Title
Conceptions of a Good College Student, Parent-Student Communication About College, First-Year Grades, and College Retention Among First- and Non-First-Generation College Students

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Conceptions of a Good College Student, Parent-Student Communication About College,
First-Year Grades, and College Retention Among First- and Non-First-Generation
College Students

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Psychology

by

Julienne Marie Alipio Palbusa

June 2016

Dissertation Committee:
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Committee Chairperson

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Fellow graduate students and colleagues deserve recognition as well. As soon as I started graduate school, Kevin Kaeochinda quickly became one of my mentors. He believed in me and encouraged me to keep going. Yeram Cheong provided an energy and enthusiasm that was infectious. I am grateful to know Yeram, who shares the same passion for understanding and advocating for college student success. Also, when I was writing this dissertation, Daniel Harmon was always willing to listen and provided the laughter that I needed. In addition, I could never forget to thank Ana Marcelo, who was my emotional rock throughout my time in graduate school. Ana gave me feedback whenever I needed it, and she was always there for me each step of the way. I am grateful to have such a supportive network of colleagues who are also my friends throughout the beginning of my educational research career and during the dissertation process.

Lastly, I want to acknowledge my family. My parents, Mary and Lutgardo Palbusa, emigrated from the Philippines to the United States before I was born because they wanted more opportunities for themselves and their children. Ever since I was little, they worked hard for my siblings and me. Through them, I learned about hard work. Along with my parents, my older siblings (Jennifer and Jonathan), the youngest generation in my family (my nephew, Jamari, and nieces, Nadia and Isla Rei), and my fat, lovable cats (Cinco and Seis) encouraged me to do the best I can. My family never doubted my dreams and passion. Whether it was going away to college and competing at a Division I field hockey program or travelling across the country to pursue a Ph.D. in developmental psychology, my family was my biggest cheerleaders. I couldn't have done this without their love, support, and encouragement.

Dedication

Throughout my childhood, both of my parents worked two full-time jobs. My mom worked during the early hours of the morning until late at night, and my dad worked overnight and during school hours. Wanting to help as a child, I asked my parents what I could do. They always replied, "Your job is school. This is how you can help." Thus, each morning before school, I thought, "I am going to work!" As I got older, I realized that my education was a way to give back to them and others. My parents did not go to college and were unfamiliar with the U.S. education system. Like a person embarking on a journey without the benefit of a map, I had to make my own decisions. I eventually discerned the path and was the first in my family to graduate from college. Now, in a couple of days, I will graduate with a Ph.D., and will continue to build my career contributing as a researcher, educator, and mentor, committed to generating new knowledge to advance the educational opportunities and success of students like myself.

As my parents once told me when I was a child: I have a job—school. This is my work. This is how I can help. This dissertation is dedicated to them, my parents—Mary and Lutgardo Palbusa. Mom and Dad, thank you for supporting and trusting me throughout my educational journey. You are the inspiration for this work.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Conceptions of a Good College Student, Parent-Student Communication About College, First-Year Grades, and College Retention Among First- and Non-First-Generation College Students

by

Julienne Marie Alipio Palbusa

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in Psychology
University of California, Riverside, June 2016
Dr. Mary Gauvain, Chairperson

This study examined conceptions of a good college student, parent-student communication about college, academic achievement, college student retention, and college generation status among first-year college students. 344 undergraduates described the characteristics and skills of a good college student. In addition, they reported the frequency, perceived helpfulness, and quality (instrumental and emotional support) of parent-student communication about college. Student GPA and second year retention data were obtained from university records. Findings revealed that for the overall sample, the five most important (i.e., highest rated) characteristics and behaviors that a good student should have were time management, getting papers done, doing well on quizzes and exams, studying for quizzes and exams, and writing papers that satisfy professor's requirements. Results further showed that the number of social skills and self-care behaviors that students used to describe a good college student predicted first year GPA.

In addition, there was no significant relation between conceptions of a good college student characteristics and first-to-second year retention. Other findings revealed that first-generation college students (parents did not attend college) did not differ from non-first-generation college students in frequency of communication or perceived emotional support. However, first-generation students had lower GPAs and reported lower perceived helpfulness and quality of parent-adolescent communication. Higher quality of communication about college predicted higher GPAs in the first year in college for non-first-generation college students but not for first-generation students. These findings are discussed with regard to implications for further research and practice in higher education.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

In the United States, the proportion of youth who are attending institutions of

higher education has steadily increased over the past half century (Arnett & Taber, 1994;

Kena et al., 2015). Because more individuals are attending college, understanding the

success and educational attainment of students during the college years is not only

important for educators and college administrators, it is also of great importance for

developmental scientists. Educational attainment beyond the high school degree has long-

term psychological benefits through its relation to higher rates of employment and higher

income after the college years (Baum, Ma, & Payea, 2013; Halperin, 1998; Institute for

Higher Education Policy, 2005). College-educated individuals also have greater access to

resources and experiences that offer opportunities for learning beyond the college years,

including books, computers, travel, continuing education courses and advanced degrees,

and an increased likelihood of colleagues and friends who have also attended college

(Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Together, these findings suggest that attaining a college

education has a long-term impact on a person's cognitive and social development (Baum,

Ma, & Payea, 2013; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). However, not all students who enter

college attain a degree. In fact, the graduation rate of all full-time undergraduate students

seeking a bachelor's degree at a 4-year institution in 2013 was 58% at public institutions

and 65% at private non-profit institutions (Kena et al., 2015). In order to better

understand college student success, the current study investigates the contributions of

students' own conceptions of a good college student and social support from parents to students' first year academic achievement and first-to-second year retention.

In this introduction, background literature on the challenges experienced by college students, particularly first-generation college students, is reviewed. In addition, conceptions of college success in the field of developmental psychology are considered and evaluated. I then draw on sociological theory to broaden the approach used by developmental psychologists to understand college students and their academic success. The section concludes with a description of the current study, a mixed-method design that integrates core theoretical ideas from developmental psychology and sociology and uses a sample of students from a diverse, four-year public research university. The study focuses on (1) students' conceptions of a good college student and (2) parent-student communication before the first year of college. More specifically, this study examines how conceptions of a good college student and parent-student communication relate to academic achievement during the first year of college. It also investigates these processes in relation to first-to-second year retention for first-generation and non-first generation college students.

In Pursuit of Higher Education

In 1990, 12 million students enrolled in degree-granting postsecondary institutions in the United States (Kena et al., 2015). In the fall of 2013, total undergraduate enrollment had increased 46%, to 17.5 million students. The National Center for Education Statistics estimates that undergraduate enrollment will increase from 17.5 million to 19.6 million students between 2013 and 2024 (Kena et al., 2015).

Over the last decade, explicit efforts have taken place to increase the number of young people attending college after high school. For example, in 2014, First Lady Michelle Obama began the *Reach Higher Initiative*, which aims to encourage every student in the country to pursue and complete their education past high school either at a professional training or certification program, a 2-year community college, or a 4-year college or university (The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 2014). As part of this initiative, the First Lady later announced that over 20 social media, business, and non-profit partners across the country were joining together to launch *Better Make Room*, a campaign directed solely at young people ages 14–19 years to get them excited about further education and to encourage them to create social media content about the college-going process (The White House, Office of the First Lady, 2015).

Although the transition from high school to college comes with positive experiences and excitement, such as opportunities for identity exploration and expanding personal interests, this transition can be challenging and stressful (Compas, Wagner, Slavin, & Vannatta, 1986). Beginning, or first-year, college students need to break from routines that were common in high school and develop new strategies better suited to the demands of the college campus. While many students manage this transition to college reasonably well, there are some students that find this experience difficult (Fisher & Hood, 1987; Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994; Hertel, 2002; Terenzini et al., 1994). Previous research has found that some college students experience an increase in psychological disturbances, particularly with depressive feelings, during the adjustment to college (Fisher & Hood, 1987). Moreover, students may experience difficulty in their social

adjustment to college, such as not fitting in well with the college environment or have concerns about their ability to meet the academic expectations in their courses (Hertel, 2002; Terenzini et al., 1994).

Thus, although transitioning to college is a major life event that is normally associated with excitement and enthusiasm along with greater educational and social opportunities, this transition may be a stressful period that can place a student at risk for homesickness and other more serious psychological concerns (Fisher & Hood, 1987). As a result, it is important for researchers to explore the role that students' social support networks play during the transition from high school to college. Social support may help buffer students who find this transition difficult and, in turn, help ensure their success in this new educational setting. These issues may be especially pronounced for beginning college students whose parents did not graduate college, referred to as first-generation college students. To examine these ideas, the current study investigates how parents offer support to their college-going child through their conversations about college.

Challenges for First-Generation College Students

Although we see an increase in the proportion of young Americans attending higher education, there remain large segments of society that enter college at a significant disadvantage (Davis, 2010; Engle, 2007; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Thayer, 2000). One such group is *first-generation college students*, who are students whose parents did not finish college (Davis, 2010). While the overall proportion of first-generation college students has declined since the 1970s, about one in six freshmen at four-year institutions in the United States today are first-generation college students (Saenz, Hurtado, Barrera,

Wolf, & Yeung, 2007). In addition, the decrease in the percentage of first-generation college students presents new challenges for the policies and programs of higher education. This is because first-generation college students today differ in many ways from first-generation students of prior generations, including students in the Baby Boomer generation who began attending college in great numbers in the 1960s. Compared to the prior cohorts, first-generation college students today are more likely to come from poorer households (Nuñez & Carroll, 1998), families where English is the second language, immigrant backgrounds (Baum & Flores, 2011), or ethnic/racial minority backgrounds (Rendon, 1994). As a result, although we see a decline in the overall proportion of first-generation college students since the 1970s, there is still much to understand regarding the experiences of these college students.

Research shows that first-generation college students today face significant challenges to their college success. These students tend to enter college with less knowledge of college-related activities and expectations, and they have less social support at home during the transition from high school to college relative to students whose parents went to college (Davis, 2010; Engle, 2007; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Thayer, 2000; Tym, McMillion, Barone, & Webster, 2004). These factors affect students' ability to do well academically and successfully progress through college (Engle, 2007). In fact, recent research indicates that being a first-generation college student is in itself a risk factor for academic failure (Chen & Carroll, 2005; Choy, 2001; Engle, 2007; Ishitani, 2006; Nuñez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Warburton, Bugarin, & Nuñez, 2001). In other words, even after accounting for students'

demographic background, academic preparation during high school, and academic performance in college, the sheer fact that a student is the first in the family to attend college places a student at-risk for poorer educational outcomes, such as dropping out of college and not attaining a bachelor's degree (Chen & Carroll, 2005; Choy, 2001; Engle, 2007; Ishitani, 2006; Nuñez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Warburton, Bugarin, & Nuñez, 2001).

The challenges these students confront occur both when they begin college and during the college years. These challenges may affect the long-range academic success of first-generation youth, which is borne out by research on the academic vulnerability of first-generation college students. Research shows that these students are less likely to complete their degree programs in a timely manner, more likely to drop out during the first semester of college, have lower first-semester grades, and are less likely to return for their second year in college compared to non-first generation peers (Ishitani, 2006; Riehl, 1994).

In addition, first-generation college students tend to show patterns of discontinuity in their post-high school education and are more likely to delay entry into postsecondary institutions. Students whose parents have attended college tend to continue onto college soon after graduating high school; however, first-generation college students often experience a "disjunction" in their lives and do not continue on to college immediately after receiving their high school degree (Engle, 2007). This type of "disjunction" between high school and postsecondary education is different from the patterns of "school leavers", that is, students who voluntarily take time out from their

formal education after completing high school to learn in a less structured way, which is commonly referred to as a "gap year" (Haigler & Nelson, 2005; Martin, 2010). For students who take a gap year, such as Kate Middleton, Duchess of Cambridge in the United Kingdom (Milton, 2016) and Malia Obama, daughter of U.S. President Barack Obama (Bradner, 2016), many tend to become involved in organized activities such as conducting research and volunteer tourism, or less structured activities, such as leisure and adventure travel (Martin, 2010). Students who do not take a gap year yet delay entry into college are more likely to come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. The time off from school is often seen as an opportunity to earn money to pay for college or, in some cases, to help support the family. Moreover, students who do not enter college right after high school are less likely to expect to achieve a bachelor or higher degree and they often have lower grades than their peers who have entered school immediately following high school (Chen & Carroll, 2005; Engle, 2007; Nuñez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Warburton, Bugarin, & Nuñez, 2001).

Taken together, these factors suggest that delayed entry into college increases some students' risk for dropping out of college without earning a degree, and first-generation students seem especially vulnerable on this count (Niu & Tienda, 2013). In fact, previous work has found that first-generation students are about twice as likely as their non-first-generation peers to drop out of a 4-year institution before their second year of college (Choy, 2001). These trends underscore the need for research on factors that may affect first-generation college students' success in higher education.

Two key societal goals underlie the strong, current emphasis on higher education in the U.S.: (1) the development of individual competencies and (2) social progress (Bowen, 1977). Postsecondary education is considered important in achieving these two, intertwined goals. As a result, every high school graduate in the U.S. who wants to attend college is encouraged, even expected, to do so. The population endorses this view. Graduating from college is seen as a means of social and economic mobility for individuals, and it can also help advance the communities from which these individuals come (Saenz et al., 2007). Even for youth in families in which parents have not attended college, there is huge interest and investment in their attendance and success in college. In essence, these students' individual success and their collective potential to contribute to and advance society are at issue.

Understanding Factors that Contribute to College Success

Much of developmental psychological research defines college success in terms of academic achievement as measured by grade point average (GPA) or in terms of college retention (i.e., successfully progressing through college each year and enrolling and attending the following year) (Dennis, Phinney, & Chuateco, 2005; Fuligni & Witkow, 2004; Hurtado-Ortiz & Gauvain, 2007). Academic achievement and college retention are of great concern for higher education institutions because these particular factors provide indication to policy makers and program evaluators that students are, indeed, succeeding academically. Therefore, it is important to include academic achievement and educational progress in developmental psychological research on college success because they are positively correlated with one another and predictive of

college completion. If students are achieving well in the classroom, then they are likely to progress satisfactorily through college and attain their degree.

However, college success is not simply the display of academic achievement or the satisfaction of degree requirements. Although the current definitions of college success in developmental psychological research consider important outcomes, in particular academic achievement and educational progress, researchers can improve these existing models by taking a broader approach to understanding college success. This is because the college experience does not merely include what occurs in the classroom. By solely focusing on academic achievement and college retention, developmental psychological researchers miss how students acquire the cultural capital that comes with being a college student and a college graduate.

Cultural capital. Cultural capital is an individual's awareness, understanding of, and proficiency in cultural codes of conduct, rules, and practices (Aschaffenberg & Mass, 1997; Bourdieu 1973; 1977). The idea of cultural capital can be applied to specific societal roles and expectations, such as that of a college student or college graduate. In this light, a person who is successful in college has acquired more than the degree; he or she has acquired a set of behaviors and ways of engaging with society that reflect that degree and help provide access to further avenues of success. Thus, using a wider approach to understanding college success allows researchers to include other possible elements of the college experience, such as the acquisition of knowledge about being a good college student (or cultural capital, i.e., conceptions of a good college student) and engagement in behaviors during the transition to and beginning of college that help set

the stage for the transmission of this knowledge (i.e., parent-student communication about college).

This expanded approach seeks to understand college success in relation to non-academic factors. It takes the view that a successful student is not only doing well in the classroom, but he or she is also connecting with other individuals on the campus, developing an understanding of the role of a successful student on campus, and knowing what characteristics and skills are needed to become and maintain the attributes of a good college student. Using this expanded research approach may be helpful for developing strategies to aid in the success of college students, especially those who come from families in which college attendance is a new and unfamiliar undertaking.

Non-Academic Factors Important to the Success of a College Student. Many factors other than those that index academic performance, such as GPA and retention, are important to college success. These include behaviors, skills, attitudes, and strategies that are relevant to academic performance, but extend beyond them and reflect a student's adoption of ways of learning and interacting with others that are important to succeeding in college and the years beyond (Farrington et al., 2012; Heckman & Rubinstein, 2001; Nagaoaka et al., 2013).

It is important to study these non-academic factors because they affect academic performance (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000). In addition, recent research suggests that programmatic social investments that support the development of these non-academic factors, for instance through bridge programs prior to college and support programs on college campuses, have the potential to yield high payoffs. Participation in

these programs is associated with better educational outcomes and reduced educational disparities for disadvantaged groups, including first-generation college students (Farrington et al., 2012). The present study examines two non-academic factors that seem particularly valuable to student success: (1) understanding the characteristics and skills of a good college student and (2) parent-student communication about college. To develop these ideas further, the next section focuses on the idea of cultural capital in relation to college success.

Cultural Capital and the College Setting

One way to broaden developmental science's understanding of college success and to explore non-academic factors is to draw knowledge from other social sciences, in particular, sociological theory on cultural capital. As stated previously, cultural capital is a person's awareness, understanding of, and proficiency in cultural codes of conduct, rules, and practices (Aschaffenberg & Mass, 1997, Bourdieu 1973; 1977). For college students, cultural capital in the student role includes knowledge, such as understanding course expectations, how to interact with instructors and teaching assistants in the classroom and during office hours, how to participate in campus activities, and how to make friends on campus. This type of knowledge is important to college success, but it is not always easy to obtain. For many students, this knowledge is passed onto them informally by family members and more formally by college counselors and other designated individuals who facilitate the college-going process, such as teachers and guidance counselors. Because this information is typically available for students whose parents attended college, these students tend to enter college with greater cultural capital

in this regard, that is greater understanding of the college student role, than first-generation college students do (Engle, 2007).

In a qualitative study examining the fit between college faculty members' expectations and students' understanding of those expectations, Collier and Morgan (2008) found that there were differences between faculty and student understandings. In addition, there were differences between first-generation college students and students who have parents who attended college. Compared to non-first-generation college students, first-generation college students wanted more detail and greater clarity when instructors discussed course content and assignments. For example, first-generation students felt that they could not produce their best work unless instructors were more specific, such as explaining format preferences for writing assignments, using less jargon during lectures, and explaining the purpose of office hours instead of assuming that all students already knew (Collier & Morgan, 2008). This study is important because it demonstrates how differences in the fit between instructors' expectations and students' understanding may result in differential college success outcomes for first- and non-first generation students for reasons other than disciplinary-based academic skills. What this research suggests is that this lack of knowledge is especially problematic for first-generation college students who may lack cultural capital in this realm, including general information regarding higher education and specific knowledge about how to assume the college student role effectively.

Conceptions of a Good College Student

Collier and Morgan's (2008) study about the college student role is important because it suggests a definition of this role that includes understanding course expectations and course work. However, the college student role may include much more than what Collier and Morgan propose. The college student role describes a good college student, that is a student with the characteristics and qualities required to be successful in college. What characteristics and skills does a good college student have, and do all college students know this information? In other words, an expanded definition of the college student role not only includes understanding course expectations and course work as proposed by Collier and Morgan, it also includes other characteristics that students need to be successful in college. Such characteristics and behaviors may include persistence, discipline, interpersonal skills, and social engagement on campus.

To explore these issues in the current study, I studied college students' conceptions of a college student using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Through surveys that yielded quantitative data, I examined whether or not students' conceptualizations included academic characteristics and skills (e.g., studying for quizzes and exams, doing well on quizzes and exams, understanding the course syllabus) and non-academic characteristics and skills, such as those that include social engagement on campus (e.g., participating in campus events and volunteering on campus) and self-care behaviors (e.g., maintaining a healthy diet, exercising regularly, and creating and maintaining fulfilling relationships).

Also, through an open-ended question that yielded qualitative responses, I coded student participant responses for whether or not characteristics and skills fell into the following categories: (1) academic behaviors and learning strategies; (2) perseverance and mindset; (3) and social skills and self-care behaviors. The current study focuses on these items because of prior research by Collier and Morgan (2008) and Farrington, Nagaoaka, and colleagues (Farrington et al., 2012; Nagaoka et al., 2013). This open-ended question yielded qualitative responses that allowed for the examination of the presence of academic characteristics and skills (i.e., academic behaviors and learning strategies) and non-academic characteristics and skills (i.e., perseverance, mindset, social behaviors, and self-care behaviors) in students' conceptions of a good college student. Academic behaviors and learning strategies include behaviors that are most proximal to students' performance in school (Farrington et al., 2012; Nagaoka et al., 2013). These behaviors are visible, outward signs that a student is engaged in college and puts effort into learning course content, such as going to class, doing homework, and taking good notes. They also include tactics and processes that a student uses to help with thinking and learning, such as study skills, time management, and goal setting. Academic perseverance and academic mindset includes characteristics that reflect students' tendency to do their best despite distractions or obstacles within the context of learning and academics, such as focus, self-control, and self-discipline (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007; Dweck, 1986; Dweck, 2006; Farrington et al., 2012; Nagaoaka et al., 2013). It also includes characteristics that that involve psychosocial attitudes or beliefs about one's ability and view of the learning, such as confident and open-minded.

Social skills and self-care behaviors include interpersonal qualities, skills, and behaviors that improve social interactions, such as communication skills, involvement on campus clubs, and being responsible (Farrington et al., 2012; Nagaoka et al., 2013). This category also includes intrapersonal and self-care behaviors, such as eating well, getting enough sleep, and relaxing. This study will investigate how these three categories of students' descriptions of a good college student relate to first-year GPA and first-to-second year retention.

The Transmission of Cultural Capital About College

In addition to conceptions of a good college student, parent-student communication is another non-academic factor that seems to be particularly valuable to student success. The transition from high school to college can be stressful for many youth (Compas, Wagner, Slavin, & Vannatta, 1986). Support from parents can be especially important during this transition because parents can offer advice, direction, and emotional support to help their children develop skills and strategies that may be useful when they encounter new situations or challenges experienced as a college student. Indeed, research shows that students can benefit from interacting with individuals who are more knowledgeable or experienced with the college-going process, including parents and other family members (Hurtado & Gauvain, 1997). However, the extent to which students experience or benefit from these interactions may differ by many factors, including parents' educational background.

The Role of Parent-Student Communication

Before students begin college, it is useful for them to learn what this experience will be like to help them prepare for it (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2005). Although this information is often conveyed by college counselors and teachers in formal settings (Attinasi, 1989), it is also passed on in less formal situations, including the home. During conversations about college, parents pass on valuable information about college, which can enhance a students' cultural capital (Aschaffenberg & Mass, 1997; Bourdieu 1973; 1977; Wren, 1999). These informal learning experiences are more available for students whose parents attended college, and as a result these students begin college with substantially more knowledge about college than do first-generation college students (Engle, 2007). In contrast, parents who did not attend college have little to no knowledge about college from their own personal experience to pass on to their children. Non-first-generation students also perceive more social support for their college attendance than first-generation students do (York-Anderson & Bowman, 1991). Cutrona and colleagues (Cutrona, 1989; Cutrona, Cole, Colangelo, Assouline, & Russell, 1994; Cutrona & Russell, 1987) found that, after controlling for academic aptitude (ACT scores), parental support significantly predicted college grade point average. Given these patterns it is not surprising that students who are the first in their family to attend college report feeling less prepared for and more fearful of failure at college than do students with parents who went to college (Bui, 2002).

Although research suggests that family experience and socio-emotional support in these two college-going populations differs and that these differences may have

16

consequences for student success, the family processes through which students learn about and prepare for college are not well understood. Prior research suggests it is important to study the nature and extent of parent-student communication about college as students transition out of high school and into college. The present study focuses on the frequency of parent-student communication about college and its expectations (e.g., courses, dorm life, registering for classes), students' perceptions of their parents' helpfulness when talking about college, and students' views of their parents' general quality of support as they launch their college careers. The quality of communication includes parents' emotional and instrumental support for their college-going child. Emotional support focuses on parents' understanding and concern about their child's feelings about attending college. There are two aspects of instrumental support: parents being available as a resource and parents providing information and knowledge about college.

The Current Study

The current study builds upon previous research and investigates students' conceptions of a good college student and parent-student communication about college during the transition to college and. First-year college students at a large, public university participated in an online survey about their understanding of the college student role and these communication experiences. Participants were also asked to describe the characteristics and skills of a good college student. In addition, they were asked about the frequency of their communication with parents about college and their perceptions of the helpfulness and quality of emotional and instrumental support in these

interactions. I compared the responses of students who are the first in their family to attend college and students whose parents attended college. In addition, the relations with students' first-year academic success and first-to-second year retention were also studied.

Hypotheses

Conceptions of a Good College Student. Using data yielded from a quantitative measure, I examined what first-year college students described as the most important characteristics and skills of a good college student. I predicted differences in students who were the first in their families to attend college (first-generation) and students whose parents attended college. I expected that first-generation college students would indicate that academic characteristics and skills (e.g., study for quizzes and exams, take good notes) were the most important for a good college student while non-first-generation college students would indicate that both academic and non-academic behaviors and characteristics (e.g., managing time efficiently, joining clubs/organizations on campus) were the most important for a good college student.

Prior research suggests that non-first-generation college students tend to come to college with greater knowledge about college (Collier & Morgan, 2008). Using the qualitative data yielded from the open-ended question, "What characteristics and skills does a good college student have?", I expected that non-first generation college students will report more characteristics and skills than first-generation college students when asked to describe a good college student. In addition, I expected that while both groups of students will report academic characteristics and skills (i.e., academic behaviors, learning strategies, academic perseverance, and academic mindset), non-first generation college

18

students will report more social skills and self-care behaviors than first-generation college students. Also, I hypothesize that the number of characteristics and skills that students report when describing a good college student will be positively related to first year college GPA and first-to-second year retention.

Parent-Student Communication about College. Based on prior research, I expected that non-first-generation students would report that, before beginning college, they talked more frequently with their parents about college and found these conversations to be more helpful compared to first-generation students. I also expected that non-first-generation students would report that this communication was of higher instrumental quality, though not higher in emotional support compared to first-generation college students. In addition, previous research has found that parental support predicts college grades (Cutrona et al., 1994), so I expected that parent-student communication about college would have a positive relation with students' first-year academic performance and first-to-second year retention, regardless of parent's college attendance.

Chapter 2

METHODS

Participants

The study sample was comprised of 344 first-year college students (58.4% first-generation; 41.6% non-first-generation) attending a 4-year public university in Southern California. The mean age of these participants was 18.05 years ($SD = .38$), and 228 were female (66.3%), 109 were male (31.7%), and 7 did not report their gender (2.0%). In terms of ethnic background, 4.1% were Black/African American, 14.8% were White/European American, 37.5% were Latino American, 35.2% were Asian American, and 8.4% identified as "Other" or chose not to answer. Of the first-generation students, 24.9% lived with their parents and 75.1% did not live with their parents (e.g., lived on the college campus, lived off-campus with peers). For the non-first-generation students, 18.2% lived with their parents, and 81.8% did not live with their parents (i.e., lived on campus in campus housing or lived off-campus but not with their parents). School reports indicated that half (50.6%) of the study's sample came from low-income families; and of these students, 79.9% were first-generation college attendees, and 20.1% were non-first-generation college attendees.

Procedure

All first-year college students at the university ($N = 4,187$) were sent an e-mail at the beginning of the first year of college inviting them to participate in an online study about college students' experiences and transition to college. A final study sample of 344 students volunteered to participate, which was an 8.2% response rate. Participants

completed three online questionnaires through Survey Gizmo, a secure website approved by the campus Institutional Review Board. The author of this study administered the surveys during the first three weeks of the students' first year in college. These questionnaires asked for background information, their conceptions of a good college student, and parent-student communication about college. Upon the completion of the survey, students were entered into a drawing to win a pair of movie tickets. Out of all of the participants, 35 students were randomly selected, and each received two movie tickets.

The university provided reports of participants' college generation status, family income, and high school grade point average (GPA). The university also provided reports of students' cumulative GPA at the end of the first year in college. In addition, at the beginning of the following fall quarter, the university provided reports of students' first-to-second-year retention (i.e., whether or not they were enrolled during the fall quarter of their second-year in college).

Measures

Participants completed three questionnaires regarding their conceptions of a good college student, parent-student communication about college, and background and demographic information.

Conceptions of a Good College Student. A quantitative measure of students' conceptions of a good college student was created. This questionnaire included 17 items. Participants were asked to indicate how important these 17 characteristics and skills were for a good college student to have on a scale from 1 to 9, with 1 = not at all important and

9 = very important. These characteristics and skills fall into either academic or non-academic domains. Examples of academic characteristics and skills included studying for quizzes and exams, doing well on quizzes and exams, and taking good notes. Examples of non-academic characteristics and skills included time management, joining clubs or organizations on campus, building and maintaining fulfilling relationships, and participating in campus events.

Participants' conceptions of a good college student were also measured qualitatively. Participants were asked the open-ended question, "What attributes, characteristics, and skills do good college students have? Using the space below, please describe what characteristics and skills you think a good college student has." The primary investigator and a trained research assistant coded participants' responses for the number of characteristics and skills that fall under the following categories: (1) *academic behaviors and learning strategies* (i.e., behaviors that are most proximal to students' performance in school, such as going to class, doing homework, and taking good notes); (2) *academic perseverance and academic mindset* (i.e., characteristics that reflect students' tendency to do their best despite distractions or obstacles within the context of learning and academics, such as focus, self-control, and self-discipline, and psychosocial attitudes or beliefs about one's ability and view of the learning, such as confident and open-minded); and (3) *social skills and self-care behaviors* (interpersonal qualities, skills, and behaviors that improve social interactions, such as communication skills, involvement on campus clubs, and being responsible) (Farrington et al., 2012; Nagaoka et al., 2013). Also, coders counted the total number of characteristics and skills each

participant mentioned in their responses. Cohen's κ was performed to determine if there was agreement between the two raters. There was excellent agreement between the two raters for academic behaviors and learning strategies, κ = .99, *p* < .001; academic perseverance and mindset, κ = .99, *p* < .001; social skills and self-care behaviors, κ = .97, *p* < .001; and overall total number of characteristics and skills mentioned, κ = .98, *p* < .001.

Parent-Student Communication. This measure included 25 items representing three aspects of parent-student communication: the *frequency* of parent-student communication about specific college topics, the *perceived helpfulness* of parent-*student* communication about these college topics, and the overall *quality* of parent-*student* communication about college. To measure frequency, participants indicated how frequently they spoke with their parents or guardians about 11 college-relevant topics on a 0 to 3 scale (0 = not at all; 3 = very frequently). These topics included registering for classes, social events on campus, financial aid, and grades.

To measure perceived helpfulness of the communication, participants indicated how helpful their parents or guardians were when speaking with them about these *same* 11 topics on a 0 to 3 scale (0 = not helpful; 3 = almost always helpful).

To measure perceived overall quality of communication about college, participants indicated the extent to which they agreed with 3 items that captured students' perceptions of their parents' instrumental and emotional support. Instrumental support included two aspects: (1) parents being viewed as a resource when their child has questions or concerns about college, and (2) parents providing useful information and

knowledge about college. *Emotional support* involved the child perceiving that their parents understood and cared about the child's feelings when they discussed college in general. All responses were rated on a scale ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 6 (Strongly agree). The three items were, "I can go to my mother/father when I have concerns or questions about college" (instrumental support/resourcefulness), "I feel when my mother/father talks with me about college, s/he cannot provide useful information" (instrumental support/usefulness; this item was reverse scored), and "When my mother/father talks to me about college, s/he understands me and cares about my feelings" (emotional support). Together, these three items tap the overall quality of parent-student communication about college in terms of instrumental and emotional support for the child.

Scores for each measure of parent-student communication were derived by obtaining the mean or average for all the items for each scale. Scores for frequency of communication had good internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha of .86 for the entire sample (alphas were .88 for first-generation college students and .84 for non-first-generation college students). Internal consistency reliability for the perceived helpfulness score was good with a Cronbach's alpha of .90 for the entire sample, with an alpha of .92 for first-generation college students, and an alpha of .88 for non-first-generation college students. Internal consistency reliability for perceived quality of communication score was good with a Cronbach's alpha of .73 for the entire sample, .71 for first-generation college students, and .86 for non-first-generation college students.

Background and Demographic Information. Demographic information (i.e., background and pre-college characteristics), such as gender, ethnicity, and living arrangement (whether they lived at home with their parents) were collected. Other pre-college information, such as college generation status, low-income background status, and high school grade point average were collected from school reports in order to control statistically for these characteristics. Previous research suggests that these factors are important correlates of college academic achievement (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980).

College Grade Point Average. School reports of each student's cumulative GPA at the end of their first year in college were collected in order to assess academic achievement. Grade point averages were on a 4.0 scale, where 4.0 = A, 3.0 = B, 2.0 = C, and 1.0 = D.

First-to-Second-Year College Retention. The university provided reports of reports of whether each student is enrolled in the fall quarter of their second year at the university. First-to-second year retention will be dummy coded with 1 = enrolled and 0 = not enrolled.

Plan of Main Analyses

Descriptive Statistics. Descriptive statistics, such as mean-level analyses, *t*-tests, and chi-square analyses, were conducted understand students' first-year GPA and first-to-second-year retention rates.

Conceptions of a Good College Student. To understand what first-year college students described as the most important characteristics and skills of a good college student, mean-level analyses and *t*-tests were conducted using the data yielded from the

quantitative measure of conceptions of a good college student. In addition, using the data

yielded from the qualitative measure of conceptions of a good college student, I

performed further mean-level analyses and t-tests to compare how first- and non-first-

generation students described a good college student. Using this same data from the

qualitative measure of conceptions of a good college student, preliminary bivariate

correlational analyses were calculated in order to examine how conceptions of a good

college student and related to first-year GPA.

Regression analysis was also used to examine how the number of characteristics

and skills that students report when describing a good college student related to first year

college GPA, after controlling for ethnic/racial background, gender, low-income

background, living at home, and high school GPA. In preparation for this analysis,

dummy variables were created for each racial/ethnic group (Black/African American,

White/Caucasian/European American, Latino American, Asian American, and Other

racial/ethnic group). The White/Caucasian/European American group was omitted as the

reference group. Gender and living with parents while in college were included as

covariates because there were marginally significant gender differences ($M_{females}$ = 2.81

and M_{males} = 2.67), $t(335)$ = -1.89, p = .06, and significant differences between students

who lived with their parents (M = 2.98) and those who did not (M = 2.98) on first-year

GPA, $t(342)$ = 3.23, p = .001. Low income background was also included as a covariate

because there were significant differences between students from low-income

backgrounds (M = 2.66) and those who were not (M = 2.88) on first year GPA, $t(342)$ = -

3.25, p = .001). In addition, high school GPA was included as a covariate because

26

correlational analyses revealed that higher high school GPAs were related to higher first-year GPAs ($r = .25$, $p < .001$). When significant results were detected, interaction effects were tested. The interactions were interpreted by centering continuous predictors at the mean and graphing the significant interaction with grade point average on the y-axis and the predictor on the x-axis (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003). Lastly, simple slopes were tested for further interpretation.

A logistic regression analysis was used to examine the relation between students' conceptions of a good college student and first-to-second-year retention. Once again, predictor variables were first-generation status, academic behavior and learning strategy characteristics, academic perseverance and academic mindset, and social skills and self-care behaviors. These analyses included ethnic/racial background, gender, low-income background, and high school GPA as covariates. When significant results were detected, interaction effects were tested.

Parent-Student Communication about College. To examine first-generation and non-first-generation college students' communication with their parents, I conducted a series of mean-level analyses and *t*-tests. Preliminary bivariate correlational analyses were also calculated in order to examine how parent-student communication and related to first-year GPA In addition, to examine the contribution of parent-student communication about college on first-year GPA and first-to-second-year retention, I conducted a series of regression analyses similar to those noted above.

Chapter 3

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

First-Year Grade Point Average

First-generation and non-first-generation college students differed in first-year cumulative grade point averages, $t(342) = 2.33$, $p = .02$. Although these two groups did not differ in high school grades (M first-generation $= 3.58$, $SD = .29$; M non-first-generation $= 3.60$, $SD = .30$; $t(342) = -.72$, $p = .47$), non-first generation college students earned higher grade point averages during their first year in college ($M = 2.87$, $SD = .66$) than first-generation college students ($M = 2.70$, $SD = .64$).

First-to-Second-Year Retention Rates

In terms of first-to-second-year retention rates, for the overall sample, 91% of the students ($n = 312$) returned during the fall quarter of their second year in college (9%, or 32 students did not return). When examined by college generation status, 90% of first-generation college students ($n = 180$ out of a total of 201) and 92% of non-first-generation college students ($n = 132$ out of a total of 143) returned during the fall quarter of their second year in college. A chi-square test was performed to examine the relation between college generation status and first-to-second year retention. The relation between these variables were not significant, $\chi^2 (1, N = 344) = .75$, $p = ns$. That is, college generation status was not related to first-to-second-year retention.

Examining Conceptions of a Good College Student

Most Important Characteristics and Skills of a Good College Student

Table 1 presents the characteristics and behaviors a good college student has and displays, according to first-year students based on their responses to the quantitative measure for conceptions of a good college student. For the overall sample, the five most important (i.e., highest rated) characteristics and behaviors were: (1) time management ($M = 8.75$, $SD = .77$), (2) gets papers done ($M = 8.75$, $SD = .70$), (3) does well on quizzes and exams ($M = 8.71$, $SD = .76$), (4) studies for quizzes and exams ($M = 8.61$, $SD = .94$), and (5) write papers that satisfy professor's requirements ($M = 8.53$, $SD = .91$). The five least important (lowest rated) characteristics and behaviors were: (1) participates in campus events ($M = 6.28$, $SD = 1.91$), (2) volunteers on campus or in the community ($M = 6.63$, $SD = 1.77$), (3) joins clubs or organizations on campus ($M = 6.70$, $SD = 1.79$), (4) exercises regularly ($M = 7.03$, $SD = 1.77$), and (5) asks questions in class ($M = 7.33$, $SD = 1.57$). In addition, as displayed in Table 1, first-generation and non-first generation college students did not differ in their ratings of importance for all but one of these characteristics, skills, and behaviors of a good college student. Specifically, first-generation college students thought that it was more important that a good college student asked questions in class than non-first-generation college students, $t(340) = 2.50$, $p = .01$.

Using data acquired through students' responses to the qualitative measure of conceptions of a good college student, I further explored how students described a good college student. As displayed in Table 2, first-generation college students did not significantly differ from their non-first-generation peers in the number of academic

behavior and learning strategies, $t(326) = .37$, $p = ns$, nor social skills and self-care

behaviors, $t(325) = -1.30$, $p = .ns$, mentioned to describe a good student. However, there

was a marginally significant difference between the two groups in the number of

academic perseverance and mindset, $t(325) = -1.70$, $p = 09$, as well as total number of

characteristics, $t(325) = -1.84$, $p = .07$, they used to describe a good college student. More

specifically, non-first-generation college students mentioned more academic

perseverance and mindset characteristics as well as more total number of characteristics

when describing a good college student compared to their first-generation counterparts.

The Role of Conceptions of a Good College Student on First-Year GPA

Table 3 displays the preliminary bivariate correlations for data yielded from the

qualitative measure of conceptions of a good college student (i.e., academic behaviors

and learning strategies, academic perseverance and mindset, and social skills and social

behaviors) and first-year GPA for the overall sample. For the overall sample, first-year

GPA was significantly related to the number of social skills and self-care behaviors

mentioned ($r = .17$, $p < .01$) and marginally related to the total number of characteristics

used to describe a good college student ($r = .11$, $p = .052$). However, first-year GPA was

not related to the number of academic behaviors and learning skills ($r = -.02$, $p = ns$) nor

the number of academic perseverance and mindset ($r = .02$, $p = ns$) characteristics

mentioned.

Correlational analyses also showed that the total number of characteristics

mentioned was significantly related to the number of academic behaviors and learning

strategies ($r = .47$, $p < .001$), academic perseverance and mindset ($r = .51$, $p < .001$), and

social skills and self-care behaviors ($r = .53$, $p < .001$) mentioned. Also, the number of academic behaviors and learning strategies was significantly related to the number of academic perseverance and mindset characteristics mentioned ($r = -.24$, $p < .001$) and marginally related to the number of social skills and self-care behaviors mentioned ($r = -.09$, $p = .09$). In addition, the number of academic perseverance and mindset characteristics mentioned was not significantly related to the number of social skills and self-care behaviors mentioned ($r = -.02$, $p = ns$).

Regression analysis was used to examine the relation between conceptions of a good college student characteristics and first-year GPA (see Table 4). Predictor variables were first-generation status, academic behaviors and learning strategies, academic perseverance and mindset, and social skills and self-care behaviors. Analyses revealed that the number of academic behaviors and learning strategies as well as academic perseverance and mindset did not predict first-year GPA, after controlling for gender, ethnic/racial background, living with parents, low-income background, and high school GPA. However, the number of social skills and self-care behaviors did significantly predict first year GPA, $b = .11$, $S. E. = .05$, $\beta = .20$, $p < .05$. There were no significant interactions in this regression model.

The Role of Conceptions of a Good College Student on First-to-Second-Year Retention

Logistic regression analysis procedures were used to examine the relation between conceptions of a good college student and first-to-second-year retention (see Table 5). Like the previous regression analysis, predictor variables were first-generation status, academic behaviors and learning strategies, academic perseverance and mindset,

and social skills and self-care behaviors. Analyses revealed that the three variables for conceptions of a good college student did not significantly predict first-to-second-year retention, after controlling for gender, ethnic/racial background, low-income background, and high school GPA.

<div style="text-align: center;">**Examining Parent-Student Communication About College**</div>

College Generation Status and Parent-Student Communication About College

Table 6 presents the means for the parent-adolescent communication variables for the entire sample and by college generation status. Findings revealed that non-first-generation and first-generation college students did not differ in the frequency of communication with their parents about college, $t(342) = -1.59$, $p = .11$. However, these groups differed in the adolescents' perceptions of helpfulness, $t(342) = -2.79$, $p = .006$, and quality, $t(342) = 3.04$, $p = .003$, of the communication. Non-first-generation students, as compared to first-generation students, reported that conversations with their parents about college were more helpful and of better quality.

Post hoc analyses of the mean level scores on the individual items (see Table 7) of the quality of communication measure indicated that first-generation students did not differ from non-first-generation students in their perceptions of parents' emotional support, $t(342) = .003$, $p = .998$. However, non-first-generation college students were more likely to report they could go to their parents when they had concerns or questions about college, which reflects the dimension of resourcefulness, $t(342) = 4.21$, $p < .001$, and that their parents could provide useful information about college, $t(342) = 3.19$, $p = .002$.

The Role of Parent-Student Communication on First-Year GPA

Table 7 displays the preliminary bivariate correlations for each of the parent-student communication characteristics (i.e., frequency of communication, perceived helpfulness of communication, and overall quality of communication) and first-year GPA for the overall sample. For the overall sample, first-year GPA was not significantly related to any of the three parent-student communication characteristics. In addition, frequency of communication about college was significantly related to perceived helpfulness ($r = .78$, $p < .001$) and overall quality of communication about college ($r = .52$, $p < .001$), such that the more frequent communication is related to higher levels of perceived helpfulness about those conversations and higher levels of overall quality of communication about college. Also, perceived helpfulness was significantly related to quality of communication about college ($r = .61$, $p < .001$), such that higher levels of perceived helpfulness was related to higher levels of overall quality of that communication about college.

Regression analysis was used to examine the relation between parent-student communication about college and students' academic achievement (see Table 8). Predictor variables were first-generation status and frequency, perceived helpfulness, and quality of communication. Covariates were ethnic/racial background, gender, living with parents, low-income background, and high school GPA. Significant results were tested for interaction effects.

After controlling for race/ethnicity, gender, living at home, low-income background, and high school GPA, frequency of communication about college before

attending college and perceived helpfulness of those conversations did not predict first-year grade point average. However, overall quality of communication about college was a predictor ($b = .14$, $SE = .06$, $\beta = .24$, $p < .05$), such that having higher quality of communication about college prior to beginning college significantly predicted a higher grade point average during the first year of college.

There were no significant interactions between college generation status and frequency and perceived helpfulness of parent-student communication about college. However, there was a significant interaction between college generation status and perceived quality of communication ($b = -.18$, $SE = .08$, $\beta = -.24$, $p < .05$). As displayed in Figure 1, higher ratings of overall quality of parent-student communication about college prior to beginning college were related to higher first-year cumulative grade point average for non-first-generation college students. In a test of simple slopes, this association was significant for non-first-generation college students, $t(340) = 2.88$, $p = .004$, but it was not significant for first-generation college students, $t(340) = -.51$, $p = .61$.

The Role of Parent-Student Communication on First-to-Second-Year Retention

Logistic regression analysis procedures were used to examine the relation between parent-student communication about college and first-to-second-year retention (see Table 9). Like the previous regression analysis, predictor variables were first-generation status and frequency, perceived helpfulness, and quality of communication. Analyses revealed that these three variables for parent-student communication about

college did not predict first-to-second-year retention, after controlling for gender,

ethnic/racial background, low-income background, and high school GPA.

Chapter 4

DISCUSSION

Given the large investment in the U.S. in first-generation college students, it is important to identify factors that contribute to these students' academic success. This study examined how nonacademic factors related to college success. More specifically, I focused on conceptions of a good college student and parent-student communication about college.

Conceptions of a Good College Student

Results revealed that for the overall sample, the five most important (i.e., highest rated) characteristics and behaviors that a good student should have were time management, getting papers done, doing well on quizzes and exams, studying for quizzes and exams, and writing papers that satisfy professor's requirements. Out of these five characteristics and behaviors, one of them was non-academic (i.e., time management). This finding reveals that although academic behaviors are important for a good college student to perform, it is also important that a good college student possess non-academic skills, such as time management, according to students in this study.

In addition, results showed that first-generation and non-first-generation college students did not significantly differ in their ratings of importance for all but one of the characteristics and skills of a good college student. More specifically, compared to non-first-generation college students, first generation college students thought that it was more important that a good college student asked question in class. This finding suggests that although these two groups rate a number of behaviors and skills similarly in

importance, there may be differences between non-first-generation and first-generation college students regarding how a student should behave in the classroom, which is consistent with previous research (Collier & Morgan, 2008).

Unlike my hypothesis, non-first-generation and first-generation college students did not differ in the number of social skills and self-care behaviors mentioned when asked to describe a good college student. Results further showed that only the number of social skills and self-care behaviors that students used to describe a good college student predicted first year GPA. In addition, there was no significant relation between conceptions of a good college student characteristics and first-to-second year retention. These findings are inconsistent with the study's hypotheses and warrant further study. Possible explanations for these unexpected results may be that first-generation college students do not significantly differ from their non-first-generation counterparts in this regard; or the study's sample was inadequate to capture group differences in student's conceptions of a good student and how students' understanding of the college student role relates to college success. School factors may have played a role in affecting the kind of students who participated in this study. Given that the data were collected at a university with multiple resources and support systems for ethnically and socioeconomically diverse and underrepresented students, including first-generation college students, future research should investigate students from different types of colleges and universities to further examine students' conceptions of a good college student and to expand the generalizability of findings.

Another possible reason why this study found unexpected results may be that non-first-generation college students are not the proper comparison group for first-generation college students. By making non-first-generation college students the comparison group, the researcher assumes that non-first-generation college students enter college with the ideal understanding of the college student role. Although previous research suggests that non-first-generation college students have greater access to information about college than first-generation college students (Davis, 2010; Engle, 2007; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), it is still possible that, in some cases, first-generation college students could have had access to support systems and resources before college. With programs, such as the federal TRIO and GEAR UP, which are geared towards first-generation college students to help them prepare for college (Saenz et al., 2007), first-generation college students in this study's sample may have just as much, or even more, information about the college student role relative to their non-first-generation peers. As a result, rather than comparing conceptions of a good college student between these two groups, future studies should aim to compare students' knowledge of the college student role when they enter college and compare that knowledge to what is expected of the students in order to succeed that their college or university.

Parent-Student Communication about College

In addition to conceptions of a good college student, this study also examined parent-student communication about college. Results revealed that non-first-generation and first-generation college students did not differ in how frequently they spoke with their parents about college topics prior to attending college. However, non-first-

generation students perceived these conversations as more helpful and of higher overall quality compared to their first-generation peers. In addition, when compared to first-generation college students, non-first-generation college students were more likely to feel they could go to their parents as resources when they had concerns or questions about college. These findings are consistent with previous research that suggests that parents who have at least a bachelor's degree "pull" their college-going child through their first year with specific advice about how to succeed in college (Nichols & Islas, 2015).

Although first-generation college students may not feel that they can get as useful information and advice about college from their parents as non-first generation students, first-generation students still benefit from parental emotional support as they prepare for college. These students talk with their parents about college and share their college experiences with them. In this way, their parents are a source of encouragement and motivation for these students, perhaps even inspiration. Previous research suggests that compared to students with college-educated parents, first-generation college students are "pushed" through their first year by their parents with support (Nichols & Islas, 2015) and are more likely to report that the reason why they went to college was because their parents encouraged them to attend (Saenz et al., 2007). Taken together, these findings highlight the important role that parents, regardless of their own college experience, continue to play in their children's lives as their children transition from high school to college.

An area that warrants further study pertains to the challenges parents and guardians encounter when they try to help their college-going children adjust to college

life. Previous research suggests that some parents may have limited information about how to help their children meet university requirements, such as college preparatory courses needed to gain admittance to four-year colleges and universities (Torrez, 2004). When parents seek out such information, the barriers they face include lower levels of English language proficiency, demands and conflicts with work schedules, and unfamiliarity with available resources and services relevant to college preparation and adjustment. These challenges are especially pronounced for parents from low-income backgrounds and of first-generation immigrant status (Baum & Flores, 2011). Better understanding of these challenges can inform college preparation programs about the different ways they can provide useful information to students' families.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. Conceptions of a good college student and parent-student communication about college were based on student self-reports. Collecting information from parents would provide additional insight into these processes as well as the types of concerns parents have as their children begin college. Such information would be especially useful to obtain from parents of first-generation college students from various ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds, a group that is making up an increasingly large proportion of college and university students (Aud, Fox, & KewalRamani, 2010). In addition, this study is based on one cohort at one point in time, and longitudinal data from multiple cohorts beyond the first year of college would reveal whether conceptions of a good college student, parent-student communication, and college success changes as students progress through college. A final limitation pertains

to the sample, which was selected from one 4-year public university, a university that has a high proportion of first-generation college students and invests heavily in programs to support their success. Generalization of the findings to other higher education insitutions, such as 2-year or private colleges or universities or campuses that have fewer first-generation students, may be limited.

Conclusion

Given the low rate of college completion for first-generation students (Ishitani, 2006), it is important to understand who offers support to these students and what kinds of information and support are helpful. This study describes how conceptions of a good college student and parent-student communcation about college relates to the success of first- and non-first-generation students. Findings suggest the number of social skills and characteristics a student uses to describe a good college student relates to their first-year academic achievement. In addition, parents' support can affect students' college success regardless of whether parents attended college. Youth who want to attend college should seek to understand different characteristics and skills of a college student. Also, students pursuing higher education and their parents should know about the value of parent-student communication in this endeavor. This information can be provided in low-cost information sessions offered by high schools and colleges. In addition, programs to help college students prepare for and succeed in college should connect students with useful social support networks.

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Table 1. *Means and Standard Deviations for Students' Conceptions of a Good College Student – Quantitative Measure*

Characteristic, Behavior, or Skill	Generation Status	Mean	Standard Deviation	*t*-test
1. Time management	Overall Sample	8.75	.77	-1.32
	Non-first-generation	8.82	.55	
	First-generation	8.71	.90	
2. Gets papers done	Overall Sample	8.74	.61	-.53
	Non-first generation	8.77	.61	
	First-generation	8.73	.75	
3. Does well on quizzes and exams	Overall Sample	8.71	.76	-.53
	Non-first-generation	8.74	.61	
	First-generation	8.69	.86	
4. Studies for quizzes and exams	Overall Sample	8.61	.94	.39
	Non-first-generation	8.58	.85	
	First-generation	8.63	1.00	
5. Writes term papers that satisfy professor's requirements	Overall Sample	8.53	.91	.95
	Non-first-generation	8.48	.87	
	First-generation	8.57	.93	
6. Takes good notes	Overall Sample	8.40	1.05	-.44
	Non-first generation	8.43	1.00	
	First-generation	8.38	1.08	
7. Reads assignments before class	Overall Sample	8.22	1.14	-.65
	Non-first-generation	8.17	1.10	
	First-generation	8.25	1.17	
8. Understands the syllabus	Overall Sample	8.02	1.37	1.17
	Non-first-generation	7.92	1.44	
	First-generation	8.09	1.31	
9. Has fulfilling relationships	Overall Sample	7.72	1.53	-.55
	Non-first-generation	7.77	1.58	
	First-generation	7.68	1.49	
10. Maintains a healthy diet	Overall Sample	7.61	1.57	-.93
	Non-first-generation	7.70	1.52	
	First-generation	7.54	1.60	
11. Goes to professor's/TA's office hours	Overall Sample	7.58	1.47	.41
	Non-first-generation	7.54	1.45	
	First-generation	7.61	1.50	
12. Participates in class discussion	Overall Sample	7.53	1.44	.91
	Non-first-generation	7.44	1.48	
	First-generation	7.59	1.40	
13. Asks questions in class	Overall Sample	7.33	1.57	2.50*
	Non-first-generation	7.08	1.67	
	First-generation	7.51	1.47	
14. Exercises regularly	Overall Sample	7.03	1.78	-.67
	Non-first-generation	7.11	1.76	
	First-generation	6.97	1.79	
15. Joins clubs and organizations	Overall Sample	6.70	1.79	.25
	Non-first-generation	6.67	1.90	
	First-generation	6.98	1.79	
16. Volunteers on campus or in the community	Overall Sample	6.63	1.78	1.36
	Non-first-generation	6.48	1.82	
	First-generation	6.74	1.74	
17. Participates in campus events	Overall Sample	6.28	1.91	.94
	Non-first-generation	6.16	2.06	
	First-generation	6.36	1.79	

† *p* < .10, * *p* < .05, ** *p* < .01, *** *p* < .001
Note: Responses were rated on a scale from 1 to 9, with 1 = not at all important and 9 = very important.

Table 2. *Means and Standard Deviations for Students' Conceptions of a Good College Student – Qualitative Measure*

Characteristic, Behavior, or Skill	Generation Status	Mean	Standard Deviation	*t*-test
1. Academic Behaviors and Learning Strategies	Overall Sample	1.53	1.27	.37
	Non-first-generation	1.50	1.38	
	First-generation	1.55	1.19	
2. Academic Perseverance and Mindset	Overall Sample	1.06	1.25	-1.70[†]
	Non-first generation	1.20	1.27	
	First-generation	.96	1.22	
3. Social Skills and Self-Care Behaviors	Overall Sample	1.09	1.13	-1.30
	Non-first-generation	1.18	1.23	
	First-generation	1.02	1.04	
4. Total Number of Characteristics	Overall Sample	3.66	1.85	-1.84[†]
	Non-first-generation	3.89	1.86	
	First-generation	3.51	1.83	

[†] $p < .10$, [*] $p < .05$, [**] $p < .01$, [***] $p < .001$

Note: Values represent the number of characteristics and skills that fall under the each of the categories

Table 3. *Bivariate Correlations between Conceptions of a Good Student Characteristics and GPA*

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Academic Behaviors and Learning Strategies	-	-.24**	-.09†	.47***	-.02
2. Academic Perseverance and Mindset		-	-.02	.51***	.02
3. Social Skills and Self-Care Behaviors			-	.53***	.17**
4. Total Number of Characteristics				-	.11†
5. First-Year GPA					-

† $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 4. *GPA Regressed on Generation Status and Conceptions of a Good Student Characteristics*

Variable	*b*	*SE(b)*	*β*
Constant	2.99***	.09	
Gender [a]	-.08	.08	-.06
Black/African American [b]	-.07	.20	-.02
Asian American [b]	-.17	.11	-.12
Latino American [b]	-.18	.15	-.13
Other Race [b]	-.02	.16	-.02
Live with Parents	.17	.09	.11[†]
Low Income Background	-.11	.08	-.08
High School GPA [c]	.41	.13	.18**
First-Generation Status [d]	-.07	.09	-.05
Academic Behaviors and Learning Strategies	-.01	.04	-.01
Perseverance and Mindset	-.01	.05	-.01
Social Skills	.11	.05	.20*
Generation Status x ABLS	-.01	.06	-.02
Generation Status x PM	.01	.06	.01
Generation Status x Social Skills	-.07	.06	-.09
F	$F(15, 305) = 3.10^{***}$		
R²	.13		
Adjusted *R²*	.09		

[a] Reference group is females.
[b] Reference group is White/Caucasian/European American.
[c] Reference group is students not from a low-income background.
[d] Reference group is non-first-generation students.
[†]$p < .10,$ [*]$p < .05,$ [**]$p < .01,$ [***]$p < .001$

Table 5. *First-to-Second Year Retention Regressed on Generation Status and Conceptions of a Good Student Characteristics*

Variable	b	SE	Odds Ratio
Constant	2.54***	.59	
Gender [a]	-.56	.39	.57
Black/African American [b]	.79	1.18	2.20
Asian American [b]	.10	.61	1.11
Latino American [b]	-1.15	1.10	.32
Other Race [b]	1.12	1.16	3.05
Low Income Background	.69	.44	2.00
High School GPA [c]	.90	.70	2.45
First-Generation Status [d]	-.68	.53	.51
Academic Behaviors and Learning Strategies	-.01	.29	1.00
Perseverance and Mindset	.05	.29	1.06
Social Skills	.61	.38	1.85
Generation Status x ABLS	.09	.38	1.10
Generation Status x PM	-.05	.36	.95
Generation Status x Social Skills	-.17	.47	.84
χ^2	15.86		
df	14		

[a] Reference group is females.
[b] Reference group is White/Caucasian/European American.
[c] Reference group is students not from a low-income background.
[d] Reference group is non-first-generation students.
$^{\dagger}p < .10,$ $^*p < .05,$ $^{**}p < .01,$ $^{***}p < .001$

Table 6. *Means and Standard Deviations for Parent-Student Communication Characteristics*

	Generation Status	Mean	Standard Deviation	*t*-test
Frequency of Communication	Overall Sample	1.57	.61	
	Non-first generation	1.63	.55	
	First-generation	1.52	.65	-1.59
Perceived Helpfulness	Overall Sample	1.86	.96	
	Non-first-generation	2.03	.98	
	First-generation	1.74	.91	2.79**
Quality of Communication	Overall Sample	4.08	1.20	
	Non-first-generation	4.31	1.17	
	First-generation	3.91	1.19	3.04**
1. Instrumental support/Resourcefulness	Overall Sample	4.19	1.56	
	Non-first-generation	4.60	1.40	
	First-generation	3.89	1.60	4.21**
2. Instrumental support/Usefulness	Overall Sample	3.67	1.50	
	Non-first generation	3.97	1.44	
	First-generation	3.45	1.51	3.19**
3. Emotional support	Overall Sample	4.36	1.37	
	Non-first-generation	4.36	1.39	
	First-generation	4.46	1.36	.003

† $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$
Note: For frequency of communication, values are on a 0 to 3 scale (0 = not at all; 3 = very frequently). For perceived helpfulness of the communication, values are on a 0 to 3 scale (0 = not helpful; 3 = almost always helpful). For perceived overall quality of communication about college, values are on a scale ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 6 (Strongly agree).

Table 7. *Bivariate Correlations between Parent-Student Communication Characteristics and GPA*

	1	2	3	4
1. Frequency of Communication	-	.78**	.52**	-.05
2. Perceived Helpfulness of Communication		-	.61**	-.02
3. Quality of Communication			-	.07
4. First-Year GPA				-

† *p* < .10, * *p* < .05, ** *p* < .01, *** *p* < .001

Table 8. *GPA Regressed on Generation Status and Parent-Student Communication Characteristics*

Variable	b	*SE(b)*	β
Constant	3.00***	.10	
Gender [a]	-.11	.08	-.08
Black/African American [b]	-.11	.20	-.03
Asian American [b]	-.14	.11	-.10
Latino American [b]	-.20	.14	-.15
Other Race [b]	-.02	.15	-.02
Live with Parents	.18	.09	.11*
Low Income Background	-.13	.08	-.10
High School GPA [c]	.43	.12	.19***
First-Generation Status [d]	-.07	.08	-.05
Frequency	-.17	.15	-.15
Perceived Helpfulness	-.10	.10	-.15
Quality of Communication	.14	.06	.24*
Generation Status x Frequency	.18	.19	.13
Generation Status x Perceived Helpfulness	.11	.13	.12
Generation Status x Quality of Communication	-.18	.08	-.24*
F	$F(15, 321) = 3.53$***		
R^2	.14		
Adjusted R^2	.10		

[a] Reference group is females.
[b] Reference group is White/Caucasian/European American.
[c] Reference group is students not from a low-income background.
[d] Reference group is non-first-generation students.
†$p < .10$, *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$

Table 9. *First-to-Second Year Retention Regressed on Generation Status and Parent-Student Communication Characteristics*
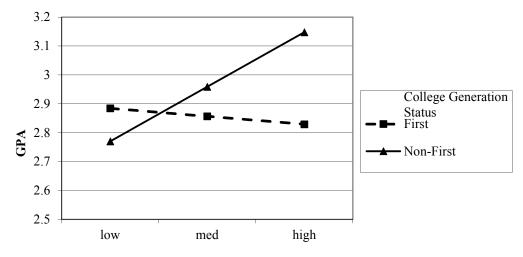
Variable	b	SE	Odds Ratio
Constant	2.42***	.59	
Gender [a]	-.64	.39	.53
Black/African American [b]	.37	1.18	1.44
Asian American [b]	.34	.60	1.40
Latino American [b]	-1.30	1.13	.27
Other Race [b]	1.22	1.17	3.40
Low Income Background	.65	.45	1.92
High School GPA [c]	1.04	.69	2.83
First-Generation Status [d]	-.56	.50	.57
Frequency	-.62	.96	.54
Perceived Helpfulness	-.23	.61	.79
Quality of Communication	.54	.34	1.71
Generation Status x Frequency	.89	1.12	2.43
Generation Status x Perceived Helpfulness	.10	.74	1.10
Generation Status x Quality of Communication	-.63	.44	.53
χ^2	12.94		
df	14		

[a] Reference group is females.
[b] Reference group is White/Caucasian/European American.
[c] Reference group is students not from a low-income background.
[d] Reference group is non-first-generation students.
†$p < .10$, *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$

Figure 1.

Quality of Parent-Adolescent Communication and Grade Point Average

Quality of Communication about College

APPENDIX A

Conceptions of a Good College Student—Qualitative Measure

What attributes, characteristics, and skills do good college students have? Using the space below, please describe what characteristics and skills you think a good college student has?

APPENDIX B

Conceptions of a Good College Student—Quantitative Measure

Using the scale below, please indicate which of the following characteristics you think are important for a college student to have.

Not at all important   Very Important
    1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9

_____ 1. Studying for quizzes and exams
_____ 2. Participating in class discussions
_____ 3. Doing well on quizzes and exams
_____ 4. Going to my professor/instructor/teaching assistants' office hours
_____ 5. Asking questions in class
_____ 6. Writing term papers that satisfy my professor's requirements
_____ 7. Reading the assigned readings before prior to coming to class
_____ 8. Getting papers done on time
_____ 9. Taking good notes for my courses
_____ 10. Understanding the syllabi from my courses
_____ 11. Managing time efficiently
_____ 12. Maintaining a healthy diet
_____ 13. Exercising regularly
_____ 14. Building and maintaining fulfilling relationships
_____ 15. Joining clubs/organizations on campus
_____ 16. Participating in events on campus
_____ 17. Volunteering on campus or in the community

NOTE: 1-10 are academic characteristics and skills. 11-17 are nonacademic characteristics and skills.

Parent-Student Communication About College

Parent-Child Communication about College: Frequency

Using the scale below, please indicate how *frequently* you speak with your parents/guardians about the following topics.

0	1	2	3
Not at all	Rarely	Occasionally	Very Frequently

1. _____ Registering for classes
2. _____ Social events on campus
3. _____ Financial aid
4. _____ Course content
5. _____ Dorm Life
6. _____ Clubs/Organizations on campus
7. _____ Grades
8. _____ Choosing a Major/Fulfilling Requirements for your Major
9. _____ Interactions with Professors and/or Teaching Assistants
10. _____ Interactions with Campus Staff and Administrators
11. _____ Interactions with Peers that you met while at this university

Parent-Child Communication about College: Perceived Helpfulness

Using the scale below, please indicate how **helpful** your parents/guardians are when speaking with them about the following topics.

0	1	2	3
Not helpful	Rarely helpful	Sometimes helpful	Almost Always helpful

1. _____ Registering for classes
2. _____ Social events on campus
3. _____ Financial aid
4. _____ Course content
5. _____ Dorm Life
6. _____ Clubs/Organizations on campus
7. _____ Grades
8. _____ Choosing a Major/Fulfilling Requirements for your Major
9. _____ Interactions with Professors and/or Teaching Assistants
10. _____ Interactions with Campus Staff and Administrators
11. _____ Interactions with Peers that you met while at this university

Parent-Child Communication about College: Perceived Quality

Please indicate your degree of agreement (using a score ranging from 1-6) for the following sentences.

Strongly Disagree   **Strongly Agree**
   1   **2**   **3**   **4**   **5**   **6**

1. I can go to my mother/father when I have concerns or questions about college.
2. (-) I feel when my mother/father talks with me about college, s/he cannot provide useful information.
3. When my mother/father talks to me about college, s/he understands me and cares about my feelings.

APPENDIX D

Background Information and Demographics

1. How old are you?   _____

2. What is your gender?

    _____ Female
    _____ Male
    _____ Other

3. Where do you now live during the school year? (Please select your response)

    _____ Dormitory or other campus housing
    _____ Residence (house, apartment, etc.) within walking distance of UCR
    _____ Residence (house, apartment, etc.) within driving distance of UCR
    _____ Fraternity or sorority house

4. If you commute to school, how long is your travel time (in minutes)?
    _____

5. With whom do you live during the school year? (Check all that apply)

    _____ No one—I live alone.
    _____ One or more other students
    _____ My spouse or partner
    _____ My child or children
    _____ My parents
    _____ Other relatives
    _____ Friends who are not students at UCR
    _____ Other people---Who? _____

6. What was your high school grade point average (GPA) out of a 4.0 scale?
    _____

7. What is your current overall/cumulative grade point average (GPA)? _____

8. What is your major and/or minor?

    _____

9. Did either of your parents and/or primary caregivers graduate from college?
   (Please select your response)

   _____ No
   _____ Yes, both parents/primary caregivers
   _____ Yes, mother/primary caregiver only
   _____ Yes, father/primary caregiver only
   _____ Don't know

10. What is the highest level of education your **mother/primary caregiver**
    completed?
    (Please select your response)

    _____ No formal schooling
    _____ Some elementary school
    _____ Finished elementary school
    _____ Finished middle school
    _____ Finished high school
    _____ Some vocational or college training
    _____ Finished four-year college degree
    _____ Finished graduate degree (medical, law, graduate school, etc).
    _____ I don't know

11. What is the highest level of education your **father/primary caregiver** completed?
    (Please select your response)

    _____ No formal schooling
    _____ Some elementary school
    _____ Finished elementary school
    _____ Finished middle school
    _____ Finished high school
    _____ Some vocational or college training
    _____ Finished four-year college degree
    _____ Finished graduate degree (medical, law, graduate school, etc).
    _____ I don't know

12. How many credit hours/units are you taking this term?

    _____ 6 or fewer
    _____ 7-11
    _____ 12-14
    _____ 15-16
    _____ 17 or more

13. What is your ethnic background?

_____ Black, African, African-American

_____ American Indian, Eskimo

_____ White (non-Hispanic), Anglo, Caucasian, European

_____ Chinese

_____ Filipino

_____Japanese

_____ Vietnamese

_____Korean

_____Other South East Asian (e.g., Thailand, Laos, Cambodian, Myanmar, etc; Please specify) _____

_____ Other Pacific Islander (e.g., Polynesia, Samoa, Fiji, Guan, etc; Please specify) _____

_____ South Asian (Indian, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, etc; Please specify) _____

_____Mexican, Chicano

_____ Central American

_____ South American

_____Puerto Rican

_____ Cuba

_____ Other Caribbean

_____ Other (please specify)