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UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Greeley, Colorado

The Graduate School

FIRST-GENERATION FACULTY: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPLORATION  
OF THEIR MOTIVATIONS FOR MENTORING  
FIRST-GENERATION STUDENTS

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

Sarah M. Chase

College of Education and Behavioral Sciences  
School of Educational Research, Leadership, and Technology  
Higher Education and Student Affairs Leadership

May, 2010

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SARAH M. CHASE

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This Dissertation by: Sarah M. Chase

Entitled: *First-Generation Faculty: A Phenomenological Exploration of Their Motivations for Mentoring First-Generation Students*

has been approved as meeting the requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in College of Education and Behavioral Sciences in School of Educational Research, Leadership, and Technology, Program of Higher Education and Student Affairs Leadership

Accepted by the Doctoral Committee

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "w\*QTUi" with a horizontal line extending to the right.

Katrina Rodriguez, Ph.D., Co-Chair

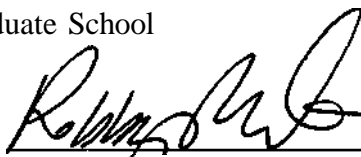
Michael J. Gimmestad, Ph.D., Co-Chair

Jean Schuber Morrell, Ph.D., Committee Member

Heather Helm, Ph.D., Faculty Represental

Date of Dissertation Defense

Accepted by the Graduate School

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robbyn R. Wacker" in a cursive style.

Robbyn R. Wacker, Ph.D.

Assistant Vice President for Research  
Dean of the Graduate School & International Admissions

## ABSTRACT

Chase, Sarah M. *First-Generation Faculty: A Phenomenological Exploration of Their Motivations for Mentoring First-Generation Students*. Published Doctor of Philosophy dissertation, University of Northern Colorado, 2010.

Research indicates that students from first-generation and low-income backgrounds persist and graduate from college at lower rates than their non-first-generation peers. Institutions of higher education can create more welcoming and success-promoting environments for first-generation students by helping them connect with faculty, particularly through mentoring relationships. This research explored the motivations of faculty from first-generation backgrounds who mentored first-generation college students within the federally-funded Ronald E. McNair Postbaccalaureate Achievement Program. Informed by constructivist epistemology and transcendental phenomenological theory as well as Bourdieu's (1986) theory of cultural capital, the phenomenon involving the transition into academe for such first-generation faculty was also explored. Six faculty participants were purposefully selected through contact with McNair program administrators at a doctoral research extensive university in the Rocky Mountain region enrolling a significant proportion of students from primarily rural areas and first-generation, low-income backgrounds. The five primary themes include: illustrations of teaching and mentoring, first-generation status, inspirations for mentoring, strategies for mentoring, and challenges in academe. These themes were further organized by corresponding subthemes and several recommendations for practice are

discussed. These include assessing the needs and expectations of McNair faculty mentors and scholars, encouraging peer mentoring networks, inviting seasoned McNair mentors to orient new mentors, acknowledging the importance of mentoring in faculty tenure and promotion decisions, thoughtfully assessing existing student services prior to implementing new ones, and providing opportunities for faculty and students to share their stories. In its entirety, this research provides a deeper understanding of the experiences of and challenges faced by faculty from first-generation backgrounds.

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my mother, Sandy Fisher, who served as an incredibly loving and supportive role model, and who instilled in me the inspiration for attaining a college degree, no matter the obstacle.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To borrow the words which Picard, one of my research participants, wrote in his own dissertation: "The outcome of any work is never the sole province of one individual's effort, but the product of interactive relationships that consciously and unconsciously move an individual towards a goal and vision" (2000, vii). I have experienced several occasions when truer words could not be spoken. This is one of those occasions. I have been blessed with the encouragement and support of many individuals throughout my life, especially in the process of completing this research. I'd like to acknowledge them and their significant contributions to the completion of this dissertation.

To the members of my doctoral committee: Dr. Katrina Rodriguez, Dr. Michael Gimmestad, Dr. Jean Schober Morrell, and Dr. Heather Helm. Thank you for your enthusiasm and support of this research, and especially for your encouragement of my abilities. I appreciate the way you've stuck with me, even as "life happened."

To my faculty participants: Abel, Alan, Emiliano, Karin, Leah, and Picard. I am privileged to share in your stories and to hear of your amazing experiences. You have greatly inspired me and you continue to inspire me in my work with students and my interactions with family, friends, and colleagues.

To my supervisor, Dr. Tom Smith. Thank you for sharing "a story about a boy" and for giving me just the appropriate amount of gentle nudging and kidding, combined



with a bit of challenge to keep me moving forward. A little guilt about not keeping my end of our "78/88/98/08" bargain didn't hurt either!

To my colleagues and friends in the UNC McNair Program: Becky Freer, Kenya Jones-Brown, and Traci Parry. Thank you for listening and encouraging me regularly, particularly as I've finished writing. You've listened to me excitedly relate ways this research complements our work with McNair scholars. And when-on numerous occasions-I'm certain I drove you crazy talking about my dissertation, you insisted otherwise and assured me that you were fascinated. Whether authentic or feigned, your enthusiasm kept my spirits up and motivated me to keep working.

To our McNair scholars at University of Northern Colorado. Your motivation, your resilience, and your determination to succeed make my professional work meaningful. Thank you for allowing me to be part of your journey.

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wisdom, and humor, along with your authenticity and groundedness. Seriously, you amaze me.

To my parents-in-law, Bob and Joan Chase. Thank you for encouraging me to "go for it" when Joel and I moved to Colorado so I could pursue this degree. Thank you especially for being available whenever and however I needed you-not just during this process, but throughout the past fifteen years. Joanie, thank you for cooking "real" meals, folding laundry, entertaining Kendall, and making sure we had plenty of wine on hand and lots of reasons to celebrate!

To my husband and best friend, Joel. I will never be able to thank you enough for supporting me through this process. You are the reason I was able to accomplish my goal. Thank you for encouraging me to keep going, even when I would have rather spent the weekends playing with Kendall and you. Thank you for never complaining about having to be a single parent for months on end. And thank you for your unwavering certainty of my ability to complete this dissertation, despite my certainty otherwise. I have been-and continue to be-so blessed by your support, encouragement, and generous spirit. I love you! And to Kendall: Having you in my life has provided the inspiration I needed to keep going. Thankfully, each time you cheerfully asked, "Goin' to work?" and I said "Yes" for what started to seem like an endless chain of days, weeks, and months, you never burst into tears at my reply, although I certainly wanted to. I am so excited to spend my time with you and Daddy again!

Finally, to my friend and colleague, Dr. Rene Couture. We did it!

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	Page
PREFACE .....	1
I. INTRODUCTION .....	2
Purpose of the Study.....	3
Methodological Frame and Research Questions .....	3
Operational Definitions: Speaking the Language .....	4
Context .....	6
Significance of the Study.....	8
A Logger's Daughter: My Personal Perspective on the Research . . . .	11
II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE .....	17
Introduction .....	17
Historical Overview .....	18
The Current State of Higher Education .....	24
Higher Education Act of 1965 and the Federal TRIO Programs . . . .	26
First-Generation College Students .....	28
Working Class Academics .....	35
Bourdieu's Theory of Cultural Capital .....	39
The Significance of Mentoring .....	41
The United States: Changing Demographics .....	46
Factors Affecting Student Success .....	47
Problem Identification .....	53
III. METHODOLOGY AND METHODS .....	55
Research Paradigm: Qualitative .....	56
Epistemology: Constructionism/Constructivism .....	57
Theoretical Perspective: Transcendental Phenomenology .....	58
Methodology: Phenomenological Research .....	64
Methods .....	65
Trustworthiness and Rigor .....	74
Summary .....	78

PARTICIPANT STORIES	79
Abel.....	79
Leah.....	88
Alan.....	95
Picard.....	101
Karin.....	110
Emiliano.....	116
Summary.....	126
THEMES AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	127
Theme 1: Illustrations of Teaching and Mentoring.....	128
Theme 2: First-Generation Status.....	142
Theme 3: Inspirations for Mentoring.....	146
Theme 4: Strategies for Mentoring.....	156
Theme 5: Challenges of Academe.....	167
Recommendations for Practice.....	172
Recommendations for Future Research.....	177
Summary.....	179
EPILOGUE.....	180
REFERENCES.....	182
APPENDIX A: Institutional Review Board Approval.....	196
APPENDIX B: Email to Potential Research Participants.....	198
APPENDIX C: Informed Consent for Participation in Research.....	200
APPENDIX D: Interview Protocols.....	203

## LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE	Page
1. The effects of support and challenge on development.....	53

## PREFACE

I have long been interested in further exploring the mentoring phenomenon because of the significant role mentors have played in my own life. Additionally, my interest in first-generation and working class faculty was initially sparked by the book *Limbo: Blue-Collar Roots, White-Collar Dreams*, in which Lubrano (2004) wrote of people who start out life in working class families, but through education, move into middle class lifestyles. When I initially conceived my research questions and the design of this study, I anticipated exploring the phenomenon of mentoring among faculty from first-generation backgrounds. However, it became clear early on that the phenomenon was not, in fact, mentoring. As I progressed with data collection and analysis, a deeper layer of meaning emerged underlying the mentoring experience. In order to more fully understand mentoring, I first had to explore and better understand the educational experiences of faculty who were first in their families to achieve college degrees, and the transition these "first-generation faculty" made as they entered academe. Therefore, the phenomenon explored in this study involves the experiences of faculty from first-generation backgrounds and the challenges they faced as they transitioned into academe as both students and as faculty rather than the originally anticipated phenomenon of mentoring, which remains of interest to me for future research.

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Students from low-income and first-generation backgrounds have been underrepresented in United States' higher education since its inception. Furthermore, research suggests that when persons from such backgrounds do pursue post-secondary education, they tend to persist and graduate at lower rates than their counterparts (Astin, Tsui, & Avalos, 1996; Chen, 2005; Choy, 2001; Gladieux, 2004; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998). When the focus shifts from the undergraduate to the graduate level, the problem appears to be compounded, with even lower numbers of students from these backgrounds continuing on to attain graduate degrees (Choy, 2001; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998). In fact, while students from first-generation families tend to enroll in certain graduate programs (such as MBA programs) at similar rates to that of their non-first-generation counterparts, they have a lower rate of enrollment, persistence, and graduation from doctoral programs specifically (Choy, 2001). One solution to this dilemma involves pairing undergraduate students with faculty mentors who are willing to serve as positive role models while introducing their proteges to the research and graduate admissions processes.

Postsecondary institutions nationwide have established formal mentoring programs to nurture connections between students and faculty. The anticipated outcome would be that, if students from such backgrounds can become comfortable working

alongside and communicating with faculty while they are undergraduates, the benefits of these relationships will follow students to graduate school. Consequently, the transition from the undergraduate experience to the graduate experience will be smoother, promoting further success at the graduate level, and ultimately resulting in a higher number of students from first-generation and low-income backgrounds who successfully attain graduate degrees. This study included faculty mentors in the Ronald E. McNair Postbaccalaureate Achievement Program (also referred to as the *McNair Scholars Program* or *McNair*), which, as discussed in further detail later, is an undergraduate research program for students from such backgrounds.

#### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the motivations of faculty who were first-generation college students themselves, and who choose to mentor first-generation college students within the Ronald E. McNair Postbaccalaureate Achievement Program. In its entirety, this research provides a deeper understanding of the experiences of faculty from first-generation college backgrounds, while suggesting recommendations for further research on this phenomenon among students from first-generation and low-income backgrounds.

#### Methodological Frame and Research Questions

There are various approaches one could take to better understand mentoring relationships and individuals' motivations for being involved in mentoring. While much of the earlier research on mentoring used quantitative approaches (Campbell & Campbell, 1997; Chao, Walz & Gardner, 1992; Thile & Matt, 1995), additional research has more recently been conducted from the qualitative paradigm (Allen & Poteet, 1999; Freeman,



1999; Saur & Rasmussen, 2003; Wallace, Abel, & Ropers-Huilman, 2000). This research study uses the qualitative paradigm and a phenomenological methodology to explore the lived experiences of faculty members from first-generation backgrounds who choose to mentor first-generation/low-income students in the McNair Scholars Program at a university located within a primarily working class, rural region.

The phenomenological research tradition and the constructivist and constructionist epistemologies were used in this research in order to discover the most effective understanding of the experiences of McNair faculty mentors from first-generation backgrounds. Research questions included the following:

- Q1. What inspires faculty who come from first-generation backgrounds to serve as mentors to first-generation students within an undergraduate research program at an institution that enrolls a large proportion of students from working class, rural, and low-income backgrounds?
- Q2. What is the nature of the mentoring relationship between first-generation college students and their mentors who came from similar backgrounds?

#### Operational Definitions: Speaking the Language

While it is difficult to convey the full array of meanings for many terms used in this study, this section provides a general context for which to understand the terms. In particular, class terminology can be exceptionally complex (Lubrano, 2004; Russo & Linkon, 2005). For example, a skilled laborer who works in construction but who does not have a college degree may have significant earnings potential. In contrast, an adjunct or lecturer in the humanities with several years of college education culminating in a doctoral degree may have more education, but a significantly lower earnings potential. The following excerpt, borrowed from Lubrano (2004), offers a straightforward and uncomplicated-albeit non-empirical-view of the importance of class. I offer it here as a

means of expounding upon the ways in which class standing impacts numerous facets of our lived experiences:

The term *class* itself is tricky to define... .When people talk about class, they're referring to nothing less than a culture, with families as the purveyors of that culture. From the moment we're born, our families tell us how to be. You adopt the attitudes held by the people around you, and you learn your place in life....Each class is a distinctive social existence, a culture that creates a sense of belonging among its members... .Class is script, map, and guide. It tells us how to talk, how to dress, how to hold ourselves, how to eat, and how to socialize. It affects whom we marry; where we live; the friends we choose;...the books we read...where our kids are educated.. .In short, class is nearly everything about you. And it dictates what to expect out of life and what the future should be. As powerful as it is, though, class is intangible, a metaphor that marks your place in the world. It's invisible and inexact, but it has resonance and deep meaning (pp. 4-5).

Although there are a number of economic and sociological theories on the use of terms such as *working class*, it is occasionally used in this study to refer, in a general sense, to students from first-generation/low-income backgrounds. It is also important to note that the first-generation and low-income definitions provided here are used in determining a student's eligibility to participate in the McNair Scholars Program.

There are numerous ways to define *a.first-generation college student*, which typically involve the amount of postsecondary education a student's parent(s) received. Because this research involved the federally-funded Ronald E. McNair Postbaccalaureate Achievement Program, the U.S. Department of Education's definition is used. That is, if neither the student's mother nor father earned a baccalaureate degree, the student is classified as first-generation, even if a parent attained some level of postsecondary education.

The federal definition for *low-income* is used in this study. Specifically, if the level of taxable income falls within 150% of the federal poverty level, the student is

considered low-income. In determining income eligibility for dependent students, parental income is used; for independent students, individual student income is used. In 2009, for example, a dependent student from a family of four with parental taxable income of \$33,075 or less would qualify as a low-income student (U.S. Department of Education, 2009).

In this research, the term *underrepresented* refers to persons of color, specifically those classified by the federal government as underrepresented in graduate education (e.g., Hispanic/Latino, African American, Native American, and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander). The term may also include other students from first-generation/low-income backgrounds.

### Context

In this section, further information is provided about the Ronald E. McNair Postbaccalaureate Achievement Program, including history, structure, and eligibility. The intent is to offer the reader a foundation for understanding the context of the McNair program.

Also referred to as the McNair Scholars Program, the *Ronald E. McNair Postbaccalaureate Achievement Program* was established by Congress in 1986 under a reauthorization of the Higher Education Act of 1965. The program is funded through the United States Department of Education, and serves undergraduate juniors and seniors from first-generation/low-income, and/or underrepresented backgrounds who aspire to attain graduate degrees. With the support of program administrators and faculty mentors, students learn to conduct undergraduate research. Participants also learn about the graduate admissions and funding processes, and are exposed to cultural opportunities to

which they may have otherwise not had access. The goal of the McNair Scholars Program is to diversify the professoriate by increasing the number of doctoral degrees earned by students from underrepresented segments of society (including first-generation/low-income backgrounds). In 2009, 200 McNair programs serving 5,430 students were funded at colleges and universities throughout the United States (U.S. Department of Education, *McNair Grantees FY2009*). A detailed description of the McNair Scholars Program, including the history of the program, is offered in the following chapter.

Undergraduate students meeting specific eligibility criteria may be selected to participate as a *McNair scholar* at their postsecondary institutions. In order to be eligible, students must be high-achieving college juniors and seniors (with a 3.0 GPA or higher) who are interested in attaining graduate degrees. Students must also come from either a first-generation/low-income family (defined earlier), or be a member of a population considered underrepresented in graduate education. Currently these populations include Hispanic, African American, Native American, and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander. McNair scholars conduct independent undergraduate research projects with the guidance of their McNair faculty mentor.

Each McNair scholar works with a *McNair faculty mentor* who guides the scholar through the research process. The mentor identification and selection process varies from one McNair program to another. However, all McNair students work with a faculty mentor. For this study, the faculty mentor's role in introducing the McNair scholar to the research process and the academic environment was explored. Specifically, faculty mentors who were first-generation undergraduates themselves were identified at a

university located in a rural, primarily working class geographic region. The identified faculty were asked to participate in the study. Faculty participants themselves did not need to have come from a rural or working class geographic area; however, they were teaching and conducting research at an institution in such a region during the period of data collection. This research further explored these mentors' reasons for and experiences serving as mentors to McNair scholars from similar class backgrounds.

### Significance of the Study

There are several groups that would have a potential interest in the findings of further research on mentoring and first-generation students. These include but are not limited to: McNair scholars and their families, McNair faculty mentors, McNair program administrators and other student affairs practitioners, educational administrators in both K-12 and postsecondary settings, the U.S. Department of Education and federal policy makers, and society in general. Each group will be discussed in further detail in this section.

First and foremost, McNair scholars, who participate individually and personally in the mentoring relationship, stand to benefit from further research on this phenomenon. McNair scholars from first-generation backgrounds are the first in their families to attain a college education. Some have strong support from their families, while others do not. However, a common factor among these students is a powerful determination to succeed. The faculty mentoring relationship appears to be an invaluable component to the success of the program. Further research is needed, however, to empirically validate this claim.

The structure of the McNair program allows faculty members to provide critical support to McNair scholars through the formal mentoring component. McNair faculty

mentors, who offer much of the influence and support to help their proteges succeed, may benefit from knowing more about the nature of the mentoring relationship and the motivations of other faculty from working class backgrounds. McNair mentors are sometimes provided a modest stipend for their services. However, it is likely that many McNair faculty mentors view the stipend as a peripheral benefit of mentoring, and that, in fact, they participate for more intangible and intrinsic reasons, such as the satisfaction of helping students succeed (Campbell & Campbell, 2000; Hardcastle, 1988; Lee, 1999). Additionally, performance incentives that encourage faculty to become involved in mentoring are poorly documented in the literature, and probably do not exist at many institutions. Further empirical evidence in support of mentoring may encourage institutional leaders to provide performance incentives to their faculty who are involved in these activities (Cesa & Fraser, 1989).

McNair program administrators nationwide, who often facilitate connecting student proteges with faculty mentors, may gain knowledge and skills relevant to their work with students and faculty mentors alike. Some program administrators come from the faculty ranks, while others identify more closely as student affairs practitioners. With this in mind, the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) and the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) may be interested in the outcome of this research, specifically as it pertains to the ACPA/NASPA joint initiative *Principles of Good Practice in Student Affairs*. These principles are intended to serve as a guideline for the profession and are a reminder to student affairs practitioners to carefully evaluate and systematically assess both the programs offered and the reasoning behind what they do in daily practice. An overview of the Good Practices includes: engaging students in

active learning, helping students develop values and standards, communicating high expectations for student learning, using inquiry to improve student and institutional performance, using resources effectively, forging partnerships to advance student learning, and building supportive, inclusive learning communities (ACPA/NASPA, 1997). Certainly, research that explores ways in which we can achieve effective faculty/student mentoring relationships within the McNair program has the potential to provide further insight to faculty, student affairs professionals and McNair program administrators.

Institutions of higher education that host McNair and other post-secondary educational access programs may benefit from research exploring mentoring among first-generation students and faculty. Furthermore, many educational institutions (both K-12 and postsecondary) provide some type of formal mentoring program, either through peer and social networks, or as part of academic departments. Institutions that currently provide, or aspire to provide, mentoring to their students may benefit from this research.

Finally, this research may be of interest to the federal government, specifically the U.S. Department of Education, which provides funding for McNair programs. In 2009, the Department of Education allocated over 47 million dollars to the administration of 200 McNair programs nationwide (U.S. ED). In that year alone, these programs served over 5,400 college students from first-generation, low-income, and underrepresented backgrounds. Despite this large federal monetary investment in mentoring, little research has been conducted to explore the effectiveness of the McNair mentoring component.

Broadly speaking, and from a societal perspective, there are larger-scale beneficiaries of research about individuals who come from first-generation, low-income,

and/or working class backgrounds. Specifically, groups who have historically experienced limited access to higher education may potentially benefit from this research. Based on the existing literature, we know that students who come from underrepresented backgrounds may be more hesitant than their peers to pursue mentoring relationships with faculty. An advantage of the proposed research is to discover how we, as educational administrators, can better serve our students from first-generation backgrounds through the mentoring relationship.

#### A Logger's Daughter: My Personal Perspective on the Research

In order for the phenomenological researcher to most effectively understand the lived experiences of the research participants, it becomes critical for the researcher to acknowledge his or her own experiences relative to the phenomenon itself. Creswell writes that this process, known as *epoche*, allows the researcher to "set aside all prejudgments, bracketing his or her experiences and relying on intuition, imagination, and universal structures to obtain a picture of the experience" (1998, p. 52). The following narrative represents my attempt to bracket my thoughts and experiences, while at the same time demonstrating my interest and connection to the research topic.

My story begins: "Sarah, go to school and study hard so you don't grow up to be a log hauler like your old daddy." I do not know how many times I have heard that phrase spoken by my father throughout the past thirty years. Too many to count. I have heard it in multiple contexts: as a little pig-tailed girl riding home in the Peterbilt after going "out to the woods" with Dad; as a high school sophomore struggling through my geometry homework at the kitchen table; even as a doctoral student feeling frustrated with the dissertation process. "Go to school and study hard so you don't grow up to be a log



hauler like your old daddy." I can hear him speaking these familiar words in his gentle encouraging way, with a grin on his face, yet with a serious tone.

When I initially read Lubrano's *Limbo* (2004), I could not help but wonder which class my family belonged to while I was growing up in rural Wyoming. Like many Americans, I figured we were part of the middle class, yet in retrospect, we clearly belonged in the working class; my dad worked long days as a logger to provide us a modest but comfortable lifestyle. Until I was seven years old, we lived in a little trailer house on the outskirts of a small northeastern Wyoming town, with chickens, horses, and a milk cow. Mom sold milk and eggs and stayed at home with my brother and me until I was in fourth grade, when she embarked on her journey to pursue a life-long dream of attaining a college education.

I have never been able to identify specifically why I think of myself as a first-generation college student, because I am definitely not. Literature on first-generation and working class students describes the struggle of college students whose families cannot or do not acknowledge the value of their sons' or daughters' educational achievements. Not only did my mother attain a bachelor's degree in mathematics, but my brother and I were able to witness the sacrifices she and my dad made in order for her to achieve her degree. For five years, Mom drove 150 miles roundtrip daily to attend college full-time as a mathematics education major. She was away at school during the day and when she got home, she spent late nights working on homework. Two years into her degree program, she was diagnosed with a non-malignant brain tumor. She underwent invasive brain surgery, disenrolled the following semester, and then picked up again where she left off—a woman with a dream of obtaining a college degree and determined to become a high

school teacher despite the obstacles, excited to share her enthusiasm for math with students who were as eager to learn as she was to teach.

Both my dad and my mom demonstrated a value of knowledge, education, and "learning for learning's sake." After the regular academic year ended, Mom took summer classes, and my brother and I would ride along with her to Black Hills State College. A few times we even got to sit in on classes with her, pretending like we were college students ourselves. When Mom entered the field experience portion of her education program, I vividly remember her practicing her "rise over run" geometry lecture on my dad, my brother and me.

Despite never having gone to college, my father is one of the most intelligent people I have known. He is also a man who has never acknowledged his own intellectual abilities. His is the type of knowledge that comes from curiosity, and from experience, and from not being afraid to tackle endeavors that you have not tackled before; from an appreciation for arts, music, and literature to a type of mechanical inclination that is rare. In addition, he has the frequent tendency to be self-deprecating, hardly believing that a fellow with "feeble" spelling skills, as he would claim, might actually be brilliant in other areas. Dad took night classes from a local community college extension program: Russian Civilization and Speech Communications. Like Mom, Dad would sometimes practice his short speeches on us or ask for our feedback on his written assignments. "Sarah, you go to school and study hard so you don't grow up to be a log hauler like your old daddy," he would say after asking me to review his grammar and spelling.

We always had books in the house. Not the dime-store romance novel variety, but "real books" like those written by Michener, Tolkien, London, and Hemingway. Dad and

Jack, our closest neighbor, would often exchange books and then get together for a cup of tea and a discussion about the most recent Michener novel they had read. Additionally, both Mom and Dad displayed intellectual curiosity and taught us the value of locating information ourselves. For example, a common response to our questions was "Let's see if we can find the book that will help us figure out the answer to that question." At our house, it was never "*If you* go to college," but rather, "*When* you go to college." The importance of knowledge and education was never devalued in my developmental years.

I have come to realize that perhaps instead of thinking of myself as a first-generation student, I identify as a working class student, much like the "straddlers" that Lubrano (2004) described: people who, through education, move from the working class to the middle class, but who never quite feel comfortable in either culture. As Lubrano stated "I am two people. I now live a middle class life, working at a white collar.. .job, but I was born blue collar. I've never quite reconciled the dichotomy" (p. 1). He further described his book as "a step toward understanding what people gain and what they leave behind as they move from the working class to the middle class" (p. 1).

As a working class college student, I come from a family rich on love, but short on dollars. I relied on scholarships, Pell grants, student loans, and often nearly full-time work to make it through my undergraduate years. My most influential work experience as an undergraduate involved being a work-study employee for the Student Support Services (SSS) program. At the time, I was an undeclared sophomore, struggling with the direction I wanted to take in my future career. I quickly recognized the warmth, caring, and genuine concern that the program staff incorporated in their interactions with program participants. The program director became a mentor to me, and it was her

influence that encouraged me to consider a professional path in higher education and student affairs.

Early in my doctoral program, I conducted a qualitative study exploring the mentoring phenomenon among student affairs professionals. In preparing to write my dissertation, I came across this excerpt from my study, which seems fitting to include here. As a young student affairs professional, and as someone who considers herself fortunate to have been offered countless opportunities, I can profoundly relate to the thoughts that Michelle, one of my participants, shared with me during our first interview:

The sun must have been shining the day I was born because for having so many challenges in my life, I've also been blessed-I can't think of any other wording for it-to have people want to give me opportunities at an unbelievable level. To this day.. .I think that opportunity has given me that open door. A crack to then do whatever I want with what I'm given (Michelle, research participant, 2005).

As a researcher, these words and the promise they convey spoke volumes to me. My own experience as an undeclared college student, unsure of what professional path to take, sparked my interest in the topic of mentoring within the field of student affairs. Fifteen years have passed since I first entered Black Hills State University as an uncertain freshman seeking a door I could open which, unbeknownst to me at the time, would eventually lead me down the path of student affairs work. During those formative college years I, like Michelle, was privileged to develop relationships with a handful of faculty and student affairs professionals who eventually became quite influential in my future career decision. In getting to know them better, I discovered these people who I so admired had several characteristics in common. Each was deeply involved in serving students and each had an obvious passion and enthusiasm for their work. Most

importantly, they all offered me the opportunity to take a glimpse through that open door and they invited me to step inside.

At that time, I could not have guessed that the examples of my own mentors would also influence my education as a graduate student, my professional work with the McNair Scholars Program, and my dissertation research exploring the first-generation faculty phenomenon. It is with continued admiration and gratitude to these mentors that I pursued the research outlined in the following chapters.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### Introduction

The American Dream is predicated on the notion that, with hard work and determination, people can pull themselves up by the bootstraps and build lives beyond their parents' and grandparents' means (Adams, 1931). For many U.S. Americans, pursuit of such a dream includes the attainment of a college education. However, in an academic environment where students from privileged backgrounds tend to be the majority, students from low-income/first-generation backgrounds, such as those from the working class, may feel lost in a virtual state of limbo (Levine & Nidiffer, 1996; Lubrano, 2004) as they attempt to navigate the unfamiliar territory of the American college or university. In fact, according to Levine and Nidiffer (1996) "Poor students regularly felt a sense of being in limbo in their elite education. Not only did they feel that they were different from other university students, they also fit less well in the world from which they came" (p. 92). Further, "poor students at the university were 'hyphenated people'; torn between two cultures, fitting comfortably into neither" (p. 93). Consider, for example, how Orbe (2004) described first-generation college students: "In addition to attempting to learn an 'alien culture' of academic and social rules, [first-generation college] students must also negotiate issues of marginality-on both ends-as

they work to bridge the worlds of their homes/families/neighborhoods and college life" (p. 133).

To establish a foundation for understanding the challenges first-generation/low-income students face as they pursue higher education, and to further understand the role of mentoring for such students, this chapter examines issues these students face in U.S. colleges and universities and discusses the significance of the mentoring relationship, particularly for students from first-generation/low-income backgrounds who choose to mentor undergraduate students from similar class backgrounds. An overview of the following topics is provided: the history of American higher education; the issues of underrepresentation and access to higher education; the Higher Education Act of 1965 and the federal TRIO programs, specifically the Ronald E. McNair Postbaccalaureate Achievement Program; and the significance of the mentoring relationship for college students, particularly those from first-generation/low-income backgrounds. The following pages provide a synopsis of the evolution of American higher education through the lens of access and underrepresentation. The evolution of the student affairs practitioner is included because of its relevance to the concept of mentoring. This overview is organized by defining eras in higher education, as outlined in various sources (Rhatigan, 2000; Rudolph, 1990; Thelin, 1996, 2004).

### Historical Overview

Historically speaking, a college or university education was a luxury afforded primarily to young men from wealthy White families. Women, people of color, and people from low-income families had limited representation on American campuses, and few opportunities to pursue undergraduate degrees, let alone graduate education. After

women's colleges and Black universities began to open their doors in the post-Civil War era, most institutions of higher education still enrolled a disproportionate number of White male students from privileged backgrounds (Horowitz, 1987). Thus, when one views the history of American higher education in its entirety, access to higher education has been available to students from underprivileged backgrounds for only a short period of time.

### *The Colonial Period (1600s -1700s)*

The roots of American higher education can be traced directly back to the residential English models of Oxford University and Cambridge University. During the Colonial Era, American colonists built colleges following this "Oxbridge" blueprint, in which faculty members lived collectively with the students in a pastoral setting (Thelin, 1996). The first of the colonial colleges was Harvard in 1636, followed by the College of William and Mary in 1693, and Yale in 1745. At the time, a college education served less as a method of gaining economic mobility, as it does for many students today. Instead, the colonial colleges concentrated more specifically on educating the "gentleman scholar." The goal of undergraduate education was to develop a progression of responsible leaders, and enrollment consisted solely of upper class White males who attended college to validate an already existing social standing (Rudolph, 1990). Because of the residential arrangement, colleges and their respective faculty members were expected to act *in loco parentis* (in absence of the parent), and were known to employ strict discipline when necessary (Rhatigan, 2000). The *in loco parentis* concept originally stemmed from a commitment to caring, respect, and concern for the development of the



whole student. In addition to developing student intellect, faculty members were concerned with developing the moral and social character of their students.

*The New National Period (1776 -1850)*

As the United States was recognized as a nation in 1776, the college concept grew along with the new nation (Thelin, 1996). Numerous small colleges were founded, which were primarily affiliated with religious institutions. The goals of many of these small colleges revolved around providing religious education and preparing future clergy (Rudolph, 1990). Each church desired its own college, and colleges relied financially upon the church and the contributions of donors. At the same time, colleges experienced a shortage of qualified students due to the fact that many students did not finish secondary education. In order to prepare a higher number of qualified applicants, college preparatory courses were developed. After the passage of the Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862 (or *Morrill Act*), which provided federal funding and support for state land-grant institutions, middle class students began entering colleges in increased numbers, drawing a wider range of socioeconomic statuses to U.S. higher education (Thelin, 2004).

*The University Building Era (1880 -1914)*

During the late 1800s, the concept of going to college became more popular. Attaining a college-level education was viewed as a means of gaining economic stability and improving social status (Thelin, 1996). The Morrill Act provided increased state support of higher education and the university concept gained popularity; states began to establish their own state universities, which were viewed as symbols of state pride. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Morrill Act of 1890 provided funds for Black institutions in seventeen states. Although Black colleges were still separate from White colleges, this period marked an

increase in access to higher education for many Black Americans (Rudolph, 1990; Thelin, 2004).

Also during this time, more women and other minorities started to pursue college educations (Horowitz, 1987). America also experienced a rise in advanced educational attainment such as masters, doctoral, and professional degrees. These advanced programs demanded a stronger emphasis on intellectual development, rather than on social character and moral development. Thus, during the University Building Era (Thelin, 1996), the U.S. experienced a shift away from the previous English educational model toward a German educational model, which was relatively unconcerned with and indifferent to the development of character. Faculty employed a didactic philosophy of information delivery and did not give a great deal of consideration to students' out-of-class experiences.

As the use of campus residential facilities declined, faculty members became less involved in student discipline and development. To offset this occurrence, institutions appointed personnel officers to handle student conduct issues and enforce discipline. These early personnel officers later became known as the first deans, and included Ephraim Gurney and LeBaron Briggs of Harvard, and Thomas Arkle Clark of the University of Illinois. Because they were often occupied with enforcing discipline, many students viewed them as nosy and authoritarian (Thelin, 1996). However, as the role of the dean evolved, personal counseling and student advocacy became a larger part of the dean's responsibilities. Dean Briggs of Harvard was described as gentle and kind. Many early deans were also described as leaders who displayed optimism, compassion, and

warmth, who held high ideals, were genuine and were often quite religious (Rhatigan, 2000).

*Between the World Wars (1915 -1945)*

After World War I, the framework of the modern Student Affairs profession began to emerge. Institutions were pleased to see a surge in student applications for enrollment; in fact, more applications were received than spots were available (Thelin, 1996). However, the increase ultimately resulted in a more selective admissions process, which served to perpetuate the discrimination already being experienced by many minorities.

As mentioned earlier, U.S. higher education witnessed a shift from the English model of education to the German model of education in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, which laid the foundation and furthered the need for recognizable Student Affairs divisions on American campuses (Nuss, 1996). With increased numbers of women and minorities entering college, student bodies became more diverse. More female and minority students meant changing dynamics among institutions that were accustomed to catering to White men. Several institutions sought to resolve the situation by appointing Deans of Women, who handled issues specific to female students. Ultimately, as coeducation became more common, the position of Dean of Women gave way to a variety of other personnel positions (Rhatigan, 2000).

*The Golden Age (1945 -1970)*

The passage of the G.I. Bill (formally the Serviceman's Readjustment Act) in 1944 was a key event during the years after World War II, which became known as the Golden Age in higher education (Rhatigan, 2000; Thelin, 1996). The G.I. Bill allowed

even more Americans to pursue a college education by paying for veterans' educational expenses (Freeland, 1997). Consequently, the United States experienced an even greater increase in access to higher education. The G.I. Bill served as a means to increase diversity on American campuses, both in terms of race and ethnicity, as well as in the number of first-generation college students (Thelin, 1996). Along with the benefits of the G.I. Bill, the federal government recognized the nation's commitment to higher education and institutions of higher education gained influence among American citizens. President Truman proposed the permanent expansion of access and affordability to higher education.

During this era, the need for Student Affairs intervention increased (Nuss, 1996). Many growing states developed community college systems to accommodate commuter students, which in turn created an even greater separation from the original residential educational concept of the English model (Thelin, 1996). In contrast, Student Affairs administrators and theorists such as Alexander Astin (1977, 1993) became aware that living in residence halls seemed to positively influence students' academic performance. Title IV of the Housing Act of 1950 successfully funded new campus housing for resident students, thereby once again encouraging a more residential campus experience (Nuss, 1996).

### *The 1960s*

Political events and activism brought on by the Vietnam War contributed to a general feeling of discontent during the 1960s. The anti-establishment movement caused more feelings of unrest throughout the decade. Additionally, campus enrollments were booming. Many campuses experienced enrollments of 20,000 students and higher,

forcing administrators to find ways to make the large campus feel smaller (Thelin, 1996). Students complained of feeling like another number. Within Student Affairs, the student development concept (Carter & McClellan, 2000; Evans, 1996; Thelin, 1996), which was primarily concerned with development of the whole individual, gained momentum during the late 1960s.

#### *The Era of Adjustment and Accountability (1970 - 1990)*

At the same time that federal funding and federal involvement in higher education increased, so did the need for institutional accountability (Thelin, 1996). The 1960s and 70s brought about increases in federal funding for education, including the Basic and Supplementary Educational Opportunity Grants, which later became commonly known as Pell Grants. Federal work-study programs and student loans increased public access to education, and programs such as Title IX and the Vocational Rehabilitation Act succeeded in bringing more diversity to American campuses. This diversity included differences in gender, age, ethnicity, socio-economic status, culture, religion, sexual orientation, and ability. At the same time federal funding and federal involvement in higher education increased, so did the need for institutional accountability (Thelin, 1996; Thelin, 2004). Despite the increase in federal funding, economic depression caused cutbacks in state funding during the 1990s.

#### *The Current State of Higher Education*

The era of adjustment and accountability, as mentioned in the previous section, appears to have followed us into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Nationwide, institutions of higher education have continued to encounter shrinking budgets and the increased accountability that goes along with them (Carey, 2007; Kelderman, 2009). Many states have faced

difficult decisions regarding how to most effectively finance public higher education within an economy that continues to be stretched. Some institutions have made innovative agreements with their state governing boards to gain increased freedom from state control (American Council on Education [ACE], 2004). While a number of institutions appear to have had success, there are also opponents to the idea, who fear that if institutions gain more freedom from state control, they will eventually fail to fulfill their mission to the public. Some critics worry that if institutions become less accountable to state government and in turn raise tuition, access to public higher education will become even more unattainable for low-income students.

In a recent report on the state of funding at land-grant universities, Kelderman (2009) indicated that the vast majority of those surveyed by the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities have experienced cuts to their state appropriated funds, with some institutions reporting cuts as significant as 20% for fiscal year 2010. Amid the current economic recession, institutions reported major restructuring of both administrative and academic programs in order to accommodate such funding shortfalls. Among other cost-cutting measures, public land-grant universities have instituted hiring freezes on administrative positions, deferred maintenance, and offered fewer courses. At the same time, in-state tuition at such institutions increased by a median amount of over seven percent. In addition, states have used nearly \$40 billion in federal stimulus funds to fill budget gaps this year. Despite these measures, Kelderman indicates it will still take several years for states to recover from the recession. In light of the current economic outlook for higher education, access and accountability remain significant issues across the country.

## The Higher Education Act of 1965 and the Federal TRIO Programs

Congress passed the Higher Education Act of 1965 (HEA) partly to address the issue of access, which provided an initial step in the process of widening educational opportunities for historically underrepresented populations, including women, students of color, students with disabilities, students from low-income families, and students of first-generation status. Specifically, Title IV of the HEA allocated federal funding in support of these initiatives. In the 1960s and 1970s, amendments to the original Higher Education Act created a number of federal programs designed to provide assistance to students in need (United States Department of Education [U.S. ED], *TRIO History*). Among these programs were two K-12 initiatives-Upward Bound and Talent Search-and a collegiate initiative, Student Support Services (U.S. ED). In the late 1960s, the name *TRIO* started being used as an umbrella reference to these federal educational assistance programs. By the late 1970s, the TRIO family consisted of four programs: Upward Bound, Talent Search, Student Support Services, and the Educational Opportunity Centers. In 1986, the fifth and newest of the federal TRIO programs, named the Ronald E. McNair Postbaccalaureate Achievement Program, was created (U.S. ED, *TRIO History*).

Today, TRIO programs are offered in over 1,000 educational institutions, including universities, community colleges, and school districts across the country (Council for Opportunity in Education [COE], *TRIO Directory*, 2009). In fiscal year 2009, the federal government appropriated \$899.4 million to the family of TRIO programs (US ED). Specifically, according to the Council for Opportunity in Education, TRIO programs "help students overcome class, social, and cultural barriers to higher education" (COE, *What is TRIO?* |3).

*The Ronald E. McNair Postbaccalaureate  
Achievement Program*

The Ronald E. McNair Postbaccalaureate Achievement Program, also referred to as the McNair Scholars Program or McNair, was created in 1986 under the fifth reauthorization of the Higher Education Act of 1965. The program was named in honor of Dr. Ronald E. McNair, an African American physicist and astronaut who overcame economic adversity to earn a doctorate by the age of 26 (National Aeronautics and Space Administration). Dr. McNair was killed in the Space Shuttle *Challenger* explosion of January 1986. The McNair Program was designed to increase the number of doctoral degrees (and more specifically, PhDs) achieved by students from ethnic minority groups and low-income, first-generation backgrounds. Additionally, the program seeks to encourage its participants to pursue careers as college and university professors. Federal funding enables Dr. McNair's legacy to positively influence the lives of students known as McNair scholars. In 2009, 200 McNair programs across the country served 5,430 participants (U.S. ED, *McNair Grantees FY2009*).

A central component of the McNair experience involves the opportunity to conduct academic research under the guidance of a faculty mentor. Additionally, McNair scholars receive a number of other tangible benefits including: preparation for the graduate school admissions process; assistance in attaining financial aid, fellowships, and graduate assistantships; academic and career advising; and monetary stipends to help offset educational expenses (Ishiyama & Hopkins, 2003; U.S. ED). In the next section, the significance of mentoring will be discussed in more detail. First however, further information regarding first-generation/low-income college students and their unique dilemma entering and ultimately living within the academy is provided.



## First-Generation College Students

An ever-increasing body of research focuses on the challenges faced by first-generation college students. As defined in chapter I, the U.S. Department of Education classifies a student as first-generation if neither parent achieved a baccalaureate degree (U.S. ED; see also Choy, 2001; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998). The volume of literature on first-generation college students has grown exponentially since the mid-to-late 1980s, when researchers such as Howard London (1989) shed light upon the unique characteristics and challenges facing these students, helping to make them of vital importance to college and university administrators and policy makers. A collection of large scale and longitudinal data sets, coupled with qualitative studies, have allowed educational researchers to better understand the experiences of first-generation students and the characteristics that contribute to the tendency for first-generation students to persist in higher education at lower rates than their non-first-generation counterparts (Chen, 2005; Choy, 2001; Horn & Nunez, 2000; Inman & Mayes, 1999; Kim & Sax, 2009; London, 1992; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Oldfield, 2007; Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004; Pike & Kuh, 2005; Rendon, 1992; Richardson & Skinner, 1992; Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996; Warburton, Bugarin, & Nunez, 2001; Zwerling & London, 1992). With regard to attrition rates among college students, several studies indicate that first-generation students are retained at lower rates than their non-first-generation counterparts (Ishitani, 2003; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998). Additionally, those who achieve bachelor's degrees may take longer than the usual four years to complete them (Ishitani, 2003). Moreover, upon completion of the bachelor's degree, first-generation students are less likely to enroll in

graduate school (Pascarella et al., 2004). In this section, characteristics of first-generation college students, as well as factors affecting their success, are identified and discussed in detail. First, however, I provide an introductory overview of two large-scale and longitudinal studies that have provided volumes of data for which to more thoroughly understand the experiences of students in the U.S. educational system. These studies are the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 and the Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study.

The National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS 88) was a major longitudinal study sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). The NELS 88 was designed to provide data about "critical transitions experienced by students as they leave middle or junior high school, and progress through high school and into postsecondary institutions or the work force" (NCES, 2010). The base year for this study was 1988, when data sets were collected from a nationally representative sample of 24,599 eighth-grade students. In addition to collecting data from the student participants, teachers, parents, and school administrators were also surveyed. Four follow-up surveys of a sample of the original student respondents were conducted in 1990, 1992, 1994, and 2000. Several educational researchers and research teams have used the NELS 88 and follow-up surveys (NELS 90, NELS 92) to further understand the experiences and characteristics of secondary students whose parents never went to college as well as first-generation college students (Chen, 2005; Choy, 2001; Horn & Nunez, 2000).

Like the NELS 88, the Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study (BPS) was sponsored by the National Center for Education Statistics. Unlike the NELS,

though, the BPS specifically follows students who enroll in postsecondary education for the first time. Data was collected relating to persistence, degree attainment, employment, goals, and demographic characteristics such as marital status, income, and debt. The BPS study "tracks students' paths through postsecondary education and helps answer questions of policy interest, such as why students leave school, how financial aid influences persistence and completion, and what percentages of students complete various degree programs." (NCES). The cohorts for the BPS were drawn from the National Postsecondary Student Aid Study. There are three cohorts in total, each of which was surveyed initially, then again in two years and five years following the year of their first college or university enrollment. In this literature review, several studies use data from the BPS, including Nunez and Cuccaro-Alamin (1998), Choy (2001), and Warburtonetal. (2001).

Terenzini et al. (1996) classified research on first-generation college students under three broad categories. These are: (a) comparisons of first-generation and non-first-generation college students on factors regarding demographic characteristics, college choice/selection, pre-collegiate preparation, and academic expectations; (b) descriptions of students' transitions from high school to college; and (c) examinations of college persistence and degree attainment rates. These topics will each be discussed in the following paragraphs, albeit in a slightly different order so as to fit with the natural progression of college preparation, enrollment, persistence, and degree attainment.

### *Demographics*

First-generation college students often possess one or more characteristics that may make it more challenging to succeed in the college environment. Research indicates

that, for example, first-generation college students are often older, married, have more dependents and lower income levels, as well as significant work and family responsibilities (Inman & Mayes, 1999; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Richardson & Skinner, 1992; Terenzini et al., 1996). Additionally, they are more likely to enroll part-time rather than full-time (Chen, 2005; Choy, 2001; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Pascarella et al., 2004; Richardson & Skinner, 1992) and to work more hours per week on average than their non-first-generation counterparts, usually off-campus (Inman & Mayes, 1999; Pascarella et al., 2004; Richardson & Skinner, 1992; Terenzini et al., 1996). First-generation students are also more likely to be Black or Hispanic (Choy, 2001; Terenzini et al., 1996).

#### *Pre-Collegiate Preparation*

First-generation status was negatively associated with academic preparation and college persistence (Warburton et al., 2001). Choy (2001) found that first-generation college students tended to enter college less academically prepared than their non-first-generation peers. They were also more likely to need remedial courses upon entering college (Chen, 2005). Additionally, according to Warburton et al., (2001) first-generation students were less likely to have completed a rigorous academic curriculum in high school (e.g., three to four years of mathematics and science course including calculus, biology, chemistry, and physics, as well as foreign language study); rigorous curricula were positively correlated with postsecondary GPA as well as rates of persistence and degree attainment. Furthermore, as high school students, first-generation students categorically spent less time interacting with teachers, another factor known to be related to academic performance and persistence (Terenzini et al., 1996).

### *Transition from High School to College*

Choy (2001) discussed five sequential steps (as earlier identified by Berkner and Chavez, 1997) that students must complete in order to successfully enroll in postsecondary education. These five steps are: (1) deciding to pursue postsecondary education and deciding which type (i.e., community college, vocational/technical training, four-year college or university); (2) preparing academically for college-level work; (3) taking the SAT or ACT entrance examination; (4) choosing one or more institutions and filing applications, and (5) gaining acceptance and making the financial and other arrangements necessary to enroll (p. 9). Choy reported that students whose parents did not attend college were less likely than their peers to successfully complete all five necessary steps for enrollment into institutions of higher education, whether at two-year or four-year colleges. They also reported receiving less support from family members in planning and preparing for college entrance, including attending programs related to educational opportunities, visiting college campuses, completing college applications, and seeking information and assistance regarding the process of securing financial aid (Terenzini et al., 1996). Additionally, first-generation students were less likely to have an effective understanding of the price of attending college and how to make informed decisions and comparisons regarding the price of one institution versus another institution (Choy, 2001).

### *College Choice/Selection*

Nunez and Cuccaro-Alamin (1998) reported several important considerations for first-generation college students-particularly those who are of non-traditional age-as they make decisions about pursuing postsecondary education. These include but are not

limited to: a need to provide a high-quality living for their families and children; a desire to improve financial situations; the ability to attain adequate financial aid; the ability to complete courses quickly; the ability to take night courses, often to accommodate family and work schedules; the ability to live at home while going to college; and the ability to work while taking classes (Inman & Mayes, 1999). Additionally, first-generation students were more likely to attend two-year institutions (Choy, 2001), tended to have more difficulty selecting a major than their peers (Chen, 2005) with the some of the most commonly selected majors being business and social sciences. Similarly, majors related to vocational and technical fields were also commonly selected by first-generation students, while majors in the physical sciences, humanities, engineering and architecture were more common among non-first-generation students (Chen, 2005).

#### *Academic/Educational Expectations*

Students whose parents never attained a college degree reported having lower educational expectations and lower degree aspirations upon entering college (Choy, 2001; Pascarella et al., 2004; Terenzini et al., 1996). Kim and Sax (2009) found that first-generation college students were less likely to be engaged in research-related faculty interactions. These results are important because their findings also indicated that higher levels of research-related faculty interactions lead to higher degree aspirations and higher grade point averages, as well as enhanced critical thinking and communication skills among all groups of college students studied. In terms of student engagement during the college years, Terenzini et al. (1996) reported that first-generation students were less likely to live on-campus, spent fewer hours per week studying, reported experiencing racial, ethnic, and/or gender discrimination more frequently, and were less likely to

perceive faculty as being concerned about student development and teaching (Pike & Kuh, 2005; Richardson & Skinner, 1992). Because they were more likely to live off-campus, first-generation students spent less time on-campus, which may contribute to a tendency to view the college environment as less supportive (Pike & Kuh, 2005).

Additionally, similar to Kim and Sax's (2009) findings, first-generation students were less likely to participate in honors programs (Pascarella et al., 2004; Terenzini et al., 1996). According to Richardson and Skinner, "For [many first-generation] students, being a college student was just one and often not the most important of many roles" (1992, p. 35). In summary, first-generation students were less engaged in the campus environment overall, according to Pike and Kuh (2005).

#### *College Persistence and Degree Attainment*

In terms of college persistence and degree attainment, first-generation students persisted at lower rates than their non-first-generation peers. Additionally, first-generation students earned fewer credits on average per year than those whose parents had earned college degrees (Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Warburton et al., 2001). First-generation students were also more likely to repeat courses and to withdraw from courses, resulting in lower overall grade point averages for first-generation college students (Chen, 2005; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998). This tendency to accumulate fewer credit hours and attain lower GPAs was consistent during the first year of college (Chen, 2005), as well as throughout the second and third years of college enrollment (Pascarella et al., 2004). In addition to these previous factors related to persistence and degree attainment, Warburton et al. (2001) reported that first-generation students were more likely to transfer downwardly (meaning, for example, from a four-year institution to

a community college) or to stop attending college altogether. For those who did persist and graduate, at the post-baccalaureate level first-generation students were just as likely to pursue MBA and other master's degrees, but they were less likely to enroll in doctoral and professional programs (Choy, 2001). According to Pascarella et al. (2004), "Not only do first-generation students confront all the anxieties, dislocations, and difficulties of any college student, their experiences often involve substantial cultural as well as social and academic transitions" (p. 250). Given this information, it is not surprising that such students also face marginalization upon entering careers in academe, which is discussed in the following section.

### Working Class Academics

The concept of the "working class academic" has been referred to as something of an oxymoron (Dews & Law, 1995). Within the past 30 years, numerous essays, chapters, and compilations have been written to address the unique circumstances of college and university faculty who grew up in working class families (Dews & Law, 1995; Lubrano, 2004; Rendon, 1992; Rodriguez, 1981; Ryan & Sackrey, 1996; Tokarczyk & Fay, 1993). Several common themes emerge within the narratives including: stories of young people who enjoyed reading and who were sometimes criticized and even chastised because of it; college graduates whose parents-proud that their sons and daughters achieved their degrees-wonder why they lack the desire to find "real jobs" instead of continuing on in graduate school; young professionals raised on union rhetoric from hard working blue collar fathers; and present-day academics who recognize the questioning voice of the impostor phenomenon (Clance & Imes, 1978) creeping in amidst the successes, making these highly capable people doubt the merit of their own abilities. The authors of these



stories grew up in a diversity of backgrounds, cultures, religions, and geographic areas, but in many regards, their stories are remarkably similar. The stories also signify several defining characteristics of the traditional working class lifestyle, which are manifested in everything from employment, education, language, entertainment, music, and food to approaches to handling finances and acceptable ways of interacting with and reacting to others (Weber, 1925/1978; see also Russo & Linkon, 2005).

In the autobiographical *Hunger of Memory*, Richard Rodriguez (1981) recounts his experiences as the son of working class parents who immigrated to California from Mexico. Referring to himself as "a comic victim of two cultures" (p. 5), Rodriguez describes the piece as "the history of my schooling," writing, "To admit the change in my life I must speak of years as a student, of losses, of gains" (p. 6). Later, Rodriguez evinces similarities between his own educational experiences and that of Hoggart's (1970) "scholarship boy":

The scholarship boy must move between environments, his home and the classroom, which are at cultural extremes, opposed. With his family, the boy has the intense pleasure of intimacy....Lavish emotions texture home life. *Then*, at school, the instruction bids him to trust lonely reason primarily. (Rodriguez, 1981, P-46)

Rodriguez extends his comparison (by virtue of his personal experience) by describing the scholarship boy's introduction to the academy-initially as an undergraduate, then as a graduate student and finally, as an academic who must reconcile the changes that have occurred in him during his journey:

The scholarship boy pleases most when he is young-the working-class child struggling for academic success. To his teachers, he offers great satisfaction; his success is their proudest achievement.. ..In his grammar school classroom, however, the boy already makes students around him uneasy. They scorn his desire to succeed. They scorn him for constantly wanting the teacher's attention and praise.... Later, when he makes it to college, no one will mock him aloud.

But he detects annoyance on the faces of some students and even some teachers who watch him....In college, then in graduate school, he behaves much as he always has...At last he feels that he belongs in the classroom...To many persons around him, he appears too much the academic. There may be some things that recall his beginnings-his shabby clothes; his persistent poverty; or his dark skin..but they only make clear how far he has moved from his past. He has used education to remake himself. It bothers his fellow academics to face this. They will not say why exactly...But their expectations become obvious when they are disappointed..They want a student less changed by his schooling. If the scholarship boy, from a past so distant from the classroom, could remain in some basic way unchanged, he would be able to prove that it is possible for anyone to become educated without basically changing from the person one was. Here is no fabulous hero, no idealized scholar-worker. The scholarship boy does not straddle, cannot reconcile, the two great opposing cultures of his life. His success is unromantic and plain. He sits in the classroom and offers those sitting beside him no calming reassurance about their own lives, (pp. 65-66)

As Rodriguez illustrates, prior to becoming faculty, academics from working class backgrounds first must learn to assimilate into the alien culture of academe as first-generation college students (Orbe, 2004). London (1992) elaborated on this process:

Whatever the inspiration, for some students, going to college can be an eventful point of departure, one that both prompts and hastens movement into some "other" culture. When this occurs, powerful social and personal dramas are played out, for cultural membership helps define who we are in the eyes of others as well as ourselves, and it does so in the most elemental ways. Indeed, [students]... making such a transition...reported having to renegotiate relations with family members, friends, and, in a fundamental sense, with themselves. These negotiations are not always accomplished easily or with a happy ending, for such passages inevitably call into question the very meaning of allegiance and love, over which people can intensely disagree. Thus, upward mobility can produce a discontinuity that arouses feelings of loss, conflict, and disloyalty-as well as of discovery, reconciliation, and joy. (p. 6)

With regard to the experience, Oldfield (2007), a working class academic himself, noted:

First-generation college students from poor and working-class backgrounds must understand that their new surroundings will require much more from them than just getting good marks. No matter what distance they have physically traveled to their campus, college requires a cultural journey to a very different land than the one they knew as youngsters. For first-generation poor and working-class college students, surviving the social challenges of higher learning can be at least as demanding as achieving a high grade point average, (p. 3)

Part of the reason the process of upward mobility can be so difficult, according to London (1989), is that modern society affords its members additional choices, regardless of from which social class those members came. London explains that in traditional (i.e., pre-industrial) society, expectations for members of future generations were dictated by previous generations with regard to occupation and livelihood, as well as religious and cultural practices. In turn, this lack of choice "encourage[d] the formation of a secure identity" (p. 168). Modern society, in contrast, requires one to make choices, which according to London, makes people (and thus students) "less certain of how and where and with whom they will find themselves" (p. 168) and can result in the type of isolation also referenced by Lubrano (2004). London elaborates:

The ethic of individual achievement and upward mobility that we, on the one hand, extol can, on the other, produce a discontinuity that cleaves families and friends. It is only when we see that mobility involves not just gain but loss—most of all the loss of a familiar past, including a past self—that we can begin to understand the attendant periods of confusion, conflict, isolation, and even anguish that first-generation students report....To say it differently...modernity creates the potential for biographical and social dislocation, so that freedom of choice, to whatever extent it exists, can also be the agony of choice, (p. 168)

Similarly, Rendon (1992), also a working class academic, referenced "how the academy changes foreigners who enter its culture (more than it is changed by them)... [and] the pain that comes from cultural separation" (p. 55) as she reflected on her own emotional response to Rodriguez's (1975) *Going Home Again: The New American Scholarship Boy* after being introduced to it as a first year graduate student at the University of Michigan in the late 1970s.

French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu further elucidated the common understanding of class differences through his theories of capital, including economic capital, symbolic capital, cultural capital, and social capital (1986). Specifically, Bourdieu's theory of

cultural capital provides an essential foundation for understanding the indeterminate state that people can experience as they move from one social or economic class to another.

An explanation of this type of capital follows.

### Bourdieu's Theory of Cultural Capital

In its most basic form, Bourdieu identified cultural capital as affecting a person's social standing and potential privilege. More specifically, according to Barker (2004):

Cultural capital acts as a social relation within a system of exchange that includes the accumulated cultural knowledge that confers power and status. For example, education and/or the ability to talk knowledgeably about high culture has traditionally been a form of cultural capital associated with the middle classes. Cultural capital is distinguished from economic capital (wealth) and social capital (whom you know). Here distinctions of cultural taste are understood to be classifications based on lines of power rather than being founded on either universal aesthetic criteria or individual choice, (p. 37)

The broad theory of cultural capital is further differentiated under three subtypes, identified by Bourdieu (1986) as embodied, institutionalized, and objectified. Embodied cultural capital manifests itself in the actions of persons who possess self-assurance and a sense of expectation or entitlement. Institutionalized cultural capital is manifested through cultural institutions, such as a specific level of educational attainment or academic credential. Finally, objectified cultural capital is manifested through tangible items such as homes, artwork, musical or scientific instruments, and books.

While students from middle and upper class families may have opportunities for exposure to diverse cultural activities, formal dining, and travel among others, first-generation and low-income students may lack exposure to such experiences, which can leave them feeling inadequate, uncertain, or awkward (London, 1989). In his extensive body of work involving status group membership, Weber (1925/1978) explained how a "*specific style of life* is expected from all those who wish to belong to the circle" (p. 932).

In addition to navigating the college or university campus, policies, academic, and social environments, first-generation and low-income students may find themselves facing unfamiliar cultural environments inhabited by students from middle and/or upper class families who seem to naturally have a firm grasp on their new cultural surroundings due to previous exposure and experiences (Pascarella et al., 2004). Access to appropriate cultural capital is beneficial and critical in the experiences of first-generation college students for a variety of reasons. According to Pascarella et al. (2004), students whose parents are more highly educated may have advantages over those whose parents have less education, including an enhanced ability to understand the culture and climate of higher education. Additionally, to non-first-generation students, cultural capital is more readily available and easily accessible via family and social connections. Conversely, by being the first in the family to attend college, first-generation students may, in a sense, be disadvantaged at accessing or understanding information that would be considered basic to non-first-generation students. Such information includes making decisions related to attending college in the first place, deciding where to attend, choosing a major, and financing a higher education. In addition to such academic decisions, first-generation students may be less likely to understand the impact of social choices in the collegiate setting. "In turn," according to Pascarella et al., "this may translate into a comparatively less influential collegiate experience for first-generation students, and perhaps even lower levels of growth in the cognitive, psychosocial, and status attainment-oriented outcomes of college" (p. 252).

Pascarella et al., (2004) used a framework based on cultural and social capital to elucidate the college experience for first-generation students. While students from non-

first-generation backgrounds may benefit from increased amounts of cultural and social capital, it appears that "the college experience itself provides a vehicle for acquiring additional cultural/social capital" (p. 252). Consequently, Pascarella et al. discovered that although first-generation students tended to be less involved in campus activities and less engaged overall, in many ways, they benefitted more overall from such interactions than their non-first-generation counterparts. In this study, the availability (or lack of) cultural capital is significant because the participants all come from first-generation and lower class backgrounds. In upcoming chapters, the shortage of cultural and social capital in the participants' transitions from family life to the academic environment and their resulting feelings of unease and apprehension will be explored further.

#### The Significance of Mentoring

The practice of mentoring has existed for centuries. The term *mentor* was used in Homer's *Odyssey* as the name of one of Odysseus's companions (Homer, trans. 1990). The qualities of Homer's Mentor, including personal warmth toward a protege, encouragement, and guidance on the skills needed to be successful, inform today's understanding and conceptualization of the value of mentors. Despite its distinguished history, only in more recent years have researchers begun to expand our understanding of the many forms of mentoring, its impact on personal and professional development, and the characteristics of mentors and their proteges. Indeed, the topic of mentoring has only been researched empirically within the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Campbell & Campbell, 1997; Fagenson, 1989; Jacobi, 1991; Kram, 1985; Levinson, 1978).

In his classical work *The Seasons of a Man's Life*, Levinson (1978) provided a glimpse into the importance and value of mentoring, particularly as it related to the life

and career transitions of men. Specifically, he stressed that mentors are not parents, or even pseudo-parents. Instead, they assume many roles, including those of teacher, advisor, and sponsor, enhancing the skills and intellectual development of their proteges, and helping initiate their proteges into new careers, organizations, and social circles.

Additionally and notably, Levinson wrote:

The mentor has another function, and this is developmentally the most crucial one: to support and facilitate *the realization of the Dream*. ...He fosters the young adult's development by believing in him, sharing the youthful Dream and giving it his blessing, helping to define the newly emerging self in its newly discovered world, and creating a space in which the young man can work on a reasonably satisfactory life structure that contains the Dream. (1978, pp. 98-99)

At this point, it is helpful to briefly revisit the original purpose of the Ronald McNair Postbaccalaureate Achievement Program. If McNair scholars are viewed as students who enter college with dreams of pursuing, first, undergraduate degrees, and secondly, graduate degrees, the full value of the faculty mentoring experience in the McNair Scholars Program begins to emerge more clearly.

Like the body of research on first-generation college students, there is also a vast amount of literature on mentoring. It covers diverse fields of study, from business and theology, to engineering and education. Likewise, it spans a range of groups, including women in the sciences, elementary school children, students of color, and new faculty. The breadth of the existing literature could easily become a focus of study in itself. However, it is necessary to limit the scope of the literature review substantially. Therefore, I focus on the definition of mentoring, the general functions and models of the mentoring relationship, the changing demographics of the United States, the factors affecting student success, the importance of college student involvement, and the need for mentoring programs.

### *Mentoring Defined*

The term *mentor* is referred to in a variety of contexts and has been defined in numerous ways. In higher education, mentors may be found among the ranks of faculty, staff, administrators, and students, whether undergraduate or graduate. Additionally, mentoring relationships may occur naturally, as the result of serendipitous contact (Redmond, 1990), or through intentional, structured opportunities. Indeed, mentoring is a concept that is difficult, perhaps even impossible, to adequately convey in a manner that resonates universally. Likewise, individuals may have differing perceptions, which are sometimes conflicting, of the mentoring relationship.

For the purposes of this discussion and to promote a shared understanding of this multi-faceted concept, definitions drawn from the mentoring literature will be provided. The first definition is borrowed from Blackwell (1989), who described mentoring as "a process by which a person of superior rank, special achievements and prestige, instructs, counsels, guides, and facilitates the intellectual and/or career development of a person identified as a protege" (p. 30). Lee (1999) expanded on this definition:

The mentor guides the development of the junior person, thus enhancing the chances that the junior person will succeed. The senior partner in the relationship is determined by age, experience, position, or education, and takes on a teaching and nurturing role to the junior partner. The *word partner* is used here to indicate that mentoring relationships should not be unidirectional. Each participant should contribute to the relationship so that each benefits, (p. 32)

The second definition is taken from Jacobi (1991), in which she identified five common components of successful mentoring relationships. These components are as follows:

1. Mentoring is focused on achievement.



2. Mentoring involves three distinct functions on the part of the mentor which include assistance with career and professional development, psychosocial support and role modeling.
3. Mentoring is a reciprocal relationship with both parties benefiting.
4. Mentoring relationships are personal.
5. Mentors have greater experience, influence and achievement in their organizations or environments than do mentees.

Finally, Parkay (1988) defined mentoring as "An intensive, one-to-one form of teaching in which the wise and experienced mentor inducts the aspiring protege into a particular, usually professional, way of life" (p. 196). However, he also provided the following caveat: "This does not mean that the protege becomes a carbon copy of the mentor. Instead, the protege selectively 'takes from' the mentor those attributes that will contribute to the protege's hoped-for unique identity" (p. 196).

In these definitions, the term *mentor* refers to the senior, or more experienced participant within the mentoring relationship or network. It follows, then, that the term *protege* is used to refer to the junior, or novice, participant. In the mentoring literature, proteges are sometimes referred to as mentees or as partners.

#### *Functions and Models of the Mentoring Relationship*

In addition to the rather concrete definitions of mentoring presented above, it is helpful to consider the functions of the mentoring relationship, or ways in which mentors benefit their proteges. These functions are well-documented (Haring, 1999; Kram, 1985; Merriam, 1983; Noe, 1988; Schockett & Haring-Hidore, 1985) and generally fall into two distinct yet interrelated categories: career-related and psychosocial.

Within the career-related category, mentors provide proteges with job-specific knowledge, advice, professional advancement opportunities, and assistance in

acclimating to institutional cultures. The psychosocial category includes personal affirmation, encouragement, support, friendship, and guidance. Additionally, Jacobi (1991) recognized role modeling as a third function of the mentoring relationship. However, in the literature, role-modeling is often included within either or both of the career-related and psychosocial categories. In fact, Lee (1999) cautioned against confusing the nature of mentors and role models: "Role modeling is much less formal in structure, and the role model could be completely unaware that someone is modeling his or her behavior. Mentoring, however, is intentional and longitudinal, generally having a recognizable structure" (p. 32).

Two types of formal mentoring models are also identified in the literature, as explained by Haring (1997; see also Haring, 1999): the grooming model and the networking model. The grooming model, also referred to as the traditional approach, involves a junior organizational member (the protege) who is taken under the wing of a more experienced member (the mentor), someone usually superior in rank. In this relationship, the mentor provides career-related functions, as described in the previous section. Levinson's (1978) description of the mentor's functions illustrates the grooming model:

What are the various functions of the mentor? He may act as a *teacher* to enhance the young man's skills and intellectual development. Serving as *sponsor*, he may use his influence to facilitate the young man's entry and advancement. He may be a *host* and *guide*, welcoming the initiate into a new occupational and social world and acquainting him with its values, customs, resources and cast of characters. Through his own virtues, achievements and way of living, the mentor may be an *exemplar* that the protege can admire and seek to emulate. He may provide counsel and moral support in time of stress, (p. 98)

The networking model can be viewed as an alternative approach to the traditional model. Girves, Zepeda, and Gwathmey (2005) describe it as "more inclusive and

egalitarian" (p. 456), involving a group of peers who come together in order to exchange ideas and share the benefits of the traditional mentoring relationship. Members contribute from their own areas of expertise, and no individual is considered to be "the mentor." A facilitator, who is not a mentor, is designated to provide support to the group, usually in the form of coordinating meetings and communicating information to all the group members.

In their research on the mentoring experiences of traditional-aged college women, Packard et al. (2004) determined that first-year college women were more likely to pursue dyadic (or one-to-one) mentoring relationships, similar to the traditional model described earlier. In contrast, fourth-year college women in this study were more likely to seek out advice and information from multiple mentors, rather than relying on one person. While this approach is slightly different than the networking model of mentoring, it is worth noting. Additionally, Packard et al. claim "traditional mentoring is criticized for its Eurocentricity; African-American feminist scholars reject the linear, one-way socialization model that transforms the mentee into the mentor, and instead favor alternative group models that incorporate communal values and reciprocity" (p. 73). This statement is worth exploring further, particularly in light of the changing demographics of today's college and university students. In this study, research participants were identified based on their involvement as faculty mentors to McNair scholars at Rocky Mountain State University.

#### The United States: Changing Demographics

According to the United States Census Bureau (2004), the demographic composition of the U.S. population will shift considerably during the first half of the 21<sup>st</sup>

century (between the years 2000 and 2050). The percentage of White residents is projected to decrease by approximately 10%, from 81.0% to 72.1%, and the percentage of Hispanic residents is expected to nearly double, from 12.6% to 24.4%. In fact, the White (non-Hispanic) group is the only racial group that is projected to experience a general decline in percentage of the overall population; every other racial category is expected to see an increase in percentage (United States Census Bureau, 2004). By 2050, individuals from what are currently considered minority groups will likely become the majority. At the same time, the number of people living in poverty is also expected to increase. For example, 1.1 million more Americans lived in poverty in 2004 than in 2003 (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, & Lee, 2005). Just as these shifts affect the nation as a whole, they will certainly have a lasting impact on our educational system.

#### Factors Affecting Student Success

In light of the projected demographic shifts, it becomes even more imperative for colleges and universities to recognize the challenges faced by underrepresented populations in higher education. These challenges can include difficulty transitioning into the campus cultural and social environments, as well as an increased need for academic support services, among others. Similarly, a number of factors have been recognized as having a potentially negative impact on students' success in the college or university environment (Ishiyama & Hopkins, 2003; Terenzini et al., 1996). Three of the most recognized factors include: (a) coming from a low-income family; (b) being a first-generation college student, defined as someone who is the first person in his/her family to attain a bachelor's degree; and (c) being a member of an underrepresented or minority group such as African American, Hispanic, or Native American. Historically, these

populations have experienced lower levels of entrance, persistence, and degree attainment from institutions of higher education (Astin et al., 1996; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998).

To illustrate the importance of social class on academic success, Hoyt (1999) described the struggles that students from working and lower class backgrounds experience in the college setting stating: "The confidence that comes with privilege is something with which working and lower class people have little experience... [They] tend to second-guess their statements, decisions, and abilities in matters pertaining to their education" (p. 199). In fact, "the importance of academic and social integration decreases as the level of the student's family education and commitment to graduation increases" (Girves et al., 2005, p. 452; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Despite the circumstances, Tinto's (1998) concept of student persistence in college provides a more optimistic perspective, which is discussed next.

#### *Involvement Matters*

While focusing generally on first-year students rather than on particular social or ethnic populations (i.e., first-generation, low-income, or students of color), Tinto (1998) identified the need for higher education professionals to bridge the perceived gap between academics and student affairs in order to enhance the persistence and success of all students. Reiterating the findings of Astin (1977, 1993), and Pascarella and Terenzini (1991), Tinto stated: "One thing we know about persistence is that *involvement matters* [italics added]" (1998, p. 168). He proposed that colleges and universities engage in collaborative learning experiences that include students, in addition to faculty and student affairs practitioners. Through such interdisciplinary partnerships, students learn

collaboratively, rather than in isolation, allowing them to understand the similarities between seemingly different subjects.

It is particularly relevant to note here that student persistence scholars stress the significance of involving students with one another, but even more importantly, with faculty members. Thile & Matt (1995) recognized Tinto's recommendations for "extensive, *high quality* [italics added] interactions with persons in the social system of the campus [as] critical for student persistence" (Tinto, 1975, p. 116). Additionally, Rodriguez's (2003) research reinforced the importance of influential teachers in the lives of first-generation college graduates, indicating that her participants cited the importance of teachers, like mentors, whose attitudes "influenced [the students'] sense of belonging and consequently, their academic success." She elaborated:

Many described coursework that was extremely difficult, but they loved it, in part because their teachers expressed a strong belief in their worth and abilities. Their teachers engaged these students, showed them that they cared, and expressed confidence that they could do the work. Several of those interviewed said, "My professor" or "My teacher changed my life." (p. 20)

Kim and Sax (2009) noted the significance of research-related faculty interactions for first-generation students and students from lower class backgrounds. Non-first-generation students were more likely to communicate and interact with faculty both in and out of the classroom setting. On one hand, first-generation, lower class, and non-White students reported being less satisfied with their faculty-related interactions overall. However, those first-generation students who engaged in faculty-led research reported higher college-level GPAs as well as higher degree aspirations, and demonstrated enhanced critical thinking and communication skills.

Despite the documented importance of such involvement, the literature also clearly established that all students do not have equal access to informal mentoring opportunities. In particular, students from underrepresented populations, as discussed earlier, appear to have less access to mentoring opportunities than their peers (Girves et al., 2005; Wallace et al., 2000). In a longitudinal study of high-achieving African American college students, Freeman (1999) found that mentoring relationships were important in helping students realize their full potential. Additionally, she concluded that the availability of formal mentoring programs would have eased the transition into the college environment. One way institutions can enhance high quality faculty/student interaction and collaboration is by encouraging participation in mentoring relationships, such as those that are developed through the McNair Scholars Program.

#### *Establishing a Need for Mentoring Programs*

Previous research suggests that participation in formal mentoring programs may increase the academic performance (as measured by GPA) and persistence among college freshmen from ethnically underrepresented groups (Thile & Matt, 1995). Likewise, Wallace et al. (2000) suggest that "although students.. .indicated a desire for a faculty mentor, these relationships were simply not forming spontaneously. The complete absence of informal faculty mentoring relationships indicated a strong need for other institutional personnel to make connections with students" (p. 99).

In a study on retention and race, Lee (1999) found that the African American students preferred having access to any type of mentoring (whether informal or formal) as compared to having no mentoring at all. Finally, Haring (1997) concluded that only a small number of mentoring programs aimed at assisting students of color existed.

Furthermore, several of the programs that existed at that time appeared to contain weaknesses that ultimately caused them to fail. Therefore, while the literature has established the need for and value of mentoring programs, administrators also need to be mindful of ways in which these programs can be better structured, more effective and, as a result, offer more success to their participants.

### *Formal Mentoring Versus Informal Mentoring*

There is ongoing debate within the literature regarding the perceived effectiveness of mentoring relationships established through formal, structured programs when compared with informal, or naturally-occurring mentoring relationships (Chao et al., 1992; Lee, 1999). While naturally-occurring, also referred to as organic, mentoring relationships may be preferable, research suggests that students from disadvantaged backgrounds, in particular, may feel intimidated by the thought of approaching someone whom they view as having significantly more expertise or power than themselves (Girves, Zepeda, & Gwathmey, 2005). Such students desire mentoring, but often lack the necessary knowledge or skills regarding how to approach a potential mentor. Additionally, students may be hesitant to burden someone they already perceive as being extremely busy.

According to Girves et al. (2005) "Traditional mentoring models...pose particular challenges for underrepresented students and faculty. It is the exceptional student who has the initiative, the confidence, or the savvy to initiate informal relationships with a mentor" (p. 454). Likewise, "unless the academic institution is able to promote a continual support system of role models and mentors, students who come from disadvantaged backgrounds are significantly less likely to sustain the motivation and

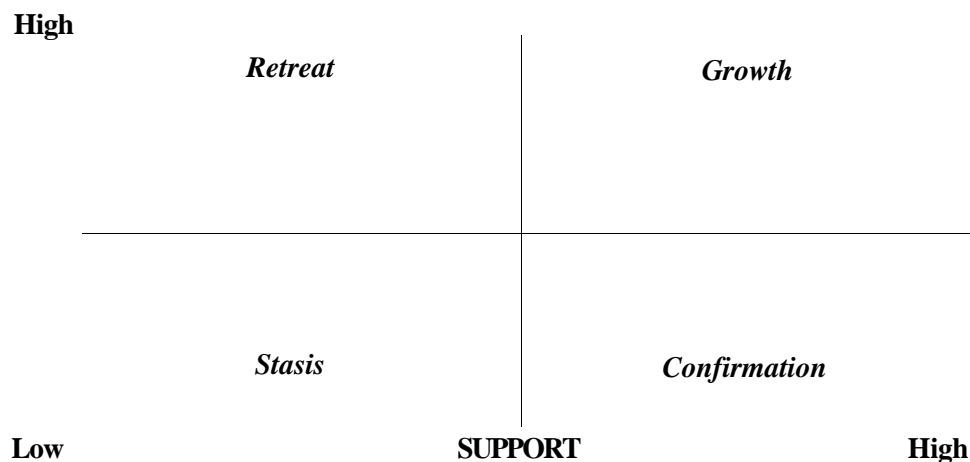


belief system necessary for academic success" (Thile & Matt, 1995, p. 117). With this in mind, educational institutions nationwide have established initiatives to institute formal mentoring programs for an increased number of students to benefit from the mentoring relationship.

### *Challenge and Support*

Regardless of the specific type of mentoring program, Daloz (1986) proposed a model that may be used as a framework for mentors and administrators. The model is based upon the effects of both supports and challenges provided by mentors on behalf of their proteges. Prior to further discussion of Daloz's model, it is relevant to briefly review Sanford's (1966) theory of student development, commonly called Challenge and Support.

The basis for Sanford's theory calls attention to the idea that an optimal balance exists between the amount of challenge and the amount of support college students can reasonably be presented with in the college environment at given stages in their development (Sanford, 1966; see also Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998). In relation to Sanford's theory, and Daloz's (1986) model, Saur and Rasmussen (2003) asserted that "a fine balance between support and challenge are needed in order to foster change and independence" (p. 197) Additionally, they emphasized the importance of maintaining this balance: "Too much support merely confirms and reinforces existing behavior if there is little or no challenge. However, too little support in the face of high challenge can lead to frustration, retreat and, often, failure" (p. 197). Daloz's model is presented in Figure 1.



*Note.* From *Effective Teaching and Mentoring: Realizing the Transformational Power of Adult Learning Experiences* (p. 214), by L. A. Daloz, 1986, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc. Copyright 1986 by Jossey-Bass Inc., Publishers. Reprinted with permission.

*Figure 1.* The effects of support and challenge on development.

Spence (2005) captured the intent behind formal mentoring programs effectively:

When one examines the proliferation of mentorship programs.. .the common denominator that links all programs together is the intention *to create opportunities for those whose history and/or experience has not guaranteed equal access* [italics added].... Mentor ship programs are effective mechanisms to help navigate the playing field, (p. 67)

#### Problem Identification

Although the results are mixed, the existing research generally supports the idea that mentoring does, in fact, benefit college students in numerous ways. When the Ronald E. McNair Postbaccalaureate Achievement Program was established in 1986 the program structure included a formal faculty/student mentoring component. Today, each McNair student is paired with a faculty mentor who guides the student through the research process. In some McNair programs, students are allowed to select faculty mentors with whom they would be interested in establishing research relationships. In other programs,

students are paired with mentors who are pre-selected by McNair program administrators. At the conclusion of the research experience, McNair program administrators may survey their students and mentors about the experience itself, yet little, if any, empirical evidence has been published concerning the effectiveness of these mentoring relationships. While this study does not provide further empirical evidence concerning the effectiveness of such relationships, it will explore the experiences for faculty mentors who come from backgrounds similar to their student scholars with the intention of better understanding their inspirations for serving as mentors to first-generation students.

Much of the current literature focuses broadly on the topic of mentoring. Less research exists exploring the inspirations for faculty from first-generation backgrounds to serve as faculty mentors to first-generation college students in specialized research programs, and how these relationships can positively influence the success of undergraduate students from first-generation backgrounds.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

Ample evidence exists to support the premise that mentoring benefits undergraduate students in a variety of ways. However, as discussed in chapter II, a majority of the existing literature focuses on broad topics within the field. Less research exists on why faculty members from first-generation backgrounds choose to become involved in mentoring relationships within specialized undergraduate research programs such as the McNair Scholars Program. Moreover, the ways in which these relationships positively influence the success of undergraduate students from first-generation and low-income populations at an institution located within a primarily rural, working class region is still unclear. This phenomenological research study explored the inspirations for faculty from first-generation backgrounds to mentor undergraduate students from similar backgrounds.

The McNair Scholars Program offers a unique combination of academic rigor and student support, often combined with activities designed to enhance program participants' personal development as scholars and researchers. However, little research exists to further our understanding of the nature of these mentoring relationships in particular. According to Thile and Matt (1995), "Future research would benefit from a careful examination of the nature of the mentor-protege interaction, taking into account the initiation, content, and interpersonal style of the mentoring relationship" (p. 125). In

this chapter, the research design is further described, including the research paradigm, epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology and methods.

#### Research Paradigm: Qualitative

According to Merriam (2002), "the key to understanding qualitative research lies with the idea that meaning is socially constructed by individuals in interaction with their world" (p. 3). In my own experience, mentors have played a critical and significant role in my personal and professional development. Additionally, while I can appreciate the universal truths of the quantitative paradigm and the positivist approach, my curiosity lies more in uncovering the deeper meanings and the essence of the phenomenon. For instance, as I embarked on this research study, I found myself particularly interested in better understanding the inspiration for faculty to become involved in mentoring relationships with first-generation, low-income McNair scholars, as well as the meaning made through such mentoring experiences and the transition into academe for faculty from first-generation backgrounds. For this reason, this study uses a qualitative paradigm to answer the following research questions:

- Q1. What inspires faculty who come from first-generation backgrounds to serve as mentors to first-generation students within an undergraduate research program at an institution that enrolls a large proportion of students from working class, rural, and low-income backgrounds?
- Q2. What is the nature of the mentoring relationship between first-generation college students and their mentors who came from similar backgrounds?

Because qualitative inquiry is emergent in nature (Schwandt, 2001), this study also explores the educational experiences of first-generation faculty as they transitioned into academe. Additionally, this research uses both constructionist and constructivist epistemologies, which are discussed in the next section.

### Epistemology: Constructionism/Constructivism

Generally speaking, epistemology refers to the nature of knowledge, or more specifically "a way of understanding and explaining how we know what we know... The theory of knowledge embedded in the theoretical perspective and thereby in the methodology" (Crotty, 1998, p. 3). *Constructionist* epistemology suggests that human beings use the world and the objects within it to construct their own meaning and views of reality, rather than to discover it (Crotty, 1998). *Constructivism*, on the other hand, "connects action to praxis and builds on antifoundational arguments while encouraging experimental and multivoiced texts" (Lincoln & Denzin, 2000, p. 158). Constructivist learning theory, for example, explains learning as a "constructive process in which the learner is building an internal illustration of knowledge, a personal interpretation of experience" (Kristinsdottir, 2001, |1).

It is important here to reveal an acute distinction between the constructivist epistemology and the constructionist epistemology, which are frequently used interchangeably. *Constructivist* epistemology is based upon the idea that reality, and therefore meaning, is *individually* constructed while *constructionist* epistemology focuses on how reality and meaning are *collectively* generated and transmitted (Crotty, 1998). Crotty differentiates the two by explaining "It would appear useful, then, to reserve the term *constructivism* for epistemological considerations focusing exclusively on 'the meaning-making activity of the individual mind' and to use *constructionism* where the focus includes 'the collective generation [and transmission] of meaning'" (p. 58). Both epistemologies were central to this research because of the importance of understanding how participants make meaning, both individually and collectively, of the mentoring

experience. However, it is important to note that primary emphasis was placed on the constructivist epistemology since much of the inquiry focused on meaning-making from individual perspectives.

#### Theoretical Perspective: Transcendental Phenomenology

Historically, the roots of interpretivism have been attributed to Weber's concept of *Verstehen*, or understanding (Crotty, 1998). The fundamental nature of interpretivism lies within the notion that human reality is constructed through each person's interactions and experiences with the physical and social world (Merriam, 2002).

Phenomenology, in fact, is considered one of the three "historical streams" of the interpretivist approach to human inquiry (Crotty, 1998). The other historical streams are hermeneutics and symbolic interactionism. Crotty described phenomenology as "putting oneself in the place of the other.... Phenomenological research of this kind emerges as an exploration, via personal experiences, of prevailing cultural understandings" (1998, p. 83). According to Creswell (1998), phenomenological research "describes the meaning of the lived experiences for several individuals about a concept or the phenomenon" (p. 51). Additionally, according to van Manen (1990) "...phenomenology is the systematic attempt to uncover and describe the structures... of lived experience" (p. 10). Finally, and more specifically, Moran (2000) explained Husserlian phenomenology as "a bold, radically new way of doing philosophy, an attempt to bring philosophy back from abstract metaphysical speculation wrapped up in pseudo-problems, in order to come into contact with the matters themselves, with *concrete living experience* [italics added]" (p. xiii).

The term *phenomenology* existed before Edmund Husserl's time; however, the German mathematician and philosopher is credited with the formal conception of the phenomenological movement in Europe at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Specifically, Husserlian phenomenology "came to exert decisive influence on twentieth-century thought" (Crowell, 2006, p. 9). Despite Husserl's conception of the phenomenological movement, it was several of his colleagues, students, and successors, including Heidegger, Sartre, Levinas, and Merleau-Ponty, who pushed Husserl's thoughts in new directions and further developed phenomenological insights (Crowell, 2006; Moran, 2000; Sokolowski, 2000). Transcendental phenomenology, most closely associated with Husserlian phenomenology, is used as a theoretical frame for this research because, as Moustakas (1994) explained: "Transcendental phenomenology is a scientific study of the appearance of things, of phenomena, just as we see them and as they appear to us in consciousness (p. 49)."

### *The Emergent Nature of Qualitative Research*

By its very nature, qualitative research is emergent in design. It is amorphous in that it lacks the rigid formal structure characteristic of quantitative research. Merriam (1998, 2002) and Creswell (1998) appropriately explore ways in which qualitative research design continually emerges throughout the data collection and analysis processes. Merriam (1998) explicates:

Throughout the research process—from designing the study, to data collection, to data analysis—there are no set procedures or protocols that can be followed step by step. The guidelines and the experiences of others can help, but the researchers must be able to recognize that the best way to proceed will not always be obvious. The very lack of structure is what makes this type of research appealing to many, for it allows the researcher to adapt to unforeseen events and change direction in pursuit of meaning. The investigator's role in qualitative research can be compared to that of a detective. At first everything is important; everyone is



suspect. It takes time and patience to search for clues, to follow up leads, to find the missing pieces, to put the puzzle together, (pp. 20-21)

As such, Merriam later explained the need for the qualitative researcher to be highly intuitive and tolerant of ambiguity, ready to "make adjustments along the way, even to the point of redirecting data collection, and to 'test' emerging concepts, themes, and categories against subsequent data" (Merriam, 2002, p. 14). Schwandt (2001) further described the nature of emergent design saying "By allowing for and anticipating changes in strategies, procedures, questions to be asked, [and] ways of generating data...the field-worker seeks to make his or her plans (i.e., design) attuned and responsive to the circumstances of the particular study" (p. 63). Finally, Creswell (1998) conceptualized the qualitative data collection process as a circle consisting of interrelated activities including gaining access/establishing rapport, purposeful sampling, data collection, and resolution of field issues, among others. Creswell emphasized the significance of the circle, explaining that the qualitative researcher may enter the process at points other than the traditional one of "locating a site or individual" (p. 110).

As I write up the findings of this phenomenological research study, I find myself reflecting on the salience of the emergent and flexible nature of qualitative research and its tendency to shift, "responsive to [the] changing conditions of the study in progress" (Merriam, 1998, p.8). When I initially conceived my research questions and the design of this study, I anticipated exploring the phenomenon of mentoring among faculty from first-generation backgrounds. However, it became clear early on that the phenomenon was not, in fact, mentoring. As I progressed with the data collection and analysis processes with the mentoring phenomenon in mind, a deeper layer of meaning emerged underlying the mentoring experience. In order to more fully understand mentoring, I first

had to explore and acknowledge the educational experiences of faculty who were first in their families to attain college degrees, and the transition these "first-generation faculty" were required to make as they entered the world of academe. Therefore, in this study, the phenomenon is the transition into academe for faculty from first-generation backgrounds. The originally anticipated phenomenon-mentoring among faculty from first-generation backgrounds-remains largely relevant and valuable for further study. Certainly, understanding my participants' transitions into academe would be an appropriate and congruous component of further understanding their mentoring relationships with first-generation students. With that being said, however, in this study, I focus on the academic transition phenomenon.

#### *Phenomenological Key Terms and Concepts*

Providing cogent understanding and explanations for the work of leading phenomenologists such as Husserl and Heidegger can be daunting to even experienced researchers. Auspiciously, several scholars have provided clarity to complex phenomenological concepts; these scholars include Moustakas (1994), van Manen (1990), Creswell (1998), Moran (2000), and Sokolowski (2000). My interpretation of the key terms and concepts in phenomenological research is based primarily on these authors' explanations, which are explored in further detail in this section, beginning with *intentionality*.

One of the most fundamental concepts in developing a solid understanding of the phenomenological perspective is the concept of *intentionality*, which refers to the act of being internally conscious of (or inseparably connected to) something. Sokolowski (2000) emphasized its importance, writing "...every act of consciousness we perform,

every experience that we have, is intentional: it is essentially 'consciousness of or an 'experience of something....Every act of consciousness, every experience is correlated with an object. Every intending has its intended object" (p. 8). Furthermore, Moustakas (1994) stated "Knowledge of intentionality requires that we be present to ourselves and to things in the world, that we recognize that self and world are inseparable components of meaning" (p. 28). More simply stated, intentionality is a way to understand the idea that the human brain is able to connect with external objects in a non-physical sense. Intentionality is comprised of two dimensions, known as the textural dimension (*noema*) and the structural dimension (*noesis*) (Moustakas, 1994). Before I discuss the next concept, however, it is important to note that the term *intention*, in the phenomenological sense, should not be confused with the ordinary meaning of the word, as in "a plan of action." Rather, it is conveyed in the theory of knowledge, or-as discussed earlier-human consciousness (Sokolowski, 2000).

A second foundational concept for phenomenology is a differentiation between the *natural attitude* and the *phenomenological attitude*. Simply, the *natural attitude* encompasses all that is in the world and all that which is explained according to the laws of nature (Moran, 2000). As human beings, we encounter numerous objects as we go about the process of living our daily lives, including trees, buildings, artwork, and other people. The *world*, then, can be described as the backdrop or context for which interactions take place between human beings and the objects they encounter. With this in mind, Sokolowski (2000) expounded on the natural attitude as follows:

..in the spontaneous, natural attitude we are directed toward all sorts of things, but we are also directed toward the world as the horizon or context for all the things that can be given, and correlative to the world is the self or the ego, the agent of the natural attitude, the one to whom the world and

its things are given, who is both part of the world and yet in intentional possession of it (pp. 46-47).

The *phenomenological attitude*, on the other hand, requires humans to become somewhat of "detached observers" or "spectators at a game...contemplating the involvements we have with the world and with things in it...We are no longer simply participants in the world; we contemplate what it is to be a participant in the world and in manifestations" (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 48).

Another central concept to phenomenological research involves the researcher's ability to suspend his or her predetermined assumptions about the world and the meaning that can be interpreted within it. In phenomenological terms, according to Sokolowski (2000), this suspension is also referred to as *bracketing* or *epoche*, an expression borrowed from Greek Skepticism that "signifies the restraint...we should have toward our judgments about things... we should refrain from judging until the evidence is clear" (p. 49). In the process, the researcher "set[s] aside all prejudgments, bracketing his or her experiences and relying on intuition, imagination, and universal structures to obtain a picture of the experience" (Creswell, 1998, p. 52). The "Logger's Daughter" section in chapter I represents my effort to acknowledge my own experiences and preconceived ideas about the phenomenon prior to commencing the data collection process.

Finally, with an understanding of the differences between the natural attitude and the phenomenological attitude, as well as the concept of *epoche*, one can better understand the concept of *phenomenological reduction*, which is the shift away from the natural attitude and toward a more restrictive phenomenological attitude (Moustakas, 1994; Sokolowski, 2000). The process of phenomenological reduction requires one to bracket out the extraneous milieu present within the world, as a larger context for the

phenomenon itself, in order to focus more narrowly on the object of inquiry (Patton, 2002). More specifically, phenomenological reduction involves several distinct steps including bracketing, horizontalizing, clustering horizons into themes, and organizing themes into textural descriptions of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). These steps, which comprised the method for data analysis in this study, are further discussed in the next section.

A transcendental phenomenological study conducted by Moerer-Urdahl and Creswell (2004) provides an example of the ways in which phenomenology has previously been used to expand our understanding of the value of mentoring. Moerer-Urdahl and Creswell explored the ripple effect theory as it related to mentoring in a youth leadership program. More specifically, the ripple effect concept theorized that mentors invest time, energy, and commitment to mentoring activities throughout their lifetimes. Over the long term, an increasing number of lives are positively influenced by these investments. Consequently, the benefits and rewards of the initial mentoring commitment begin to multiply and expand exponentially.

#### Methodology: Phenomenological Research

Phenomenological research, in particular, can be quite perplexing. A primary reason for this lies in the fact that phenomenology is grounded in philosophy, as described by the work of Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Sartre, and a variety of others (Dreyfus & Wrathall, 2006), as discussed earlier. However, phenomenology is also one of the widely accepted research traditions, or research methodologies (Creswell, 1998; Moustakas, 1994). In this section, I discuss phenomenology as a research methodology in more detail.

In his explanation of interpretivism and phenomenology, Crotty (1998) called attention to the relationship between research data and emergent themes, stating, "researchers... want to make sure that the themes pinpointed in the data do, in fact, arise out of the data and are not imposed on them" (p. 83). Phenomenological research, then, concerns removing ourselves from ordinarily understood meanings in order to see concepts in a new light or from a new perspective. Furthermore, Merriam (2002) asserted that the "defining characteristic of phenomenological research is its focus on describing the 'essence' of a phenomenon from the perspectives of those who have experienced it" (p. 93). It is important to note, here, the emphasis on essence. This is not to say that the research participants themselves are not important. In fact, they are vital to the qualitative paradigm; however, in phenomenological research, primary emphasis is placed upon the essence of the phenomenon, or the "thing itself more than on the people who have experienced the phenomenon. In fact, Crotty (1998) called attention to this notion in his description of the phenomenologist's battle cry: "Back to the things themselves!" (p. 78). Following the phenomenological tradition, then, each of the six participants later described in chapters IV and V are essential individually to this research. More importantly, however, the phenomenon of being faculty from a first-generation background becomes the central focus.

## Methods

### *Setting*

Collectively, the Council for Opportunity in Education divides the federal TRIO programs into ten smaller geographic regions. Region VIII is referred to as the Association of Special Programs in Region Eight (ASPIRE), which is comprised of

institutions in Colorado, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah, and Wyoming. Upon initiating contact with the McNair and TRIO program administrators at Rocky Mountain State University (RMSU), located in Region Eight, I obtained IRB approval from both RMSU (as the research site) and University of Northern Colorado. Six research participants were purposefully identified from RMSU. This institution was of particular interest because it enrolls a significant proportion of students from primarily rural areas. In fact, of the over 8,000 undergraduate students enrolled at RMSU in Fall 2008, fully 63% were residents of that state. The remaining top three feeder states to RMSU were Colorado (with 16% of the total student population), Nebraska (with 4% of the total), and South Dakota (with 2% of the total). In Fall 2008, 44% of all full-time undergraduate students at RMSU were determined to have some type of financial need. Additionally, 23% of all full-time undergraduate students at RMSU were awarded need-based scholarships or grant aid. Moreover, while the state boasts a high school graduation rate higher than that of the nation (90.9%) as compared to 84.5%), the rate of residents with a bachelor's degree or higher is below the national average. Less than one-quarter (23.3%) of residents age 25 and older have achieved a baccalaureate-level education or higher as compared to the national average of 27.4% (United States Census Bureau, 2008).

### *Participants*

This study further explored the inspirations of faculty mentors who come from first-generation backgrounds similar to those of their McNair proteges. For this reason, I purposefully selected six McNair faculty mentors (Crotty, 1998) through initial contact with McNair program administrators at Rocky Mountain State University. In phenomenological research, in particular, the intent is to purposefully select participants

who have experienced the phenomenon itself (Moustakas, 1994), with less emphasis placed on the number of participants involved in the study.

RJVISU and McNair administrators, who served as gatekeepers to the research process and its participants (Creswell, 1998), were provided a copy of the Institutional Review Board proposal, which outlined the research. After obtaining permission, I worked collaboratively with these administrators to identify faculty mentors who fit the research criteria (e.g., faculty from first-generation backgrounds). Next, the RMSU McNair administrators contacted the identified faculty mentors to explain the purpose and goals of the study and inquired about their interest in participating in my research. Finally, I directly contacted the six faculty members who responded affirmatively to the initial inquiry. I then met with each respondent individually to share further information about the proposed research. All respondents expressed an interest in the research and each agreed to participate in the study. Subsequently, signed consent forms were obtained from the six participants.

The participants' formal mentoring experience within the McNair Scholars Program varied widely. Some participants had mentored only one McNair scholar, while the most experienced participant mentored many McNair scholars at a minimum of two different universities. This participant's experience with McNair stretches back some dozen years or more. Additionally, during the participant recruitment process, I stipulated that mentors had to have already completed at least one round of the formal mentoring component so as to allow for more effective reflection regarding their mentoring experiences.



### *Data Collection Procedures*

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews of approximately 50-90 minutes in length (Creswell, 1998). Each participant engaged in a minimum of three interviews, with some participants completing a fourth interview, depending upon content and necessity. All of the interviews were conducted by me, as the researcher, during the months of March through November of 2008. Each interview was audio recorded and transcribed for data analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted on an individual basis in the participants' offices and homes in order to maximize confidentiality. When available, archival data was collected, including magazine and journal articles as well as conference proceedings.

#### *Semi-Structured Interviews*

To guide my research, I developed an interview guide based upon a review of literature concerning mentoring characteristics, types, and outcomes for those involved in mentoring relationships, as well as literature on social class theory. The semi-structured interviews were progressive in nature (Merriam, 1998); participants were asked to reflect on their overall experiences with their mentoring partners, as well as on specific instances as mentioned during the interviews. The interview guide addressed topics such as: mentors' experiences coming from first-generation backgrounds; the influence or absence of mentors in participants' lives; how mentoring relationships were initiated; demographic characteristics of the mentor; perceptions of the benefits of being a mentor; expectations of mentoring relationships; relevance to the undergraduate research process; and personal and/or professional development associated with the overall mentoring experience.

Because this research was phenomenological, it was especially important to ask only open-ended questions in order to minimize the potential for bias. Questions focused on the participants' lived experiences with the phenomenon (Creswell, 1998). Therefore, I developed questions prompting participants to recount their experiences regarding their first-generation status and mentoring in an open and thoughtful manner, so as to stay within the phenomenological tradition (Crotty, 1998). Additionally, topics for follow-up were identified throughout the interview and data collection processes. The following questions guided the interviews:

1. Tell me about your background, including your childhood and family life.
2. How would you describe your upbringing? 4
3. How would you describe your family's values and perspectives on educational attainment?
4. Tell me about your own personal experiences as a first-generation college student.
5. What differences did you perceive between your undergraduate and your graduate experiences?
6. Describe someone special in your life who has influenced you in a positive way.
7. Describe a time when your experience as a first-generation student influenced the way you related to your McNair scholar.

### *Researcher Reflexivity*

Prior to conducting interviews, it is critical for the phenomenological researcher to engage in self-reflection, or reflexivity, which is an important component of the data collection process (Wolff, 2002). The intent behind reflexivity is for the researcher to stay mindful of his or her biases regarding the phenomenon and to address these as they become apparent. I journaled prior to each interview session in order to maintain

reflexivity throughout the data collection and analysis phases, and I have incorporated portions of my research journal as appropriate throughout chapters IV and V. In his own phenomenological research experience, Wolff revealed the significance of reflexivity, saying: "Since phenomenological methodology is an embodied process, the researcher must engage in self-reflection to understand how the process is unfolding" (p. 117).

### *Epoche*

As previously discussed, epoche-or the suspension of "judgment about the existence of the world and.. .existential assumptions made about everyday life and in the sciences" (Schwandt, 2001)—is a vital part of phenomenological research. It requires the phenomenological researcher to set aside assumptions stemming from the natural attitude in order to become more open to receiving the phenomenon itself from the phenomenological attitude (Sokolowski, 2000). From a simple perspective, the idea of bracketing suggests that phenomenological researchers can effectively disregard their experiences with the phenomenon being explored in order to, in a sense, become objective observers of the phenomenon. However, the concept of seeking cannot be separated neatly from inquiry, as Husserl's description of epoche or transcendental reduction would lead one to believe. Heidegger (1962) extended Husserl's concept of transcendental reduction by validating the importance of seeking to the nature of inquiry, writing, "Every inquiry is a seeking. Every seeking gets guided beforehand by what is sought" (p. 24). According to Ashworth (1999), bracketing is "...part of a quest for unassailable truths which will form the basis for a reform of understanding. We find, having performed bracketing appropriately, pure and indubitable phenomena, detached from the shifting and ephemeral" (p. 707).

Ashworth (1999) identified types of assumptions that should be bracketed, one of which addresses the "temptation to impose...life-world claims emanating from objective science or other authoritative sources [i.e., research literature]" (p. 709). For this reason, I prepared an initial literature review to meet the requirements of the doctoral proposal. However, I refrained from adding additional literature until after the themes related to this phenomenon emerged, so as to avoid the potential for becoming biased by the existing literature concerning the experiences of first-generation college students and working class academics. Specifically, there are several sources that I did not read (and frankly of which I was unaware) as I collected and analyzed my data. After all of chapters IV and V were complete, I returned to the literature and voraciously read sources such as Rodriguez's *Hunger for Memory* (1981), Rendon's *From the Barrio to the Academy: Revelations of a Mexican American "Scholarship Girl"* (1992), London's (1989, 1992) work on first-generation college students, and select essays from Dews and Law's *This Fine Place so Far From Home* (1995), for example.

Epoche is not a singular, finite, one-time-only action, but rather a concept that involves an ongoing process that must be revisited throughout phenomenological data collection and analysis. I initially attempted to bracket my assumptions concerning both the experience of growing up in a working class family and that of being mentored as an undergraduate, as portrayed in the "Logger's Daughter" section of chapter I. Also, I kept a research journal in order to remain cognizant of my potential biases and assumptions regarding the research. Additionally, I engaged in conversations with others (including my faculty advisor, my supervisor, and a few select colleagues) about the research process as it unfolded. For example, I was able to speak with my brother frequently

throughout the data collection and analysis period. I mention my brother specifically because we share a common upbringing and family messages regarding the value of education-and because he, too, teaches at the university level. Through our conversations, I was able to continue acknowledging my own assumptions, in essence "laying them out on the table" while asking him to challenge them. It is important for me to note that at no time did any of the people mentioned here have access to the interview recordings. Rather, I simply discussed my understandings and assumptions about the participants' experiences with them in order to keep myself in check.

### *Data Analysis*

In addition to the process of bracketing and clarifying the researcher's personal stance, the phenomenological data analysis for this study involved a series of steps, as described by Creswell (1998):

The original protocols are divided into statements or *horizontalization*. Then the units are transformed into *clusters of meanings* expressed by psychological and phenomenological concepts. Finally, these transformations are tied together to make a general description of the experience, the *textural* [noematic] *description* of what was experienced and the *structural* [noetic] *description* of how it was experienced, (p. 55)

Merriam (2002) described the process of phenomenological reduction as "continually returning to the essence of the experience to derive the inner structure of meaning in and of itself" (p. 94). During the process of horizontalization, all of the data was regarded as equally important, with no data having more value than any other. Through this process, data was then categorized into themes, which later informed the textural and structural descriptions, as mentioned earlier in this section by Creswell. Finally, the findings were written up using "rich, thick description" (Merriam, 1998), as called for in the qualitative

paradigm. In phenomenology, specifically, the reader should be able to clearly understand what it would be like to have experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 1998).

After bracketing my own perceptions of and experiences and collecting data through interviews and observations, I analyzed the data by horizontalizing all the information in the interviews. As described earlier, this means that all the initial data was treated as being equally important and relevant to the phenomenon. Next, I determined which portions of the interview transcripts were not relevant to either mentoring or the experience of transitioning into academe for faculty from first-generation backgrounds, and these portions were kept, albeit disregarded. This process of horizontalizing and clustering the data into themes allowed me to focus carefully on the most important and relevant aspects of the phenomenon. In describing horizontalization, Moustakas (1994) explained: "We consider each of the horizons and the textural qualities that enable us to understand an experience. When we horizontalize, each phenomenon has equal value as we seek to disclose its nature and essence" (p. 95).

To further elucidate the process of phenomenological reduction, pretend for a moment that we are analyzing a song. The sound of each instrument, each voice, and each note are equally important horizons to the song as a whole, so each of these aspects would be horizontalized during the listening (or analysis) process. After recognizing each of these qualities, we might shift to analyzing the message of the song and the intended meaning that the writer conveys. Next, we could identify the emotions or feelings that we, as listeners, experience as we hear the song.

Stepping away from the musical example momentarily and back to my research, I used *imaginative variation* to identify the essential structures of the phenomenon. This

process involved altering these structures in order to determine whether or not they were truly essential to the phenomenon itself. In our example, we could imagine that a trombone replaces the piano and a male voice replaces the female voice. How would the song sound different, and what different meanings might be conveyed through these changes? Would our emotional response to the music change along with the instruments and voices? If we respond affirmatively, we know then that these characteristics (instrument and voice) are essential elements or universal qualities of the song's essence.

Finally, the last step in the analysis process involved synthesizing the essential elements and essence, as identified earlier, into a coherent description of the phenomenon (Creswell, 1998; Moustakas, 1994). It is worth repeating here that the final write-up of a phenomenological study allows the reader to feel that he or she has actually experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 1998).

#### Trustworthiness and Rigor

In qualitative research, just as in quantitative, it is important to establish the validity and reliability of the study. The concepts of *trustworthiness* and *rigor*, however, capture the essence of the qualitative paradigm more effectively. From a phenomenological perspective, "You demonstrate validity by showing that you collected your data in a thorough and authentic manner, were rigorous in your analysis, [and] can explain alternative competing meanings...." (Worthen, 2002, p. 141). Merriam (1998) commented further on the concept of trustworthiness in qualitative research:

One of the assumptions underlying qualitative research is that reality is holistic, multidimensional, and ever-changing; it is not a single, fixed, objective phenomenon waiting to be discovered....What is being observed are people's constructions of reality-how they understand the world.. ..Most agree that when reality is viewed in this manner, internal validity [or credibility in qualitative terms] is a definite strength of qualitative research, (pp. 202-203)

According to Guba and Lincoln (1989), four specific criteria can be used to determine the rigor of qualitative research, including credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability, which are each discussed in the following section.

### *Credibility*

Analogous to the concept of internal validity in quantitative research, Guba and Lincoln's (1989) credibility criterion requires the researcher to establish a sense of validity or believability from the perspective of the research participants. Because phenomenology involves describing the lived experiences of the participants with regard to the phenomenon, the participants are, in a very legitimate sense, the only persons qualified to assess the credibility of the findings. Three methods of enhancing credibility were used in this research: member checking, peer examination, and triangulation (Creswell, 1998).

The process of *member checking* requires the qualitative researcher to revisit each participant and ask them to review transcripts, observations, and overall themes and provide feedback on them (Merriam, 2002). This allows the researcher to ensure that the research participants feel the phenomenon has been adequately captured and conveyed in the final stages of data analysis. Upon completion of my interviews and observations, I asked each participant to review my observations, as well as my themes and initial findings. The feedback provided by my participants allowed me to revise the themes and findings as necessary in order to strengthen the trustworthiness and rigor of the findings prior to final dissemination.



Similar to member checks, *peer examination* was also used to strengthen the rigor of the study. To protect the confidentiality of the research participants, peer examination occurred in consultation with my dissertation committee, primarily through interactions with my research advisor, who scanned "some of the raw data and assess [ed] whether the findings [were] plausible based on the data" (Merriam, 2002, p.26). Additionally, one instructor (who is not affiliated with the McNair Program) at Rocky Mountain State University and two McNair staff members at University of Northern Colorado reviewed chapters IV and V.

Finally, *triangulation* allows the qualitative researcher to enhance the overall credibility of the study (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 2002). In this study, multiple sources of data were used to triangulate the findings including both data triangulation and methodological triangulation. I conducted multiple interviews with each participant, analyzed additional documents, and observed participants in relevant settings.

#### *Dependability*

A second criterion for establishing trustworthiness, according to Guba and Lincoln (1989) is *dependability*. In quantitative research, dependability may be likened to reliability, or the ability to obtain the same results in subsequent studies. However, the same data can never be recollected using qualitative methods. Therefore, with dependability the researcher is "concerned with the stability of the data over time" (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 242). Likewise, because methodological changes and "shifts in construction" (p. 242) are to be expected due to the nature of emergent design, it is paramount for qualitative researchers to carefully record decisions regarding data analysis techniques, which can later be useful during the audit process (described later).

### *Confirmability*

A third trustworthiness criterion is *confirmability*, which is most closely related to the traditional concept of objectivity. That is, the research findings must be confirmable by external objective sources-beyond the researcher. Or, as Guba and Lincoln (1989) stated, "Confirmability is concerned with assuring that data, interpretations, and outcomes.. .are rooted in contexts and persons apart from the evaluator and are not simply figments of the evaluator's imagination" (p. 243).

Guba and Lincoln (1989) suggest that both the dependability and confirmability criteria can be enhanced through the use of audits. In this research, I maintained such an audit trail, consisting of both audio records and transcripts of all the interviews. Additionally, I maintained a research journal and extensive notes regarding the data analysis and decision-making processes (Merriam, 2002). I also kept copies of all electronic correspondence with my research participants concerning their thoughts and impressions of the research findings.

### *Transferability*

According to Guba and Lincoln (1989), as opposed to the other trustworthiness criteria, the *transferability* of qualitative research is determined by the reader (or receiver), rather than by the participant or the researcher. However, researchers can enhance transferability by providing adequate thick description throughout the research narrative. This type of rich, thick description is particularly evident in chapter IV and chapter V when the participants and themes are described in detail. Additionally, I include quotes from the participants so their stories can be shared in their own words and from their own perspectives. Ideally, receivers of the research should be able to identify

areas from their own experiences with the phenomenon being explored. Stated another way, the findings may resonate with readers.

### Summary

This qualitative research study was informed by transcendental phenomenology. As a qualitative researcher, I am interested in better understanding the meaning constructed by my research participants surrounding the experience of being faculty from first-generation backgrounds; for this reason, this study uses both constructionist and constructivist epistemologies. Six research participants were purposefully selected through intentional interactions with the McNair Scholars Program administrators at Rocky Mountain State University. A series of semi-structured interviews was conducted with each participant. Interview transcripts and notes were coded using data analysis techniques consistent with the phenomenological methodology, including horizontalizing and categorization of emerging themes. The findings were revealed using rich, thick description of the phenomenon. In the following chapter, I convey the research participants' experiences using a combination of emic and etic perspectives, to include stories of the participants' experiences in their own words, as well as my interpretation, as the researcher, of their experiences with the phenomenon. Finally, emerging themes are discussed in chapter V.

## CHAPTER IV

### PARTICIPANT STORIES

Each of my participants has a unique and intriguing life story to share. During the period of data collection, all the participants were faculty at Rocky Mountain State University, a state university enrolling a large proportion of students from working class, rural, and low-income backgrounds. The participants self-identify as the first in their families to attain an undergraduate degree-and subsequently, each was the first to attain a doctoral degree. Two are education faculty; the others represent the fields of business, chemistry, social work, Chicano studies, and criminal justice. Two participants identify as Chicano, one as Black, and the others as Caucasian. They were raised in different states, including California, Nebraska, Connecticut, Texas, and Colorado. Four of the six are male and two are female. All described being raised in working-to-lower-middle class families. In this section, I attempt to portray each of the participants in a way that the reader may develop a deeper appreciation of their backgrounds and life experiences.

#### Abel

Abel describes himself as the son of migrant farm workers. Both his mother and father migrated from central and south Texas with their families to the Nebraska panhandle. Originally, the families planned to work in the sugar beet fields for one summer. However, the families settled in, and even today most of Abel's family remains

in Nebraska. Abel's parents married at a young age; his mother was 17 and his father 20. By the time his mother was 23 or 24, she'd given birth to six children, with Abel being the second oldest child, and the only boy, among five sisters. An adopted cousin was like a brother to Abel, who described his family as a traditional Mexican family that adhered to a fairly strict set of gender and age-based rules. The boys were expected to look after the girls, and with this responsibility came more privileges. Though of Mexican heritage, Abel is a fourth-generation American; his maternal grandmother was born in central Texas and his paternal grandmother came to the United States around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Abel characterized his father's early educational experience as a "classic push-out story." Despite being a "top-notch student," Abel's father was not allowed to enter the eighth grade because he missed the last two weeks of his seventh grade year when the family migrated to Nebraska to work in the sugar beet fields:

The story that my father tells me is that they told him that he could take seventh grade over or you can't go to school at all, and he said, "Well, I just won't go to school." So he walked home and started working for the rest of his life.

After leaving school and moving to Nebraska, Abel's father met Abel's mother, who became pregnant after her eighth grade year.

In Nebraska, the family lived in several locations during the first few years, including a small four-room structure nicknamed a "beet shack," which lacked running water and was located on a farmer's property. Despite the simplicity of the family's home, Abel conveyed a sense of good fortune in comparison to other nearby farm laborers:

The one we lived in was pretty nice compared to what some other people had to live in. I guess they even had some that were portable, you know, little one room

portable houses that people would pull themselves.. .move it to the next field or whatever.

In addition to his father's union job at the local sugar factory, Abel's entire family worked together in the beet fields. His father was able to negotiate an agreement with the landowner that allowed the family to live on the farm rent-free in exchange for a guaranteed work crew in the summers, which included Abel, his mother, grandmother, sisters, aunts, and other relatives:

It's pretty difficult when you look back at it. It wasn't like my mom paid a babysitter to go work out in the fields. We would all go out to the fields with my parents-with my mom-and be out there all day long. Myself and my older sister would ride herd on the younger ones. We had a '57 Nomad station wagon. Me and my sister would get out and help my parents do a couple of rounds of thinning beets in the morning. The kids would be sleeping by themselves in the station wagon. Right about the time that they'd be waking up we'd be coming back from a round or two and then my sister and I would have to watch my younger siblings. And then my father would take off to his job 'cause he'd have to be at work at 8:00, but he would be out in the fields at 5:00 at the crack of dawn helping my mom do more rounds because we got paid.. .it was kind of like piece rate or whatever. At five years old-and my sister would have been six-we would go and help 'em in the fields and we wouldn't be doing our own row, we would kind of go up and it was a process of them teaching us how to thin beets, and they'd correct our work. I would help my mom and my sister would help my dad.

These experiences left Abel with an indelible work ethic and a strong impression of the family working together as a team.

During Abel's early years, a neighboring farmer who also happened to be a member of the local school board urged Abel's mother to make sure her only son had an opportunity to stay in school due to his high scores on a recent exam. Abel recalls his mother thanking the neighbor and then later commenting to Abel and his father, "He wasn't telling us anything we didn't already know because we saw that in you early on. You would read to your sisters before you even started kindergarten." When Abel's older

sister began kindergarten, their parents spoke Spanish less and less frequently at home, particularly in front of their children:

My parents would speak Spanish with each other but not all the time and probably increasingly less as the years progressed. They spoke English with us. [When I asked] them "how come you guys decided that?" they go "We don't even know if we decided that. We just started doing that." To me, it's kind of like one of those things that they grew up in Texas and they experienced extreme racism or discrimination and they probably figured "Our kids are going to learn English to the best of their ability so they don't have to experience what we did."

Although Abel's parents did not speak Spanish frequently as he and his siblings became educated, it was clear through my interactions with Abel that the language holds a significance that continues to securely connect him with his heritage and his family.

When Abel was ten, the family moved from the farm into town. Although they initially planned to move back to Texas, the family had established a home and lifestyle in Nebraska and decided to stay. Though not particularly welcoming, Abel described their life in Nebraska as better than the earlier 20<sup>th</sup> century social and political climate in Texas from which his parents' families had come, particularly in terms of cultural tension:

It was alright. It's not like people kicked us and invited us to everything that was going on. There was the Mexican community and the White community and they left us alone and they let us work. It was better than what was going on in Texas at the time. They had a lot more discrimination-overt discrimination-that they had to face in the schools which is probably what happened in terms of my dad's situation with the school. I know there were policies to prevent people from leaving the state of Texas, particularly Mexican people at times of harvest when they needed workers themselves and so they would have these policies about the prevention of farm workers leaving the state.

Eventually, Abel's family was able to save up enough money to purchase their own home in a "blue collar, working class neighborhood." Abel elaborated, saying their new neighborhood was "in the White part of town-it wasn't in the *barrio*. It wasn't across the

tracks, and that was a conscious decision my parents made." Later he shared how being the only Mexican family in their neighborhood gave "my dad and mom some golden opportunities to teach us things about racism and discrimination." Abel's parents' decision to keep their family out of the *barrio* resulted in opportunities for Abel that he most likely would not have had elsewhere:

Because of biased enforcement of laws, some people get punished differently, you know? A lot of my [neighborhood] friends that would get stopped by the cops would get let go. Whereas, a lot of my [Mexican] friends would get stopped and right away they'd get a ticket. I did notice these differences all along... I never had a Latino mentor or a Latina mentor. All of the people that mentored me were people that were White, but they identified that I had the ability and they encouraged me to go on in a lot of different situations.

These early sociocultural experiences undoubtedly played a critical role in fostering Abel's future academic research and activism.

Abel knew early on that he would pursue a college education, recognizing the tangible benefits a higher education would bring: a good job and a way to help his family. He recalls telling his mother "After I go to college, I want to buy you a really nice washing machine. That was one of the first things I was going to buy her after I got my education and was able to get a good job." Abel's parents were supportive of his decision to go to college. Not wanting to be a "burden on his parents," who still had his four younger sisters to support, Abel insisted on helping pay his way through school. In retrospect, Abel credits his parents for instilling such a strong work ethic in his sisters and him, which ultimately led to his insistence that he put himself through college. "Trying to decide which school to go to, and of course looking at cost, [my father] told us 'Whatever we decide to do, he'd support us.'" However, Abel could not help but sense a tinge of disappointment from his father at his disinterest in enlisting in the military. Abel,



thinking his father's disappointment reflected "him trying to cop out of his stated commitment for me to go to college," discussed it further with his mother who divulged that enlisting in the military had always been his father's own dream, but he was unable to due to poor eyesight. He elaborated, "The biggest regret my father had was not being able to enlist in the military.. .so he was encouraging me to go into the military more so because it was his dream."

When he arrived on campus as a new freshman, Abel recalled being surprised by instances that non-first-generation students probably would not think twice about. For example, he shared his astonishment (and his father's) upon learning he could purchase college football tickets at a discounted rate:

I remember going to campus and finding out the first day that I could buy Big Red football tickets at a student price, you know. We were already Big Red fans at the time, and I said "Dad, I can buy tickets for the whole year for this much, and he goes "Really?" and I said "Yeah, and I guess I can sell 'em to you or you can use 'em if you wanted to come up," and he goes "Okay, we'll buy that ticket!"

I choose to incorporate this particular story because, to many, the act of a student purchasing tickets to a college football game is such an ordinary occurrence. However, the incredulity conveyed by both Abel and his father in this vignette captures the innocence of inexperience that occurs as first-generation students and their parents navigate the unfamiliar territory of the collegiate environment.

Despite having always been "on the college track," the realities of college presented challenges that Abel was initially ill-prepared to handle. Because he was helping put himself through school, he ended up working too many hours, a situation commonly faced by first-generation undergraduates (Inman & Mayes, 1999; Pascarella et al, 2004; Richardson & Skinner, 1992; Terenzini et al., 1996). He admits that as a

straight-A student in high school, he never developed the study habits he would need to be successful in college. Additionally, as a first-generation student, Abel's parents were unable to offer him assistance in navigating the maze of policies and procedures that came with college enrollment. Perhaps most importantly, Abel admits being incredibly homesick, saying, "I never realized just how much I liked being at home and how much the Latino community meant to me." He eventually dropped out during his third semester, becoming a "blue collar worker just like my dad, like a bunch of guys I knew." Seven years later, after working hard and playing hard too, Abel was laid off from a job and mandated to attend outpatient treatment for alcohol abuse. At that point, he made the decision to return to college part-time. After a semester at a local community college, Abel transitioned back to full-time study at his former university.

While in the process of completing his undergraduate education, Abel met a social psychology professor who encouraged Abel and his classmates to learn the process of conducting research. The same professor introduced Abel to the concept of graduate school. As he drew nearer to graduation, two of Abel's sociology professors encouraged him to apply to graduate school, sensing that he would do well with graduate study. Additionally, they provided information and applications for a newly established minority graduate fellowship. Again, being a first-generation college student, Abel viewed the fellowship application as "more paperwork to fill out," not understanding the full benefit receiving a fellowship would bring:

I remember meeting [my advisor] in front of the library and he goes "Just the person I was looking for." He opened up his briefcase and took out a folder that had the graduate application and minority fellowship application. He said, "We need to get this filled out by the end of the week. You've got a good chance of getting in and a good chance of getting this fellowship. It's \$7500.00 for the year and they'll waive your tuition." I go, "What's that mean?" and he goes "Here's a

guy that's working two part-time jobs, taking out students loans, and that whole thing. You just have to make reasonable progress toward your degree and they'll give you \$7500.00 for the year." And I go, "Wait a minute...you mean they're going to pay me to study?"

As the previous vignette illustrates, it took some convincing by Abel's advisor to persuade him that the graduate fellowship was legitimate. Ultimately though, Abel applied for graduate school and for the fellowship, which he was awarded. In subsequent years as a doctoral student, he also applied for and received a Ford Foundation pre-doctoral fellowship, due in part to the research skills he developed as an undergraduate through a summer research program funded by the National Science Foundation.

Abel's family had limited ability to understand why, after finally completing his undergraduate degree, Abel chose to continue on to graduate school. However, they were encouraged by the fact that his studies would be fully paid through his fellowship, which seemed "like a pretty good deal" in their eyes:

I did my best to explain it to them, but the good thing they saw is that I didn't have to pay. [They expressed] "It must be okay if they're going to pay you to do this and you don't have to work." I said, "I just try to keep my grades up and that's all I have to do - work in the library studying and stuff. Sounds pretty good." They didn't really know what to tell me. I think they were happy just as long as I didn't ask for too much from them, you know?

The concept of a fellowship was as foreign to his parents as it was to Abel when he initially learned of it, just as funding an undergraduate education can seem like a foreign concept for many first-generation students.

As a new graduate student in sociology, Abel quickly became disillusioned with his program and nearly quit during his first semester. It felt to Abel "like a place for privileged people to come and talk about how to fix society." Up to that point, Abel's experiences led him to believe that community activism, rather than talk, was a more

tangible and immediate way to serve the needs of society. He shared, "I didn't like what I was reading... what people now call 'dead White men.' So it wasn't until I read W.E.B. DuBois' work that things started clicking for me." He recalls sharing his concerns with a professor, saying, "I don't know why we have to read this [meaning classical theorists like Durkheim and Marx]. What does this do for me and my community? I think I'm going to quit." Rather than giving up on Abel, she acknowledged his concerns, while at the same time helping him understand the value of furthering his understanding and his education. Abel recalls her saying:

I understand where you're coming from. If you want to quit, that's fine. If you quit right now, you'll be great at whatever you do. You go home, you get a job, and you work in your community. You'll be great at it. But that's just at home. If you continue with this, you could probably touch a lot more people and you'll probably be able to inform a lot more people about what it is to be Latino, what it is to be a person from a "marginalized" group, and you'll be able to change more minds.

Abel credits this professor, whom he considers a mentor, with encouraging him to stay in graduate school. At the same time, she showed him how to apply sociological theory in a broader context while helping him think more critically about what it means to be an activist.

Abel's time as an undergraduate and graduate student caused him to reflect on the sacrifices made by his family in order for him to attain his education. Specifically, his training as a sociologist frames the way in which he recalls his mother's acquired ability to "navigate social institutions" on her family's behalf. Abel seemed regretful that she never had an opportunity to further her own education as he shared:

[My mother] was top-notch in terms of academic ability. I wish she could have gone [to college]. She does some amazing things. In many families, it's usually the woman who has to navigate the social institutions, the rules and regulations about getting your kids into school, what kinds of programs are available, taxes,

all that kind of stuff. She was the one that had to figure those things out. She had to navigate those social institutions and learn how to do all that. I mentioned earlier that she was the crew leader in the summertime and so she would have to figure out the pay for everybody and settle disputes. So you look back and see what she did and it's amazing-and with seven kids in tow. I think that's what keeps me balanced lots of times when I start complaining about how tough I have it or whatever. I always remember them and still see them plugging away and that's what keeps me going with everything.

When I asked Abel to describe his family's perspectives on his level of educational attainment, he fondly recalled a memory of the first time his parents overheard a student refer to their son using his formal title:

We went to eat at a barbecue joint and one of my students was our waiter. He said "Hey Dr. A," and my dad said "They just called you "Dr. A," and I go "Yeah, that's the title that comes with a PhD, and he says "Huh? They call you 'doctor' all the time?"

In reflecting on this story, I am reminded of his father's initial disbelief at learning that Abel could purchase Big Red tickets at a discounted rate. Perhaps it is the small delights-like getting a good deal on college football tickets, or hearing your son being called "doctor"-that are some of the biggest surprises in the educational process for first-generation college students and their families.

#### Leah

Leah also described herself as having roots in Texas, growing up in a Dallas suburb, the middle child and the only girl, born six years after her older brother and six years before her younger one. Leah shared that she and her brothers "like to think that we're all only children 'cause we're so far apart." During Leah's childhood, her mother worked as a bookkeeper and later as a data processor, eventually starting her own small business selling bookkeeping software to larger companies. Her father was a machinist for a large Texan tool company:

I remember my dad working the night shift and coming home with little pieces of metal embedded in the soles of his shoes. At one point he got laid off from Hughes and he worked for a couple different companies. He tried to start his own company and that didn't go well. Then he ended up going back to work for a company in Dallas and he was working for them when he had a stroke and died some 20 years ago. He was only 52 when he died.

Neither of Leah's parents earned a college degree as she was growing up. She estimates that her father attended college for about a year prior to becoming a machinist. Her mother took night classes and may have earned an associate's degree in bookkeeping or accounting. Interestingly, not long before she retired, Leah's mother decided to return to college to earn her bachelor's degree in literature at the age of 65. At first she worked full-time while taking one or two classes each semester. Eventually, however, she retired and completed her bachelor's degree afterward. In contrast, Leah describes her father as "wanting good things for us," but rather than encouraging his children to further their education, he was "all about hard work and being responsible and pulling your load, but not necessarily education."

Leah fondly recalled sitting around the living room as a child with her parents and older brother, who were all avid readers. Additionally, her parents were members of the local MENS A society, a club for people who score within the upper two percent of the general population on intelligence tests. They often welcomed other MENSA members to their home for social events and meetings. Of her parents, Leah joked, "The people who were involved in the club-at least the friends of my parents-were all these kinds of oddballs. So I think my parents were also oddballs."

In addition to their intellectual endeavors, Leah and her family were lovers of the outdoors, particularly camping and backpacking. She enjoyed sharing a favorite story about having never stayed in a bona fide hotel until she participated in a high school band

trip as a teenager saying, "For our family vacations, we always went camping." In fact, as a Girl Scout troop leader, Leah's mother led kayaking and backpacking trips in lieu of more traditional Girl Scout activities like baking and sewing. The troop eventually converted into a coeducational branch of scouting called Explorers, in which its members participated in a variety of high adventure activities.

Leah described her family as working class with middle class values, particularly with regard to their perspectives on education:

My perception of it is that in terms of finances, I would call us working class because we were always hurting for money, always. I think I had like \$100 a year clothing budget when I was in high school. We didn't have much money for food. I just remember it being really, really tight all the time, especially because my parents got divorced when I was in high school and things got even tighter after that. But knowing what I know now about class, I feel like we had the trappings or maybe the attitude of middle class, but the finances of working class. So in terms of really valuing education-that came from my mom very clearly-very, very clearly. It was expected that when I graduated from high school I was going to go to college.

Leah's working class perspective became more evident as she shared a story about her early career interests with me. It is likely that similar stories are common among working class students, particularly those who are first in their families to go to college, who tend to limit their academic majors to those with which they are familiar:

When I graduated from high school I actually wanted to be a truck driver, and I went to the first two days of truck driving school-like the free sessions that you can go to before you have to actually start paying for it. I remember my mom just basically saying, "This is not good enough for you. You need to go to college," and walking me over to the local university and being like, "Enroll this girl right now." I knew that I needed to go to college, but I was never really interested in it. I did okay in school, but it wasn't very challenging for me in high school. I loved driving and I thought there was something romantic about being a truck driver. When I was in junior high I wanted to be a high school band director. That actually was throughout a big chunk of my high school life. That's when I remember going to my band director when I was in junior high and saying, "What would I need to do to be a band director," and him saying, "Well, you need to be

able to play a lot of different instruments." So I started trying to pick up different instruments and stuff like that.

As I listened to Leah recount her youthful desire to become a truck driver and learned of her mother's resulting disapproval, I could not help but smile to myself. In my mind, I heard my own father whisper "Sarah, go to school and study hard so you don't grow up to be a log hauler like your old daddy."

Ultimately, Leah's mother succeeded in enrolling her in college at a small state university, which she estimated was similar in enrollment to Rocky Mountain State University, where she currently teaches. Leah credits her involvement in a sorority with helping her successfully navigate many of the administrative processes (e.g., financial aid and registration) that often hinder the success of first-generation college students. Specifically, Leah credited her "big sister" in the sorority with mentoring her through the pledge process, as well as providing assistance with the university's administrative procedures:

I had gone to my university with a friend from high school and we were roommates in the dorms. She met a girl from the sorority during rush week so we got invited to go to the KD house for a little party. We went and then we're like "Well, these girls are nice." So we signed up for rush and then we both pledged KD. It was interesting because my experience now with sororities is very different than that sorority that I was part of because there were a lot of working class women in [my] sorority because it wasn't an expensive school. It was sort of out in the country. There were lots of girls from neighboring towns who came to that school. It was absolutely beneficial for me. [My sorority sisters] helped me with the administration stuff about school, knowing how things worked. There was always somebody who had more experience than me that I could go to and go, "My financial aid is like six weeks late. What do I do?" And they would help me figure it out.

With the help of federal grants, Leah succeeded in achieving her bachelor's degree in history and English education without accumulating any debt, a feat that can be especially difficult for students of limited means (Vargas, 2004).



In the first six years following graduation, Leah taught in several different places including East Africa. While working at a private school in California, she found herself becoming complacent in her teaching, saying, "I was feeling kind of stale..." She decided to return to school to earn her California teaching credential, of which she had thus far been able to do without. One of the first courses in which Leah enrolled involved reading in the content area, which she eagerly described as "like a huge light bulb-a massive change in my teaching-like 180 degrees. It got me so excited about [literacy education]." Leah's newly discovered passion for literacy inspired her to return to her alma mater to pursue a master's degree in reading education while also teaching full-time.

Leah acknowledged both her master's and her doctoral advisors as mentors. She feels especially fortunate to have developed a close relationship with her master's advisor, who inspired her to stretch beyond the established bounds of her comfort zone:

He consistently gave me opportunities to do things that appealed to my strengths. He asked me to be an editorial assistant for a yearbook for a professional organization. It was an assistantship so he paid me, which was nice. As a high school English teacher, that was right up my alley because it was editing and checking references and things like that. I loved that. And then he and another colleague that he had gone to grad school with were doing a research project and he asked me to be a participant. It involved him coming to my classroom and interviewing me, some of my students and my principal. It was this big case study. So that made me feel really-it was like he saw something in me that was strong and then he appealed to that. I love that man to this day because he really kind of pushed me beyond my comfort zone in a lot of areas, particularly around publishing and things like that.

Admittedly, Leah had no intention of going on for a doctorate. At the encouragement of her mentor, though, she began to entertain the idea more seriously:

While I was pursuing my master's, I remember sitting down with him for advising and we were talking about what classes I needed to take. He was like, "Leah, you should consider getting a PhD." At the time I was like "Ugh, no way. I'm never going to do that." The fact that he saw that in me made me start thinking about it then. When I kind of had the freedom to do that, that's when I decided to do it. He

also is the one who helped me pick out where I would get my PhD because he gave me the names of some really great programs in my field and pushed me in that direction which was fabulous. I don't know if he's like that with everybody, but he was certainly like that with me. It was great.

Leah eventually applied to several programs and received acceptances to a couple of them, ultimately deciding to attend a large southern research university, where she was awarded a four-year research assistantship. She also received a competitive dissertation award during her final year of doctoral study. Research assistantships are generally regarded as more prestigious than teaching assistantships, and Leah feels honored to have received such a comprehensive funding package. At the same time, though, she admits that she and her fellow students in the education program "...laughed about it because we were like 'Well, teaching is actually a good part of what we [aspire to]!'"

Leah credits the other doctoral students in her program as serving in a mutually supportive capacity, saying:

Interestingly, while I was working on my doctorate, my advisors were not so much the faculty as the students. We all had our offices in this same little hallway. No windows of course. We had an organization. We were all in the same department...and there were some of us who came in together and then there were some who were two years ahead or three years ahead. Those were the people we would go to to say "I need to write up a conference proposal. How do you go about doing that? Let me go ask Gwynne." And Gwynne would read my conference proposal and kind of revise it with me. It was fabulous. I think because we were so focused, and our offices were right there together. We socialized. We did everything together.

Leah described her doctoral advisor as someone who mentored her as a graduate student, and who has taken on an even stronger mentoring role since Leah became faculty:

[My doctoral advisor] has consistently sent me jobs because she's kind of a big name in my field. If she gets approached to do something that she doesn't really have time to do or she's already committed elsewhere, she'll recommend me to do it if it fits what I like to do in my area. I've gotten to edit a book out of that. I've gotten a couple of different chapters out of it. So she's constantly shuttling opportunities my way and that's really a powerful thing.

As Leah expressed her appreciation toward her mentor with me, she also revealed that she was recently awarded tenure at Rocky Mountain State University. She continued by crediting her mentor with sharing opportunities that eventually became significant to her in the tenure process.

Leah perceived that her graduate experiences were vastly different than her undergraduate experiences. She recalled as an undergraduate feeling like she "didn't really know any of [the] professors," adding "I went to class. I listened to the lectures and took notes. I studied. I took tests and then I went my merry way." She compared this with her own more recent experiences as a faculty member, saying "I think about how [well] I know [some, of] my undergraduates now. I never had that kind of relationship with my professors." In contrast, her graduate programs felt much more collegial and her professors "were really interested in being there for the students."

Leah reports that while her mother "has always been my biggest champion," her father "was absent because he worked nights and then he was gone after my parents got divorced." And although Leah's younger brother is proud of her education and profession, he lacks a frame of reference for fully understanding her career. According to Leah, "He doesn't really understand the world I'm in. Some of the questions he asks, it's really obvious that he doesn't really get it. He thinks I teach English, and he's never been to college so I can understand." Later in our conversation, I asked Leah if there were ever times when she felt different than other students because of her first-generation status. She admits that at times she perceived that other students had more contacts-or more connections-than she did. However, she attributed this to coming from a working class family, rather than being a first-generation student. She added:

Maybe it had to do with social skills. I felt some people were much more comfortable in a classroom university setting than I was. I thought they must sit at home around their tables and have these kinds of conversations, whereas for us- we didn't do that. We would eat dinner and watch TV.

Leah elaborated by describing herself as an undergraduate who was disinclined to approach faculty after class or during office hours, a sentiment commonly experienced by first-generation students (Kim & Sax, 2009; Pike & Kuh, 2005; Terenzini et al., 1996).

Additionally, she says:

I saw a huge division in status between me as a student and them as professors which kept me from really initiating conversations with them. So yeah, being shy and also feeling like I'm just a lowly student and you're a professor.. .now seems like a really funny attitude to me.

Leah's own undergraduate experiences have directly influenced the way she approaches her students and her roles as faculty, mentor, and teacher of aspiring teachers. These experiences inspire Leah to create a classroom environment that promotes student engagement (Pike & Kuh, 2005) and a community of learners:

I'm always experimenting with teaching. I like trying out different things. I think if you asked any of my students they would tell you that I try very hard to establish an atmosphere where people feel comfortable asking questions, feel like their voice is being valued, that if they're confused they can ask someone near them or ask me and I'll help them.

#### Alan

Alan described himself as growing up in a bedroom community outside Los Angeles in a middle class White neighborhood of newer tract-style houses, which were popular in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Reflecting back, Alan described his family:

[We were] pretty much a standard nuclear family; stay at home mom, father who worked.. .Looking back on it, I didn't realize how Beaver Cleaver we were, but no matter what we were doing, [my mother] always managed to get us all dusted off and stand at the entrance way when my father drove in from work. And he just greeted us at the door and we had dinner. It was great.

Alan's father spent much of his professional life in a "lower white collar" job as a purchasing agent for a local aerospace firm. Alan could not recall for certain if his father finished high school, but he estimates that he most likely did graduate prior to serving in the military for a few years. When he was 27, he met Alan's mother, who was just 16 years old at the time. As Alan describes it, his father "robbed the cradle"; the two fell in love and married, quickly adding Alan's older brother to their young family. Two years later, Alan came along. In describing his family, Alan depicted his father as being "more like my older brother. He was into cars. He's kind of a greaser with his hair slicked back." His mother completed two years of high school prior to marrying and starting a family. Alan recalled his aunt telling him, "Your mom was always really mature. Our family had kids spaced about seven to nine years apart, so she pretty much raised her young sister." Alan supposes that his mother "always wanted to be a mom and she was kind of mature about it; she saw some tall handsome guy with greased back hair and a nice car and married him." Despite her parents' initial shock and disbelief that the relationship would last, Alan proudly relates that the two have been married for over 55 years, declaring, "They are just good."

Alan conveyed a pragmatic perspective about his childhood. However, he seemed nostalgic as he recalled the ways in which his neighborhood had changed in the years since he lived there as a child:

The neighborhoods were full of kids about the right age. You could almost walk into any house and they'd feed you lunch. It was like a commune, only it wasn't hippies. There were fields and orchards that we could play in. There was a little old lady who had a farmhouse and we'd steal eggs. I think that was kind of neat. By the time I left, though, everything was completely filled in. All the farms had been bought up and turned into apartments. [When I was in graduate school], I would drive up North to see my folks and I'd see the off ramp that led to my old neighborhood. And I just couldn't get myself to get off it. When I was a kid, I

thought my block was this huge thing and you'd run forever to get to the other end. My brother went and visited later on and came back in shock thinking what a tiny little neighborhood that was. I thought everything was so big and spacious. And now, you grow up and it's a little tiny place. Of course, all the trees grew up, so it's this big shady area instead of this new area we had. So-I knew I'd be disappointed. So I just couldn't get myself to get off that exit.

From the time he was a young boy, Alan displayed an innate interest in science, delighting in mixing strange concoctions and leaving them in random places around the house for his mother to later find and clean up:

I was an avid science fiction reader and I stumbled upon old Robert Heinlein books. I used to love the library and I stumbled upon a book like *Have Space Suit, Will Travel*. I liked science long before I could even tell if I had the tools. I was always first and foremost pretty much a little nerdy kid. My brother got a chemistry set when I was about seven or eight. He played with it a little bit, but I really liked it and I took it over and did all the experiments. The first time I ever mixed two things and they fizzed, generating hydrogen gas and you lit it with a match and it went poof-that got me hooked. So I figured out bigger ways to make bigger explosions. And ever since then, pretty much, I've played with chemistry.

Alan recalled a high school teacher giving him an intelligence test because she suspected he was gifted. Although he was a bright student, Alan described himself as intractable and unwilling to solve the problems on the intelligence test during the allotted time. After the test, on his way back to the classroom, Alan would solve the problems in his head. Later, Alan described himself as a student who was never challenged in high school. Despite attending school in a relatively affluent area, and despite his natural aptitude for the sciences, his school offered little in terms of advanced placement courses, particularly in math or science. In fact, Alan remembers feeling "ripped-off when, as an undergraduate at University of California Berkeley, he realized that many of his fellow students had already earned their first two years worth of college courses in high school through the Advanced Placement process. Several times, Alan referred to himself as being lucky, rather than intentional, in the educational process:

I would characterize my entire education as just total naivete. I only went to Berkeley because I visited it once in a model United Nations meeting and it looked really cool. It was sunny. There were musicians. I had to go. Turns out it was one of the top undergraduate schools in the country. I lucked into that one, and in particular in chemistry, it's considered one of the top. So it looks like I picked a good school, but I didn't pick it at all.

As I listened to Alan's candid description of his college selection process, I found myself wondering how many other college students choose institutions for similar reasons. I suspect this happens commonly, particularly among those from first-generation backgrounds.

Alan developed an appreciation for hard work and discipline when, in 1971, his father was laid off and subsequently started his own small pool cleaning business in the Monterey Bay area. Alan spent his high school years working for his father cleaning pools. He recalls being chastised by privileged children who complained, "Are you done with my pool yet? I want to go swimming!" The experience made Alan aware that he did not want to clean pools or work in the service industry for a living, and he credits it with keeping him inspired to continue on to college.

Alan's freshman year at Berkeley was an eye-opening experience, particularly in an academic sense. He explains:

I really didn't think I was very good until I went to college and I was worried. A friend of mine gave me a calculus text before going and I thought, "I'd better study this because I know I have to take it and they're going to flunk me out of college if I don't know this stuff." So I spent all summer reading this book and then I went to college and actually studied—quite a concept for most people—and started getting As. And I realized, you know, three-quarters of the people really don't do the homework. If you just do the homework and actually read the text, you can get As. Once you start getting a bunch of As, you don't want to ruin your GPA. And then I started getting more obsessive about it: "I've gotta keep getting As. I've gotta keep getting As." The secret was to actually read the material and do the homework. You don't have to be brilliant. I know a lot of brilliant people who aren't good because they just don't do the work. I wouldn't say I was brought up with a great work ethic, but it seems like it compared to some people. It was a

shock to me that when I went in there all ready to fight the system and struggle to do well that I found I could actually be better than all these people coming from all the better high schools with all the college prep courses.

For perhaps the first time, Alan realized how far a little effort could get him, despite having come from what he considers a less-than-stellar academic environment.

Unlike the other participants, Alan does not have anyone he considers a mentor. When asked about people who had influenced him along his journey, Alan struggled to identify any particular person. Despite recalling a good friend from high school with whom he still keeps in touch and described as his intellectual cohort, Alan asked "Would it be sad to say I can't think of anyone primarily?" While Alan does not consider his friend a mentor, he does consider this friend a person he can relate to on several levels and who shares a common intellect:

I found out we had common interests in science, and we both read science fiction, we both liked some of the same things, and we had these marathons where we'd basically stand outside some room and talk for hours and just... just eternally, just talk about things. Just all day long... This guy has always been kind of my intellectual cohort, the person who's similar enough to me and smart that I basically, we talk about all things... My deep thought things go to my old high school buddy. And when I look back on how many people I've kept contact with... on a day-to-day or more constant basis, it's my old high school friend.

Alan continued to share information about his high school friend's own academic path, which ended abruptly when his father was killed during their senior year of high school. As Alan described his friend's experiences dropping out of high school just a few credits shy of graduating, I felt deeply aware of their relationship's significance to Alan. Despite Alan's vast network of academic colleagues, this friend-who Alan describes as "a brilliant guy" in math and physics- is the person who most closely provides that critical intellectual inspiration and connection for Alan.



When I asked him how his family perceives his academic accomplishments, particularly his attainment of a PhD, Alan shared an analogy that I suspect is common among first-generation students and their families. He said, "I think they always thought of me as a black sheep because first of all, I did go to college." He continued by describing what I suspect is another common reaction among families of first-generation students. That is, through the process of achieving a college degree, their sons or daughters have become too liberal in their perspectives (London, 1992). Or as Alan, who considers himself politically moderate, said, "They think I'm a flaming liberal because I went to Berkeley." He elaborated:

I think it worked against me that I went to [an extremely liberal place like] Berkeley because my family is very conservative. I've learned not to ruin Thanksgiving when I meet with them; I just kind of bite my tongue as much as I can because-it's weird. You would think by getting educated, your opinions would be valued, but are actually-in some sense from my family-devalued because I went to this college where they teach you these "horrible liberal thoughts." And so, I can almost not open my mouth when I talk to my folks...

In addition to the above illustration, Alan recalled a dinner conversation with his ultra-conservative parents concerning evolution, in which he remarked, "It's silly not to believe in the theory of evolution." Upon receiving blank stares from his parents, the highly trained physical scientist in Alan could not help but exclaim:

"Look. You know I've been educated in science, right? You now that I've gone to the best schools and you might give me some credit for knowing a little bit about science, so believe me when I tell you that the theory of evolution is about as well-established right now as the law of gravity. It is not under dispute. The only disputes are the little pieces here and there." And I don't think I convinced them, but I pretty much was trying to call upon authority to say, "Give me some credit."

I have chosen to include the two previous vignettes because of their ability to illustrate the sense of dissonance, or "limbo," that Lubrano (2004) writes of and which is further discussed in chapter I. In Alan's case, though, this dissonance is experienced with regard

to the political continuum, rather than with regard to moving between social classes, as Lubrano refers. I suspect that many first-generation students, particularly those who achieve advanced degrees at prestigious institutions like Alan has, experience moments when they yearn for their families to be able to better relate to their level of education and give them due credit for their hard-earned expertise in specific topics.

### Picard

Picard was born in Florida, and at the age of 17 months was sent to live with his grandmother and an aunt in upstate New York. What originated as a "summer stay" turned into more than a three-year period during which he was separated from his mother, father, and a baby sister who remained in Florida. The family eventually reunited after moving to Connecticut when Picard was five years old. He described his earliest recollections of the entire family, including his grandmother, living in a single room of a boarding house in South Norwalk, Connecticut.

Picard's mother earned her high school diploma, worked as a domestic for affluent White families, and yearned to attain a bachelor's degree. She began taking college courses at night while Picard and his sister were of elementary age. His father, who worked as a common laborer, never completed high school. After Picard's father expressed insecurity about everyone in the family becoming educated except him, his mother stopped taking college classes. Picard shared, "Dad said, 'Well, everybody's going to school and getting ahead of me.' Mom dropped out of school so Dad wouldn't feel bad." Years later, however, she succeeded in earning an associate's degree after Picard and his sister enrolled in college.

Picard described his father as "exceedingly smart" and mathematically inclined, despite his limited education. During the mid-1950s, he worked at a large chemical plant; his supervisors offered to send him back to school to receive training that would allow him to be promoted to the position of plant foreman. Although this proposition conveyed confidence in his skills, Picard's father declined the offer, insisting that he had no interest in becoming "the boss of his friends."

Picard "lived the length of Spring Street" in South Norwalk; he and his family moved from one end of the street to the other on four separate occasions between 1953 and 1959. On Spring Street, Picard had many friends among his neighbors, who-like Picard's own family-were nearly all working class Black families. The family eventually moved in with Picard's father's older brother, but was later kicked out as the result of a disagreement between Picard's father and his uncle. At that point, they moved into a duplex across town, which Picard described as their first real house. He shared several fond memories from that time: one involved him and his sister picking small potatoes from a garden, of which they later cooked for dinner; another involved learning to ride a bicycle. Despite these happy memories, Picard described himself as insecure with few friends, which he attributed to living too far for a young boy to travel alone to visit his old friends back on Spring Street. Faced with the prospect of having to make new friends, he began to feel increasingly isolated. During his later-elementary years, Picard struggled socially and academically; these struggles continued throughout his secondary school years.

Although Picard's father was always content with the family's short-term and temporary housing arrangements, his mother dreamed of buying a home of her own. The

owners of the family's rented duplex respected Picard's parents so much that they were willing to make it financially feasible for the family to purchase the home and rent the other half. Picard's father refused to sign the paperwork finalizing the sale of the duplex, even though it was the only remaining necessity. Picard explains:

At that time [Mom] wanted a house and Dad didn't want a house. His attitude was "he wasn't going to put his money into no house." Dad was the kind of man who was just comfortable living where he was. I know him and Mom loved each other, but he didn't want to buy a house.

Disappointed at the unsuccessful sale, the duplex owners quickly sold the home to another family, resulting in yet another move for Picard. Later, his mother tried again to purchase a home, with different yet equally disappointing results:

A couple of the White families [she worked for] were going to co-sign for Mom to get a house. At that time-for a White man to co-sign a loan for a Black family to get a house-it said a lot about Mom. Mom was well liked by all the people. So she went down to the bank to get the money out of the savings account and it was at a time when there was about three or four thousand dollars in there. But [in the 1960s] that was a lot of money. And the bank wouldn't give it to her because her name wasn't on the...account [even though] she had a marriage license and all of that. They just said, "Well, gee, we're really sorry we can't help you." But she was going to go and get the house and so we ended up moving again from South Norwalk to Norwalk and this time it was still kind of a rooming house but we had the right side of the building. We had a living room, a dining room, a kitchen and a little back room that my mother used as a sewing room. Upstairs there were three bedrooms and a bathroom. So we had that whole side. There was no grass in the yard-the front yard was like scattered weeds and things like that, you know. No potatoes or anything like that but it was, again, we had separated from the familiar things that I knew. I think that was when things began to go downhill.

Picard described his neighbors on Spring Street as predominately Black and working class, but his schools were much more diverse, with many immigrant families and Greek, Italian, and Jewish students. After moving so frequently, however, Picard was left with few friends and he felt inadequate at making new ones. The friends he did have were

predominately White, and he recalled several Black kids being unfriendly toward him, including his own cousin, who at one point accused Picard of "talking White."

During his senior year of high school, Picard was unexpectedly chosen to attend a prestigious private boys' preparatory school in a wealthy community nearby:

In my senior year, my guidance counselor-who had never called me before-sent a message for me to come down to his office. They were looking for some students to leave public school and go to a private school in Fairfield County. I found out years later it was the richest county in Connecticut because it was a suburb of New York. Most of the people that worked on Wall Street like Walter Cronkite lived there, and Joanne Woodward and Paul Newman lived in Westport. To me, Norwalk was the poverty pocket in the middle. These [people] were wealthy-and that's where my mother worked. She asked people and they said, "Oh, St. Luke's is the top school in New Canaan." I was going to graduate that year and I went out for an interview and they said, "Well, we'd have to put you back one year so that you'd be competitive," and that kind of thing. I didn't want to be put back.

A phenomenon referred to as "ascending cross-class identification" may be helpful in understanding the significance of this new experience in Picard's life. According to Rodriguez (2003):

Students from the middle class, educators, community members, and various others were catalysts for an academic-success-promoting phenomenon I call *ascending cross-class identification*, which occurs when a person from a lower socioeconomic class gains deep understanding of what life is like in a higher class. In addition, this person comes to discover practical ways of attaining that higher status, (p. 21)

In many ways, Picard's admission to St. Luke's School for Boys during his junior year of high school exposed him to the experiences and ways of life of upper class students and their families. Picard's mother knew that getting a good education would provide her two children their best chances for success. Specifically, Picard shared, "A good education was the only way to make it." For this reason, she would simply not allow Picard to settle for less when it came time to make the final decision regarding St. Luke's. Recalling her resolve and determination, Picard laughingly recalled, "My mother, in her inevitable

style, said, 'You're going.' There was no choice. So I went."

In retrospect, Picard considers his move out of the Norwalk public schools and into St. Luke's "divine order." Shortly after beginning his junior year, he received a letter from the Selective Service containing a train ticket:

[Me] being young, nobody really said anything. Well, hell—I just get on the train and go down. The next thing I know I'm going and getting my physical and filling out this paperwork.. .not even thinking about it until I got pulled out of line and they said, "Well, you checked that you haven't graduated high school yet." I said, "No, I just started my junior year." They gave me a ticket and put me back on the train and really never explained. It wasn't until I got back home and Mom was there and she had called my Uncle Francis who had been in the military. I was at the induction station. See, technically, I would have already graduated, right? So I would have been on my way to Vietnam or somewhere 'cause Vietnam was right then at its height. This was like 1969-70, right around in there. And so that's that divine order piece.

To this day, Picard is uncertain as to how he was selected to attend such an elite and expensive school. It is likely he received a scholarship, as he remembers never having to pay tuition. His entire class consisted of 15 boys from wealthy families who Picard described as being accustomed to "school trips to Spain-not the museum or to the beach for a picnic." While completing his first year at St. Luke's, education and learning had become critical components of Picard's life. "Because of the atmosphere," he remembers, "I found myself reading and really being interested in things." For each of Picard's classmates, college was simply the next step. After talking with the junior class advisor, Picard found himself wondering if college could be a possibility for him, too. He shared:

I [went] home and asked my mother, 'Well, is that a possibility for me?' She said, 'If you want to go, you can go. I'll see what I can do about funding.' She recommended Hampton, which was a historically Black college, and so I started looking.

Picard credits his mother with making it possible for him to attend St. Luke's School for Boys, thereby continuing on to earn his bachelor's degree from Hampton University. His

mother insisted he attend Hampton. In fact, it was so important to her that she paid for Picard to attend, despite his full scholarship offer at a small private college in the Midwest. In retrospect, Picard admits that attending Hampton was beneficial to him because after growing up in a working class Black neighborhood, he had "never really been around successful Black people."

Picard described his first year at Hampton as a difficult transition socially, sharing, "If you look at my transcript my first semester-it was a party. I watched TV, played pool, had my little bouts with going out with the guys and drinking." Upon returning for his second semester and noticing that several of his fellow students had dropped out, it was like "another light bulb moment" for Picard, who suddenly understood, "Oh, they kick you outta here." He added "That was when I really got earnest about my studying." Early in his sophomore year, Picard met Carrie, a fellow undergraduate and a serious student who spent much of her time in the library studying. Picard's desire to spend time with Carrie, coupled with his knowledge of her most frequented studying spots, found him suggesting they meet in the library for study sessions, which ultimately resulted in Picard developing stronger study habits. He elaborated:

So that was how I started studying. The idea was we used to go and find a nice quiet place in the stacks and she'd sit at a desk and I'd sit at a desk. Well, I wanted to talk, but she wanted to study. So as a consequence, I started studying, and then my grades began to get important because they were important for her. I could see how she was studying. So that was how my education kind of kicked in.

With his newly established study habits, along with his desire to maintain strong grades, Picard consistently earned 3.6 and 3.7 grade point averages throughout the remainder of his undergraduate years, including a 4.0 GPA his final semester.

After witnessing the sacrifices his mother made to pay for both her children to attend Hampton, Picard decided to apply for the Army ROTC scholarship shortly before his junior year. Picard joined ROTC primarily because of the scholarship and tuition benefits offered, knowing it would be a relief to his mother. Due to his exceptional GPA, the Army fully paid for the last two years of Picard's undergraduate education. Additionally, he received a monthly stipend with which he was able to make car payments. Admittedly, the artillery aspect of the Army never interested Picard. He recalls feeling devastated after firing the guns during summer camp at Fort Bragg, and consequently wondering, "Oh my God, what am I going to do? I don't want to do that." He recalled feeling the influence of "divine order" again as he entered the ROTC detachment building, still wondering what to do next:

[As I entered], right over the door there was this round window of stained glass. [The room] was like a rotunda and in the middle was a table where they used to have career information for the Army. As I walked in, the light was coming through the stained glass window and it was shining on this table. And I remember being right there saying, "What am I going to do?" And I happened to look down and there was this blue pamphlet that said, "Be a social work officer in the Army."

To Picard, who was majoring in sociology with a minor in social welfare, the divine message seemed to fit perfectly. He arranged a meeting with a professor who had recently graduated from a social work program. Following their conversation, Picard promptly applied to the same program and was accepted with full funding.

Looking back years later, Picard compares the time period between his acceptance to St. Luke's School for Boys until he received his master's of social work degree, to that of conception through the age of five. More specifically, it was a period of unparalleled and tremendous growth for Picard-emotionally, socially, and intellectually. During this



time, Picard began to finally feel successful in developing self-confidence and assuredness with himself and his abilities, rather than trying to live up to the expectations of others. As Picard describes, "To stand on your own and withstand criticism" and "to be okay with being a person of difference."

Despite earning two master's degrees and writing a thesis, Picard had no intention of pursuing a doctorate. He laughed as he recalled the first doctoral dissertations he encountered, which were still prepared on manual typewriters at that time: "I remember saying to myself not, 'No,' but, *"Hell no, I'm not doing this!"* And while Picard's mother encouraged-even insisted-that her children earn bachelor's degrees, she simply lacked the framework for understanding his decision to go on to graduate school. He reflected back on his mother's dream for him to attain a degree: "[She said] 'You're going to college. I don't want you cleaning anybody's slop jars.' But I think I took it a lot further than even she expected." He seemed disappointed as he confessed that none of his family attended the commencement ceremonies for either of his master's degrees, nor his doctoral hooding. He elaborated by saying, "I'm not sure if my mother-with her state of learning-really understood [the importance of it]."

Picard's many accomplishments include numerous grants, publications, and presentations, both national and international. All of this, combined with the self-determination he was forced to develop throughout his childhood and young adulthood, have a way of intimidating people. For one, he suspects others have a tendency to develop preconceived ideas about him-as a Black male-which are rarely accurate. He describes his relationships with other African Americans, both educated and uneducated, as generally distrustful, adding "I have gotten more help in my career and more respect in

my career from Whites than I have African Americans. I've had more African Americans stand in my way." In the Army, Picard felt like his degrees were never fully appreciated, describing each as just "one tick mark," and a master's degree as something "everybody's got now." Picard later felt this way outside the Army as well. From his perspective, educated acquaintances passed value judgments, thinking, "What you're doing with [your education] is not as important as what I'm doing," and "The fact that you have a PhD [means] you think you're better than I am," or "What research are you doing?" While lamenting this academic "pecking order," Picard shared how, even today, he feels more comfortable talking with the janitorial staff than with most of his colleagues, saying, "Those are 'real people.' They're not concerned with your status. They're concerned with how you treat them. That's what I like, you know, do you treat me with respect and dignity? Do you remember to say 'hi' to me?"

This desire for authenticity and groundedness was unmistakable later as I asked Picard to describe someone who had positively influenced his life. Quickly identifying two teachers, Picard reached for a book on a shelf in his office and began to read aloud:

I wish to acknowledge two teachers from my life who saw the abilities and competencies within me that at the time, due to my youth, fears and insecurities, I did not see in myself. I give thanks to Mrs. ... my fifth and sixth grade teacher. Through her strength of will and determination for me to succeed, she would not allow me to wallow in self-pity and feel sorry for myself for perceived inadequacies. It was solely her singular belief in me that provided reason for me to succeed. She had confidence in my abilities to accept her consistent challenges and her stated belief of knowing I could do the work. [Secondly], to Dr. ... I am and always will be eternally grateful and humbled by her presence in my life. She died of cancer shortly after I graduated, but during the time we walked the same path, she too left an indelible mark upon my heart, my mind, and spirit and she is due recognition. She took a young graduate student and in the midst of his self-imposed pressure, fear of failure and succeeding and the feeling he was not supposed to be in graduate school, opened the doors of learning rather than closing them through her patience, guidance, mentoring, coaching, and a belief in my gifts for social work practice. She epitomized and lived the philosophy and

practice incumbent to education and social work. She is the bright star in the night sky by which I set my pedagogical and social work course and the beacon light of teaching and social work knowledge that guides my progress. To this day, I consider her a Godsend, a guardian angel there to prevent my capitulation and to keep me on the path to this culmination.

I closed my eyes to focus on Picard's words as he read aloud, and found myself instantly aware that he had opened the pages of his own dissertation, and was sharing a paragraph from the acknowledgements section. The conviction emanating from his voice was palpable as he shared these words and thoughts regarding his own path. Even now as I look back at that paragraph nearly two years later, I feel Picard's feelings of indebtedness and the extraordinary importance of these two mentors in his life.

#### Karin

Karin described herself as the oldest of six children of parents who married young, both at the age of 17. When Karin was just 11, her parents divorced; Karin and her siblings stayed with their mother, who went to school to become a dental assistant in order to support the family. Looking back, Karin marvels at her mother's ability to raise the children as a single parent while furthering her education by attending school to become a dental assistant:

We were really poor for a while. Now I look back and I don't even know how she managed it because she absolutely, flatly refused to go on welfare. She just didn't think that was the right kind of lifestyle. She got a little bit of help from her grandfather for a little while to help us tide over while she was doing that training. But they paid her-this was in the 1960s-they paid her \$65 a week. And when my dad left, he left us with a lot of debts, too. The car was several payments behind, the mortgage was behind, the fuel oil had run out, the furnace was off. I don't know how she did it. I honestly don't. It was really a tough situation. Then she married my stepfather who was a bachelor farmer, and you know, it was like all of the sudden we had meat to eat. I was 15 then and it was just like Christmas. He went out and bought us a color TV to watch the Orange Bowl. We just weren't used to that kind of luxury. So, it was a big change for our family, and you know, now it just seems phenomenal to me. It was a miracle that I went to college.

Although I am but an outsider in relation to Karin's childhood experiences, her reflections about it being "a miracle" that she went to college resonated with me, particularly as she continued relating her story.

Neither of Karin's parents attained a college education, but both of Karin's grandmothers attended some college, although neither finished a degree. She recalled her mother instilling the value of education in Karin and her siblings, often relating the story of Karin's great grandfather, who immigrated to the United States from Norway, and who was known for saying, "No matter what else happens, education is something no one can ever take away from you." Karin's maternal grandfather, a farm boy from rural Iowa, had dreams of attending Iowa State University. However, because his older sister had not pursued a college education, their father denied him the opportunity, telling him "No, I'm not sending you to college. Your sister didn't go, so you don't get to go." Interestingly, Karin's paternal grandparents intended to send both of their children to college, and they even encouraged their daughter to become a medical doctor. Despite their encouragement and support, Karin's father opted to go to barber school after getting married during his senior year of high school. In retrospect, this was most likely a logical career choice for a young man with a rapidly growing family who lacked the time to pursue lengthier training. Later, Karin would describe her father as what would these days be called a "dead beat dad," lending little financial or emotional support to his children. Again, it was Karin's mother who encouraged her children to value education. In fact, Karin shared that while she was in the process of finishing her PhD, her mother went back and earned a bachelor's degree in psychology:

My stepfather wasn't particularly supportive. He didn't really discourage her, but he didn't really encourage her either. So I tried to do as much as I could to

encourage her, and she finished it. She really wanted to get a degree. And I think for her partly it was because when she was divorced- it was still-people looked down on you. And she grew up in a household where her father was a terrible alcoholic, and so I think she always felt like even though people in her hometown treated her okay, for the most part, I think she always felt like there was a stigma. And she had to prove she was as good as everybody else. I think she really wanted that piece of paper just to show she had a college degree because she's gone through at least two periods in her life where she felt like people would look down on her and she wanted to show she was as good as anybody else. And then she did that and she got elected to the school board. She's done a lot of different things. When I think about how smart I think she is and I, with the PhD, I know she's smarter than I am. It's just that the circumstances in her life, she just didn't pursue what she probably could have done. It amazes me sometimes-all the things she has done.

Karin shared some other interesting information with regard to her mother's upbringing and how it may have influenced her educational aspirations. Although Karin's grandfather offered to help Karin's mother pay for college, Karin shared that her mother felt that he had "already helped so much while they were growing up that she just didn't think it would be right to take the money." Additionally, Karin speculated that her mother "perceived that you had to have nice clothes and money to go to college, so even if [my grandfather] had paid for her tuition, she felt like she'd be an outsider."

Of all five siblings, Karin is the only one to have completed a bachelor's degree, much less master's or doctoral degrees. All three of her sisters completed some community college, with one of the three recently earning an associate's degree. Karin shared that another sister expressed a desire to go back to school, but her husband-who never finished high school-seemed resentful and presented as many obstacles as he could to her in the process of returning. Tragically, that sister was killed in a car accident and was never able to realize her dream. She continued by describing her brother's aptitude for teaching, saying:

He just has a gift for working with kids and talking, and I always thought he would have been a dynamite high school teacher. He works in a manufacturing plant and I think he likes his job okay. He's done fine there and makes pretty decent money. But when I think about the talent he has, it makes me sad. He does hard physical work, but he could have done something that would have been such a gift to students.

Karin seemed proud, yet melancholy, as she expressed what a wonderful teacher her brother might have made.

Like Leah, Karin was an avid reader throughout her childhood and she particularly enjoyed Nancy Drew novels. Because she excelled in school, which was a familiar environment to her, Karin described aspiring early on to become either a teacher or a mystery novel writer. She even wrote several short novels as a teenager and a longer novel as an adult. Despite her interest in writing, and probably due to her impoverished upbringing, Karin craved the kind of stability that only a steady job could provide:

The thought of not having a steady job with benefits terrifies me. Stability is really important to me and so I wanted something that I could count on. I think a lot of times kids who grow up in poorer households are that way.

In high school, Karin recalled wanting to take Spanish, but decided to take a typing class instead at the suggestion of a guidance counselor. Karin was initially reluctant, thinking that her counselor was stereotyping her into a secretarial role. In retrospect, however, Karin was pleased to have learned the skill, which opened the door to several secretarial positions during her undergraduate years. Ultimately, Karin secured part-time work in the university's purchasing department and as a clerk in a federal government office. While her friends were waiting tables, these secretarial positions allowed Karin to work throughout her undergraduate years and pay her own way through college.

Like many first-generation students, Karin later learned of several steps she could have done differently as an undergraduate (and even as a graduate student), which would

have allowed her to complete her education more efficiently. First, Karin shared her desire to attend a small private college located just two blocks from her grandparents' home. However, because it was a private institution, Karin knew it would be prohibitively expensive. When she received a regents' scholarship to the state university, Karin's decision was, in a sense, "made for her." Looking back, she recognizes that as the top student in her high school, there were probably several smaller colleges that would have offered her full scholarships. While attending the state university, she probably would have been eligible for more scholarships which would have allowed her to work fewer hours as a student, thereby finishing her degree in less time. Additionally, Karin describes "stumbling into" a business major, feeling fortunate that it ultimately worked so well for her. Despite the fact business was a good fit academically, Karin speculates that she could have benefited greatly from consulting an academic advisor and taking an aptitude test. Because she graduated with two separate degrees from two different academic colleges—one in Business Education and the other in Business Administration—Karin completed over 150 credit hours as an undergraduate. She further described the experience, saying:

I took a lot of different classes and it was because I had to fulfill all the requirements for two colleges. And I should have talked to an advisor and said, "You know, I'm taking political science here. Could I substitute this for one of the requirements there?" [Instead], I just took them all. It took me six years to finish [while I was working].

However, Karin simply did not know how to find out about such opportunities. In fact, she recounted an experience her freshman year that set the course for the remainder of her undergraduate years:

I really was a pretty good student. I had this one year scholarship and I remember going in as a freshman to the scholarship and financial aid office....I said "I heard

from someone that, even though it's a one year scholarship, it might be possible to get it renewed so that I could have it the next year." And [the financial aid counselor] said "We don't deal with those. Go away." I didn't know who to turn to, who to ask. If I'd had parents who knew that, they'd have either called, or they'd have marched down there with me-or told me, "Go ask your advisor. Go ask." I didn't know who to ask and I never asked anybody. I just paid my own way.

Fortunately, Karin is skilled at recognizing the benefit of all her experiences, saying, "Over the course of my life, I've decided nothing you learn is really wasted. I took a lot of things that I found really interesting later." A positive outcome of taking additional classes is that, through the full array of her academic experiences, Karin found several topics that intrigued her, and she ended up specializing in them during her graduate school years. For example, as a freshman Karin took psychology and education courses, which she says became invaluable later as she studied marketing and consumer behavior in graduate school.

As the oldest child in her family, Karin describes herself as "kind of a striver and an achiever," saying that is probably one of the reasons she kept going to school, ultimately attaining a PhD in marketing. She admits that part of her motivation for earning a PhD was perhaps "to show that I could." Karin also credits her early years with providing additional incentive, adding, "Part of it was probably because of that upbringing that I felt like I had to do more to raise my socioeconomic status."

Karin credits her dissertation advisor with serving as a mentor to her, particularly as she completed her doctoral degree:

He was the best mentor I ever could have wanted. He was a terrific mentor and part of it I think was because he's an excellent scholar and so he just seemed always-no matter what questions you'd come up with, he'd know something about it or where to find something about it. And now having been in my career for about 20 years I think, "Wow, how did he keep up with the journals?" because it's so hard with all the day-to-day pressures sometimes just to read as much as



you want to. And he did. He had a great balance. But there are other reasons. I think part of it is he would lead and give me good ideas, but he wasn't pushy. He had a very gentle way of working with graduate students where he didn't make you feel.. .I know some other faculty that just made it such a miserable experience that by the time their student finished they never wanted to see that faculty member again. And mine was just the opposite. Students flocked to him because he was such a kind and wonderful person and didn't push. He would in a very subtle way say, "Yeah, you need to get this done," but he wasn't, "Hurry up." He wasn't beating on you. I just think he has more integrity than just about anybody I know and he always treats his alums just like family. He and his wife came to my wedding. They came, in fact, to my graduation and to my grandfather's funeral. They just keep a good relationship with his past students. I really see him as somebody who has a lot of the qualities I wish I had as a faculty member. Sometimes when I find myself feeling cynical and jaded I try to make myself think, "How would he do this?" and I know he wouldn't ever let students feel that they were a bother.

### Emiliano

Emiliano described himself as a middle child among seven siblings. His father was originally from Pennsylvania and his mother from Denver. Despite being born in North Carolina and moving several times early on, Denver always felt like "home" to Emiliano and his siblings. His mother's immediate and extended family had been in Denver many years, and the area served as a home base to the family when Emiliano's father was stationed overseas. After his father's departure from the military, the family moved for a brief time to Pennsylvania so his dad could work in the steel mills, which closed down shortly thereafter. Lack of work sent the family back to Denver to be closer to Emiliano's mother's family.

Emiliano recalls his family often being "always on welfare." He elaborated, sharing that although his father worked hard and consistently and his mother did, too, the sheer size of their family qualified them for social assistance programs throughout all of Emiliano's childhood years. With little education, both Emiliano's parents worked at

low-skill, low-wage jobs, including as a janitor for the phone company, a hotel maid, or packing carrots for a local vegetable company.

Seven or eight of Emiliano's K-12 years were spent in the Denver public school system, where he recalled being placed in the "industrial track" because of an older brother's aptitude with wood and metal. After it became evident that Emiliano was less skilled with wood than his brother, he was moved to the general education track:

So I ended up in the industrial track, and I'm klutzy! There was a point at which I almost cut off a couple of fingers and this one time a piece of wood went flying across the room and the teacher came and said to me, "You're outta here." And he took me up to the counselor and he said, "Get this guy outta here before he kills somebody." So they had to move me out of the industrial track and into the general ed track. Had I been good, I probably would be a cabinetmaker instead of a professor, I imagine.

Emiliano estimates his high school was probably eighty percent Mexican and Mexican-American, ten percent Black, ten percent White-and experiencing a lot of racial tension at that time. Early in his education, Emiliano described himself as obedient and attentive, but disengaged: "I was always there. I showed up. I was nice. I did my work. It was something to do. I had very little passion for it, very little enthusiasm." This changed dramatically, however, when Emiliano became connected to an English teacher who introduced him to a wider variety of literature, including stories about characters to which Emiliano finally felt he could personally relate. While the rest of the class was reading *Grapes of Wrath* and *Wuthering Heights*, Emiliano became immersed in Rudolfo Anaya's *Bless Me Ultima* and Claude Brown's *Manchild in the Promised Land*. He explains:

I remember the teacher had these glasses and was sipping tea and listening to classical music when I came in, and he was talking about, you know, taking us to the art museum. I think he was trying to give us some culture or something like that, and, of course one of the first books he had us read was *Picture of Dorian*

*Gray*. I remember I was reading it and I went home and I was like, you know what, I have to take a certain path so that I can miss the gangbanger guys who- they would just pick on ya- and the winos and all the used prophylactics and walkin' by these shacks, and whatever. And I was thinking, here's this guy who wants to live forever and how if this is what you have to face why does anybody want to even live as long as they want to live? [I was] completely disconnected. And so I went back [to class] the next day and [the teacher] was asking me about what we were supposed to have read, and I just said, "I didn't read it." And I remember him looking down at me, you know, from his glasses- looking down at me, he said, "You didn't read it?" And I said, "Nope. And I'm not going to. I don't feel any connection to this person. I don't know why somebody would want to live a long life. This is what I'm seeing and quite honestly I'm not sure life's worth it." And he politely kept on going right down the aisle, and then my neighbor friend said, "You're an idiot." He's just going.. ."What the hell? Here's your chance and you- you're just an idiot." And the next day in class I was thinking he was going to boot me out. I thought for sure he was going to boot me out, but instead he put a book on my desk; it was called *Manchild in the Promised Land*. It was by Claude Brown, and it's a story about a guy in New York and he gets into drugs and prostitution, and all these really bad things. And about halfway into the book he changes his life around, and I remember the book had the word *fuck* in it, you know. Like, "Hey! The guy talks and he uses real language!" And I was so excited and I'd stay after [class], and then he changes his life around. And I'm like, wow, this is really, you know, New York City, it was like I could really relate to it. The rest of the class went on to like *Grapes of Wrath* or *Wuthering Heights*, or something, and I'm in, you know, *Manchild in the Promised Land* and meeting after school with the teacher and just talking with him about it. You know, he just loved it. He would just sit there and smile; he could just tell that I had this enthusiasm for what I was reading. And then he said, "Well, did you ever read *Bless Me Ultima*?" I said, "No." And he said, "Oh Rudolfo Anaya. It's a book about this *curandera*- this woman who uses herbs and medicines, a very spiritual woman in New Mexico." And I read it and I'm like, "Oh my gosh- he's describing my grandmother! This is my grandmother, right here!" And so I read it, my dad read it, my mom even read it. I mean, she trudged through it. My brothers and sisters read it. You know, we're not a very literate family that way, but we've all read *Bless Me Ultima*. It was so cool, and I really got turned on to learning and reading at that particular point.

Though lengthy, I have chosen to share the previous illustration from Emiliano's story because it seems to so powerfully capture the incredible influence educators and mentors can have on young people.

Through President Johnson's federal War on Poverty initiative during the 1960s, both Emiliano and an older sister tutored for an alternative education program, which was

"very cultural" according to Emiliano, and "situated in the needs of that particular community." Of the program participants-seventh and eighth grade students who had been previously expelled from the public school system-Emiliano recalls, "Sometimes they wouldn't show up, and sometimes they'd show up all high on sniffing glue. Sometimes they'd show up and be so engaged and wanting to learn. You just never knew."

Emiliano recalled as a high school junior being asked by a young Cuban student teacher about his future plans. Since college had never been part of his family's story, Emiliano had never given it any consideration. Perhaps more accurately-he did not even realize that it was an option to be considered. As a result, he remembers replying, "Well, I'm going to get a job, work in a factory, buy a car, give half of my money to my mom and dad, and eventually get married and settle down," adding "That was the narrative of my family." Sensing the future could involve more, Emiliano's teacher remarked "I've seen your work and I've been watching you in class, and I think you would be a person that could potentially go to college." Although taken aback-and even describing himself as wondering why this particular teacher would take an interest in him-Emiliano began to consider this foreign concept of "college" further. The following summer, he enrolled in an Upward Bound program at a university about an hour from his family's home.

Like the McNair Scholars Program, Upward Bound is a federally funded TRIO program whose mission is to prepare first-generation, low-income students for college enrollment at the undergraduate level (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Emiliano credits Upward Bound with being "a great, great program for me." Through Upward Bound, Emiliano spent several summer weeks living on a college campus, even taking

college preparatory classes. He vividly recalls his excitement as he visited the campus bookstore and purchased his first book. As he related this story, Emiliano gestured toward his own office bookshelves, now filled with books, and said "It's still over there." He smiled as he recalled his astonishment at being given not only a dictionary, but also a thesaurus, joking, "I'd never seen a thesaurus before. I was like, 'What is this? And how [do you use it]?' Words to give you other words? Dang, these people are smart!" In addition to getting an opportunity to live on a college campus during the summers after his junior and senior years, Emiliano credits the Upward Bound staff with teaching him how to complete college applications and financial aid forms, and prepare for admissions tests such as the SAT.

As Emiliano further elaborated on his family and his early years, three concepts emerged as particularly influential in developing a deeper understanding and appreciation for the values of his immediate and extended family: family ties, social activism, and the cultural concept of being *bien educado*, or well educated at home. As mentioned earlier, since Emiliano's father was in the military, the family moved every few years prior to eventually settling down in Colorado. Because of this, Emiliano says, "we have a strong sense of family, [knowing that] those [other] friendships were temporary, but our relationships with our brothers and sisters were permanent." Additionally, each of Emiliano's seven siblings was born within about a year of the previous one, making them "best friends with each other." Emiliano describes his father as a "very strong unionist guy," encouraging his family to be involved in union activities as well. An aunt was also closely involved with the Democratic Party, so the family became active in political marches, especially those involving the Chicano movement. Emiliano conveyed, "Being

politically engaged was important." Finally, Emiliano shared that with regard to being *bien educado*:

Being "well educated" was never about what grade you got, but rather how respectful and honorable you were. My dad's sense, in particular, was that whatever we did reflected on him and reflected on our larger family, and we always had to keep that in mind. So we were pretty well behaved kids-and still are, actually.

During his senior year, Emiliano became quite involved in school activities, including reading, student council, debate club, and a new role as class president. He recalls starting to "hang out with kids who were talking about going to college." Additionally, he was able to put his new skills to use when he learned that an admissions counselor from a small college in Wisconsin was visiting his high school. As it happened, Emiliano and a friend received a note from the guidance counselor indicating that their SAT scores were available to pick up. While at the counselor's office, the two met the admissions counselor, who asked if she could take a look at their scores. Upon reviewing them, she asked if they had heard of Carroll College, handed them some pictures of the campus and remarked, "It's free to apply." Since the two were in the middle of a "boring class," according to Emiliano, they decided to take some additional time to complete the college application right there in the counselor's office. Calling his decision to apply "serendipitous," Emiliano added "she happened to be there at the moment, and she always had large numbers of students from Colorado and from the Virgin Islands 'cause those were the two places she loved to vacation."

Despite appearing indiscriminate, Emiliano was much more intentional about his college application process than the previous story suggests. He eventually applied and was accepted to seven colleges, ultimately choosing to attend Carroll College because of

the attractive financial aid package he was offered. Even now looking back, Emiliano still seems slightly incredulous as he remembers, "...the scholarship paid me to go there. I was like one of the only people that went to the financial aid office and they gave me a check. And I'm like 'Wow, this is cool!'"

Emiliano estimates that his mother never finished fourth grade, sharing that she is "not very literate in terms of traditional literacies." Yet, he shares:

[Mom] was pretty engaged in our schooling experiences, so that even though she didn't have much of an education, she always was interested in our education, asking us about how our grades were, or if we were doing what we needed to do. So even though she didn't go very far, she always placed a really high value on education and in schooling. Maybe it was because she didn't have the chance [herself].

Despite his mother's active interest in the children's schooling, Emiliano admits that her expectations for their educational attainment ended with high school. This makes sense, given that high school was far beyond her own understanding, and college most likely existed even further outside that realm of possibility. Emiliano later shared his memories of deciding to attend college out-of-state, describing his mother as lacking the ability to comprehend why he would want to do such a thing.

As one might anticipate, making the transition from a racially diverse and low-income high school in Colorado to a small, private liberal arts college in Wisconsin proved to be initially difficult for Emiliano, as so often happens with first-generation college students:

These were kids who'd gone primarily to these private schools; they were very well prepared. I was completely unprepared economically. So even though I had great inspirational teachers...it was a combination of things. I struggled academically, and I struggled culturally.

Emiliano reminisced about receiving his first college English paper back. He felt confident in the paper, having "poured his heart and soul into it," even-as he laughingly recalled, "quoting from [the musical group] Earth, Wind and Fire." When the professor asked to speak to him after class, Emiliano's initial reaction in his self-proclaimed "delusional way" was, "Dang, he likes my paper so much he wants to publish it!" His professor's opinion of the paper was drastically different, however. In fact, because of the numerous grammatical errors, the professor incorrectly assumed Emiliano was not a native-English speaker and added, "This is one of the worst papers I've ever read." Emiliano was dejected. Through further assessment and talking with his professor, Emiliano learned that there are fundamental differences in the meanings of words such as *to*, *two*, and *too*, for example, or *there* and *their*. Despite the professor's harsh assessment, he conveyed two powerful concepts for which Emiliano is, to this day, grateful. First, he told Emiliano "Your preparation does not equal your potential." He assigned Emiliano two grades for each assignment: one based on creativity, the other based on writing. Secondly, he stated, "Now, you could walk away and not address these [academic] issues or you could let me help you" asking, "*If not now, when!*"

The professor's comments forced Emiliano to engage in serious self-reflection and soul-searching, and he recalls wandering the campus and surrounding city for hours, momentarily considering quitting: "Maybe I should just go home. Maybe this isn't for me. This culture's not for me. This academic thing I'm not prepared for. Maybe I just call it quits and go home." Late that night after returning to his dorm room, Emiliano resolved to stay, returning to his professor's office the next day and regularly for the remainder of that semester for writing assistance. He credits being at a small private college, and also



that particular faculty member for caring enough to devote the additional time and energy. Most importantly, however, Emiliano remembers feeling the incredible weight of his family's expectations as he recalled:

An aunt told me I had to show our family what was possible from our family. [There was this] recognition that I'm going to have to go home and people are going to know that I failed, and can I do that? Is that what I want my brothers and sisters and my cousins and neighbors to say, you know, "This is what happened to Emiliano at school"? So that weighed into my decision. Like I said, family was so important and they were all watching. Not just them-not just my brothers and sisters, but my cousins and nephews and nieces. It was like, here's a pioneer, and what's going to happen to him? And if [I] came back like, "College is not a good thing," then that sends a powerful message to the whole family.. .knowing whatever decision I make is going to affect generations.

Emiliano recalls his family's expectations feeling like a tremendous responsibility. In hindsight, though, he describes his family as "very unconditionally accepting," and admits realistically that they probably expected less of him than he expected of himself *for* them, confessing, "They would have just said, 'You gave it a try. We're glad you're home.'"

During his first year or two at Carroll, Emiliano admits feeling culturally estranged amidst the predominately White middle class student population. However, sometime during his sophomore year, he began feeling engaged and developed connections and networks on campus. His relationship with his family, in particular his mother, continued to grow even stronger during his time spent away at college. During his undergraduate and graduate school years, Emiliano would have described his family as "curious" about his educational pursuits. This makes sense, given their lack of experience with such endeavors, and the lack of context surrounding college itself. Despite their curiosity, his parents never came to visit the campus until Emiliano graduated with his bachelor's degree. By that point, he says, they were "very proud that I

was graduating." Today, he says, "they are exceptionally proud," adding, "It's not just curiosity anymore. They're very, very proud of me."

Emiliano initially considered taking graduate courses to stay academically engaged and to fulfill continuing education requirements for his teaching license. However, while exploring his options at the local university, a faculty member encouraged him to pursue a graduate degree in educational psychology at the state university instead. Ultimately, he was able to earn his master's degree with the full support of an Advanced Opportunities Fellowship, then returned to teaching for six or seven years. Emiliano credits his wife with inspiring him to return once again for his doctorate, and for encouraging him to seek out another Advanced Opportunities Fellowship, reminding him "You know, they're not going to have these kinds of programs for very long." As Emiliano reflected on his decision whether or not to return for his doctorate, he shared a conversation with his aunt, redolent with that distinctive sense of expectation he felt during his years as an undergraduate at Carroll College:

I remember telling [my aunt], "Tia, they're offering me this fellowship to go back and get my doctorate degree, and I just don't know whether I can do it." And she said, "You have no choice." And I was like "What? That wasn't the answer I wanted to hear." She said, "You have to go back. Our family is watching you, and we need you to be successful."

This intimate exchange shared between Emiliano and his *tia* reminded me of a phenomenon mentioned in the literature, that of "special status." According to Rodriguez (2003):

*Special status* is an academic-success-promoting influence often granted by uneducated family members. Special status resulted in most participants being singled out, in a positive way, even as young children, with advantageous effects on their self-confidence and on their willingness to take informed risks, (p. 19)

Emiliano did return to the university, eventually earning his PhD in educational psychology. Our earlier exchange about the academic and cultural struggles he experienced as an undergraduate segued into fond recollections of his strong support network of fellow Latino graduate students at University of Wisconsin. Like Leah, Emiliano credited his fellow graduate students with providing much of the social and academic support that is often critical to the success of students, regardless of a student's cultural or class background:

We always met in the student pub and we would just sit and talk for hours and eat popcorn for dinner. We talked a lot about everything from politics to what professors to take, to which classes to take, to great articles somebody had read, to when the next *pachanga* was going to be. It was a very nice-small but very good-graduate group for my PhD program to hang out with.

In hearing Emiliano's story, my attention turned back to Leah's recollection of her fellow doctoral students and the inclusive nature of their academic and professional interactions as they navigated the doctoral process together. The value of such peer interactions will be discussed further in the following chapter.

### Summary

In this chapter, I provided stories of each participant's experiences growing up, including information about their early years, messages received regarding the value of education, and triumphs and/or struggles experienced in the educational process. I have also begun to establish the participants' experiences with mentoring. In the following chapter, I provide context with which to understand the participants' mentoring styles. Additionally, themes and recommendations for practice and future research are discussed.

## CHAPTER V

### THEMES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Bringing voice to, and subsequently conveying the participants' experiences with authenticity and accuracy, is just one of the many challenges of conducting phenomenological research (Creswell, 1998; Crotty, 1998; van Manen, 1990; Worthen, 2002). It is the single most daunting task I have faced in the process of writing my dissertation. It is my sincere intent in this chapter to illustrate the emergent themes in a way that will resonate with the reader, as well as with each of my participants. As might be expected, each participant's experience was incredibly unique. Indeed, there are more differences in the experiences of Abel, Leah, Picard, Emiliano, Karin, and Alan than there are similarities. However, the similarities that exist are noteworthy; they comprise the themes further discussed in the following pages.

The intention of this phenomenological research study was to explore the inspirations for faculty from first-generation backgrounds to mentor first-generation college students. Additionally, the phenomenon involving the transition into academe for such first-generation faculty is explored. This chapter is organized by five main themes. These are: (1) illustrations of teaching and mentoring, (2) first-generation status, (3) inspirations for mentoring, (4) strategies for mentoring, and (5) challenges of academe. Within each theme are corresponding subthemes, which will be introduced in the upcoming pages.

## Theme 1: Illustrations of Teaching and Mentoring

In this section, illustrations of the faculty participants' teaching and mentoring styles are shared. My purpose in sharing these illustrations is to provide further context for better understanding the participants' individual styles and how they relate to their students.

### *Abel*

Abel was initially introduced to the McNair program during his first year as a faculty member; one of his dissertation committee members was involved as a faculty mentor in the program and she invited Abel to speak to a group of McNair scholars at University of Nebraska. Also during his first faculty position in a neighboring state, he recalled being quickly sought out by the McNair program administrators there, where he served as a mentor to at least two McNair scholars.

When I commented that mentoring seems to come naturally to Abel, he disagreed, saying that his mentoring style-and his work with students in general-has evolved a lot over the years. He acknowledges that students will experience some of their own bumps and bruises in the academic process, including understanding the politics of graduate school and academe in general, and the process of writing for publication, having articles returned numerous times for editing and rewrites. While Abel recognizes that he cannot protect his students from this, he tries to help them understand that those bumps and bruises are part of the process. He tries to inform them about these ahead of time so they will be prepared when they arise.

As Abel and I talked about his experiences with his most recent McNair scholar, he remembered being pleased by the way she seemed to systematically uncover and

better understand each step of the research process. Very early in their mentoring relationship, Abel described her as "gung-ho" and excited about the research. However, as they entered the second month, he noted that she had begun to withdraw; he was not seeing her as frequently as he had become accustomed. As an experienced faculty mentor, Abel was prepared for this shift in her involvement:

This is about the time when a student will get overwhelmed with what they need to do...especially with the type of research we were conducting. And so I gave her some time [and] when she finally came back around [I said] "Okay, we need to chat." I said, "You're a bit overwhelmed, aren't you?" And she looked at me like "Wow!" I explained to her that there were some similar types of things that I went through that everybody goes through, particularly as a McNair scholar. I told her these are the same things I was going through when I was in graduate school as well. Once you get your coursework finished, you have no other structure than to get your stuff done.

Abel's approach, and specifically his way of conveying that he understood what his student was experiencing, was quite effective in helping her reengage in the research. By assuring her that her feelings are a natural part of the process and by helping her acknowledge her uncertainty, she once again became gung-ho about their project. Abel delighted in describing how, in fact, she later became the partner encouraging *him* to continue on, and identifying their next steps. In a significant way, she took on ownership for the completion of their research, of which Abel is understandably proud.

#### *Emiliano*

As Emiliano and I explored the concept of mentoring and its significance, he estimated that nearly all of the students he has mentored have been students of color, explaining that he "thinks it is kind of natural. They're looking, and I'm looking for them, because my life is enriched by that." The foundation for Emiliano's mentoring relationship with his McNair scholar had been established earlier on through a minority

student leadership initiative at RMSU. He described their connection as more "natural" and organic. His scholar invited Emiliano to be a mentor because of their previously established relationship and their commonalities, including the fact they are both Latino.

Additionally, Emiliano described mentors as opening doors, but he took the metaphor even further:

I think of a mentor as someone who opens doors.. .not only opening the door but going into the hallway and pulling people in; it's sometimes not enough just to open the door because people won't know to look in. So you're always opening doors for possibilities. I think of a mentor as having both a social component, like making a human connection and finding out about people's lives, and also providing the kinds of academic support that they need to be successful in whatever they're pursuing. I think those are probably the core elements.

As he conveyed his interpretation of the significance of the mentoring relationship, I reflected back on my initial arrival to Emiliano's office. He had created an especially inviting space. A striking Diego Rivera print depicting an indigenous-looking man on his knees, a basketful of flowers on his back, and an old woman helping him up, filled the wall adjacent to his desk. Several symbols of his Latino heritage resided next to the painting. Shelves packed with books lined the opposite wall. Between these-near the window-were numerous awards, including several plaques recognizing Emiliano's scholarly achievements, and also thanking him for his mentorship, collegiality, and tireless work on behalf of his colleagues and his students. Although there were a couple of chairs for visitors and students, Emiliano immediately invited me to sit in his chair for our interview. I initially declined his offer, thinking of how awkward I would feel taking his space, and reflecting on how personal my own office space is to me. He insisted, however, maintaining that he would be more comfortable using one of the other chairs, which appeared to me to look considerably less comfortable than his own.

Our first interview, then, was conducted with me sitting at Emiliano's desk-thus with Emiliano sitting in an adjacent chair, viewing his office from an angle different from his day-to-day perspective. Our exchange regarding the chair, and his subsequent insistence that I take his seat, took place prior to the audio-recorded interview, so it is not part of the formal interview transcript. For this reason, I nearly missed the importance of the exchange and its symbolic representation of Emiliano's mentoring style. Fortunately, just prior to our second interview I jotted a quick note in my research journal reminding myself to ask Emiliano to elaborate on the intentionality behind his gesture. He explained:

It's kind of a symbolic way of getting people to think about [their own aspirations]. "Really, this is where I want to be. This is where I want to sit." There have been several students that I'll say, "Here, I want you to sit here and I'll sit there, alright?" And part of it is to begin to develop that sense of identity, but I think more of it is that sense of ambition and kind of goals and this is what I'm striving for. This is where I want to be...I want to be at a desk - not this messy desk - but some desk, someday. And I want to be able to have the kind of interactions with people where I feel like I'm contributing something. So yeah-there's a pretty deliberate goal of doing that. I don't do it very often, but I do think it's important.

As much as anything in the first interview transcript, this simple gesture spoke volumes about Emiliano's ways of interacting with students.

#### *Alan*

Alan could easily be considered the realist-or perhaps the pragmatist-of this group. This descriptor seems appropriate given that he is the only one of my participants who comes from the physical sciences. He discloses that he came to Rocky Mountain State University because after interviews here, in New York, and in Michigan, he received an offer from RMSU. "This place kind of grew on me," he says, describing it as an exceptionally positive experience, having now spent nearly 25 years at RMSU.



He admits to perceiving his students-mostly graduate-level-as "his progeny" since he and his wife do not have children of their own. Prior to becoming acquainted with his McNair scholar and learning more about the McNair program, Alan had never deliberately reflected on the fact he is a first-generation student himself. He shared, "That was the first time I'd even realized.. .there were first-generation people [and] 'Hey, I'm a first-generation [student]!' It just struck me and made me aware of it."

Generally speaking, Alan perceives his students as "less monomaniacal," less hyper-driven-yet just as intelligent-as students at more highly selective institutions such as Berkeley, his alma mater. Alan's high school experiences cleaning swimming pools for his father's business have allowed Alan to develop an appreciation for students, including his McNair scholar, who are disciplined and "working their own way through" college. He recalls the students who "grew up working to get money rather than being given an allowance," saying that, in general, such students often seem to have better attitudes. He also admits to liking his non-traditional students in particular, as well as the veterans who have developed "a lot of discipline by being in the military."

Coming from a place where his colleagues were very competitive, even cutthroat, it was a pleasant surprise for Alan to adjust to the more relaxed climate of RMSU. It was a change Alan appreciated:

[RMSU] has worked out really great for me because it's the perfect size compared to the departments I've worked in. I've worried [if I] can get good enough students to do the work, and I've always had enough. When the first crop went away, I said, "Oh, there they go. I'll never get students like that again." And then the next students come, and they're different, but after awhile you like them in different ways; they're just as good. So I've found through four or five cycles of PhDs, I like working with [these] students. [When I] get frustrated that things aren't going fast enough, [I think back] to Caltech, where every person there is really bright and motivated and does all the stuff. Yeah, I'd get more done. But

here [at RMSU], you swing with the punches, and you try to encourage people, and I think it's been pretty rewarding because of that. So I've always enjoyed it.

Alan continued by relating a story about a colleague whom he described as "always grumbling" about RMSU. Repeatedly, his colleague would ask Alan what attracted him to the place. It was partly through these exchanges that Alan recalls clearly acknowledging his appreciation for the more relaxed atmosphere of RMSU, saying, "It suits me."

When I inquired about someone Alan would consider his mentor, he struggled to identify any specific person, asking, "Would it be sad to say I can't think of anyone?" Because of this, Alan shared that it causes him to be more intentional about advising and guiding his students, saying, "I've decided not everyone has a mentor." For this reason, Alan tends to draw from the mentoring and teaching styles of many people, which he then adapts to his own style, and he likened mentoring to "imparting his experience," saying:

I think a lot of people dice and slice everyone around them. It's something I tell my students-especially the ones who aren't very good at giving presentations-I say, "When you're watching someone's presentation, ask yourself, 'Gee, that was a good talk. Why?' 'Well, I like the way he did this.' Whip it out! If you don't like this, don't do it." There're a few dos and don'ts, but really you sample things around, the same thing I'm sure writers do. If you like Hemingway-short, declarative sentences-go ahead and write like that.

He also often finds himself stepping in to help promote his students as they are in the process of applying for jobs, graduate programs, or grant funding, particularly those in the physical sciences, who he suspects are more naturally inclined to introversion.

Despite his interest in mentoring and his own self-identified lack of mentoring, Alan has specific ideas about what works and what does not with regard to formally structured mentoring programs, or as he referred to it-"mandating mentoring." He

disclosed that, to him, such programs could feel like loaded propositions, acknowledging that the expectations can be difficult for both mentor and student to fulfill. Specifically, Alan is concerned by the idea that people from certain populations (i.e., new faculty, at-risk students, etc.) should be required to participate in formal mentoring programs. He is not necessarily resistant to such programs. However, he has serious reservations about the ability of these programs to be truly effective (Allen & Poteet, 1999; Chao et al., 1992), sharing the following description of his wife's experience with a formal mentoring program designed for academically high-risk students:

[My wife] was [involved with a program] for students coming in who were considered high risk [academically], and she's supposed to mentor them. So she's scheduling meetings and stuff, and they wouldn't show to the meetings. Their interest level is not high enough to succeed, and I think this is one of those things that sounded good from an education perspective-throw some money at it, they had a nice luncheon, and it fails miserably. So I think legislating mentoring just doesn't work too well. The resources are available to people if they want to seek help.

Alan is especially critical of the institution's propensity to commit money and effort to duplicate existing student services in hopes of achieving increased student success. The following excerpt clearly demonstrates Alan's conviction about student services, as well as his strongly held belief that students themselves must be held accountable for their effort and attendance:

If I'm teaching freshmen, [I need to] know where to send people. I can help them with some things, but if it's deeper than that, there are all kinds of student counseling and resources they're probably not aware of. [University administrators] keep saying, "Well, should we do more tutoring for these students who are having trouble getting chemistry?" And we point out to them that there are like a half dozen tutoring programs on campus. Almost every day of the week there's a place you can go for help. You don't need to create another one. These students just need to [use the ones that already exist]. And going to class would really help. Every time somebody decides to make a way for students to succeed better is to add another thing on the menu. It's just too much, and I think that's unfortunate. I have a little bit of a skeptical attitude about [people who think] that

[adding more of these services] will make them succeed. And if we just change how we teach, they'll succeed.

Alan's mentoring and teaching style may be best captured through the idea that by focusing your energy on those students who are demonstrating a genuine effort, you will achieve the greatest return:

My wife, [who also teaches in this department] is depressed by the problem cases, [saying] "Maybe I shouldn't teach anymore, because it's so depressing, all these people." And I keep telling her "don't focus on the percentage flunking, because you've probably done all you could. How about the ones who actually come to your office hours and really want to learn? Think about those guys."

In my own work with college students over the past decade, I can relate to the sentiments expressed by both Alan and his wife. I, too, have pondered similar questions regarding how to most effectively direct my energy and attention. Occasionally, but thankfully not often, I find myself spending more time and effort than I would prefer on students who outwardly demonstrate little personal investment in their education. At other times, I remind myself to try not to take personally such students' minimal efforts, but it is admittedly difficult. I do not have an answer to questions regarding how to maintain an appropriate balance, but I appreciate the importance of it. Alan's comments also serve to remind me of my respect for the students, like many of the McNair scholars I have worked with, who devote an incredible amount of time and energy to their education, despite often having family and work obligations. In many ways, it reinforces my enthusiasm for working with McNair scholars and other first-generation college students.

#### *Picard*

Picard first learned of the McNair program through one of his undergraduates, Beth, who had taken several of his classes. When she became a McNair scholar, Beth invited Picard to be her faculty mentor, having become familiar with his teaching and

advising style. He fondly recalled her as "effervescent and vivacious," an "unusual undergrad" that stood out because of her willingness to ask questions and challenge him in class. He shared, "You could see she knew what she wanted and she had ideas" adding that Beth ultimately achieved both her masters and her PhD. Because of his experiences working with Beth, Picard has made a point to repeatedly bring the McNair program staff into his classes to share information, recognizing the potential significance of the program to other first-generation students.

After serving in the Army and working as an outpatient therapist, Picard began teaching because he viewed it as an opportunity to make a genuine difference and to get in on the ground floor of a social work department. He enjoys teaching, and he enjoys striving to stimulate the minds of his students. "I don't [always] appreciate research for research sake," he says:

I'm too much of a practical person, [asking] how is that going to help the common person to live a happy, for lack of a better word, normal life? How's that going to help them with their marriage? With them raising their children? Finding a job? You know, increasing their self-esteem. Those kinds of things. Being able to deal with life's problems-that's the kind of research I appreciate.

Admittedly, Picard values research most when it can be applied, as depicted in the previous quote. However, he also appreciates research that can make a positive difference in the lives of his clients and students.

Throughout our conversations, Picard revealed a strong spirituality, mentioning a number of instances of what he described as "divine order." One such instance was conveyed in the previous chapter when Picard was summoned to the local military induction station during the Vietnam era. Similarly, coming to Rocky Mountain State University felt like divine order to Picard. When he originally accepted his position at

RMSU, he was familiar with the then director of the Social Work department. He had gained experience teaching at Midwestern State University prior to completing his doctorate and before moving to the Rocky Mountain region.

At RMSU, Picard recalled his students, particularly his undergraduates, as energetic and vivacious:

My undergraduate students were the ones who were thirsting. They were the ones who were real inquisitive. They would listen. They would ask questions. They seemed eager to learn. I can engage with them, and they would ask me questions individually after class or something in a different type of setting. It was my undergraduate students that made it fun. I was the advisor to the ASSW, which was the undergraduate student organization for about four years. I worked with them on their group projects. And they felt free to come to me.

Although Picard described having a difficult time initially adjusting to his teaching load as a new faculty member, he went on to describe how well respected he became among both his undergraduate and his graduate students. He began to understand how to have full ownership over his classes, which helped immensely. He also began chairing graduate committees, sometimes serving on as many as ten at one time.

Picard compared mentoring to an apprenticeship, where the mentor demonstrates a process, whatever it may be, to a novice or protege (Haring, 1997, 1999). He recognized his second division director at RMSU as a mentor in the sense that she worked well with him to further develop his research and teaching skills, saying "When I look back on [my experience with her], that's where I grew. We did presentations together and we wrote articles together."

While Picard believes his experiences as a first-generation college student have directly influenced the way he works with students, he does not believe they have impacted his relationships with colleagues. He noted that his academic pedigree, his

research, and his race have been more likely than his first-generation status to influence these relationships, saying:

What seemed to matter was, what research are you doing? When did you get your PhD? And where did you get your PhD? Those things seem to matter more than my being first-generation. Whereas with students, I think [being a first-generation student myself] matters because in many, many cases they are the first to go to school, breaking all kinds of barriers to do it.

Picard shared a story with me, which I find particularly revealing about the initial impression he is able to convey to those around him. He describes an exercise he uses in his diversity seminars:

After [the students] have gotten to know me and they're comfortable with me, I will say to them, "What would you say my background is-by looking at me? What are my parents like?".. .that kind of thing. [And my students will guess] educated, born with a silver spoon in my mouth, no money worries. Family owns their own business. I mean, all those kinds of things. You know? And I say, "No," and I tell them parts of the story I just told you [which were portrayed in chapter IV].

I can relate to his students' initial impressions. Despite having grown up in a poor family, Picard exudes an air of confidence and self-assuredness that belies the uncertain and reticent child he describes himself as having been. In fact, without knowing differently, a person could initially mistake Picard as being intimidating.

When I met Picard for our last interview, he was in the final stages of checking out of his office, turning in his keys, saying his goodbyes to colleagues and staff, and preparing to move back to Midwestern State University where he had recently purchased a house and secured a new tenure-track position. During the years prior to my meeting Picard, RMSU's Social Work division had experienced significant turnover. Several faculty from diverse backgrounds resigned, including a gay man, a lesbian, an Asian woman, a Filipino woman, and a White woman. Although Picard does not believe the

resignations were related to discrimination, he expressed concern about the political climate fostered by the new division director, comparing it to a "cult of personality." He described the new director as needing to be surrounded by people who defer to her. Despite the less-than-optimal departmental situation contributing to Picard's resignation, he values what he described as his "many good experiences there."

*Karin*

Karin believes strongly that she is at her best and most effective in one-on-one situations, such as with her McNair scholar, or in small group settings, as when she takes groups of students abroad for international business courses. She admits feeling substantial pressure to produce good teaching evaluations:

I would enjoy teaching if I could just teach, but it's pressure to get good evaluations and pressure not to have too high a GPA in your class, too. So all semester you're thinking, "Oh if I do what I really ought to do and ream 'em out and say, 'you guys blew this test and it's your own fault and you should have studied harder.'" Instead I'm being super-diplomatic because I know they're going to crucify me when they get the evaluation. We're all teaching in a way so that we don't get beaten up too badly on the evaluations and so the only time that you can really enjoy working with a student seems like when they do an independent study or one-on-one kind of project [like with my McNair scholar].

Despite feeling overwhelmingly busy, Karin accepted her McNair scholar's request for mentoring specifically because she wishes there had been some type of similar program for first-generation students when she was an undergraduate. In both her teaching and her mentoring, Karin is especially careful not to appear as though she is "talking down to" her students, and she treats them as adults. However, she is also very intentional about the way she explains concepts, particularly with regard to the research process. She continually strives to be as clear as possible, while at the same time being thorough. While working with her McNair scholar, it was important to Karin to avoid making



assumptions about her student's previous experiences and understanding of the research process. She acknowledged that this intentionality was due to her own experience as a first-generation student.

Karin shared that with more years of teaching experience, and by adjusting her teaching style to make sure that she uses a practical approach to information delivery, she has become a more confident teacher. Her non-traditional students, in particular, seem to appreciate her practical approach. She tries to ensure that the students can clearly see the connections between the information they learn in her classes and their future careers. She acknowledges that students, especially those who are first-generation, may be intimidated by faculty and thus are less likely to talk with faculty outside of class or during office hours. Her recognition of this encourages Karin to be more intentional in her interactions with students. Although not certain, Karin speculates that few of the students who have taken her overseas classes are first-generation (or at least, few of them are from low-income backgrounds). The demands of going to school and for many, working part-to-full-time, may contribute to a lower proportion of first-generation, low-income students studying abroad.

In recounting her own experiences as an undergraduate, Karin remembered an aloof and intimidating person in the office of financial aid who made her feel like she should already have known all the answers. Karin credits the field of Student Affairs with encouraging professionals to be more approachable to today's undergraduates, particularly those from first-generation backgrounds. She sees and appreciates the many improvements that have been made since the days when she was an undergraduate trying to navigate the unfamiliar waters of attaining a college degree.

*Leah*

For Leah, communication and common goals are two critical components factoring into the success or demise of mentoring relationships. She shared, "I need to be able to communicate [with my students] and they need to be able to communicate with me. We need to be honest with each other so that I can give good news and bad news both." Additionally, she expressed:

.. .A clear sense of what I'm trying to accomplish with the person I'm mentoring and a clear sense of where they are now [is critical]. So [it's determining], what is the goal and where are we now in relation to that goal so we can chart out a path to get there.

Having been a high school teacher for twelve years, Leah considers herself primarily a teacher more than a professor. As such, she naturally likened mentoring to teaching:

A lot of who I am is invested in being a teacher. I think of [mentoring] the same way I think of teaching in that-for whomever I'm mentoring-I want to have high expectations and [provide] high levels of support. I think if you drop either one of those balls, then you're not offering the best for that person.

When Leah's McNair scholar, Brian, initially approached her about serving as his mentor, he had already been working with a different faculty member whom was thus far unresponsive, having failed to return Brian's phone calls and emails. Since he had taken a class with Leah previously, Brian decided to ask her if she would consider becoming his new mentor. She enthusiastically agreed.

Leah credits her own working class background with inspiring her to be a better mentor than the person with whom Brian had previously been working. She compared working with Brian on his McNair research to working with a master's student on the thesis-except she "felt he was even more motivated than a master's student would be because the McNair program set timelines for him and he had to meet those timelines."

Leah felt their mentoring relationship was both successful and rewarding, concluding, "[Brian] worked really hard on [his research] and it was important to him. He was motivated. I was motivated. It was a lot of fun to meet with him and work on it."

## Theme 2: First-Generation Status

In this section, I introduce themes related to first-generation status, including the participants' mothers' roles in encouraging education, the educational attainment of the participants' siblings, and the fact that none of the participants embarked on their educational journeys with intentions of attaining a PhD.

### *The Significance of the Mother's Role in Encouraging Education*

Nearly all the participants, with the exception of Alan, shared specific memories of their mothers encouraging them to become further educated. The definition of "further education" differed based on each mother's own educational attainment. For instance, since Emiliano's mother completed a fourth grade education, she expected that her children complete high school. When Emiliano completed not only high school, but also a bachelor's degree and then master's and doctoral degrees, it was far beyond her expectation. I sensed from Emiliano that it was also probably outside her realm of experience. Similarly-while also notably different-Karin and Leah both proudly revealed that each of their mothers completed bachelor's degrees later in life, and were most likely inspired by their daughters' educational attainment.

Most of the participants' mothers worked outside the home. Through the process of coding the data and in reflecting on all the interviews, it became clear that the mothers' roles both inside and outside the home were critical components of the educational messages conveyed to their children. Their employment was essential to the survival of

their respective families. Consequently, I was struck by Alan's comment: "[We were] pretty much a standard nuclear family; a stay-at-home mom, father who worked...." The idea of a "standard nuclear family" with a stay-at-home mom was clearly not the reality for most of the other participants: Karin's mother became a dental assistant to support her family after her divorce from Karin's father. She later completed her bachelor's degree in psychology while Karin was completing her doctorate. Leah's mother worked as a bookkeeper and completed her bachelor's degree in literature upon retiring. Picard's mother worked as a domestic for higher-income families in one of the wealthiest counties in the country. Abel's mother organized labor crews and thinned beets alongside her husband and her children. Emiliano's mother cleaned hotel rooms and packed carrots for a local vegetable company. Every one of these mothers worked outside the home. Every one of these mothers advocated the achievement of an advanced education, whether high school or college.

These realizations become even more intriguing when compared to some of the participants' fathers' attitudes about education and educational achievement. For example, Picard's mother expected both Picard and his sister to earn bachelor's degrees, perceiving it as their entree to a better livelihood. At one point, Picard's mother even enrolled in college courses but eventually quit because his father was intimidated by "everyone getting ahead of him. Similarly, while Leah considers her mother her strongest advocate, she described her father as more likely to encourage hard work as a means of advancement, adding that he was mostly absent after her parents divorced. Likewise, Karin extols her mother as an advocate of education, while comparing her

father to today's "dead beat dad," leaving his family with little support and plenty of debt.

The children-my participants-acknowledged the extraordinary abilities of their mothers to overcome and to succeed, despite numerous challenges including their limited educations. For instance, Abel revealed a strong conviction as he described his mother's acquired ability to "navigate social institutions" even though she possessed but an eighth grade education. In fact, Abel's conviction might be further defined as regret-that his mother never had an opportunity to acquire more education.

It would be misleading for me to conclude this section by leaving the reader with the impression that all the participants' fathers denied the value of higher education; that is simply not true. It is true, however, that while most of the participants spoke explicitly of their mothers' beliefs and strong advocacy of education, none of the participants spoke about education being a value encouraged by their fathers. It is more accurate to say that some of the participants' fathers encouraged the value of developing a strong work ethic-as in the case of Abel's family-or of choosing practical occupations, as in the cases of Alan, Leah, and Karin's fathers. Regardless, the role of the participants' mothers in encouraging education was undeniable.

This finding is consistent with Horn and Nunez's (2000) research involving secondary school students whose parents did not go to college. Specifically, Horn and Nunez discovered, as early as the eighth grade, their participants were significantly more likely to discuss future educational plans with their mothers than with their fathers. They were also more likely to discuss such plans with their friends rather than with their fathers. At the same time, according to Horn and Nunez, "while frequent discussions with

mothers varied little with parents' [level of] education, discussions with fathers increased as parents' highest education rose" (p. vii).

### *Educational Attainment of the Participants' Siblings*

Given that the participants' mothers were such an integral part of their educational aspirations, one might expect that more than two of the participants' siblings would go on to earn bachelor's degrees. While all six participants earned PhDs, only Picard's and Emiliano's younger sisters went beyond community college. Recall that there are a total of 27 children including the original six participants: Abel has five siblings, Alan one, Emiliano seven, Karin five, Leah two, and Picard one. I cannot help but wonder why-of all the participants' siblings-only Picard and Emiliano's younger sisters went on to attain bachelor's degrees. Additionally, my participants are the only ones to have continued on to graduate school and to have earned doctorates. It is not surprising that none of their siblings earned PhDs (Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998), given that an estimated one percent of the entire United States population has a PhD (U.S. Census, 2008). It is surprising, though, that so few even went on to college at all. According to Pascarella et al. (2004), first-generation college students "made significantly smaller increases in the highest degree they planned to obtain" (p. 277) than students whose parents were college educated. Pascarella et al., speculate, "Students with highly educated parents may simply be more aware of the importance that advanced degrees play..." (p. 277). As I write this, Emiliano reports that his youngest sister is in the process of completing her doctoral coursework and embarking on her dissertation research. What is it about my participants that caused them to go to college in the first place? More importantly, why did each one take it all the way to the PhD? Rodriguez's (2003) "special status" phenomenon

(previously mentioned in chapter IV) may assist researchers in more clearly understanding the answers to these questions. At this point, I cannot answer these questions-and it is beyond the scope of a phenomenological study-but they strike me as fascinating areas to explore more deeply in the future.

### *No Intentions of Pursuing a PhD*

As I reflect further on the participants, their experiences, and their interviews, I become remarkably aware that they did not begin their educational journeys with the intention or desire to attain doctoral degrees. In fact, both Picard and Leah were adamant in their descriptions of their initial reactions to hearing an advisor or mentor suggest they continue on to earn the PhD. For Picard, it was not just "'No,' but *hell no*, I'm not doing [that]!" Leah's reaction was quite similar: "No way. I'm never going to do that!" Abel described being uncertain as to what graduate school would entail. In some ways, he arrived there by default, following his advisor's suggestion to apply for an attractive fellowship. While Emiliano had considered attaining his PhD, he felt uncertain about his desire to go all the way. During a pivotal conversation with his aunt (described in chapter IV), Emiliano became convinced that, as a role model for his immediate and extended families (Rodriguez, 2003), it was critical for him to further his education.

### Theme 3: Inspirations for Mentoring

The third theme, "Inspirations for Mentoring," addresses the original research question, "What inspires faculty who come from first-generation backgrounds to serve as mentors to first-generation students?" Within this theme are four subthemes which I have chosen to call: (a) Diamonds in the Rough, (b) Gratitude, (c) The Discovery of Knowledge, and (d) Paying it Forward by Affecting Positive Change for the Future. In

the following pages, the subthemes will be described in further detail. Additionally, consistent with the qualitative paradigm, quotes from the participants are used to illustrate themes and enhance authenticity from the participants' experiences.

### *Diamonds in the Rough*

One of the many benefits of the mentoring relationship, particularly for students who are the first in their families to go to college, is that mentors often have the ability to sense their students' academic and intellectual capacities more clearly than the students themselves. Each of the participants described experiencing an immense sense of fulfillment from working with individuals who were unaware of their own potential. In fact, all of the participants related stories about students who seemed to be "diamonds in the rough," to borrow Alan's terminology. As Emiliano enthusiastically described:

Once in awhile, a student just pops up with some kind of undefined potential that you just see and you just [think] "Oh my gosh-this person's going to be fabulous, I can tell." And so you start letting them know that and see how you can be more supportive of them and helping them in whatever ways possible, and as opportunities come, thinking of them as well.

As a faculty mentor, Emiliano recalled several of his former students in whom he saw potential early on, yet who seemed unaware of it at that point in their lives, asking:

How do you get [students] to feel comfortable enough that they need to have that kind of faith in themselves, in their own abilities, to stand up and do the work that / see they're capable of but that I'm not sure *they* feel they're capable of?

Similarly, Karin described the way in which her McNair scholar asked for guidance concerning where to look for appropriate literature to inform her research. Ultimately, though, Karin understood that while her scholar appreciated Karin's practical research-specific guidance, she seemed to thrive most when provided affirmation of her inherent abilities:



I know she wanted some guidance about where to look for the kinds of reading she needed and the kind of questions she wanted to research... but what she needed was just someone to have confidence in her. I sort of sensed-even in class -that she had a lot of good ideas but that she didn't feel sure of herself and just needed somebody to kind of help bolster that. I do think I helped build her confidence up because I could see she had a lot of ability.

Leah conveyed her deeply held conviction that "there's a lot of untapped potential in 'this group' of people"-meaning, I think-working class and first-generation college students.

Alan shared his thoughts regarding untapped potential from a slightly different perspective than the other participants, albeit an equally important one, saying "I think I respect [my first-generation and working class students] because I know they came from...more humble origins." Focusing on his belief that many of his students at Rocky Mountain State University were every bit as talented as those he'd worked alongside at more highly-selective (i.e., prestigious) institutions, Alan noted the primary difference between his students at RMSU and those from more prestigious institutions was the level of competitiveness among students. He explains:

The competitiveness is the only difference I've seen. I expected to get not as good a quality student when I got [to RMSU], but I was pleasantly surprised to get those who seemed every bit as good. And the only thing they really needed was motivation. So my job really is to convince people to have some ambition, and want to go off and do things. The odd thing about some of the most capable students.. .that I could have pushed to go to the big time...[is that they have had such] modest goals.

Alan continued by reflecting on his own experiences as an undergraduate at Berkeley, describing some of the more prestigious universities as "cauldrons of insecurity," with highly intelligent students fearing that because they are but one student among many other bright students, they will be proven less capable. From the perspective of a faculty mentor who comes from a first-generation background himself, Alan further pondered the

intelligent, but perhaps naive, students he occasionally encounters in his teaching and advising:

I'm really curious when I see a very promising person [who is not from an elite school], because it's like a diamond in the rough. This person could be good. And because I didn't choose my places rationally, there are very few people who come from [less prestigious] places who could be head and shoulders above everybody. And so I look for those. Even in grad school, the students we get aren't the ones that want to go to Harvard, MIT, Berkeley. They sometimes don't even know about that; they have a level of naivete, and some of them are really good, but they don't know it. And so it's kind of fun to find students who are every bit as capable, and they're not snobbish about it, because they don't come in saying, "I'm from Harvard."

### *Gratitude*

Perhaps the very notion that these students seem unaware of their own potential makes them that much more appreciative when a faculty member takes an active and intentional interest in developing their inherent talents. Perhaps also, it makes the students that much more attractive to faculty who are willing to serve in a mentoring capacity (Campbell & Campbell, 2000). This sense of gratitude-that someone the student regards so highly would demonstrate a keen interest in them-appeals strongly to these participants. Simply put, Emiliano appreciates students who are appreciative. In his own experience, he has witnessed this gratitude in connection with first-generation and working class students, who may, in many cases, view education as a privilege rather than as an entitlement. Abel illustrated this idea nicely as he shared his perspective on his own McNair scholar's appreciation, saying, "She's just a great student to work with. She's grateful about the things that you help her with. When people are gracious about the things that happened and the respect they show you and the deference...it's like 'wow!'"

At several points during our time together, Karin expressed retrospectively feeling like she did not help her McNair scholar as much as she would have liked. During the year she worked with her scholar, she described having a variety of time-consuming obligations that seemed to take away from the time she would have liked to devote to her scholar. Despite these misgivings, Karin seemed thankful as she noted that her scholar still keeps in touch periodically:

I felt like I didn't really do very much and later I felt like I should have done more. But yet, she seemed really truly appreciative and she's kept in touch with me over the years, and every once in a while I'll still get an email from her, so I think she must have found it helpful or she appreciated what I did do.

Throughout our interviews, it was obvious Karin seeks ways to make the learning process beneficial and practical for her students. Specifically, though, Karin shared stories about her experiences teaching international business courses overseas. As Karin reflected on these trips, she noted, in particular, the gratitude these students expressed in having such a unique learning opportunity:

They get so much out of it and it broadens their horizons and changes their perspective on life and on the world. And there again, it makes it worthwhile to do that. Even though I usually barely get paid for it..the time and effort aren't worth what little pay I get for it, but it's the most rewarding teaching that I get to do.

Although Leah never explicitly articulated thinking that gratitude among her students is of particular importance to her, she did describe feeling annoyed by students who enter college with a sense of entitlement, saying "Some of them come in with sort of this entitled air and that drives me nuts." For Leah, then, the inspiration for working with students comes less from gratitude displayed and more from a sense that she can make a difference in the lives of those who do not come in displaying a privileged expectation for their education.

Picard conveyed a sense of immense gratitude to those who helped him along his own educational journey; this gratitude is apparent during all his interviews. It could be described as being woven throughout the conversations we shared. His deep sense of conviction was palpable as he related stories of his own mentors and teachers. It seemed natural to me, then, when I realized how much Picard appreciated his students' sense of gratitude for the commitment he showed to their learning and success:

[One of my former students] said, "It was nice," but her words were, "to have someone who legitimately cared." So I thanked her. So it's those little things. It's the other students who've come to me and said, "We're going to miss you," and things like that that made the difference.

My participants' words regarding gratitude elicited memories of my own work with McNair scholars. In particular, I recalled a student during my first year with our program-Alfonso, the son of Mexican immigrants who became a widely respected leader in campus social and political activism during his undergraduate years. I admired him and enjoyed working with him for many reasons; perhaps most of all because of his gratitude for the sacrifices his parents made to provide a better life for Alfonso and his siblings. Their sacrifices were certainly not lost on him. It is my impression, based on my interactions with Alfonso, that he most likely reflected on them every day and they became a guiding force in his decision-making.

### *The Discovery of Knowledge*

In a previous section, I related the story of Abel's McNair scholar's uncertainty regarding their research, and his subsequent steps in reassuring her that such uncertainty is common and to be expected. During this time, Abel described delighting in her discovery of knowledge, or as he eloquently conveyed "*se priendo elfoco*" meaning "the light bulb turned on." With his gentle encouragement, she was eventually able to

acknowledge her uncertainty and to move forward in learning all she needed in order to successfully navigate her previously uncharted territory. Eventually, with her newfound knowledge and confidence, she took the reins of leadership in their project, even making methodological and theoretical adjustments, as well as suggesting their next steps. Abel radiated pride as he recounted her growth and successes, saying, "It's been a great experience. I miss her already, [but] she's doing real well."

As mentioned earlier, Karin especially enjoys working with her students through her overseas educational trips, describing the trips as opportunities to work in a more individual capacity with her students, much like that of her relationship with her McNair scholar. Through these unique experiences, Karin also witnessed what she referred to as "the light bulb going on":

You see the light bulb go on and they really appreciate it. That's also one of the reasons I do the classes that take students overseas because those students appreciate it so much. They get so much out of it and it broadens their horizons and changes their perspectives on life and on the world.

Alan reminded me how important the student's individual work ethic becomes within this larger learning process as he recounted a story of encouraging his wife to focus on the students who make the effort to ask for assistance during her office hours and who really want to learn. He elaborated on his own teaching philosophy on student learning and effort:

The underlying thesis is: everyone has the inherent ability to be successful. I teach large sections and I tell them at the beginning, "In my experience, nobody does worse than a pass if they actually do the homework." It seems so simple. Those who don't, flunk. Those who do, pass. Every time I teach, I keep getting the same curve. And it's not really a curve of ability; it's a curve of who's working in the course.

As a new faculty member, Picard described the pursuit of knowledge as a learning experience for both himself and his students, sharing how his expectations for the teaching and learning process evolved during his time at RMSU. Picard elaborated by saying, "I think I came in thinking that all students wanted to learn.. .to kind of sit there under the tree of knowledge, you know, that kind of thing. If only it was that way." Despite the reality being different than his initial expectations, Picard demonstrated how the learning process was one of mutual benefit, saying:

I never said I knew everything. I always tell my students, "We're here to learn. I don't know what world you're going into. So the best thing I'm going to try to do is to teach you all to think and process information and understand where you can find information." And they seemed to like that. [Then they'd be prepared] for whatever world it is.

During my conversations with Leah, it became apparent she is quite skilled at internally composing her responses prior to answering the interview questions, which resulted in particularly succinct responses. In light of this, I was delighted to listen in as she externally processed and elaborated on a new project idea she was preparing to pilot in one of her classes. The project incorporates a book containing a series of first-person vignettes on activism and developing a set of supplemental classroom materials incorporating diversity of authorship and genre. In the end, she admitted to being motivated by having the opportunity to engage her students in the content. Moreover, since she is a teacher of future teachers, Leah's desired result is for younger students in the K-12 setting to become more engaged in the class content as well. In summary, I was able to witness Leah's enthusiasm as she speculated about how her students (and ultimately *their* students) would benefit from the discovery of new knowledge.

*Paying it Forward by Affecting Positive  
Change for the Future*

As discussed in chapter II, the ripple effect and its relation to the mentoring phenomenon was explored by Moerer-Urdahl and Creswell (2004). In a similar way, Emiliano described his desire to both "pay it forward" and "pay it back," while at the same time bringing others along as he strives to move himself forward. Emiliano related a story of one of his own mentors, who-when Emiliano asked what he would ever be able to do to repay her-told him "You can thank me by helping others." He shares:

It was always [about] giving back to the community and rooting what we do in the development of a stronger sense of community. But I think it was kind of natural, I was just [mentoring] as this kind of..this is what I do. But I think when I was talking with [my mentor] it propelled it even further. So part of it is-and still is-"How do I advance the community," but part of it is also now "How can I honor the people who've given to me?" So it's not just [that] I'm giving back to the community, but I'm also now honoring the people who [have helped me in my journey].

Like Emiliano, Abel described the significance of giving back to his community-meaning his Latino/Chicano heritage-through mentoring:

I never had a Latino mentor. All of the people that kind of mentored me were...White but they identified that I had the ability and they encouraged me to go on in a lot of different situations. One of the fundamentals of being a Chicano studies scholar is that you come back to your community. What inspires me is that lots of times I think these students come from the same background that I came from, in that they really don't know what's out there for them. Doing research helped me learn what was out here, what the possibilities were. And not just in the field of research but out there in the professional world, so to speak. So for me, just to help them get through that process and to have a successful kind of experience... we see [giving back] as one of the fundamental responsibilities of what we do.

In addition to his involvement in mentoring, Abel spoke of the importance of influencing and ultimately affecting positive change for the future, particularly for students of color and first-generation students:

In my graduate program and also professional associations I realized if I stuck it out, there could be good things all the way around in terms of affecting change. One of the biggest things for me when I say that is bringing more students of color into the fold and first-generation students, too. There're a lot of them that are first-generation who click with me and we work together and stuff. That's being a rebel, being an activist, to me-getting people in that nobody thought would be part of the system to be agents of change, so to speak, because lots of times those students go on and do the same thing, too, you know.

While Abel referred to the cultural significance of mentoring, Leah elaborated on the political ramifications of mentoring as a means to promote education and more liberal perspectives, saying:

[I mentor because] there's a lot of untapped potential in that group of people and to really change the world for the better. Maybe it's also because those of us who lend ourselves much more toward the liberal tend to be the more educated ones-not saying that's right or wrong. It's just that's the way the demographics break down, and if politics is how things get changed then I want to see more and more people get educated as much as possible so that we can take things in a [positive] direction. When I graduated from college I was in a very religious phase of my life and I worked as a missionary. In some ways I've been trying to change the world since I graduated from college or even before. At one point in my life I really thought that religion was the way to change the world. I don't believe that anymore, but I'm a strong believer in education as a world changer. Yeah, I'm a missionary at heart.

Like Karin and Picard, Leah values the importance of making her course content applicable to her students in their future careers:

My real goal is to make [my students] readers and writers for life. I think the fact that I'm not so interested in developing little literary scholars comes from my working class background. It definitely plays out in how I organize my classes and how I teach my students to teach. I would like for them to be lovers of reading and writing so that they go on to continue their education and love reading-and pass that onto their children [and to their own students].

As the interviews with all the participants progressed, I began to realize more acutely how Alan's perspective on mentoring, teaching, and advising seems to diverge from that of the other participants. I suspect there are several explanations for this divergence, one being that as a scientist by nature and training, Alan is the only participant that comes



from a non-social sciences background. As such, he could be described as more skeptical and analytical. For this reason, his thoughts are represented differently within many of the themes. However, I feel adamantly that his perspectives are every bit as relevant and salient as those of the other five participants. Alan's take on the "Paying It Forward" theme is an especially effective illustration. In a later interview, he elaborated:

Some of my desire for mentoring and advising is just the feeling that I didn't get a lot of guidance early on. So I sort of stumbled, but I did fine. Everything I did turned out to be a good decision, but it was for weird reasons. It wasn't like my school was giving me the options. I got very little good input, especially through undergraduate. Since nobody in my family was there, I blindly went in and decided, "If you just get good grades that's all you need," and I didn't know what to do with it. Looking back on it I realize, if you're doing well in school there's lots of opportunities, so [now as an advisor and mentor] I talk to people: "Oh, do you know you can go off to summer internships.. you can do all these neat things?" And the reason I do it is because I was never told of that.

While the other participants described being inspired to mentor *because of the mentoring* they had personally benefited from, Alan stated simply "Having a *lack of a* mentor makes me try to mentor more." Because he could not identify any particular mentor in his own life, it would be easy for Alan to have an "I did it on my own and you can, too" attitude. Instead, Alan recognizes the significance and the potential benefits of the mentoring relationship. For this reason, he chooses to use his own experience not having a mentor to guide his students during their academic experience, and ultimately, to affect positive change in their lives.

#### Theme 4: Strategies for Mentoring

In this section, I discuss strategies my participants commonly use in their mentoring, teaching, and advising roles. These strategies are organized into four subthemes including: (a) Preparing Future Professionals, (b) Use of Self-Disclosure, (c) Having High Expectations, and (d) Mentoring Moments.

*Preparing Future Professionals*

All of the participants, in a variety of ways, expressed the personal significance of being involved in preparing future professionals-whether they aspire to become educators, business people, social workers, or scientists. As educational faculty charged with preparing future teachers, both Leah and Emiliano expressed their thoughts about this theme using the language of "modeling." Specifically, Leah shared that she tries "to model some of the teaching techniques that I think are valuable in terms of building a classroom community and helping kids be better readers and writers." Likewise, Emiliano mentioned incorporating strategies into his classes that he hopes his students will borrow and use with their own students and in their own classrooms in the future. Emiliano spoke of mentoring and, subsequently, impacting the lives of future generations, in terms of "passing the torch." Emiliano's philosophy could be accurately incorporated into a number of themes, but it seems most appropriate as a strategy for preparing future professionals, so I have chosen to include it here. Specifically, Emiliano shared:

I had this great class in the spring semester-all PhD students in Advanced Issues in Multicultural Education-[and I was trying to convey to them] that "You're the next generation of scholars and you need to pick up the torch.. .that I've been carrying, which I picked up from other scholars, who picked it up from other scholars." And I was trying to give them that sense of, "You're the next generation of scholars and you need to be in these positions and you need to get there and you need to be well prepared and you need to be able to make a difference in the kinds of things that you do."

Picard, too, spoke of the importance of modeling, particularly for the benefit of his first-generation students. When asked why he mentors, Picard emphatically replied:

Encouragement that they can do it. To model. Because [your own family members] have never gone to college, they have no idea what you're going through. They have no idea of the pressure that you're going to be under. One

minute they support you but then the next minute they don't. [I want to help my students] get past that, and stay focused on their learning and on their growth. That's what I want. That's what I would bring and what I've encouraged and what inspired me to work with those students. My own experience with that. And thinking back, you know, where was McNair when I was coming up? You know? Because I didn't have that. I was blessed with teachers like Dr. Jones. But boy, I wish I had someone that could have [told me about] those things that I had to learn [on my own].

Leah stated simply, "Teaching others to teach is important." She later elaborated on this idea saying, "I'm not trying to create little literary scholars, but I am trying to help my students become lifelong readers and writers. And I'm hoping that they, in turn, will teach their students to become lifelong readers and writers, too." Citing literacy scholar Patricia Alexander, Leah expressed a particularly noteworthy concept with regard to social class and ethnicity: Literacy is a threshold domain-an access point-and a way for people to get into higher education.

Interestingly, Alan also displayed an interest in preparing effective teachers. I was initially surprised by this revelation. However, his motivation became clearer to me as he expressed pride in the fact that many of his students eventually become teachers. He lamented the lack of formal requirements for college and university faculty to have taken pedagogy classes to learn effective teaching techniques.

Abel mentioned his feelings of pride as he witnessed his McNair scholar begin to truly understand the research process and take ownership for the outcomes of their research. It was at this point, I believe, that he began to view her from a more collegial perspective, noting, "I was totally pleased with [my McNair scholar]-the experience we had together. [Though she was a student], I have no problem calling her my colleague or my collaborator."

Like Alan and Karin, on several occasions Picard mentioned his interest in creating course materials that could be both relevant and practical for his students, the majority of who planned to enter the social work or counseling professions. When discussing research, Picard was adamant that it have potential for practical application to his students in their future careers. As business faculty, Karin also acknowledged that her non-traditional students tend to be more concerned with the practicality and applicability of their course content. Although Karin did not identify a personal philosophy on mentoring, she described how her approach to mentoring has evolved over the years:

When I think about mentoring now I think much more about trying to model behaviors that reflect the values that I hope I display and that I would want my students to also. Sometimes the informal situations where I've worked with somebody on a project or in an organization have been very valuable to me as a mentee because I've watched that person and seen how they handled situations and seen the integrity that they showed in their life. Those are the kinds of things I hope I can carry on and do. From the time I started teaching I always had the philosophy that I wanted to treat students the way I would want to be treated.

Karin's recollections about how her own mentors served as models of integrity reminded me of my earlier conversation with her in which she described her doctoral advisor. Specifically, she admired his engaging manner, his aptitude for staying updated with the most current research, and especially his ability to make students feel like valued contributors to the educational process. Her appreciation of her advisor's qualities, along with her acknowledgement of her own attempts to emulate these qualities for her students' benefit, serves as a poignant reminder that as professionals, we may not always be aware of how our students perceive us, or what positive difference we may have an opportunity to make.

*Use of Self-Disclosure*

Initially, the idea of using self-disclosure presented itself to me as "The Impostor Phenomenon." After further contemplation, though, I realized that while my participants had certainly experienced periods of self-doubt, this failed to adequately capture the essence of their message. Rather, the participants talked of using their own self-doubt as a tool to help their McNair scholars and other students better understand the research process, as well as the realities and complexities of graduate school and their professional lives.

When I asked Picard to elaborate on how his status as a first-generation student influences the way he works with his students, he immediately identified that familiar but menacing inner voice questioning his credibility (Clance & Imes, 1978). Now, however, he uses that voice to benefit his students:

When I was working on my graduate [and undergraduate degrees], there was that little voice telling me "You don't belong here. This is just a fluke and they're going to find you out. You're not smart enough. You're not capable enough." So my approach is encouraging students. Helping them see the small steps. And being comfortable enough to self-disclose. I tell students "If I can get a PhD, anybody can get one. It just involves work. It just involves struggle. It just involves going to your teachers and your professors and asking for help and asking for clarification."

Like Picard, Emiliano described using his own self-doubt as a mentoring tool to help his students recognize and understand their potential, saying:

I am unafraid to share my own struggles, my own challenges, my own self-doubts that I had and sometimes still continue to have-though not quite as much as I used to-in the hopes that might affirm for them, where they're at in their place and give them a sense of hopefulness: "Well, jeez, if that guy can do it, then I can do it, too."

Similarly, Abel shared he still experiences self-doubt occasionally, although he may not explicitly describe it to his students as "self-doubt." Rather, he may couch it in other

ways, such as describing to his scholar how he has been forced to develop a thick skin through the publication and editing processes after being rejected and having to re-write many times. Abel elaborates:

The self-doubt that comes into students at different points in time never ends. That's what I keep telling students-that it never ends. Even at this point in my career, I'm still kind of like, "How the hell did I get here?" You know? I don't feel any smarter than some of my students sometimes. But that, I think, comes with having to be highly self-motivated in order to carry projects out to completion.

As I listened to my participants describe their own self-doubts, particularly with regard to the research and graduate school processes, I could not help but wonder if they were-at that moment-doing what comes so naturally to them: mentoring. Do they know that I am in the process of questioning my own ability to complete this seemingly insurmountable academic undertaking? If so, do they choose to disclose these stories, along with their encouragement, in order to reassure me that, like them, I too can achieve a PhD? I never did ask my participants these questions, but I think it is safe to say, whether these messages were conveyed intentionally or subconsciously, the answer is a resounding "yes."

### *Having High Expectations*

For more than forty years, college student development theorists have understood the importance and necessity of two elements, challenge and support, in order for students to experience significant growth in their academic and personal lives, as well as in mentoring relationships (Sanford, 1966; see also Daloz, 1986; Evans et al., 1998). The concept of challenge and support was strongly evident in conversations with all my participants. I feel it especially important to note at this point that I did not specifically ask my participants to talk about Sanford's (1966) theory. In fact, the challenge and

support theory was never mentioned as such during any of the interviews. However, in reviewing all the transcripts and data, the challenge and support concept exists undeniably. The only concept that emerged more clearly is that of the mentors simply having high expectations for their scholars, which is described in greater detail here.

In general, I would describe Emiliano as someone who exudes high expectations of those around him. Although I struggle to identify specifically what makes me feel this way, I think much of it stems from his innate tendency to question before fully accepting situations at face value. Through our conversations, Emiliano described intentionally seeking out his students' strengths while at the same time making sure to identify areas where they could improve. Although he did not describe this intentionality theoretically, his description of it was very similar to the concept of challenge and support (Sanford, 1966):

I try always to be positive in comments that I give to people.. .to identify and highlight what I think are some real great strengths and then I tend to be also pretty critical on the other side, too. But I try to make sure there's always that balance of, here's what I really like, and I really appreciate this, and this is new for me, or I really learned something here. Sometimes I'll couch it in questions and sometimes I'm just straight on and say, "This is a bit of a challenge here."

Emiliano revealed that he sometimes wonders if he is too harsh in his critique of students and also of colleagues, whether through the article review process or through committee work. Despite being intentional in identifying strengths, he is also conscientious of how his critiques are perceived by his students. Often, he finds himself pondering questions concerning how he can most effectively share criticism, yet do it-as he says-"in a good way," a concept he referred to several times during our interviews. He explains further, saying, "Education is a deeply human activity, so how do you do things that really help people preserve their sense of identity and their sense of esteem, and how they feel about

themselves-and *put it in a good way?*" Emiliano summarized his personal approach to mentoring saying:

[I try to always] do things in a good way, that kind of radical truth-telling... affirming and supporting, but also being critical where I need to, sharing stories, just being present. When I'm with them [meaning, "my students"], I'm full on with them.

When sharing her perceptions of the mentoring experience with her McNair scholar, Karin described appreciating how she could expect her scholar to take initiative on her own, but to be unafraid to come to Karin for suggestions and advice, saying:

My main expectation was that once we kind of laid out together a direction for her to go... that she would work on her own and that she'd come to me if she had questions. So I guess I expected her to both put in the effort and to be self-directed and take the initiative for it.

Abel described himself as having high expectations for all his students, but particularly of his McNair scholars. He indicated that we are doing a disservice to McNair scholars, and students who aspire to graduate school, if we fail to have high expectations of them:

I expected [we would] work together as collaboratively as possible in order to produce a paper that's presentable to a professional association, and then maybe for publication. So those were my expectations, particularly from McNair because McNair does have this goal of preparing students for graduate studies. A big part of graduate study is how to do research. So I think we're doing a disservice to those students in this program if we don't expect the highest from them.

Leah spoke of the value of having high expectations from her perspective as a protege in her relationship with her own faculty mentor:

I love that man to this day because he really kind of pushed me beyond my comfort zone in a lot of areas, particularly around publishing and things like that. While I was pursuing my master's, I remember sitting down with him for advising and we were talking about what classes I needed to take. He was like, "You should consider getting a PhD." At the time I was like "Ugh, no way. I'm never going to do that," [but] the fact that he saw that in me made me start thinking about it then. He also is the one who helped me pick out where I would get my PhD because he gave me the names of some really great programs in my field and pushed me in that direction. That was fabulous.



As Leah went on to pursue her doctorate, she chose an advisor who she later described as a mentor. In retrospect, Leah recognized the added value in having another faculty mentor with high expectations of her, remarking: "[My mentor] has very high standards. She provided the support I think you need in order to meet those standards, but she's not afraid to tell you when you're not meeting those standards either."

Although not apparent in the following quote, Picard described being very encouraging of his students, while at the same time having high expectations for their work. On one hand, Picard could easily expect his students to learn all the necessary life skills on their own, after Picard's having overcome social and economic barriers to serve in the military, while at the same time earning a bachelor's degree, two master's degrees, and a doctorate. However, through his numerous descriptions of working with students, I sensed that he has a soft spot for students who have overcome challenges and obstacles, yet who have admirable goals and aspirations and who are courageous enough to come to him for guidance. Perhaps this comes naturally for someone who works, counsels, and teaches in the social work field. Perhaps instead, Picard draws from his own experiences and from his own struggles in order to make a positive difference in the lives of those he teaches and counsels:

I'd like to think I'm a little more patient-particularly if I see them struggling. Sometimes my tact gets in the way because I get very forceful, you know, "you can do it." Pushing them. Sometimes I think I may push too much.

In contrast to Picard's concern about pushing his students "too much," Alan's high expectations could be described much differently. Simply put, Alan's expectations are for students to be self-motivated. He admits to having a much more hands-off mentoring and

teaching style than some of his colleagues, and he expects, without exception, that students should be self-motivated without needing additional praise from him:

..it's embarrassing to get praise, and it goes both ways. I don't give it. My students know it's kind of a joke; to get a word of praise from me is kind of like pulling teeth. I sort of expect everybody to have their own internal motivation. I think you can push and help a little bit, but if somebody's just not motivated, what are you going to do? And I've decided in some cases you just don't push. If they're not pushing themselves, then I let them make mistakes. I don't force people through graduate school; I let them actually fumble around. Almost intentionally. I'll let them fly. I'll let them have a project I know isn't working, and I'll watch them struggle with it, and they'll either surmount it and figure something out, or they'll just sort of give up. It's a little cruel I guess, but it tells me a little bit about them, and I still believe that they should have their own self-motivation. And to me it tells me, "Well, they either persevere and spend time, or they sort of give up and go on vacation." And sometimes I'll have a [graduate] student who really isn't a very good student, just barely doing the minimum, and after a few years they'll come and say, "What do I have to do to get out of here?" And I say, "Well, it's all up to you." I say, "You have to actually complete a project, do some stuff." And I say, "If you want to ask me for goals, I will give you some goals," but I never give it to them until they ask. So it's like the old kung fu movie: Fetch the pebble from my hand, and until you do you cannot leave the temple. So I don't know if it comes from being first-generation or being self-motivated. I was self-motivated-otherwise I wouldn't have done anything. I would still be cleaning swimming pools. I think I expect everyone else to be self-motivated, too.

As I write this, I find myself reflecting on Alan's words, aware that his aloof candor could be easily mistaken for indifference; one could erroneously believe that Alan does not care. In this case, that person would be wrong; Alan has a much different way of demonstrating his care and his commitment to students. In fact, I witnessed his availability to students several times during my visits to his office. Alan never completely closed his office door during our interviews, always keeping it slightly ajar, indicating that his students and colleagues understand this signal to mean that he is busy. However, if they needed him, they were welcome to interrupt. On several occasions, I observed Alan patiently answer questions for students who stopped in to ask for advice or guidance

about experiments they were in the process of conducting. It again reminded me of how easy it would be for someone to confuse Alan's candor with indifference, and I consider myself fortunate to have learned otherwise.

### *Mentoring Moments*

On several occasions, as the participants described their experiences from the perspective of both protege and of mentor, they shared stories of influential interactions that were sometimes brief and often singular. Emiliano referred to these interactions as "fleeting mentoring moments" (Parse, 2008; see also Saur & Rasmussen, 2003).

Reflecting on the factors motivating him to encourage students to "sit in his chair," Emiliano recalled a potential faculty advisor he visited when contemplating doctoral programs. This person invited Emiliano to sit in his chair, and subsequently to further contemplate his motivation for aspiring to become faculty:

He was a guy I went to meet with when I was thinking about going to graduate school. So I went into his office and he said, "Come. I want you to sit here [in my chair]." So, I sat there and he said, "Why is it that you want to be in this kind of chair?" It was very meaningful, like "Why do you want to get your doctoral degree?" And I said, "Well, someday I think I'd like to be a professor." We talked for a while. He said, "Okay, I don't want you to come here. I want you to go to [another institution]." I was like, "What?" And he said, "[Their] professors are way better than ours and you'll come out with a much stronger standing than if you went here. And so, while I'd love to work with you, I really want you to go there." It was the last time I talked to him. Of course I went to [the other institution] based on his recommendation. When I think about mentors, there're these fleeting mentoring moments that, like, I'm not sure that that person would've ever [realized they'd been influential]. What you learn in even just a small moment cumulatively has a big impact. Lots of people who maybe said something to me or who had me sit in a chair...I'm not sure they'd ever look at it as mentoring, whereas I kind of do in retrospect. I never went back to that guy and said, "Hey, you know what? First of all, your advice to go [elsewhere] was really important, but that moment of having me sit in your chair.. .it wasn't a major thing, it was just a minor thing, *but it was important enough that you 'd remember it and pass it on.*"

Emiliano's experiences with such fleeting moments are consistent with Saur and Rasmussen's (2003) research on "butterfly power." Borrowing terminology from chaos theory, the concept of butterfly power generally refers to a negative consequence resulting from a brief moment, which causes some type of chaos or disarray. However, Saur and Rasmussen's research involving mentoring and deaf education provides a positive perspective on this concept, asserting, "A fresh look at the concept enables us to see that butterfly-created chaos can, in fact, create exciting new possibilities and new directions for an individual as well as for a society" (p. 196). Like the idea conveyed above of a fleeting mentoring moment, Saur and Rasmussen's research asserts that brief and seemingly insignificant interactions may potentially have significant results in the lives of college students.

#### Theme 5: Challenges of Academe

In addition to the four themes and corresponding subthemes described earlier, there were two other concepts mentioned at length by several participants. While I view them as important enough so as not to be eliminated, I cannot accurately describe them as being directly related to mentoring. For this reason, the following subthemes are included under "Challenges of Academe": (a) the course evaluation process, particularly early on in the participants' academic careers; and (b) the prevalence of academic elitism, or perhaps more aptly, the emphasis on academic pedigree as experienced by my participants.

##### *Course Evaluation Process*

At several points during our interviews, participants shared their thoughts about the course evaluation process by which students rate their professors at the end of each

semester. They referred to it as a difficult learning experience, especially as new faculty embarking on their academic careers. Abel described being burned early on by tough comments and critiques on his evaluations, but he developed stricter strategies and a set of rules for his students to follow. While Abel is known for being a demanding professor, he is also known for being fair. He seems to have an effective way of being able to balance understanding and caring about students' circumstances while still maintaining high expectations of his students. He explains:

I think that's a correct interpretation because... I don't have any of those problems that I used to get before, in terms of [students accusing me of being] anti-White, racist, he's unfair, .. .all he cares about is race, class and gender and doesn't teach us about criminal justice....In any case, one of the things that comes across also, and even kind of the anecdotal kinds of comments that get back to me is, yeah, people say you're tough but they say you're fair.

At a previous institution, Karin felt that the undergraduates she taught behaved "like spoiled brats." She described how the students "ripped her up" on her teaching evaluations. That was a real struggle for Karin, who believes it is important to deliver the appropriate content to her students, but she feels that since she is "not a stand-up comedian or a game show host," some students rate her poorly on evaluations. This has been especially difficult for Karin:

I have struggled with teaching. I still don't think I'm a very good teacher although I really try to do a good job, but I'm not funny, I don't tell jokes, I think I have a hard time sometimes relating to the students and so I guess one thing that I've found really different is I think the students at the other institution I was at just would rip me up on the evaluations and some of it was they were too lazy. They didn't want to work.

Comparatively, Karin noted that her students at Rocky Mountain State University seem to have a stronger work ethic.

Like Abel and Karin, Picard noted that he had trouble with his course evaluations during his first few years. After it was brought to Picard's attention that he had taught 27 different courses in the short time since coming to RMSU, Picard began to notice that his teaching evaluations improved once he had a chance to teach the same course multiple times, thus improving it each time he taught it:

My first year here, I felt that I really did not get the support that I should have gotten as a junior faculty, brand new. At the time I was still working on my PhD-finish up the dissertation. The next director, who was really supportive of me, pointed out that I had 27 new preps in the time I had been here. All of a sudden it began to dawn on me..no wonder my teaching evaluations were so poor. It was like every semester I was developing a new class. And I was brand new!

Picard soon began to notice a change. His teaching evaluations, as well as his ability to engage students, improved dramatically. During this time he also began developing what he perceives as stronger relationships with his undergraduate students.

#### *Academic Elitism and the Emphasis on Pedigree*

The reality of academic elitism and the significance of a proper academic pedigree were also raised by several participants. Karin described feeling so fortunate even to have attained a college degree at all that she cannot imagine "looking down her nose" at someone who attains all his or her degrees at the same institution:

When I was a graduate student and some of the others were [starting to interview] for teaching jobs, one of the guys said something about, "I'd really like to teach at this smaller school but then I could kiss my career goodbye." And somebody else was making comments about certain pedigrees. I wasn't even familiar with that term at the time-of looking at where they got their degrees and if it was a prestigious enough school. I thought, man-I was just darn lucky to go to college at all. I'm certainly not going to be turning up my nose because somebody's degree is from the University of Kansas instead of Stanford or something, you know? Who cares?

Having been educated at a prestigious institution, Alan viewed the notion of an academic pedigree from a slightly different perspective:

I came through public schools and thought you never do anything but that. Berkeley was closest to where I was at at the time, and it seemed pretty good, so that's where I went. When I look back on that, I accidentally stumbled on a good pedigree, and it does help later on. If you're good, and if you go to a good school and do well, you can pretty much go to any other school. It's sort of a self-feeding system, though. One thing I found is that, once you're at a big, prestigious school, you don't step down to the second and third tier schools because it does open doors. My educational pedigree automatically got me on a short list at a lot of places for interviews, and actually it's kind of embarrassing sometimes. I'll give a seminar and the guy always introduces the person and says where they've gone. Sometimes they make a big deal, all these top schools I've gone to, and it was all on accident. But after you've gone, you suddenly realize, "Oh, now I can't just step down." If you want to be marketable, you've got to stay at that level.

Leah contemplated the importance of academic pedigree as she shared how her own mentor assisted her in selecting an appropriate doctoral program, helping her see the significance of the program's reputation, as well as the reputation of the faculty, saying:

He gave me a list of some of the top programs that have really good reputations and he explained to me that you need to go to a top school because then you can get a job in a top university. That's important. And you need to work with somebody who's really a top person in the field.

Similarly for Picard, first-generation status never seemed to be an issue in his relationships with colleagues and students. Rather, he recalled feeling judged by his academic pedigree, sharing "What seemed to matter was, what research are you doing? When did you get your PhD? And where did you get your PhD? Those things seem to matter more than my being first-generation."

The participants each contributed richness and vivid imagery as they shared their journeys transitioning into academe from both their undergraduate and graduate years, as well as from their more recent perspectives as faculty. Among the numerous thoughts shared during the interviews were stories related to some of the most basic human elements and intrinsic benefits (Campbell & Campbell, 2000; Hardcastle, 1988; Lee, 1999) including gratitude and appreciation, untapped potential, and self-doubt. It has

been a privilege for me to be able to share in the lives and the experiences of Karin, Abel, Picard, Alan, Emiliano, and Leah, even if for a brief period of time. As I engaged in the final writing and member checking processes, I found myself initially reluctant to send chapters IV and V to my participants-not because I was anxious about their reactions, but because I doubted my ability to adequately capture the essence of their experiences. However, as I began receiving their feedback, I found my spirits buoyed by their enthusiasm and interest in the findings. With each subsequent draft, I eagerly awaited hearing from them. I enjoyed conversing with them over email and telephone, and benefited immensely from their gentle yet persistent encouragement.

In a phone conversation to discuss chapter IV, Picard revealed that our interviews had kindled much personal reflection regarding his early family life and educational experiences. In the process of contacting his mother to confirm some of the specific details, he told her that his experiences as a first-generation student were being explored by a doctoral student for her dissertation. Upon hearing this, Picard's mother reminded him that she has kept extensive journals chronicling her many years of memories, from working as a domestic, to sending her children off to Hampton, to traveling to Alaska to visit Picard-her college-educated and successful son. It is her hope one day to have the journals compiled and published as a book. "You know," she told Picard, "I already have a title for my book." Intrigued by his mother's idea, Picard agreed to help her realize her wish. "Faces in the Window," she tells him, recalling the nights she would arrive home from long workdays to find the two small faces of Picard and his sister eagerly watching for her out the front window. Later she would tell them, "You're going to college. I don't want you cleaning anybody's slop jars." Instantly, I am taken back to my own early years



and recollections of a faded photograph; a toddler in pajamas, standing in her crib ready to pull back the curtains at the sound of jingling chains on a log truck trailer turning on to a dark dirt road on the outskirts of a small Wyoming town. "Go to school and study hard, Sarah, so you don't grow up to be a log hauler like your old daddy." With the inspiration of our families in mind, I offer recommendations for practice in working with students from first-generation and working class backgrounds. Following this discussion, I propose areas for future research.

### Recommendations for Practice

This qualitative phenomenological study was based on the experiences of six faculty mentors from first-generation backgrounds. For this reason, the results cannot be generalized to the larger population, as could the results of a quantitative study. Consistent with the qualitative paradigm, the transferability of the participants' experiences and the themes, as expressed through the inclusion of rich description, suggest a number of important implications for academic practitioners. In this section, I discuss specific strategies that can be implemented by McNair staff and other academic administrators.

#### *Assess the Needs and Expectations of Mentors and Scholars*

McNair administrators would benefit from conducting a needs assessment of their students prior to the faculty mentor selection process. Such an assessment would allow program staff to more accurately determine the areas in need of development for their McNair scholars. For example, some scholars may have a firm understanding of the research process, but desire more assistance with graduate school admissions and funding. Others may require closer assistance in designing and conducting their research

projects, but less guidance concerning graduate school decisions. Still others may need affirmation of their abilities as scholars, which can be particularly meaningful when provided by faculty.

In addition to assessing their students, McNair staff may benefit from learning about prospective faculties' mentoring styles and their expectations of their scholars, as well as their own potential status as first-generation college students. For example, like the faculty in this research, some mentors may expect their students to be self-motivated, while others may view gentle nudging as an important part of the research mentoring process. Assessing faculty mentors' expectations for their student scholars may also provide better guidance as to which pairs may be effective mentoring matches.

#### *Encourage Peer Mentoring Networks*

Using the results of the aforementioned mentoring assessment, McNair staff should consider pairing McNair students with one another or in small groups according to identified areas of need. The intent, in a sense, would be to simulate the networking model of mentoring among peers (Haring, 1997, 1999). Groups may consist of a combination of first-year and second-year scholars, as well as graduate students who are McNair alumni. Students who become accustomed to this method of interaction during their undergraduate experience may be more likely to establish such peer networks early on in their graduate school years. Additionally, students who have experienced successful mentoring through the faculty/scholar relationship may have an opportunity to share their newly gained knowledge with their peers, thus encouraging a more solidified understanding of the research and graduate admissions processes. Students not

experiencing successful faculty mentoring relationships stand to benefit from such peer networks by virtue of being involved with a network of fellow scholars.

*Invite Seasoned McNair Mentors to Orient New Mentors*

McNair program administrators may benefit from identifying a core of experienced McNair faculty mentors willing to orient new McNair mentors. During such discussions, seasoned mentors could address the McNair mentoring process and share strategies for success from their personal experiences, in addition to answering questions from new mentors. For example, since Abel served as a McNair faculty mentor to several McNair scholars-and because of his own experiences as a first-generation student-he would be an ideal person to invite to talk about some of the early challenges he experienced in his mentoring relationships. Additionally, new faculty could benefit from learning about Abel's strategies for success, some of which he most likely learned through trial and error. Not all strategies will be successful for all mentor/scholar pairs; however, providing a foundation for effective mentoring may be especially beneficial to new mentors. Additionally, a faculty-led format (as opposed to a discussion led by administrators) may be more readily received by new faculty.

*Acknowledge the Importance of Mentoring in Promotion and Tenure Decisions*

Faculty mentors should be encouraged and supported in their mentoring endeavors (Girves et al., 2005). Currently, such involvement is not formally recognized in the faculty promotion and tenure decision processes. Faculty members spend significant time, energy, and personal commitment to the mentoring relationship, particularly when mentoring undergraduate research is involved. For this reason,

recognition in promotion and tenure decisions could further encourage and support continued involvement.

*Thoughtfully Assess Existing Student Services  
Prior to Implementing New Services*

We often hear anecdotally about the propensity for colleges and universities to institute additional student services prior to-or instead of-critically assessing the usefulness of existing services. Careful assessment of existing student services, such as mentoring programs and tutoring, prior to implementing additional services may allow college and university administrators to make more effective use of limited funding. This recommendation comes at a critical time when leaders in every facet of our society, including K-12 and higher education, are being forced to make difficult economic decisions. A significant component of a thoughtful assessment of such services would include input from first-generation college students specifically. This recommendation would allow administrators to obtain a more accurate understanding of their level of effectiveness and utilization. Equally important, it would help first-generation students feel their opinions on such matters are valued and their voices heard.

*Provide Opportunities for Faculty and Students to Share Their Stories*

The faculty highlighted in this research study all shared poignant life stories. McNair scholars, too, often have compelling life stories. As humans, we may be more likely to invest time and energy in our fellow humans when we are aware of their life stories, including the challenges faced and triumphs achieved to realize their goals. Knowing this, it may be beneficial for program administrators to provide opportunities for faculty and students to share their own stories in an appropriate and supportive environment. Such exposure to others' experiences may nurture a more informed and

supportive mentoring relationship. The "self-disclosure" subtheme described in chapter V supports this recommendation. However, it is important to also acknowledge that faculty involved in mentoring relationships may be naturally inclined to focus their attention and energy more intently on their students' experiences as well as on the research process itself, rather than on spending time relating their own stories. This became especially evident to me during the member-checking process. While preparing this manuscript, I sent the participants their sections from chapters IV and V, asking them to review for accuracy and authenticity, while also providing their personal reflections. In his response, Emiliano shared:

It's really quite beautifully written, but it's hard to read stuff about me as written by [another because]...I'm usually not comfortable drawing attention to myself. Recall how much of what I've done is in service to others—even my own academic achievements. [The narrative about me] does just that. It's not you nor anything you wrote; it's me reading about *me*.

Emiliano's response highlighted the tendency for mentors to focus on others, rather than on themselves. While it is important that we remain understanding of and sensitive to this tendency, there is much to be learned and appreciated by providing opportunities for story sharing amongst faculty and student scholars. Administrators, then, should carefully consider the timing and structure for such activities, gathering specific faculty input prior to implementation. The reality is that not all faculty mentors will be interested in participating. I am confident, however, that those who do-like my participants-will add depth and richness to their students' experiences.

## Recommendations for Future Research

### *Mothers' Influence on Their Children's Educational Attainment*

As previously discussed, mothers' influence on their children's levels of educational attainment and related messages regarding the value of education are of paramount importance. Further exploration of these issues would be especially critical for developing a better understanding of how educational administrators may benefit from understanding mothers' roles more clearly. In her qualitative study exploring the lived experiences of Latina first-generation students and their parents, Schwartz (2009) suggests further research on the parental engagement of college students from all backgrounds. Research using both quantitative and qualitative methods may be especially beneficial. Initially, students from first-generation backgrounds and their mothers could be surveyed to determine which factors specifically may have been beneficial in their decisions to go to college. Based on the findings of such an examination, focus groups could be conducted with purposefully selected participants in order to more deeply explore concepts related to the mother's role in their educational attainment. Additionally, similar research examining the father's role in educational attainment may allow researchers to compare and contrast each parent's role in their children's educational decision-making process.

### *First-Generation Faculty According to Specific Characteristics*

Because there is little research currently available exploring the experiences of faculty from first-generation backgrounds, it would be appropriate and beneficial to more deeply explore this phenomenon. A variety of characteristics of faculty could be explored

using compare/contrast techniques. In this study alone, the roles of gender, academic discipline, birth order, and participant experiences regarding culture/race/ethnicity may have influenced these participants to attain doctoral degrees and ultimately to mentor first-generation students. Research utilizing both quantitative and qualitative methodologies would provide additional valuable insight. Case study or oral history methodologies would be appropriate for further exploring the experiences of faculty from first-generation backgrounds who also share similar ethnic backgrounds and/or cultural values. In particular, such information would be beneficial in informing the research regarding the experiences of faculty of color.

Furthermore, in this study five of the six participants attained their undergraduate degrees between 1975 and 1984, with the sixth participant completing his degree in 1990. During the 1970s, the concept of being first-generation held less significance, as a smaller proportion of the overall population had attained a college degree. More students were first in their families to go to college. Thus, being a first-generation student was not as uncommon as it is today. Future research on faculty from first-generation backgrounds who attended college during the 21<sup>st</sup> century may shed light on deeper layers of meaning regarding what it is to be a first-generation student who successfully transitioned into academe.

*Perceived Value of Peer Mentoring Networks  
Among Doctoral Students*

In chapter IV, Emiliano and Leah each expressed the importance of the support they received from their peers during their years as doctoral students. Leah recalled her fellow teaching assistants-who all had offices near each other-lending advice and assistance when needed. Similarly, Emiliano mentioned the social support he received

from his fellow doctoral students who met regularly at the university pub to exchange advice and stories. Given the perceived value by these participants of such peer mentoring networks (Girves et al., 2005; Haring, 1999), further research should be conducted to explore the potential benefit of such networks for both undergraduate and graduate students, specifically those from first-generation and working class backgrounds.

### Summary

In this chapter, I elaborated on five main themes related to the research questions from chapter I. These themes included: illustrations of teaching and mentoring, first-generation status, inspirations for mentoring, strategies for mentoring, and challenges in academe. The main themes were further organized by corresponding subthemes. Based on all the findings, several recommendations for practice were discussed. These include assessing the needs and expectations of McNair faculty mentors and scholars, encouraging peer mentoring networks, inviting seasoned McNair mentors to orient new mentors, acknowledging the importance of mentoring in faculty tenure and promotion decisions, thoughtfully assessing existing student services prior to implementing new ones, and providing opportunities for faculty and students to share their stories.



## EPILOGUE

In the months preceding the completion of my dissertation, I accompanied one of my McNair scholars to a national institute on teaching and mentoring, and intended for scholars of color who aspire to attain doctoral degrees and become faculty. The closing session keynote speaker was Dr. Mildred Garcia, a first-generation college student herself, current president of California State University-Dominguez Hills, and the first Latina president in the California State University system. Dr. Garcia shared stories of her own experiences as a first-generation college student, born to factory-worker parents who immigrated in the 1940s to New York City from Puerto Rico so she and her six siblings could have better lives. Listening to Dr. Garcia's message, I recalled the philosophy passed down to Karin by her Norwegian grandfather about education being "something no one can ever take away from you." Upon learning that her father died when she was 12 years old, I was moved by Dr. Garcia's description of her mother's philosophy on education: "*Za unica herencia que puede dejar una familia pobre a sus hijos es una buena education*;" the only inheritance a poor family can leave its children is a good education." As I glanced around the room, I saw a vast sea of a thousand beautiful faces of color, dark shining eyes focused intently on our keynote speaker. Although the institute's purpose was to bring doctoral scholars of color together, Dr. Garcia's conviction about the transformative power of education resonated with me, the daughter of a Wyoming logger. It reminded me of this message's relevance to people-students-

from all walks of life. It transcends class, age, color, social boundaries, and first-generation status. The message, like my participants and themes, will continue to inspire me.

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APPENDIX A  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

August 13, 2007

TO: Carol Roehrs  
School of Nursing

FROM: Gary Heise, Co-Chair: *SDT*  
UNC Institutional Review Board

RE: Expedited Review of Proposal, *A Phenomenological Exploration of the Mentoring Relationship as Experienced by First-Generation McNair Scholars and Their First-Generation Faculty Mentors*, submitted by Sarah Chase (Research Advisor: Katrina L. Rodriguez)

First Consultant: The above proposal is being submitted to you for an expedited review. Please review the proposal in light of the Committee's charge and direct requests for changes directly to the researcher or researcher's advisor. If you have any unresolved concerns, please contact Gary Heise, School of Sport and Exercise Science (x1738). When you are ready to recommend approval, sign this form and return to me.

I recommend approval as to.

Signature of First Consultant Date

The above referenced prospectus has been reviewed for compliance with HHS guidelines for ethical principles in human subjects research. The decision of the Institutional Review Board is that the project is approved as proposed for a period of one year: *t''^ "ZGC^- to J7 "S ' 200\*%*

*Gary D. Heise* 9/3/2008  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 Gary Heise, Co-Chair

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Comments: *O ^ ^ t ^ [ 0\*ft f\*\*\*y»f^ " \$C\*\*~\* 5^ <\*\*\* f w^3^*

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UNIVERSITY »/  
NORTHERN COLORADO



APPENDIX B

EMAIL TO POTENTIAL RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

**From:** "Chase, Sarah" <[Sarah.Chase@unco.edu](mailto:Sarah.Chase@unco.edu)>

**Date:** Wed, 06 Feb 2008 16:46:21 -0700

**To:**

**Cc:**

**Subject:** McNair Dissertation Research - Email to Potential Research Participants

Hi [Program Director],

Will you please share the following request with the McNair faculty mentors we identified as being from first-generation backgrounds?

Thanks!

Sarah

Dear McNair Faculty Mentors,

Greetings! I am currently a doctoral candidate in Higher Education and Student Affairs Leadership at University of Northern Colorado in Greeley. Additionally, I serve as the director of UNC's McNair Scholars Program.

I am writing you with regard to my upcoming dissertation research, which will involve a qualitative exploration of the mentoring phenomenon as experienced by faculty members who were first-generation college students themselves, and who have served as mentors to students within the McNair Scholars Program at [your university]. Having come from a first-generation family yourself, I am interested in talking with you further about my research topic. Specifically, I'm hoping that you have an interest in becoming one of my research participants.

I'm looking for 6-10 faculty participants, and I anticipate each participant engaging in at least 3 semi-structured interviews with me. I'm hoping to identify my research participants, conduct initial meetings regarding the informed consent procedures, and engage in the first interview during the months of February and early March 2008. All interviews and data collection will take place in [your town].

If you are interested in allowing me to contact you about this project, please share your interest with [name of director], McNair Director. [She] will be forwarding me a list of potential faculty participants, and I will follow up directly with you to share more information and to set up individual meetings with interested faculty. [She] can be reached via email at [email] or by phone at [phone].

*Please contact [her] by Wednesday, February 13 if you are interested in participating.*

Thank you in advance, and I hope to meet you!

Sarah Chase

*Sarad 94. Chase*

Doctoral Candidate, Higher Education & Student Affairs Leadership  
Director, McNair Scholars Program  
University of Northern Colorado  
Michener L-75, Campus Box 83  
Greeley, CO 80639  
[sarah.chase\(j5\)unco.edu](mailto:sarah.chase(j5)unco.edu)  
970.351.2744 (w)

APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

UNIVERSITY *of*  
NORTHERN COLORADO

McNair Faculty Mentor ~ Informed Consent for Participation in Research  
University of Northern Colorado

Title of Project: A Phenomenological Exploration of the Mentoring Relationship as  
Experienced by First-Generation McNair Scholars and Their  
First-Generation Faculty Mentors

Primary Investigator: Sarah M. Chase, Doctoral Candidate  
Phone Number: 970.353.6337 (home) or 970.351.2744 (office)  
Research Advisors: Katrina Rodriguez, PhD, and Michael Gimmestad, PhD  
Higher Education and Student Affairs Leadership  
Phone Numbers: 970.351.2495 (K. Rodriguez)      970.351.2530 (M. Gimmestad)

In partial fulfillment of the requirements of my doctoral program at the University of Northern Colorado, I am conducting research to explore the mentoring relationships of McNair Scholars and their faculty mentors. This research study will involve participants in the Ronald E. McNair Postbaccalaureate Achievement Program and their faculty mentors. You have been selected as a potential participant because you fit the criteria I am interested in. I hope to find out more about the mentoring relationships that McNair Scholars and their faculty mentors have been involved in. Additionally, I would like to know more about your beliefs regarding what a mentor is, and the influence that involvement in mentoring may have on your protege's development as a scholar and as a first-generation college student.

If you agree to be part of this study, you will be asked to participate in a series of three semi-structured interviews, which will be conducted in a private location on your campus during the 2007-2008 academic year. The interviews will last approximately 60 minutes each. During that time, you will be asked to reflect on your experiences in regard to your relationship with your McNair student. You will be asked to describe: your experiences as a first-generation college student; how your mentoring relationship was initiated; characteristics of your McNair protege; your perceptions of the benefits he/she has received; your expectations of your protege; your perception of the benefits to you as a mentor; and personal and/or professional development associated with the mentoring experience. Your McNair student protege will also be asked to participate in a similar series of interviews. Finally, the two of you will be asked to participate in at least one interview together. I am also interested in observing your relationship in relevant settings, such as at a research conference or in a classroom.

You should be aware that your interviews will be recorded. The contents of these digital files will be kept completely confidential. To maintain your privacy, a pseudonym will replace your name on any corresponding documents. Written records will be stored in a locked file cabinet in my home office (to which only I will have access), and electronic records will be maintained under password protection. The original audio records of your interviews will be destroyed upon my verification of each transcript's accuracy. After three years, the hard copy interview records will also be destroyed. After I have reviewed the transcripts of your interviews and before the research is submitted, you may be contacted to review the final report to comment on its accuracy. As a participant, your name will not appear in any professional reports of this research.

I foresee minimal risks, if any, to you as a participant, beyond those involved in personal reflection activities. Please be assured that participation in this study is completely optional and voluntary. No negative consequences will come about if you choose not to participate. Additionally, feel free to contact me if you have any questions or concerns about the research. I also ask that you retain one copy of this letter for your records.

Thank you for your assistance with this research. Your participation is greatly appreciated!

Sincerely,

Sarah Chase

*Participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate in this study and if you begin participation you may still decide to stop and withdraw at any time. Your decision will be respected and will not result in loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Having read the above and having had an opportunity to ask any questions, please sign below if you would like to participate in this research. A copy of this form will be given to you to retain for future reference. If you have any concerns about your selection or treatment as a research participant, please contact the Sponsored Programs and Academic Research Center, Kepner Hall, University of Northern Colorado Greeley, CO 80639; (970) 351-1907.*

Participant's Signature

Participant's Printed Name

Date

APPENDIX D  
INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS



## r<sup>1</sup> INTERVIEW: FIRST-GENERATION STATUS

Pseudonym: \_\_\_\_\_

Tell me about your background (childhood, family life)...

What do you know about your parents' educational attainment? What did they do for a living when you were growing up?

How would you describe your upbringing (for example, would you consider yourself coming from the middle class, working class, etc)?

As a child, what types of jobs did you see yourself doing when you grew up?

How would you describe your family's values and perspectives on educational attainment?

Tell me about your own personal experiences as a first-generation college student.

How did you decide to pursue a graduate degree?

What differences did you perceive between your undergraduate and your graduate experiences?

Was there ever a time when you felt that being a first-generation student made you any different than other students? If so, can you describe an example to me?

## 2<sup>ND</sup> INTERVIEW: MENTORING

Pseudonym:

Describe someone special in your life who has influenced you in a positive way.

How did you initially become involved with the McNair Scholars Program?

As a McNair faculty mentor, describe your expectations of your McNair scholar(s)?

What expectations do you feel your scholar(s) had of you?

Aside from the formal mentoring component in the McNair program, how would you describe the concept of "mentoring"?

Do you have a personal mentoring philosophy? If so, how would you describe it?

3<sup>KU</sup> INTERVIEW: FIRST-GENERATION STATUS AND MENTORING

Pseudonym:

- 1) How did you decide to teach at Rocky Mountain State University?
  - What characteristics attracted you to RMSU?
  - Are there any characteristics about RMSU that do not appeal to you?
  
- 2) If you've taught or conducted research at other institutions, how have your experiences with students here at RMSU been similar to your experiences with students at other institutions?
  - How have your experiences here at RMSU been different than your experiences at other institutions?
  
- 3) Has your own status as a first-generation college student influenced the approach you use with your students in any way? If so, how? If not, why do you think this is?
  - Can you describe a specific example?
  
- 4) Describe a time when your own experience as a first-generation student influenced the way you related to your McNair Scholar.
  
- 5) What importance do you think the mentoring relationship has to students from first-generation backgrounds?
  - From your own perspective as a 1<sup>st</sup> generation student?
  - Can you speculate about the importance from your students' perspectives?
  
- 6) What inspires you to serve in a mentoring capacity to students from 1<sup>st</sup> generation backgrounds (such as your McNair scholar) - especially given how busy your schedule can get?