dominion University's Monarch OneSearch, EBSCO, and Google Scholar. The present study focused on the following areas: Black community college students, first-generation students, and academic warning (commonly referred to in literature as *academic probation*). Literature on transgender (trans*) and non-binary students is often grouped together with research related to Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual (LGB) students (Gonzalez & Duran, 2023; Zelaya et al., 2021). However, LGB are sexual orientations, not gender expressions. Scholarly attention to Black trans* and non-binary community college students appears to be scarce, so the review of

literature was expanded to include their experiences at four-year institutions. Search terms used to yield relevant literature include: *power and privilege, intersectionality, suburban community college, first-generation community college students, academic probation, community college mission, community college and academic probation*, *Black students in community college, Black men in community college, Black women in community college*, and *Black trans* and non-binary in community college.* Figure 1 illustrates the review of the literature and its topics as well as the current gap in knowledge pertaining to the experiences of Black first-generation students in unsatisfactory academic standing at a suburban community college using decriminalized language in its academic policies.

Figure 1

Literature Review Topic Pyramid Diagram



Power and Privilege

A review of literature relevant to the present study would have been incomplete without a discussion of power and privilege. Miley et al. (2016) described privilege as a condition that occurs when membership in a group confers differential and preferential status, and power as an individual's or group's access to information and societal resources that allows them to choose actions from many possibilities and act on those choices. hooks (1984) described the absence of these choices as oppression. The historic oppression faced by the Black community in the United States is well chronicled (Hannah-Jones, 2021). Presently, Black students continue to face oppression while pursuing a degree (Dika et al., 2023; Ebanks & Francois, 2022; Patton, 2016;

Roberts, 2020), leading to symptoms of trauma which may affect their academic and psychological functioning (T. Williams et al., 2022). Other issues of power and privilege continue to permeate higher education. For example, according to Jones and Kunkle (2022), categorization of institutions (i.e., predominantly White, minority-serving, etc.) has implications for both how they are discussed within higher education scholarship and the distribution of resources.

As the future of college access in the United States remains uncertain following the recent ruling by the United States Supreme Court determining race-conscious admissions as unconstitutional, a prominent area of discussion surrounding power and privilege in higher education has focused on the college admissions process (Callender & Melis, 2022; Sulè et al., 2022; Wofford, 2022). Prior to the June 2023 Supreme Court ruling, Sulè et al. (2022) analyzed online comments to an article regarding race-conscious admissions and concluded that popular opinion views higher education as a privilege, with non-Black students as the most deserving of entry into selective institutions of higher education. Wofford (2022) further acknowledged privilege in the college admissions process by analyzing characteristics of students admitted to colleges or universities through early admissions programs (i.e., Early Action or Early Decision). Using multiple regression analyses, Wofford discovered that students more likely to get accepted through an early admissions program were White, continuing-generation, and from an affluent household (Wofford, 2022). Callender and Melis (2022) agreed, having found that students' financial resources not only affect when and where they enroll, but also their choice of major.

Another prominent and recent strand of higher education research surrounding power and privilege relates to institutional responses to social injustice (Hoffman & Mitchell, 2016; V. Jones, 2019). As institutional leaders may be viewed by students as a power structure with the

power to remedy their concerns (Broadhurst, 2014), institutional responses to social injustices have the power to perpetuate or eliminate dominant discourses of privilege (V. Jones, 2019). However, frequently, institutional responses to social injustices often contradict their stated commitments to diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice (Hoffman & Mitchell, 2016; Vèlez & Jessup-Anger, 2022). V. Jones (2019) analyzed the responses of three college presidents to headlined acts of campus racism and concluded that the presidents downplayed the racist acts in their responses and offered communication to their campus communities without substantial action (V. Jones, 2019). Anderson (2019) agreed, adding that institutional responses should be action oriented, which often includes a shift in institutional resources and power.

Intersectionality

Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989; 1991) developed intersectionality as a theory to describe the structural, representative, and political discrimination Black women face in the criminal justice system due to race, gender, and class. Intersectionality acknowledges that an individual's combined social identities may place them in positions of marginalization or privilege depending on their social environment. Rooted in Black feminist thought and critical race theory (Carbado et al., 2013), race and gender were the primary social identities discussed in early intersectional research. However, more recently, intersectionality has been used in a variety of research disciplines to explore how other marginalized social identities such as sexual orientation, immigration status, ability, and age impact individuals' lived experiences (Moradi & Grzanka, 2017).

A. Stewart and McDermott (2004) outlined three central tenets for conducting intersectional research: 1) all social groups are heterogenous in nature; 2) individuals are situated in social structures in which power dynamics affect their experiences within the social structure;

and 3) the effects of identifying with more than one social group are unique. The first tenet suggests that to get a better understanding of an individual's lived experiences, researchers should not approach social groups with the assumption that all members live homogenous lifestyles. The second tenet suggests that within social structures, status is assigned whether formally or informally, and one's status within a social group affects how they experience their social identity within the structure. Finally, the last tenet acknowledges that individuals may identify with more than one social group simultaneously, and in doing so produces individualized (i.e., intersectionalized) experiences.

Intersectionality as a theory, offers insight into how subordinated individuals experience social injustices imposed upon them due to their social identity (Collins, 2019). Rooted in an ontology of power, intersectionality applied to higher education research acknowledges that higher education is hierarchical, perpetuating positions of privilege and disadvantage (Severs et al., 2016). Therefore, intersectionality may be helpful in addressing issues of educational inequities, as it helps researchers and practitioners understand the complex needs of students as they navigate institutional, societal, and political structures (Museus & Griffin, 2011; Raven, 2021; Strayhorn, 2017c).

Intersectionality as a theory also acknowledges that students come to college with identities that are deeply interwoven and sometimes at odds. Students' intersecting identities shape their interactions with their peers (Duran, 2021; Garvey et al., 2018; Willis, 2015). However, institutions of higher education often use a student's singular social identity in evaluation and assessment (Oropeza-Fujumoto & Luna, 2014). Scholars of higher education have utilized intersectionality to inform their work in both qualitative (Abes & Wallace, 2018; Duran, 2021; Willis, 2015) and quantitative (Becerra et al., 2020; Lund & Ross, 2021) research;

highlighting the importance of student identity, and its impact on students' experiences in college.

Applying intersectionality to qualitative research offers researchers an in-depth understanding of how students from marginalized backgrounds experience structures of domination, and how it shapes their identity as a student (Duran & Jones, 2019). Using narrative inquiry, Abes and Wallace (2018) used semi-structured interviews to explore the lived experiences of 13 college students with physical disabilities. The researchers discovered that many of the students experienced an erasure of their intersectional identities by members of the campus community. In greater detail, participants with visible physical disabilities expressed that members of their campus were hyper-focused on their disability, taking away from an acknowledgement of their other identities (Abes & Wallace, 2018). Duran (2021) applied intersectionality to explore resilience among 12 Queer students of color attending a Predominately White Institution (PWI). Using narrative inquiry, data from semi-structured interviews revealed that students occupying multiple marginalized identities had trouble making singular-identity-based connections with other students. Specifically, students looking to make connections based on their race felt disconnected from the group based on their sexual identity, and when trying to connect with other students based on their sexual identity, were disconnected based on their racial identity. Qualitative research has also explored how students' social identities can conflict with one another. For example, Garvey et al. (2018) found that in response to a tumultuous campus racial climate, LGBTQ students of color felt the need to place a greater importance on their racial identity over their gender or sexual identity.

Intersectionality also has the potential to offer significant contributions to quantitative research, especially in tracking educational inequalities (Mcmaster & Cook, 2019). However, the

limited body of quantitative research employing intersectionality may be best explained by the challenges it presents to quantitative inquiry. For example, according to Dubrow (2013), applying intersectionality to survey data would require researchers to recruit more cases per survey and ask intentional survey questions related to social identities such as race and gender. Becerra et al. (2020) used survey data from 308 students and concluded that psychological distress was significantly related to low self-esteem. Having found that women reported lower rates of self-esteem and higher rates of discrimination than men, among the implications of their study included further exploration into the intersection of gender, discrimination, and self-esteem. Lund and Ross (2021) further explored the role of intersectionality on college student victimization by analyzing survey data from 58 students with disabilities across multiple universities. The researchers found that students who were sexual minorities experienced significantly higher levels of past peer victimization than others, affirming that students who occupy a larger number of marginalized identities experience higher rates of oppression than others (Lund & Ross, 2021).

The way students occupy and relate to their social identities is complex and has significant implications for student engagement, as not all social identities seen on college campuses are visible or assigned at birth. A body of higher education scholarship has explored the intersection of social identities and identity-based student activism on campus. Following the 2012 murder of Trayvon Martin and the growth of the *Black Lives Matter* movement, several student protests occurred across America's college campuses. In 2015, demanding institutional change, 30 Black football players from the University of Missouri went on a strike and threatened to not play until then President Tim Wolfe resigned. Their potential failure to play in the upcoming game against Brigham Young University would have cost the school a fine of one

million dollars (Izadi, 2015). In this instance, the students prioritized their marginalized racial identity over their social identity as members of the football team. These findings were later corroborated by Chambers et al. (2021), who used narrative inquiry to examine the experiences of three Black marching band members who engaged in a *Black Lives Matter*-inspired protest during a band performance at a football game at their rural, primarily White, public university in the southern United States. Instead of playing during the national anthem, the three band members and others knelt; using their musical voices (instruments) to demonstrate the importance of Black voices and ultimately, Black lives. The student activists risked membership and their social identity as members of the marching band and stated (even after having items thrown at them from angry spectators), that they would do it again. Black students have a long history of engaging in student activism. However, Linder et al. (2019) concluded that not all Black students who engage in activism are looking to socially identify as an activist. The researchers found that many of the Black students in their study identified simply as individuals seeking equitable campus spaces and conditions (Linder et al., 2019).

Community Colleges

Since the early twentieth century, community colleges have been an important component of American education. Initially referred to as junior colleges, community colleges serve as intellectual, social, and cultural hubs in their community (Vaughan, 2006). With over 1,000 community colleges in the United States, 39% of students who attend postsecondary education are enrolled at a community college (American Association of Community Colleges, 2022). With a history rooted in expanding access to education, currently, community colleges offer a comprehensive curriculum consisting of general education, workforce training, transfer education, and developmental education (Vaughan, 2006). The range of components offered as

part of the comprehensive curriculum is reflective of both the various needs of students who enroll in community colleges, and the evolving mission of community colleges.

Historical Overview

Throughout most of the nineteenth century, higher education was accessible primarily to White males from wealthy families. During the midpoint of the century, there was a push to increase access to higher education. Federal support came in the form of the *Morrill Land Grant Acts of 1862* and *1890* which each expanded access to public higher education (Cohen et al., 2013). However, there remained a gap in postsecondary education between high school and universities. Joliet Junior College was founded in 1901 by William Rainey Harper, then President of the University of Chicago, and is credited as being the first public community college in the United States. Although most junior colleges were independent, some were attached to public high schools, receiving financial support from public school budgets (Tollefson, 2009), while others were attached to four-year colleges (Brint & Karabel, 1991).

As the number of junior colleges slowly grew during the early twentieth century, the Association of American Junior Colleges (AAJC) was established in 1920. The AAJC served as a support for junior college leaders to discuss similar challenges they faced (Brint & Karabel, 1991). According to Bogue (1950), originally, junior college was defined as "an institution offering two years of instruction of strictly collegiate grade" (p. 17). However, in 1925, the definition expanded and stated, "the junior college may, and is likely to develop a different type of curriculum suited to the larger and ever-changing civic, social, religious, and vocational needs of the community in which the college is located" (Bogue, 1950, p. 17). This expansion to the definition was timely. Following the United States' Great Depression of 1929, the years 1929 to 1939 saw an increase in enrollment at junior colleges from 56,000 students to 150,000 (Brint &

Karabel, 1989), with most of the growth taking place in vocational curricula (Wattenbarger & Witt, 1995).

In 1947, the Truman Commission recommended the establishment of community-based colleges that would be free of cost to students (Zook, 1947). These community colleges were to be used to meet the Commission's recommendation of expanding access to higher education by removing racial, religious, financial, and sex-related barriers to postsecondary enrollment (Gilbert & Heller, 2013). According to Cutler-White (2022), these recommendations were in response to an increase of high school and college enrollment, post-World War II economic and technological expansion, and the GI Bill providing financial support for veterans to attend college.

The role of community colleges continued to evolve throughout American history. Having initially focused on agricultural education, later in the century, community colleges played an active role in the United States remaining competitive against Russia in the race into space during the 1960s, serving as training sites. During this same time, community colleges received stable funding at both the state and federal level. The level of support from these funding sources varied by state, and in many ways reflected the value in which states placed on investing in community colleges (Phelan, 2014).

In response to a college education being viewed as a means for economic and social mobility, particularly for the unemployed, the 1950s and 1960s saw a continued increase in the number of two-year institutions across the country. By the 1960s there was at least one public two-year college in 49 states (Brint & Karabel, 1989). During this time, the nomenclature surrounding junior colleges began to change. The term *junior college* was applied to private two-year institutions, while the term *community college* emerged to describe publicly supported two-

year institutions (Cohen et al., 2013). Around this same time, community colleges saw a change in financial support, as America's recurring recessions created competition among community colleges, corrections, healthcare, and K-12 education for state funds (Barr & McClellan, 2017).

Although during the 1960s, nearly three-quarters of community college students were enrolled in transfer and general education pathways, according to Brint and Karabel (1991), in the 1980s nearly three-quarters of students were enrolled in a vocational pathway, seeking employment directly after the community college. The 1980s also saw a change in the demographic of students attending community colleges. By this time, there was an increase in students from ethnic minority backgrounds attending community colleges as well as women, and older adults (McCartan, 1983).

Currently, deep cuts in federal and local funding to community colleges have caused them to scale back student services and become reliant on part-time faculty (Morest, 2013). Cuts in funding have also pushed more of the cost of attending community college onto students through increased costs of tuition and fees (Katsinas & Palmer, 2005). Financing a college education may be especially difficult for students who enroll in our nation's community colleges, as it is known that community college students are more likely to work while in school, and often arrive to campus with low levels of financial literacy (Starobin et al., 2013). McKinney et al. (2015) conducted student interviews to investigate community college students' perception of borrowing. The researchers found that borrowing (temporarily) alleviated financial stress, and the funds borrowed allowed students the opportunity to work less hours and allocate more time for studying and campus involvement. Although borrowing may prove beneficial for some students, community college students default on their loans at alarming rates (McKinney et al., 2021).

From Purpose to Mission

Prior to World War II and the expansion of community colleges to other countries such as Japan, junior colleges used purpose statements to distinguish themselves from other institutions (Ayers, 2017). Although the original purpose of the junior college was to expand access to higher education, at their inception, junior colleges were viewed as academically inferior to four-year colleges and universities. To combat this perception, junior college leaders transformed the institutions from transfer-orientated institutions to institutions focused on occupational training (Brint & Karabel, 1991). According to Dougherty (2001), this vocationalization of two-year institutions was also propelled by self-interest from state and local leaders hoping to secure prestigious roles at junior colleges.

During the mid-twentieth century, community colleges moved from the use of purpose statements and began to use mission statements as a guide for institutional planning and to establish a collective sense of purpose (Ayers, 2017). Mission statements help community college leaders react to changing conditions and outline a process for pursuing new opportunities (Dougherty, 2006). Although some community colleges focus on mission statements that are easy to communicate to institutional stakeholders, according to Lake (2011), mission statements should be effective and efficient in clarifying institutional goals. Unfortunately, community colleges may be overextended in their mission and goals, and the current multiple functions of the community college may be contradictory of one another in fostering and measuring student success (Dougherty, 2001; Lake, 2011; Morest, 2013).

Currently, the mission of community colleges continues to grow and become more complex (Amey, 2017). As multipurpose colleges, to meet their mission of being open access, community colleges continue to offer a comprehensive curriculum to address the needs of

students from various academic, social, and economic backgrounds. Components of the comprehensive curriculum often include: (a) developmental education, (b) transfer, (c) vocational/technical education (CTE), (d) continued education, and (e) English as a Second Language. Community colleges also meet their mission of being open access by removing barriers to enrollment that other institutional types often impose. Community colleges have few deadlines around enrollment, making it possible for students regardless of their income and academic history to make a last-minute decision to enroll in college (Morest, 2013).

In the most recent years prior to the 2023 Supreme Court ruling of race-conscious admissions to colleges and universities as unconstitutional, institutions of higher education increasingly asserted commitments to diversity and social justice in their mission statements (Hytten & Bettez, 2011; Morphew & Hartley, 2006). However, according to Robertson et al. (2016), these assertations alone do not demonstrate a true commitment to the success of students of color. Andrade and Lundberg (2018) agreed, finding that from a sample of 70 Hispanic-Serving community colleges, there was no mention of their Hispanic-Serving function within their institutional mission statement. Using a comparative analysis of community college mission statements, Ayers (2015) concluded that over a nine-year period, discourses related to degree completion became increasingly salient in community college mission statements. The researcher contented that this increase was in response to political and economic influences shaping rates of degree completion as an indicator of institutional legitimacy (Ayers, 2015). These findings are noteworthy, as community colleges continue to provide educational opportunities to a disproportionally large share of historically marginalized students across various geographic settings.

Suburban Community Colleges

After World War II, America went into a rapid period of suburbanization. Between 1940 and 1970, four million Blacks migrated from the rural South to central cities in the North. In response, in part to avoid sending their children to racially integrated schools in the city, millions of White families fled to the suburbs (Boustan, 2010). This *White flight* led to decades of residential segregation in the United States. As the theory *geography of opportunity* suggests attributes of a community can impact its residents' life chances (Galster & Killen, 1995), a thread of community college research has focused on suburban community colleges, specifically in ways they differ from community colleges in different regional settings.

Prior to 2005, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (an independent research and policy center), did not capture categorical differences among community colleges (Harder, 2010). In 2005, using guidance from previous research, community college data began to be disaggregated using geographic service area as part of the definition for institution type (Hardy, 2005). This change in classification is important as community colleges are often reflective of the communities they serve, and suburbs are known to be less populated than urban areas, lacking public transportation infrastructure, and mostly residential (National Geographic, n.d.).

Proximity to a suburban community college may lead to additional financial barriers for financially vulnerable students (Dache-Gerbino & White, 2015), as students further away from the campus incur greater costs related to transportation and time spent in commuting. Mukherjee et al. (2017), surveyed community college students and found that students who displayed lower levels of financial well-being were more likely to doubt their ability to earn their degree. These findings mirror later findings from Yang and Venezia (2020) who reviewed longitudinal data

comparing the impact of financial aid on rates of degree attainment across community college settings. The researchers found students attending rural community colleges were more likely to qualify for financial aid and had higher rates of degree completion when compared to suburban students who were more likely to be traditional aged, male, and work off-campus (Yang & Venezia, 2020).

Differences among institutional type are seen not only in terms of student outcomes, but also in resource allocation. For example, Charlier and M. R. Williams (2011) surveyed chief academic officers at 347 community colleges and discovered that suburban community colleges were more likely to rely on adjunct faculty members than those in rural areas. As part of their study exploring how blind racism affects financial aid delivery and resource allocation at a community college with campuses in multiple geographic service areas, White and Dache (2019) conducted interviews with financial aid staff. The researchers concluded that administrators at the suburban (main) campus, were incognizant of how understaffed the urban campus was, and how the inequitable distribution of institutional resources between the campuses impacted delivery of financial aid services to students attending the urban campus; primarily Black and Latinx students with a greater need of financial aid (White & Dache, 2019). In addition to inequity in distribution of resources, Dache-Gerbino and White (2015), found that Black and Latinx students attending a community college's urban campus faced higher rates of surveillance from law enforcement than students attending the college's campus in the suburbs with majority White enrollment.

Although the majority of residents in America's suburbs are still White (Pew Research Center, 2020), there has been an increase in the number of students from other ethnic backgrounds enrolling in suburban community colleges. Included in this diversity are students

from immigrant backgrounds and undocumented youth. Caicedo (2019) examined motivations for attending college among seven students protected under *Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals* (DACA). Caicedo (2019) found students attending community college in an urban setting were motivated by improving their families' quality of life while the students attending community college in a suburban setting were motivated by improving their own personal growth. Motivation for attending college has been found to be a key indicator of degree attainment, especially for students who are the first in their family to attend college (Dryden et al., 2021).

First-Generation College Students

The definition of who is first-generation in college differs across literature. Although some studies have defined first-generation students as students of whom neither parent has any postsecondary education (Hines et al., 2019; Moschetti & Hudley, 2015; Schelbe et al., 2019), others have defined first-generation students as those of whom neither parent has an earned bachelor's degree (Almeida et al., 2021; Katrevich & Aruguete, 2017; Latino et al., 2020), or students of whom neither parent has an earned bachelor's degree in the United States (Hébert, 2018). Toutkoushian et al. (2021) explored differences in student outcomes across the varied definitions and discovered that a student's likelihood of graduating from a four-year institution increased along with the level of their parent's education and the number of parents at that level of education. A review of literature related to first-generation students may offer insight into why first-generation students enroll in community colleges at higher rates than other institutional types (NPSAS, 2018f).

Background Characteristics

According to the Center for First Generation Student Success (2019), 56% of students classified as first-generation are students of whom neither parent has earned a bachelor's degree. First-generation students are more likely to be of a racial or ethnic minority and come from a lower socio-economic background (Postsecondary National Policy Institute, 2021). Consequently, first-generation students often begin college with limited knowledge and experience about higher education (Marine-Nin & Gutierrez-Keeton, 2020), making them less aware of important academic policies (prerequisites, withdrawal deadlines, office hours etc.) that could be beneficial to their academic success.

First-generation students often experience a unique set of academic challenges. According to the Postsecondary National Policy Institute (2021), first-generation students are more likely to come from high schools of lower academic rigor, rely on financial aid, work part-time while taking college credits, and enroll in fewer credits. Although first-generation community college students place more importance on achieving their college related goals, they experience greater life-related challenges than their continuing-generation peers (Bamberger & Smith, 2023).

Although attending college can be a major transition for first-generation and racially minoritized students and their families (Bukoski & Hatch, 2016; Harper et al., 2020; McCoy, 2014), first-generation students may benefit from perceived familial support (Harper et al., 2020; Irlbeck et al., 2014; Wang, 2014). This support may take various forms such as financial, emotional, and in offering problem solving techniques (Harper et al., 2020). Research from Irlbeck et al. (2014) and Wang (2014) suggests that although their parents may not have experienced college for themselves, first-generation students attending a university may receive

familial/parental support through efforts to understand their lives as students and by being assured that they can focus on their studies without the need to worry about their familial obligations back at home.

Even with familial support, first-generation students may still carry emotional burdens (Covarrubias & Fryberg, 2015; Marine-Nin & Gutierrez-Keeton, 2020; McFadden, 2016). For example, Covarrubias and Fryberg (2015), found that first-generation students from minoritized backgrounds who went away to college experienced *achiever's guilt* for leaving their working-class home environment for the middle-class college setting and may experience depressive symptoms that negatively impact their academic performance. Marine-Nin and Gutierrez-Keeton (2020) agreed, finding that for first-generation students, navigating community college without parental guidance, can lead to feelings of isolation.

Financial Barriers

As first-generation students often come from homes with lower income levels, it is plausible that they would face financial barriers while in college which negatively impact their progress towards degree completion (Marine-Nin & Gutierrez-Keeton, 2020; O'Neal et al., 2016). Undocumented first-generation students often have an additional layer of stress, as their citizenship status often does not allow them to qualify for federal financial aid, and consequently, they may struggle to balance the responsibility of employment while enrolled in school (O'Neal et al., 2016). Marine-Nin and Gutierrez-Keeton (2020) agreed, finding that limited income contributed to the sporadic enrollment among the first-generation community college students in their study.

First-generation students are more likely to apply for financial aid and take out larger amounts of student loans than their continuing-generation peers (Furquim et al., 2017). Although

taking out a student loan may temporarily alleviate some of the financial stress experienced by community college students, it should be done with caution and with education about the implications of borrowing (Baker & Doyle, 2017). Unfortunately, according to McKinney et al. (2015), many first-generation community college students borrow without a complete understanding of the details of their loan obligation (e.g., repayment terms, interest rates). Not surprisingly, McKinney et al. (2021) found that students in loan default were more likely to come from lower-income background, be male, be an ethnic minority, and have a first-generation student status.

Engagement

Although first-generation community college students may utilize campus resources at the same rate as continuing-generation students, community colleges may still struggle to convince first-generation students of the importance of campus engagement beyond the classroom (Shumaker & Wood, 2016). As first-generation students often require a unique set of supports (McFadden, 2016), the benefits for student engagement are many, including receiving training on peer-to-peer referral to mental health services (Kalkbrenner et al., 2021). Two strategies institutions often use to foster first-generation student engagement are summer bridge programs and learning communities (McCoy, 2014; Schwartz et al., 2018; Wirt & Jaeger, 2014).

Academic Engagement. For many first-generation students without early academic preparation such as Advanced Placement coursework, becoming engaged academically may be difficult, as they are less likely to connect with faculty or utilize tutoring centers (Katrevich & Aruguete, 2017). Schwartz et al. (2018) compared outcomes of first-generation students who participated in a summer bridge program to those who did not. Schwartz and colleagues discovered that in addition to a higher grade point average (GPA), the students who participated

in the bridge program had positive attitudes towards reaching out to faculty (Schwartz et al., 2018). These findings are especially noteworthy for the present study, as poor academic engagement has been shown to be a cause for poor academic performance (Katrevich & Aruguete, 2017).

Social Engagement. Opportunities for fostering connectedness for students do not occur solely in the classroom. Hopkins et al. (2021) explored the role out of classroom experiences have on first-generation student persistence by analyzing individual interview and focus-group data. Hopkins and colleagues discovered that for first-generation students in their sample, being connected to the campus through sports, Greek-life, or employment prevented them from dropping out of college.

Social networks are important to students' overall social capital; a collection of intangible resources that students can use to navigate challenges. Almeida et al. (2021) found social capital to be more influential over first-generation student success than grit (defined by the researchers as one's perseverance towards obtaining a goal). Although many first-generation students come to campus without an understanding of the concept and importance of social capital, institutional based programming aimed at teaching first-generation students how to acquire social capital on campus (connecting with faculty and other campus resources) have been shown to increase career preparedness and academic success in students from ethnic and racial minority groups (Schwartz et al., 2018).

Factors that Promote Success

Although the bulk of literature on first-generation students is focused on their shortcomings, a growing strand of literature has sought to investigate factors that facilitate their success (Hébert, 2018; Longwell-Grice et al., 2016; Vue, 2021). For example, Hébert (2018)

found that the first-generation students in their study who achieved academic success in college participated in programs for the gifted or had enrolled in honors and Advanced Placement (AP) coursework during their K-12 academic journey. Covarrubias et al. (2020) underscored the importance of early preparation, finding that students who had college preparatory conversations with parents entered college with a better sense of their academic ability (Covarrubias et al., 2020).

Vue (2021) shared reflections from faculty and administrators of color related to their experiences as first-generation students. The participants in Vue's study placed special value on institutional experiences that fostered feelings of mattering. These findings support earlier research from Hébert (2018) and Longwell-Grice et al. (2016), each having used qualitative inquiry to explore factors that contributed to first-generation student success. The students in each study credited connecting with faculty through mentorship as contributors to their success.

In terms of first-generation students having academic difficulty, Dryden et al., (2021) concluded that Attributional Retraining (AR) was effective in reframing first-generation students' perceptions of their academic setbacks from factors that were external (professor's teaching style) and uncontrollable (course demands) to factors that were internal (aptitude) and controllable (number of hours dedicated to studying). Furthermore, the researchers concluded that the internal and controllable attributions had a positive impact on students' academic performance, allowing the student to view themselves as having control of their academic journey (Dryden et al., 2021).

Black Students at Community College

According to the National Clearinghouse Research Center's (2022) college completion report, of the number of Black students entering public two-year institutions in 2011, only 31.1%

earned a credential within six years compared to 50.6% of White students. Currently, Black student enrollment at community colleges is in a recovery phase, showing modest increases following a 19.2% decline in enrollment of Black men and 9.2% decline in enrollment of Black women in 2020, perhaps a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic (National Clearinghouse Research Center, 2024; The Education Trust, 2021).

Black students are more likely to be placed into developmental coursework than their White peers (David et al., 2013). What makes this especially problematic, is the fact that although a goal of developmental education is to foster students' self-efficacy for college level coursework, Black community college students have reported instances of racism in developmental courses (Roberts, 2020). Roberts (2020) used interview data from eight Black students placed into developmental mathematics and discovered that among the indirect and direct experiences of racism faced by students, included preferential assistance offered to non-Black students in the course. Additionally, according to Dika et al. (2023), Black community college students are more likely to experience institutional conditions that thwart their transfer inspirations, such as being directed into vocational pathways.

The notion that Black students can excel in higher education by simply working harder is rooted in racist and classist assumptions (Patton, 2016). Additionally, it does not take into consideration the role power and privilege play in higher education, nor does it acknowledge student success as a shared responsibility between the student and their institution. Factors such as racial/gender stereotypes, negative peer influences, and media portrayals can be barriers to Black students' ability to engage with members of their campus community (Wood, 2012).

As Black students do not have homogenized experiences prior to and during college enrollment, there are differentiated outcomes among Black men and women. For example, Black

women are nearly 10% more likely to earn a degree than Black men (The Education Trust, 2021). This disparity among students of the same racial group underscores the effects of intersecting social identities such as race, class, gender, and other identities that exacerbate disparities.

The Four Domains

Wood and Harris (2014) developed a conceptual model for Black male success at community colleges based on an interdisciplinary synthesis of relevant literature (Harris & Wood, 2016). This model later informed the socio-ecological outcomes (SEO) model used by Harris and Wood (2016) to offer insight into the background and societal factors faced by men of color that influence several socio-ecological domains while students, which ultimately impact outcomes such as degree completion and transfer (Harris & Wood, 2016). The four socio-ecological domains offer a holistic framework to examine the inequitable outcomes of Black men attending community college (Harris & Wood, 2016; M. Jones, 2019). First, according to Harris and Wood (2016), the environmental domain is comprised of variables such as finances, family commitments, and stressful life events. Second, the noncognitive domain is comprised of variables such as gender, racial, and spiritual identity as well as self-efficacy. Third, the academic domain consists of variables related to faculty-student interaction and students' commitment to their course of study. Finally, the campus ethos (institutional) domain relates to sense of belonging, connectedness, and access to campus resources (Harris & Wood, 2016). Although the original conceptual framework focused exclusively on Black men at community colleges (Wood & Harris, 2014), it helped shape the following synthesis of literature related to both Black men and women as community college students.

Black Men as Community College Students

As 42% of Black men attending college enroll in two-year institutions (NPSAS, 2018a), there has been significant scholarly attention paid to their experiences at community colleges (Wood, 2012; Wood & Harris, 2014; Wood & Harrison, 2014; Wood & Turner, 2010). With 25.6% of Black men attending community colleges beginning their enrollment at the age of 25 or higher (NPSAS, 2018c), they represent the largest group of adult community college learners. Black men attending community colleges also represent the lowest income quartile within their race (NPSAS, 2018d). This may explain why Black men also represent the male group among students of color most likely to work full-time while in college, with 39.1% of Black men working full-time while enrolled at community college (NPSAS, 2018e).

Environmental Considerations of Black Male Community College Students. Societal factors often impact how Black men navigate college (Harris & Harper, 2008; Harris & Wood, 2016). For example, Black men may subscribe to socially constructed views of masculinity that influence their goals for attending college. For example, Bukoski and Hatch (2016) concluded that the Black men in their study were motivated to attend college for financial stability, which was rooted in their social expectation of being a provider. Additionally, the researchers discovered that the men in their study framed success as an accumulation of material items (Bukoski & Hatch, 2016). These societal influences may also work in tandem with many of the environmental occurrences that Black men experience prior to matriculation (Harris & Wood, 2016). For Black men, community college may serve as an opportunity for respite from negative home environments (Camacho et al., 2023). Black men's decision to enroll in community college is often based on economic considerations (Wood & Harris, 2015; Wood & Harrison, 2014).

Wood and Harrison (2014) used longitudinal data to examine differences in selection factors used by Black men attending community colleges compared to those attending four-year institutions. Among the between-group differences, they discovered that Black men attending community colleges were less likely to be worried about the school's course offerings and availability of financial aid but were more likely to be concerned with admission criteria and the opportunity to live at home (Wood & Harrison, 2014). The paradox of Black men seeing college as a respite from home, but also wanting to be near home represents some of the tension often experienced by Black men as it relates to their personal values and pre-college commitments (Bukoski & Hatch, 2016).

Although attending college can be stressful for Black men, they often receive emotional support throughout their journey (Bass, 2019; Brooms, 2019; Smith, 2023). In addition to support from internal agents, Black men may receive validation from external agents. Johnson and Manyweather (2023) interviewed formerly incarcerated Black men attending community college and found that for many of the participants in their study, their parole officer was instrumental in their decision to enroll in college. Additionally, participants received support from other external validating agents such as community advocates and counselors.

Noncognitive Factors Impacting Black Male Community College Students. Although environmental factors may influence experiences prior to community college enrollment, there are noncognitive factors that may provide Black men with the tools they need to succeed once enrolled. These noncognitive factors include sense of belonging, focus, and spiritual identity (Johnson, 2012; Salinas et al., 2018; Wood & Harris, 2014; Wood & Palmer, 2014). Wood and Palmer (2014) described focus as the degree of effort or attention students paid to their studies. Using interview data from 28 Black male community college students, Wood and Palmer (2014)

found participants described being focused as taking a higher course load while also completing assignments on time and attending class regularly.

When navigating a new environment or when faced with adversity, Black men often rely on spiritual identity (Johnson, 2012; Lassiter & Mims, 2022; Salinas et al., 2018; Smith-Lee et al., 2020). For example, Johnson (2012) discovered that spirituality may have provided the Black men in their study with inner strength, compassion, and forgiveness as they encountered microaggressions while attending community college. Salinas et al. (2018) added that among the five themes that emerged in their study, Black men attending community college used the Bible as a guide for manhood and masculinity. Additionally, the Black men in their study indicated that achieving their goals would not be possible without God (Salinas et al., 2018).

Academic Experiences of Black Male Community College Students. Faculty interaction has been identified as a key factor influencing outcomes for Black men attending community college (M. Jones, 2019; Wood & Newman, 2017; Wood & Turner, 2010)**.** However, not all Black men engage with faculty at the same level (Wood & Newman, 2017). Wood and Newman (2017) used data from 16 urban community colleges to identify determinants of faculty engagement among Black men attending community college. The researchers discovered that Black men more likely to engage with faculty came from lower income levels, had more college credits accumulated, and worked less hours per week. To add further insight into differences among faculty engagement, M. Jones (2019) interviewed Black men attending a community college in southern California and found that apathy and cultural insensitivity were among some of the barriers to engagement between the students and faculty. These findings corroborate findings from an earlier study from Wood and Turner (2010) who used data from student interviews to create an outline of four steps community college faculty can take to build and

maintain Black male student engagement: a friendly demeanor, checking in on student progress, listening to student concerns, and encouraging student success.

Institutional Experiences of Black Male Community College Students. Black men may have trouble connecting with campus resources, as Black men may feel solely responsible for their academic success and may exude high levels of independence (Bukoski & Hatch, 2016; M. Jones, 2019). A recent study from K.D.A Williams et al. (2023), found that although Black men experience similar rates of depression and anxiety, they are significantly less likely to utilize campus mental health resources. However, this may be due to an underrepresentation of Black male counselors on campus (Leath & Jones, 2022). A quantitative study by Strayhorn (2012) is one of few that explored how factors such as engagement and academic success along with other factors such as background traits and personal commitments relate to levels of satisfaction among Black men attending community college. Strayhorn (2012) used data from the Community College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CCSEQ) and found that younger Black male community college students were more likely to be satisfied than older Black male students.

A strand of qualitative research related to the experiences of Black men as community college students has focused on their perception of faculty. Wood and Turner (2010) interviewed 28 Black community college students who identified as male. The findings from their study suggest that personal attention from faculty was important to the success of their participants. Specifically, faculty engagement was strongest among participants who felt the faculty had a friendly demeanor, checked in on students, addressed issues proactively, and encouraged student success. This is further supported by research from Baber et al. (2015) that found that Black male community college students who participated in *Together We Achieve* (a faculty mentor program

for students in developmental coursework) were 36% more likely to complete their developmental coursework than those who did not participate.

Horton (2015) analyzed quantitative data to assess differences in academic performance and pre-college characteristics among Black male student athletes. Horton discovered that Black men had the lowest percentage of completed attempted credits among each gender and racial group studied. Additionally, Horton concluded that Black men from affluent backgrounds had higher rates of attempted credit completion (82%) than those from lower social economic backgrounds (67%). Although Horton's study addressed differences among socio-economic status, the study did not discuss the role a student's first-generation student status may have played.

Black Women as Community College Students

Black women who earn a bachelor's degree are equally as likely to pursue an advanced degree regardless of if they started at a two-year or four-year institution (Walpole, 2014), making the community college environment a critical access point to higher education for Black women. However, the limited availability of literature related to Black women as community college students suggests that they are often overlooked in research. Although 40.7% of Black women attending college enroll in two-year institutions (NPSAS, 2018a), most of the existing literature related to their experiences as college students is focused on their experiences at Historically Black Colleges and Universities and Predominantly White Institutions (Commodore et al., 2018; Greyerbiehl & Mitchell, 2014; Strayhorn & Johnson, 2014). Moreover, much of the existent higher education scholarship related to Black women as community college students includes women from other ethnic groups (Rose et al., 2014) or compares them to Black men and women from other racial groups (Walpole, 2014).

Environmental Considerations of Black Female Community College Students. Black women are motivated to enroll in college for several reasons including family, friends, mentors, and themselves (Turner, 2011). However, although Black women enrolled at community colleges are as academically engaged as female students from other races, they face unique environmental considerations which may present barriers to persistence (Falana, 2020; Grayson, 2022). For example, Black women represent the largest group of female first-generation community college students, with 23.5% of Black women attending two-year institutions having parents' whose highest level of education is a high school diploma or its equivalent (NPSAS, 2018f). Additionally, Black women (34%) are nearly twice as likely than White women (18.9%) to be single mothers while attending public community colleges (NPSAS, 2018b). Perhaps this explains why Black women also represent the racial/gender group with the longest delayed entry into higher education, with 22.5% of Black women who attend community college starting at age 25 or higher (NPSAS, 2018c). These environmental considerations have implications for student outcomes, as according to Ebanks and Francois (2022), Black women who experienced financial strain were among the group of Black women less likely to persist at community college. These findings are like Strayhorn and Johnson (2014), who stated that Black women with high levels of familial responsibility disclosed that it impacted their academic performance and were less likely to be satisfied with their community college experiences.

Noncognitive Factors Impacting Black Female Community College Students. Among the noncognitive factors known to impact Black women's educational journey is self-identity (Cobb, 2020; Grayson, 2020; Ibourk et al., 2022; Moss, 2021). According to Esteban-Guitart and Moll (2014), an individual's self-identity is comprised of their self-expression, self-understanding, and self-definition. Furthermore, self-identity is shaped by lived experience and

developed by culture (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014). Recent literature has explored the ways in which gendered racial identity influences both the experiences and outcomes of Black women attending community college (Cobb, 2020; Grayson, 2020). For example, as part of a mixed-methods study, Grayson (2020) concluded that Black women with higher rates of racial affinity also demonstrated higher rates of self-efficacy and greater locus of control. The researcher acknowledged that these findings were inconsistent with previous research on Black students attending four-year institutions and offered that perhaps, for the Black women in their study, attending community college represented creating a better future for themselves and their families, thus demonstrating to women their ability to control their own fate (Grayson, 2020).

Cobb (2020) further explored gendered racial identity by using an anti-deficit approach to explore the role identity played in the lived experiences of 11 Black women attending a community college in California. According to Cobb (2020) the Black women in their study used their identity to traverse negative educational and societal experiences as well as combating negative stereotypes. Specifically, the women in the study did not question if they were strong or resilient, but instead questioned why society expected them to be (Cobb, 2020). The researcher also underscored the fact that Black women are not a homogenous group and have identities that are nuanced (Cobb, 2020). Moss (2021) agreed, finding that for some Black women attending community college, spirituality may be as much a part of their identity as race and gender.

Academic Experiences of Black Female Community College Students. Strayhorn and Johnson (2014) replicated an earlier study by Strayhorn (2012) by using data from the Community College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CCSEQ) to discover predictors of Black women's satisfaction with their community college experience. Like Black men, age was a key indicator of satisfaction among Black women. However, unlike the findings in Strayhorn

(2012), Strayhorn and Johnson (2014) found that older women were more likely to be satisfied than younger women. The researchers also discovered engagement with faculty as a predictor of both satisfaction and academic performance (Strayhorn & Johnson, 2014).

A great deal of literature related to the academic experiences of Black women attending community college has focused on their interaction with faculty (Allen et al., 2022; Bivens, 2016; Falana, 2020; Grayson, 2022) and the importance of academic support (Ebanks & Francois, 2022; Vaughan, 2022). Ebanks and Francois (2022) utilized a three-step hierarchal regression analysis to determine factors that influenced persistence among Black women attending a community college in Louisiana. The researchers discovered that financial strain, racism, and academic support predicted college persistence among the women in their study. Specifically, the researchers discovered that women with more financial strain were less likely to persist, and those more likely to persist had greater levels of academic support (Ebanks & Francois, 2022). The importance of academic support was also highlighted by Vaughan (2022) who interviewed a small group of Black women attending a community college and found the students in the study created peer support systems and made intentional connections with faculty, mentors, and advisors to persist. These findings corroborate earlier findings from Bivens (2016), who found that the Black female community college students in their study used strategies such as taking multiple courses with the same instructor to establish relationships with faculty. These findings refute earlier findings from Rose et al. (2014), who concluded that Black women and other women of color were less likely to engage academically and socially, preferring to complete community college independently.

Institutional Experiences of Black Female Community College Students.

Unfortunately, the college-going experience for Black women frequently includes subtle racism

in the form of microaggressions (Grayson, 2022; Lewis et al., 2013; Willis, 2015). A major strand of research related to the institutional experiences of Black women while attending community college has focused on their underrepresentation in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics ([STEM]; Allen et al., 2022; Jackson, 2013). According to the American Association of University Women (AAUW), Black women only account for 2.6% of computer science degree recipients, 2.3% of degree holders in mathematics, 4.2% of degrees in biological science, and .99% of engineering degrees (AAUW, 2022). To offer insight into this underrepresentation, Allen et al. (2022) interviewed Black women in STEM who transferred from a community college to a four-year institution and found that the women in their study experienced racism from their peers and faculty by being ignored and having their competence questioned. However, Jackson (2013) suggested that Black women attending community college and majoring in STEM may find success by transferring to a Historically Black College or University (HBCU). According to Jackson (2013), Black women in STEM who transferred from a community college to an HBCU felt it helped develop their STEM identity and build career capital, a connection between their STEM degree and a career in STEM.

Willis (2015) interviewed 19 Black women enrolled in a study abroad program for community college students. The students in the study experienced microaggressions while studying abroad in the form of racial isolation from non-Black peers. Unfortunately, these isolating social interactions are not reserved for interactions with only non-Black peers. According to Grayson (2022), Black women attending community college may also experience microaggressions from Black men and other men of color in the form of invalidating the women's lived experiences. Although these disparaging social interactions may cause Black women to feel excluded, these same Black women may leverage these negative experiences into

determination to prove their disparagers wrong (Grayson, 2022). Interestingly, adverse social encounters may also influence Black women attending community colleges to become involved in co-curricular activities (Vaughan, 2022). Vaughan (2022) interviewed five Black women attending community college and found that involvement in co-curricular activities not only provided the women in their study with a supportive social environment, but also access to campus resources. These findings corroborate earlier findings from Lewis et al. (2013) who concluded that Black women as college students experience gendered racial microaggressions, and identified five strategies used by the women in their study to cope; (a) reclaiming power by speaking up and directly addressing perpetrators; (b) resisting behaviors that perpetuate Eurocentric standards as dominant and other ideologies that oppress Black women; (c) seeking support from their social network; (d) becoming desensitized and escaping; and (e) becoming a *Strong Black Woman* by taking on multiple responsibilities as a way to showcase their resilience and strength. The Strong Black Woman stereotype represents a cultural expectation for Black women to take on caretaker qualities and display strength, while suppressing their own feelings (Castelin & White, 2022; Cobb, 2020). An internalization of this stereotype may prove problematic for Black women attending community college, as Black women who subscribe to this stereotype may engage in self-silencing behaviors and fail to communicate their needs (Avery, 2022).

Black Trans* and Non-Binary Individuals as College Students

Very few journals of higher education research publish studies related to transgender (trans*) students (Garvey, 2014). Consequently, scholarly literature on Black trans* and non-binary community college students is limited. Navigating higher education as a Black trans* or non-binary student may mean navigating multiple systems of oppression latent with

heterosexism and genderism (Pitcher & Simmons, 2020). These systems of oppression may include gender-restrictive institutional policies and norms which often push trans* students out of higher education (D. Stewart & Nicolazzo, 2018). The association between the social stressors experienced by trans* and non-binary individuals and their negative physical and mental health outcomes is referred to as gender minority stress theory (Cogan et al., 2021). The theory of gender minority stress supports the findings of Goldberg et al. (2019), who interviewed 14 trans* and non-binary students of various racial backgrounds who had either withdrawn from college, taken leave, or transferred institutions, and concluded that trans* students often encounter institutional discrimination and a lack of gender-affirming campus resources which can lead to chronic stress.

Recently, there has been an increase in scholarly attention paid towards Black trans* and non-binary college students. However, institutions are still falling short in meeting the needs of trans* students of color (Simms et al., 2023). Jourian and McCloud (2020) found that Black trans-masculine students often must negotiate their racial and gender identities, especially in navigating the gender expectations and stereotypes of Black masculinity which were often reinforced in class lectures and in student organizations. Although navigating on-campus spaces can be challenging, for many Black trans* students, the internet can be a haven for finding community (Simms et al., 2023). Nicolazzo (2016) agreed, citing that Black trans* and non-binary students wrestle with their intersecting identities and navigating spaces on campus, especially LGBT centers which may be viewed by Black trans* students as Eurocentric and uninviting.

A major strand of scholarship related to the academic experiences of Black trans* students is focused on outness and identity-development (Garvey et al., 2018; Zamani-Gallaher,

2017). Garvey et al. (2018) used both quantitative and qualitative alumni data to analyze rates of outness among Black queer and trans* alumni during their undergraduate years as compared to alumni from other racial backgrounds. Garvey and colleagues found that Black students were less likely to be out than Latinx and multiracial students (Garvey et al., 2018). Additionally, the alumni reported that their marginalized gender and sexuality identities were at times in conflict with their racial identity, often a result of a tumultuous campus racial climate. This adds to Zamani-Gallaher's (2017) earlier assertation about the importance of students from marginalized and minoritized groups developing a collective identity on their own terms.

Another predominant strand of Black trans* and non-binary college student research looks at their experiences attending HBCUs (Mobley et al., 2021; Mobley & Hall, 2020; Mobley & Johnson, 2019). HBCUs have been criticized for upholding conservative ideals through traditions (Mobley et al., 2021; Mobley & Hall, 2020) and appropriate attire policies (Mobley & Johnson, 2019). Mobley and Johnson (2019) used critical discourse analysis to analyze media coverage and reaction to an appropriate attire policy at Morehouse College (a historically Black men's college in Georgia) between the years 2007-2017. Among the public opinions uncovered by their analysis included the opinion that students who did not embody traits considered respectable should face discipline and be changed to meet the culturally expected image of masculinity (Mobley & Johnson, 2019).

Mobley and Hall (2020) offered a framework for redefining Black trans* student retention which includes validating their experiences from point of admission and use of preferred pronouns in the classroom. Although Mobley and colleagues offered groundbreaking work around Black trans* and non-binary student success, a critique of their work is that it

leaves a knowledge gap related to how these students' experiences directly impacted their academic success (Garvey et al., 2018; Mobley & Hall, 2020; Mobley et al., 2021).

Unsatisfactory Academic Standing

As each academic institution has its own academic standards, most institutions of higher education have an institutional policy aimed at letting students know their current academic performance is below said standard (Barouch-Gilbert, 2022). Commonly referred to in literature as *academic probation*, typically students are placed in unsatisfactory academic standing when their grade point average (GPA) falls below a 2.0 on a 4.0 scale, which at many institutions is the minimum GPA to graduate (Schudde & Scott-Clayton, 2016). It is estimated that 25% of undergraduate students are placed into unsatisfactory academic standing at some point in their academic career, with an even higher percentage for students attending community colleges (Tovar & Simon, 2006). Although first-generation students are at heightened risk for unsatisfactory academic performance, not all students in unsatisfactory academic standing were identified as at-heighten risk when enrolling in college (Tovar & Simon, 2006). Additionally, although students are typically notified of unsatisfactory academic standing by a letter, both the method of delivery of the letter and its contents can impact a student's likelihood of increasing their GPA in the following semester (Moss & Kelcey, 2022). Students who receive financial aid and fail to meet outlined academic progress standards may lose their financial aid (Scott-Clayton & Schudde, 2020).

As students attending community colleges are placed into unsatisfactory academic standing at higher rates than students attending other institutions (Tovar & Simon, 2006), it is important to acknowledge that first-generation students are overrepresented on community colleges campuses, many of whom are of racial or ethnic minority and come from a lower socio-

economic background that requires them to rely on financial aid (Ma & Baum, 2015; Postsecondary National Policy Institute, 2021). Literature suggests that intersections exist between challenges faced by first-generation students and students of color (Katrevich & Aruguete, 2017; McCoy, 2014; Strayhorn, 2017b). Mcdossi et al. (2022) reviewed survey data from 2,365 students attending a large midwestern university and found that students who were first-generation students and of racialized minority groups had lower levels of campus integration when compared to their peers. These findings offer that perhaps many students are placed on academic warning in part, due to a lack of awareness of campus support services, a consequence of poor campus integration.

Decriminalized Language

The frequently used term of academic probation is problematic. Criminalized language is especially problematic for Black students, who experience higher rates of police brutality than their White peers (Anderson et al., 2021). As highlighted in the literature, labeling students has a negative impact on their self-efficacy and may lead to them withdrawing from college (Barouch-Gilbert, 2015). This reframing of language is not new, as previous research has considered the ways in which structures of oppression such as institutional language impact Black students' identities as scholars (Duran & Jones, 2019; Whiting, 2006; Womack et al., 2023). For example, some researchers have moved away from language using deficit points of view such as *at risk* and towards terms like *students of promise* (Whiting, 2006; Womack et al., 2023).

The Effects of Unsatisfactory Academic Standing

As a student's placement on academic warning can affect their ability to remain enrolled (Rainey & Taylor., 2023), the effects of being in unsatisfactory academic standing have been studied in both quantitative and qualitative empirical research. Most of the research, however, is

focused on institutions using the term academic probation. Bowman and Jang (2022) used a sample of nearly 10,000 students to study the effects of academic probation on four-year graduation rates. The authors found placing a student on academic probation based on their cumulative GPA reduced their chances of four-year graduation by 40%. Casey et al. (2018) used regression analysis to investigate enrollment behaviors among students placed on academic probation. According to the researchers, White students were more likely than Black students to engage in strategic course taking behaviors such as taking fewer credits and withdrawing from instead of failing courses, suggesting that students of color are less likely than White students to utilizing campus resources such as academic counseling (Casey et al., 2018). Interviews with students placed on academic probation revealed a desire to learn more about academic policies such as academic probation prior to their placement into unsatisfactory academic standing (Barouch-Gilbert, 2015; Hoover, 2014). Additionally, other qualitative inquiry found that being labeled as academically deficient led to feelings of embarrassment (Barouch-Gilbert, 2015), feeling like a failure (Arcand & LeBlanc, 2012; Rainey & Taylor, 2023), and questioning of one's academic abilities (Bryant, 2020). The previously used label of being on academic probation is especially problematic for the many Black and Latinx students who attend community colleges as the term probation has an association with criminal behavior (Bryant, 2020). Now, in response to the social and political unrest of the 2010s, and the BlackLivesMatter movement, institutions are looking at ways to use culturally sensitive language in their messaging to students, particularly those who have historically been at heightened risk for attrition (Steele, 2022).

Interventions

Historically, community colleges have lacked the funding to be able to provide a wide range of specialized services for students in unsatisfactory academic standing. However, there are few cost-efficient measures that have been proven successful in helping students regain satisfactory academic standing. Being in unsatisfactory academic standing usually places restrictions on students (such as limiting the number of credits they can enroll in each term) while offering institutional supports to regain satisfactory academic standing. Institutions typically use a variety of interventions to transition students in unsatisfactory academic standing back to satisfactory academic standing (Bateman, 2022). These interventions range from academic advising to success courses.

Academic Advising

Academic advising is a frequently used strategy to connect students to their institution (Schwartz et al., 2018). As one of the stated goals of policies for students in unsatisfactory academic standing is to connect students with campus services, two approaches to academic advising have been salient in research related to working with students on academic probation; proactive and appreciative advising (Butler, 2016; Miller et al., 2019; Vander Schee, 2007).

Proactive advising (previously referred to as intrusive advising) requires frequent communication between the advisor and student (Drake et al., 2013). In some cases, proactive advising involves a signed contract between the advisor and advisee (Vander Schee, 2007). Vander Schee (2007) added to existing literature on proactive advising by implementing insight-oriented strategies to proactive advising sessions; allowing students to reflect on non-academic factors that may have contributed to their placement on academic warning. Vander Schee (2007)

concluded that this addition to proactive advising sessions attributed to the demonstrated increase in academic achievement among students in the study.

Hutson et al. (2014), outlined the six phases guiding appreciative advising: (a) disarm, (b) discover, (c) dream, (d) design, (e) deliver, and (f) do not settle. Butler et al. (2016), provided a detailed application of appreciative advising in work with students on academic probation. Butler and their colleagues described the *disarming* phase as making the student feel welcomed and appreciated through communication. The *discover* phase was actualized by allowing students to reflect on what caused them to be placed on academic warning, discovering their strengths and weaknesses, and what support they needed from the institution. During the *dream* phase students and their advisors collaborated on how to achieve academic goals provided by the student. These goals were referred to as students' hopes and dreams related to their academic status at the institution. Next, during the *design* phase, the advisor designed a custom resource sheet with a list of campus resources available for the student's specific needs. The goal of the resource sheet was to serve as a tangible reminder that there are campus resources willing and waiting to help students. The *deliver* phase built upon the work in the design phase by boosting students' confidence to achieve the goals outlined in the previous phase. During the *deliver* phase advisors sent out frequent email communication to students reminding them of their availability and to keep students abreast of important institutional information. Finally, in the *do not settle* phase, the advisors worked to keep students motivated to achieve their goals.

Peer-Mentoring

Although academic advisors are crucial in helping students regain satisfactory academic standing, many institutions have limited resources and do not have enough trained advisors to offer the detailed support needed for students in unsatisfactory academic standing. To

supplement, institutions have implemented peer mentoring programs. Being paired with an experienced student has helped inexperienced students integrate to campus (Yomtov et al., 2017). Blankenship et al. (2020), conducted a quasi-experimental mixed methods study to investigate the effects of peer-mentoring for students on academic probation. They concluded that neither weekly nor bi-weekly peer mentoring meetings had a significant effect on GPA or retention. Although Blankenship et al. (2020) gathered qualitative data from the peer mentors, the study could have been enhanced by gathering qualitative data from the students on academic warning. The findings from Blankenship et al. (2020) are not surprising, as earlier research showing that being labelled academically deficient led to feelings of embarrassment and shame, and that students hid their academic standing from family, friends, and others at their institution (Arcand & LeBlanc, 2012; Barouch-Gilbert, 2015,) offering insight into potential barriers to connecting students in unsatisfactory academic standing with peer mentors.

Success Courses

Although student success strategies such as peer-mentoring and goal setting separately may not increase academic performance of all students at heightened risk for or currently on academic probation (Blankenship et al., 2020; Bowman et al., 2019; Hall et al., 2021), these collective strategies delivered as a success course may increase academic motivation and performance (Bowering et al., 2017; Mellor et al., 2015; Rivera, 2019). Mandated participation in success courses can increase students' motivation (Burke-Leòn et al., 2019) and mastery of academic success skills such as studying habits (Arcand & LeBlanc, 2012). Bowering et al. (2017) also agreed, concluding that upon completion of a 14-week success course, students on academic warning acquired new study skills, and reported decreased levels of test anxiety and procrastination.

Burke-Leòn et al. (2019) analyzed data from 4,673 students on academic probation who completed a required success course. The researchers discovered that participants of the course were 20% more likely to persist and graduate than students who did not. Their findings mirror McGrath and Burd (2012), who found that participants of a similar program were 40% more likely to be return to satisfactory academic standing within a year, and 20% more likely to earn a degree within four to five years of matriculation. Literature surrounding success courses offer valuable insight into their effectiveness. However, the scholarly conversation can be enhanced by exploring the effects of courses that are mandated as compared to those that are not, in addition to those that are credit-bearing compared to those that are non-credit-bearing. Offering a credit-bearing success course at the community college level may not be realistic, as often those concerned with community college curriculum development must consider transferability of credits to bachelor-degree granting institutions.

Gaps in Literature

Most of the qualitative inquiry related to students in unsatisfactory standing is focused on their being labeled as on academic probation (Arcand & LeBlanc, 2012; Barouch-Gilbert, 2015). However, there is a current gap in literature related to the experiences of Black students at institutions that have made efforts to decriminalized institutional language. Additionally, although most of the literature that focuses on first-generation student success corroborates the importance of student-faculty connection (Hébert, 2018; Longwell-Grice et al., 2016; Vue, 2021), there appears to be a gap in literature as to how first-generation students connect with faculty at institutions with lower rates of full-time faculty and if faculty-status (adjunct, full-time, part-time, etc.) has an impact on student engagement.

Chapter II Summary

This chapter provided a review of literature relevant to the present study. As community colleges have historically remove barriers imposed by other institutions, and with their low costs and proximity to home, it is logical that Black and first-generation students would enroll in community colleges at such high rates. Literature has revealed some of the complexities that form at the intersection of gender and race for Black students. These complexities may also vary by institution type. However, each gendered group faces experiences that can be detrimental to their academic and psychological well-being, placing them at heightened risk for unsatisfactory academic standing. The following chapter will provide an outline of the methods and methodologies used to explore the lived experiences of Black first-generation community college students on academic warning.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

According to Berger (2015), qualitative researchers demonstrate critical reflection of their role in the research process (referred to as *reflexivity*) through use of first-person language and reporting their research decisions and rationale in a manner that is both detailed and transparent. The purpose of Chapter II was to highlight literature relevant to the study. As mentioned in Chapter I, the theoretical framework of intersectionality provides foundation for the phenomenological inquiry used in the present study as the study aimed to explore the lived experiences of students with similar intersecting social identities. The purpose of this chapter is to outline the methods and methodologies utilized to address the knowledge gap related to the lived experiences of Black first-generation college students in unsatisfactory academic standing at an institution using decriminalized language. First, the purpose of the study and the research question are revisited. Then, a large portion of the chapter is dedicated to describing the philosophical underpinnings of the study as well as their alignment with my methodological choices, including the setting of the study, its participants, as well as the data collection and analysis procedures that were used in the study. Finally, the chapter concludes with details regarding the ethical considerations for the study and the study's limitations.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of Black first-generation students on academic warning (commonly referred to as *academic probation*), while enrolled at a suburban community college in the northeast United States. As Black students remain underrepresented among community college degree earners, the

perspectives shared in the present study should inform institutional policies and practices aimed at their success.

Research Question

The following research question guided this study:

What are the lived experiences of Black first-generation community college students in unsatisfactory academic standing at an institution using decriminalized language?

Epistemological Stance

Philosophical assumptions heavily undergird qualitative research by providing direction for developing and answering research questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Huff, 2008). The philosophical assumptions that researchers utilize to guide their work is frequently referred to as their research paradigm (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lather, 2006). Although ontology relates to researchers' philosophical assumptions about the nature of reality, epistemology as a philosophical assumption describes both the nature of knowledge and how claims of knowledge are justified (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Crotty, 1998; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). My epistemological stance for the present study was that of constructivism. In alignment with the study's ontological stance that reality is multiple and influenced by an individual's lived experience, constructivism holds that there is no absolute truth, and that meaning is constructed, not discovered (Schwandt, 1994). The constructivist epistemological stance helped frame the research question in its acknowledgment that there is no uniform way of experiencing being a Black, first-generation community college student in unsatisfactory academic standing, thus highlighting the importance of investigating multiple lived experiences. Furthermore, the epistemological stance also informed the methods for answering the research question by acknowledging that people construct meaning by reflecting on experiences (Seidman, 2019).

Research Design and Rationale

As mentioned in Chapters I and II, there are significant quantitative data evidencing community colleges' inability to produce equitable outcomes for Black students. However, less is known about the experiences of these students as presented in their own words. To explore the central phenomenon of being Black, first-generation, and in unsatisfactory academic standing, the present study utilized a qualitative method of inquiry. Qualitative inquiry was the most appropriate method for answering the guiding research question for many reasons. First, although numerical data help identify the scale of a problem, a qualitative approach to understanding the lived experiences of Black first-generation students in unsatisfactory academic standing allowed insight into the depth of the phenomenon under investigation. Second, a qualitative method of inquiry also allowed me to investigate the phenomenon in its natural context (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Leedy & Ormrod, 2018). Finally, the individual interviews with students afforded me insight into how Black first-generation students created meaning from their experience (Hébert, 2018; Hines et al., 2019; Schelbe et al., 2019), and if that meaning had an influence on their enrollment behaviors (Schelbe et al., 2019).

Phenomenological Approach

Although human experience is the main epistemological basis for qualitative research (van Manen, 2014, p. 15), phenomenology as an approach to qualitative inquiry seeks to find commonalities in the meanings ascribed by several individuals related to their lived experiences with a phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Philosophically, phenomenology values the intertwining between subject and object, and acknowledges that it is impossible to separate out the multiple social identities that individuals occupy. *Ergo*, phenomenology was the best methodological choice for addressing the study's research question as it aligned with the

epistemological understanding that individuals experiencing the same phenomenon may construct meaning in different ways.

There are several defining features of phenomenological research. First, although constructing meaning is essential to phenomenological research, it is done strictly through understanding experience as lived (Peoples, 2020). Second, as individuals' experiences are context-bound and do not need to be generalizable, phenomenological research typically does not require a large sample size (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Finally, as a goal of phenomenological research is to obtain concrete descriptions of the phenomenon under study (Jackson et al., 2018), data are frequently collected through interviews with individuals who have relevant lived experiences (Creswell & Poth 2018).

There are two distinct branches of phenomenological research: hermeneutic and transcendental (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Vagle, 2018). Although both branches of phenomenology seek to provide detailed descriptions of participants' lived experiences, they differ in their philosophical underpinnings. Philosophically, hermeneutic phenomenology views the mind and world as connected, although transcendental phenomenology places a greater focus on consciousness, separating the mind from the world (Vagle, 2018). According to Hopkins et al. (2016), these differences have implications for how phenomenological researchers: (1) explore lived experience (2) manage pre-understandings, and (3) engage with participants' stories. For example, with regards to engaging with participants' stories, frequently referred to as descriptive phenomenology (Jackson et al., 2018), transcendental phenomenology is focused on participants' description of their lived experiences, whereas hermeneutical phenomenology, frequently referred to as interpretive phenomenology (Burns et al., 2022), is focused on the researcher's interpretations of the participants' experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Transcendental Phenomenology

Edmund Husserl is commonly credited as the founder of phenomenology (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Hopkins et al., 2016; Larsen & Adu, 2022; Moustakas, 1994; Peoples, 2020; Vagle, 2018). The goal of Husserl's work was to explore individuals' experiences to determine the *essence* of a phenomenon (Hopkins et al., 2016). Essence, as described by Hopkins et al. (2016), includes features of something that makes it what it is and makes it distinguishable from other phenomena. Husserl was concerned with ensuring the rigorous nature of a scientific approach to exploring individual's lived experiences (Jackson et al., 2018). This rigor is achieved in part by the signature methodological concepts of transcendental phenomenology; phenomenological reduction and *epoché* (Kidd, 2021). These concepts refer to techniques utilized by researchers to manage their pre-understandings related to the phenomenon under investigation.

In terms of managing pre-understandings, transcendental phenomenology requires that the researcher set aside any prior knowledge or beliefs related to the phenomenon (Jackson et al., 2018; Lopez & Willis, 2004; Peoples, 2020). As a mathematician, Husserl referred to this structured setting aside as *epoché* or bracketing (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Much like bracketing in a math equation, when bracketing in transcendental phenomenological research, personal beliefs, and experiences are set aside, as to not influence the researchers' interpretation of participants' experiences (Hopkins et al., 2016). Bracketing as a research technique is often criticized, as it asks researchers to resist human nature and become completely devoid of what they feel and know (Jackson et al., 2018).

The present study followed a transcendental phenomenological approach in the tradition of Edmund Husserl. Transcendental phenomenology was chosen as the best methodological fit as my goal as the researcher was to present the participants' lived experiences as free from my

own experiences as possible. Completing a bracketing exercise felt especially prudent to me as the researcher, as I wanted to honor these Black first-generation community college students as the experts of creating meaning of their lived experiences. Additionally, I felt it important to elevate their voices, as too often, their voices are not considered when creating institutional programming and policies aimed at their success. Essentially, as the researcher, following a transcendental (descriptive) phenomenological approach as opposed to a hermeneutic (interpretive) phenomenological approach, helped better situate me as a messenger of the participants' experience instead of an interpreter.

Setting

The present study took place at a suburban community college in the northeastern United States that recently received designation as a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI). The specific location of the institution and its name were not shared. Instead, a pseudonym (East Coast Community College; ECCC) was used. ECCC is a multi-campus institution, and at the time of the study, had the largest student population of any community college within its state system. Currently, Black students represent the racial group at ECCC with the longest time-to-associate degree completion rate. Prior to Fall 2022, students were in unsatisfactory academic standing if: (a) their GPA fell below a 2.0 on a 4.0 scale, or (b) if they failed to meet a designated rate of completion (students' completed credits divided by overall credits attempted; Brochet, 2020). Specifically, students with less than 31earned credits were required to successfully complete 50% of all attempted credits, while students with 31 or more earned credits were required to successfully complete 66% of attempted credits to avoid being placed into unsatisfactory academic standing. In Fall 2022, as part of an effort to decriminalize institutional language, ECCC renamed its academic policy for students in unsatisfactory academic standing from

academic probation to academic warning. Additionally, ECCC removed rate of completion as a criterion for academic standing. ECCC was chosen as the research site primarily due to these changes and its overall enrollment size.

Participants

The goal of the study was to develop an understanding of the lived experiences of Black first-generation community college students in unsatisfactory academic standing. Therefore, participants in the present study were selected based upon their experience with the phenomenon under investigation. Black students who are of multiracial backgrounds may mistakenly believe that they are ineligible for studies aimed at Black students (Strayhorn, 2017a), so it is important for researchers to consider students' intersecting identities when recruiting participants for their studies. This criterion-based selection allowed for a purposeful sample of individuals with a shared yet individualized experience (Moser & Korstjens, 2018; Vagle, 2018). The goal of sample sizing in qualitative research is to reach data saturation, the point in which collecting new data would not produce any additional insight (Moser & Korstjens, 2018; Peoples, 2020). One approach to reaching data saturation is using multiple sources of data, frequently referred to as triangulation (Donkoh & Mensah, 2023; Fusch et al., 2018). Recommendations for sample sizes within phenomenological studies vary (Moser & Korstjens, 2018; Vagle, 2018). Based on Moser and Korstjen's (2018) recommendation of no more than 10 participants, and Peoples' (2020) recommendation of eight to 15 participants, the target sample size for the study was 9-10 participants. Participation in the present study was limited to the following criteria:

- be at least 18 years old,
- self-identify as Black, Black (Biracial), or Black (multiracial),
- neither parent with an earned postsecondary degree, and

- be placed on academic warning at the research site at the time of the study.

Recruitment

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1972 (FERPA) helped inform the limitations surrounding student data that the research site was able to provide me during the recruitment stage. Therefore, I was unable to receive a list of names and contact information for the Black first-generation students at the research site currently on academic warning and email them about the study. Instead, after receiving Human Subjects approval from Old Dominion University and Institutional Review Board approval from the research site, I provided employees of the research site who have high contact with students such as academic advisors, advisors of student clubs and organizations, and campus administrators with a copy of the study's recruitment flyer (see Appendix A) and asked that it be shared with students. Both the flyer, and email invitation (available to students who emailed me demonstrating interest in learning more about the study; see Appendix B) provided information about the study, including an offer of compensation of $50 for completion of the study. Students interested in participating were required to complete a demographic and criteria matching survey to ensure they met the research criteria, and to gather information regarding their gender identity (see Appendix C). Prospective participants were notified that completion of the demographic and criteria matching survey indicated their interest in participating in the study. Participation in the study required answering "YES" to the following questions:

- Are you at least 18 years old?
- Are you currently on academic warning at the research site?

and "NO" to the following question:

- Have either of your parents earned a college degree?

Race and racial identification are complex. So, to determine if students interested in participating in the study have a racial identity that includes Blackness, a multiple-choice question regarding racial identification asked:

- How do you identify racially?

After three weeks of beginning the recruitment process the targeted number of participants was not achieved, so a reminder email was sent to employees of the research site, with an offer to come to campus to explain the study in further detail to their colleagues and any students potentially interested in learning more about the study. Additionally, a follow-up email was sent out to any students who expressed interest in the study but had not completed the demographic and criteria matching survey. These follow-up measures proved helpful in reaching the targeted number of eligible participants. Students who did not meet the criteria based on their responses on the demographic and criteria matching survey were thanked for their interest and notified of their ineligibility to participate in the study. During the recruitment stage, participants were continuously informed that their participation was voluntary, and that their identity would remain confidential. Additionally, participants were notified that participation in the study would not influence their academic standing at the research site (see Appendix B).

Research Instrument

The research instruments for this study included two individual, in-depth, semi-structured interviews with Black first-generation community college students who were in unsatisfactory academic standing. Among the many benefits of individual interviews is that they may provide an environment free of judgment (Hines, 2019). The initial interviews were each approximately an hour, with second interviews lasting approximately 30 minutes. The goal of the first interview was to better understand participants' backgrounds as well as investigate the emotional, social,

and academic experiences of being a Black first-generation community college student on academic warning. Discussing emotional experiences may be triggering to participants and may elicit an emotional response. As a licensed mental health professional, providing participants with mental health counseling would present a conflict of interest. Therefore, as part of the debriefing after each interview, I was prepared to refer participants to appropriate resources should the discussion trigger an emotional response or leave them in a state of anxiety or distress. The goal of the second interview was to provide me with any clarity needed from the first interview. Participants' first and second interviews were spaced somewhere between three to 10 days to allow participants sufficient time to reflect on the previous interview, but not too much time to compromise the working relationship with the researcher. Additionally, the interviews used open-ended questions to allow participants to reflect on their experience, as a goal of phenomenological interviewing is to have participants describe their experience, not explain it (Jackson et al., 2018; see Appendix E). The rationale for semi-structured interviews is to allow the researcher an opportunity to ask follow-up questions to statements, to better draw out the essence of the phenomenon. The interviews were conducted via Zoom at a mutually agreed upon time, and at a location that was conducive to conversation. All participants were asked to select a pseudonym at the start of the interview, and to keep their cameras on during recording so that I can collect relevant visual data.

Data Collection Procedures

No data were collected prior to receiving approval from the Human Subjects Committee at Old Dominion University and Institutional Review Board from the research site. Additionally, prior to data collection, I engaged in a bracketing exercise, writing down any of my known experiences and preconceptions related to the inquiry, as bracketing aids in researchers' ability to

view the phenomena freshly (Moustakas, 1994, p. 22). Bracketing served as a strategy to ensure that the data represented the voices of the study's participants and were not influenced by my own experiences and beliefs.

A demographic and criteria matching survey was utilized to collect data in Qualtrics in order to verify participants' eligibility for the study (see Appendix C). Participants determined to be eligible for the study were emailed informed consent forms and directions for arranging an interview. In addition to the survey data, data were also collected through individual, in-depth semi-structured interviews conducted in Zoom. Participants were instructed that their cameras needed to be on throughout the interview and in no way would their name, image, or likeness be published. The visual data were used solely to take note of any relevant nonverbal behaviors. Upon conclusion of recorded meetings, Zoom offers both a video recording and audio transcriptions of the meeting. Both items for each interview were stored electronically via my password-protected Zoom account. In addition to the video and audio recordings from Zoom, I used a handheld voice recorder, in the event of technical issues arising with the Zoom platform. To safeguard the data, I was the only person with access to the survey and interview data, as they were protected through password authentication. Next, as interviews were completed, I downloaded the audio transcripts from Zoom to edit grammatical errors and remove filler linguistics before beginning to analyze the data. After the interview transcripts were edited, the transcripts were shared with participants to ensure what they said was accurately reflected. This *member checking* reflects the ethical relationship between the participants and I, keeping participants' involvement in the study at an appropriate level (Naidu & Prose, 2018). Once all participants had the chance to provide feedback and corrections, audio and video recordings were scheduled to be destroyed within a year of the study's completion.

Data Analysis

The goal of transcendental phenomenological research is to present the essence of the phenomenon without corruption (Peoples, 2020). Therefore, prior to analyzing the data, I again engaged in a bracketing exercise, as a researcher's past experiences may influence how they collect and analyze data (Fischer, 2009). Computer-assisted analysis of phenomenological data is a subject of debate among scholars (Peoples, 2020; Vagle, 2018; van Manen, 2014). A common criticism of the use of computer software in analyzing phenomenological data is that it is dehumanizing (Sohn, 2017). Analyzing phenomenological data typically includes following systematic procedures that move data from smaller units of analysis to larger units which describe how and what participants experienced (Creswell & Poth 2018; Moustakas, 1994). To meet this goal, the study utilized the six-step whole-part-whole process outlined by Vagle (2018):

- Step 1: Holistic Reading of Entire Text
- Step 2: First Line-by-Line Reading
- Step 3: Follow-Up Questions
- Step 4: Second Line-by-Line Reading
- Step 5: Third- Line-by-Line Reading
- Step 6: Subsequent Readings

The first step required me to review the data holistically; viewing the recording of each interview and reading each interview transcript free of distraction and without taking notes (Vagle, 2018). Then for Step 2, I re-read each interview transcript line-by-line, taking margin notes of excerpts that appeared to have meaning. For each participant, the first two steps were conducted prior to interviewing the next participant. For Step 3, I reviewed the margin notes

from the previous step as a guide for creating follow-up questions for participants' second interview. Step 4 took place after the second interview and included another line-by-line reading of the text. After, I created a new document for each participant, which included an articulation of meanings and any statements or non-verbal behaviors that might contribute to the phenomenological text (Vagle, 2018). The addition of notes on non-verbal behaviors such as facial expressions and gestures, were used to complement the verbal transcript data, as a strategy to reach data saturation through data triangulation (Donkoh & Mensah, 2023; Fusch et al., 2018). Step 5 included a final line-by-line reading of the text and a final viewing of the interview recording after which, I recorded my analytical thoughts about part of the data. Finally, for Step 6, I reviewed all data parts with the goal of finding "patterns of meaning" (Vagle, 2018, p. 111). These patterns of meaning were referred to as themes and turned into thick descriptive data on how the participants experienced the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). The descriptive data should not only describe the phenomenon but may also be recognizable to others impacted by the phenomenon. Although, the goal of phenomenological research is to highlight commonalities in meaning shared by participants, participant statements that are outliers among patterns were viewed as unlocking a potential new way of thinking about the phenomenon.

Positionality Statement

Phenomenological researchers position themselves within their research by exploring life experiences that shape their work. I completed both my undergraduate and graduate coursework as a Black student with neither of my parents or siblings having earned a college degree. My professional career in higher education began in college admissions at a selective public research university. The bulk of my work in that role was aimed at presenting college awareness programming to students from historically underrepresented backgrounds. When I transitioned

into academic advising, a part of my role included working with students who had been placed on academic probation or academic dismissal, co-creating a plan to regain satisfactory academic standing. As a first-generation student who would not have been academically admissible to the university I was working at, and as a Licensed Social Worker, I began to lament my role as a gatekeeper of higher education and felt better connected to the open access mission of community colleges.

My professional beginnings within community college began as an academic counselor. In that role, I worked with a larger number of first-generation students and students from minoritized backgrounds as compared to my previous role at the selective public research university. Much of what shapes my research agenda is the many years of meeting Black and first-generation students who during our first meeting are excited about the start of their new academic journey, but at the end of their first semester return to me feeling defeated and facing unsatisfactory academic standing. Prior to beginning the study, I knew that separating myself from the research was going to be a complexed process. I view this declaration not as a detriment to the study, but as a reflection of strong objectivity, increasing the credibility of this study's findings. According to Berger (2015), my position as a Black first-generation student may benefit the study, as participants may be more willing to share their experiences with someone who they perceive as sympathetic to their situation.

To ensure that I presented the phenomenon as faithfully as possible to the descriptions offered by participants, I followed the three positionality tasks outlined in Jackson et al. (2018). First, I ensured that I was both mentally and physically immersed in the research process. Second, I attempted to bracket out all prior knowledge related to the phenomenon under investigation. Third, as a licensed mental health professional, I offered sensitivity to the

phenomenon under investigation by prioritizing the voices of participants through active listening.

Trustworthiness

Guba (1981) outlined four components necessary to achieve trustworthiness: credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), credibility relates to the confidence of truth in the findings. To establish credibility, triangulation and member checking occurred. The triangulated data sources used to develop a deep understanding of the phenomenon were the audio and visual data produced by the interviews with participants. Member checking allowed participants the option to review their interview transcript, to ensure what they said was accurately reflected in the verbatim interview transcript. Patton (2002) described dependability as the stability of the data. One way in which the study achieved dependability is by ensuring consistency in the way in which data were collected. Doing so ensured that each participant was offered the same research conditions. Confirmability relates to the objectivity of the research. Confirmability was achieved by my engaging in a bracketing exercise prior to the data collection and data analysis processes, to document and examine my experiences and assumptions related to the research endeavor (Berger, 2015). Additionally, I maintained a reflexive journal to document any feelings and thoughts as they came up during various points of the study. According to Guba (1981), the goal of transferability in qualitative research is not to create generalizable text that can be applied to larger groups, but instead is to seek to ensure that the data are context-bound. The study achieved transferability by gathering rich and descriptive data related to the essence of the phenomenon, which should be transferable to future qualitative inquiry into to the lived experiences of Black first-generation

students in unsatisfactory academic standing at a suburban community college (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Pilot Study

To help achieve trustworthiness, a pilot study was conducted. The participants of the pilot study were three Black individuals who did not participate in the present study. As such, the findings from the pilot study were not included in the findings for the present study. Utilizing a pilot study benefited the present study in a couple of ways. First, the pilot study helped enhance the data collection procedures for the present study by providing clarity on recruitment instructions that were confusing to the participants of the pilot study. Second, the pilot study illuminated wording of interview questions that were perceived by participants of the pilot study as ambiguous.

Ethical Considerations

This study used an informed consent procedure for its participants. Participants were provided with the purpose of the study, the benefits of participating, the risks involved, and the time commitment required. After participants confirmed their interest in participating, they received a consent form to complete and return to me prior to the interview, including consent to be recorded (see Appendix D). Participants were reminded at all points of the study that their participation was completely voluntary, and that they were free to cease participation at any point.

In addition to informed consent, all efforts were made to maintain participants' confidentiality. As a first step in ensuring confidentiality, participants were given instructions on how to select a pseudonym for the Zoom meeting. Additionally, as participants were asked to keep their camera on to allow retrieval for any relevant visual data, they were assured that in no

way would their image or likeness be published. The study presented minimal risk to participants as there is no exposure to harm or experimental treatment. Permission to conduct the study was granted by the participants' institution. Participants' pseudonyms were used when reporting data. As an additional measure of confidentiality, participants' ages were reported as a range. All data were stored electronically, and password protected with only me as the researcher having access to the password. All raw data were scheduled to be destroyed within a year after the study's completion, and there are no plans to use the data for any other purpose.

Limitations

The study has limitations. First, whenever conducting interviews, there is a possibility that participants will say what they believe the researcher wants to hear instead of their own truth. Additionally, the qualitative data derived from the interviews cannot be used to determine causation of potential differences among student outcomes by institutional language type (decriminalized rather than criminalized) surrounding students in unsatisfactory academic standing. A final limitation of the study is although I engaged in a bracketing exercise, I may not have been able to fully remove all my personal experiences or beliefs related to the phenomenon.

Chapter III Summary

This chapter presented an overview of the methodology for the study as well as my background as a researcher. Participants for the study were selected based on their experience with the phenomenon under investigation. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews. Using a whole-part-whole method, data were analyzed to extract the essence of being a Black first-generation community college student in unsatisfactory academic standing. The chapter also discussed the ethical considerations and trustworthiness of the study. The findings from the data analysis will be presented in Chapter IV and discussed in Chapter V.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of Black first-generation students on academic warning (commonly referred to as academic probation), while enrolled at a suburban community college in the northeast United States. The study aimed to find commonalities in the meanings ascribed by participants related to their lived experience with the central phenomenon under investigation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Individual interviews with students self-identified as both Black and first-generation while on academic warning at the research site were conducted via Zoom. Participants in the study chose a pseudonym for themselves, confirmed that their participation in the study was voluntary and confidential, and were assured that their name, image, or likeness would not be published.

This chapter will provide a presentation of the findings from the study. The chapter begins with a description of participants and their demographic information. Data were analyzed utilizing a six-step whole-part-whole process outlined by Vagle (2018). This method of data analysis required me to read verbatim the interview transcripts several times to become familiar with the text and repeatedly analyze participants' collective responses for commonalities.

Description of the Participants

Participation in the study was limited to the following criteria:

- be at least 18 years old,
- self-identify as Black, Black (Biracial), or Black (multiracial),
- neither parent with an earned postsecondary degree, and

be placed on academic warning at the research site at the time of the study.

All nine participants self-identified as being a Black first-generation student on academic warning at the research site by completing a demographic and criteria matching survey (see Appendix C). In terms of gender, four participants identified as female, four identified as male, and one identified as non-binary. With regards to racial identity, six identified as Black (single race) and three identified as Black (multi-racial). At the time of interviews three students were taking a semester long break from classes but remained matriculated at the research site: each stating plans of returning to ECCC the following semester. The participants' chosen pseudonym as well as relevant demographic information are shown on Table 1. Participants' age was reported as a range to help maintain confidentiality.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Gender Identity	Age Range	Racial Identity
Dimitri	Male	18-20	Black (Single race)
Erica	Female	25+	Black (Single race)
Eve	Female	18-20	Black (Multi-racial)
Jae	Male	25+	Black (Single race)
Jordan	Male	21-24	Black (Multi-racial)
Morgan	Non-binary	21-24	Black (Single race)
Tamara	Female	21-24	Black (Single race)
Tami	Female	25+	Black (Multi-racial)
Tivon	Male	18-20	Black (Single race)

Dimitri

At the time of our interviews, Dimitri was a male student between the ages of 18 and 20 and was enrolled in one of ECCC's competitive allied health programs. Unfortunately, due to falling below the academic performance requirements for his major, at the conclusion of his first semester, he was removed from his major, but not from ECCC. When we met, Dimitri was taking a semester off to "gather himself" and reconsider his career goals. Although he felt confident that he wanted to remain in the healthcare profession, he was considering roles different from that of his first attempt.

Much of my conversation with Dimitri surrounded his experience struggling to adjust to the time demands of college. Dimitri attributed his poor academic performance to juggling a part-time job, classwork, an internship, and managing personal relationships with friends. When discussing his experience making the decision to take a semester off from college, he shared: "I'm young, I'm 18, I could always go back. I felt like taking one semester off wasn't going to be that bad."

Erica

At the time of our interviews, Erica was a female student over the age of 25 with the career goal of becoming a registered nurse. Erica first attended college over 20 years ago, taking coursework in criminal justice which led to a career as a paralegal. Erica was motivated to enroll in ECCC by her desire for a career change after serving as a caregiver for her ailing grandmother and seeing most of her cousins with successful careers as registered nurses.

As a mother of three who maintained full-time employment, Erica thought it would be wise to lighten her first semester course load by taking her Anatomy & Physiology I course over an accelerated summer session a few weeks prior to her previously scheduled fall semester start.

Erica believed it was this decision that led her to being placed on academic warning. She stated: "Someone should have told me that you cannot take A & P I over the summer session. It's a lot, so that's where I went wrong."

Eve

Eve was a female student between the ages of 18 and 20 with the career goal of becoming a neonatal nurse. Although early in her teenage years Eve wanted to do something outside of healthcare, during her final year of high school, she attended a vocational program that provided her an entry-level credential in the allied health field, which sparked her interest in nursing. At the time of our interview, Eve was taking a semester off from school to focus on saving money to afford the payments more comfortably on her new car but had planned to return to ECCC the following semester. Eve started her college journey at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) out of state and moved back home due to what she described as a "culture shock."

In the semester that led to her being placed on academic warning, Eve worked one full-time job and one per-diem job while maintaining a full-time course load that was comprised of evening and online courses. Eve shared that in the past, she had always been able to juggle her multiple responsibilities, but a series of unfortunate circumstances led to her not being able to keep up with her coursework: "That semester, I was ready to go to school, but between work, my car breaking down, and being out sick for three weeks with Covid, it's just like all my motivation went away."

Jae

During the time of the study, Jae, an adult learner, was in his first semester back at ECCC after a nine-year hiatus, however, was still on academic warning based upon his overall institutional GPA. Jae initially enrolled in ECCC to earn college credits alongside earning his

high school equivalency diploma. During his first attempt of college, Jae stated that he did not take the opportunity seriously and had since matured significantly during his hiatus from college. In response to an interview question about his classroom experience when he first attended ECCC, Jae stated:

> It's hard to build a relationship with your professors when you go to class and do nothing. If you just sit there, page over once or twice and just take home the paperwork without even looking at it... when you say you're going to the bathroom, but you're really going outside to smoke a cigarette.

For the past five years, Jae worked two part-time jobs simultaneously. Although he and his ex were separated, he stated that she still allowed him to see their two children. Jae shared that although he has had offers, he did not have time to commit to full-time employment while focusing on his education. Jae's immediate goals were to complete his associate degree in business and although he was unsure in which area of business he wanted to specialize, his years of experience working in retail sales, made him more confident in his business abilities than when he first began at ECCC. Jae shared that he was surprised to learn upon his return to ECCC that the remedial coursework he took years prior did not count towards the credits needed to complete his degree, resulting in him having fewer credits than he initially thought and ultimately prolonging his goal of earning a degree.

Jordan

Jordan was a male student between the ages of 21 and 24, with a career interest in entrepreneurship and information technology (IT). Although Jordan's work intensity typically varied between part-time and full-time, when he interviewed, Jordan was unemployed and

looking for work. As the eldest of his siblings, Jordan frequently helped his parents financially with household bills.

Jordan admitted that he was apprehensive about enrolling in ECCC stating school is “not his thing”, but that he believed in the value of a higher education. Jordan’s senior year of high school was during the shutdown due to the COVID-19 outbreak. Jordan believes the abrupt shift to online learning during his senior year impacted his preparation for college. Jordan shared:

> I didn’t really have many people to go to for help in terms of college tips and things of that nature, I couldn’t ask my parents, they have never been to college, so for me, it was more of like trial and error.

Morgan

Morgan, a student who identified as gender non-binary, was between the ages of 21 and 24 at the time of their interview and was attending ECCC part-time in an art-related major with a career interest in graphic design. Morgan did not have any dependents and lived with family while maintaining part-time employment. Morgan shared that they had a background in playing sports and the piano, as one of their parents was a jazz musician. Like Eve, prior to enrolling at ECCC, Morgan began their college journey by completing one semester at a PWI away from home. Throughout their interview, Morgan recalled their experience at the PWI as isolating particularly due to their racial and gender identities, and the main reason for their return home and subsequent transfer to ECCC. During their first interview, Morgan discussed the impact of transferring to ECCC and being able to see representation among other Black creatives in their art classes:

“I’m going to class, I have about four other Black kids with me, and it kind of makes me go... okay, I’m not alone in this.”

Morgan admittedly did not take academics seriously from as early as high school. Like Jordan, Morgan's senior year of high school was in 2020 during the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Morgan shared that they were able to pass their classes their senior year of high school with minimal effort, a habit Morgan shared unfortunately followed them into their college journey, ultimately resulting in them being placed on academic warning their first semester at ECCC and losing a merit-based scholarship.

Tamara

At the time of our meeting Tamara was aged between 21 and 24. Tamara worked part-time for an organization that provides residential care to individuals with developmental disabilities and had the career goal of becoming a social worker/mental health counselor. Tamara shared she chose ECCC due to its diversity, and noticed the decline in Black student enrollment at ECCC after the COVID-19 pandemic:

> When I first started before the pandemic, there was a lot of diversity and a lot of *us* at ECCC.... They had a lot of support for us; especially for the Black community, especially for me. Then once the pandemic started, there weren't so many of us... and that made me feel like... okay... maybe I should go to another school because seeing diversity makes me feel like my voice is being heard.

Unfortunately, Tamara lost both of her parents during her time at ECCC, losing her father in her first semester and her mother two years later. These consecutive losses are what Tamara shared mostly contributed to the mental health challenges which negatively impacted her academic performance. Like Dimitri and Eve, at the time of her interviews, Tamara was taking a semester off from ECCC with hopes to return the following semester. Tamara shared that she was using the semester off to save money for ECCC after an unsuccessful second attempt at

appealing the loss of her financial aid, after having successfully appealed and having her financial aid reinstated in a previous semester.

Tami

Tami was a first-time-in-college adult learner. Prior to being placed on academic warning, Tami had worked full-time and supported herself independently for over 30 years. Since being placed on academic warning, at the recommendation of her mental health provider, Tami resigned from her full-time job as it was negatively impacting her mental health. At the time of our meeting, Tami's career goal was to become either a nurse or science teacher, and she was a single mother with one daughter who began attending ECCC the same semester.

Tami shared that she was partially motivated to enroll in college by her daughter and her cousin. However, her greatest motivation for enrolling in ECCC was to begin a new career. During her first interview, Tami shared her thought process on deciding to enroll in community college at this stage of her life, as well as her frustrations with her previous work experience:

> It's now or never at this age... and I was just like maybe I can do it, instead of sitting at a job doing the same thing monotonously...day in day out, just a number, easily replaceable, work not being acknowledged, it just started really messing with my brain.

Tivon

Tivon was a male student between the ages of 18 and 20 with a career goal within the field of sport management. As a high school athlete, during his senior year of high school, Tivon considered attending colleges that his friends would be attending but chose ECCC because of its track team. Tivon shared that he had been dealing with a chronic illness since his junior year of high school. This illness caused him to have a number of absences, most of which were considered excusable by his high school. However, during our first interview, Tivon discussed

the shock he experienced to learn that things were different in college. He shared, “Once I began to have flare ups, I went to get checked out and was missing class a lot more, and the teacher basically was like sickness is not an excused absence.”

Tivon believed that although he was in communication with his classmates to get class notes and tried to make up missed assignments, his excessive absences due to his chronic illness are what caused him to fail all his first semester courses, and ultimately be placed on academic warning.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

For their research to be deemed as trustworthy, researchers must ensure that their data are analyzed in a manner that is consistent, accurate, and thorough. According to Guba (1981) there are four components necessary to achieve trustworthiness of data: credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. This study followed systematic approaches to collecting and analyzing data to ensure all four components of trustworthiness were achieved.

Credibility

Credibility was established in several ways. First, I established rapport through active engagement with participants throughout the research process. Additionally, I began each of the participants’ first interview with a healthy disclosure of my identity as a Black first-generation student and reminded participants that their participation would remain confidential. I believe the strength of the rapport built with participants is evidenced by the depth of personal information and experiences shared with me, a person they were meeting for the first time while being visually and audibly recorded. Credibility was also established through triangulation of the audio and visual data produced. Both verbal and non-verbal behaviors during the interviews were considered when developing my understanding of participants’ lived experiences with the

phenomenon. Finally, credibility was also established through member checking; allowing participants to review their interview transcripts, to ensure what they meant to say was accurately reflected in that portion of the data.

Dependability

To ensure dependability of the data, I followed faithfully and consistently a systematic approach to collecting and analyzing the data. This ensured that each participant was offered the same research conditions. To help ensure that participants were participating willingly, they were reminded that their participation was voluntary, and that there was no penalty for discontinuing participation. Additionally, clear instructions for accessing Zoom were provided to each participant, including a recommendation to be in an area conducive to private conversation.

Transferability

Unlike quantitative studies, qualitative inquiry is not concerned with generalizability of data. Rather, the transferability of a study relates to the degree in which the findings from this study can be transferred to a future study done within a similar context. Transferability was achieved through transparent reporting of my research decisions, and in outlining the study's data collection and analysis processes in a detailed manner. Thus, the findings from this study should be of benefit to any future research related to Black first-generation community college students in unsatisfactory academic standing, attending a suburban institution that has decriminalized its language surrounding academic standing.

Confirmability

Confirmability relates to the objectivity of the data. Confirmability was established by engaging in a bracketing exercise before the data collection and analysis processes, to document and set aside my experiences and assumptions related to the inquiry. However, bracketing does

not prevent researchers from experiencing emotions. So, in addition to bracketing, I maintained a journal to document my feelings throughout the research process. I found both exercises to be supportive in allowing me to process my own experiences as a Black first-generation student.

Data Collection

No data were collected prior to receiving approval from the Human Subjects Committee at Old Dominion University and Institutional Review Board from the research site. Additionally, *The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1972* (FERPA) helped inform how and which data were collected. Specifically, the research site was not permitted to provide me with a list of students on academic warning. Instead, recruitment flyers were shared with various employees at the research site that have high contact with students. These employees were asked to share the flyer with students, allowing students interested in participating to self-disclose information relevant to the study. To collect relevant data, participants determined to be eligible for the study were emailed a consent form (see Appendix D) and directions for arranging an interview. In addition to the demographic and criteria matching survey data collected in Qualtrics, data were also collected through two, in-depth semi-structured interviews conducted in Zoom. The goal of the initial interview was to better understand participants' background as well as investigate the emotional, social, and academic experiences of being a Black first-generation community college student on academic warning. The purpose of the second interview, was to gain insight into meanings gathered in the first interview, and to provide any clarification if needed. Prior to collecting interview data, a pilot study was conducted with three individuals to determine the clarity of the recruitment instructions and interview questions. The participants in the pilot study did not participate in the main study, and the data collected in the pilot study were not included in this chapter. Data collection for the present study continued until data saturation was reached.

Data saturation was established through triangulation of the audio and visual data collected and was reached at the point where I determined additional interviews would be unnecessary. Although I used a hand-held voice recorder as a backup option, the primary recording device was Zoom audio and visual recording.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed utilizing the six-step whole-part-whole data analysis process outlined by Vagle (2018) which required me to review each interview transcript holistically and several times before comparing it to others to find commonalities in lived experience among the participants. As part of the first step of the data analysis process, I downloaded the interview transcript and copied it into Microsoft Word. After downloading the interview transcript, I then watched the video recording of the interview, editing any parts that did not accurately reflect the verbatim conversation between the participant and me. Once the transcripts were edited, they were sent to participants for optional member checking prior to their second interview. The original whole (collective audio, visual, and interview transcript data) was fragmented into smaller parts (relevant statements and actions) to a create a new whole (patterns of meaning). These patterns of meaning are presented as themes (Creswell & Poth 2018; Moustakas, 1994).

After completing preliminary and follow-up interviews for each participant, I again engaged in a bracketing exercise to avoid making assumptions about what I might find in the data. Then, I began the process of developing themes. In pencil, I underlined significant statements within each interview transcript. Then, for each participant I created a separate document with a list of these statements and relevant non-verbal behaviors. As I noticed commonalities, I created a new document with potential themes and assigned them their own

color. After this, I returned once more to each interview transcript and highlighted verbatim statements that matched the themes using its respective color.

Presentation of Themes

The analysis of the data led to the identification of five themes. The themes were: (a) familial influence is a motivator, (b) underutilization of campus resources, (c) feeling like a failure, (d) academic warning as a second chance, and (e) language matters. In addition to identifying themes, I identified relevant statements and actions from participants' interviews that support each theme. The themes as well as the identified statements and actions were then evaluated to ensure that I had effectively answered the research question by capturing the essence of participants' lived experience of being a Black first-generation community college student on academic warning at an institution that has decriminalized its language surrounding it's unsatisfactory academic standing policy.

Theme 1: Familial Influence as Motivation

During the interviews, participants were asked about their experiences prior to enrolling in college. This conversation led to participants sharing their motivation to enroll in college. A theme that emerged rather clearly was that the participants' family members influenced both their decisions to enroll in college and to continue their enrollment after facing academic hardships.

Frequently discussed within the conversations with participants with children was their role as parents. As a mother with a college-aged daughter, Tami shared that in addition to being motivated by a cousin and a change in career, as a first time in college adult-learner, she was motivated to enroll in ECCC alongside her daughter who began the same semester.

Like Tami, Jae was motivated to return to ECCC by his role as a parent. When recalling his thought process of deciding to return to ECCC after a nine-year hiatus Jae shared:

> You're either going to support your family or throw your life away, and at that point I was like, "you know what enough is enough. I gotta give it up. I gotta you know... either support my family, do what I'm supposed to do, or it's time to get out the way, one or the other man."

The role of parents was also discussed in conversations with students who are not in parental roles. However, in some cases, students recalled their experience of deciding to enroll in college as motivated by family expectations. Jordan shared:

> I've seen the hardships my parents went through without a higher education. Both of my parents are from Haiti... it's just been rough for them, and they've always enforced that a higher education could benefit me in the future God forbid they're not here one day.

Morgan had a similar experience: "Being a student from a Caribbean household going to college is like the main thing that's instilled within me, you finish your education because your parents always want to make sure that you're set with education."

Although Jordan and Morgan shared how their families' expectations motivated them to enroll in college, Tamara shared how familial expectations motivated her to continue even after facing academic hardship, she shared:

> It was hard for me to try explaining to my family that I needed a break that first year after COVID, I tried explaining to them that I needed a break, but they don't believe in breaks, they believe in just keep going.

The theme of familial influence reemerged when each participant was asked, whom if anyone, they shared their academic standing with. All participants but Dimitri, shared their

academic standing with someone. Interestingly, a common experience among participants who shared their academic standing, was that the first person that they shared their academic standing with was their maternal figure. I shared this realization with Jordan, and his response offered insight:

> My father is in my life, it's just I have more of a connection with my mom. My mom is more of a gentle person than my dad... he's not a bad guy but... I was you know already beating myself up. I didn't want to tell my father so he could you know deliver that finishing blow on me you know. I wanted my mom to be a little more gentle with me.

Theme 2: Underutilization of Campus Resources

Participants were asked to reflect on their experience as a Black and first-generation student at ECCC and consider what factors they believed led to their placement into unsatisfactory academic standing. One of the most frequently cited factors related to an underutilization of campus resources. Conversations with students uncovered that many participants experienced an underutilization of campus resources due to issues regarding access or confusion on how to utilize campus resources.

As a student whose first semester of ECCC was when the campus was fully remote due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Jordan offered a unique perspective on access to resources during that time. When comparing his first semester at ECCC to his current semester he recalled: "Well, the thing was my first year compared to now, I didn't have that on campus... you know access. Now I can just walk through like different centers that can assist me...I can talk to somebody, you know."

Like Jordan, Eve, Erica, and Tami also shared concerns regarding accessibility of campus resources. Eve worked full-time and was only on campus during the evening. She shared that by

the time she arrived on campus for her evening classes, all the campus resources such as tutoring, and counseling were closed. Erica shared a similar experience, when asked if there have been any resources that have been helpful in her journey to regaining satisfactory academic standing, Erica shared that she had to hire a private tutor because the availability of tutors offered by ECCC conflicted with her work schedule. She stated:

> Well, they give us a tutor. But it's like it's one set time that doesn't work for me. But you know if I'm at work I can't have the tutor. The lady was like only available from 8am to 10am or something like that, and I work those hours. So, it's not available for me. So, I have to you know, use my own outside resources.

Interestingly, although she mentioned utilizing campus resources as a strategy to improve her academic standing, during her second interview, I witnessed Tami trying to negotiate being able to access campus resources while navigating personal responsibilities. She stated:

> They said there's free tutoring too, so I maybe want to look into a tutor, but I don't know, because like I'm a full-time mom... I have to go to school, then I gotta come home and cook, make time for homework, and walk the dog.

Tamara and Morgan offered insight as to why although students may be aware of resources, they remain underutilized. Tamara, who struggled with grief after losing both of her parents throughout her time as a student at ECCC offered additional consideration. She shared: "There were some times where I just didn't want to ask for help, because I was so burnt out from school." The concept of being burnt out was further discussed by Morgan, however, my conversation with them, uncovered a lack of understanding of the role and responsibilities of counselors at ECCC. Morgan shared:

> When I was first starting to burn out, it was kind of a bit lonely. I don't think I really had any real contact with any counselors or like with any offices for a check-in which shouldn't be expected, because you are in college. But also, it would have been nice initially to have someone checking up like, “Hey, how are you doing? Looks like you're kind of falling off a little bit.”

Morgan’s thought that counselors should not be expected to reach out to students having difficulty because they are in college was especially noteworthy and was concerning to me as a counselor. Tami had a similar experience regarding confusion about the role of counselors and how contact should be initiated. She stated:

> I didn’t realize also like the counselors... I was like aren't they supposed to reach out to us or something? But I guess we're supposed to be reaching out to them. I didn't know about that either. Knowing that in advance would have been helpful.

Theme 3: Feeling Like a Failure

During their interviews, participants were asked to recall their experience of finding out they were placed on academic warning. Specifically, the goal of the open-ended question was to investigate the emotional experience of learning they were in unsatisfactory academic standing. Although admittedly Jae was too immature to take being placed on academic warning seriously, and Tivon externalized responsibility because he felt his chronic illness was beyond his control, the majority of participants recalled experiencing emotions related to feeling like a failure. These sentiments often were related to familial expectation.

Eve, whose family members hold various roles in healthcare such as nurses, physician assistants, and physicians shared: “It was really disappointing for myself, I felt like a failure. I

come from a family of straight A's. I wouldn't say it hurt my ego, but it hurt what I knew of myself."

Eve was not alone in feeling like a failure. Jordan who stated in his first interview that his main goal in life was to make his parents happy, recalled journaling his feelings at that time and shared: "I felt like a failure at that time because I had one job you know... I only had one job and that was to pass my courses... and I flunked them."

As a single parent attending college alongside her daughter, Tami expressed an additional layer of responsibility. In her first interview she became emotional when she recalled the experience of learning both she and her daughter were placed on academic warning. She shared:

> I felt bad, I felt sad, I felt like a failure. I felt like you can't even go to school, what is wrong with you? I just felt really bad. And on top of that, I felt like a bad mom because my daughter wasn't doing good either, and was placed on academic warning too.

Although each participant had neither parent with an earned college degree, salient within this theme was a suggestion that participants' feelings surrounding being placed on academic warning were influenced by expectations (self-imposed or otherwise) on how to navigate college as a member of their family unit. Morgan's response offered additional insight into how some students may harness familial expectations into resilience after learning of their academic setbacks:

> At first admittedly, it was kind of a bit of a gut punch, once again realizing the consequence of my actions. I'm not sure if it's also linked to the way my parents raised me with the Caribbean attitude of like "Well, you gotta pull yourself up by your bootstrap", but you have to make the best out of the situation compared to just kind of sulking and sitting in it.

Theme 4: Academic Warning as a Second Chance

Although placement on academic warning left many participants with a negative self-perception, a common theme among participants was that they experienced academic warning as a second chance. Participants were probed about their understanding of the purpose of academic warning. A common response shared by many participants was that academic warning is a second chance, and an opportunity to do better.

In his interviews, Dimitri took full responsibility for his academic standing. When asked if he thought the institution could have done anything different to avoid him being placed on academic warning, he replied "No", stating that he experienced the faculty and advisors within his major as supportive, providing him with the tools he needed to be successful. During his second interview, when further probed about his experience during his semester away from ECCC, Dimitri shared some of the self-reflection he engaged in. He shared:

> Being placed on academic warning was definitely a wakeup call, but not jumping directly back into the next semester allowed me to say, "okay this is what I did, I remember what I did wrong, going into it again hopefully this is what I can do better."

Unlike Dimitri, Tami did not opt to take a break in her enrollment, Tami shared a similar experience stating:

> I am getting in the groove now. It's like alright, now I know what to do, and I know what's available to me. The tools are here, and it's really not that hard. You just have to do the work you know. You have to manage your time and stuff, put things in place, and you'll be alright.

For many students, being placed on academic warning not only served as a second chance to remain enrolled in ECCC but also a second chance to maintain their financial aid.

Eight of the nine participants stated that they received financial aid prior to being placed on academic warning. Unfortunately, after being placed on academic warning, each of the eight students experienced a loss of their eligibility for financial aid due to not maintaining Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP). However, a few students had experienced going through the financial aid appeal process to regain their financial aid.

As a student who had been placed on academic warning for several consecutive semesters, Tamara had previously had her aid appealed about a year prior to our interviews, but when we met was not eligible for an appeal. Both Tami and Tivon shared in detail their experiences with the financial aid appeal process. Tami shared:

> I met with the Director of Financial Aid, and she told me (because I was like crying like what the heck, I failed at this now), and she was like there are ways you can appeal under certain circumstances. She explained to me what they were, I told her about my mental health and everything else happening, and she said, I could write up an appeal and as long as I have the documentation to support it from my doctors, that it should be okay. So, I was like on pins and needles about that but, thank God, they said, my appeal was approved. I got an email, and I was like, "Thank God, for another chance."

Tivon shared that he was confident that his appeal would be approved because he had medical documentation to support his need to be absent from classes due to his chronic illness. However, unfortunately, he did not realize the importance of getting his documentation submitted in a timely manner. Both Tami and Tivon shared that in their previous semester, after financial aid had covered their tuition and fees, some of their surplus financial aid was disbursed in the form of a textbook voucher to be redeemed at the campus bookstore. Unfortunately, according to Tivon, students only have within the first few weeks of the start of the semester to

use the voucher before it is processed as a direct deposit or check to the student (a process that takes weeks to complete). So, because both Tami and Tivon's appeals were approved after the period to get their bookstore vouchers, they were both left without money to purchase the textbooks needed for their courses until later in the semester.

Although most participants were fortunate to have their financial aid appealed, unfortunately not every student was aware of the appeal process. In perhaps the most emotional part of his interviews, Jordan shared in detail his experience taking out a private student loan without knowing the financial implications of this action. He shared emotionally:

> It was like when it happened it was like a mistake... I am trying to put into words how I felt because it was a bad feeling. I took out the loan and I was oblivious to what I did, I just took it out because I didn't know how to react to that...that student probation I thought it was like over for me. I thought I couldn't reinstate into the college. I wasn't aware of things, so I took out the loan to pay for the courses, and it was like afterwards when I realized what I did. I wasn't aware of anything. I just seen that my classes weren't paid for, and I had to pay for the classes so I could reenroll... take more classes. Yeah, it was just a bad experience it was horrible.

Theme 5: Language Matters

During the interviews, participants were informed that prior to Fall 2022, ECCC referred to students in unsatisfactory academic standing as being on academic probation, as opposed to the current academic policy named academic warning. Participants were asked to freely discuss what their thoughts were on that change and if they felt there was a difference between the two terms.

Interestingly, each of the students who had been on academic warning prior to the name change (Jae, Jordan, Morgan, and Tamara) stated that they did not receive any notification from ECCC about the change. However, Jordan noticed it on his academic record and thought it meant that his academic standing had improved. Although each of the participants agreed that the previously used term of academic probation was harsher than the new term of academic warning, Jae and Tami's lived experiences cause them to have different opinions as to which term was better suited for students in unsatisfactory academic standing.

Jae reflected on his experience as an immature 18-year-old starting at ECCC and while he agreed that the term academic probation was harsher than academic warning, he offered:

> I agree that language matters, but it depends on the mindset of the student, for an immature student like I was, they may see academic warning and probably not take it seriously. But if they see academic probation, they're gonna probably be like "okay they're not playing."

Tami's answer was influenced by her lived experience of having noticed that not only her and her daughter were placed on warning, but through private conversations with her cousin that motivated her to enroll in college, and another Black female in her gym class, that many of the Black women she knew who attended college also fell into unsatisfactory academic standing at some point in their lives. Tami responded: "Yeah, probation sounds like really bad, and I mean, especially in noticing that many of the people on academic probation look like you and I that doesn't sit, mix, or look well at all.

The importance of language was also evident in my interviews with Morgan and Tamara. In trying to explain their understanding of academic warning, Morgan's response included rate of completion as their answer. It was clear that not having been notified of the change in language

and policy, had a negative impact on Morgan's understanding of their current standing. Tamara unfortunately had a similar experience. During our first interview, Tamara was under the impression that due to her current academic standing, she was not allowed to enroll in classes at ECCC. During her first interview, when asked about her experience deciding to take a semester off, she stated: "I just had no choice, because the school was not allowing me to go back. That was the only thing they said. I can't come back this semester." By our second interview, she realized she was misinformed, received clarification, and was excited about returning the following semester.

The Essence of Being a Black First-Generation Student on Academic Warning

The goal of transcendental phenomenological research is to determine the *essence* of participants' lived experiences with the phenomenon (Hopkins et al., 2016). Vagle (2018) described essence as that which makes "the thing itself" the "thing itself", and not something else. Furthermore, Vagle (2018) acknowledged that essence is not meant to represent a universal truth, but rather should take into consideration the influence of social context. The essence of participants' lived experiences is often presented in the form of a synthesized general description of participants' lived experiences (Peoples, 2020). What follows is the essence of being a Black and first-generation community college student on academic warning at a suburban community college.

Black and first-generation community college students are typically motivated to enroll in college by their family. Additionally, they may struggle to balance personal challenges and responsibilities while enrolled in coursework. These personal challenges and responsibilities in addition to a lack of awareness of how to navigate campus resources, may cause Black students who are the first in their family to attend college to underutilize campus resources, which

contributes to poor academic performance. Although being placed on academic warning typically causes Black first-generation community college students to feel like a failure, academic warning serves as a second chance for continued college enrollment. Finally, institutional language and clear communication from their institution are critical for Black first-generation community college student success.

Chapter IV Summary

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of Black first-generation students in unsatisfactory academic standing at an institution using decriminalized language surrounding academic policies. This chapter included participants' demographic information, as well as my findings in response to the research question. The analysis of the data collected led to five themes. The themes were (a) familial influence as motivation, (b) underutilization of campus resources, (c) feeling like a failure, (d) academic warning as a second chance, and (e) language matters.

I conducted one-on-one semi structured interviews with nine Black first-generation community college students attending one institution. The participants were selected based upon meeting selection criteria outlined in a demographic and criteria matching survey (see Appendix C). which was accessible via a web link included on a recruitment flyer shared with members of the research site that have high levels of contact with students (academic advisors, advisors of student clubs and organizations, and campus administrators; see Appendix A). Their interviews were transcribed verbatim and then analyzed utilizing a six-step whole-part-whole data analysis process (Vagle, 2018).

In the final chapter, I present a summary of the study, its findings related to existing literature, as well as my concluding thoughts. Finally, recommendations for both institutional leaders and practitioners as well as future research are discussed.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Community colleges serve as critical access points to higher education for Black students, with nearly half of all Black college students in the United States enrolled in a two-year institution (NPSAS, 2018a). However, the present study followed a recent decline in community college enrollment among Black men (23.5%) and Black women (15%; Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, 2022). Additionally, the present study took place only months after the June 2023 United States Supreme Court ruling of race-conscious admissions to colleges and universities as unconstitutional, making the future of access to higher education for students from historically marginalized backgrounds unknown. As placing students in unsatisfactory academic standing can lead to a significant loss of revenue (Gonzalez, 2022), the findings from this study are timely, as they may positively impact the financial stability of an institution, especially public institutions of higher education currently in competition with other public entities for funding (Barr & McCllelan, 2017).

Although there have been several studies related to the experiences of Black and first-generation students, most research focuses on their deficiencies (Pèrez et al., 2017) or promotes racist discourse that Black students are inferior (Williams, 2019). The present study addressed the knowledge gap related to the lived experiences of Black first-generation community college students in unsatisfactory academic standing at an institution that has decriminalized its language surrounding its unsatisfactory academic standing policy.

As the final chapter of this dissertation, Chapter V begins with a summary of Chapters I through IV. Next, I discuss the study's findings in connection to previous scholarly inquiry. Then, I continue with further discussion regarding the study as well as its implications for leaders

and practitioners of higher education. Finally, I end the chapter with recommendations for future research and my concluding thoughts.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of Black first-generation students on academic warning (commonly referred to as academic probation), while enrolled at a suburban community college in the northeast United States. The study aimed to find commonalities in the meanings ascribed by participants related to their lived experience with the central phenomenon under investigation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Individual interviews with students self-identified as both Black and first-generation while on academic warning at the research site were conducted via Zoom. Each participant chose a pseudonym and was assured that their participation in the study was both confidential and voluntary.

Research Question

The following research question guided this study:

What are the lived experiences of Black first-generation community college students in unsatisfactory academic standing at an institution using decriminalized language?

Summary of the Methodology

I utilized a qualitative method of inquiry to explore the lived experiences of nine Black first-generation community college students attending a suburban institution that has decriminalized its language surrounding its unsatisfactory academic standing policy. The philosophical underpinnings of the study helped provide guidance for developing and answering the study's research question. The epistemological stance of constructivism offered that there is no absolute truth, and that meaning is constructed, not discovered (Schwandt, 1994).

Additionally, utilizing intersectionality (Collins, 1991; Crenshaw, 1989; 1991) as the study's theoretical framework centered the role of power and privilege in higher education, acknowledging that higher education is hierarchal in nature, and that individuals occupying multiple marginalized identities may experience greater levels of oppression (Lund & Ross, 2021). As a Black and first-generation student, I worked diligently to ensure that each of the four components of trustworthiness were achieved (Guba, 1981). To help achieve trustworthiness, I engaged in a bracketing exercise before the data collection and analysis processes as well as maintained a reflexive journal to help process my feelings associated with engaging in research with participants occupying similar social identities as myself.

The research site (referred to as the pseudonym East Coast Community College; ECCC) was chosen based on its recent decriminalization of language surrounding its unsatisfactory academic standing policy in 2022, and its large student enrollment. Due to guidelines outlined by *The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1972* (FERPA), employees at the research site with high levels of contact with students were asked to share the study's recruitment flyer (see Appendix A), allowing students interested in participating in the study to self-disclose their racial identity, academic standing, and other relevant information via a demographic and criteria matching survey (see Appendix C). Recruitment for the study remained opened until I achieved data saturation; the point in which collecting any new data would have been redundant. Data were collected through two in-depth individual semi-structured interviews conducted in Zoom.

The first interviews each took less than an hour and explored the emotional, academic, and social experiences of being a Black first-generation student in unsatisfactory academic standing (see Appendix E). The goal of the second interview was to gain additional insight through follow-up questions from the first interview, and provide any clarification needed.

Second interviews lasted about 30 minutes and took place no more than ten days after participants' first interview. Each interview was recorded for audio and visual data. After each interview, I downloaded the Zoom transcript, and edited it to ensure that it accurately reflected the verbatim conversation between me and the participant. After each interview was edited, it was sent to the participant for optional member checking to ensure what they said was reflected in the transcript.

Data were analyzed using the six-step whole-part-whole process outlined by Vagle (2018). This process required me to review each individual interview transcript several times before comparing it to the others, searching for commonalities in lived experiences among each participant. The original whole (collective audio, visual, and interview transcript data) was broken down into smaller parts (participants' relevant statements and actions) to create a new whole (patterns of meaning presented as themes). After bracketing out assumptions of what I thought I may find in the data, I underlined significant statements within each interview transcript. From there, I created a separate Microsoft Word document for each participant with a list of relevant statements and non-verbal behaviors. As I noticed commonalities, I created another Microsoft Word document with a list of potential themes, assigning each theme its own color. After this, to ensure the selected themes were in alignment with the research question, and participants' verbatim statements, I returned once more to each interview transcript, and highlighted verbatim statements that matched the selected themes with its corresponding color.

Summary of Major Findings

This transcendental phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of nine Black first-generation community college students in unsatisfactory academic standing at an institution that decriminalized its language surrounding its academic standing policy. The analysis of the

data led to the identification of five themes: (a) familial influence as motivation, (b) underutilization of campus resources, (c) feeling like a failure, (d) academic warning as a second chance, and (e) language matters. The following section will provide a summary of participants' experiences related to these themes.

The first theme emerged when participants were asked about their experiences prior to enrolling in college. Specifically, participants were asked about their motivation to enroll in college. Eight participants cited family as their motivation to enroll in college. For some students, the experience of seeing their parents face financial hardships due to not having any postsecondary education, inspired them to pursue a college degree. Two participants shared that their role as a parent influenced their decision to enroll at the research site, with one participant enrolling the same semester as her daughter. A few participants experienced their family as not only motivation to enroll in college, but also motivation to remain enrolled after facing academic hardships.

The second theme emerged after participants were asked what experiences they believed led to their placement on academic warning. Majority of participants shared a similar experience of underutilizing campus resources. However, in most cases, this was due either to confusion on how to access campus resources, or an inability to access campus resources due to scheduling conflicts. Specifically, two participants shared that they could have benefitted from connecting with a counselor but were unsure if they should reach out to a counselor, or if a counselor would reach out to them. Participants who were aware of campus resources but did not utilize them shared that they were unable to due to their work schedules conflicting with the availability of resources.

Regarding the third theme, most of the participants recalled their experience of finding out that they were placed on academic warning as feeling like a failure. Each of the participants viewed attending college as a responsibility needing priority. For many participants, falling into unsatisfactory academic standing was experienced as a failure to honor said responsibility. Notably, Tami offered a unique perspective. She shared that the experience made her feel like a failure as both a student and parent, having realized that her daughter had also been placed on academic warning.

Regarding the fourth theme, although being placed on academic warning caused most of the participants to feel like a failure, when asked their thoughts about the purpose of academic warning, a majority of participants shared that they experienced academic warning as a second chance. For the participants in the study, academic warning served as a second chance for both continued enrollment at the research site, and for receiving financial aid. As recipients of financial aid prior to their placement on academic warning, eight of the nine participants shared that being placed on academic warning resulted in a loss of their financial aid. However, at the time of the study, after going through an appeal process, five participants had successfully regained their financial aid at least once, and the remaining three participants shared plans of attempting to go through the appeal process as soon as possible.

Finally, I notified participants that the research site changed the name of its academic policy from academic probation to academic warning and ask them their thoughts on the change. None of the participants who were already in unsatisfactory academic standing when the name of the academic policy was changed recalled experiencing any notification from the research site regarding the change in name. Interestingly, one participant stated that they noticed the name change on their academic record, but thought the change simply meant their academic standing

had improved, demonstrating how unclear communication between students and their institution can lead to ambiguity or confusion. Each of the participants in the study agreed institutional language mattered, and the use of the term academic warning, was less jarring than academic probation.

Researcher's Reflection

Although the goal of the study was to explore the lived experiences of Black first-generation students on academic warning while enrolled in a suburban community college, engaging in reflexive activities such as journaling, also helped unearth findings related to me as a researcher, particularly regarding my own identity as a Black and first-generation student with a family history that includes immigration. Upon reflecting on my experience as the researcher in this study, I realize that I entered the study placing great emphasis on my identity as a Ph.D. candidate, which may have consequently minimized my identity as a first-generation student to an experience that was in my past during my undergraduate education. I reflect on how perhaps unconsciously, my role as Ph.D. candidate and researcher may have led to an internalized power differential between my participants as the subjects under analysis and me as the researcher conducting the analysis. It wasn't until I began to engage with participants who had lived experiences like my own, particularly students who discussed their lived experiences in relation to their family's immigrant backgrounds, that I began a deeper reflection of my own experiences as a first-generation doctoral candidate. This deep reflexivity helped me to recognized that although I was a Ph.D. candidate and the researcher, throughout the course of the study, I was still a Black and first-generation student at a critical point in my degree attainment. Additionally, like many of the participants, at the time of the study, I was balancing challenging coursework while working full-time, and had a strong desire to be a source of pride for my family.

Findings Related to the Literature

The present study generated new knowledge related to the lived experiences of Black first-generation students in unsatisfactory academic standing. However, many of the study's findings are salient in previous research. The review of literature relevant to the study presented in Chapter II highlighted scholarly inquiry into unsatisfactory academic standing as well as the experiences of Black and first-generation students. The following section presents the themes that emerged from the present study in relationship to existing qualitative and quantitative studies.

Familial Influence as Motivation

In the present study, all but one participant cited family as their motivation to enroll and remain enrolled in college. This finding supports earlier research from George-Mwangi et al., (2017), who explored intra-racial differences amongst Black students regarding their motivation to enroll in college. According to George-Mwangi et al. (2017), the first-generation students in their sample were more likely than their continued-generation peers to allow motivation from family to supersede their own desires. In the present study, Tamara had a similar experience, wanting to take a break from school, but not doing so because her family did not believe in taking breaks.

The findings from the present study also corroborated findings from George-Mwangi et al. (2017), who found that the Black students in their study from immigrant backgrounds were more likely to be motivated to enroll in college due to perceived family responsibility and obligations. In the present study, Dimitri, Jordan, and Morgan each spoke of their families' immigrant background. Both Jordan and Morgan described being motivated to enroll in college due to a responsibility or obligation that had been instilled in them since childhood. Specifically,

as the oldest sibling in his Haitian American family, Jordan spoke of his financial responsibilities surrounding helping his parents provide for their family. For Dimitri, the obligation to his family took the form of living with his physically disabled grandparents, providing physical support whenever needed.

The present study also found that all but one participant shared their academic standing with their family. For each of the eight participants that shared their academic standing with a family member, that family member was a maternal figure. These findings support earlier work from Harper et al. (2020) who interviewed eight parents of first-generation students. Harper and colleagues found that although parents may not have familiarity with situations their first-generation students face in college, parents were able to demonstrate support by providing guidance and problem-solving techniques (Harper et al., 2020). For example, in the present study, because he was unaware of the financial aid appeal process, Jordan needed his mother's help in applying for a student loan to cover the cost of his tuition.

Harper et al. (2020) also discovered that the relationship between first-generation students and their parents may change while they are enrolled in college. Specifically, the parents in their study mentioned changing their role from guardians to consultants. Similarly, in the present study, Tivon shared that when he began college, his mother sat him down and explained to him that although she would continue to financially support him to the best of her ability, now that he was a college student and an adult, his education was his responsibility. As an adult learner, Erica had a similar experience sharing that she did not have any fear of getting in trouble with her parents when sharing with them her academic standing, since she is an independent adult with children of her own. Erica stated that her parents were the ones who encouraged her to appeal the loss of her financial aid.

Underutilization of Campus Resources

Most of the participants from the present study attributed an underutilization of campus resources as a factor that impacted their academic standing. In the present study, in most cases, this underutilization of campus resources was due to a lack of awareness of campus resources, a consequence of poor campus integration. This finding supports earlier work from Mcdossi et al. (2022), who compared survey data from 2,365 students attending a public university in the midwestern United States. The researchers concluded that although first-generation students were more interested in getting involved on campus than continued-generation students, first-generation students were 30% less likely to be academically and socially integrated into campus due to family and work responsibilities (Mcdossi et al., 2022). In the present study, each of the participants (excluding Tivon who was a student athlete) stated that they were too busy to engage in campus activities and resources in which they otherwise might have had an interest.

Interestingly, in the present study, the campus resource that was discussed the most was counseling, as many of the participants in the present study disclosed experiencing challenges with their mental health. Although both men and women in the present study discussed challenges surrounding mental health, only the female participants discussed utilizing mental health resources. This supports the work of K.D.A. Williams et al. (2023), who explored survey data from 2,500 students regarding mental health symptoms and campus utilization rates. The researchers discovered that although Black men and women experienced similar rates of anxiety and depression, Black men were significantly less likely than Black women to utilize campus support systems. However, earlier research from Leath and Jones (2022) offered that an underrepresentation of Black male counselors on campus, may serve as a barrier for Black men to seek counseling on campus.

Feeling like a Failure

When asked to describe their experience of finding out they were placed on academic warning, most participants in the present study described their experience as feeling like a failure. Although the term frequently used in literature is academic probation, the findings from the present study echo findings from previous research on participants in unsatisfactory academic standing. The finding that participants in the present study felt like a failure after being placed on academic warning supports earlier research from Barouch-Gilbert (2015), who interviewed 23 students on academic probation and found that being labeled as academically deficient led to feelings of embarrassment and failure. Specifically, the participants in the present study, much like the participants in Barouch-Gilbert (2015), viewed their placement on academic warning as not only a failure to meet institutional expectations, but personal ones as well.

Arcand and Leblanc (2012) presents one of very few individual case studies related to the experiences of individuals on academic probation. Their study, which chronicled the experience of one student named Mark, has findings like the present study. Like many of the students in the present study, Mark recalled feeling like a failure after being placed on academic probation. Additionally, Mark like Dimitri from the present study, was removed from his academic program due to his academic performance. Dimitri much like Mark, described that experience as one that led to feelings of self-doubt about their academic ability to complete his degree. This internalization of self-doubt found in the present study also supports work from Bryant (2020), who interviewed nine Black men on academic probation while attending a PWI. Their research concluded that after being placed on academic probation, the Black men in the study experienced self-doubt and saw themselves as academically inferior to non-Black students on campus (Bryant, 2020).

Academic Warning as a Second Chance

Although many of the participants in the present study felt like a failure, most participants also viewed their placement on academic warning as a second chance for continued enrollment. Although academic warning is typically referred to in literature as academic probation, the findings from the present study are not unlike findings in previous literature. Rivera (2019) conducted interviews with 20 students on academic probation, like the participants in the present study, the participants in Rivera (2019) viewed academic probation as well as the academic support intervention being offered to them as a second chance to remain enrolled at their institution.

For most of the participants in the present study, academic warning served as a second chance to receive financial aid. Eight of the nine participants in the present study discussed losing financial aid due to their academic performance being out of compliance with Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP). SAP represents the rate of completion needed for students to maintain their eligibility for financial aid (Schudde & Scott-Clayton, 2016). Most of these same participants shared that they would not have been able to continue enrollment in college without appealing the loss of their aid or taking out a student loan. The importance of financial aid for the participants in the present study supports the findings of Scott-Clayton and Schudde (2020), who used regression discontinuity and difference-in-difference designs to investigate the consequences of SAP policies for students attending a community college in one state. The researchers concluded students with the most financial need felt the consequences of academic standards faster than students able to finance their own education (Scott-Clayton & Schudde, 2020).

The findings from the present study also support findings from Rainey and Taylor (2023) who interviewed 14 students on academic probation and at risk of losing their financial aid. Like participants in the present study, the participants in Rainey and Taylor (2023) were motivated to improve their academic performance by financial aid eligibility. Interestingly, although the students in Rainey and Taylor (2023) were aware of the consequences of not doing well and discussed plans to increase their utilization of campus resources, the researchers shared that the participants' actions were not always congruent with their stated plans. Specifically, some of the participants in their study continued to miss assignments or complete assignments after their due date (Rainey & Taylor, 2023). I had a similar experience in the present study with Tami. Interestingly, Tami seemingly had the most financial need of any of the present study's participants. Tami left the workforce at the recommendation of a mental health professional she was seeing outside of the research site. Then while on public assistance, during the time of our interviews, Tami's monthly income was a fraction of what it was when she was employed. Even after being notified that she would not be able to appeal any potential future loss of financial aid again, when discussing her plans to regain successful academic standing, Tami shared that although math was a course she was struggling with, she had not yet been able to go to investigate the hours of availability for math tutoring on campus, because of her personal responsibilities at home.

Language Matters

Participants in the present study agreed that the term academic probation was problematic. Tami's response was based on her observation that many of the other Black students she shared her academic standing with had also been placed on academic warning at some point in their college journey, including her daughter. This supports findings from Vélez,

and Jessup-Anger (2022), who used focus group data to explore the experiences of institutional messaging of 21 Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) students attending a PWI in the midwestern United States. The participants in their study shared that some of the institutional language was problematic, which students felt led to feelings of isolation and a perpetuation of negative stereotypes associated with BIPOC individuals. The findings also support earlier work from Bryant (2020) who utilizing parts of stereotype theory, interviewed nine Black men on academic probation at a PWI. The participants in the study felt being placed on academic probation aligned them with a stereotype of criminality.

A finding from the present study also related to language was the importance of transparency in institutional language. Interestingly, none of the participants in the study who were in unsatisfactory academic standing when the name of the academic policy was decriminalized by the research site recalled receiving any notification from the research site about the name change. For some students, this led to some ambiguity surrounding their academic standing. If it is true that the research site did not notify students about the change in name and criterion surrounding its academic standing policy, although assumptions about the intention of the research site cannot be made, this finding supports findings from Moss and Kelcey (2022). The researchers explored differences in outcomes among 500 students on academic probation at a suburban community college. Specifically, the researchers sought to explore if students who received a detailed letter about their academic standing had any significant difference in their performance from students who received a letter that was more vague. The researchers concluded that the participants who received the more detailed letter (which included a diagram outlining the institution's academic policy as well as a list of resources that may be helpful in regaining satisfactory academic standing) had significantly

better academic performance in the following semester in comparison to those who received a letter with vaguer language.

Discussion

Although there has been significant scholarly attention paid to Black and first-generation students as college learners, this qualitative exploration into the lived experiences of Black first-generation community college students in unsatisfactory academic standing revealed several important takeaways that warrant further discussion. First, the Black and first-generation students in the present study experienced community college as an opportunity to achieve a post-secondary education at a financially affordable institution alongside similarly socially situated students. Although most of the participants in the study had personal commitments that made them too busy to engage in student groups on campus, for the participants in the study, seeing representation on campus through students that looked like them, made them feel at ease. Furthermore, the students in the study who began their college experience at an out of area Predominantly White Institution (PWI), each reported that experience as isolating and the reason for their transfer to the research site.

Although each of the study's participants were Black and first-generation, they did not live homogenous lives. Each participant occupied other intersecting social identities that impacted their college experience. For example, most participants referred to their identity within their families as the reason they enrolled or remained enrolled in college after being placed on academic warning. Specifically, participants who shared that they are the oldest sibling had a similar experience of wanting to be a role model for their younger siblings and helping to financially contribute to their household. Similarly, participants who are parents made clear in their interviews their desire to provide a better life for themselves and their family.

Also worth further discussion is the finding that a majority of the Black and first-generation students in the study experienced challenges balancing family, work, and their education. Although most participants began their academic journey with excitement, life's circumstances such as illness or the disablement of a motor vehicle, caused them to fall off course. Furthermore, participants' busy schedules served as a barrier to connecting with campus resources that may have otherwise been helpful in addressing their needs and concerns.

For many students in the study, financial aid was a lifeline. Most participants in the study utilized financial aid to cover the cost of their tuition and textbooks. When asked about their experience of finding out they were placed on academic warning, most of the participants experienced concerns about their ability to fund their education after losing their aid as most of the participants would not have been able to continue post-secondary enrollment without financial aid. Although most participants received guidance on how to appeal the loss of their aid, one participant did not, and regrettably took out a student loan without having a complete understanding of their loan obligation

A final takeaway from the present study is that student success requires transparent and open communication between students and their institution. Tamara, who lost both of her parents during her time at the research site shared that she felt the institution could have been more empathetic during her grieving process. However, responses from other participants suggest that students do not always know how and when to share personal challenges, prompting further discussion regarding the importance of two-way communication between students and their institution. In the present study, the importance of clear and transparent communication between students and their institution was echoed by the finding that participants who were placed on unsatisfactory academic standing prior to the decriminalization of the academic policy had not

recalled receiving notification of the name change nor the removal of rate of completion as a criterion for academic standing. This breakdown in communication led to ambiguity amongst participants regarding their current academic standing as well as how to return to satisfactory academic standing.

Implications for Leadership and Practice

The present study uncovered commonalities in the lived experiences of Black first-generation students in unsatisfactory academic standing while attending one suburban community college that has made efforts to decriminalize institutional language. The findings from the study suggest that participants' placement on academic warning did not represent an inability to complete college coursework nor a lack of ambition. Moreover, the findings underscore student success as a shared responsibility between students and their institution. As a decline in enrollment of any student group presents a threat to the financial stability of an institution, institutional leaders and practitioners should be concerned with the inequitable outcomes faced by Black students. The following section outlines implications for leaders and practitioners based on the study's findings.

Several participants shared a lack of awareness related to how establishing a connection with their campus counseling center was initiated. Especially concerning is that many of these same participants shared that they faced challenges related to their mental health. Based on the findings from this study, counseling centers should not only be equipped with proactive services but should also have leaders who consider the ways in which students are invited to engage with these services. To increase students' engagement in counseling services, institutional leaders should allow students to opt-in to a bi-weekly check-in program via a preferred method of contact (email, text, etc.) and beyond traditional service hours. This check-in program should

allow participants to respond as to if they need additional support, and if so, what additional support is needed.

Findings from the present study highlighted the importance of collaboration between teaching faculty and counseling centers. Based on the findings from the present study, one way in which counseling centers and faculty can better collaborate is through an early alert system in which faculty can input appropriate concerns (attendance, incomplete assignments, etc.) which would allow the counseling center to initiate contact with students in danger of failing their courses. Such an alert system should not be used to replace timely feedback provided directly to the student from their instructor, but as an additional strategy to ensure that students are connected to appropriate campus resources. As faculty are often the first individuals to provide students with feedback on their academic performance, the role of faculty in supporting students in or near unsatisfactory academic standing should not be understated. However, to be effective in their role as ambassadors for campus resources, faculty members need support from campus leadership. Ergo, institutional leaders should make every effort to support all faculty by providing them with pertinent information related to campus resources and policies, helping faculty to serve as a conduit of accurate and consistent information for students.

Another opportunity for faculty and counseling centers to collaborate is by offering academic success workshops based on needs commonly observed by faculty and counselors and those shared by students. As indicated by the experiences of students in the present study, it is important that these workshops be available to students both in-person and asynchronously online. Findings from the present study suggest that participants might have benefited from attending workshops related to specific topics such as time-management, study skills, and financial aid compliance. Offering a series of workshops available to students in mutually

beneficial times, and in various online modalities will better provide students in need with some of the tools known to be helpful for students likely to experience unsatisfactory academic performance.

The findings from the present study also highlight the importance of transparent communication between leaders and students. None of the participants who were in unsatisfactory academic standing prior to the name change were able to recall receiving notification of the change in name of the policy from academic probation to academic warning, nor did they recall notification that their placement on academic warning would now be based solely on their GPA and not their rate of completion of courses. To increase transparency, and limit ambiguity, when changing academic policies that impact students currently enrolled, institutional leaders should not only provide students with notification of the change, but the rationale for the change.

Finally, institutional leaders should make every effort to cultivate a campus community that is welcoming to all students. Several participants indicated choosing to enroll at the present study's research site in anticipation of an environment that would be welcoming to them based on their racial background. One way institutional leaders can better foster an environment that is conducive to student success is by hosting open campus discussions about the use of language and policies that impact student persistence, such as grading policies. These open campus discussions may better position institutional leaders in their ability to reevaluate institutional policies, programming, and language that could be perceived as unwelcoming to students. When considering naming their institution's policy for students in unsatisfactory academic standing, institutional leaders should consider using language reflective of the seriousness of a student's

academic standing, but also sensitive to the known psychosocial experiences of students facing academic difficulty.

Recommendations for Future Research

Although the present study offered valuable insight into the lived experiences of Black first-generation students in unsatisfactory academic standing, the study had limitations which present opportunities for future research. First, although the research site is unique in that it is a community college that has made efforts to decriminalize language surrounding its academic policies, the present study did not allow for an exploration of any potential effect the change of language may have had on student outcomes. Therefore, I suggest future research consider a comparison of student outcomes and experiences of students in unsatisfactory academic standing by institutional language type (decriminalized compared to criminalized).

Additionally, utilizing a phenomenological approach to answering the research question limited me to presenting only commonalities in participants' lived experiences. However, each participant in the study offered rich data in the form of their own storied experience with the phenomena under investigation. Therefore, I suggest future research consider a narrative inquiry. A narrative inquiry might provide additional context into how Black and first-generation students navigate higher education, offering insight into participants' experiences not common amongst other participants, however still valuable in advancing knowledge related to the experiences of students from marginalized backgrounds. This narrative inquiry would perhaps be best informed by utilizing an anti-deficit framework as its theoretical framework. Utilizing an anti-deficit framework would potentially deepen understanding of the strengths Black and first-generation students bring with them to campus, and how these strengths assist students to persist as they navigate higher education (Harper, 2010).

Each of the studies' participants agreed that language mattered. Therefore, another opportunity for future research includes an exploration of other language used in higher education that could be experienced as negative. Specifically, future research should explore campus members' experiences with terms such as *disabled student, remedial coursework,* and *at-risk students*. Future research exploring negative language may also consider institutional messaging that may present a barrier to enrollment, such as language found in financial aid letters which may be confusing to students and their families who are inexpert in navigating higher education.

A final recommendation for future research is based on one of the study's findings. Although several participants cited their family as motivation for enrolling and remaining in college, a few students experienced this motivation in the form of familial expectation. Unfortunately, as experienced by Tami, familial motivation can be negative, and the advice offered by family may be the wrong advice. Ergo, the paradox of parents having not completed a college degree but expecting their children to, needs further investigating. Therefore, I suggest future research explore the emotional labor of first-generation students who perceive parental expectation as motivation for them to enroll and remain enrolled in college.

Conclusion

As open access institutions, community colleges need to be prepared to meet the needs of students regardless of race or other demographic characteristics. However, current trends in student outcomes suggest that community colleges are missing the mark on producing equitable outcomes for Black students. Although navigating higher education as a Black student or a first-generation student each come with their own set of challenges, occupying both identities may place Black students who are the first in their family to attend college in a particularly precarious

position. Although many well-intentioned leaders create policies and programming aimed at improving success rates for students from marginalized backgrounds, too often, the voices of those with relevant lived experiences are not considered in decision making processes.

The present study highlighted the voices of Black first-generation students in unsatisfactory academic standing while attending a suburban community college that has decriminalized its language surrounding academic policies. Interviews with participants uncovered commonalities in their experiences. Using a transcendental phenomenological method of inquiry, these commonalities were presented as the following themes: (a) familial influence as motivation, (b) underutilization of campus resources, (c) feeling like a failure, (d) academic warning as a second chance, and (e) language matters. It is my hope that the findings from this study will help better equip institutional leaders and stakeholders to be proactive in their approach to closing the current equity gap between Black students and their non-Black peers.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

RECRUITMENT FLYER

PARTICIPANTS NEEDED

EXPLORING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF BLACK FIRST-GENERATION COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS IN UNSATISFACTORY ACADEMIC STANDING

RESEARCH CRITERIA

Participants Must:

- Have a racial identity that includes being Black, Black (bi-racial), or Black (multi-racial)
- Have neither parent with an earned college degree
- Be at least 18 years old
- Be a [redacted] student currently on academic warning (previously referred to as academic probation)

Criteria Matching Survey

If you believe you meet the research criteria and are interested in participating in the study, please complete the brief survey at the QR code or link below.

What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of Black first-generation students on academic warning (previously referred to as academic probation)

What is required of participants?

- Completion of criteria matching survey (QR code and link provided below)
- Two audio & visual-recorded Zoom interview sessions. The first session will be approximately an hour. The second session will be approximately 45 minutes.
- Optional review of your interview transcript
- Willingness to share your experience as a Black first-generation student on academic warning (previously referred to as academic probation)

What are the benefits of participating?

- All participants who complete the study will receive a $50 financial incentive
- The benefit of influencing institutional policies that directly affect you and your peers

Who may I contact with questions?

If you have any questions, please contact Gerome Bell at gbell004@odu.edu

Survey Link https://odu.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6ohmHtp3Ug007eC

This study is authorized by the Institutional Review Board at [redacted] (no. 23-005) and the Human Subjects Review Committee at Old Dominion University.

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APPENDIX B

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN STUDY

[Insert date]

Dear (insert student name):

My name is Gerome Bell, and I am an Assistant Professor of Counseling at Suffolk County Community College as well as a doctoral student at Old Dominion University. As part of my doctoral dissertation, I am conducting research on the experiences of Black first-generation community college students on academic warning, approved by the Old Dominion University Education Human Subject Review Committee (project 2109593-1) and the Institutional Review Board at [redacted] (No. 23-005).

I am inviting qualified students to participate in research that will inform institutional policies and practices aimed at their success. Participants must:

- be at least 18 years old,
- must self-identify as Black, biracial (Black included), or multiracial (Black included),
- must have neither parent with an earned postsecondary degree, and
- must be currently placed on academic warning at [redacted]

Based on your current academic standing at the college, I am asking you to consider participating in an interview lasting approximately an hour in length and a subsequent follow-up meeting lasting approximately 45 minutes in length**.** Note that choosing to participate in the study will not change your academic standing. To ensure confidentiality of your participation and responses, all interviews will be individual, and you will be asked to choose an alternative name**.** Your participation is completely voluntary, and you can discontinue your participation at any time of the study**. All participants who complete the study will be provided a $50 financial incentive for their time.**

In addition to the financial benefit of participating in the study, participants will have the benefit of influencing institutional policies that directly affect their peers. If you agree to participate (I hope you will!), please complete the survey found here by February 1st. Surveys completed after February 1st will be reviewed on a space-available basis.

I am also happy to talk further if you'd like more information about the study, including measures to maintain confidentiality of your participation and responses, or details related to the financial incentive.

Thank you in advance for your consideration

Best,

Gerome Bell

Gbell004@odu.edu

APPENDIX C

DEMOGRAPHIC AND CRITERIA MATCHING SURVEY

OLD DOMINION
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Please complete this quick survey to express your interest in participating in a research study about the lived experiences of Black first-generation community college students on academic warning (previously referred to as academic probation).

Completion of this survey indicates your interest in participating in the study. Participation will include completing two individual interviews. The first interview will take approximately one hour. The second interview will take approximately 45 minutes. Please contact Gerome Bell at gbell004@odu.edu with any questions about this study.

Are you a [redacted] student currently on academic warning (previously referred to as academic probation)?

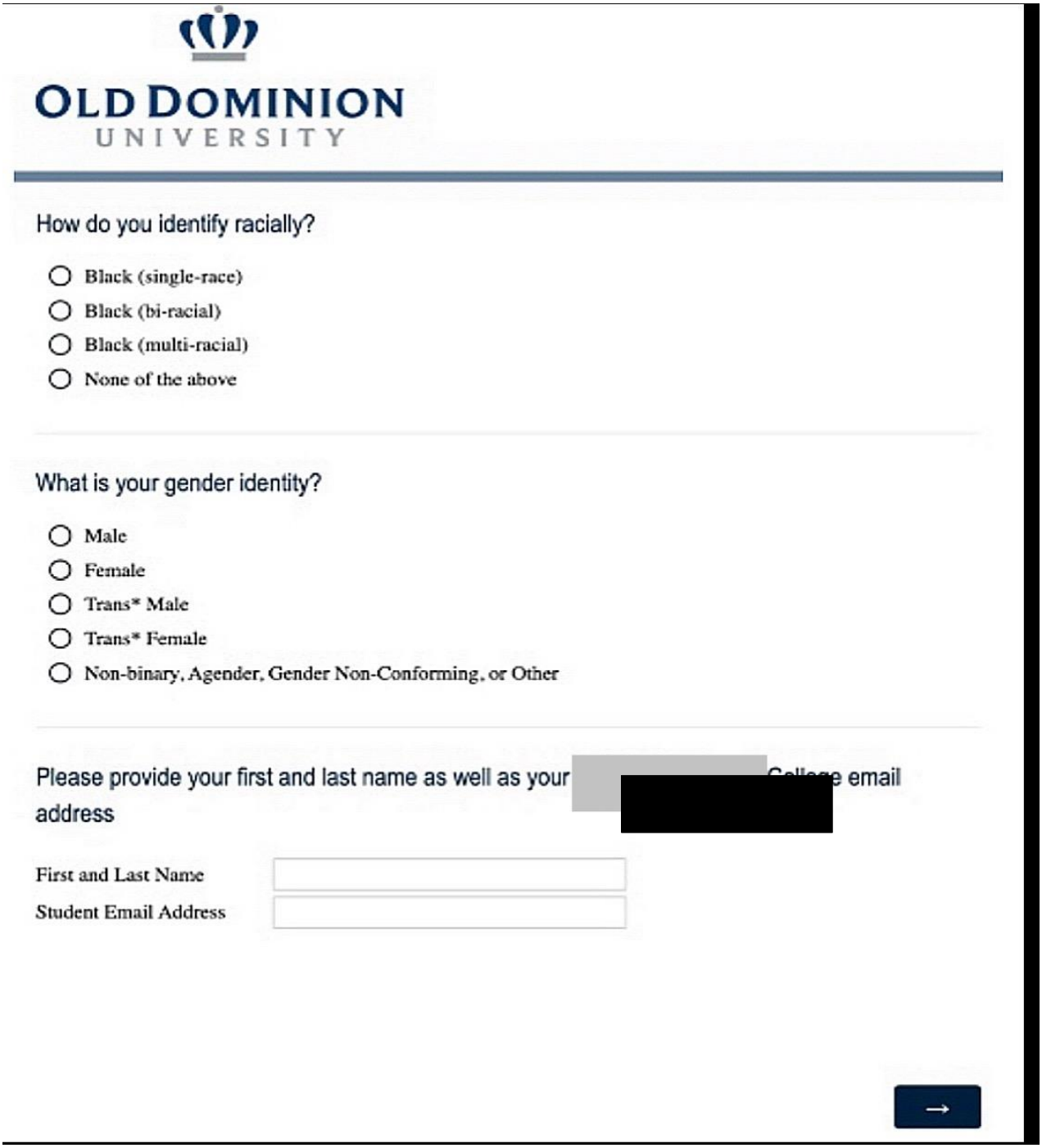
- ○ Yes [redacted]
- ○ No

Are you at least 18 years old?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

Did either of your parents earn a college degree?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No



OLD DOMINION
UNIVERSITY

How do you identify racially?

- ○ Black (single-race)
- ○ Black (bi-racial)
- ○ Black (multi-racial)
- ○ None of the above

What is your gender identity?

- ○ Male
- ○ Female
- ○ Trans* Male
- ○ Trans* Female
- ○ Non-binary, Agender, Gender Non-Conforming, or Other

Please provide your first and last name as well as your [redacted] email address

First and Last Name

Student Email Address

→

APPENDIX D

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

PROJECT TITLE: Decriminalizing Academia: Black First-Generation Community College Students in Unsatisfactory Academic Standing.

INTRODUCTION

The purposes of this form are to provide you with information that may affect your decision to say 'yes' or 'no' to participating in the research project and to record the consent of those who say 'yes'.

RESEARCHERS

Gerome Bell, LMSW – Ph.D. Candidate
gbell004@odu.edu

Mitchell Williams – Associate Professor, Ph.D. Program in Community College Leadership
mrwillia@odu.edu

DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH PROJECT

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore Black first-generation community college students' experience with being placed on academic warning. The goal of the research is to use student narratives to influence institutional policies and procedures aimed at their success. Your participation will include two interviews that are both individual and confidential. The first interview should take approximately an hour. During the interview you will be asked a series of questions aimed at understanding your experiences while on academic warning. You do not have to answer any questions you do not feel comfortable answering. The second interview should take approximately 45 minutes and is aimed at gaining any additional insight that may have been missed in the interview. Both interviews will be audio and video recorded for accuracy.

EXCLUSIONARY CRITERIA

You should have completed an online questionnaire to confirm that you meet the eligibility criteria for the research project. Based on that questionnaire, to the best of your knowledge, you do not have any reason to believe you are ineligible to participate in the research project.

BENEFITS AND RISKS

BENEFITS: Aside from the direct financial compensation for participating, an in-direct benefit of participating institutional policy and procedures that affect Black first-generation student success.
RISKS: Participants will be asked to reflect on experiences that may cause slight discomfort.

COSTS AND PAYMENTS

There is no cost to you as a participant in the study. All participants who complete the study will be provided a $50 financial incentive for their time.

CONFIDENTIALITY

To ensure confidentiality of your participation and responses, **all interviews will be individual and confidential, and you will be asked to choose an alternative name.** All research materials will be locked and stored for up to a year and then destroyed.

RIGHT TO WITHDRAW FROM STUDY

Your participation is completely voluntary, and you can withdraw your participation at any time of the study. Only students who complete the study will receive the financial compensation.

HARM OR INJURY

If at any point you feel pressured or feel you were harmed in any way by participating in the research project, contact the Old Dominion University Darden College of Education and Professional Studies Human Subjects Review Committee Chair, Dr. John Baaki at jbaaki@odu.edu or at 757 683-5491. Saying 'yes' to participating does NOT waive your legal rights.

VOLUNTARY CONSENT

By signing this form, you are saying several things. You are saying that you have read this form or have had it read to you, that you are satisfied that you understand this form, the research study, and its risks and benefits. Participants have **two** options to offer their voluntary consent to participate in the study. **Please complete only one of the two options.**

Option 1: **Physical or Electronic Signature (Electronic Signature via DocuSign or Adobe)**
By signing below, you are telling the researcher 'Yes', that you give consent to participate in the research study. Once signed, email the form to gbell004@odu.edu. A copy of this form should be given to you for your records.

_____
Printed Name

_____
Physical or Electronic Signature

_____
Date

Option 2: **Returned Email Statement**
By replying to this email from your student email address with your first and last name and stating that you consent to participate in the study, you are telling the researcher 'Yes', that you give consent to participate in the research study.

APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Hello, my name is Gerome Bell, and I am a doctoral student at Old Dominion University. I am interested in exploring the lived experiences of Black first-generation community college students on academic warning. Thank you for taking time out of your day to speak with me. The goal of this interview is to learn more about your experience as a Black and first-generation student on academic warning. Know that there are no right or wrong answers. For a bit of healthy disclosure, I too am a first-generation student, who also identifies as Black.

This interview as well as the follow-up interview will be recorded to help me analyze the data. What you share here will remain confidential, and you will be referred to solely as the pseudonym you chose for this study. Thank you for reading and completing the informed consent form that was emailed to you. The informed consent form provides you will important information about the study including your rights as a participant. Remember that if at any point you wish to stop the interview, you can do so. This interview is expected to last no longer than an hour. Do you have any questions before we start? If no, I will begin by asking the first interview question.

Interview Questions

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. Tell me a little about yourself (your background and interests inside and outside of the classroom)

2. What or who motivated you to become a community college student?

3. Prior to starting college, did you think that racial or first-generation background would influence your college experience? If so, how?

4. When did you realized your academic performance was declining? What did you do after the realization?

5. Tell me what your understanding of academic warning is?

6. What was it like to learn you were placed on academic warning?

7. Who (if anyone) have you shared your current academic standing with? What was the experience of sharing that information with them like?

8. What factors do you believe led to you falling into unsatisfactory academic standing?

9. How would you describe your college experience now since being a Black first-generation student on academic warning? Are there any ways in which it is different from when you were in good academic standing?

10. What parts of being placed on academic warning as a Black first-generation student have been the most challenging? Have there been any parts that have been beneficial?

11. What (if anything) would you have done differently to avoid being placed on academic warning?
    a. As a follow-up, what could the institution have done differently?

12. Please describe your journey to getting back into good academic standing? Have there been any actions that have been especially helpful or unhelpful?

13. Prior to Fall 2021, the term academic warning was called academic probation. The college thought that language could be perceived as unwelcoming. What are your thoughts about the name change?

14. Is there anything that I did not ask that you think I should know?

APPENDIX F

IRB AUTHORIZATION FROM RESEARCH SITE

[redacted]
Institutional Review Board
[redacted]

12/1/2023

To: Gerome Bell
[redacted]

From: Courtney [redacted], Co-chair
Institutional Review Board
[redacted]

Re: Decriminalizing Academia: Black First-Generation Community College Students in Unsatisfactory Academic Standing

Dear Gerome,

After a review of your protocol, it was the decision of the Board that the study meets the federally designated criteria for an IRB exemption under category 45 CFR 46.104(d)(3). Please note the following information:

- **IRB# 23 005**
- **Expiration Date: N/A**

Please note that changes to the protocol must be reported to the IRB immediately and that such changes may warrant a new review. An adverse event is any instance which places participants at risk or at a level or degree of potential harm outside of those indicated within the initial protocol. Should such an event occur, the College IRB must be notified within 48 hours of the event. This information will be forwarded to the Vice President for Planning and Institutional Effectiveness as well as to the Office for Human Research Protection.

Upon receipt of the adverse event report, the co-chairs of the IRB, in consultation with other members and administrators as appropriate, will require immediate suspension of the activity prior to review by the full membership.

Should you have any questions, feel free to contact either myself or my co-chairs, Dr. Helen [redacted] and Rachael [redacted]

Sincerely,

Dr. Courtney [redacted]
Professor
Co-chair, Institutional Review Board
[redacted]

Rachael [redacted]
Assistant Professor
Co-chair, Institutional Review Board
[redacted]

Dr. Helen [redacted]
Assistant to the Vice President
Co-chair, Institutional Review Board
[redacted]

APPENDIX G

EXEMPTION LETTER

OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY

OFFICE OF THE VICE PRESIDENT FOR RESEARCH

aacsb INTERNATIONAL
PROUDLY, AN AACSB ACCREDITED PROGRAM

Physical Address
4111 Monarch Way, Suite 203
Norfolk, Virginia 23508
Mailing Address
Office of Research
1 Old Dominion University
Norfolk, Virginia 23529
Phone(757) 683-3460
Fax(757) 683-5902

DATE:	December 18, 2023
TO:	Mitchell Williams
FROM:	Old Dominion University Education Human Subjects Review Committee
PROJECT TITLE:	[2109593-1] Decriminalizing Academia: Black First-Generation Community College Students in Unsatisfactory Academic Standing
REFERENCE #:	
SUBMISSION TYPE:	New Project
ACTION:	DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS
DECISION DATE:	
REVIEW CATEGORY:	Exemption category #2

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The Old Dominion University Education Human Subjects Review Committee has determined this project is EXEMPT FROM IRB REVIEW according to federal regulations.

We will retain a copy of this correspondence within our records.

If you have any questions, please contact John Baaki at (757) 683-5491 or jbaaki@odu.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Old Dominion University Education Human Subjects Review Committee's records.

VITA

GEROME MAURICE BELL JR., LMSW
Old Dominion University
Darden College of Education and Professional Studies
Department of Educational Leadership and Workforce Development
Norfolk, VA 23529

EDUCATION

M.S.W., 2013, Social Welfare, Stony Brook University
B.A., 2011, Criminal Justice, St. Joseph's College

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

2018-Present	Assistant Professor of Counseling & Transfer Counselor Suffolk County Community College, Riverhead, NY
2013-2018	Transfer Admissions Counselor Stony Brook University, Stony Brook, NY
2011-2013	Child Care Worker Montfort Therapeutic Residence, Port Jefferson, NY

PRESENTATIONS

2023	*Suffolk Community College Adult Learners Strategic Enrollment Management Plan.* American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO) Strategic Enrollment Management Conference, Denver, CO
2020	*Helping Students to a Degree through the Lens of the Guided Pathways Advising Model".* Suffolk County Community College Professional Development Day, Suffolk County Community College, Brentwood, NY.
2019	*College Planning 101.* Southampton High School College Planning Night, Southampton High School, Southampton, NY.
2017	*Money Matters; Navigating the Financial Aid Process and Applying to College.* Bellport High School College Planning Night, Bellport High School, Bellport, NY.

AWARDS

2024	Community College Leadership Poindexter Outstanding Student Award, Old Dominion University
2022	Inaugural Community College Leadership Program Scholarship Recipient, Old Dominion University