Using a framework of social and cultural capital, this study examined successful African American and Latina/o community college students. Based on focus group interviews with twenty two African American and Latina/o undergraduates at an urban community college, the authors reveal how social and cultural capital gained from students' relationships and interactions with friends, family, faculty members, student affairs staff and college support services impacted their successful college outcomes. In general, students identified social capital resources in the form of faculty relationships, supportive family, and campus engagement as sources of support for their college success. In addition, students showed personal determination to succeed against all odds displaying important aspirational capital as well. This research illustrates the importance of countering idea that first-time, full-time, four-year college attendance is the only path to college success, and the importance of social capital in helping underrepresented groups of students navigate the college completion process.

Introduction

The college completion agenda has shifted the national discussion in higher education from access to success (Sutherland, 2011). The Commission on Access, Admissions and Success in Higher Education formed by the College Board, was charged with assessing current pathways to higher education, and identifying enrollment and completion opportunities that institutions could implement to increase graduation outcomes for more students (College Board, 2011). The goal is to increase the number of American adults who hold a college degree or certificate to at least 55 percent by 2025 (College Board, 2011). The ultimate goal is to have an educated adult population that can fill the jobs of the future, and help the country become economically strong (Sutherland, 2011).

Community colleges can play an important role in achieving our nation's education goals (Sutherland, 2011). Almost half of all students of color and forty percent of under resourced students are enrolled in community colleges.
(Mullin, 2012). However, most of the higher education retention and persistence literature focuses on the negative impact of attending a community college. For example, college outcomes research points out that under fifty percent of community college students whose goal is to complete a degree or other type of credential, actually graduate within six years after their initial enrollment. (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2012).

Additionally, the number of students attending community colleges who complete a degree within three years has remained at about one third of those who start college for over a decade. (U. S. Department of Education, 2011).

Students of color are entering community colleges at high rates, but only one-fourth of them transfer to a four-year institution (Provitera-McGlynn, 2005). Previous research indicated that, students of color who attend a baccalaureate degree granting institution directly from high school are much more likely to graduate than their peers who attend community colleges (Arbona & Nora, 2007). However, a more recent study indicated that the majority of community college transfer students do complete their degrees within six years of transferring to baccalaureate degree-granting institutions (Shapiro & Dundar, 2013). In addition, there are many benefits to attending a community college in terms of selection of programs, career and academic pathways, and increased earning potential (Belfield & Bailey, 2011). The latter is especially true for students of color, women, and immigrants (Belfield & Bailey, 2011). Community college attendance also benefit the community in terms of partnerships with employers, retaining of displaced workers, higher retention rates at baccalaureate institutions, lower crime rates, and lower utilization of public assistance (Belfield & Bailey, 2011). In fact, the latest research supports the importance of the community college sector of higher education in contributing to the achievement of the national college completion goals.

Community colleges have the potential to significantly impact the higher education outcomes for the students that they serve. Community colleges offer a significant option for students among the wide array of choices offered within the U.S. system of higher education, as they promote dearly held democratic values of access, equality, and opportunity (Topper & Powers, 2013). However, not as much research exists on the positive ways in which community colleges impact students (Pascarella, 1999; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Most retention research on students of color has been conducted at baccalaureate universities assuming that the student experience at community colleges will mirror that of the student experience at universities (Crisp, & Nora, 2010; Strayhorn, 2012). Additionally, most community colleges, and other institutions of higher learning do not pay attention to the cultural capital that many of their students bring to the college experience, which can inevitably aid in their academic success, and overall retention.

**Literature Review**

Programs designed to promote retention of diverse students attending community colleges need to take in to account the students’ unique learning needs and work-life balance issues (Ingram & Gonzalez-Matthews, 2013). When designing retention support and programming, taking the life circumstances of community college students into consideration is important (Capps, 2012). Students often live within the college’s service area with or nearby family members. A supportive family system is a significant contributor in designing success models for community college students (Capps, 2012). Additionally, changes in life circumstances such as divorce, unemployment, or illness can negatively impact student retention (Capps, 2012).

Although financial resources are not the only barrier for diverse and under resourced students interested in degree programs that
provide transfer pathways, financial aid is a factor that can impact retention (Crisp, & Nora, 2010). In fact, students at community colleges who do not apply for financial assistance, even when they will likely be eligible, are much less likely to persist from the first semester to the second (McKinney, & Novak, 2013). The positive impact of applying for financial assistance on retention is consistent regardless of whether students are attending the community college part-time or full-time (McKinney, & Novak, 2013). This is an interesting finding considering that other studies have shown part-time students attending community colleges are less likely to persist, graduate, and transfer (Crisp, & Nora, 2010).

Academic factors that contribute to successful student transfer include the quantity of high school math courses, and enrollment in math classes early in the college curriculum (Crisp, & Nora, 2010). In addition, attending a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) and successful freshman year academic outcomes predicted degree completion, and subsequent academic success at the transfer institution, whereas delaying college enrollment, enrolling part-time and working more hours did not (Crisp, & Nora, 2010). White students perform better overall in developmental education mathematics courses (Wolfe, 2012). However, students enrolled in college level mathematics immediately following completion of developmental education experienced successful outcomes equivalent to those students who did not require remediation in mathematics (Wolfe, 2012). Overall, cumulative grades are the best indicator of community college student success (Nakajima, Dembo, & Mossler, 2012). However, students with clear academic goals and high academic self-efficacy also had high grade point averages (Nakajima et al, 2012).

Culture is one factor that needs to be considered in retention models for students of color at community colleges. In a study where culture was considered, parental level of education was a form of socio-cultural capital that positively predicted the retention and transfer of community college students who identified as Latino (Crisp, & Nora, 2010). Additionally, African American and Latino community college students believe that cultural factors contribute to their success in college (Barbatis, 2010). Family, friends, and community members also provided important social capital in terms of support systems for college success (Barbatis, 2010). However, social capital is a less important factor for retention in the initial semesters of the college career than it is when students are closer to graduation (Wells, 2008). In fact, it is reliance on these socio-cultural resources that allow many community college students to successfully complete college in spite of the fact that they have many characteristics associated with being at-risk for dropping out, or stopping out of college (Topper & Powers, 2013).

**Conceptual Framework**

Not all college retention models consider the role that culture plays in the persistence of diverse students, assuming they will persist if they integrate into the college culture (Guiffrida, 2006). People who are marginalized in higher education often struggle with a sense of self-doubt and lack of academic self-efficacy (Rice, Lopez, Richardson, & Stinson, 2013). These feelings are a result of a legacy of institutionalized oppression in higher education which causes some people of color to internalize the feelings of not belonging (Yosso, 2006). However, examining students of color who do persist reinforces the fact that people of color to rely on their cultural capital in order to not only be competitive, but also survive in academia (Yosso, 2006).

According to Rodriguez, Guido-DiBrito, Torres, and Talbot (2000), cultural capital includes the culturally learned and internalized beliefs, values, and attitudes about the role education plays in life success. Although many
students of color have high intellectual abilities, their school systems often devalue their cultural knowledge, which creates and perpetuates structural inequities in the educational pipeline that can impact their future opportunities (Rodriguez et al., 2000). Possessing cultural capital includes having access to quality education and language instruction (Yosso, 2005). This is something that community colleges provide, which includes a wide array of developmental, ESL, transfer preparation, and career education programs (Hirt, 2006).

Cultural capital can also include social capital, which is having access to social networks and connections; aspirational capital, meaning seeing a vision for the future; familial capital, which is having a shared and connected history; and navigational capital, meaning understanding how to successfully navigate institutions (Yosso, 2005). There is a diversity of academic preparation, socioeconomic status, family experience with college, and racial and ethnic diversity at community colleges that points to the potential for social capital to positively impact student retention (Greene, Marti, & McClenny, 2008). This prompts the question, what cultural resources do community college students bring to the college experience that can positively impact their college success and do these resources influence their overall retention within a higher educational environment?

Method

College Description

The community college where the research was conducted has two campuses located in a diverse suburban community in the southwestern United States. The student body is comprised of 11,500 students. The institution is a majority minority-serving institution with diverse students making up 51% of the total enrollment. The service area, in which the college is housed, has a large immigrant population, which mirrors the college’s student population. Students have national origins from over 100 different countries. The three most common languages spoken by students are English, Amharic, and Spanish. The college is a comprehensive community college with curriculum that includes developmental, ESL, career and technical, transfer, and lifelong learning opportunities.

Seventy-five percent of the college’s students attend part-time. This fact was of great interest to members of this research team. A closer examination of our retention and persistence data indicated that African American students at this college do indeed perform better academically if they attend full-time. However, Latino students at this college perform better academically if they attend part-time. While that data was not the specific focus of the research, it peaked our interested in exploring student outcomes further, specifically disaggregated by race and ethnicity.

Focus of the Research

In order to closely examine the successful students’ enrollment experiences at this college, the research team conducted focus groups with successful African American and Latino part-time and full-time students to learn about their patterns of success. Specifically, by success the research term focused on success in individual courses, retention from semester to semester, continuous enrollment, successful progress toward degree completion, and graduation. The students’ social capital was also noted and analyzed, and will be described further in this study.

Recruitment and Selection of Participants

The sampling method for the study was purposive. Employing purposive sampling allowed the research team to find participants whose characteristics and experiences that were the focus of the study were most commonly found (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). For this research study, successful students were defined as those with a 2.5 grade point average
or higher. The college’s Office of Institutional Research provided lists of currently enrolled African American and Latino students who met the conditions for inclusion in the focus group research. Email invitations were sent to eligible students congratulating them on their academic successes, and inviting them to participate in a discussion group on factors that contributed to their success. The focus groups were held over the lunch hour, or in the evening to accommodate varied schedules. The focus group sessions were called Pizza for Persistence, and student received pizza, and a gift card of their choice for participating.

Data Collection

Focus group methodology was selected for this study. This methodology reflects the exploratory nature of the study. By examining the experiences of the participants, new knowledge emerged about the phenomenon under study (Ivanoff & Hultberg, 2006). Focus group questions primarily focused on their interpretations of contextual aspects of their educational experience that supported their successful academic outcomes, and what influenced their academic success.

Data Analysis

Two note takers transcribed each focus group discussion verbatim. To determine salient themes from the data, the investigators independently read the transcripts several times, recorded reflective notes, as well as referred to their individual field notes taken during the focus groups. Actual focus group questions were an initial lens through which the results were viewed and analyzed. Next, each data document was coded using categories of cultural capital (i.e. aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational and resistant) to inform the analytical framework. As themes outside of this initial framework emerged, they were added to the analysis. The research team then met for a collaborative re-visitation of data and reorganization of themes ultimately leading to a rich interpretation of data. From these analyses we created a picture of the personal experiences of these successful students.

Trustworthiness of the Research

Creswell and Miller (2000) developed a list of eight procedures that can be used by qualitative researchers to document trustworthiness of the research. They include extended field engagement, triangulation of data, debriefing and review by peers, analyzing negative cases of the phenomenon, acknowledging researcher biases, providing detailed description, and conducting inter-rater reliability including member checks and external auditing. Other procedures identified in the literature include purposive sampling, code-recode strategy, and detailed description of participants (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002, LeCompte & Goetz, 1982). A minimum of at least two of these validation procedures should be used in a qualitative study (Creswell, 1998). In this study, we used four procedures to ensure trustworthiness of the research: triangulation, rich and thick description, purposive sampling, and detailed description of the participants.

Triangulation.

Triangulation is a method of cross checking the data source (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Triangulation is achieved by gathering evidence from multiple sources using different methods (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This study used three types of data, the student’s data from their academic records, demographic data, and the focus group data.

Rich and thick description.

When describing the findings, the researcher should use rich and thick description to increase trustworthiness by giving the reader authentic detail about the phenomenon being studied.
To report the qualitative findings of this study, detailed description, and direct quotes from the participants were included to tell their stories in their own words, and from their perspective.

**Purposive sampling.**

Purposive sampling allows the researcher to use specific criteria to select the participants or cases that will best answer the questions or test the hypothesis by giving in depth information (Kemper, Stringfield, & Teddlie, 2003; Maxwell & Loomis, 2003). Participants were carefully selected for this study first by identifying all students enrolled at the college who identify as either Latino or African American, and second by using clear criteria for inclusion in the focus groups.

**Detailed description of participants.**

LeCompte and Goetz (1982) state that providing a detailed description of the participants helps to eliminate possible informant bias by identifying the groups to which the participants belong. For this study, a total of twenty-two students participated in the focus groups. Eight students were African American, all female. Fourteen students were Latino, of those eight were female and six were male. Twelve of the participants were full-time and ten were part-time. They ranged in age from nineteen to sixty with their average age being thirty two. Their grade point averages ranged from 2.56 to 4.0 with the average grade point average being 3.16.

The reasons the students gave for choosing to attend a community college were very consistent. The first and most common reason among all the student groups was proximity to where they lived. The second most common reason among all students was the fact that they knew someone who was already attending the college. The third most common reason for selecting a community college was their desire to take general studies courses in preparation for transferring to a baccalaureate degree granting institution. In addition to the top three reasons listed above, full-time students also specifically mentioned the good reputation of the college, and participating in concurrent enrollment college classes while in high school as criteria for selecting the college. On the other hand, part-time students also identified the flexibility of course offerings and options as influencing their choice to attend a community college.

We also looked at the reasons for selecting the college identified by the two different ethnic groups. Latino students more often noted that they chose the college based on its affordability, and that they came for a specific program the college offered. African American students more often noted that the racial and cultural diversity of the college as a reason they decided to enroll.

The participants identified three main academic goals for attending college. The first was a career goal. The career goal theme was not limited to any one ethnic group, or to those attending full-time or part-time. The second major goal identified by the student participants was a transfer goal. The transfer goal was not limited to any one ethnic group, or enrollment status. The third major goal of the student participants was viewing this opportunity as their last, or second chance to complete a college degree. Students who identified this goal had either attempted college before and were unsuccessful, or had forgone attending college to work instead. They all displayed a gritty determination to be successful this time as a student. Again, students who identified this as a major goal cut across both ethnic groups and enrollment statuses.

These community college students were clearly motivated to enter college and be successful, and they were able to identify their main source of motivation. Those motivations fell into four main categories. Overwhelmingly, the most common motivation was the desire to be a role model. Students in both ethnic groups, full and part-time, mentioned being...
role models to their children or other family members. The second category emerged because many of the focus groups included immigrant students from Africa and Mexico, mirroring the overall college student population. These students specifically mentioned that attending college in order to have a better life was necessary in the United States. Those students who were not immigrants were also motivated by the promise of a better life. They specifically mentioned that college offered the chance for something better. Finally, many of the participants cited spirituality and religion as both a source of motivation, and support to their college attendance and success. This was the fourth and final category of motivation.

Results

Social Capital and Student Success Themes

These community college students spoke to three major themes that contributed to their success as students. Those themes were: (1) relationships with faculty, (2) family support and (3) campus engagement and support.

Relationships with faculty.

Overwhelmingly participants spoke about their instructors as being instrumental to their success in college. What was unique was that all focus group participants made some mention of their instructors as critical to their success. The number one theme echoed by all students related to the accessibility of their instructors. They said, "The teachers are easily accessible and always willing to help," and "My instructor always stayed after class and scheduled time to meet with students."

Instructors were described as willing to provide additional tutoring support, or be accessible over email during their office hours. This access made a big difference in the success of our focus group participants. Another comment echoed by many students was that their instructors were motivating. Many stated that their instructors didn't assume it was the student's job alone to succeed in class. One student described a particularly motivational instructor:

For example [one professor] in a really difficult class, where a lot of students were struggling emailed inspirational messages like, "how bad do you want it?" After hours, I can [email] the instructor [to get feedback]. If it wasn't for that, I would have dropped out of class. Research methods are tough.

Finally, at this institution over three-quarters of the faculty members are adjunct. Students felt like they benefited from the career expertise their instructors brought to the classroom. One student stated, "They are experts in their area and they want to help, lead you in the right direction in and out of school." From simply making themselves available, to taking time to help keep students motivated, to bringing their career expertise into the classroom, the quality of faculty was critical in the success of both our part-time and full-time focus group participants.

Family support.

Family also played a critical role in the success of the student participants. Family, for these participants, was defined in many ways. Some participants were children in a family unit, while others were parents themselves. Support was also defined in a variety of ways; from allowing someone to live at home while in school, to leaning on a spouse to handle financial responsibilities. One student described her family support this way:

My support system is really my husband and my kids. I've worked ever since I was in high school and once I got married and had kids my life took that little derailment. Now I'm just kind of at a point where we are not rich, but we are comfortable and financially it's
okay for me to continue my education while my husband pays the bills, so that’s my biggest support system.

Students also described the financial support that families were able to contribute to their education:

I live with [my parents] so as long as I live under their roof I won’t have to worry about a job, car, bills or work, so I can be a full-time student and focus on my education.

Family members were willing to take on more of the financial and household responsibilities in order to support the academic success of their loved one:

Not working is a lot of help. I have more time and am able to just focus on school, while my husband takes care of the home and financial stuff. My husband helps a lot with the house. I get a lot of support from him.

Family members also provided moral support and encouragement for schoolwork. A Latina, single mother described her supportive relationship with her son, “My son will tell me to study because it will be on the test. He reminds me what is the most important for the exam. He is my support.” A younger Latina received support from an older sister, “My sister has finished college so she helps me a lot.” A Latino male student attending part-time stated it simply, “Living with my parents gives me a support system. They believe in me.” Family members also gave advice about successfully navigating the college system. The same young man who said his parents believed in him also recalled, “My Dad suggested I go to advising to get help getting classes organized.” An African American female received advice from her mother to attend full-time and finish her degree:

My mother had me and my brothers. She said it was so hard balancing life. She told me to [finish] now and then enjoy the fruits of my labor when I am older.

Another unique dynamic at this institution was the number of participants who were in school with members of their family. Many students described situations of being in class with their kids or their siblings, and the idea of going to school together was a source of support. One woman had taken classes with her family members stated, “I have taken classes with my daughter and now with my grandson!” Another student described her family connection to the college, “I have three children. Two are at [this institution] as well. They love the school.”

For all students who participated in the study, the recognition of the support they received from their families was something they all believed contributed to their success.

Campus engagement and support.

A third theme among all focus group participants was that of campus engagement and support. The theme is interesting because seventy-five percent of students at this institution are part-time students. It seems for these students regardless of whether they attend full-time or part-time, feeling connected to the campus was a factor in their college success. The ways in which students connected to the campus varied from obtaining work study jobs, to feeling connected in class, to having helpful staff members assist in their academic processes, and joining clubs and organizations. One student described the benefits of working on campus, “I have a work study award. That allows me to make money while attending classes. My supervisor is always very supportive. She has helped me in many ways.” Another student described it this way, “Getting involved on campus as a work-study [student] made it easier to connect on campus. I am going to be an orientation leader this summer.”

Other student participants talked about how the campus felt to them; specifically that it felt like a friendly and helpful campus. “The
school feels a lot like a family and [students tend] to be successful,” stated one part-time Latino student. Another student who compared her experience at this campus to another college experience stated:

This is the first place I actually feel like I belong. The other colleges made me feel depressed because I failed, and didn’t fit in. When I got my student ID, I smiled. I am a social person and [this college] has good customer service.

That sense of fitting in at the college was reiterated by other students as well, “I love how accepting [this college is]. I have always felt very accepted; it is a very diverse and accepting community.”

Students also felt like they received a lot of support from both the staff and faculty which in turn helped them feel more connected to the college. One student stated, “I talk to my counselor regularly, even if it’s not school specific.” This theme also overlapped with the theme of high quality relationships with faculty. Again, because so many students are part-time, they seemed to rely on their faculty for a sense of connection on campus.

Finally, students talked about being involved on campus in more traditional ways such as participating in clubs and organizations. While this was not the number one way students were engaging on campus, it is still important for some of the students in this study to have opportunities to connect in a more social environment.

Discussion

These data present the argument that many of the student participants possessed or acquired, as a part of their attendance at the college, a distinct kind of social capital or “cultural wealth,” which is described as “not inherited or possessed by the middle class, but rather it refers to an accumulation of specific forms of knowledge, skills, and abilities that are valued by privileged groups in society” (Yosso, 2005, p. 77). In Yosso’s (2005) analysis of cultural wealth, communities of color tend to possess at least six forms of capital. For the purposes of this article, we determined that our student participants possessed four of the six forms of capital which were aspirational, familial, social, and navigational capital.

Aspirational capital involves maintaining hopes and dreams for the future, regardless of real or perceived barriers (Yosso, 2005). Our student participants experienced significant personal and professional barriers while attending college. However, many had signs of significant aspirational capital which helped them persevere through their programs, even when many were the first in their family to do so. As a result, many of them had high aspirations to not only be employed, but also be in an upper management position, or in occupations with high levels of responsibility.

Familial capital encompasses the cultural knowledge maintained among family that carries a sense of community history, memory and cultural intuition (Yosso, 2005). From these familial bonds, we learn the importance of maintaining a healthy connection to our community and its resources (Yosso, 2005). Many student participants had solid ties with their immediate and extended families while attending college. Many described the power of receiving encouragement and support from family members which sustained them through their academic programs. The support they received in turn allowed the students to view themselves as role models to their younger family members which inevitably enhanced their overall family legacy in higher education.

Social capital involves accessing social contacts, networks, and community resources to help a student identify and earn scholarships, maintaining the tradition of “lifting as we climb” (Yosso, 2005). Many student participants noted how they gained social capital as they benefitted from the real world
expertise as well as the access given to them by their faculty members, many of whom were adjunct faculty members. The student participants also stated how their overall campus environment embraced a sense of inclusiveness, regardless of whether the students were enrolled as full or part time.

Navigational capital includes the skills of moving through social institutions, such as colleges, giving student the ability to be invulnerable and successful (Yosso, 2005). Many of the student participants who had attempted to enroll in college at one time but were unsuccessful, are now enrolled once again in higher education. Many have gained a new sense of navigational capital where they now have the skills to maneuver themselves through the sometimes intimidating college system. Many of these student participants now feel comfortable attempting to earn their degrees in a place they can successfully navigate.

Our data confirms that the student participants possessed many of the forms of cultural capital, while not having the notion of what this capital signified, or how it played out in their lives. Yet it was evident that these forms of cultural capital were important factors in their sustained success while attending community college.

Limitations

The lack of participation by African American males was an immediate concern for the research team. While we did have several African American males who initially signed up for the focus groups, none actually attended. We did receive feedback from students that while they were honored to have been asked to attend, they were unable to do so due to work and/or family obligations. Although we had evidence from the enrollment and demographic data that we do have successful African American male students at the college, it should be noted that their voices were unfortunately not reflected in our results.

In addition, the sample size for the study was very small and drawn from only one community college. Thus, any conclusions made from the study are limited in scope. However, the study does validate previous research on the important relationship of social and cultural capital to student success. In addition, the student success themes from the study do point to important avenues of further research in this area.

Conclusions

This study confirmed information that we already know about students who choose to attend community colleges. First, the students, like other community college students, chose to attend community college due to proximity, accessibility, and affordability (Excelencia, 2007). Additionally, these students, like other community college students, believed they would receive a high quality education at the college they chose (Excelencia, 2007). This study also demonstrated that contrary to popular belief, diverse families support their children's college aspirations, and students feel an obligation to meet those family expectations about college completion (Minority Student Achievement Network, 2002). In fact, it is that family engagement that is a source of support and strength as diverse students navigate the college experience.

Similarly, religion and spirituality have been previously found to impact both student success and career development, particularly for African American college students (Hernandez, 2000; Constantine, Miville, Warren, Gainor, & Lewis-Coles, 2006). This study identified religion as a source of motivation to attend college, and confirmed that religion and spirituality are sources of support that contribute to retention and college success for some African American and Latino college students. This finding warrants further study, as there is very little research on the role of religion and spirituality in college student development, and both provide avenues to enhance the college experience in several important ways (Bowman & Small, 2010).
This study also emphasized the importance of considering the unique perspectives of students of color when examining community college student success. This is in contrast to the lens that has been used previously to examine community college success, specifically in terms of the behavior of White, upper middle-class, traditionally aged students at baccalaureate institutions (Martin Lohfink, & Paulsen, 2005). Higher educational professionals cannot make assumptions about the expected outcomes of community college students, based on four-year college models that consider demographic characteristics and enrollment patterns alone. For example, like other groups of successful students that have been studied, our students also displayed a fierce passion and perseverance toward achieving their goals, defined in the literature as grit (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007). This is a personal characteristic seen often in high achieving, educated professionals, and students at elite institutions of higher education (Duckworth et al., 2007). It is characterized by having consistent interests and defined goals with perseverance of effort toward those interests and goals (Duckworth et al, 2007). All of the students in the study clearly stated career and academic goals, and displayed the perseverance toward achieving them in spite of significant obstacles. This is defined as grit (Duckworth et al., 2007). This personality characteristic is also a form of aspirational capital (Yosso, 2005).

This, along with our other findings reminded us to recognize that diverse populations can possess their own distinct cultural wealth or cultural capital. Yet, in its true form, it can be viewed and valued differently in the majority culture (Engberg & Allen, 2011). These types of cultural capital have contributed to the overall academic and personal success of the community college students who participated in this study. We recommend that further research surrounding the personal and academic results of cultural capital should be considered when studying the success of underrepresented students in higher education, specifically at community colleges.

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