A COMPARISON OF THE ACADEMIC ATTITUDES, BEHAVIOURS AND ATTAINMENTS OF THREE GROUPS OF FIRST-GENERATION STUDENTS AT AN ONTARIO COLLEGE

by

Linda Anne Smithies

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Graduate Department of Leadership, Higher and Adult Education
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
University of Toronto

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Abstract

This quantitative study focused on first generation students (FGS) entering diploma programs at a large urban college in Toronto, Canada. The FGS were divided into three groups based on their birthplaces and/or parental birthplaces: those born in Canada to at least one Canadian-born parent ("domestic" FGS), those born in Canada to foreign-born parents ("established immigrant" FGS), and those born outside of Canada ("recent immigrant" FGS). The intent of the study was to identify any significant differences among the groups in their academic attitudes, behaviours, and attainments. The choice of dependent variables was informed by Bourdieu's social reproduction theory, especially the concept of habitus, and by prior American and Canadian FGS research.

The data was obtained from a 2008 survey of all entering students, and from academic transcripts in May 2012, the four-year graduation time limit. Of the 549 students included in the study, 259 were "domestic," 203 were "established immigrant," and 87 were "recent immigrant." No significant differences were found in high school GPAs or academic behaviours,
levels of academic confidence, value placed on PSE, retention and graduation rates, time needed to complete programs, status at the time of withdrawing, or college GPAs. However, significance differences did occur among the three groups in the time spent studying in high school, time spent exploring vocational outcomes, intent to persist, and intent to pursue degree-level studies, with small to medium effect sizes. Many of these findings are consistent with prior research; however, others may indicate traditional models used to predict student retention and graduation rates, such as incoming GPAs, levels of academic confidence, and intent to persist, do not appear to have the same predictive power for FGS entering diploma programs that they may have for those entering degree programs; in other words, for FGS, these variables may be more relevant in predicting who accesses PSE, and not persistence. In addition, the established and recent immigrant FGS in this study appear to be using the college system as a gateway to degree-level studies, which has implications for the types of programming, services and supports the colleges provide for FGS.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

As a post-secondary educator in a large Ontario community college for more than twenty years, I have observed a myriad of changes both to the college system itself, but more importantly, to the students who choose to enroll in a college program. Just as the composition of the greater Toronto area has changed due to immigration, so has the composition of the student body. The college where I am employed is located in the northwest region of Toronto where many of the students are foreign-born and struggle with cultural differences and language difficulties on a daily basis.

The students have also changed in their expectations. In fact, many Ontario students now expect a college education to be a gateway to a degree which, unlike the American college system, was never part the Ontario system’s original mandate (Clark, Moran, Skolnik & Trick, 2009; Ekos Inc, 2006). Not surprisingly, many of these students are classified as first generation, which means they have parents or guardians who have no education beyond high school. In fact, almost two-thirds of all college applicants in Ontario are first generation (Acumen Research, 2004). For these students, the location of a college within their communities and the much lower tuition costs are attractive, as first generation students are more likely to live at home and are usually from working class families (Choy, 2001; Corea, 2009; Cushman, 2007; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Hartig & Steigerwald, 2007; Inman & Mayes, 1999; Jenkins, Miyazaki, & Janosik, 2009; Lehmann, 2009a; McConnell, 2000; Mehta, Newbold, & O’Rourke, 2011). As an educator, I first taught in and then coordinated an “access” program specifically designed to
prepare students for further studies at both the college and university level.\textsuperscript{1} Needless to say, the program attracted a substantial number of both domestic and immigrant first generation students who were underprepared for post-secondary programs or were not qualified for admission to their target programs because they took the “wrong” courses in high school or received poor grades. Many of those students were new arrivals to Canada, and struggled with language and adjusting to a new country during their high school years, which also contributed to their lack of adequate preparation for higher education. In recent years, like many other post-secondary institutions, the college has introduced numerous programs intended to engage and retain first generation students. Most of these programs, which are largely modeled on American initiatives, are based on the premise that all first generation students constitute a homogenous group and share similar academic and personal challenges. However, it may be possible that immigrant and domestic first generation students are not a homogenous group and would actually benefit from more focused programs to support their academic success. As well, it may also be possible that first generation students who enter college programs in Ontario differ in their academic behaviours and attainments than their counterparts in the university system or in other jurisdictions such as the United States.

Specifically, then, the purpose of this study is to explore the differences in pre-college academic confidence, intentions and behaviours and how these differences impact the academic attainments of three groups of first generation students entering two-year college diploma programs in September, 2008: first generation students who were born in Canada to at

\textsuperscript{1} In the Ontario college system, a coordinator is responsible for scheduling and staffing courses, resolving student and faculty issues, and maintaining program logistics, among other duties as assigned.
least one Canadian-born parent, first generation students who were born in Canada to foreign-born parents, and first generation students who were born outside of Canada.

**Reasons for Pursuing This Study**

There are three main reasons for pursuing this study. First, the bulk of the research on first generation students originates in the United States and, to a lesser extent, in the United Kingdom (Auclair et al., 2008; Grayson, 2011; Grayson & Grayson, 2003). There are, however, major structural differences in the post-secondary systems (Grayson & Grayson, 2003), meaning that what is applicable in the United States or the United Kingdom cannot be uncritically transferred to the Canadian context. For example, in Canada and the United Kingdom, there are few private post-secondary institutions, and those that do exist are largely unaccredited "career colleges" that provide specialized job training. In the United States, a much greater number of accredited colleges and universities are private and are, therefore, able to set their own fee structures, which inevitably impacts their affordability for students from lower income homes. As well, many community colleges in the United States have enrollment agreements with four-year institutions, where the college provides the first two years of education and the university provides the final two years. In the United Kingdom, students typically finish high school at age 16 and then can opt to take two additional years at "further education colleges" before attending university, or enter a regional college for vocational training.

There is also comparatively little Canadian research on immigrant youth (Dinovitzer, Hagan & Parker, 2003). The majority of immigrant youth in Canada are members of minoritized
racial groups (Anisef, Brown, Pythian, Sweet & Walters, 2008; Anisef & Pythian, 2005; Boyd, 2006; Taylor & Krahn, 2005), and again, most of the research on minoritized racial youth originates in the United States. However, because of the differences in the racial composition and the histories of the two countries, the attitudes and academic behaviours of minoritized racial young people who have immigrated to Canada may be very different from that their peers south of the border, meaning that American policies and practices to support them may not be as effective or relevant in Canada.

Secondly, there is currently both a social and economic need in Canada to increase the number of young people who enroll in higher education (Auclair et al., 2008; Berger, 2008; Berger & Motte, 2007; Butlin, 1999; Canadian Council on Learning, 2007; de Broucker, 2005; Educational Policy Institute, 2008; Lehmann, 2007, 2009a, 2009b; Sattler & Academia Group, 2010; Wilson, Andrews & Foley, 2012). This increase will only occur if those from under-represented groups, including first generation domestic and immigrant youth, are more effectively integrated into the post-secondary system (Berger, 2000; Sattler & Academia Group, 2010). There are, however, no Canadian studies that compare the pre-college attributes and college experiences of the domestic and immigrant first generation students who are entering colleges and universities. As a result, many of the programs and services available at most institutions to support the academic achievements of first generation students are based on the premise that they would all benefit from the same initiative or strategy, which may not be the case. Due to the differences in their personal and familial histories, domestic and immigrant students may, in fact, have distinct sets of attributes that, if directly addressed, may contribute to their success and to better labour market outcomes.
Third, this study will focus on first generation students enrolled in a diploma program in a community college in the northwest region of Toronto. In both the United States and Canada, more first generation students choose vocational two-year colleges as their gateway to the post-secondary system (Auclair et al., 2008; Choy, 2001; de Broucker, 2005; Dumais & Ward, 2010; Engle & Tinto, 2008; London, 1978; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Paulsen & St. John, 2002; Thayer, 2000). Although immigrant youth in Canada generally aspire to a degree (Finnie, Childs, & Wismer, 2011; Human Resources and Social Development Canada, 2008), many of them are opting for a less expensive college programs, perhaps because their parents are not doing as well financially in Canada as they have in previous decades (Anisef et al., 2008; Bonikowska, 2007; Finnie & Mueller, 2009). As well, due to the high competition for university admission in Ontario and the consequent “rationing” of access (Drewes, 2008), many first generation students who are not successful in obtaining university admission are intentionally using a two-year college diploma as a means for university admission (Decock, McCloy, Liu, & Hu, 2011). However, the Ontario postsecondary system has been slow in keeping pace with this student-driven shift, especially the university sector (Clark et al., 2009). In recent years, there has been a coordinated effort by the Ontario colleges, universities, and Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities to formalize transfer arrangements for college graduates to complete degrees with some advanced standing, meaning that the college enrollment of students who intent to transfer to a university is likely to rise. Knowing more about these students’ educational goals and attainments would also contribute to more focused initiatives by both the college and university sectors to support their achievements and aspirations. The college where the study will occur is also located in a region of Toronto that has a robust and diverse
immigrant and domestic first generation population, which means the results have the potential to be more inclusive and broadly informative.

**Limited Canadian Research**

According to Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini (2004), to date, the majority of research from the United States on first generation students focuses on three areas; the first group of studies compares first generation students and their continuing generation peers in terms of their demographics, their preparation for post-secondary studies, their choice of colleges and programs of study, and their educational expectations; the second group of studies focuses on the challenges and difficulties that first generation students encounter as they make the transition to college; and the third group of studies focuses on the educational retention, persistence, and attainments of first generation students. In Canada, there is comparatively less research that uses the first generation concept to analyze educational data, especially in relation to retention and persistence (Auclair et al., 2008; de Broucker, 2005; Grayson, 2011), and even less that focuses specifically on community colleges where both American and Canadian data show that most first generation students are enrolled (Acumen Research, 2004; Auclair et al., 2008; Engle, 2007; Kerr, McCloy, & Liu, 2010; Knighton & Mirza, 2002; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2003). There is no Canadian research that specifically looks at the differences between domestic and immigrant first generation students in the community college system. Even in the United States, the bulk of the first generation research does not differentiate between those who are native-born and those who are foreign-born. As well, because researchers in the United States have studied non-traditional students, such as first generation students, for a much lengthier
period of time, it is not surprising that many Canadian colleges and universities looked south of
the border for strategies and initiatives to support the academic achievement of these
students. For example, freshman student success courses have been common in American
colleges and universities for decades, but have only relatively recently been introduced in
Canadian institutions. However, because of course delivery methods and limitations, initiatives
such as student success courses often treat all non-traditional students, including first
generation students, as a homogenous group who share similar needs or deficits, such as poor
study and test-taking skills, time management and procrastination issues, or lack of academic
preparation for post-secondary studies, that must be addressed or overcome if they are to
persist and succeed, which may in fact not be the case.

Differences in the American and Canadian Post-Secondary Systems

Certainly, there are many studies, especially large-scale American quantitative studies,
that show that first generation students do overall share many similarities: they consistently
have poorer educational outcomes, they have lower educational aspirations, they are more
frequently enrolled in remedial courses, they achieve lower grades, they are less confident in
their academic abilities, and they are more likely to leave college or university without
obtaining an educational credential (Choy, 2001; Collier & Morgan, 2008; Gibbons & Borders,
2010; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Hudley et al., 2009; Jenkins, Miyazaki & Janosik, 2009; McCarron &
Inkelas, 2006; Mehta, Newbold & O’Rourke, 2011; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998). First
generation students are also more likely to belong to a minoritized racial group, come from
lower socio-economic homes, and face economic constraints when financing their educations
(Corea, 2009; Ishitani, 2006; Gibbons & Borders, 2010; Jenkins et al., 2009; Lehmann, 2009a;
Lohfink & Paulson, 2005; Mehta et al., 2011; Stieha, 2010; Wilson et al., 2012). Although Canadian research on first generation students tends to replicate many of the more generalized American findings, the Canadian context is probably responsible for some important but unacknowledged differences (Grayson & Grayson, 2003).

Specifically, the Canadian system is far less stratified, and there are fewer residential colleges (Grayson & Grayson, 2003; Lehmann, 2007; Sattler & Academia Group, 2010), meaning that students are more likely to attend a local institution and live at home. With few accredited private post-secondary institutions and strict government oversight of tuition fees in the publicly funded ones, there is less variability in the quality of the educations provided by the various Canadian institutions (Grayson & Grayson, 2003). Although some institutions, such as McGill University, Queen’s University, and the University of Toronto, are considered more prestigious, they are all public institutions with legislated tuition rates. In the United States, first generation students more typically attend the lower-tiered, less expensive state-funded institutions (Dumais & Ward, 2010; Engle, 2007; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Gibbons & Borders, 2010; London, 1978; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998). Although fewer first generation students are admitted to the more prestigious Canadian institutions, largely because of the perception that these institutions cost more (de Broucker, 2005), the stark dichotomy in enrollment patterns evident in the United States is generally not replicated in Canada, which means there may be some important differences in the first generation students of the two countries, especially in the attitudes and enrollment patterns that affect academic attainments. Knowing these differences would help Canadian post-secondary institutions develop more focused programs that specifically address the needs of the Canadian first-generation population.
Research Related to Minoritized Racial Students

The Canadian context is also probably responsible for some important differences in the characteristics of first generation students in minoritized racial groups. For example, although a number of more recent American studies have expanded on the educational experiences of a variety of immigrant students in minoritized racial groups (see, for example, Bankston, 2004; Fuligni & Witkow, 2004; Goyette & Xie, 1999; Vernez & Abrahamse, 1996), much of the American research focuses on Hispanic, African-American, and Aboriginal first generation students, who were not only born in the United States, but can claim lengthy ancestral connections and familiarity with North American culture.

In contrast, first generation students in minoritized racial groups in Canada are more likely to be children of immigrants, or immigrants themselves, represent many different ethnicities, speak a language other than English or French, and have more tenuous connections with the values and milieus of their new country (Boyd, 2006; Taylor & Krahn, 2005). In fact, prior to 1961, 95 percent of those who immigrated to Canada came from the United States or Europe and were not visibly different. By 1996, this percentage had declined to 21 percent, and since 1990, 75 percent of all immigrants have been a member of a minoritized racial group (Boyd, 2006). Consequently, these newly arrived immigrants are probably not as familiar nor as comfortable with North American culture when compared to their American peers in minoritized racial groups. For instance, in Toronto and its environs, approximately 50 percent of the population describe themselves as immigrants to Canada (www12.Statscan.gc.ca/census, 2006). As well, more than 27 percent of current public elementary and high school students enrolled in the Toronto District School Board (TDSB), one of the largest pools of potential post-
secondary applicants and the most diverse school board in the country, were born outside the
country, speak a total of 75 different languages in their homes, and account for 175 countries
of origin (www.tdsb.on.ca/AboutUs, 2014). In addition, a first generation student of a
minoritized racial group who immigrated to Canada and experienced first-hand linguistic and
cultural differences and perhaps alienation, along with the immense familial and personal
stress of settling into a new society, is quite likely to be operating with a much different set of
attributes, expectations and needs than a student who did not face the upheaval of relocating
to another country. Yet, regardless of the challenges they may face, immigrant youth in Canada
are highly engaged in their educations; although there are differences by racial group, they
tend to pursue post-secondary studies, especially degree studies, in higher proportions than
their non-immigrant peers, with those from China and India having the highest levels of
participation (Abada et al., 2009; Dinovitzer et al., 2003; Kao & Tienda, 2005; Richmond, 1986).

Ensuring the successful academic integration of immigrant youth is a vital concern to
many countries, including Canada (Schleicher, 2006). A recent large scale Canadian study that
does provides comprehensive analysis on the ethnic differences in the university educational
attainment of immigrants to Canada found that generally most groups do successfully achieve
upward mobility, although there are some differences across groups. Much of this upward
mobility, however, was explained by the high educational levels of the immigrant parents
(Abada, Hou, & Ram, 2009), and the study did not distinguish between first and continuing
generation students, nor look at college enrollment. An additional study that focused solely on
youth in Ontario also found that university enrollment is higher for immigrant youth when
compared to their domestic counterparts, especially for those living in urban areas, even after
controlling for family income. Again, the most significant factor contributing to the differences in post-secondary attendance rates was parental education (Lennon, Zhao, Wang, & Gluszynski, 2011). In fact, in all regions of Canada, for both domestic and immigrant youth, low parental education is the primary obstacle to attending college or university, and not socioeconomic status (Finnie et al., 2011; Tomokowicz & Bushnick, 2003).

Members of minoritized racial groups in the United States have also experienced centuries of discrimination, social exclusion and marginalization, as well as systemic and structural impediments to educational achievement and the social mobility it can provide (Ballantine, 1997; Ogbu, 2008). This history has in turn contributed to an oppositional culture in some young people where they intentionally reject education as a means of gaining upward social mobility (Boyd & Grieco, 1998; Boyd, 2006; Ogbu, 2008). For these young people, adherence to established social norms and expectations is perceived as a personal failing or weakness, a type of capitulation or submission, which leads to a loss of respect from their peers and their family members (Alford, 1998; Boyd, 2006; Carter, 2003). With the exception of the Aboriginal population, most minoritized racial groups arrived in Canada only within the past few decades and most intentionally chose to emigrate for the better living standards, as well as the educational and employment opportunities, that are available in Canada compared to their countries of origin (Anisef et al., 2008; Sweet, Anisef & Walters, 2008). The difficulties they experience as immigrants, then, may be tempered by “immigrant optimism,” by the hope and expectation of achieving those benefits with time and effort (Boyd, 2006; Kao & Tienda, 1995; Sweet, 2005).
Because students’ educational aspirations reflect those their parents hold for them (Lehmann, 2009b; Looker & Thiessen, 2004; Tomkowicz & Bushnik, 2003), and immigrant parents tend to have high aspirations for their children (Goyette & Xie, 1999; Sweet et al., 2008; Sweet, Anisef, Brown, Walters & Pythian, 2010), it’s quite likely that this optimism and determination transfers to their children. As evidence, the children of immigrants to Canada generally have higher rates of completing postsecondary studies than their domestic peers, especially university education (Abada & Lin, 2011; Sweet et al., 2010). It's also quite likely that minoritized racial immigrants entering the United States in recent years also share the same "immigrant optimism" and aspire to pursuing higher education. There are, however, differences in the immigrant patterns of the two host countries. By far the largest immigrant group currently entering the United States is Hispanic (Passel, 2011; Teranishi, Suarez-Orozco, & Suarez-Orozco, 2011), a group that continues to have overall low levels of educational achievement (Baum & Flores, 2011), meaning that programs intended to support and encourage educational aspirations remain more relevant in the United States. In other words, minoritized racial first generation students who enter community colleges in Canada could potentially be very different than their non-minoritized peers in the value they place on education and their expectations for higher education, meaning that for these students, programs designed to encourage and support post-secondary aspirations are less relevant. Knowing these differences, especially those related to post-secondary intentions, would again contribute to more focused programs and interventions to specifically support the post-secondary attainments of all first generation students.
Economic and Social Benefits of Higher Education

Immigrants choose to come to Canada for many reasons; there are those who come to Canada to escape serious and often life-threatening political or social upheaval in their countries of origin, those who come to reunite their families, as well as those who come from relatively stable countries, but aspire to the better economic or educational opportunities available here. However, for whatever reason they decided to make the move, the majority of immigrants to Canada today do share a common feature – they generally leave a part of the world that is conceptualized as “developing” on the basis of its economic and social infrastructure, and arrive in a developed country that is no longer dependent for financial stability on physical resources or primary manufacturing.

Although Canada historically enjoyed a rich resource-based economy, most wealth is now generated by knowledge, but more specifically, by the application of that knowledge (Drewes, 2010; Wilson, McCaughan, & Han, 2011). As a developed country, Canada must now compete in a world market with knowledge and skills (Lehmann, 2009a, 2009b; Sattler & Academic Group, 2010), and can no longer rely on its natural resources for economic stability (de Broucker, 2005; Wilson et al., 2011). But this knowledge primarily comes from some form of higher education, which means that ensuring both access to and completion of post-secondary studies is essential to the financial wellbeing of the country (Dooley, Payne & Robb, 2009; Educational Policy Institute, 2008; Sattler & Academia Group, 2010; Wilson et al., 2011).

There is, however, some disagreement that post-secondary education will be the overriding economic panacea that some economists and governments endorse. Specifically, some
economists question whether tertiary education in developed countries will continue to provide the same access to higher status jobs and better wages that it historically has provided (Brown & Lauder, 2003; Brown, Lauder & Ashton, 2008). Many developing countries, like India and China, are aggressively increasing their post-secondary participation, which will mean that many of the “knowledge jobs” will move away from North America and Europe to countries with lower wages. As a result, there may be a downward shift in the entry-level positions of college and university graduates in the developed countries, as well as a softening in the wage premiums that post-secondary education is expected to provide (Brown & Lauder, 2003; Brown et al., 2008). At the same time, there has been a concurrent increase in the “credentialization” of many entry-level positions in North America (Grubb & Lazerson, 2004). Compared to previous generations, young people today have fewer opportunities to “work their way up” in a company or organization without some form of post-secondary education to initially get them in the door. Many professions have also instituted educational and licencing requirements. These requirements do promote and safeguard professional standards, especially as the knowledge to perform a specific job may become more complex (Grubb & Lazerson, 2004), but it also means that many lower status, entry-level positions now require a credential, without providing the income advantage that previous “credentialized” occupations enjoyed. Both the globalization of higher status jobs and the increased “credentialization” of lower status jobs may in part explain why there has been a narrowing of wage differences between those with a university degree and those with only a high school diploma (Frenette & Morisette, 2014; Paquette, 1999), especially for younger workers (Conference Board of Canada, 2014). However, the wage difference between younger and older members in the workforce does decrease as
the younger workers mature and gain more experience and job-related skills (Lammam, Karabegović, & Veldhuis, 2012).

Although the rhetoric of the “knowledge economy” may arguably be over stated, and the overall initial income premium of post-secondary education may have declined, achieving a post-secondary credential still remains central to gaining entry to the work force in an advanced economy, such as Canada’s, especially for stable, full-time employment (Frenette & Morissette, 2014). According to Human Resources Development Canada, almost 50 percent of all new jobs will require a minimum of seventeen years of education (Butlin, 1999); other studies predict that between 60 and 70 percent of all job openings in the years between 2006 to 2015 will be in management positions or occupations that require post-secondary credentials (Berger, 2008; Canadian Council on Learning, 2007; McElroy, 2008; Sattler & Academia Group, 2010; Sweet et al., 2010). It is also becoming increasingly challenging for Canadian institutions to produce the required skilled and educated adults the economy and society will need unless more young people from traditionally under-represented groups pursue post-secondary studies, including first generation and minoritized racial students (Berger, 2008; Clark et al., 2009; Palameta & Voyer, 2010; Sattler & Academia Group, 2010; Wilson et al., 2011). This increase is, however, unlikely to occur on its own without the Canadian government and post-secondary institutions actively recruiting under-represented groups and providing adequate financial aid and specialized support services (Berger, 2008; Clark et al., 2009; Sattler & Academia Group, 2010). According to Finnie and Mueller (2009), post-secondary education remains an important driving force for success in the Canadian economy.
The need to give all young people an opportunity to undertake and complete post-secondary studies is, therefore, an important and necessary investment (Auclair et al., 2008; Drewes, 2010; Educational Policy Institute, 2008). As a result, access to college and university studies has been a priority in Canada for the past three decades, but takes different forms in the various regions of the country. Some provinces focus on reforming high school teaching, others look to establishing new or hybrid post-secondary institutions or expanding the ones that already exist, while others impose temporary freezes on tuition or introduce new scholarship or financial incentive programs (Auclair et al., 2008). Young people and their parents have definitely picked up on the human capital discourse regarding the “knowledge economy” and the need for higher education; as a result, post-secondary enrollments overall have increased across Canada (Auclair et al., 2008; Lehmann, 2007).

Yet, for all these increases in the number of enrollments, in Ontario nearly 40 percent of high school students either drop out of high school or immediately enter the workforce after graduating and do not go on to college or university studies (King, Warren, King, Brook, & Kocher, 2009). Regardless of the “softening” of the value of a post-secondary credential, Canadian research clearly shows a salary gap, with earnings for the most highly educated increasing more rapidly when compared to other groups (Looker & Thiessen, 2004). In Ontario, males with a baccalaureate typically earn 40 percent more than high school graduates, and females earn 50 percent more (Drewes, 2010). When all college and university graduates in Ontario are combined, they typically earn about 25 percent more than high school graduates, a gap in earnings that has almost doubled in the last two decades (Drewes, 2010). Furthermore, across Canada, the unemployment rate for those who have less than a high school education is
three times higher compared to those who have a baccalaureate (Canadian Council on Learning, 2007).

In addition to better employment outcomes, there are also social and personal benefits to providing widespread access to post-secondary studies. Education contributes to social cohesion and unity by increasing tolerance for diversity and respect for local laws, which is particularly relevant in a multi-cultural country like Canada (de Broucker, 2005). Post-secondary education also provides for a higher standard of living (de Broucker, 2005); this is especially important for minoritized racial youth and immigrant youth, who are more likely to be living in lower income homes when compared to their non-minoritized domestic peers (Anisef & Pythian, 2005; Anisef et al., 2008; Bonikowska, 2007; Finnie & Muller, 2009). In a developed economy, post-secondary education is, in fact, the most important means for obtaining upward mobility (Collier & Morgan, 2008; Lehmann, 2009a, 2009b; Pratt & Skaggs, 1989), and is a strong determinant of successful economic and social integration (Hansen & Kucera, 2004; Lum & Grabke, 2012). Those with a college or university education also report higher satisfaction with life in general, and perceive themselves to be in better physical and psychological health (Canadian Council on Learning, 2007; de Broucker, 2005).

**The Value of Using a Community College for this Study**

There are a number of reasons why using a community college population is fitting for this study. First, fewer studies have focused solely on the community college population (Auclair et al., 2008). Yet more first generation students who do decide to pursue further education enroll in community colleges instead of universities (Acumen Research, 2004; Dumais
& Ward, 2010; Engle 2007; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Gibbons & Borders, 2010; Kerr et al., 2010; Knighton & Mirza, 2002; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Pascarella et al., 2003). This is supported by data from the Canadian Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics (SLID), which is an annual longitudinal study of the demographic traits, labour market characteristics, educational attainments and income levels. Between 1993 and 1998, from a sample of 1,640 respondents who were 18 to 21 and no longer in high school, approximately 65 percent of them had enrolled in a post-secondary program at some point in time. Of those who were first generation students, 29 percent had enrolled at a community college compared to 17 percent who had enrolled at a university (Knighton & Mirza, 2002). This may partially be because community colleges present a less threatening environment that helps compensate for a lack of social and cultural capital (Pascarella et al., 2003), or the fact that these institutions provide more practical learning at a lower cost (Acumen Research, 2004; Knighton & Mirza, 2002). Furthermore, a community college is the more prevalent choice for students who come from families in the lower two income quartiles (Finnie et al., 2011; Human Resources and Social Development Canada, 2007; Knighton & Mirza, 2002). Only 31 percent of Canadian students in the lowest income quartile enroll in a university by the age of 19 compared to 50 percent of those in the highest income quartile (Frenette, 2007). Overall, at Canadian universities, the participation rate for those from lower income families, which tends to apply to many first generation students, is 50 percent lower (Kerr et al., 2010).

Community colleges in Canada are also economic and social equalizers. Young people from all income quartiles are just as likely to enroll in a community college, while the universities have a significantly lower percentage of students from less affluent homes (Berger,
Yet, according to data from the 1997 Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Canada ranks as the highest in terms of the population between 25 and 34 years of age who have post-secondary credentials, which represents a 19 percent increase over the preceding thirty years. This increase is largely due to the higher participation rate in the college system, not the university system, and to Canada’s immigration policies, which favour those with higher education (de Broucker, 2005). Not only do the colleges in Canada enroll more students than the universities, they also have a greater reach across all parts of the country (Canadian Council on Learning, 2007). The colleges in Canada are also more diverse. According to a study of traditionally under-represented students in their first year of college, Human Resources and Social Development Canada (2008) reported that, when compared to universities, the colleges enroll significantly more first generation, immigrant, minoritized, aboriginal students, as well as students with disabilities. Yet there is very little Canadian research on Canadian community colleges, their faculty, and their students (Canadian Council on Learning, 2007).

**Purpose of this Study**

Through a secondary data analysis, this study will compare three groups of first generation students enrolled in two-year college diploma students at a large urban college in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA): those born in Canada to at least one Canadian-born parent ("domestic first generation"), those born in Canada to foreign-born parents ("established immigrant first generation"), and those who are themselves foreign-born ("recent immigrant first generation"). The groups will be compared at two intervals – immediately upon admission to college in September 2008, and then again in May 2012 when the students should have
completed their diplomas at the 200 percent time allotment. The first two questions focuses on exploring the differences among the three groups in terms of their pre-college attributes, behaviours, and values. The answers to the first set of questions will be derived from quantitative data obtained from the College's Fall 2008 Partners in Education Inventory\(^2\) and from the enrollment records of students beginning two-year diploma programs:

- Do the three groups differ significantly in their pre-college academic performance and behaviours?
- Do the three groups differ significantly in their confidence, post-secondary intentions, and program choices?

The second question focuses on a four-year follow-up of the educational attainments of the three groups of first generation diploma students originally surveyed in the Fall of 2008; by May, 2012, the students should have completed their two-year programs of study. The data to answer this question, then, will be based on the transcripts of the students in each of the samples representing the three groups of first generation students initially identified in the Fall 2008 Partners in Education Inventory:

- Do the three groups differ significantly in their college attainments?

**Conclusion**

American programs and initiatives to support the academic achievement of first generation students can certainly provide a foundation for Canadian programs. As Grayson and Grayson note (2003), American data can sensitize Canadian researchers and policymakers to the central issues, but it would be inappropriate to uncritically apply their conclusions in a Canadian context. The Canadian community colleges enroll more first generation college

\(^2\) See Appendix I for the *Partners in Education* Survey Instrument
students than the universities (Acumen Research, 2004; Human Resources and Social Development Canada, 2007), largely because they are less selective, open-access institutions. However, in accepting students who may be less prepared, institutions have the responsibility of providing adequate resources and opportunities for all students to complete a credential (Tinto, 1993). Open access is meaningless, and perhaps even deceptive, if students do not also have access to a full range of services and experiences that support their personal and academic needs (Pascarella et al., 2004).

Therefore, as more and more first generation students enter Canadian colleges, it becomes increasingly important to identify the more finely nuanced attitudes, behaviours and expectations that can either contribute to or impede their success. In other words, we need to look beneath superficial, all-encompassing statements of deficit, limitation and prognostication, in order to determine if there are meaningful distinctions between groups, such as domestic and immigrant first generation students. As well, we need to be assured that what we believe to be the characteristics of first generation students do in fact apply to students entering college programs in Canada, where first generation students are more likely to be found, and are not generalizations based on students in different systems or countries. This knowledge could contribute to establishing more focused programs to support the needs of all first generation students, and in evaluating the usefulness of programs that may actually contribute little, if anything at all, to their academic success.
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This review of the literature provides an overview on two main areas relevant to this study: what is known about first generation students, and what is known about immigrants to Canada and their children. The discussion on first generation students focuses first on defining first generation status and then on the cultural capital of first generation students, including the relationship between first generation status and socio-economic status, the pre-college attributes of first generation students, their knowledge about and planning for post-secondary studies, parental and peer support for their post-secondary aspirations, their choice of a post-secondary institution and program of study, and lastly, their post-secondary academic behaviours and attainments.

The discussion in the second section on immigrants to Canada and their children focuses on the demographic characteristics of the immigrant population, immigration theories and the educational attainments of immigrants and their children, and the influence of language and socio-economic status on those attainments.

First Generation Students

What is a first generation student?

The first generation concept initially originated in the United States at a 1978 Iowa meeting that focused on the non-financial impediments to higher education, and was then used federally in the United States as a criteria for post-secondary access and outreach programs; before then, first generation status was not perceived as a discreet or distal variable that had its own impact on access to and completion of higher education (Auclair et al., 2008).
Since then, many North American studies have focused on the first generation concept; however researchers have used a variety of definitions for the concept, ranging from a rarely used strict or narrow definition to the one most frequently used. At the strict or narrow end of the scale, at least one study defined first generation students as only those where no immediate member of their families have pursued post-secondary studies, including siblings; these students are described as being “true firsts” without the benefit of a parent or even a brother or sister who can help them navigate their way through the post-secondary experience (Inman & Mayes, 1999). In contrast, others have broadened the definition to include students whose parents may have had some post-secondary education but did not graduate (Willett, 1989; Grayson, 1995; Palameta & Voyer, 2010). For example, in their study of the willingness to pay for post-secondary education among under-represented groups in Canada, Palameta and Voyer (2010) defined first generation students as those with no parent with a completed credential at the post-secondary level. An additional Canadian study of the academic attainments of first generation students at York University, Grayson (1995) included as first generation students all those who did not have at least one parent with a baccalaureate. Students whose parents had a college credential or only partial university experience were, therefore, defined as first generation.

However, regardless of the various definitions and classifications of first generation students, numerous studies confirm that first generational status overall is an enduring risk factor for lower post-secondary educational achievement. This risk exists even after controlling for other variables, such as family background including socio-economic status, high school academic performance, educational expectations, and support from parents and educators in
anticipating and preparing for post-secondary education (Butlin 1999; Choy, 2001; Cheung, 2007; Engle, 2007; Finnie, Lascelles & Sweetman, 2005; Grayson, 2011; Horn & Nunez, 2000; Lehmann, 2007; Tomkowicz & Bushnick, 2003; Lennon et al., 2011; Quinn 2004). Although many of the studies on first generation students include those whose parents have some higher education, for the purposes of this study, a student is defined as first generation if neither of his or her parents has any education beyond high school, which Auclair et al. (2008) refer to as the traditional or most common definition; the majority of researchers do believe that having at least one parent who participated in some type of formal education beyond high school provides enough social and cultural capital to help facilitate a child’s transition to post-secondary study. Continuing generation students are defined as those who have at least one parent with some formal education beyond the high school level, parents who can potentially provide assistance and support for their children in accessing post-secondary studies.

**First Generation Students and Socio-Economic Status**

Canadian studies on first generation students generally report a strong overall relationship between a lower family income and the level of participation in post-secondary education (de Broucker, 2005; Finnie et al., 2005; Lehmann, 2004). Low income Canadian parents are less likely –or able– to save for their children’s education, especially those whose family income falls below 30,000 dollars per year (Sweet et al., 2008). Low income students in Canada are also more likely to be enrolled in community colleges with their lower tuition fees as opposed to degree-granting universities, regardless of the generalized belief that in Canada post-secondary education is more open and accessible (Auclair et al., 2008; de Broucker 2005).
A study based on the data collected in the Canadian Youth in Transition Survey collected between 2000 and 2006 found that higher parental income is definitely associated with higher university enrollment; 61 percent of young people from families in the highest income quartile were enrolled in degree studies, whereas students in the lower three quartiles were equally represented in the “other” post-secondary categories, which included community colleges, private training and apprenticeship programs (Lennon et al., 2011). An additional study that looked at the relationship between income and university participation also found a strong correlation between socio-economic status and university enrollment. By examining applications to Ontario universities from 1995 to 2005, the authors found that young people in low income areas were 13 percent less likely to apply to university, a difference that actually increased slightly over the ten year period (Dooley et al., 2009).

From a social-reproduction perspective, lower income parents lack both the sense of entitlement and the cultural capital that middle-class parents pass on to their children, which are important in forming post-secondary intentions (Laureau & Weininger, 2003). As evidence, even in countries where tuition is free, such as France and Austria, young people from low income homes are less likely to pursue higher education (de Broucker, 2005) indicating that socio-economic or class based factors shape the patterns of participation in higher education, even when the financial barrier of tuition fees is removed (Paulson & St. John, 2002).

In contrast, continuing generation students report a broad range of parental support for education, and because they are generally of a higher socio-economic class, their parents possess the economic capital to invest in books, computers, tutors, school trips, and cultural experiences, such as travel, visits to museums and art galleries, that all contribute to higher
grades (Billson & Terry, 1981; McElroy, 2008; Sweet, 2005). For students from lower income homes, these material inequalities make it more difficult for them to thrive and succeed; consequently, lower grades are strongly associated with lower socio-economic status (McElroy, 2008; Quinn, 2004). Lower income parents may also not be as capable of helping their children with homework because they lack the time, the knowledge, or both (McElroy, 2008); yet support with homework may actually be more important than family income in contributing to a student’s grades and aspirations for a post-secondary credential (McCarron & Inkelas, 2006).

In addition, compared to lower income parents, middle-class parents interact with their children’s teachers differently and are generally more involved in their children’s elementary and high school experiences (Laureau & Weininger, 2003). Lower income parents are more inclined to encourage their children to follow the rules and not to question authority figures, like their teachers, which are traits more suited to the working conditions of lower paying occupations (Ballantine, 1997; Laureau & Weininger, 2003). In contrast, middle class parents are more assertive in their interactions with the school system and tend to act as advocates for their children. Over the past few decades, child-rearing professionals may have changed their recommendations to parents from telling them to blindly following the advice of experts to encouraging them to become more involved and active parents, but this advice has either not been transmitted or heard equally across social classes. Middle-class parents have definitely received and embraced the message, lower class parents less so (Laureau & Weininger, 2003).

A number of studies have also found a correlation between membership in a minoritized racial group and low socio-economic status (Auclair et al., 2008; Choy, 2001; Lohfink & Paulson, 2005). Because first generation students are more likely to be from lower
income homes, they are also more likely to be members of a minoritized racial group. Although minoritized racial parents in Canada generally have very high educational aspirations for their children (Abada et al., 2009; Educational Policy Institute, 2008; Krahn & Taylor, 2005), the realities of access and cost may eventually lead to diminished expectations and attainments. As Lohfink and Paulson (2005) point out, first generation students, especially students from minoritized racial groups, very likely inhabit “intersecting sites” of disadvantage based on race and class (p. 418). It is highly probable, then, that initiatives intended to increase access to and success in post-secondary education for first generation students may also benefit students who are members of minoritized racial groups, such as many of the immigrants to Canada, as well as those who come from low income homes (Choy, 2001).

**Pre-college Characteristics**

First generation students share a number of common characteristics or attributes in relation to their pre-college educational experiences. In fact, even before high school, differences in variables that predict post-secondary participation, such as student attendance and required courses in math and English, have been noted in first generation students (Bui, 2005; Choy, 2001; Stage & Hossler, 1989; Warburton, Bugarin & Nunez, 2001). While enrolled in high school, first generation students are also less likely to take the more rigorous courses that would better prepare them academically for higher education. Perhaps because of their limited understanding of the academic requirements for post-secondary education, parents of first generation students are less involved in helping their children select their high school courses, and are less inclined to encourage them to take the more rigorous courses (Engle,
2007; Padron, 1992). As evidence, a Canadian study that looked at high school levels of math achievement across all provinces found that students with university educated parents were more likely to enroll in more rigorous courses, like math, that keep their “options” open (Krahn & Taylor, 2007). In other words, because these students have successfully completed the more demanding academic courses, they can elect to continue their educations at either the diploma or the baccalaureate level, and select from a wider range of study options.

Overall, first generation students are also less likely to achieve high averages in high school (Fischer, 2007; Lee, Sax, Kim & Hagedorn, 2004; McElroy, 2008), yet high school courses and grades are strong predictors of post-secondary enrollment and persistence (Cheung, 2007; Dooley, Payne & Robb, 2011; Educational Policy Institute, 2008; Fischer 2007; Grayson, 2011; Lee et al., 2004; Lennon et al., 2011). A large scale study of the post-secondary participation of Canadian youth found that high school students with averages greater than 80 percent were ten times more likely to go on to post-secondary education, with the majority enrolled in degree programs (Lennon et al., 2011), while one-third of Canadian high school students with averages below 70 percent or below did not go on to higher education, especially those with friends who had not completed high school (Educational Policy Institute, 2008; Lennon et al., 2011). First generation students also report spending less time on their homework in high school when compared to those whose parents have post-secondary education, and they tend to skip classes more often, which can have a further negative impact on their grades (Human Resources & Social Development Canada, 2007).
Even if a student with a lower high school average does enroll in post-secondary studies, that student is at greater risk for attrition. For example, Berger and Motte’s (2007) analysis of the academic attainments of Canadian young people two years after they completed grade twelve found that more than 50 percent of those who entered post-secondary studies with high school averages below 70 percent eventually dropped out. An additional large scale study based on a sample of 45,000 applicants to Ontario’s colleges and universities reported that those with lower grades were more likely to withdraw and less likely to understand the academic requirements of their programs of study (Sattler & Academia Group Inc., 2010).

First generation students are also more likely to be employed while in high school, with those of lower socio-economic status working more hours per week than their more affluent peers (Reay, Davis, David & Ball, 2001). There appears to be a correlation between the number of hours students work per week while in high school and their post-secondary aspirations. For example, Looker and Thiessen (2004) examined the aspirations of Canadian fifteen-year-olds using data from both the first cycle of the Youth in Transition Survey (YITS) and the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and found that Canadian young people who planned to enroll in a community college as opposed to a university generally worked more hours while attending high school. Not surprisingly, high school students who work more hours also tend to have lower grades (Butlin, 1999).

Overall, then, first generation students are less academically prepared for the demands of higher education (Choy, 2001; Hahs-Vaughn, 2004; Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996; Thayer, 2000), and those entering community colleges are particularly under
prepared in key competencies such as reading, math and writing (Byrd & MacDonald, 2005; Human Resources and Social Development Canada, 2007; Terenzini et al., 1996). A pan-Canadian study of almost 30,000 first-year students in community colleges, where first generation students are more frequently enrolled, found that significant numbers felt their basic learning and academic skills were less than optimum, especially their math, studying and test-taking skills (Human Resources and Social Development Canada, 2007). First generation students are more likely to report experiencing “voids” or deficits in their educations once they are enrolled in a college or university (Lehmann, 2007; Richardson & Skinner, 2000), and they tend to have lower critical thinking and time management skills (Human Resources and Social Development Canada, 2007; Terenzini et al., 1996; Thayer, 2000). First generation students are also less likely to take the admission tests often required by more selective post-secondary institutions; and when they do take these tests, they tend to perform more poorly relative to their continuing generation peers, which in turn limits their post-secondary choices (Auclair et al., 2008; Canadian Council on Learning, 2007; Engle, 2007; Hahs-Vaughn, 2004; Reay et al., 2001; Warburton et al., 2001).

Knowledge about Planning for and Financing Post-Secondary Studies

As well as being less prepared academically for higher education, first generation students lack basic knowledge about how to prepare for post-secondary studies (Ekos Inc, 2009; York-Anderson & Bowman, 1991). This process is not a straightforward one, but involves complex social and physical components in addition to the necessary academic preparation (Richardson & Skinner, 2000). Parents without any education beyond high school are generally unable to provide the perspective and reflective experience to engage meaningfully in their
children’s post-secondary planning and decision making (Auclair et al., 2008; Ekos Inc, 2009; Hartig & Steigerwald, 2007; Horn and Nunez, 2000). As a result, even though they may be initially enthusiastic about their children’s decision to pursue higher education, it is not uncommon for the parents of first generation students to begin feeling inadequate and to gradually become more distant and less supportive as the process proceeds from intention, to application, and finally to enrollment (Davis, 2010).

First generation students themselves are also less likely to discuss the process with their parents (Horn & Nunez, 2000), even though parental involvement in the planning process significantly increases a student’s chances of pursuing higher education, regardless of parental education (Engle, 2007). Nor are they likely to receive adequate help from their high school teachers and guidance counsellors (Choy, 2001). These students are less likely to be encouraged by their university educated, middle-class teachers to pursue post-secondary studies, probably because they are perceived as having less intelligence and competence due to their lower academic achievement (Auclair et al., 2008; Choy, 2001; Engle, 2007; Lareau & Weininger, 2003). The limited information that first generation students do receive about college and university also tends to occur too late in their high school careers for it to be a meaningful or useful (Ekos Inc, 2009). In fact, a cross-Canada study of community college students showed that 20 to 30 percent of all first-year entrants had undertaken absolutely no career investigation activities prior to applying and enrolling in a college program (Human Resources and Social Development Canada, 2007). Prior research also shows that first generation students often make haphazard post-secondary choices that are based on convenience rather than preparation and planning (Tinto, 1993), and they tend to apply to fewer institutions (Engle,
For them, the transition from high school to university or college, the “boundary crossing” (Somers, Woodhouse & Cofer, 2004, p. 429), is not only an unknown, but one that is potentially hazardous and full of personal, social and especially financial risks (Lehmann, 2004; Palameta & Voyer, 2010; Ryken, 2006).

To compound their lack of knowledge about the planning and decision-making process, first generation students and their parents also tend to have limited and often inaccurate knowledge about the costs and benefits of a higher education. In Canada, according to the Educational Policy Institute (2008), financial concerns have been studied the most of the many barriers to post-secondary access. As a result, a number of studies have found that students from lower income homes are more debt aversive and less willing to take on loans to support a post-secondary education (Educational Policy Institute, 2008; Frenette & Robson, 2011; Palmeta & Voyer, 2010; Usher, 2005). As well, a recent large scale study of students who did not pursue post-secondary studies commissioned by the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) found that both young people and their parents are largely unaware of both the actual costs of higher education and the various means to finance that education (Ekos Inc, 2009). In terms of the cost of post-secondary studies, another study showed that 33 percent of students in their upper years of high school who actually intended to pursue higher education could not reliably state what it would cost, and of those who ventured an estimate, 60 percent believed it would be twice as expensive as it actually is (Berger, 2008). When the Ontario College Application Service (OCAS) surveyed its applicants, most could also not provide an accurate estimate about the cost of a college program (Acumen Research, 2004). Another study commissioned by the Canadian Millennium Scholarship Foundation found that Canadians in
general overestimate the costs of a post-secondary education, especially the cost of university tuition, and those from low income homes were especially misinformed or replied that they didn’t know (Usher, 2005). Parents of first generation students are especially cost sensitive when compared to those with a university degree (Palameta & Voyer, 2010). This lack of accurate information is not limited to the cost of a post-secondary education; Canadian students from low income homes, those who would benefit the most from financial assistance, are also generally unaware of the many government loans and grants available to them (Frenette & Robson, 2011), further restricting their capacity to pursue further study.

Needless to say, student and parental concerns about the cost of a higher education and the debt that they may incur, even if these concerns are based on misconceptions, prevent many students from under-represented groups, including first generation students, from even applying to college or university in the first place (Canadian Council on Learning, 2007). In fact, about 20 percent of first generation Ontario students do not go on to college or university at all (Lennon et al., 2011), a figure that is three times higher than those who have a parent who completed a degree (Tomkowicz and Bushnik, 2003). In recent years, these concerns have also been exacerbated by media reports that tend to lament the increasing costs of post-secondary education, of high student debt, and of the high rate of default on student loans. For those who have no familial perspective on post-secondary educational costs and benefits, these reports may be the only information they receive, and may explain both their misconceptions and their choice of less expensive post-secondary options, such as enrolling in a community college program (McElroy, 2008). These reports may also contribute to what Frenette and Robson (2011) refer to as “anchoring bias” with parents and their children relying on the limited
information they initially receive to make their post-secondary decisions, regardless of whether it is accurate or not. Although misconceptions about the cost of post-secondary studies do prevent some young people from even enrolling, those who do enroll and then withdraw generally do not cite financial concerns as the reason for leaving their program of study; a large scale Canadian study found that about 50 percent of college students and 35 percent of university students who withdrew did so because of a lack of interest in their program, followed by health and personal reasons and low grades. Financial concerns were much lower on the list (Finnie & Qui, 2008; Finnie, Childs, & Qiu, 2012).

**Parental Support for Post-Secondary Studies**

Unlike their continuing generation peers, numerous studies have shown that first generation students are less likely to receive parental and peer support for their post-secondary aspirations (Lareau & Weininger, 2003; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Padron, 1992; Rendon, 1994; Terenzini et al., 1996; Thayer, 2000). Social learning theory suggests that the more parents value education, the higher their children’s educational achievements (Aldous, 2006). In fact, parental involvement and encouragement is a key predictor of post-secondary aspirations, regardless of parental educational attainments or socio-economic status (Engle, 2007; Looker & Thiessen, 2004). In their study of the educational aspirations of Canadian youth, Looker and Thiessen (2004) found that young people’s aspirations closely aligned with the value that their parents placed on education; the more the young people aspired to higher education, the more they believed that a post-secondary credential is important to their parents. An additional study that focused on three pathways taken by high school graduates—those who enrolled immediately after graduation, those who delayed up to a
year, and those who decided not to pursue post-secondary studies—also found a significant
connection between immediate enrollment and the value that parents place on education; 80
percent of the respondents who enrolled immediately after high school reported that their
parents felt it was important or very important that they continue their education compared to
fewer than 50 percent of those who chose not to enroll (Tomkowicz & Bushnik, 2003).

One of the reasons why the parents of first generation students are less supportive may
have to do with their lack of awareness of the personal and economic benefits of a college or
university education (Engle, 2007). In fact, Canadian parents and young people from all income
levels have limited knowledge, even incorrect knowledge, about the benefits of obtaining a
post-secondary credential, which may in itself form another distinct barrier to further
education quite separate from the ability or willingness to pay (Usher, 2005). For example, a
large scale Canadian study of young people who didn’t pursue post-secondary education and
their parents found that both the parents and their children had a limited understanding of the
relationship between higher education and the advancement of knowledge and skills (Ekos Inc,
2009). First generation students are especially more inclined to believe that a post-secondary
education is not necessary to obtain a good job (Berger & Motte, 2007), and they often don’t
understand the connection between education and a particular career (Richardson & Skinner,
2000); yet knowing about the relationship between an occupation and an education is one of
the strongest predictors of post-secondary enrollment (Looker & Thiessen, 2004).

Examined through the lens of Human Capital theory, an education is an investment of
time, money and effort, which are the “costs” of obtaining a credential; a young person will
choose to invest if he or she perceives the “return” or the advantages from that credential,
which include future earnings and social benefits, to outweigh the costs of the investment (Auclair et al., 2008 Educational Policy Institute, 2008; Palameta & Voyer 2010; Usher, 2005). In other words, when deciding to enroll in post-secondary education, students need to balance the costs of the program and the loss of earnings for the duration of their studies against the long-term financial and personal benefits of obtaining a credential (Educational Policy Institute, 2008; Palameta & Voyer 2010; Usher, 2005). First generation students and their parents tend to over-estimate the costs and under-estimate the return, a miscalculation that in turn negatively affects their support for higher education (Auclair et al., 2008). In fact, Canadian students, even those who are continuing generation, tend to underestimate the differences in income between those who have a degree and those who have only a high school education, especially those from low income homes (Palameta & Voyer, 2010; Usher, 2005). As a result, even though the overall number of students enrolling in Canadian colleges and universities is steadily increasing, the percentage of students from low income homes has remained static, perhaps as a reaction to the perception of low returns for what they believe to be a high monetary outlay (Frenette & Robson, 2011).

Overall, then, first generation students are less likely to be encouraged by family members and friends to pursue a higher education, and are more frequently expected to provide an immediate financial return by working full-time and helping support their families (Engle, 2007; Rendon, 1994). In fact, some of their parents may be actively antagonistic towards their child’s decision to attend college or university, perhaps because they lack trust in a school system that failed them (Davis, 2010; Padron, 1992). First generation students who do persist and enroll in a college or university can find themselves actually having to defend their decision,
an uncomfortable and often distressing position that is rarely shared by their continuing
generation peers (Auclair et al., 2008). Therefore, even before they enroll in a post-secondary
program, first generation students share a constellation of background variables that can
negatively impact their success—they have limited knowledge about the post-secondary
system, lower academic preparation for higher education, less support from their families
(Berger & Mott, 2007; Quinn, 2004), and inadequate or incorrect information about the costs
and benefits of higher education. As Billson and Terry (1981) comment, “First generation
students are making a longer jump from the social status of their parents,” but even more
importantly, “they are making that jump with fewer resources and less support and positive
role modeling from significant others” (p. 18).

Post-Secondary Institutional and Educational Choices

As noted earlier, first generation students are more likely to enroll in two-year
vocational institutions, such as community colleges (Auclair et al., 2008; Choy, 2001; de
Broucker, 2005; Lennon et al., 2011; London, 1978; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Palameta &
Voyer, 2010; Paulson & St. John, 2002; Thayer, 2000). Much of the decision to attend a two-
year college is generally based on economic and academic constraints; because of their lower
grades and because they lack of funds to move away from home and pay the considerably
higher tuition fees and living expenses at a university, first generation students who aspire to a
post-secondary credential may have no other option than attending a local community college
(Reay et al., 2001). In fact, in their study of applicants to Ontario colleges, Acumen Research
(2004) reported that, after the availability of a specific program of study, the location of a
college is the second most important factor for students when choosing if and where to attend,
and most intend to live at home. Living at home may actually be a positive move – an American study did find that first generation students who chose to attend a particular post-secondary institution specifically because they could live at home were more likely to persist and graduate (Lohfink & Paulson, 2005). In addition, parents from certain cultures pressure their children to live at home while attending college or university, perhaps to maintain the familial and cultural ties (Cushman, 2007).

First generation students are also more instrumental in their choice of a program of study, and tend to favour a vocational qualification aligned with a specific occupation (Inman & Mayes, 1999; Paulson & St. John, 2002). They generally select business or management programs (Warburton et al., 2001), or technical or professional courses that have practical components and clear employment outcomes (Acumen Research, 2004; Chen and Carroll, 2005; Kiang, 1992; Pascarella et al., 2003). A 2007 Canadian study of first year students in community colleges, where most first generation students are enrolled, found that 23 percent of the students were enrolled in business, 17 percent in health sciences, and 10 percent in social and community services. Only 10 percent were enrolled in applied engineering and 5 percent in information technology, perhaps because of the advanced math requirements for these programs, and fewer than 4 percent were enrolled in liberal arts programs with their more intrinsic and theoretical focus (Human Resources & Social Development Canada, 2007). This enrollment pattern has remained consistent over time. Seven years later in 2014, health science, business, and social and community service programs were still the most popular choices (Academia Group, 2014).
In terms of the important aspects of attending college, first generation students are more likely to point to career preparation and the acquisition of job skills as the most rewarding part of attending school and are less likely to mention the psychosocial rewards, such as developing social connections and a sense of independence (Billson & Terry, 1981; Lee & Brotheridge, 2005). They are also more likely to be instrumental and utilitarian in their approach to education, and will question their teachers about the value or the use of what they are learning when they can’t make the clear vocational connection (Lee & Brotheridge, 2005). They are more interested in getting value for their tuition dollars as opposed to enjoying themselves and socializing, which is more typical of continuing generation students (Lehmann, 2007). In fact, first generation students are more likely to report feeling bewildered by the value that their continuing generation peers place on having fun and interacting with others, and with the time and effort they “waste” in these meaningless pursuits (Bergerson, 2007). Yet social contact is often strongly associated with academic persistence, especially for younger students (Tinto, 1993).

Post-Secondary Behaviours and Attainments

While enrolled in post-secondary studies, first generation students are more likely to be employed, and they frequently work longer hours, sometimes full-time hours, while attending college (Auclair et al., 2008; Billson & Terry, 1981; Choy, 2001; Lee et al., 2004; Sattler & Academia Group, 2010). Consequently, they often prioritize work over school, and perceive themselves as employees first and students second (Billson & Terry, 1981; Choy, 2001). They are more likely to schedule their classes around their work schedules (Billson & Terry, 1981; Engle, 2007; Richardson & Skinner, 2000), and when conflicts arise between their work hours
and educational demands, such as completing assignments and attending class, they will give priority to the job. First generation students are also more likely to drop out of college to take full-time employment (Billson & Terry, 1981; Engle, 2007). However, when they do persist, they tend to follow non-traditional attendance patterns by more frequently dropping to part-time status, or by periodically interrupting their studies or “stopping out” (Engle, 2007; Richardson & Skinner, 2000; Ryken, 2006; Warburton et al., 2001). Perhaps because they are working longer hours, first generation students are also less likely to become involved in campus activities that contribute to social integration, and more likely to report that their best friends are at work and not at school (Billson & Terry, 1981; Grayson, 1995).

Unlike their continuing generation peers, once they arrive at college, first generation students are more frequently enrolled in remedial course work, which along with lower academic preparation is in itself a risk factor for attrition (Engle, 2007; Padron, 1992; Warburton et al., 2001). They are less likely to enroll in courses in mathematics, perhaps due to lower high school math attainment, and they are also less likely to take courses in the natural sciences and in the arts and humanities, possibly because from their more utilitarian perspective, they do not recognize these courses as having any value (Pascarella et al., 2003; Terenzini et al., 1996). Not surprisingly, first generation students report spending less time on studying and completing homework, have higher rates of absenteeism, and are more likely to not finish or submit assignments, perhaps partially due to the high number of hours they are employed (Billson & Terry, 1981; London, 1978; Looker & Thiessen, 2004).
Overall, when compared to continuing generation students, first generation students tend to complete fewer credit hours throughout their educations, and when they do persevere to graduation, they are more likely to require longer periods of time to complete the credential (Chen & Carroll, 2005; Pascarella et al., 2004); they also typically have lower grades and overall lower academic achievement (Billson & Terry, 1981; Fischer, 2007; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Pascarella et al., 2003). In fact, a Canadian study on first generation students that focused on measuring their academic experiences and achievements during their first year at a large urban university found that even when they came into the university with high secondary school grades, they ended up with lower grade point averages (GPAs) compared to their continuing generation peers. They also spent considerably less time on campus and were less socially and academically involved, all variables that can contribute to higher grades and to successfully completing a credential (Grayson, 1995).

One of the typical outcomes of lower academic achievement is attrition (Billson & Terry, 1981; Ishitani, 2003; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Pascarella et al., 2003; Warburton et al., 2001). Attrition rates in Canadian post-secondary institutions have remained stable over the past few decades, with about 50 percent of students not completing the original programs they entered. Generally, the highest attrition, about 25 percent, occurs during the first year, with the remaining 25 percent or so spread out over the remaining years of the program (Canadian Council on Learning, 2007; Grayson & Grayson, 2003; Finnie et al., 2012). These attrition rates, however, do not distinguish between continuing and first generation students. Ironically, in Canada, first generation students who enter the certificate or diploma programs offered by
Community colleges are more likely to persist to graduation (Choy 2001; Finnie et al., 2012; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998).

When generalized attrition rates are examined more closely, prior research shows that first generation students are overall more vulnerable when compared to their continuing generation peers (Billson & Terry, 1981; Ishitani, 2003; McCarron & Inkelas, 2006; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Pascarella et al., 2003; Warburton et al., 2001). Canadian research replicates this finding; one study that used the Youth in Transition Survey (YITS) data set, a national sample of young Canadians who were interviewed every two years from 2000 to 2006, reported that 24 percent of students whose parents had no education beyond high school eventually withdrew from post-secondary studies compared to fewer than 17 percent of students who had at least one parent with a degree (Finnie & Qui, 2008). In fact, another qualitative study with first generation Canadian university students who dropped out revealed that many were actually supported by their families in doing so, even though they generally had strong academic performances (Lehmann, 2007).

When first generation students do persevere, the post-secondary credential that they receive is also more likely to be a certificate or diploma, and not a baccalaureate degree (Chen and Carroll, 2005; Choy, 2001; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998). Research from the United States also shows that even when first generation students initially enroll in a degree granting program, they are more likely to leave after two years with a vocational credential instead of staying to complete the degree (Choy, 2001; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998). Whether the same pattern exists in Canada is yet to be confirmed. Because of the structural differences between the American and Canadian post-secondary systems, Canadian students generally do
not have the option of entering a degree granting program and then exiting after two years with an associate degree or a diploma; although there has recently been some relaxation in the strict dichotomy of the Canadian system in terms of the credentials being awarded, students in Canada, especially Ontario, are generally forced to choose between colleges, which are largely two-year institutions, and universities, which are largely four-year institutions, with little, if any, transferability of credits between the two. Unlike the American system, the colleges in Ontario and many other jurisdictions in Canada were not originally set up to provide transfer opportunities to four-year institutions (Clarke, 1960), but were meant to deliver alternative vocational training to those who are less academically oriented (Clark et al., 2009). In recent years, though, the number of students entering Canadian community colleges who indicate that they intend to eventually complete a degree has risen (Human Resources and Social Development Canada, 2007).

There is also some evidence in the opposite direction; many of the students who do drop out of Canadian universities, including first generation students, re-enroll at community colleges. This evidence comes from a study using Statistics Canada’s Youth in Transition (YITS) dataset from 2000 to 2006, which found that only 57 percent of college students and 52 percent of university students graduated from their original programs. However, when those who switched programs or returned to post-secondary studies in some capacity are included, the graduation rates rise to 73 percent for initial college entrants and 69 percent for initial university entrants. When those who are still enrolled in post-secondary studies are also included, the rates rise to 82 percent and almost 90 percent respectively (Finnie & Qui, 2008).
Unfortunately, if they don’t succeed, first generation students are more likely to blame themselves. They often have a working class ethic that tells them personal achievement comes from determination, self-control and ability, and that one’s achievements are a direct reflection of personal attributes and strengths. Therefore, they interpret their failure as a consequence of being less intelligent or lazy, and don’t recognize that structural influences beyond their control, such as deficits in cultural and economic capital, may have played a role (Billson & Terry, 1981; London, 1978; Reay et al., 2001). It certainly doesn’t help that it is currently out of favour to discuss these largely hidden or unacknowledged constraints and impediments in a world where individuals are increasingly being held accountable for their own attainments and failures (Reay et al., 2001). In fact, many of the more current youth transition studies emphasize the concept of personal agency and choice, and therefore promote the underlying assumption that traditional structural determinants, like socio-economic status, no longer hold the same predictive influence. The evidence, however, continues to indicate otherwise (Lehmann, 2004). Fortunately, when they do succeed in obtaining a post-secondary credential, the labour market outcomes for first generation students are very positive. Although there is no Canadian study that specifically compares the earnings on first generation and continuing generation graduates, there is obvious evidence that those with post-secondary credentials do have much stronger employment outcomes (Drewes, 2010; Looker & Thiessen, 2004).

Overall, then, first generation students have many common attributes that reflect a lack of middle-class capital: they tend to come from lower income homes, are less prepared academically, and have limited knowledge about how to plan for and finance post-secondary studies. As a result, when they do enroll in a college or university, they have overall lower
achievement and higher attrition rates. For these reasons, it may be more appropriate to perceive first generation status as a composite or proximate variable, one that combines the effects of a number of social or cultural factors that work both independently and collaboratively to impede their chances of improving their social and economic status through higher education (Auclair et al., 2008; Educational Policy Institute, 2008).

**Immigrants to Canada and their Children**

**The Immigrant Population in Canada**

Currently in Canada, immigrants and their children form about 35 percent of the population between 16 and 65 years of age, which is the traditional range for employment (Finnie & Mueller, 2009). When the number is further narrowed down to represent only young people between the ages of 15 and 24, the ages when young people are either considering or enrolled in post-secondary studies, about 14 percent of the population is foreign born (Anisef et al., 2008). The population born outside of the country has, in fact, been growing more quickly than the population born within Canada (Anisef et al., 2008).

Those who do immigrate to Canada also tend to settle in the larger cities, especially Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver (Bonikowska, 2007). Overall, about 50 percent of all newcomers settle in Ontario, meaning that the Ontario population is now 28 percent foreign-born (Anisef et al., 2008). The Toronto District School Board (TDSB) reports that up to 26 percent of its students are new arrivals to Canada, making up 7 percent of the total elementary school enrollment, 7 percent of the high school enrollment, and 12 percent of the pre-school enrollment (Dinovitzer et al., 2003). Furthermore, of those in Toronto who are of the traditional
ages of post-secondary enrollment, 48 percent were born outside the country (Anisef et al., 2008).

In recent decades, the majority of immigrants to Canada are also members of minoritized racial groups (Boyd, 2006; Taylor & Krahn, 2005). Prior to the 1970’s, 95 percent of immigrants to Canada came from the United States or from the north or western parts of Europe and were, therefore, generally not “visibly” different from the domestic population (Anisef et al., 2008; Human Resources & Social Development Canada, 2008). However, by 1996, this percentage had declined to less than 22 percent (Anisef et al., 2008; Boyd, 2006). Currently, data from the 2006 Canadian census shows that 58 percent of immigrants now come from East and South Asian countries, and 11 percent come from African countries (Anisef et al., 2008); if the present rate continues, as it is predicted to, by 2017 members of minoritized racial groups will represent a full 20 percent of the population of Canada (Anisef & Pythian, 2005). Overall, immigrants to Canada originated in 220 countries, and speak over 150 languages (Anisef et al., 2008), a noteworthy difference from previous waves of immigrants to the country.

Immigrants to Canada are generally better educated than the domestic population, especially with advanced levels of education, probably due to Canada’s selection policy that favours more highly educated immigrants (Canadian Council on Learning, 2007; Human Resources & Social Development Canada, 2008; Sweet et al., 2008; Krahn & Taylor, 2005). In the 1990’s, 61 percent of all working-age newcomers had post-secondary credentials, compared to 48 percent of those who arrived in the previous two decades (McMullen, 2004). Parents of minoritized racial youth are also more likely to be better educated. A large scale Canadian study of the educational aspirations of fifteen-years-olds found that 35 percent of the
minoritized racial youth in the study came from a home where at least one parent had a
degree, while only 21 percent of non-minoritized youth had a parent with a degree (Taylor &
Krahn, 2005).

**Immigration Theories**

Immigrant parents value education, and most have post-secondary aspirations for their
children (Goyette & Xie, 1999; Sweet et al., 2008; Sweet et al., 2010). In fact, immigrant parents
often report that one of their main reasons for immigrating to Canada was to provide their
children with better educational opportunities that would lead to economic and social stability
(Sweet et al., 2008). They are, therefore, more likely to monitor their children’s educational
progress by setting aside study time, limiting television watching and gaming, and checking
homework, which in turn sends the message to their children that obtaining an education is an
important and valuable activity (Dinovitzer et al., 2003; Sweet et al., 2008). As a result,
compared to their Canadian-born classmates, immigrant children generally have a more
positive view of education and are more motivated and engaged, regardless of their country of
origin or their immigration history (Finnie & Mueller, 2009; Schleicher, 2006).

However, once they arrive in Canada, immigrants face numerous challenges as they
assimilate and adapt to a culture and living conditions that are often very different from their
countries of origin. Immigration assimilation theories include linear assimilation and
segmented assimilation. Linear or straight-line assimilation theorizes that the longer an
immigrant lives in Canada, the more that person will absorb and reflect the behaviours, values,
and socioeconomics of Canadian society, and their children even more so (Anisef et al., 2008;
Boyd, 2006; Kao & Tienda, 2005). Until recently, the linear or straight-line model was assumed
to be the typical or traditional pathway of newcomers to Canada; however, changes in the
ethnicity and linguistic characteristics of the more recent waves of immigrants have brought
into question the applicability of this model because it largely ignores the barriers that many
immigrant groups encounter (Anisef et al., 2008). Many immigrants, especially members of
minoritized racial groups, may actually experience segmented assimilation, which has two
distinct patterns: instead of blending into the dominant or mainstream culture, minoritized
racial immigrants may slip into an underclass of permanent poverty, sometimes referred to as
truncated assimilation, or conversely, they may do well economically but intentionally avoid
assimilating into the dominant society by deliberately retaining their own cultural and ethnic
identity (Aldous, 2006; Anisef et al., 2008; Boyd, 2006).

In terms of the achievements of immigrant youth, the linear or straight-line model
predicts that youth born outside of Canada will have the lowest academic attainment (Kao &
Tienda, 2005). However, this is actually tempered by the age a child arrives in Canada (Anisef et
al., 2008; Dinovitzer et al., 2003; Kao & Tienda, 2005). Young immigrant children and children
born in Canada to immigrant parents, especially those who deliberately retain cultural and
ethnic ties, one of the patterns of segmented assimilation, may be in a better position to
succeed academically because they are not as influenced by the peer culture of their domestic
classmates, and because they can draw on the cultural and social capital of both ethnic and
non-ethnic communities (Dinovitzer et al., 2003; Kao & Tienda, 2005). This is especially true of
younger immigrant children or children born to immigrant parents who speak another language
other than English or French at home, but have had the time to become fluent in the language
used in their schools (Kao & Tienda, 2005). One study that analyzed data from 1994 to 1999
National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY) found that although immigrant children enter the Canadian school system with lower reading, writing, and math abilities than their native-born classmates, by the time they finish elementary school, they are performing at the same level or at a level above their peers (Worswick, 2004).

An additional study that examined the differences between immigrant and non-immigrant children further divided the large sample into three groups—those who were born to two immigrant parents, those who were born to an immigrant and a Canadian-born parent, and those who were born to two Canadian-born parents. The study found that even though immigrant parents were less likely to speak English or French, the children born to two immigrant parents outperformed the children of the other two groups (Sweet et al., 2008). A more recent large-scale study that analyzed data from the Youth in Transition Survey (YITS), also found that the children born in Canada to immigrant parents generally outperform the children of Canadian born parents (Finnie & Mueller, 2009). In terms of pursuing higher education, another study found that only 16 percent of young people born outside the country did not pursue post-secondary studies, in contrast with 25 percent of all young people born in Canada (Butlin, 1999). All of these studies reinforce other findings that show children born to immigrant parents generally achieve more education than any other group, although there are differences along racial lines (Abada et al., 2009; Dinovitzer et al., 2003; Kao & Tienda, 2005; Richmond, 1986). Data from the Canadian Survey of Labour of Income and Labour Dynamics (SLID) confirmed that this was the case, even after controlling for parental education, socioeconomic status, and mother tongue (Hansen & Kucera, 2004). These findings are especially true of the children born to immigrant parents with the lowest levels of education (Bonikowska,
2007), which perhaps reflects the “immigrant optimism” theory and the determination of immigrant parents to provide their children with opportunities that may have been denied to them (Boyd, 2006; Kao & Tienda, 1995).

Although the children born in Canada to immigrant parents generally outperform the children of Canadian born parents, this is not always the case with immigrant children born outside the country. As noted above, the age of arrival in Canada correlates with academic attainment, meaning that the age when a young person arrives in Canada definitely influences his or her educational outcomes, with younger children having more favourable outcomes (Anisef & Pythian, 2005; Anisef et al., 2008; Bonikowska, 2007; Dinovitzer et al., 2003; Kao & Tienda, 2005). Not surprisingly, immigrant youth need a certain amount of time to adapt to a new culture and educational system. Children who arrive before the age of six have the most success, and those who arrive by age fourteen when most young people are starting high school have success rates similar to Canadian-born students; however, those who arrive during their high school years are particularly more susceptible to dropping out (Bonikowska, 2007). Students who immigrate to Canada during the latter part of their high school years when young people are typically making decisions about their future educations not only experience a two-year disadvantage compared to their Canadian-born classmates (Bonikowska, 2007), but they are also less likely to pursue post-secondary studies (Human Resources & Social Development Canada, 2008). One study found that even if these young immigrants eventually enroll in a college program, their average entry age is about 25, compared to 22 for those who were younger when they arrived in Canada (Human Resources & Social Development Canada, 2008).
Regardless of parental education or their age when they arrived in Canada, overall, minoritized racial youth have the highest educational achievements in Canada, and show less evidence of downward mobility or underclass assimilation (Abada et al., 2009; Boyd, 2006). Furthermore, once they finish high school and enroll in a college or university program, they are also more likely to persist (Finnie & Qui, 2008). However, there are some differences among immigrant groups. In their study of the differences in educational attainment among the children of seven minoritized racial groups of Canadian immigrants, Abada et al. (2009) found that the highest levels of achievement occurred in the Asian groups, with 69 percent having obtained a degree; the lowest attainment occurred with Black immigrant youth, followed by Filipino youth.

Members of minoritized racial groups experience additional barriers to upward mobility through education. In the United States, minorities have experienced centuries of discrimination, social exclusion and marginalization, as well as systemic and structural impediments to educational achievement and the social and financial benefits it can provide (Ballantine, 1997; Ogbu, 1991). Boyd (2006) argues that in Canada the underclass or truncated designation for immigrant youth, in particular Black youth, a designation prevalent in the United States, is unlikely to occur because of the differences in the history of the two countries. Boyd (2006) describes the Black population in the United States as predominantly an involuntary one, initially brought into the country through conquest, slavery, or colonization, and as a population that has historically been subjected to both overt and systemic racism. As a result, Black American youth often adopt an oppositional or anti-social attitude, which includes
rejecting education as a means of obtaining socioeconomic advancement, an attitude that is commonly supported and encouraged by their peers (Alford, 1998; Boyd & Grieco, 1998; Boyd, 2006). For these young people, adhering to the social norms and expectations of the white culture is perceived as a personal failing or weakness, a type of capitulation or submission, which leads to a loss of respect from their peers and their family members (Alford, 1998; Boyd, 2006; Carter, 2003).

However, the evidence that does exist suggests that Boyd (2006) may be too optimistic or naïve in her belief that Black youth in Canada are unlikely to develop an oppositional stance. For example, Toronto has a large population of Black youth of Caribbean heritage, who either emigrated with their parents or were born here to immigrant parents. The Black population in the Caribbean was also largely involuntary, with most originally being brought to the islands to work as slaves or as indentured labour on the sugar or fruit plantations. Unlike other immigrant youth, in Canada young people of English-speaking Caribbean heritage are significantly less likely to be enrolled in the academic stream at high school, and are at greater risk for dropping out, regardless of when they arrived. In fact, in the Toronto District School Board (TDSB), 40 percent of Black youth from the Caribbean eventually drop out of high school, which is in stark contrast to minoritized racial immigrant students from East Asia who have only a 10 percent drop-out rate (Anisef et al., 2008). Excluding the United States, youth born in the English-speaking Americas, including the Caribbean, also have lower post-secondary aspiration and participation rates than all other immigrant groups (Finnie & Mueller, 2009), and are the only group of young people who actually have lower educational aspirations than their parents have
for them (Alford, 1998). In fact, only about one-quarter of Black youth who immigrated to Canada eventually obtain a degree (Abada et al., 2009).

**The Canadian Context**

The Canadian context is also probably responsible for some important characteristics of minoritized racial first generation students, especially when compared to their American counterparts. For example, although a number of more recent American studies have expanded on the educational experiences of a variety of immigrant groups (see for example Bankston, 2004; Fuligni & Witkow, 2004; Goyette & Xie, 199; Vernez & Abrahamse, 1996), much of the American research related to minoritized racial status focuses on Hispanic, African-American, and Native American first generation students, who were not only born in the United States, but can claim lengthy ancestral connections and familiarity with North American culture. In contrast, with the exception of the Aboriginal population, most minoritized racial groups in Canada arrived only within the past few decades and most intentionally chose to emigrate for the better living standards, as well as the educational and employment opportunities, that are available in Canada compared to their countries of origin (Anisef et al., 2008; Sweet et al., 2008). The difficulties they experience as immigrants, including discrimination and lower earnings may, then, be tempered by the hope and expectation of achieving those benefits with time and effort (Boyd, 2006; Kao & Tienda, 1995; Sweet, 2005). The children of immigrants to Canada generally do have higher rates of completing postsecondary studies than their domestic peers, especially university education, meaning that these hopes and expectations are being realized (Abada & Lin, 2011; Sweet et al., 2010).
The Influence of Language

Although less frequently examined as a variable in post-secondary studies of first generation students, language issues do influence immigrant student educational attainment at all levels. According to the 2000 Youth in Transition Survey (YITS), almost 66 percent of all minoritized racial students in Canada, both immigrant and native born, had a first language other than English or French (Taylor & Krahn, 2005). Approximately 84 percent of immigrants to Canada between the ages of 15 and 24 speak another language at home and are three times more likely than non-immigrants to be living in poverty (Anisef & Pythian, 2005). Data from the 2006 census also shows that in Toronto, 50 percent of the total population is foreign-born. Of those, 49 percent identify themselves as members of a minoritized racial group, and 70 percent speak a language other than English at home (Anisef et al., 2008). The Toronto District School Board (TDSB) reported that 46 percent of its students in elementary and secondary school spoke English as a second language (Dinovitzer et al., 2003).

Although immigrant youth who speak another language at home initially perform more poorly in the education system, having a mother tongue other than English or French may actually have a long-term positive effect on educational attainment, especially for those who arrive at a young age or are born in Canada to immigrant parents (Dinovitzer et al., 2003; Hansen & Kucera, 2004; McMullen, 2004). An analysis of data from the 2000 Programme for International Assessment (PISA) showed that immigrant children in Canada who spoke a language other than French or English at home were initially disadvantaged in the school system with lower reading, writing and math abilities, but they were able to catch up after living in Canada for about fourteen years (McMullen, 2004), additional evidence that arriving at
a young age is critical to academic success. Another study using data from 1994 to 1999 gathered through the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY) also found that children in immigrant families began school with deficits in core reading, writing, and math skills; however, these deficits largely disappeared by the time they reached high school regardless of their mother tongue (Worswick, 2004). In fact, many of these students outperformed their peers (McMullen, 2004). There is some evidence that indicates bilingual young people have enhanced intellectual or cognitive development. Because they are fluent in at least two languages, they may have greater flexibility in thought, as well as more positive relationships with their parents and more access to social resources in their ethnic communities (Dinovitzer et al., 2003). In fact, a study of English as Second Language (ESL) students in the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) confirmed this impression; the ESL students, which represented 46 percent of the total enrollment for the Board, showed more academic effort, achieved better grades, and had higher post-secondary aspirations than their peers who spoke one of Canada’s official languages at home (Dinovitzer et al., 2003). Overall, those with English or French as their mother tongue tended to obtain lower levels of schooling (Hansen & Kucera, 2004).

**Immigrants and Socio-Economic Status**

Although the immigrant population in Canada is better educated than the native population, and their children academically outperform other groups, in recent years, immigrants have not done as well financially, and they are experiencing higher poverty rates than previous waves of newcomers (Anisef et al., 2008; Bonikowska, 2007; Finnie & Muller, 2009; Krahn & Taylor, 2005). This is especially true of minoritized racial immigrants (Anisef &
In the two most recent decades, immigrants have been subjected to higher rates of unemployment and lower entry-level earnings, while the unemployment and poverty rates for the native born have either remained the same or declined slightly (Anisef et al., 2008). Compared to those who arrived in the 1960’s, the entry-level earnings of immigrants are now 47 percent lower, and more than 35 percent of current immigrants live in low-income homes, a 50 percent increase since 1980 (Anisef & Pythian, 2005). Many of them are also working at jobs they are over-qualified for, perhaps because their foreign-earned credentials are not recognized (Bonikowska, 2007; Human Resources & Social Development Canada, 2008). As a result, many immigrant children are being raised in less than optimum environments. A recent cross-Canada study of 26,000 fifteen-year-olds intended to measure their academic aspirations found that 59 percent of minoritized racial youth were living in lower income households with cumulative earnings of 60,000 dollars or less per year; for Canadian-born, non-minoritized youth, the rate was much lower at 46 percent (Taylor & Krahn, 2005). In Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal, where immigrant families are more likely to settle and living expenses are considerably higher, the poverty rate for minoritized racial youth is actually three times higher than that of non-immigrant youth (Anisef & Pythian, 2005).

The lower earnings of immigrant parents definitely has an impact on their children’s social and educational experiences. In general, children raised in low-income homes have poorer physical and emotional health outcomes, are more prone to abuse and punitive parenting styles, and have higher levels of anti-social behaviour (Anisef & Pythian, 2005). Immigrant children from lower socio-economic backgrounds often attend schools in economically disadvantaged areas where students are more likely to be enrolled in general or
applied high school courses and not the academic program, and where drop-out rates are higher (Anisef et al., 2008; Schleicher, 2006). All of this should put immigrant children at a greater risk for school failure or for not pursuing post-secondary studies (Sweet, 2005). Yet, with the exception of those of English-speaking Caribbean heritage and Filipino heritage (Abada et al., 2009; Krahn & Taylor, 2005), their educational attainments exceed those of non-immigrant youth. This perhaps reflects the high aspirations of their parents, who were willing to risk the uncertainties and the familial upheaval of relocating to another country for the economic and social benefit of their children (Sweet et al., 2008). Immigrant first generation students are also not as “debt averse” as their domestic peers, and are more willing to take out loans to finance their educations (Palameta & Voyer, 2010). As well, many tightly knit ethnic communities may engage in “closure,” where parents develop strong social networks to support one another in transmitting shared values and obligations, including the propensity for higher education (Abada et al., 2009; Coleman, 1988; Coleman, 1990).

Conclusion

The focus of this study is first generation college students, those who have parents with no more than a high school education. Specifically, this study is intended to compare the intentions, the academic confidence, the behaviours and values, and the educational attainments of first generation students who are themselves immigrants or the children of immigrants to those who are not. Although immigrants to Canada tend to have higher education because of Canada’s selective immigration policy, a significant number do not. In fact, almost 40 percent of immigrant parents have no education beyond high school (McMullen, 2004).
As well, much of the research on first generation status assumes all young people who are the first in their families to seek a college or university education share similar characteristics, including pre-college attributes, limited knowledge about and planning for post-secondary studies, lower parental and peer support for post-secondary aspirations, similar tendencies in choosing a post-secondary institution and program of study, and lastly, post-secondary academic behaviours and attainments. Yet, many first generation students in Canada are immigrants or the children of immigrants, who have very different familial and educational experiences, academic behaviours, and post-secondary aspirations, which are all influenced by their socio-economic status, the age they arrived in Canada, and the language they speak at home.

Most post-secondary institutions in Canada recognize that first-generation students are at higher academic risk and have implemented a variety of student support programs, and even entire courses, intended to increase both their participation in higher education and their success in achieving a credential. However, most of these programs are based on long-standing American initiatives, largely because there is a robust body of American research on first generation students and far less Canadian research. In fact, much of what we think we “know” in Canada about first generation students is actually informed by American data, without full recognition of important differences that may simply be due to the Canadian context. In short, the current strategies that Canadian post-secondary institutions use for integrating their first generation population may not recognize two important distinctions: most of these programs are based on American data and initiatives that are arguably less relevant in Canada, and first generation students do not form a homogenous group that would uniformly benefit from the
same programs or initiatives. In fact, more focused programs that address these differences
may improve academic success rates for all first generation students.
CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As more and more domestic and immigrant first generation students enter our colleges and universities, it becomes increasingly important to identify the more finely nuanced cultural perspectives and ingrained dispositions that can either contribute to or impede their academic success. In other words, we need to look beneath superficial, all-encompassing statements of deficit, limitation and prognostication, in order to reveal more meaningful distinctions between domestic and immigrant first generation students. One means of exposure is by examining these differences through the lens of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of social reproduction, especially his concept of *habitus* – the ingrained values, beliefs, attitudes, and inclinations that unconsciously exert their power over our agency.

**Bourdieu’s Theory**

Like his predecessor and one of the founding fathers of sociology, Emile Durkheim, Bourdieu was interested in the means by which societies reproduced class hierarchies. However, unlike Durkheim who saw social reproduction as the basis for an orderly, functioning society (Wexler, 2009), Bourdieu was curious to understand why people simply accept their positions in the hierarchy, even when it does them great harm, without being forced to do so through legalized restrictions or laws. As Bourdieu states, “I can say that all my thinking started from this point: how can behaviour be regulated without being the product of obedience to rules” (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 65). Bourdieu, therefore, looked at social inequity from the perspective of explaining how and why it continues to reproduce from one generation to the next with the apparent compliance or acquiescence of those most disadvantaged by it. As a sociologist, he felt his responsibility was to peel away the layers to show how society functions,
to reveal what is opaque to us because it is so familiar, and make “public or conscious and problematic of that which is unconscious, taken-for-granted” (Branson & Miller, 1991, p. 37). Bourdieu’s objective was to reveal, to expose and to demystify how cultural resources, processes, and even social institutions trap individuals and groups in self-perpetuating structured hierarchies of domination that they then accept as natural or normal (Swartz, 1997). As Branson and Miller (1991) point out, Bourdieu’s intent was to undermine the very process of social reproduction, to “subvert the hegemonic domination of our consciousness and action by ideological principles which are taken for granted as ‘common sense’ “(p. 38).

Needless to say, Bourdieu’s social theorizing has been described as blatantly political because his objective was the transformation of society by exposing the unquestioned ideology and processes at the root of our beliefs and our actions (Swartz, 1997). Unlike Karl Marx, however, Bourdieu did not solely focus on the economic determinants of class, nor did he anticipate a class war where those most disadvantaged by the hierarchy and the unequal distribution of wealth and advantage would inevitably rise up and defeat their oppressors and establish a classless society (Wexler, 2009). Instead, Bourdieu believed that social change was a slow, awkward process characterized by intermittent gains and setbacks and predisposed to inertia (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977), yet he also believed that social conditions could change, but only if the concealed dimensions of power and power relations were unveiled (Swartz, 1997).

In his investigation of the reproduction of social stratification, Bourdieu grounded his theory in studies that focused on the French educational system, and on the development of cultural differentiation, such as artistic taste (Swartz, 1997). Bourdieu believed that, as an
institution beyond the parameters of the family, the educational system played the most crucial and the most injurious role in the reproduction of class:

Indeed, among all the solutions put forth throughout history to the problem of the transmission of power and privileges, there surely does not exist one that is better concealed ... than that solution which the educational system provides by contributing to the reproduction of the structure of class relations and by concealing, by an apparently neutral attitude, the fact that is fills this function (Bourdieu, 1977a, p. 488).

According to Bourdieu’s analysis, the educational system presents itself as a “neutral” body, an egalitarian system where individual merits or abilities are recognized and rewarded, independent of social class. In fact, the structure of the system is based entirely on the presumption that all participants share the same cultural and linguistic competencies of the dominant class. The educational system does not provide these competencies, but implicitly demands and rewards that “which can only be produced by family upbringing when it transmits the dominant culture” (Bourdieu, 1977a, p. 494). In other words, class structures are not externally imposed, but are reproduced internally within families through learned cultural dispositions or *habitus* —the collected values, attitudes, and behaviours— that correlate with a family’s position on the social hierarchy. Those who are of working-class origins and consequently lack the valued dispositions of the dominant culture are forever trapped by their cultural impoverishment and their lack of “capital” (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). It is this process of the transmission of “capital” that lies at the heart of Bourdieu’s theory.
Bourdieu theorized that the inequities of social stratification were reproduced through the process of cultural reproduction. All social relations or institutionalized places of interaction are, in fact, metaphorical “battlegrounds,” where individuals and groups constantly compete or struggle to possess, maintain or improve their positions in the social hierarchy. Bourdieu described the resources employed in this struggle as “capital,” which not only forms the basis for all forms of social power, but is also generally transferred from one generation to the next. Although the family is the primary locale for the transference of capital, other institutions, like education, also serve to reinforce and legitimize its transference (Bourdieu, 1986).

Bourdieu identified four types of capital—economic, social, cultural, and symbolic—that we use as resources when competing in a social space or field, a competition intended to maintain or increase that capital, and therefore, our power. Economic capital refers to our access to money or property, while social capital refers to our social connections, the people we know or the organizations we belong to that can help us accrue additional capital. The third type of capital, cultural capital, is conceptually more complex, incorporating an extensive range of tangible resources, such as access to books, computer equipment, and tutors that all require a financial expenditure, as well as intangible or “embodied” resources, such as behaviours, attitudes, preferences, expectations, skills, communication style, and knowledge (Bourdieu, 1986). The preferred cultural capital is determined by the dominant class in a society. Those who do not have access to dominant cultural capital, and have not internalized the *habitus* it generates, consequently lack a “natural” familiarity or affinity with those of the dominant class, and will experience cultural exclusion when interacting in settings that demand and reward the
preferred cultural capital. Lastly, symbolic capital refers to the process of having our capital “legitimized” within a field or social space, when others accept or internalize our demand for recognition and power within that space (Bourdieu, 1986). In society generally, the dominant classes have their cultural capital legitimized, which is then imposed on the dominated classes, a process Bourdieu refers to as “symbolic violence” (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977, p. 5).

Nowhere is this imposition of “symbolic violence” on the lower classes more evident than in the educational system, where all students are assumed to share the same habitus, that of the dominant class, and are evaluated and judged accordingly, quite often to their detriment (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). Recognizing the central role of habitus in educational settings is, therefore, at the heart of understanding how the educational system is complicit in the reproduction of social hierarchies.

**Habitus**

When an individual enters a new social space like a college or university, which Bourdieu described as a “field,” that individual’s actions are largely determined by his or her habitus, an embodied set of behaviours and values, of entitlement and confidence, that can either facilitate or hinder his or her agency in that space. Bourdieu’s conceptualized habitus as the individual’s perception of himself or herself in society and as how that perception in turn affects that person’s behaviour or interaction within society. Bourdieu defined habitus as an internalized system of lasting, transposable dispositions, formed early in life through familial socialization that functions at every moment to influence our perceptions, aspirations, actions and reactions. It is “a system of internalized structures, schemes of perceptions, conception, and action common to all members of the same group or class” (Bourdieu, 1977b, p. 86). Children do not
inherit their class *habitus* consciously or intentionally; it is transmitted from parent to child subjectively through “a whole system of techniques ... charged with a host of social meanings and values” (Bourdieu, 1977b, p. 87). These “techniques” include family practices and rituals, the acquisition of a style of communication, as well as personal and familial experiences. Even the gestures, postures, tones of voice, and facial expressions that children reflexively assimilate play a role in social differentiation (Bourdieu, 1977b). Overall, however, it is our *habitus* that generates the perceptions and behaviours that correspond to our class origins and in turn inhibit us from transcending those origins. In other words, we learn through socialization our position in the social hierarchy, as well as the dispositions that will ensure that we remain in that position.

Bourdieu also believed that *habitus* enables us to internalize, to reconcile, to connect our social location or position with our way of being, usually without intentional awareness. Through *habitus*, we develop our sense of entitlement, our expectations of success in a social space or field, and live accordingly. Our *habitus* functions to mediate or assess individual practices or interests, more often on an unconscious or partly-conscious level. It is the operation of our *habitus* that estimates our likely chances of success in a social location, like a college or university, by aligning our interests with what we perceive subjectively to be “sensible” and “probable” for someone of our class (Bourdieu, 1977b, p. 79). For instance, if a student is raised in a home where at least one parent has a college or university education, then that student is more likely to have internalized the belief that attending a post-secondary institution is a reasonable expectation, and is more likely in possession of the *habitus* of the dominant culture. Because the educational system is entrenched in dominant cultural
dispositions, when that student begins attending college or university, he or she is more likely to feel a sense of belonging, of confidence, of entitlement. That student expects to be successful and is well-equipped to interact and compete. On the other hand, a first generation student who does not have a parent with a post-secondary education and does not have the same *habitus* of the dominant culture is more likely to feel uncertain or hesitant about attending college or university. Once there, that student may feel alienated and alone, doubtful of his or her ability to succeed, unfamiliar with the “rules” of the field, and less likely to negotiate or conform to the unwritten expectations or assumptions. In fact, many first generation students do report feeling an uncomfortable sense of being out-of-place when they first enter the post-secondary environment, especially four-year institutions, which can have a damaging effect on their academic persistence (Collier & Morgan, 2008; Corea, 2009; Dumais & Ward, 2010; Housel, 2012; Lara, 1992; Lehmann, 2007, 2009a; London, 1992; Stieha, 2010; Wilson, T., 2012).

**Criticisms of Bourdieu’s Theory**

Bourdieu’s theory has, of course, not been without its detractors. Bourdieu did not provide extensive lists of variables to “operationalize” the concept of cultural capital, such as the types of activities, experiences or even possessions that would be characteristic of the dominant class (Swartz, 1997). In fact, Bourdieu originally conceived cultural capital as socialization into and preference for highbrow cultural activities, such interest and familiarity with art, classical music, literature and drama (DiMaggio & Ostrower, 1990; Kalmijn & Kraaykamp, 1996; Lareau & Weininger, 2003), and one of the major criticisms of Bourdieu’s
theory is the lack of consensus around how interest and familiarity in highbrow culture actually confers social advantage (Collier & Morgan, 2008; Dumais, 2002; Lareau & Weininger, 2003). As well, unlike Bourdieu’s mid twentieth-century France, North American society does not have a strong single dominant culture, but is made up of a multiplicity of cultures that may place different value on interest and participation in the arts. For example, Di Maggio and Ostrower (1990) specifically looked at the difference in high culture participation by Black and White Americans. Their study showed that Black Americans had lower participation when compared to White Americans, even when controlling for educational level and socio-economic status, and were more likely to participate in historically Afro-American art forms. In fact, participation in the arts was relatively low and even declining in both groups, indicating that patterns of artistic taste and preference may play a very modest role in reflecting social advantage in a heterogeneous society, or that a shift has occurred in how the arts are perceived in a neoliberal context.

Therefore, in a differentiated society, Bourdieu’s conception of cultural capital may not be as useful for examining the processes though which the acquisition of cultural capital leads to social stratification and reproduction (Dumais & Ward, 2010; Dumais, 2002; Lareau & Weininger, 2003; Swartz, 1997). For these reasons, Lareau and Weininger (2003) have argued that cultural capital should be perceived as the strategic use of skills and knowledge when dealing with institutionalized standards of evaluation and access. In other words, in an educational setting, cultural capital may be reflected in “role mastery,” in how comfortable and competent a student is when dealing with institutional “gatekeepers,” such as teachers and administrators. Swartz (1997) also argues in favour of expanding the definition to include
“verbal facility, general cultural awareness, aesthetic preferences, information about the school system, and educational credentials” (p. 74). From this perspective, family background and resources do confer advantages for those in the dominant group, more so than exposure to highbrow culture or the “beaux arts” (Collier & Morgan, 2008; Dumais, 2002; Dumais & Ward, 2010). Although the North American context is very different from Bourdieu’s France, students here do develop a set of attitudes, beliefs, behaviours and intentions that can either contribute to or impede academic success, and educational achievement remains a key component in social stratification and reproduction (Swartz, 1997).

Overall, if one interprets Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital as a “meta” concept, a concept intended to transcend timelines, societies, and places, then expanding the definition to include broader knowledge and competencies is quite appropriate. After all, the indicators of cultural capital change according to time and place as status markers shift (Aschaffenburg & Mass, 1997). Therefore one strength of Bourdieu’s theory rests precisely in its ability to be relevant over culture and time, to provide a durable, rather stable means of exposing underlying social forces, such as cultural capital and habitus, which operate across cultures and time periods to maintain social stratification, and not just in mid twentieth-century France.

Bourdieu has also been criticized for emphasizing only one cultural capital, that of the dominant group, which in his era was generally made up of white, middle-class and upper-class males. Other groups in society most definitely do have their own cultural capital —their shared attitudes or beliefs, means of communicating, expectations, skills, and knowledge— but it is not “legitimized,” not a provider of power and advantage in fields like post-secondary education, which bestow the credentials that can lead to economic and social success (Carter,
The unfortunate truth remains that it is still the dominant culture that sets the demarcations of social stratification. It may clearly be a social evolutionary failing that the capital and *habitus* of other groups are not valued equally, but it is the reality. Nevertheless, if we are to overcome its grip on society, then it is best we know what we are dealing with so that we can learn to recognize and acknowledge other ways of “knowing” and “being.”

More importantly, Bourdieu has also been criticized for ignoring the role of personal agency, the ability of the individual to use his or her own personality and power to subjugate the control that social stratification exerts over the individual. Bourdieu’s theory, however, is more concerned with how society reproduces social inequity from generation to generation, with what he refers to as the “statistical regularity” of the behaviours and attainments of groups or classes of people, such as employment rates, income, and access to higher education (Bourdieu, 1977b, p. 77). Although Bourdieu did not specifically focus on the process of social change (Swartz, 1997), he did believe that becoming aware of how inequitable social reproduction occurs “points to the social conditions under which these hierarchies can be challenged, transformed, nay overturned” (Wacquant, 2006, p.3). Bourdieu’s intent was to elucidate, to expose how, through unquestioned acquiescence and assumed inevitability, social institutions, like schools, have lulled classes and groups into accepting the structured hierarchies of domination in society (Swartz, 1997). He was, therefore, less concerned with individuals and more concerned with groups or classes.

That said, however, Bourdieu did not ignore the role of personal agency in individual choices and behaviours. The concept of *habitus*, with its inherent feeling of determinism, initially seems a rather bleak concept in terms of the potential for personal and even social
change (Swartz, 1997). Yet, because it is not possible for all members of the same social class to have had exactly the same socializing experiences and, therefore, the same habitus, Bourdieu did acknowledge that “organic individuality ... can never entirely be removed from sociological discourse” (Bourdieu, 1877b, p. 86). Human action is not just a pre-programmed, mechanical or structural response to external conditions, nor is it always rational, conscious, and unencumbered by past experience. Rather, habitus has an innovative capacity as it mediates or shapes individual responses, or “strategies,” to external circumstances. Our actions always incorporate ambiguities or uncertainties, both conscious and unconscious, as we react dispositionally to the possibilities and limitations inherent within a social space. As Swartz states, “As grammar organizes speech, the structures of habitus can generate an infinity of possible practices” (1997, p. 102). These “possible practices,” however, usually align with the collective expectations or internalized possibilities of a particular class. As Bourdieu states, “each individual system of dispositions may be seen as a structural variant of all the other group or class habitus” (1977b, p. 86). In other words, personal agency is most definitely possible, but it generally falls within the confines of social stratification, which is the main reason we find “statistical regularity” in the analysis of class-based behaviour.

The Relationship of Bourdieu's Concept of Habitus to the Study of Immigrant and Domestic First Generation Students

Bourdieu’s theory of social reproduction, especially the concepts of acquired cultural capital and habitus, is relevant to the study of immigrant versus domestic first generation students for three reasons. First, Bourdieu recognized that differential capital leads directly to differential educational outcomes. In fact, schools actually exacerbate inequities in cultural
capital by implicitly favouring those with the cultural capital and *habitus* of the dominant class and penalizing those without. Teachers can identify more readily with students who share their cultural capital and *habitus*, and respond by rewarding these students with more attention and positive evaluations (Bourdieu, 1977a; Dumais & Ward, 2010). As a result, those not in possession of the capital of the dominant class generally fall behind, even in their early years (Aschaffenburg & Mass, 1997). Children learn very quickly that the school is a seminal location, or field, for the recognition and accumulation of status and privilege (Swartz, 1997). Lower income parents, especially those who have only a high school education or less, have different behavioural expectations for their children. They expect them to behave in class, to follow the rules, to not question the teacher or any other person in a position of authority, and to do as they are told—behaviours that suit lower class or working class employment. Lower income parents also tend to interact very infrequently with the school, are less able to provide financial support for field trips or tutoring, and have lower post-secondary aspirations for their children, if any at all (Ballantine, 1997). It’s not surprising, then, that a student raised in that environment would not develop the appropriate ingrained *habitus* for successful integration into college or university, and would lack in the feelings of entitlement and confidence that correlate with success.

However, the *habitus* typical of first generation students may not be the same as for immigrant first generation students. Because immigrant parents and their children have higher expectations for post-secondary education, even those parents who have no post-secondary education themselves (Bankston, 2004; Fuligni & Witkow, 2004; Goyette & Xie, 1999; Kao & Tienda, 1995; Vernez & Abrahamse, 1996; Wells, 2010), they may intentionally engage in
transmitting these intentions, along with the *habitus* to support these intentions (Bankston, 2004; Goyette & Xie, 1999; Lehmann, 2009b; Wells, 2010). In fact, there is evidence that those who immigrated to Canada, including those with limited education, may have done so primarily to improve their children’s opportunities for social advancement through education and may, therefore, have transmitted a very different set of dispositions to their children (Anisef, et al. 2008; Finnie & Mueller, 2009; Sweet, 2005).

Yet, due to the shift in the economy of this country and the emphasis on getting a college or university education for any decent employment prospects, today first generation students, even those with the ingrained disposition or *habitus* in favour of post-secondary education, may find themselves enrolled in an post-secondary institution without the cultural capital or knowledge about how to choose a program or institution appropriately, or even how the educational system works (Collier & Morgan, 2008; Dumais & Ward, 2010; Engel, Bermeo, & O’Brien, 2006; Hudley et al., 2009; Sullivan, 2002; Wilson et al., 2012). In fact, the impact of cultural capital is probably the most important factor in the decision to enter post-secondary education after high school (Aschaffenburg & Mass, 1997; Dumais & Ward, 2010). Whether the same knowledge gaps characteristic of lower-income Canadian-born parents and their children also apply to immigrant parents and their children is as yet not clear. Although Bourdieu’s theory was firmly situated in the social and educational context of mid-twentieth century France, it can be readily transposed to any other society and culture, such as Canada’s, where social hierarchies do exist and also reproduce themselves. However, what may be recognized as valued indicators of cultural capital here may be very different elsewhere, and produce a *habitus* at distinct odds to the *habitus* of those students who are most successful at Canada’s
colleges and universities. For example, in the dominant culture of North America, individualism and personal achievement are generally admired, meaning that someone raised within this dominant culture will have this ingrained cultural capital functioning as a resource for academic success. In contrast, in some cultures, like the Hispanic and some Aboriginal cultures, individualism is perceived as a weakness, an unacceptable self-centeredness that undermines, even subverts, the collective needs of the family or group (Rendon, 1994; Stein, 1992), and does not acknowledge the primacy of connections to family and community (Hare & Pidgeon, 2011). For a student from a culture like this, the emphasis on individualism and personal achievement is not ingrained, and therefore can present a serious impediment to academic integration and success. This has important implications for a study of immigrant versus domestic first generation students. Not only must the cultural capital and \textit{habitus} of students who are not members of the dominant culture be considered, but also the cultural capital and \textit{habitus} of students from foreign cultures.

Thirdly, the majority of current North American research on first generation students is predicated on one of two well-known models: Tinto’s (1993) social and academic integration model, or Astin’s (1993) Input-Experience-Output (I-E-O) model. Both of these models recognize that the diverse characteristics, resources and abilities that a student brings to a college or university are important to his or her persistence and eventual graduation; however, the models do diverge once the student has enrolled and is attending. Tinto’s model emphasizes first-year integration in both the social sphere and the intellectual sphere of the institution as requisites for success. In other words, the more students perceive themselves as socially congruent with an institution and their peers, as well as intellectually with the demands
of their programs of study, the likelier they are to persist. Astin also addresses the “input variables” of post-secondary students, but his focus then shifts to the cognitive and affective changes that occur in post-secondary environments through the types of experiences that the students encounter. It must be noted, however, that both theorists generally focused on traditional students enrolled in four-year baccalaureate programs who are usually living on campus, so the models in their totality may not align well with the characteristics and abilities of non-traditional students, like first generation students, commuter students, older students, or part-time students. In fact, Astin didn’t include any two-year college students in his studies because he believed too many changes had been occurring in these institutions, yet more first generation students enroll at two-year colleges compared to four-year institutions (Auclair et al., 2008; Choy, 2001; de Broucker, 2005; Dumais & Ward, 2010; Engle & Tinto, 2008; London, 1978; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Paulson & St. John, 2002; Thayer, 2000).

As well, the theorists who have used Tinto’s and Astin’s models to study first-generation students tend to focus on the more utilitarian aspects of students’ backgrounds, their SAT scores or high school grades, their socio-economic status, their race or ethnicity, the types of post-secondary institutions they have selected, the programs they have enrolled in, their financial issues and the adequacy of student aid, and their persistence and graduation rates. Some of these studies do include factors that could potentially be described as reflecting the ingrained dispositions of class *habitus*, such as academic aspirations, confidence levels, feelings of belonging and validation, and support from family and friends. However, a more focused assessment that compares the *habitus* of immigrant and domestic first generation students has the potential to reveal the specific factors that impede or contribute to their academic success.
Issues of grades, money, and race will always be important and always demand a voice in post-secondary research. However, as more and more immigrant and domestic first generation students enter Canada’s colleges and universities, it is equally important to recognize both the similarities and the differences in *habitus* between the groups that create unique “statistical regularities.” Only then can our colleges and universities adjust or introduce more inclusive measures intended to benefit all students.
CHAPTER 4: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The concepts that will be measured in this study are all constructs that relate to *habitus*, to the embodied personal dispositions, values, and beliefs that inexorably influence a young person’s post-secondary decisions and achievements. These concepts include educational aspirations, in other words the amount and type of education that a young person would ideally like to achieve compared to his or her actual intentions; the confidence or expectation of academic success that a student brings to his or her post-secondary experience; and the social and academic integration into a post-secondary institution that contributes to that success.

**Aspirations and Intentions**

The relationship between educational aspirations and achievement has been well documented in the literature, with students possessing high post-secondary aspirations being more likely to pursue their goals (Aldous, 2006; Butlin, 1999; Canadian Council on Learning, 2007). There is, however, a difference between an *aspiration*, which is the ideal level of education, and an *intention*, which is influenced by real-life constraints shaped by one’s *habitus*, such as economic and cultural capital (Looker & Thiessen, 2004). Intentions are not formed at one moment in time, but are shaped throughout childhood and young adulthood in response to cultural and social factors (Bourdieu, 1986; Swartz, 1997). Although many young people may aspire to an undergraduate or even a graduate degree, in reality they may expect to achieve much less and plan accordingly. Both families and the larger society as a whole transmit “messages” that eventually become internalized. These messages dictate to young
people what they should perceive as reasonable educational expectations for their social class and their intellectual or academic abilities, and what types of occupations they should consider (Bourdieu, 1977a; Bourdieu & Passerson, 1977; Reay et al., 2001). Not surprisingly, students from lower income families, such as most first generation students, eventually form lower intentions and expectations for themselves, one of the “hidden injuries of class” that contribute to reproducing social stratification (Sennett & Cobb, 1972).

Research from the United States indicates that first generation American students do have lower post-secondary intentions than their continuing generation peers, especially in terms of degree studies, with more of them reporting that a two-year diploma is their ultimate goal (Hahs-Vaughn, 2004; Inman & Mayes, 1999; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Somers et al., 2004; Pascarella et al., 2004). In contrast, young people in Canada generally appear to have higher post-secondary educational plans, regardless of their parents’ educational achievements. Data from the first cycle of the Youth in Transition Survey (YITS) indicated that 90 percent of Canadian fifteen-year olds planned on pursuing some form of post-secondary education, with the majority specifying degree studies (Looker & Thiessen, 2004). An additional study that examined the educational intentions of Canadian students enrolled in two-year college programs also found that two thirds of the students fully expected to eventually complete a degree (Ekos Inc, 2006). These studies, however, included all students, so there may potentially be some differences if generational status was considered.

These high post-secondary intentions of Canadian youth are fully supported by their parents. Most Canadian parents want their children to eventually pursue degree studies, even
those in the lower income quartiles; in fact, 80 percent of Canadian parents with household incomes below 30,000 dollars want a university education for their children, a percentage that rises to 95 percent for those with household incomes above 80,000 dollars (de Broucker, 2005). Parental support for high academic intentions is even more pronounced in the immigrant population in Canada (Dinovitzer et al., 2003; Finnie & Mueller, 2009; Sweet, 2005). Data from the 2002 Survey of Approaches to Educational Planning found that when compared to Canadian-born parents, immigrant parents more closely monitored their children’s educations, and more actively promoted high educational expectations. The study further showed that in families where both parents were foreign-born, a greater percentage expected their children to attend university compared to families with Canadian-born parents (Sweet et al., 2008). An additional study that focused on immigrant students in the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) found that the English as a Second Language students had the highest educational aspirations and occupational achievements (Dinovitzer et al., 2003). Immigrant students from minoritized racial groups are also more likely to aspire to a degree when compared to their Canadian-born, non-minoritized peers (Taylor & Krahn, 2005). These findings are, perhaps, not surprising as many immigrant parents specifically come to Canada to offer their children a better life (Anisef et al., 2008), and believe that education is the foundation for social and occupational mobility (Sweet, 2005).

Overall, young people’s post-secondary intentions tend to mirror their parents’, and those with parents who have degree-level intentions for them are more likely to attend university (Finnie & Mueller, 2009). These plans for post-secondary education demonstrate that young people and their parents have embraced the message that education is important.
for their future careers, and that they recognize the relationship between a post-secondary credential and a well-paying job (Berger & Motte, 2007; McElroy, 2008; Looker & Thiessen, 2004). Although Canadian youth may initially aspire to high levels of post-secondary education during high school, these aspirations tend to decline as they approach graduation and factors such as financial limitations, grades, or a lack of a career or educational focus take hold (Berger & Motte, 2007). Consequently, many of those fifteen-year-old high school students who originally aspired to a degree may find themselves adjusting their post-secondary plans. As well, in the greater Toronto area, where the youth population is expected to increase by at least another 10 percent by 2018, the universities are at capacity and in future may not be able to offer admission to all qualified applicants (Berger, 2008). Because they typically come from lower income homes, especially if their parents are immigrants, first generation students often cannot afford the expense of moving away from home in order to enrol at a university and may seek out other options, such as a local college program. Tuition fees at a college are also about half that of university fees, so many first generation students from lower income homes who originally aspired to a degree may find themselves enrolled in a more affordable diploma program. In fact, data from the Canadian Post-Secondary Financial Survey found that 25 percent of all college students cited the cost of degree studies, not their eligibility, as the reason why they didn’t enroll at a university (Ekos Inc, 2006).

Overall, then, compared to their American counterparts, prior research has shown that Canadian students report high academic aspirations with most intending to eventually pursue degree-level studies; moreover, their parents share this aspiration, especially immigrant parents. However, most Canadian studies on educational aspirations do not distinguish
between first and continuing generation students where there may be significant differences.
What also remains unknown is whether first generation students entering college programs
have adjusted their expectations of pursuing degree-level credentials, and whether there are
differences based on the immigration status of the students.

**Academic Confidence**

In both the United States and Canada, first generation students entering four-year
degree programs often report feeling less confident about their academic competence than
their continuing generation peers. They also frequently find their confidence shaken as they
realize that they are not as prepared, both academically and psychologically, for post-secondary
studies as their continuing generation classmates who attended better high schools or took
more demanding courses (Cushman, 2007; Engle, 2007; Inman & Mayes, 1999; Tomokowicz &
Bushnik, 2003; Lehmann, 2004, 2007). First generation students also report limited self-efficacy
and lower self-esteem when compared to their peers, and are more nervous about the
workload and less certain that they have made the right choice (Inman & Mayes, 1999; Lee et
al., 2004). These feelings of inadequacy are exacerbated by the fact that first generation
students have less knowledge about the post-secondary system (Educational Policy Institute,
2008; Ekos Inc, 2009; Usher, 2005; York-Anderson & Bowman, 1991) and have received less
encouragement and support from their families and their high school teachers (Engle, 2007).
First generation students are, therefore, more likely to view enrolling in university as a risky,
uncertain step, and are more prone to self-doubt about their academic competence, their
ability to handle the workload, and their overall decision to pursue a degree (Lehmann, 2004,
2007).
In contrast, this academic self-doubt is not as pronounced for first generation students entering two-year colleges (Cushman, 2007). Perhaps because they are generally still living at home, participating in family activities, and socializing with the same friends, a community college may feel more like an extension of high school rather than an abrupt, life altering event (Lara, 1992; London, 1989). In a large-scale Canadian study that examined the post-secondary academic confidence of fifteen year olds, 89 percent of the high school students reported that they have the ability to do well in a community college (Looker & Thiessen, 2004). Although many secondary students’ educational intentions may decline as they approach high school graduation, this high level of confidence in their ability to do well in a college program does not. When the Ontario College Application Service surveyed its applicants, almost 90 percent of the respondents reported feeling confident that they will do well in their program of choice (Acumen Research, 2004). However, the study included all applicants and did not distinguish between first and continuing generation students, where differences in confidence levels may occur.

Another cross-Canada survey that measured the educational confidence of first-year college entrants found that 93 percent of the students agreed that they have the ability to succeed in college, 86 percent said that they were well prepared to be successful students, and 83 percent believed they were capable of achieving a B+ average or higher (Human Resources & Social Development Canada, 2007). These are very positive findings, especially since a young person’s confidence in his or her ability to succeed is one of the strongest predictors for persistence and academic achievement (Looker & Thiessen, 2004). However, the survey was conducted at the beginning of the first semester when students are still in the “honeymoon”
period of their adjustment to college, and have not yet received any grades or feedback that may dampen their confidence levels (Clark, 1960; Human Resources & Social Development Canada, 2007). As well, high school students are often told by their teachers that college is “easier” than university, again bolstering their confidence levels. As an instructor and then a coordinator in the college system, I regularly spoke with students who were "surprised" by the academic demands of their college courses since they had been led to believe that succeeding in a college program would be relatively easy. In fact, this belief has become so pervasive that in March, 2015, the college where this study occurred actually partnered with four area school boards in order to bring in high school teachers for a full day of sessions that focus on both the types of programming that colleges offer and the levels of academic performance required to be successful in those programs.

Overall, then, young people entering college programs in Canada have very high levels of confidence and optimism in their ability to succeed academically. What remains unknown, however, is whether there are differences in the confidence levels of first generation students compared to their continuing generation peers, and whether these high levels of confidence are sustained as they progress in their programs. To date, there have been no Canadian studies that compare the initial optimism and confidence of first generation students with their actual retention and attainments, nor have any studies focused on any differences among the first generation students based on their immigration status.
Social and Academic Integration

Once a student has accepted an offer of admission and enrolls in a college or university, he or she faces the challenge of becoming socially and academically integrated into the institution. According to Tinto (1993), the process of becoming integrated into the social and academic life of a post-secondary institution involves three stages: separation, transition, and incorporation. The transition from high school to a college or university is, therefore, not a simple process, but one that is shaped by numerous interdependent factors, including the student’s socio-economic background, family structure, educational intentions, parental education, and peer interactions, which all interact to have an impact on that student’s social and academic integration (Terenzini et al., 1994). Successful integration is characterized by a sense of fitting in, of belonging and feeling connected to others, and by a sense of self-worth and academic competence. Feeling socially and academically congruent with others is essential to a young person’s psychological adjustment to higher education, which in turn leads to greater self-reliance and higher academic achievement (Pittman & Richmond, 2007). For continuing generation students, the social and academic transition to higher education is less problematic and more likely to be viewed as a rite of passage, a traditional and expected step to adulthood and independence that is fully supported by their families and peers (Terenzini et al., 1994). For first generation students, however, the transition is a disjunction, a breaking away from family tradition, and as a consequence is more intimidating and risky, and the campus environment perceived as less welcoming and accommodating (Lehmann, 2004, 2007; Somers et al., 2004; Terenzini et al., 1994).
First generation students, therefore, more frequently report emotional stress and a sense of being out of place when compared to their continuing generation peers (Pittman & Richmond, 2007; Thayer, 2000). Students of working class origins, the dominant socio-economic status of most first generation students, often experience “fundamental discontinuities” between their life histories and values and those of their middle class peers (Lehmann, 2007, p. 106). The feeling of being out of place is particularly acute for those students enrolled at more selective or prestigious post-secondary institutions. American research that focuses on first generation students who attend elite private residential four-year colleges consistently finds that the first generation students have less of the social and academic integration that correlates with success, and they are more likely to feel intimidated by their more confident continuing generation peers who have had better academic preparation for post-secondary studies and hold different beliefs and priorities (Metzner & Bean, 1987; Pike & Kuh, 2005). A study of first generation students at a Canadian university also found that they saw themselves as “cultural outsiders” and more frequently felt academically inadequate and less competent than their continuing generation counterparts (Lehmann, 2007, p. 96). First generation students living on campus are even more affected as they are daily reminded in their encounters with their continuing generation peers of their lower social origins and inadequate cultural capital (Pike & Kuh, 2005). Without the funds to buy items, such as expensive electronic devices, or participate in the same activities as their more affluent peers, first generation students often feel deficient, powerless, and even resentful (Aries & Seider, 2005; Bergerson, 2007; Lehmann, 2007).
It’s not surprising, then, that first generation students are more likely to drop out, or tend to select post-secondary institutions where they feel they will be accepted and where they will find others who share their socio economic origins. For example, in the United Kingdom, first generation students are more likely to enroll in the newer “low risk” universities with their ethnic and socio-economic mix, a process that Reay et al. (2001) refer to as “psychological self-exclusion” from the established, more elite universities with their middle class, white student populations (p. 864). Although the Canadian post-secondary system is not as stratified as the British or American systems, Lehmann (2007) also found that Canadian first generation students report feeling more comfortable and accepted at community colleges, or at institutions where the student population is more racially and economically diverse. In Lehmann’s qualitative study of students who dropped out of an established, middle-class university, the first generation students reported that they felt different from the other students and out of place; even when they had been doing well academically, it was a relief for them to drop out and go home, in both a metaphoric and literal sense, to a familiar place (Lehmann, 2007). A number of the students in Lehmann’s study who dropped out did return to post-secondary studies, but went to a community college or into trades training instead, where there were more people like them who shared their working class origins (Lehmann, 2007).

As well, attending a community college is not as abrupt a shift as attending a residential university. Most community college students live at home, so the experience is more like a continuation of high school; they come home every day after classes, continue to participate in family activities, follow many of the same routines, socialize with the same friends, and maintain the same religious or ethnic connections (Lara, 1992; London, 1978). As a result, social
integration into the institution is not an important pre-requisite for academic success (Metzner & Bean, 1987). An added advantage of a community college program is the much lower tuition fees. Although the students in Lehmann’s study did comment on the cost of university, it was not, however, an important reason for dropping out. Another large scale Canadian study using data from the Post-secondary Educational Participation Survey also found that financial issues were not the main reason why students withdrew. Of the 250,000 students who entered a Canadian college or university program in the fall of 2000, approximately 16 percent withdrew. Of those, 75 percent reported leaving because of a lack of fit or a mismatch with their program or institution, and not a lack of money (de Broucker, 2005).

The first generation students who do persevere, especially those in the more elite four-year institutions, find that they have to unlearn their working class attitudes and values, and acquire new characteristics and behaviours that are very different from the familiar ones of their social origins, in order to survive psychologically and academically (Rendon, 1992). These students must often switch between two cultures—that of home and that of the institution—often with the unsettling feeling that they do not fully belong to either culture (Aries & Seider, 2005; Cushman, 2007; Rendon, 1992; Zwerling, 1992). As they gradually discard the attributes of their working class origins, first generation students can also experience what Rendon (1992) refers to as the “pain that comes from cultural separation” (p. 55). They often feel guilty for being disloyal to their origins as they seek upward mobility through education, and frequently face disapproval and distancing from their families and friends as their values and interests shift (Cushman, 2007; Zwerling, 1992).
It’s not surprising, then, that first generation students who do persevere are less socially integrated and therefore infrequently attend campus functions and are less connected with the various aspects of campus life, such as clubs and organizations, and are less likely to socialize with their college peers (Billson, 1981; Pike & Kuh, 2005; Terenzini et al., 1996; Walpole, 2003). They are more likely to report that their friends are workmates, not classmates (Billson, 1981), perhaps because they do not recognize the need to build new relationships (Schultz, 2004). Yet making social connections can play an important role in contributing to academic integration and ultimately to persistence (Fisher, 2007; Folger, Carter & Chase, 2004; Kiang, 1992).

Although Tinto (1983) theorized that social integration is an essential component for the successful transition to higher education, and a number of studies do confirm that social integration is a component of post-secondary persistence and achievement (Grayson & Grayson, 2003), for first generation students and students attending commuter institutions, academic integration is actually more important, especially those who attend two-year colleges and do not live on campus (Grayson & Grayson, 2005; Lohfink & Paulson, 2005). For these students, an important component of academic integration is validation, the belief that they are capable of learning and that their life experiences and contributions have value (Rendon, 1992; Rendon, 1994; Terenzini et al., 1994). It is contact with faculty members who genuinely believe they are capable of learning and care about their progress and achievement that provides this validation and the motivation to persist (Cushman, 2007; Rendon, 1992; Terenzini, et al., 1994; Stein, 1992). Unfortunately, first generation students are less likely to believe that faculty members are concerned with student achievement, and as a consequence spent less time interacting with faculty members (Terenzini et al., 1996; Walpole, 2003).
Tinto’s interactionalist theory has reached near paradigm stature in the literature on student retention and attrition perhaps because of its intuitive appeal (Braxton, 2000). However Tinto’s theory has more recently been the subject of some powerful critique mainly for two reasons—his theory is based primarily on students enrolled in four-year residential institutions, in other words, “traditional” students (McConnell, 2000), and his theory is based on an anthropological perspective that largely excludes many of the sociological, economic, psychological, and organizational factors that may contribute to a student’s decision to persevere or withdraw from postsecondary studies (Braxton, 2000). For Tinto’s traditional students—who tend to be middle-class, continuing generation, white students—the social and academic transition to higher education is less problematic and more likely to be viewed as a rite of passage, a customary and expected step to adulthood and independence that is fully supported by their families and peers (Terenzini et al., 1994). For many first generation students and minoritized racial students, however, the transition is a disjunction, a breaking away from family tradition (Lehmann, 2004, 2007; Somers et al., 2004; Terenzini et al., 1994).

In fact, from a social reproduction perspective, traditional students do not actually have to face the challenge of separating from the norms, values and beliefs of their backgrounds. They possess both the cultural capital and habitus that eases their transition into postsecondary life and, therefore, tend not to experience the feelings of disjuncture and estrangement common to first generation or minoritized racial students (Berger, 2000). Tinto also did not consider how economic capital affects a student’s decision to persevere or withdraw, specifically a student’s perception of his or her ability to finance post-secondary studies, and whether the benefits outweigh the costs (St. John, Cabrera, Nora, & Asker, 2000). Rendon,
Jaloma, and Nora (2000) also challenge the separation and transition stages that Tinto theorized were essential to successful student integration into the community of a postsecondary institution. Specifically, they question the assumption that minoritized racial students, who are often first generation students as well, must abandon their cultural backgrounds in order to be successful at a college and university, and point out that Tinto’s theory ignores the concepts of biculturalism and dual socialization. In other words, minoritized racial students are often able to move successfully between cultures as needed, and need not reject their familial and cultural origins, which are actually a source of strength. This critique has important resonance for immigrant students who also find themselves transitioning between two cultures—the culture of their countries of origin when at home with their families, and the culture of their new country when on a college or university campus.

As well, Tinto’s model does not address the psychological processes, at both the student and institutional levels, that may impact academic integration and success (Baird, 2000; Bean & Eaton, 2000), and tends to measure social and academic integration through composite indexes that prioritize time spent on campus (McConnell, 2000). Compared to continuing generation students, for first generation students, time spent on campus may not correlate with academic success. For example, in his study of first generation students at four Canadian universities, Grayson (2011) found that campus experiences had no impact on the achievement of domestic first generation students, and that all the variance in their post-secondary grade point averages was explained by their entering high school grades.

Overall, Tinto’s model, with its origins in the experiences of "traditional" students at four-year residential institutions, tends to overlook the myriad of factors that interact at
personal, familial, cultural, and institutional levels, factors that may play a much more important role in the success of first generation students attending two-year colleges, and it is less relevant in the Canadian context with both its high immigrant post-secondary population and with its propensity for college students to live at home. What remains unknown is whether first generation students attending Canadian community colleges have the same experience of “disjuncture” as reflected in their academic performance and behaviours before commencing college, in their entering college attitudes and intentions, and in their college outcomes; further, whether there are differences based on immigrant status is also unknown.

The Purpose of this Study

As noted earlier, much of the prior research on Canadian college students does not distinguish between first generation and continuing generation students, and that which does, addresses first generation students as a homogenous group with similar behaviours, attitudes, aspirations, and outcomes. The purpose of this study is to determine if there are differences in in three groups of first generation students entering two-year college diploma programs—those born in Canada to at least one Canadian-born parent (“domestic” first generation students), those born in Canada to foreign-born parents (“established immigrant” first generation students) and those born outside the country themselves (“recent immigrant” first generation students). Specifically, this study will focus on pre-college behaviours and attainments, entering college attitudes and expectations, and overall college attainments. The research questions for this study are categorized under the following three areas:
**Pre-College Academic Performance and Behaviours**

- Are there any significant differences in the average entering high school GPA of the three groups of students?

- Are there any significant differences in the high school academic behaviours of the three groups of students?

- Are there any significant differences in the average amount of time spent researching their program occupational outcomes of the three groups of students?

**Entering College Attitudes, Values and Intentions**

- Are there any significant differences in the levels of academic confidence of the three groups of students?

- Are there any significant differences in the perceptions of the value of a post-secondary credential of the three groups of students?

- Are there any significant differences in the intent to persist to graduation of the three groups of students?

- Are there any significant differences in the intent to pursue degree-level studies of the three groups of students?

**College Performance and Attainments**

- Are there any significant differences in the retention and graduation rates of the three groups of students?

- Are there any significant differences in the average college GPAs of the three groups of students?

- Are there any significant differences in the academic status of those who withdrew before graduation of the three groups of students?
CHAPTER 5: METHODS AND ANALYSES

Research Design

The purpose of this study was to determine if there are any significant differences among three groups of first-generation students: students born in Canada to at least one Canadian-born parent ("domestic" first generation), students born in Canada to foreign-born parents ("established immigrant" first generation), and students who themselves were foreign-born ("recent immigrant" first generation). The study has a two-part design. The first part is a secondary data analysis of student survey results of the study variables related to the students' pre-college characteristics, including high school academic performance and behaviours; and to their entering college attitudes, values and intentions. The second part of the study compares the college outcomes with the same three groups of students four years later when they should have completed their original programs of study by the allotted 200 percent time limit. The data for this part of the study were extracted from the College academic records of the students included in the study. This two-part design allows for more direct comparison and analysis of pre-college characteristics with college achievement within and across all three groups of first generation students.

College Site

The study took place at a large, urban community college in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) in Ontario, Canada. The College has a large main campus located in one of the GTA's priority neighbourhoods³, as well as a smaller but growing campus located 20 kilometers south

³ The neighbourhood has a higher percentage of households with median incomes lower than the overall median for the City of Toronto (Retrieved from www1.toronto.ca on May 1, 2015).
of the main campus, and a very small "outpost" campus located in a community 50 kilometers north-west of the main campus. The College self-identifies as a polytechnic institute and as such offers more than 150 distinct programs of study leading to a broad range of credentials, including preparatory certificates, two-year diplomas, three-year advanced diplomas, four-year applied degrees, and post-graduate certificates for degree holders. In the Fall semester of 2008, when the survey data used in this study were collected, 16,144 full-time students were enrolled across all three campuses; 8,821 of them were entering their first semester.

Instrument and Data Collection

The survey used for the secondary analysis, known as the “Partners in Education Inventory,” is very comprehensive with a total of 92 items. The first section, items 1 to 31, asks the students to provide demographic, personal, and familial data, which allowed the results to be sorted by generational status and by the birthplace of both the students and their parents; the items in this section also ask the students to identify their enrollment status, their program of study, the amount of time they spent researching the type of occupation their program would lead to, their high school academic behaviours and attainments, and their perceived academic deficits. The following three sections of the survey ask the students to indicate their level of agreement to a series of statements using a five-part Likert scale. Statements 32 to 69 focus on attitudes and values that students may have about their college educations; statements 70 to 80 focus on the students' impressions of the college based on their experience to date; and statements 81 to 92 focus on the students' reasons for attending college. On the final page of the survey, the students are asked to sign a consent for the

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4 See Appendix I for the Partners in Education survey instrument
release of the survey data to college staff for the purposes of helping them adjust to college and be successful. A number of the survey items located in different sections were designed to address the same variable, meaning that a series of three to five questions could be extracted to develop scales for specific variables, contributing to the reliability and validity of the findings.

The survey was administered on paper to all first-semester students enrolled in full-time programs at the College during the second week of classes in the fall semester, 2008. For every program, faculty members teaching first-semester courses for incoming students were selected to administer the survey in class. At that time, all the College programs had group timetables; in other words, students in larger programs with multiple "sections" had all the same classes and travelled together as a cohort. This made administering the survey more efficient, more likely to achieve a robust response rate, and less likely to lead to duplicate responses. The survey took about 45 minutes to administer and complete. The completed surveys were then delivered to the College's institutional research office for data cleaning, storage and analysis.

The Sample

Of the 8,821 students registered in their first semester, 7,700 completed the survey, a response rate around 87 percent. For the purposes of this study, however, only the responses of first generation students who were enrolled in two-year diploma programs were used, the most popular credential offered by the College. Students enrolled in one-year certificate programs were excluded because these programs are all foundation or transfer programs, meaning that the students enrolled in these programs are, by definition, all aspiring to further education; as well, they were likely to have been “shadowed,” meaning that they did not meet

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5 See Appendix II for the list of the two-year diploma programs the respondents were enrolled in
the entrance requirements for their target program and were offered a place in a foundation program to help them prepare for future study. Students enrolled in three-year advanced diplomas were also excluded—many of these programs allow students to exit after two years with a diploma instead of the advanced diploma, a popular option that negatively distorts the retention and graduation rates for this credential.

Of the approximately 7,700 students who completed the survey in the fall of 2008, about 3,800 students, or half of the new intake, were students entering two-year diploma programs. The first generation students in the new intake were then identified using two items on the survey instrument:

17. Indicate the highest level of education attained by your parents or guardians by filling in the appropriate circle below.

Father’s highest level of education
- 1. less than elementary school completion
- 2. completed elementary school
- 3. some high school
- 4. completed high school
- 5. some trade/vocational training
- 6. competed college or CEGEP
- 7. some university
- 8. completed Bachelor’s degree
- 9. partial Master’s or PhD study
- 10. completed Master’s or PhD
- 11. completed professional degree (lawyer, MD)
Those students who “bubbled in” 1, 2, 3, or 4 for both parents were placed in the first generation category. Those students who “bubbled in” 1, 2, 3, 4 for one parent and left the other parent unanswered were also placed in the first generation category. If a student indicated that either parent has any training or education beyond high school, that student was excluded from the study; according to Auclair, et al. (2008), most researchers believe that having at least one parent with some post-secondary education or training provides enough social and cultural capital to help facilitate a child’s transition to post-secondary study. As well, as noted earlier, neither parent having any educational experience beyond high school is the most commonly used criteria to delineate first generation status (McConnell, 2000).

The first generation students were then further divided into three groups based on how they answered the following question:
24. **How would you describe yourself?**

- 1. born in Canada and both parents born in Canada
- 2. born in Canada and 1 parent born in Canada
- 3. born in Canada and neither parent born in Canada
- 4. not born in Canada and now a Canadian citizen
- 5. landed immigrant/permanent resident
- 6. visa student

Those who identify themselves as “born in Canada and both parents born in Canada” or “born in Canada and one parent born in Canada” were placed in the domestic first generation category; those who identify themselves as “born in Canada and neither parent born in Canada” were placed in the established immigrant first generation group; and those who identify themselves as “not born in Canada and now a Canadian citizen” or “landed immigrant/permanent resident” were placed in the recent immigrant first generation group.
Dependent Variables

The dependent variables addressed in this study are categorized under the following three headings relating to the academic performance and behaviours of the three groups of students prior to entering college; their attitudes, values, and intentions at the time they entered college; and their actual college performance and attainments.

Pre-College Academic Performance and Behaviours

High School GPAs

The following survey question was used to determine if there were any differences in the incoming high school averages among the three groups of first generation students:

12. What was your approximate overall average in your final year of high school?

High School Academic Effort

The following three questions were used to determine if there were any differences in the high school academic efforts among the three groups of first generation students:

13. How often did you study while in high school?
   - Rarely, only before an exam
   - One or two nights a week
   - Three or four nights a week
   - Five or six nights a week
   - Every night

14. How often, on average, did you skip classes in high school?
   - Once a week or more
   - Two or three times a month
   - Approximately once a month
   - Almost never
   - Never
15. How often did you complete homework assignments on time in high school?
   - Never
   - Rarely
   - Sometimes
   - Usually
   - Always

Planning for Post-Secondary Studies

The following survey question was used to determine if there were any differences among the three groups in the amount of time they spend exploring the college program they eventually selected:

30. About how much time have you spent exploring what you would actually be doing in the type of job you feel your program will lead to?
   - One hour or less
   - More than 1 hour but less than 4 hours
   - 4 or more, but less than 8 hours
   - Between 8 and 10 hours
   - More than 10 hours

Entering College Attitudes, Values and Intentions

Academic Confidence

The following five statements in the survey were used to measure the levels of academic confidence in the three groups:

34. I am capable of getting a B+ or 78% average or better in my courses
36. I am very certain I will complete my program in the usual time (e.g. a 2 year program in 2 years)
42. I am very certain that I will obtain a college degree/ diploma/ certificate
45. I have the ability to succeed in college-level studies
64. I think I am well prepared to be a successful student in college
Perception of the Value of a College Education

The following two statements in the survey were used to measure how strongly the students value a college-level education in terms of both its contribution overall to obtaining employment after graduation, as well as obtaining more satisfying employment when compared to those who do not graduate from college:

53. College graduates have a better chance of getting a good job than those who do not graduate
68. College graduates find more satisfying jobs than those who do not graduate

Intent to Persist

The following four statements in the survey were used to measure how committed the three groups of students were to persisting in their post-secondary educations:

32. It is important that I complete my program and obtain a certificate/ diploma/ degree
48. I am determined to finish my college education
42. I am very certain that I will obtain a college degree/ diploma/ certificate
56. It is not important that I graduate with a degree/ diploma/ certificate

Post-Secondary Intentions

The following three statements in the survey were used to measure whether the students were intending to pursue degree-level studies:

I am attending college in order to
82. To prepare for university studies
87. To obtain a college diploma then continue on to a university and obtain a degree
33. I am here to take a few courses only and then transfer to university.
College Performance and Attainments

Retention and Graduation Rates

The students' academic records as of May 2012 were used to determine if they persisted to graduation, and if they did, whether they graduated on time at the end of the Winter semester 2010 (100% program time), by the end of the Winter semester 2011 (150% program time), or by the end of the Winter semester 2012 (200% program time).

College GPAs

The students' GPAs were obtained from their academic records as of May 2012. Only the GPAs of students who had actually graduated were used.

Academic Status of those who Withdrew before Graduation

For those students who did not complete their programs, their academic status at the time they withdrew (honours, good standing, on probation, or required to withdraw) was obtained from their academic records as of May 2012.

Analyses

Pre-College Academic Performance and Behaviours

High School GPAs

The means of the incoming GPAs of the three groups of first generation students were analyzed using one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to determine if there were any significant differences among the three groups of first generation students.
**High School Academic Effort**

For the three questions on high school academic effort, the students were assigned scores ranging from 5 points for “every night” for question 13, “never” for question 14, and “always” for question 15, to 1 point for “rarely,” “once a week or more” and “never” for the same questions; individual scores were then combined to create composite scores ranging from 3 representing the least amount of high school academic effort to 15 for the greatest effort. Cronbach’s alpha, however, was not strong for this subscale (a = .529), so the means of the scores for the questions were analyzed individually using one-way ANOVA to determine if there were any significant differences among the groups.

**Planning for Post-Secondary Studies**

For the question on the amount of time the students' spent exploring the college program they selected, the students were categorized into a three by five table (the three student groups by the five potential answers) based on their responses. Pearson Chi-square was used to determine if there were any significant differences among the groups.

**Entering College Attitudes, Values and Intentions**

**Academic Confidence**

For the five statements addressing academic confidence, the students responded using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." Their responses were assigned scores ranging from a score of 1 for "strongly disagree" to a score of 5 for "strongly agree;" individual scores were then combined to create composite scores ranging from 5 for the lowest level of academic confidence to 25 for the highest levels. Cronbach’s
alpha indicated that the five questions combined do reliably measure the students’ confidence in their ability to succeed academically in college-level studies (a = .785). One-way ANOVA was then used to determine if there were significant differences in the means among the three groups.

**Perception of the Value of a College Education**

For the two statements used to measure their perceptions of the value of a college education, the students responded using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." Their responses were assigned scores ranging from a score of 1 for "strongly disagree" to a score of 5 for "strongly agree;" individual scores were then combined to create composite scores ranging from 2 representing the lowest perceived value of a college education to 10 for the highest level of perceived value. Cronbach’s alpha indicated that the two questions combined reliability measure the perceived value of a college education (a = .762). One-way ANOVA was then used to determine if there were significant differences in the means among the three groups.

**Intent to Persist**

For each of the four statements measuring their intent to persist, the students responded using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly agree." For statements 32, 48, and 56, their responses were assigned scores ranging from a score of 1 for "strongly disagree" to a score of 5 for "strongly agree." However, statement 56 ("It is not important that I graduate with a degree/ diploma/ certificate") was reverse coded with a score ranging from 1 for “strongly agree" to with a score of 5 for “strongly disagree.” The individual scores were then combined to create composite scores ranging from 5 for the lowest level of
intent to persist to 20 for the highest level. Cronbach’s alpha was not as strong for this subscale (a = .574), so the means of the scores for the individual statements were analyzed individually using one-way ANOVA to determine if there were any significant differences in the means among the three groups.

**Post-Secondary Intentions**

For one of the statements measuring their intent to pursue degree-level studies (32), the students responded using a five-point Likert scale and were assigned scores ranging from 1 for "strongly disagree" to 5 for "strongly agree." For the remaining two statements (48 and 56), the students also responded with a five-point Likert scale, with 1 representing "not a reason" for attending college and 5 representing a "major reason" for attending college. Their individual scores were then combined to create composite scores ranging from 3 for the lowest intention of pursuing degree-level studies and 15 for the greatest intention. Cronbach’s alpha indicated that the three questions combined did reliably measure intent to pursued degree-level studies (a = .837). One-way ANOVA was then used to determine if there were significant differences in the means among the three groups.

**College Performance and Attainments**

**Retention and Graduation Rates**

The on-time and maximum time graduation rates in each of the three groups of first generation students were analysed using logistic regression to determine if there were any significant differences among the three groups.
**College GPAs**

The means of the GPAs of the graduating students in the three groups were analysed using one-way ANOVA to determine if there were any significant differences among the three groups.

**Academic Status of those who Withdrew before Graduation**

For each group of first generation students, the number of students who withdrew in each category (Honours, In Good Standing, On probation, and Required to Withdraw) were analyzed using logistic regression to determine if there were any significant differences among the three groups.
CHAPTER 6: RESULTS

The Sample

Of the 8,821 students registered in their first semester, 7,700 completed the "Partners in Education" survey instrument, a response rate of around 87 percent. Over the past decade, first generation enrollment has consistently represented about 30 percent of the total enrollment at the College, meaning that the sample size for this study could have potentially been about 1250 students. The College, however, made the decision to not release the responses of those students who had not signed the final page of the survey, even though no student identifiers were attached to the final data released for this study. This in turn reduced the sample size to 549 students, which is a limitation of this study –it’s quite possible that the students who signed the final page of the survey differ in essential characteristics when compared to those who did not sign it.

Of the 549 students, 184 identified themselves as being born in Canada and both parents born in Canada, and 75 identified themselves as born in Canada with one parent born in Canada, for a total of 259 students, representing 47.2 percent of the study sample in the "domestic" category. A further 203 students identified themselves as born in Canada and neither parent born in Canada, representing 37 percent of the sample in the "established immigrant" category; and 87 students identified themselves as immigrants to Canada, representing 15.8 percent of the sample in the "recent immigrant" category.
Dependent Variables

The descriptive statistics and the results of the significant testing on the dependent variables are discussed under the following three headings relating to the academic performance and behaviours of the three groups of students prior to entering college; their attitudes, values, and intentions at the time they entered college; and their actual college performance and attainments.

Pre-College Academic Performance and Behaviours

High School GPAs

In terms of their high school GPAs, domestic first generation domestic students reported a mean of 72.6 (SD = 11.11), established immigrant students reported a mean of 72.85 (SD = 7.03), and recent immigrant students reported a mean of 72.63 (SD = 10.27). One-way ANOVA found no significant difference among the groups: $F(2,534) = 0.39, p = .961$. The distribution of the incoming averages (see Figure 1 below) also shows a very striking similar pattern in the three groups.

Figure 1: Distribution of Incoming GPAs
**High School Academic Effort**

Because Cronbach’s alpha was not strong for the three questions intended to make up this subscale ($a = .529$), the means of the scores for the questions were analyzed individually. In terms of the amount of time spent studying (question 13), recent immigrant first generation students spent more time studying than their domestic counterparts. More than 85 percent of domestic first generation students studied only two nights or fewer per week compared to about 60 percent of recent immigrant students; at the other extreme, almost 40 percent of recent immigrant students studied five nights or more per week compared to fewer than 15 percent of domestic students (see Figure 2 below).

**Figure 2: Q13 — How often did you study during the week while in high school?**

![Bar chart showing the distribution of study time among domestic first generation, established immigrant first generation, and recent immigrant first generation students.]

Domestic first generation domestic students reported a mean of 1.76 (SD = .80), established immigrant students reported a mean of 1.93 (SD = .93), and recent immigrant students reported a mean of 2.29 (SD = 1.06). One-way ANOVA found a significant difference.

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6 See Appendix III for the frequencies and percentages of the responses to the individual questions.
among the groups: $F (2,545) = 11.29, p < .001$. Tukey's post-hoc comparisons did confirm that recent immigrant first generation students spent a significantly higher amount of time studying than domestic students with a medium effect size (Cohen’s $d = .563$), as well as a significantly higher amount of time than established immigrant students with a small effect size (Cohen’s $d = .362$). However, the comparison between domestic and established immigrant first generation students was not statistically significant.

In terms of skipping classes in high school (question 14), the three groups also reported similar rates: 44 percent of the domestic first generation students, 37 percent of the established immigrant students, and 47 percent of the recent immigrant students reported that they "almost never" or "never" skipped classes. One-way ANOVA found no significant differences among the group means: $F (2, 543) = .604, p = .547$.

In terms of completing homework assignments on time (question 15), there was also little difference among the three groups of students: 80 percent of the domestic first generation students, 86 percent of the established immigrant students, and 85 percent of the recent immigrant students reported that they "usually" or "always" completed homework assignments in time in high school. As with question 14, one-way ANOVA found no significant differences among the group means: $F (2, 541) = 2.932, p = .054$.

**Planning for Post-Secondary Studies**

The results show that, in contrast to the similar distribution of entering high school grades, there were significant differences among the groups in the amount of time they spent researching the type of employment their program would eventually lead to (see Figure 3
The greatest difference occurred between domestic and recent immigrant first generation students, especially at the two extremes: 37 percent of the domestic first generation students spent more than ten hours exploring the type of employment their program would lead to, compared to less than 23 percent of the established immigrant students and 20 percent of the recent immigrant students. Conversely, only 6 percent of the domestic students and 7 percent of the established immigrant students spent reported spending an hour or less, compared to 16 percent of the recent immigrant group. Pearson Chi-Square found a significant difference: $\chi^2(8, N = 546) = 25.79, p < 0.01$. A higher than expected percentage of domestic first generation students spent more than ten hours researching their program compared to the recent and established immigrant students.

**Figure 3: Amount of Time Spent Exploring Vocational Program**
Entering College Attitudes, Values and Intentions

Academic Confidence

The confidence levels overall for all three groups were uniformly very high and close to the maximum possible score of 25 on the five survey items used to measure this variable.7 Domestic first generation domestic students reported a mean of 22.75 (SD = 2.20), established immigrant students reported a mean of 22.19 (SD = 2.36), and recent immigrant students reported a mean of 22.30 (SD = 2.19). One-way ANOVA did find a significant difference among the three groups of students: $F(2, 529) = 3.75$, $p < .024$; the overall effect size, however, was small ($\eta^2 = .014$). Tukey's post-hoc comparisons indicated that domestic first generation students were significantly more confident than the established immigrant students with a small effect size (Cohen's $d = .245$). All other comparisons were not statistically significant.

Perception of the Value of a College Education

The responses to the two statements intended to measure the students' perception of the value of a college education were very positive.8 The means clearly show that all three groups believe in the value of a college education in leading to more satisfying employment with little differences among the groups. Of a possible combined maximum score of 10, domestic first generation domestic students reported a mean of 8.46 (SD = 1.66), established immigrant students reported a mean of 8.37 (SD = 1.70), and recent immigrant students reported a mean of 8.45 (SD = 1.49). Not unexpectedly, one-way ANOVA found no significant difference among the three groups of students: $F(2, 539) = 1.92$, $p = .827$.

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7 See Appendix IV for the frequencies and percentages of the responses to the individual questions
8 See Appendix V for the frequencies and percentages of the responses to the individual questions
**Intent to Persist**

Because Cronbach’s alpha was not strong for this subscale (a = .574), the means of the scores for the individual statements measuring intent to persist were analyzed individually. Only two of the statements, however, showed any significant differences among the groups.\(^9\) For statement 48 (“I am determined to finish my college education”), one-way ANOVA found a significant difference among the group means: \(F(2, 543) = 3.35, p = .036; \) however the overall effect size was small (\(\eta^2 = .012\)). Tukey’s post-hoc comparisons indicated that domestic first generation students (\(M = 4.88, SD = .37\)) were significantly more likely to agree with the question than established immigrant students (\(M = 4.77, SD = .54\)), \(p = .035\), with a small effect size (Cohen’s \(d = .238\)). The other comparisons were not significant.

For statement 56 (“It is not important that I graduate with a degree/ diploma/certificate”), one-way ANOVA also found a significant difference among the groups: \(F(2, 544) = 3.22, p = .041; \) again, however, the overall effect size was small (\(\eta^2 = .012\)). Tukey’s post-hoc comparisons found that domestic first generation students were significantly more likely to disagree when compared to the recent immigrant students (\(M = 4.48, SD = .87\)), \(p = .032\), with a small effect size (Cohen’s \(d = .288\)). The other comparisons were not significant. Overall, then, the domestic students were slightly more determined to persist that the established and recent immigrant students, although overall all three groups of students indicated very high levels of commitment to completing their programs.

\(^9\) See Appendix VI for the frequencies and percentages of the responses to the individual questions.
Post-Secondary Intentions

In terms of their intent to pursue degree-level studies, out of a possible maximum score of 15 for the three statements used to measure this variable, the domestic first generation domestic students reported a mean of 7.02 (SD = 3.71), established immigrant students reported a mean of 8.77 (SD = 3.74), and recent immigrant students reported a mean of 8.58 (SD = 3.89). One-way ANOVA indicated a significant difference among the three groups of students: $F (2, 537) = 13.80, p < .001$; the overall effect size, however, was small ($\eta^2 = .049$). Tukey's post-hoc comparisons indicated that established immigrant first generation students were significantly higher than domestic first generation in their intention to pursue degree-level studies ($M = 7.02, SD = 3.71, p < .001$), and recent immigrant first generation students were significantly higher than domestic first generation students ($M = 7.02, SD = 3.71, p < .003$). The comparison between established and recent immigrant students was not statistically significant.

College Performance and Attainments

Retention and Graduation Rates

The graduation rates for the three groups of first generation students were very similar; 50 percent of the domestic students, 51 percent of the established immigrant students, and 52 percent of the recent immigrant students graduated from their programs by the 200 percent allotment time. Not surprisingly, logistic regression found no significant differences among the groups: $\chi^2(2, N = 549) = 0.06, p = .969$.

10 See Appendix VII for the frequencies and percentages of the responses to the individual questions
When the on-time graduation rates were compared, logistic regression also showed no significant difference among the three groups: $\chi^2(2, N = 278) = 4.97, p = .083$. The students in all three groups who persisted in their programs were just as likely to graduate on time at the end of their fourth semester.

*College GPAs*

Much like their incoming high school grade point averages, the college grade point averages of the three groups of first generation students who completed their programs were also very similar. Domestic first generation domestic students reported a mean of 78.5% (SD = 5.59), established immigrant students reported a mean of 77.6% (SD = 5.86), and recent immigrant students reported a mean of 78.6 (SD = 7.85). One-way ANOVA confirmed that there were no significant differences: $F (2, 277) = .739, p = .479$.

*Academic Status of those who Withdrew*

Of the first generation students in this study who left their programs, 60 percent of the domestic students, 55 percent of the established immigrant students, and 45 percent of the recent immigrant students were either required to withdraw for academic reasons or were on probation at the time they withdrew (see Figure 4 below). Conversely, 40 percent of the domestic students, 45 percent of the established immigrant students, and 55 percent of the recent immigrant students were either in good academic standing or achieving honours at the time they withdrew.\(^{11}\) Although the recent immigrant students were slightly more likely to leave when they were doing well in their programs compared to the two other groups of students, logistic regression found no significant difference between the percentage of students

\(^{11}\) See Appendix VIII for the frequencies and percentages of the students' status at the time of withdrawing.
who left the program in good academic standing compared to those who were struggling: \( \chi^2 (2, N = 252) = 0.81, p = .669. \)

**Figure 4: Status of Students Who Withdrew at Time of Leaving their Programs**

![Bar chart showing status of students who withdrew at time of leaving their programs](image)

**Similarities and Differences**

Overall, then, the findings of this study indicate that the three groups of first generation students share many similar characteristics and behaviours both prior to and during their college programs:

- All three groups of first generation students reported mean incoming high school grade point averages around 72 percent; as well, the proportions of students with averages of 69 percent or below, between 70 and 79 percent, and above 80 percent were almost identical.

- All three groups reported similar, positive high school academic behaviours; 80 to 86 percent of the students “usually” or “always” completed homework assignments on time, and 37 to 47 percent said they “never” or “almost never” skipped classes.
• All three groups reported very high levels of confidence in their ability to do well academically in their college programs, and felt that they were well prepared for college-level studies.

• All three groups were similar in the value they placed on college education, and felt that college graduates have better chances of finding more satisfying jobs.

• All three groups reported similar graduation rates between 50 and 52 percent, and were equally likely to graduate on time.

• All three groups had similar college grade point averages in the high 70’s at the time of graduation.

However, there were also a number of differences among the three groups:

• Compared to the domestic and the established immigrant first generation groups, there was proportionally a much lower representation of recent immigrant students in the study sample; only 16 percent were recent immigrants, while 37 percent were established immigrants and 47 percent were domestic first generation students.

• Recent immigrant first generation students were also significantly more likely to report spending more time studying in high school compared to their domestic and established immigrant peers.

• Compared to the established and recent immigrant groups, the domestic first generation students showed higher levels of commitment to completing their college diplomas; they were more likely to agree with the statement “I am determined to finish my college education,” and more likely to disagree with “It’s not important that I graduate with a degree/ diploma/ certificate.”

• Compared to the established and recent immigrant groups, the domestic first generation students were less likely to indicate that their intent was to eventually pursue degree-level studies.

• Compared to the established and recent immigrant groups, the domestic first generation students spent significantly more time researching their college programs prior to enrollment; 37 percent of the domestic students spent ten hours or more, compared to 23 percent of the established immigrant and only 20 percent of the recent immigrant students. Conversely, only 6 percent of the domestic students and 7 percent of the established immigrant students spent an hour or less, compared to 16 percent of the recent immigrant group.
- Finally, recent immigrant first generation students are more likely to leave their programs even when they are performing well; 55 percent of the recent immigrant students withdrew even though they were in good academic standing, compared with 40 percent of the domestic and 45 percent of established immigrant first generation students.

Many of these similarities and differences are consistent with previous studies on first generation and immigrant students, while others appear to contradict the prior research. A further discussion of these findings, along with how they align with the social reproduction theory that informs this study, is provided in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION

The Sample

*The Distribution of the Three Groups of Students*

Compared to the domestic and the established immigrant first generation groups, there was proportionally a much lower representation of recent immigrant students in the study sample; only 16 percent were recent immigrants, while 37 percent were established immigrants and 47 percent were domestic first generation students. The breakdown of this sample does deviate in some aspects from a large scale Canada-wide study of the characteristics and experiences of first-year college students conducted by Human Resources and Social Development Canada (2007). The HRSDC study was based on surveys completed by college students at the beginning of their first term in fall 2006; 102 Canadian colleges and institutions participated, although the majority of the students were enrolled in Ontario. In total, 28,992 students completed the survey. As indicated in Figure 5 below, there is a striking difference in the percentages of students who identified as being born in Canada to two Canadian-born parents – 61 percent of the students in the HRSDC study compared to only 33.5 percent of students in the current study. In contrast to the current study that placed students with at least one Canadian-born parent in the "domestic" group, the HRSDC study combined those who were born in Canada with only one or neither parent born here. However, when the students in the current study are re-classified according to the HRSDC criteria, 40.7 percent in the current study have at least one foreign-born parent compared to only 20 percent of the students in the HRSDC study, another substantial difference. The difference in the percentages of those
students who were born outside of Canada was not as wide, at 15.8 percent in the current study and 19 percent in the HRSDC study.

**Figure 5: Percentages of Students Categorized According to their Own and Parental Birth Places: Study Sample versus HRSD Canada (2007) Sample**

![Bar chart showing percentages of students categorized by birthplace.](chart)

Although these differences may initially seem to indicate that the study sample is not representative of Canadian college students, a vital difference needs to be noted—the HRSDC study did not distinguish between first generation and continuing generation students. In light of this, it would appear that a much higher percentage of first generation students in the current study have some immigrant experience in their family (66.5% combined) compared to Canadian college students overall (39% combined). This lower percentage in the HRSDC study may in fact reflect the higher levels of post-secondary education in the immigrant population in Canada (Canadian Council on Learning, 2007; Human Resources & Social Development Canada, 2008; Sweet et al., 2008; Krahn & Taylor, 2005), meaning that their children are less likely to be considered first generation and less likely to enroll in a college program. If the HRSDC study had
controlled for generational status, the percentages may have been more closely aligned. In addition, there is a substantial difference between the two samples of the percentages of those born in Canada to two Canadian-born parents (33.5% versus 61% respectively); this difference may again be explained by the higher levels of immigrant parental education and by domestic first generation students preference for college-level studies (Auclair et al., 2008; de Broucker, 2005; Lennon et al., 2011; Palameta & Voyer, 2010). Immigrant student preference for university-level studies and first generation domestic student preference for college-level studies are concepts that are further explored.

**Choice of Programs**

The enrollment records for the Fall 2008 diploma cohort show that all three groups of first generation students were by far more likely to enroll in programs in the Social and Community Services occupational cluster (see Figure 6 below); 30 percent of the domestic students, 40 percent of the established immigrant students, and 45 percent of the recent immigrant students were enrolled in Social and Community Services programs, although there were slight differences in their choice of program in the cluster.12 The most popular choices for both the domestic and established immigrant students were Early Childhood Education, followed by Law Clerk/Paralegal and Police Foundations in that order; for the recent immigrant students, the most popular program was Law Clerk/Paralegal, followed by Early Childhood Education and Social Service Worker.

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12 See Appendix II for a list of the programs by occupational cluster
The students' choice of programs definitely conflicts with previous research, which indicates that first generation students generally select Business or Management programs (Warburton et al., 2001), or technical courses that have practical components and clear employment outcomes (Acumen Research, 2004; Chen and Carroll, 2005; Kiang, 1992; Pascarella et al., 2003). The HRSDC (2007) study of first year students in community colleges referred to earlier also found that only 10 percent were enrolled in Social and Community Services programs, compared to the 30 to 45 percent of the students in this study. Another large scale survey of Fall 2008 applicants to Ontario Colleges also found that health sciences and business programs were the most popular (Academia Group, 2008). The huge difference between the findings of this study compared to the HRSDC and the Academia Group's studies is
puzzling. One possible explanation may relate to differences in assigning programs to occupational clusters; for example, the current study classifies the Paralegal program as part of the Social and Community Services sector, while the HRSDC and the Academia Group studies may have possibly classified it as part of the Business sector. In other words, if the same classification systems were used, which is unknown, the differences might not be so striking.

As well, as noted earlier, the HRSDC and Academia Group studies did not control for generational status, meaning that the current study may indicate that, unlike their continuing generation peers, first generation college students are more likely to choose Social and Community Services programs. This finding may also be an anomaly that is locally driven. The college where this study took place is located in one of the Greater Toronto Area’s priority neighborhoods, an area characterized by high immigrant numbers, low socio-economic levels, and greater criminal activity. In other words, personal, social and economic challenges may have influenced the students’ program choices.

Another explanation may relate to a limitation of this study—the students in the study were not divided by gender. Because many of the Social and Community Services programs, such as Early Childhood Education, traditionally attract significantly more female than male students, it may be that the gender balance of the sample was also proportionally more female than male, which influenced their program choices.

The lower enrollment numbers for first generation students in the Creative Arts and Design cluster and the Performing Arts cluster are not surprising—prior research does indicate that first generation students are more attracted to programs that are directly connected to
specific occupations and less likely to take risks with programs that have “softer” employment outcomes, such as those related to the arts (Human Resources & Social Development Canada, 2007; Academia Group, 2008, 2014), especially for many immigrant first generation students with their more tenuous ties to the western cultural propensities that inform the arts in North America.

**Pre-college Academic Performance and Behaviours:**

**High School GPAs**

All three groups of first generation students in the current study reported mean incoming high school grade point averages around 72 percent; as well, the proportions of students with averages of 69 percent or below, between 70 and 79 percent, and above 80 percent were almost identical. These results are somewhat surprising for two reasons. First, prior research has consistently indicated that first generation students enter post-secondary institutions with lower high school GPAs than their continuing generation counterparts (Fischer, 2007; Lee, Sax, Kim & Hagedorn, 2004; McElroy, 2008). Yet the first generation students in this study actually had, on average, higher entering high school GPAs than their continuing generation peers. In the Fall of 2008, only 69 percent of all the students entering two-year diploma programs at the college, first and continuing generation combined, had GPAs of percent or better. Yet when the first generation students in this study are separated out, 79 percent of the domestic first generation students, 76 percent of the established immigrant first

13 Source: Institutional Research, Humber College
generation students, and 77 percent of the recent immigrant students had incoming averages above 70 percent, which are considerable differences (see Figure 7 below).

Figure 7: Percentages of Students Entering Diploma Programs with GPAs above 70%, Fall 2008

A second reason why the similarity in the high school GPAs of the three groups in this study is somewhat surprising relates to the prior Canadian research that has consistently indicated that immigrants and the children of immigrants academically outperform their domestic peers (Abada et al., 2009; Dinovitzer et al., 2003; Kao & Tienda, 2005; Richmond, 1986; Sweet et al., 2008; Worswick, 2004), yet all three groups in this study had similar levels of high school academic achievement, with the domestic students slightly outperforming the established and recent immigrant students. The limited evidence in this study potentially suggests that much of the higher academic achievement of immigrant youth in previous studies may be explained by the overall higher academic attainments of their parents, while first generation immigrant students actually perform much the same as their domestic classmates. It is also probable that first generation immigrant students who enter the college system differ
in their achievement levels when compared to their first generation immigrant counterparts who enter the university system. A large scale study of the post-secondary participation of Canadian youth did find that high school students with GPAs greater than 80 percent who went on to post-secondary studies were more likely to enroll in degree programs (Lennon et al., 2011). Therefore, it may be that the higher performing immigrant first generation students were admitted to university programs, while those who were not as successful entered college programs.

As well, there may also be system-based explanation for this discrepancy. In Ontario, high school students in their final two years take courses at three different levels: academic, mixed or college levels. Academic and mixed courses lead to admission to university, while college-level courses are, clearly, the minimal basis for admission to college programs. That is not to say, however, that all students entering a college program took college-level courses in their final two years of high school. Since first generation students are more likely to indicate that their primary post-secondary goal is to obtain a college-level credential (Auclair et al., 2008; Choy, 2001; de Broucker, 2005; Lennon et al., 2011; London, 1978; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Palameta & Voyer, 2010; Paulson & St. John, 2002; Thayer, 2000), it may initially seem reasonable to expect that they selected the more applied college-level courses in high school, and therefore achieved higher grades than those who took the more theoretical academic courses. Therefore, there may be differences among the three groups in high school course selection, especially in light of the fact that immigrant students typically have a higher preference for degree-level studies (Abada & Lin, 2011; Sweet et al., 2010; Taylor & Krahn, 2005.) If a higher percentage of established and recent immigrant students entered the
college with academic-level courses when compared to domestic students, this could potentially have an impact on the average incoming GPAs for the three groups. As well, it could offer some evidence to explain why the established and recent immigrant students were more likely to withdraw from their college programs— their initial goal was always to enter a university program, as potentially reflected in their high school course selections.

**High School Academic Effort**

In the current study, the recent immigrant first generation students were significantly more likely to report spending more time studying in high school compared to their domestic and established immigrant peers. These findings are consistent with previous research that indicates immigrant students spend more time studying than their domestic counterparts (Dinovitzer et al., 2003; Sweet et al., 2008). All three groups reported similar, positive high school academic behaviours; 80 to 86 percent of the students “usually” or “always” completed homework assignments on time, and 37 to 47 percent said they “never” or “almost never” skipped classes. These findings, however, are definitely not consistent with prior research, which indicates that the children of immigrants, or immigrant students themselves, are more likely to be “better students,” meaning that they skip classes less frequency and are more likely to complete homework assignments by their due dates (Schleicher, 2006; Sweet et al., 2008), and are in general more academically engaged (Finnie & Mueller, 2009). Most of these studies, however, do not control for first generation status, which may mean that first generation immigrant students, whether they be established immigrants born in Canada to foreign-born parents or recent immigrants themselves born outside of the country, are assumed to have attributes more aligned to academic success than their domestic peers, when in fact they may
not. Therefore, if programs specifically intended to support immigrant students in the elementary and secondary systems do not differentiate between generational statuses, then these programs may not be as effective for first generation immigrant students.

**Planning for Post-Secondary Studies**

Compared to the established and recent immigrant groups, the domestic first generation students in this study spent significantly more time researching their college programs prior to enrollment; 37 percent of the domestic students spent ten hours or more, compared to only 23 percent of the established immigrant and 20 percent of the recent immigrant students. Conversely, only 6 percent of the domestic students and 7 percent of the established immigrant students spent an hour or less, compared to 16 percent of the recent immigrant group. The findings differ from those of the HRSDC (2007) cross-Canada study of community college students, which showed that 20 to 30 percent of all first-year entrants had undertaken absolutely no career investigation activities prior to applying and enrolling in a college program. The HRSDC study, however, did not control for generational status, meaning that the responses of both first generation and continuing generation students were combined. In light of this, the first generation students in this study appear to have put considerably more effort into investigating their career options, especially the domestic students, compared to their continuing generation counterparts. This finding supports prior research that indicates first generation students in general are more interested in college-level credentials with a vocational focus (Acumen Research, 2004; Chen and Carroll, 2005; Inman & Mayes, 1999; Kiang, 1992; Pascarella et al., 2003; Paulson & St. John, 2002; Warburton et al., 2001);
consequently, they may be more invested in exploring the type of work a program will prepare them for after graduation.

In Canada, the children of immigrants have generally an overall greater interest in pursuing post-secondary studies (Abada & Lin, 2011; Finnie et al., 2011; Human Resources & Social Development Canada, 2008; Sweet et al., 2010), yet the recent immigrant students in this study spent significantly less time exploring their programs of study than the domestic students. This may align with their greater interest in eventually transferring to degree programs – they may have originally applied to a university program, not been successful in gaining admission, and then applied to a college program that had not yet filled as an alternative path to university. Looking at the dates of the students’ applications to the College, along with the types of high school courses they took, may provide some evidence to support this interpretation, especially if a higher proportion of the recent immigrant students applied much later in the application cycle.

**Entering College Attitudes, Values and Intentions**

*Academic Confidence*

Although domestic students were slightly more confident than the recent and established immigrant first generation students, overall, all three groups reported very high levels of confidence in their ability to do well academically in their college programs and felt that they were well prepared for college-level studies. In fact, what is notable is that not a single student in the sample “strongly disagreed” with any of the survey items intended to
measure academic confidence, and only a handful “disagreed.” More than 80 percent of all the students “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that they were capable of getting a B+ or better in their courses; more than 90 percent “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that they were certain they would complete their programs on time; more than 95 percent “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that they were certain they would earn a credential; more than 95 percent “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that they have the ability to succeed in college-level studies; and more than 85 percent “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that they were well prepared to be successful in college.

The very high levels of confidence of the students in this study conflict with previous American research that found first generation students generally tend to have less conviction in their ability to do well academically (Engle, 2007; Inman & Mayes, 1999; Tomokowicz & Bushnik, 2003), as well as Canadian research on first-generation university students (Lehmann, 2004, 2007). It is however, consistent, with prior Canadian research on college students (Cushman, 2007; Acumen Research, 2004; Human Resources & Social Development Canada, 2007). The impressive confidence levels of these students may be a legacy of the self-esteem movement that informed parenting and teaching practices as they were growing up, or may reflect the message delivered throughout Ontario high schools that college programs are “easy” when compared to university programs—a message that may actually be setting these students up for failure as they enter college-level studies believing that minimal effort will still result in academic success. Although previous studies have found a positive relationship between

14 See Appendix IV for the frequencies and percentages of the responses to the individual questions
academic confidence and graduation rates, as noted previously, only half of the students in this study actually graduated from their programs.

There also appears to be a “disconnect” between these high confidence levels and students’ self-reported academic limitations. For example, the HRSDC (2007) large-scale study referred to earlier that focused on the self-reported entering characteristics of first year college students found that substantial numbers of these students felt their basic academic and study skills were weak, especially those related to study skills and time management; in fact, only 16 percent reported that their study skills were very good, and only 24 percent reported that their time management skills were good. This may mean that for first generation students in college programs, at least in Ontario, academic confidence does not correlate well with their actual levels of achievement and, therefore, may not be a relevant variable in models used to predict retention and graduation rates in the college system.

**Perception of the Value of a College Education**

All three groups were similar in the value they placed on college education, and felt that college graduates have better chances of finding more satisfying jobs. The strength of their conviction is generally a positive finding—knowing about the relationship between employment and education has been identified as a strong predictor of post-secondary participation (Looker & Thiessen, 2004). What is surprising, however, is the overwhelming strength of the students’ convictions in light of previous Canadian research that indicates first generation students are less likely to believe that a post-secondary education is necessary for obtaining a good job (Berger & Motte, 2007). This may indicate that first generation students have finally embraced
the message heavily promoted by school boards, as well as regional, provincial and federal
levels of government, that education is important for their future employment, and they now
recognize the relationship between a post-secondary credential and a well-paying job (Berger &
Motte, 2007; McElroy, 2008; Looker & Thiessen, 2004).

However, it may also indicate that first generation students who do choose to enroll in
college are very different in the value they place on post-secondary studies when compared to
those who do not enroll. As well, if the first generation students in this study are
representative of their cohorts in other post-secondary institutions, then recognizing the
relationship between a post-secondary credential and a good job may no longer be an
important variable contributing to retention and graduation rates, or at least not for college-
level first generation students, although it quite likely remains an important factor in their
initial decision to enroll in a college program. The strong conviction that the students in this
study demonstrate –that a college education will lead to more fulfilling employment –contrasts
sharply with their actual graduation rates, and may in fact now simply reflect the larger societal
message they received in the course of their elementary and secondary educations.

**Intent to Persist**

Although the domestic first generation students in this study showed slightly higher
levels of commitment to completing their college diplomas, all three groups of students
reported extremely high levels in their intent to persist. Almost 100 percent of the students
“agreed” or “strongly agreed” with the statements, “It is important that I complete my program
and obtain a certificate/ diploma/ degree;” “I am very certain that I will obtain a college
degree/ diploma/ certificate;” and “I am determined to finish my college education.” This high level of commitment conflicts with both previous American and Canadian research that found first generation students are generally less certain that they will obtain a post-secondary credential (Cushman, 2007; Engle, 2007; Inman & Mayes, 1999; Tomokowicz & Bushnik, 2003). It is also not consistent with the HRSDC (2008) follow-up study that focused on the characteristics and experiences of aboriginal, disabled, immigrant and minoritized racial students, which found that immigrant students were much less committed to their college programs—only 65 percent of the recent immigrant students “strongly agreed” that they were determined to complete their college program, compared to the 82 percent of the recent immigrant students in this study. The HRSDC (2008) study did not control for parental education, however, which would suggest that a higher proportion of continuing generation immigrant students were in college to prepare for university studies, while first generation recent immigrant students, like their domestic peers, were more committed to persisting in their college programs.

On the other hand, the high commitment level of the students in this study is consistent with the HRSDC (2007) study on the characteristics of first-year Canadian college students, which found that 96 percent of the students said they were determined to finish their educations, and 95 percent believed that finishing their program was important. Previous research has reported a positive correlation between intent to persist and graduation rates (Astin, 1993; Braxton, 2000; Tinto, 1993), yet only half of the students in this study graduated from their programs. Therefore, similar to the poor relationship between high levels of

15 See Appendix VI for the frequencies and percentages of the responses to the individual questions
confidence and academic achievement, this may mean that for first generation students in college programs, at least in Ontario, intent to persist also does not correlate well with their actual levels of achievement, and like academic confidence, may not be a relevant variable in models used to predict retention and graduation rates in the Ontario college system.

Another factor to consider is the timing of both the study college survey and the HRSDC (2007) survey of new college students. Both surveys were administered in the first few weeks of classes when students are still in the “honeymoon” stage—in other words, they are embarking on a new venture and have not yet received any negative input, like receiving poor grades or finding their courses less interesting than they expected, that would lead them to doubt their choice. In fact, a large scale, longitudinal study of patterns of persistence in post-secondary education across Canada found that half of all college students who decided to withdraw reported “lack of fit” with the program (Finnie et al., 2012), a decision that would typically be made in the post-honeymoon period after spending some time in the program. Another more recent study that focused on retention in six Greater Toronto Area (GTA) colleges, including the college where this study took place, also found that 41 percent of the students who voluntarily withdrew said they didn’t like their programs (Lopez-Rabson & McCloy, 2013). Both of these studies would indicate that, regardless of their initial enthusiasm and determination, about one-quarter of all college students eventually decide against persisting in their original programs; neither study, however, controlled for first generation status. Although the withdrawal rates for first generation and continuing generation students in the Ontario college system are close—38 percent of first generation students and 43 percent of continuing generation students—their reasons may not be similar (Finnie et al., 2012). It may be
that more continuing generation students who are dissatisfied with their programs are “switchers” who re-enroll in a different college program or transfer to university, while a higher proportion of first generation students abandon post-secondary studies altogether and enter the workforce.

Post-Secondary Intentions

Compared to the established and recent immigrant groups, the domestic first generation students in this study were less likely to indicate that their intent was to eventually pursue degree-level studies. This finding is consistent with prior research, which indicates that immigrant students in Canada overall have a preference for university programs, but immigrant students are also more likely to have parents with post-secondary educations (Abada & Lin, 2011; Human Resources and Development Canada, 2008; Sweet et al., 2010; Taylor & Krahn, 2005). The HRSDC (2008) follow-up study referred to earlier that focused on the characteristics and experiences of aboriginal, disabled, immigrant and minority racial students, also found that a higher proportion of recent immigrants in the college system indicated that the college program was not their first choice and they were there to prepare for university studies. The study, however, did not control for generational status, which along with the lower commitment levels of the recent immigrant students in the same study and the higher commitment levels in this study, would suggest that higher proportions of continuing generation immigrant students are intending to leave their college programs for university, while first generation immigrant students are more similar to their domestic counterparts in their post-secondary intentions.
College Performance and Attainments:

Retention and Graduation Rates

All three groups of first generation students had similar graduation rates. Fifty percent of the domestic students, 51 percent of the established immigrant students, and 52 percent of the recent immigrant students graduated from their programs, and all three groups were equally likely to graduate on time. The overall college graduation rate was also very similar – about 50 percent of all students who began two-year diploma programs in the Fall of 2008, both continuing generation and first generation students combined, graduated by the 200 percent time allotment.¹⁶ In other words, the overall graduation rate was almost identical, even when not controlling for generational status.

This finding seems to contradict numerous previous studies that indicate first generation students have lower retention and graduation rates (Choy, 2001; Collier & Morgan, 2008; Gibbons & Borders, 2010; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Hudley et al., 2009; Jenkins, Miyazaki & Janosik, 2009; McCarron & Inkelas, 2006; Mehta, Newbold & O’Rourke, 2011; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998). If that were indeed the case in this study, the college graduation rate would have been greater than 50 percent as it would have included the higher rate of continuing generation students. In fact, it would appear that the first generation students in this study were modestly more successful than their continuing generation peers. Because much of the prior Canadian post-secondary research focuses on universities, and less research has been done on colleges (Acumen Research, 2004; Auclair et al., 2008), this finding suggests that for college students, generational status may not be as important a factor in contributing to

¹⁶ Source: Institutional Research, Humber College
retention and graduation rates as it is for university students. In fact, this finding supports a previous study that found first generation students in Ontario college programs appear to be graduating at slightly higher rates that their non-first generation peers (Finnie et al., 2012).

That said, about 50 percent of the first generation students in this study did leave their original programs, a figure that is somewhat higher than the averages for the other colleges in the Greater Toronto Area, which ranges from 29 to 45 percent (Lopez-Rabson & McCloy, 2013), as well as for the college system across Canada with an average withdrawal rate of 44 percent (Finnie & Qui, 2008). However, a large scale study that tracked Canadian college students who withdrew from their original programs found that five years after entering post-secondary education, a further 17 percent had graduated from a program and 9 percent were still enrolled, pushing the college graduation rate up to 73 percent and the overall retention rate up to 82 percent; overall, about a quarter of all students entering college programs in Canada either re-enroll in their original program, switch to another program or college, or transfer to university (Finnie & Qui, 2008), a phenomenon that has been described as "positive attrition" (Lopez-Rabson & McCloy, 2013). Finnie and Qui (2008) also found that about 25 percent of all first generation college students do not return to post-secondary studies within five years, indicating that parental education continues to play a role in participation in higher education. In other words, continuing generation college students have greater "system retention" and are still more likely to eventually obtain a credential when compared to their first generation counterparts (Finnie & Qui, 2008).

What is less clear, however, is whether there is a difference in the re-enrollment or switching rates for immigrant first generation youth compared to both their domestic peers and
to immigrant continuing generation students. When the students in this study and the HRSDC (2007) study referred to earlier are categorized solely by their birthplace—either in Canada or outside of Canada—and are then compared to the "leaving" rates from a study that focused on retention in in six Greater Toronto Area (GTA) colleges, there is a proportional difference in the rates based on their birthplaces (see Figure 8 below). Lopez-Rabson & McCloy (2013) surveyed GTA college students who had voluntarily withdrawn from their programs to identify the reasons why the students chose to leave and the pathways they took after withdrawing from their initial program. The study found that about 66 percent of the “leavers” were Canadian by birth, which would combine both the domestic and established immigrant students in the current study, while about 32 percent were born outside the country.

Figure 8: Percentages of “Leavers” Categorized According to their Own Birth Places: Study Sample (2008) and the HRSD Canada (2007) Sample Compared to the “Leavers” in the Lopez-Rabson & McCloy (2013) Sample
What is interesting in the Lopez-Rabson & McCloy (2013) study is that proportionally more students born outside of Canada voluntarily left their programs compared to those who were Canadian-born. The study also found that 25 percent of all the students who intentionally withdrew had transferred to university, which again suggests that a higher percentage of those born outside of Canada may be withdrawing in order to pursue a degree. In other words, the college program was intended to provide a pathway to university and was not an end in itself (Finnie et al., 2012; Human Resources & Social Development Canada, 2007). However, like the HRSDC (2007) study, no distinction was made between continuing and first generation students, and it is entirely possible that there are differences in the re-enrollment or switching rates for immigrant first generation and immigrant continuing generation youth; continuing generation immigrant students may be more likely to switch programs or institutions, which would explain the higher leaving rate for GTA college students born outside of Canada.

**Academic Status of the Students Who Withdrew**

Although all the students in this study had high withdrawal rates, the recent immigrant first generation students were more likely to leave their programs even when they are performing well –55 percent of the recent immigrant students withdrew even though they were in good academic standing, compared with 40 percent of the domestic and 45 percent of established immigrant first generation students.\(^{17}\) Previous Canadian research has indicated that first generation students are more likely to drop out, even when they are doing well in their programs (Finnie & Qui, 2008; Lehmann, 2007). However, the difference in the withdrawal rates of the students in this study align with those of the Lopez-Rabson & McCloy (2013) study.

\(^{17}\) See Appendix VII for the frequencies and percentages of the students' statuses at the time of withdrawing
discussed previously – a higher proportion of foreign-born college students withdrew compared
to those who were Canadian-born. This pattern also provides additional evidence that
immigrant first generation students may be using the college system to access university,
especially since 64 percent of the leavers overall, and 76 percent of leavers with high grades,
reported being satisfied or very satisfied with their college experience (Lopez-Rabson & McCloy,
2013).

**College GPAs**

Finally, for the first generation students who did complete their programs, all three
groups had similar college grade point averages in the high 70’s at the time of graduation,
comparable to the overall average GPA of two-year diploma graduates at the College.¹⁸ This
finding contradicts prior research that indicated the children of immigrants tend to
academically outperform their peers (Dinovitzer et al., 2003; Finnie and Mueller, 2009;
Schleicher, 2006; Sweet et al., 2008), as well as prior research that found that first generation
students tend to struggle more academically in post-secondary studies than their continuing
generation peers (Finnie & Qui, 2008; Fischer, 2007; Lee, Sax, Kim & Hagedorn, 2004; McElroy,
2008). In fact, this similarity in the GPA’s of both first and continuing generation students in
this study, along with their similar graduation rates, suggests that first generation students who
persist in college programs are actually not at greater academic risk and perform as well as
their continuing generation counterparts, a finding that replicates an earlier study of the
achievement levels of Canadian first generation college students (Finnie et al., 2012).

¹⁸ Source: Institutional Research, Humber College
However, there may still be essential differences between first generation students who enter the college system and those who do not, especially in terms of their high school academic behaviours and achievements, and the value they place on a college credential. As well, the decision to enter post-secondary studies in Canada is still heavily influenced by levels of parental education (Finnie et al., 2011; Finnie, Lascelles, & Sweetman, 2005; Tomkowicz, & Bushnik 2003). In other words, access to post-secondary education remains an ongoing challenge for first generation students, but once a first generation student does gain admission to college program, the good news is that his or her chances of success in that program are equal to, or even slightly better, than his or her continuing generation peers.

**The Relationship of Bourdieu’s Social Reproduction Theory and the Concept of Habitus to the Findings in this Study**

According to Bourdieu, students from working class homes, where parents generally have lower educational achievement and less income, are less likely to be in possession of the dominant middle-class cultural capital that leads to academic success, capital that requires exposure to an extensive range of tangible resources, such as access to books, computer equipment, and tutors that all require a financial expenditure, as well as the intangible or “embodied” resources, such as behaviours, attitudes, preferences, expectations, skills, communication style, and knowledge about the educational system itself (Bourdieu, 1986). Bourdieu’s theory was firmly entrenched in socio-economic or “class” structures, whereby students from lower income homes were not in a position to develop the ingrained propensities that align with academic success. Bourdieu theorized that a young person raised in a home without exposure to the preferred cultural capital is unlikely to have internalized the
habitus, the embodied personal dispositions, values and beliefs that involuntarily promote post-secondary participation and achievement. Those who lack a “natural” familiarity or affinity with the dominant class are less likely to believe that pursuing higher education is appropriate or even desirable for someone of their class. If that young person does take the risk of enrolling in higher education, he or she is also more liable to experiencing cultural exclusion—a sense of being out of place, of not fitting in—and is therefore less likely to be successful in a setting that implicitly expects and rewards the preferred cultural capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977).

Bourdieu’s concept of habitus was firmly rooted in his analysis of social reproduction in mid-twentieth century France, a much more homogenous society with clearly entrenched historical social and class-based demarcations. Whether habitus exerts the same power over a young person’s agency in the younger, more diverse heterogeneous society of Canada is not fully clear. Consequently, a number of the variables investigated in this study are constructs that relate to Bourdieu’s theory of social reproduction and the concept of habitus. These include preparation for post-secondary studies; educational intentions, especially the amount and type of education that a young person expects to achieve; the confidence or expectation of academic success that a student brings to his or her post-secondary experience; and the eventual academic achievement of that student. Specifically this study focused on identifying any differences among three groups of first generation students in an Ontario college—domestic, established immigrant and recent immigrant students—in light of the fact that immigrant parents and their children have higher expectations for post-secondary education, even those parents who have no post-secondary education themselves (Bankston, 2004; Goyette & Xie, 1999; Kao & Tienda, 1995; Sweet et al., 2008; Sweet et al., 2010). Unlike the
working class parents in Bourdieu’s France, these parents may have intentionally engage in
transmitting these expectations, along with the *habitus* to support these expectations. In fact,
there is evidence that those who immigrated to Canada, including those with limited education,
may have done so primarily to improve their children’s opportunities for social advancement
through education (Anisef et al., 2008; Finnie & Mueller, 2009; Sweet, 2005); therefore, these
parents may have transmitted a very different set of dispositions to their children.

Overall, the findings in this study, along with previous studies of Canadian college
students, only partially align with Bourdieu’s theory. First, the first generation students in this
study were not the least hesitant or uncertain about the possibility of succeeding. All three
groups of first generation students had no doubt in their ability to do well in their college
programs and were fully confident that they were well equipped for post-secondary studies, a
finding that replicates a large-scale cross-Canada study of both first and continuing generation
college students (Human Resources & Social Development Canada, 2007). The students in this
study had every expectation of doing well, and even had higher entering high school averages
than their continuing generation peers. Secondly, although the overall graduation rate for all
three groups was only about 50 percent, it was actually higher than their continuing generation
peers, again similar to a previous study of the success rate of students in college programs in
Canada (Finnie & Qui, 2008). These findings suggest that Bourdieu’s theory of social
reproduction may not fully apply to first generation students entering college programs in
Canada, as these students are as confident and as successful as those from more affluent
homes with parents who have post-secondary experience. In other words, it is possible that
*habitus* may not have the same power to dampen or diminish a first generation college
student’s sense of belonging and expectations of success that it may have in other settings. This perhaps speaks well to the efforts of the elementary and secondary systems in Ontario in their dedicated efforts to advance and solidify inclusionary practices across economic and racial divides.

It must be noted, however, that this study focused only on first generation students who had successfully enrolled in a diploma program at a single Ontario college. Overall, the proportion of first generation students in Canada who pursue post-secondary studies is still lower than their continuing generation peers (Finnie et al., 2005; Tomokowicz & Bushnick, 2003), as well as lower for those in the lowest income quartile (Finnie et al., 2011; Human Resources and Social Development Canada, 2007; Knighton & Mirza, 2002); in other words, habitus may still be a factor in a young person’s decision to continue his or her education beyond high school, as well as a factor in the type of education he or she chooses. So far, no Canadian studies have compared the habitus—the differences in academic intentions, confidence levels or expectations of success—of first generation students who go on to different levels of post-secondary studies compared to those who do not.

There are possibly also differences between the habitus of a first generation student who enters a college program compared to one who enters a university program since proportionally more first generation students in Canada enroll in college programs rather than university programs (Auclair et al., 2008; de Broucker, 2005). Previous American and Canadian research has found that first generation students who enter four-year programs, especially those who move away from home to attend university, are more uncertain about their educational plans, are less confident in their ability to succeed, and feel more alienated from
the beliefs, behaviours and expectations of their continuing generation peers (Collier & Morgan, 2008; Corea, 2009; Dumais & Ward, 2010; Housel, 2012; Lara, 1992; Lehmann, 2007, 2009a; London, 1992; Stieha, 2010; Wilson, T., 2012). For many of these students, pursuing a four-year degree can truly create an uncomfortable and unwelcome disconnection with the values and experiences of their families and friends (Aries & Seider, 2005; Cushman, 2007; Lehmann, 2004, 2007; Rendon, 1992; Somers et al., 2004; Terenzini et al., 1994). In contrast, students who attend two-year commuter colleges, like the students in this study, are not taking the same life-altering risk and making a disconcerting break with their pasts. They are generally still living at home and participating in family and cultural activities, socializing with the same friends and pursuing the same interests, and working at the same part-time jobs (Lara, 1992; London, 1978). For them, college is not a dramatic change from what is familiar and may simply feel more like a continuation of high school.

This study does, however, provide some evidence that that *habitus* of first generation domestic students may differ from their recent immigrant peers, especially in terms of the amount and type of education that they would ideally like to achieve. Fewer than a third of the domestic students in this study indicated that they were in college to prepare for university studies, and compared to their continuing generation counterparts, the domestic first generation students indicated that their primary goal is to obtain a college credential, which is consistent with prior research (Hahs-Vaughn, 2004; Inman & Mayes, 1999; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Somers et al., 2004; Pascarella et al., 2004); in other words, their *habitus* has led them to believe that a college-level education is an appropriate choice for someone of their background. In contrast, almost half of the established and recent immigrant first generation
students indicated that they intended to pursue a degree, and the recent immigrant students had higher rates of withdrawing, even when they were doing well in their programs. These findings would indicate that the *habitus* of many immigrant first generation students does not preclude them from forming aspirations to attend university and does not exert what Lehmann (2004) refers to as “predictive significance” (p. 380). For many of them, degree level studies are both possible and probable, and their college program is simply a step in that direction.

Yet, in the Canadian context of a heterogeneous society with a significant immigrant population, *habitus* may be a more complex construct. In fact, other factors, such as immigrant history and the basis of immigrant status, may play a more influential role in the development of ingrained attitudes and expectations of *habitus*. Certainly “immigrant optimism,” the expectation of attaining a higher standard of living through education and work, may influence immigrant *habitus* in a generalized sense; as well, not all immigrant groups share the same immigrant experience. Their ethnicity, experiences as refugees, or reasons for immigrating, such as family reunification, may all influence their expectations of success, or *habitus*, in a new country. As well, in some immigrant groups, young people may live in extended family arrangements, which means that although their parents may have no post-secondary education, other members of their family do, who are a source of cultural capital in favour of postsecondary aspirations. These factors definitely may influence the *habitus* these students bring to their post-secondary expectations.
CHAPTER 8: AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall, the findings of this study indicate that the three groups of first generation students share a number of similarities, especially related to their pre-college academic behaviours and attainments, their belief in the value of a post-secondary education, their confidence in their ability to do well in college, and their determination to complete a credential. Furthermore, the first generation college students in this study report behaviours, attitudes and attainments that are very similar to, if not slightly better, than their continuing generation peers, and do not actually appear to be at greater academic risk. It must be noted, though, that this study focused solely on students entering two-year programs at a large community college in the Greater Toronto Area, and therefore may not apply to students in entering smaller colleges in less populated areas, nor to students entering university programs. These similarities, however, do suggest seven potential areas for further study.

Implications for Further Research

1. The first potential area for further study involves high school GPA's. The first generation students in this study actually had higher entering averages than their continuing generation counterparts. This difference in achievement may be further investigated in a study that compares the types of courses first generation and continuing generation students take in high school. If first generation students are largely enrolled in the more applied college-level courses, while the continuing generation students generally take the more academic courses, then this would indicate that first generation students continue to have less academic preparation for post-secondary studies, especially degree-level studies. As well, it would
suggest that the *habitus* for first generation students, especially those in high school, still constrains the level of higher education they see as probable and appropriate. If the study also looked at the differences in high school course work between immigrant and domestic first generation students, and a higher proportion of immigrant students were enrolled in the academic courses, this may provide further evidence that immigrant students are more likely to use the college system as a step to university, as discussed below.

2. Second, all of the students in this study were successful in gaining admission to a college program, yet 20 percent of all first generation students in Ontario do not go on to post-secondary studies (Lennon et al., 2011). A study that compared first generation high school graduates who went on to college with those who did not in terms of their high school achievement, their belief in the value of a post-secondary education, and their confidence in their ability to do well if they were enrolled in a college program may also reveal substantial differences in their *habitus*. These differences may also show that the variables used in traditional models to predict retention are actually more relevant in predicting who will access post-secondary studies, not who will stay the courses.

3. Third, the overwhelming preference for programs in the Social and Community Services cluster would benefit from further investigation. One of the limitations of this study is that the student responses were not analyzed by gender, yet the gender balance at the college where this study occurred has consistently been almost equal for the past decade – around 48 percent male and 52 percent female.\(^{19}\) It may be possible that a higher proportion of female first generation

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\(^{19}\) Source: Institutional Research, Humber College
students overall are represented in the study sample, or that female immigrant students are more likely to choose college programs compared to their domestic peers or male counterparts, which in turn has implications for the types of supports available to the various groups of students.

4. Fourth, although numerous studies have shown that immigrant youth in Canada overall outperform their domestic peers (Abada et al., 2009; Bonikowska, 2007; Butlin, 1999; Dinovitzer et al., 2003; Finnie and Mueller, 2009; Hansen & Kucera, 2004; Kao & Tienda, 2005; Sweet et al., 2008; Richmond, 1986), the immigrant students in this study actually had higher rates of withdrawing from their college programs. In combination, however, the evidence in this study suggests that the immigrant students are more likely to be using the college as an access point to university. They spent very little time researching the type of work the college credential would prepare them for, they were more likely to indicate that they intended to pursue degree-level studies, and they had higher rates of withdrawing from their programs even though they were doing well academically. A study that correlated the time of application and withdrawal rates of the three groups may also provide additional evidence. Specifically, when compared to the domestic students, if the immigrant students applied later in the application cycle, this may be because they were unsuccessful in being admitted to a university program and chose the college program as an alternate; this would also explain the lack of time these students spent researching the type of work the college program leads to. More directly, surveying incoming students to find out if they were denied admission to a university before entering college would also confirm this explanation. In addition, a follow-up study that
focused on comparing, by immigrant status, the first generation students who successfully transferred from college to university may also provide confirmatory evidence.

5. Fifth, the data for this study was obtained from a questionnaire administered to students at the beginning of their first semester, before they had attended many classes, assessed the amount of effort they would need to put into their school work, or received any feedback about their academic ability or progress in their college courses. If the same questionnaire were administered later in the semester, there may be considerable differences in the students' levels of confidence in their ability to do well and in their intent to persist as the semester progressed. If the study also compared the responses of both first generation and continuing generation students, there may also be differences in the two groups in terms of how well they sustain their levels of academic confidence and intent to persist. In other words, it may be conceivable that first generation students' levels of confidence and indicators in favour of persistence may erode more quickly over time compared to their continuing generation peers. If this were the case, this too would have implications for the type of interventions designed to support first generation students, especially the timing of these interventions.

6. Sixth, although a number of studies have focused on students' patterns of persistence in the Canadian system of higher education (de Broucker, 2005; Dooley et al., 2011; Finnie & Qui, 2008; Finnie et al., 2012), none of these studies have focused on comparing immigrant with non-immigrant first generation students. A study that specifically compared these students in terms of their rates of transferring from diplomas to degrees would also provide additional confirmation that in turn may inform programs to assist these students as they navigate through a complex post-secondary system.
7. Finally, the intent of this study was to examine differences in three groups of first generation students by domestic or immigrant status to differentiate among the groups to challenge homogenous assumptions, yet the truth is that immigrants to Canada are themselves not a homogenous group. Some minoritized racial groups, such as Asian students, are very successful in post-secondary education, while others, such as Blacks of Caribbean origin, are less so. In other words, a further differentiation of first generation students by race on the variables in this study would further enrich our understanding of the types of supports and programs that would contribute to the academic success of minoritized racial groups in Canada. As yet, we do not have a full understanding of the academic behaviours, challenges, aspirations, and post-secondary patterns of persistence of the various groups.

**Recommendations for College Practices and Programming:**

The findings of this study lead to a number of recommendations for the Ontario colleges in terms of their enrollment practices, their student support programs, and their academic programming:

**Recommendation 1: Reconsider the Variables Used as Predictors of Persistence**

First, the similarities between the first generation students in this study and their continuing generation counterparts in previous studies suggest that traditional models used to predict student retention and graduation rates that include variables such as incoming GPA, levels of academic confidence and intent to persist do not have the same predictive power for students entering two-year college-level programs that they may have for students entering degree-granting programs. As noted above, the first generation students in this study actually had
higher graduation rates than their continuing generation peers. Therefore, the colleges may need to rethink the use of these variables, as well as first generation status overall, as predictors of persistence in their strategic enrollment formulas.

**Recommendation 2: Revise Student Support Programs for First Generation Students**

The higher incoming GPAs and the slightly higher persistence and graduation rates have implications for the types of services and programs designed to support first generation students in the college system, especially in terms of their applicability and effectiveness. Most student support programs for first generation students are based on “deficit” models—in other words, they assume that first generation college students need additional academic support to compensate for their lack of preparation for post-secondary studies, more advising services to help them successfully negotiate the system to compensate for their lack of capital, or peer-based interventions intended to boost their low confidence in their academic ability. Although it could be argued that the success of the first generation students in this study is entirely due to the existence of these support programs, the truth is that most first generation students do not actually seek them out, even when they are directly contacted and invited to do so; in fact, at the college where this study occurred, fewer than 10 percent of first generation students access any of the programs intentionally designed to support them, and even when they do, most of that contact is negligible at best, perhaps because the students do not see their relevance. The results of this study would suggest, then, that programs initially designed to address “deficits” need to be revised in order to make these programs more appropriate and effective for first generation students.

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20 Source: Office of Student Success and Engagement, Humber College
**Recommendation 3: Develop Programs to Help Students Find Alternate Post-secondary Pathways**

Most retention support programs at the colleges focus on strategies for keeping the students in their original programs of study and fail to acknowledge that a quarter of all students, first and continuing generation combined, leave their programs for reasons such as “lack of fit,” “didn’t like it,” or “it wasn’t for me” (de Broucker, 2005; Finnie et al., 2012; Lopez-Rabson & McCloy, 2013). Although continuing generation students are more likely to re-enrol in a post-secondary program, first generation students are less likely to return to higher education within five years (Finnie & Qui, 2008). Instead of focusing on retaining students in a specific academic program, which is unlikely to be successful if a student has genuinely lost interest in that program, the colleges may want to consider developing support programs that help students find alternate post-secondary pathways with the goal of optimizing system retention instead of specific program retention. Such interventions would help students clarify their personal and occupational interests, create educational plans, and help them make a seamless transition to a new program.

**Recommendation 4: Develop Dedicated Student Support Systems for Immigrant First Generation Students**

With the exception of the amount of time spent researching their college programs, both the established and the recent immigrant students in this study were very similar in their high school behaviours and GPAs. This finding would suggest that the overall greater achievement of immigrant students in the Canadian educational system can be explained by the higher academic achievement of their parents. In other words, immigrant and domestic first generation students are more alike than different; in fact the overall higher educational
achievement of immigrant parents may actually be masking this similarity and creating the impression that immigrant students generally have the capital and *habitus* in favour of academic achievement and high post-secondary aspirations. As a result, programs across all levels of education intended to support the integration of immigrant youth into the Canadian educational system that do not distinguish between generational status may not be as effective for first generation immigrant youth, and might even alienate these youth, especially in helping them build post-secondary intentions and ultimately achieve those intentions. In response, programs across the various levels of education, and especially the college system, should consider including dedicated student support systems specifically for immigrant first generation students that address their unique needs and help them build and achieve their aspirations.

**Recommendation 5: Develop Academic Programs that Replicate the First-year Experience of Degree-level Studies**

Many of the first generation students in this study, especially the recent immigrant students, appear to be using the college system in order to access degree programs. Using the college system for admission to university has a number of implications for vocational programing, especially since in Ontario, unlike many other jurisdictions, the college system was intentionally set up to *not* facilitate transfers from college to university (Clark et al., 2009) and is still in the process of building diploma-to-degree transfer opportunities that appropriately recognize and reward students' college achievements. Specifically, the college system in Ontario, through strategic enrollment initiatives, has begun a process of more carefully aligning the number of students it accepts into vocational programs with the projected employment
opportunities for graduates of those programs. In the past, student demand and institutional capacity often played a larger role in the enrollment targets of college programs. However, if students are entering vocational programs and then leaving them to transfer to university, then there could potentially be a misalignment, a “skills shortage,” in some occupations between the number of entry-level positions and the number of graduates qualified for those positions. As well, because programs at colleges generally focus on a defined set of skills and knowledge related to a specific occupation, students intending to transfer to university may not be getting “good value” in advancing their expertise in some areas, such as critical thinking, which are necessary for academic success at a university, especially if these students are leaving the programs before graduation, which has implications for the types of academic programming offered by the colleges.

Currently, almost every college in Ontario does have General Arts and Science programs that focus on more global academic skills and knowledge without a vocational focus; however, they are largely remedial programs that would not be attractive, nor useful, to a student who did well in high school, like the majority of the first generation students in this study. In Ontario, especially in the Toronto area with the universities at capacity, if students continue to use the college system to access university, then the students –and the colleges –may benefit from programming specifically intended to replicate the first-year experience of degree-level studies in generalized areas such as business, social sciences, engineering, and health sciences. This would also allow students who took college-level high school courses the opportunity to obtain degree-level admission requirements without having to repeat two or more years of

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21 Source: Institutional Research, Humber College
high school. Although obtaining transfer credit for these programs would be highly unlikely due to the historical and political divide between the two post-secondary systems in Ontario, I believe that those students who were initially unsuccessful in gaining admission to a university program would welcome these programs since they would better align with their post-secondary intentions than a vocational program, especially if these programs were recognized as a basis for admission to degree studies like the academic high school courses. The smaller class sizes and the longer semester that colleges offer would also provide these students with a more supportive educational environment as they prepare to enter a more complex “field,” to use Bourdieu’s term, that requires greater self-efficacy, as well as explicit cultural capital such as knowledge about negotiating the post-secondary system that can bewilder first generation students.

**Recommendation 7: Allow Non-degree College Students to Enroll in Degree Breadth Courses**

Since it is clear that many first generation students, and quite likely their continuing generation counterparts, are using the college system for admission to degree-level studies, then the colleges should consider allowing students to take course currently restricted to degree programs at their institutions. Many of the Ontario colleges do offer four-year baccalaureates –in fact, the college where this study occurred offers twenty-five baccalaureate degrees in applied areas of study, such as commerce, media studies, and social and community services. All of these degrees have between 20 and 25 percent breadth requirements, meaning that the college has developed an extensive offering of both lower and upper degree-level breadth courses. Currently, non-degree students, such as the diploma students in this study, are prohibited from enrolling these courses. However, if the colleges should consider opening
these courses to non-degree students, perhaps in their second year of study, then students
would then not only have additional opportunities to develop the knowledge and skills to help
them be successful in degree-level programs, but it would also increase the number of
transferable credits. As well, this would allow students with degree aspirations to “test out”
the academic and cognitive demands of degree-level studies, and the colleges would have a
larger audience for it degree-level breadth options, leading to a more robust and diverse
package of offerings.

**Recommendation 8: Provide More Support for Students Transferring to Degree Studies**

Finally, since many of the students in this study intended to pursue degree-level studies,
the colleges may want to develop more diploma-to-degree support services, not just for first
generation students, but for all students with degree aspirations. Currently, most students are
made aware of the degree-completion arrangements for their specific programs of study, but
generally lack knowledge about the many other opportunities available to them. ONTransfer
has definitely become a valuable resource for students interested in exploring other programs
of study at both the college and university levels, but even with this resource, many students
are still uncertain about the transfer requirements, and some of the terminology used by the
"receiving" institutions can be unclear. For example, a student who is attempting to determine
the number and type of transfer credits he or she will receive must be able to differentiate
among advanced standing, individual course equivalencies, specific transfer credits, unspecified
transfer credits, or generic transfer credits—as well as the process for receiving those credits. A
program that assisted students with understanding and navigating the process would likely be
well received by students, especially by recent immigrant students who have less experience in the Canadian educational system.

Conclusion

Overall, the findings of this study indicate that first generation students entering college programs—whether they were born in Canada to Canadian-born parents, born in Canada to foreign-born parents, or foreign-born themselves—are confident, feel they are academically prepared, and are certain they will be successful. In other words, their *habitus* does not predispose them to be tentative or undecided about their decision to pursue a college diploma; their retention and graduation rates also support this analysis, which in turn has a number of implications for further study and for college practices and programming.

There does, however, appear to be a “threshold” *habitus* effect among the three groups. In other words, the domestic first generation students in this study seemed more likely to perceive a college diploma as a terminal credential that is probable and appropriate for someone of their background, while immigrant students are more likely to move on to degree studies. Only by comparing the eventual attainments of the three groups of first generation students with their continuing generation counterparts, as well as the post-secondary paths that the students eventually pursued, can the extent to which *habitus* exerts its influence on the type of post-secondary education students aspire to and achieve be more fully known, and the programs and pathways to support that achievement be implemented.
REFERENCES


Foley, K. (2001). *Why stop after high school? A descriptive analysis of the most important reasons that high school graduates do not continue to PSE.* Montréal, QC: Canadian Millennium Research Foundation.


Human Resources and Social Development Canada. (2007). *Pan-Canadian study of first year college students. Report 1: Student characteristics and the college experience*.


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APPENDIX I: The Partners in Education Survey Instrument

PARTNERS IN EDUCATION INVENTORY
CREATING PARTNERSHIPS FOR LEARNING

ENSURING SUCCESS: In a recent study, 90% of college and university students said they would like to attend an institution that actively promotes their success by working with every student as an individual. This means that institutions should recognize and respond, as much as possible, to the uniqueness of each student by creating individualized learning opportunities. The result can be a much more satisfying and rewarding college experience.

To help you succeed, therefore, we need to know a little about you and the services you think could benefit you the most. Your responses to this survey will then be used to create your own Personalized Learning Plan, a customized report providing information on those services that match your specific needs. Using these will make your transition to college easier and create a more satisfying college experience. That is why the completion of this survey is so important; it provides an opportunity for us to help you achieve your postsecondary goals.

Our objective is to work with you as partner in your success.

INSTRUCTIONS: Please read each question carefully and answer all parts of this form according to the instructions provided. USE A BLACK LEAD PENCIL. Complete each part accurately and honestly by deciding which response best reflects your situation or opinion. There are no 'correct' answers and it is especially important that you answer every question if possible. Should you change your answer, be sure to fully erase your first response.

HOW TO RESPOND: Please answer the questions on the following pages as shown below. If you have any problems, ask your instructor or other member of college staff.

This survey is conducted under the legal authority of the Ministry of Colleges and University Act, R.S.O., 1990, Reg. 770. Only general statistics will be reported and no individual will be identified unless authorized in writing by the respondent. For more information contact: Dr. Peter Dietsche, Humber College of Applied Arts and Technology 416.675.6522, ext. 4524.

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Please do not write in this area

83563
1. Please write in the name of your college below.

2. Gender:
   - Male
   - Female

3. First time at this college as a full-time student?
   - Yes
   - No

4. Enrollment status:
   - Full-time (4 courses or more)
   - Part-time (3 courses or less)

5. Student Number:

6. Age:

7. Class:

8. Program length:
   - 1 year
   - 2 years
   - 3 years
   - Other

9. Please provide the first three characters of your permanent home postal code:
   - First
   - Second
   - Third
10. Please indicate the highest level of education you have attained so far. (Choose one response)
   - less than grade 12 graduation
   - grade 12 graduation
   - post secondary 1 or 2 years
   - grade 13 graduation (6 OACs)
   - grade 12 graduation (6 OACs)
   - partial college studies
   - partial university studies
   - no degree/diploma/certificate
   - university degree (B.A., B.Sc., etc.)

11. What type of course did you take the greatest number of in high school grades 11-12?
    Choose ONE answer below please.
    - advanced
    - university (U)
    - general
    - university/college (U/C)
    - career
    - college (C)
    - did not attend an academic
    - workplace
    - Ontario School Board

12. What was your approximate overall average in your final year of high school?
    FILL IN ONE NUMBER IN EACH COLUMN PLEASE.

13. How often did you study while in high school?
    - rarely, only before an exam
    - once or two nights a week
    - three or four nights a week
    - five or six nights a week
    - every night

14. How often, on average, did you skip classes in high school?
    - never
    - rarely
    - sometimes
    - usually
    - always

15. How often did you complete homework assignments on time in high school?
    - hardly
    - rarely
    - sometimes
    - usually
    - always

16. Which language did you learn first?
    - French
    - English
    - Abor ( Cree, Inuit, Ojibway, Mi'kmaq etc.)
    - Spanish
    - other European (Italian, Greek, German etc.)
    - Indo-Pakistani (Bengali, Hindi, Urdu, etc.)
    - East Asian (Chinese, Japanese, Latin etc.)
    - an African language
    - other language

17. Indicate the highest level of education attained by your parents/guardians by filling in the appropriate oval.
    - Father's highest level of education
    - less than elementary school completion
    - completed elementary school
    - some high school
    - completed high school
    - some trade/vocational training
    - completed college or CEGEP
    - university
    - completed Bachelor's degree
    - partial Master's or Ph.D. study
    - completed Master's or Ph.D.
    - completed professional degree (lawyer, M.D.)

18. Mother's highest level of education
    - less than elementary school completion
    - completed elementary school
    - some high school
    - completed high school
    - some trade/vocational training
    - completed college or CEGEP
    - university
    - completed Bachelor's degree
    - partial Master's or Ph.D. study
    - completed Master's or Ph.D.
    - completed professional degree (lawyer, M.D.)

19. What was your MAIN activity during the 12 month period prior to entering this college?
    - attend n_g. high school full-time
    - attend n_g. college full-time
    - attend n_g. university full-time
    - working full-time (over 28 hrs. per week)
    - working part-time (less than 30 hrs. per week)
    - both working and studying part-time
    - a full-time homemaker
    - unemployed and seeking work
    - other

20. How many people, besides yourself, are financially dependent on you?
    - None
    - one
    - two
    - three
    - over 3
    - one
    - two
    - three
    - over 3
29. How often do you expect you will have to study to be successful in your program?
   a. rarely, only before the exam
   b. once or twice a week
   c. three to four nights a week
   d. five to six nights a week
   e. every night

30. About how much time have you spent exploring what you would actually be doing in the type of job you feel your program will lead to?
   a. 1 hour or less
   b. more than 1 but less than 4 hours
   c. 4 or more, but less than 8 hours
   d. between 5 and 10 hours
   e. more than 10 hours

31. Indicate whether you visited this college to participate in any of the following activities.
   Yes, I attended
   No, I did not attend
   Cannot remember
   a. College information day/Open House
   b. Program visit (with program faculty)
   c. Summer information session (June/July)
   d. Registered as a part-time student
   e. Off-campus events (sports concerts, etc.)
   f. Career day/Student for a Day
   g. Orientation day(s) before classes started

THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS DESCRIBE CERTAIN ATTITUDES THAT STUDENTS MAY HAVE REGARDING THEIR COLLEGE EDUCATION. PLEASE INDICATE WHETHER YOU AGREE, DISAGREE OR ARE NEUTRAL/HAVE NO OPINION ABOUT EACH STATEMENT ACCORDING TO THE SCALE DESCRIBED BELOW.

SA = STRONGLY AGREE: You totally agree with the statement
A = AGREE: You agree more than disagree with the statement
N = NEUTRAL: You neither agree nor disagree; you are undecided/have no opinion
D = DISAGREE: You disagree more than you agree with the statement
SD = STRONGLY DISAGREE: You totally disagree with the statement

32. It is important that I complete my program and obtain a certificate/diploma/degree (depending on your goal).

33. I am here to take a few courses only and then transfer to a university.

34. I am capable of getting a B+ or 78% average or better in my courses.

35. I am NOT sure what kind of work I will be doing after I graduate.

36. I am very certain that I will complete my program in the usual time (e.g., 2-year program in 2 years, 3-year program in 3 years)

The next question and others like it have been included to identify any errors in the computer processing of this form. For each of these, simply darken the oval in the response area corresponding to the number indicated. For example, answer question 37 by darkening oval #3.

37. Please respond to this question by darkening oval #3.

38. I may quit my studies at this college before I finish my program.

39. I could benefit greatly from special help in securing financial aid for my education.

40. I have chosen the program I am in because I have a particular career/field in mind.

41. My success in college will depend on being able to manage my time.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>42. I am very certain I will obtain a college degree/diploma/certificate (depending on your goal).</td>
<td>0-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43. Graduating from college will improve my future job potential.</td>
<td>0-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44. Problems in my personal life may interfere with my academic success.</td>
<td>0-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45. I have the ability to succeed in college-level studies.</td>
<td>0-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46. My goal in college is to study only until a good job becomes available.</td>
<td>0-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47. Difficulties with finances may mean that I will have to quit my studies.</td>
<td>0-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48. I am determined to finish my college education.</td>
<td>0-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49. I am NOT sure how the program I am in is related to my future career.</td>
<td>0-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50. Please respond to this question by darkening oval # 1.</td>
<td>0-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51. I may NOT continue with my studies next semester.</td>
<td>0-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52. My goal in college is to take a few courses only without completing a program.</td>
<td>0-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53. College graduates have a better chance of getting a good job than those who do not graduate.</td>
<td>0-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54. I would prefer to be attending another institution rather than this college.</td>
<td>0-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55. I am quite sure about the kind of work I will be doing after I graduate.</td>
<td>0-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56. It is NOT important that I graduate with a degree/diploma/certificate.</td>
<td>0-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57. I would decide to remain in college even if I offered a full-time job.</td>
<td>0-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58. I feel undecided about what my career will be after I finish college.</td>
<td>0-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59. I find it easy to make friends in new situations.</td>
<td>0-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60. I am dependent upon financial assistance in order to pay for my education.</td>
<td>0-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61. Please respond to this question by darkening oval # 4.</td>
<td>0-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>62. I would rather be working full-time than studying right now.</td>
<td>0-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63. I feel my program is directly related to the type of work I want after I graduate.</td>
<td>0-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64. I think I am well prepared to be a successful student in college.</td>
<td>0-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65. Paying for my education is NOT going to be a problem for me this semester.</td>
<td>0-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66. If I work hard at my college studies I am more likely to get a good job.</td>
<td>0-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>67. My goal in college is to complete my studies on a full-time basis.</td>
<td>0-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>68. College graduates find more satisfying jobs than those who don't graduate.</td>
<td>0-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>69. If I had the chance to have a full-time job I would take it and leave college.</td>
<td>0-3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
THE STATEMENTS BELOW REFLECT POSSIBLE ATTITUDES YOU MAY HAVE ABOUT THIS COLLEGE. BASED ON YOUR EXPERIENCE SO FAR, INDICATE WHETHER YOU AGREE, DISAGREE OR ARE UNDECIDED/NEUTRAL ABOUT EACH STATEMENT. IF YOU FEEL YOU HAVE NOT YET HAD ENOUGH EXPERIENCE TO MAKE A JUDGMENT, RESPOND WITH "NEUTRAL" (N).

70. I do NOT think my program is of high quality.  
71. College staff I have had contact with care about helping students with their problems.  
72. Please respond to this question by darkening oval #5.  
73. Orientation provided information that helped me get ready for college.  
74. I think now that I did NOT make the right decision in coming to this college.  
75. The faculty/instructors in my program are excellent teachers.  
76. So far, college staff have been friendly and welcoming.  
77. I consider this to be an excellent college.  
78. College staff have been able to answer all my questions so far.  
79. At this time I feel that this may NOT be the best college for me.  
80. This college is concerned with helping students succeed in their studies.

POSSIBLE REASONS FOR ATTENDING A COLLEGE ARE LISTED BELOW. INDICATE HOW IMPORTANT EACH IS TO YOU USING THE SCALE WHERE 5 = "MAJOR REASON", 3 = "MINOR REASON" AND 1 = "NOT A REASON".

81. To acquire the knowledge and skills for my future occupation.  
82. To prepare for university studies.  
83. To obtain a student loan or other form of financial assistance.  
84. To be able to make more money.  
85. To help decide on a career.  
86. To be with my friends.  
87. Obtain a college diploma then continue on to university and obtain a degree.  
88. Could not find a job I wanted.  
89. To improve my chances for career advancement.  
90. Personal development: help develop a sense of self or discover who I am.  
91. To broaden my knowledge about the world around me.  
92. Because my parents wanted me to go to college.
To ensure your experience here is positive and to provide you with personalized service, we may contact you by email or telephone. If you prefer email, reply "yes" to Q93 and provide your email address.

E-Mail Address

Area Code+Tel Number

Answer any extra questions provided on a separate sheet using buttons 95-104.

105. Consent
I understand that the information collected on this questionnaire will only be provided to authorized college staff for the purpose of helping me adjust to and be successful in college. I permit, therefore, the release of this information for this purpose only.

COMMENT?

Signature of student

Please do not write in this area
## APPENDIX II: Two-Year Diploma Programs at Study College by Occupational Cluster

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupational Cluster</th>
<th>Program Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Applied Technology</strong></td>
<td>Computer and Network Support Technician&lt;br&gt;Computer Programmer&lt;br&gt;Heating, Refrigeration and Air Conditioning Technician&lt;br&gt;Landscape Technician&lt;br&gt;Landscape Technician Co-op Apprenticeship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Business</strong></td>
<td>Business –Accounting&lt;br&gt;Business –Fashion Arts&lt;br&gt;Business –Financial Services&lt;br&gt;Business –Management&lt;br&gt;Business –Marketing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Creative Arts and Design</strong></td>
<td>Advertising and Graphic Design&lt;br&gt;Advertising and Marketing Communications&lt;br&gt;Creative Photography&lt;br&gt;Interior Decorating&lt;br&gt;Multimedia Design and Production Technician&lt;br&gt;Multimedia 3D Animation&lt;br&gt;Visual and Digital Arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Health Sciences</strong></td>
<td>Funeral Service Education&lt;br&gt;Occupational Therapist Assistant and Physiotherapist Assistant&lt;br&gt;Pharmacy Technician&lt;br&gt;Practical Nursing&lt;br&gt;Paramedic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hospitality, Tourism and Recreation</strong></td>
<td>Culinary Management&lt;br&gt;Fitness and Health Promotion&lt;br&gt;Hospitality Management&lt;br&gt;Recreation and Leisure Services&lt;br&gt;Tourism Hospitality Management –Business Applications&lt;br&gt;Tourism Management –Travel Industry Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Performing Arts</strong></td>
<td>Acting for Film and Television&lt;br&gt;Broadcast Television/ Videography&lt;br&gt;Broadcast –Radio&lt;br&gt;Comedy Writing and Performance&lt;br&gt;Theatre Arts –Technical Production</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social and Community Services</strong></td>
<td>Community and Justice Services&lt;br&gt;Court and Tribunal Agent&lt;br&gt;Developmental Services Worker&lt;br&gt;Early Childhood Education&lt;br&gt;Law Clerk/ Paralegal&lt;br&gt;Police Foundations&lt;br&gt;Social Service Worker</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### APPENDIX III: High School Academic Effort – Frequencies and Percentages

#### Q13: How often did you study during the week while in high school?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>1-2 nights</th>
<th>3 to 4 nights</th>
<th>5 to 6 nights</th>
<th>Every night</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Domestic (259)</td>
<td>109(42.1%)</td>
<td>112(43.2%)</td>
<td>30(11.6%)</td>
<td>6(2.3%)</td>
<td>2(0.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Combined: 221 (85.3%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Established (203)</td>
<td>77(37.9%)</td>
<td>76(37.4%)</td>
<td>41(20.2%)</td>
<td>5(2.5%)</td>
<td>4(2.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Combined: 153 (75.3%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recent (86)</td>
<td>22(25.6%)</td>
<td>30(34.9%)</td>
<td>25(29.1%)</td>
<td>5(5.8%)</td>
<td>4(4.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Combined: 52 (60.5%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Q14: How often on average did you skip classes in high school?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Once a week or more</th>
<th>2 to 3 times a month</th>
<th>About once a month</th>
<th>Almost never</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Domestic FGS (257)</td>
<td>55(21.4%)</td>
<td>54(21.0%)</td>
<td>34(13.2%)</td>
<td>72(28.0%)</td>
<td>42(16.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Combined: 143 (55.6%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Established FGS (203)</td>
<td>39(19.2%)</td>
<td>53(26.1%)</td>
<td>35(17.2%)</td>
<td>47(23.1%)</td>
<td>29(14.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Combined: 127 (62.5%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recent FGS (86)</td>
<td>17(19.8%)</td>
<td>15(17.4%)</td>
<td>14(16.3%)</td>
<td>26(30.2%)</td>
<td>14(16.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Combined: 46 (53.5%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Q15: How often did you complete homework assignments on time while in high school?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Usually</th>
<th>Always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Domestic FGS (256)</td>
<td>3(1.2%)</td>
<td>14(5.5%)</td>
<td>35(13.7%)</td>
<td>127(49.6%)</td>
<td>77(30.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Combined: 52 (20.4%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Combined: 204 (79.7%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Established FGS (202)</td>
<td>0(0%)</td>
<td>4(2.0%)</td>
<td>24(11.8%)</td>
<td>104(51.5%)</td>
<td>70(34.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Combined: 28 (13.8%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Combined: 174 (86.2%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recent FGS (86)</td>
<td>0(0%)</td>
<td>4(4.7%)</td>
<td>9(10.5%)</td>
<td>40(46.5%)</td>
<td>33(38.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Combined: 13 (15.2%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Combined:73 (84.9%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX IV: Academic Confidence – Frequencies and Percentages

Q34: I am capable of getting a B+ or 78% average or better in my courses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Domestic FGS</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>41 (15.9%)</td>
<td>97 (37.6%)</td>
<td>120 (46.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(258)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>217 (84.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Established FGS</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>2 (1%)</td>
<td>27 (13.4%)</td>
<td>94 (46.8%)</td>
<td>78 (38.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(201)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>172 (85.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recent FGS</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>14 (16.3%)</td>
<td>32 (37.2%)</td>
<td>40 (46.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(86)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>72 (83.7%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q36: I am very certain that I will complete my program in the usual time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Domestic FGS</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>1 (0.4%)</td>
<td>9 (3.5%)</td>
<td>66 (25.6%)</td>
<td>182 (70.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(258)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>248 (96.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Established FGS</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>2 (1.0%)</td>
<td>14 (6.9%)</td>
<td>75 (37.1%)</td>
<td>111 (55.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(202)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>186 (92.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recent FGS</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>6 (6.9%)</td>
<td>26 (29.9%)</td>
<td>55 (63.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(87)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>81 (93.1%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q42: I am very certain that I will obtain a college degree/ diploma/ certificate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Domestic FGS</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>1 (0.4%)</td>
<td>4 (1.6%)</td>
<td>53 (20.8%)</td>
<td>197 (77.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(255)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>250 (98.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Established FGS</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>1 (0.5%)</td>
<td>2 (1.0%)</td>
<td>54 (26.9%)</td>
<td>144 (71.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(201)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>198 (98.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recent FGS</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>3 (3.5%)</td>
<td>18 (20.9%)</td>
<td>65 (75.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(86)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>83 (96.5%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q45: I have the ability to succeed in college-level studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Domestic FGS</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>8 (3.1%)</td>
<td>71 (28.0%)</td>
<td>175 (68.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(254)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Combined: 246 (96.9%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Established FGS</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>1 (0.5%)</td>
<td>5 (2.5%)</td>
<td>71 (35.5%)</td>
<td>123 (61.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(200)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Combined: 194 (97.0%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recent FGS</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>3 (3.4%)</td>
<td>40 (46.0%)</td>
<td>44 (50.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(87)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Combined: 84 (96.6%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q64: I think I am well prepared to be a successful student in college

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Domestic FGS</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>2 (0.8%)</td>
<td>14 (5.5%)</td>
<td>120 (47.1%)</td>
<td>119 (46.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(255)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Combined: 239 (93.8%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Established FGS</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>2 (1.0%)</td>
<td>21 (10.4%)</td>
<td>104 (51.7%)</td>
<td>74 (36.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(201)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Combined: 178 (88.5%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recent FGS</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>11 (12.8%)</td>
<td>41 (47.7%)</td>
<td>34 (39.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(86)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Combined: 75 (87.2%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX V: Perception of the Value of a College Education –Frequencies and Percentages

Q53: College graduates have a better chance of getting a good job than those who do not graduate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Domestic FGS (258)</td>
<td></td>
<td>2 (0.8%)</td>
<td>8 (3.1%)</td>
<td>31 (12.0%)</td>
<td>65 (25.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined:</td>
<td></td>
<td>217 (84.1%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Established FGS (199)</td>
<td></td>
<td>2 (1.0%)</td>
<td>12 (6.0%)</td>
<td>24 (12.1%)</td>
<td>55 (27.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined:</td>
<td></td>
<td>161 (80.9%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recent FGS (87)</td>
<td>1 (1.1%)</td>
<td>2 (2.3%)</td>
<td>11 (12.6%)</td>
<td>28 (32.2%)</td>
<td>45 (51.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined:</td>
<td></td>
<td>73 (83.9%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q68: College graduates find more satisfying jobs than those who do not graduate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Domestic FGS (255)</td>
<td>3 (1.2%)</td>
<td>14 (5.4%)</td>
<td>54 (20.9%)</td>
<td>77 (29.8%)</td>
<td>110 (42.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined:</td>
<td>187 (72.4%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Established FGS (201)</td>
<td>1 (0.5%)</td>
<td>9 (4.5%)</td>
<td>41 (20.4%)</td>
<td>66 (32.8%)</td>
<td>84 (41.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined:</td>
<td>150 (74.6%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recent FGS (86)</td>
<td>1 (1.2%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>18 (20.9%)</td>
<td>36 (41.9%)</td>
<td>31 (36.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined:</td>
<td>67 (77.9%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### APPENDIX VI: Intent to Persist – Frequencies and Percentages

#### Q32: It is important that I complete my program and obtain a certificate/ diploma/ degree

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Domestic FGS (258)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>1 (0.4%)</td>
<td>17 (6.6%)</td>
<td>240 (93.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined: 257 (99.6%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Established FGS (203)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>1 (0.5%)</td>
<td>11 (5.4%)</td>
<td>191 (94.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined: 202 (99.5%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recent FGS (86)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>1 (1.2%)</td>
<td>85 (98.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined: 86 (99.5%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Q42: I am very certain that I will obtain a college degree/ diploma/ certificate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Domestic FGS (255)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>1 (0.4%)</td>
<td>4 (1.6%)</td>
<td>53 (20.8%)</td>
<td>197 (77.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined: 250 (98.1%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Established FGS (201)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>1 (0.5%)</td>
<td>2 (1.0%)</td>
<td>54 (26.9%)</td>
<td>144 (71.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined: 298 (98.5%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recent FGS (86)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>3 (3.5%)</td>
<td>18 (20.9%)</td>
<td>65 (75.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined: 83 (96.5%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Q48: I am determined to finish my college education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Domestic FGS (259)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>4 (1.5%)</td>
<td>24 (9.3%)</td>
<td>231 (89.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined: 255 (98.5%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Established FGS (200)</td>
<td>1 (0.5%)</td>
<td>1 (0.5%)</td>
<td>2 (1.0%)</td>
<td>35 (17.5%)</td>
<td>161 (80.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined: 196 (98.0%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recent FGS (88)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>2 (2.3%)</td>
<td>14 (15.9%)</td>
<td>72 (81.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined: 86 (97.7%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q56: It is **not** important that I graduate with a degree/ diploma/ certificate (reverse coded)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Domestic FGS</td>
<td>0.8% (2)</td>
<td>1 (0.4%)</td>
<td>10 (3.9%)</td>
<td>46 (17.8%)</td>
<td>200 (77.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Established FGS</td>
<td>2 (1.0%)</td>
<td>3 (1.5%)</td>
<td>5 (2.5%)</td>
<td>47 (23.4%)</td>
<td>144 (71.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recent FGS</td>
<td>2 (2.3%)</td>
<td>2 (2.3%)</td>
<td>4 (4.6%)</td>
<td>23 (26.4%)</td>
<td>56 (64.4%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Combined: Domestic FGS 246 (95.0%)
Combined: Established FGS 191 (95.0%)
Combined: Recent FGS 79 (90.8%)
### APPENDIX VII: Intent to Pursue Degree Level Studies – Frequencies and Percentages

#### Q 33: To I am here to take a few courses and then transfer to a university

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Domestic FGS (256)</td>
<td>94 (36.7%)</td>
<td>73 (28.5%)</td>
<td>63 (24.6%)</td>
<td>17 (6.6%)</td>
<td>9 (3.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined: 101 (65.2%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Established FGS (203)</td>
<td>58 (28.6%)</td>
<td>36 (17.7%)</td>
<td>62 (30.5%)</td>
<td>33 (16.3%)</td>
<td>14 (6.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined: 94 (46.3%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recent FGS (87)</td>
<td>22 (25.3%)</td>
<td>24 (27.6%)</td>
<td>23 (26.4%)</td>
<td>14 (16.1%)</td>
<td>4 (4.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined: 46 (52.9%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Q 82: To prepare for university studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Not a Reason</th>
<th>Minor Reason</th>
<th>Major Reason</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Domestic FGS (259)</td>
<td>100 (38.6%)</td>
<td>29 (11.2%)</td>
<td>50 (19.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined: 129 (49.8%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Established FGS (201)</td>
<td>49 (24.2%)</td>
<td>14 (7.0%)</td>
<td>43 (21.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined: 63 (31.4%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recent FGS (86)</td>
<td>25 (29.1%)</td>
<td>6 (7.0%)</td>
<td>15 (17.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined: 31 (36.1%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Q 87: To obtain a college diploma and then continue to university

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Not a Reason</th>
<th>Minor Reason</th>
<th>Major Reason</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Domestic FGS (256)</td>
<td>128 (50.0%)</td>
<td>23 (9.0%)</td>
<td>54 (26.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined: 151 (59.0%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Established FGS (200)</td>
<td>64 (32.0%)</td>
<td>6 (3.0%)</td>
<td>53 (26.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined: 70 (35.0%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recent FGS (85)</td>
<td>28 (32.9%)</td>
<td>5 (5.9%)</td>
<td>16 (18.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined: 33 (38.8%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group</td>
<td>Required to Withdraw</td>
<td>On Probation</td>
<td>In Good Standing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic FGS (119)</td>
<td>35 (29.4%)</td>
<td>36 (30.3%)</td>
<td>37 (31.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined</td>
<td>71 (59.7%)</td>
<td>Combined: 48 (40.3%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Established FGS (91)</td>
<td>27 (29.7%)</td>
<td>23 (25.3%)</td>
<td>36 (39.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined</td>
<td>50 (55.0%)</td>
<td>Combined: 41 (27.0%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recent FGS (42)</td>
<td>7 (16.7%)</td>
<td>12 (28.6%)</td>
<td>18 (42.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined</td>
<td>19 (45.3%)</td>
<td>Combined: 23 (54.8%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>