In This Together: The Impact of Mentorship Programs On The First-Generation Student Experience

by

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Abstract

This study outlines the impact that a mentorship program directed at first-generation students in university has on the individuals who participate. First-generation students are identified as those whose parents do not have any postsecondary education. Colleges and universities are seeing more non-traditional students pursuing postsecondary studies and first-generation students fall into this group. However, despite the increasing numbers of first-generation students enrolling in university, there have not been many programs introduced to facilitate their transition into university. Concerns about their retention persist as these students are at a greater risk of dropping out as compared to their non-first-generation peers. Additionally, the factors associated with being a first-generation student may be limiting their ability to effectively engage in their academic experiences as well as the array of out-of-classroom offerings available at their campuses. Recognizing the challenges faced by first-generation students, the Ontario provincial government introduced funding for colleges and universities in 2005 to institute programs to address some of these issues. Using this funding, a number of college and universities in Ontario have introduced mentorship programs for first-generation students as they make their transition into their postsecondary studies.

This study explored the experience of a group of students in relation to their first-generation identity and how their participation in a mentorship program influences their
experience. This study was conducted using a mixed methods approach, using a secondary analysis of survey data and 16 interviews of first-generation students who participated in a mentorship program. Evaluating the experience of these students will help researchers and practitioners to better understand the barriers and strategies to support first-generation students who choose to study at university.

The thesis applies a conceptual framework that focuses on three concepts: cultural capital, habitus, and self-efficacy. The findings support previous research that has shown the impact that cultural capital can have on habitus as well as self-efficacy. The results of this study also suggest two new findings: a) That an increase in one’s cultural capital can also increase their sense of self-efficacy via the effects of habitus; and b) That a strong sense of self-efficacy can positively affect their habitus.
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Dedication

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Chapter 1
Introduction

1.1 Overview

The rate of participation in postsecondary education in Canada has steadily grown over the years to a point where it is one of the highest in the world (Statistics Canada, 2014). Part of this growth is due to the increasing numbers of students from previously underrepresented populations. However, there has been growing recognition that the services and supports offered by postsecondary institutions are not enough to match the needs of the non-traditional student. One such group that has been underrepresented in universities is first-generation students (The Educational Policy Institute, 2008; Barr-Telford, Cartwright, Prasil, & Shimmons, 2003). First-generation students are defined as students whose parents did not attend postsecondary education (Finnie, Childs & Wismer, 2010). Through provincial government funding introduced in 2005, a number of colleges and universities in Ontario initiated the development and implementation of programs to support first-generation students including mentorship programs meant to facilitate the transition of students into university.

The primary focus of my thesis is on the experience of first-generation students in university with a particular lens on their academic and social-related experiences. Additionally, I will be looking at how their participation in a mentorship program for first-generation students has shaped their experience and personal development. Much of the available literature on first-generation (FG) students has focused on three areas: college choice decisions and aspirations; academic achievement; and persistence and retention (Padgett, Johnson & Pascarella, 2012). My area of research, however, will focus on the experience of first-generation students once they have entered university and will contribute to the literature in this area. This is an applied study which focuses on the experience of students who participated in a mentorship program for first-generation students and considers their experience using concepts from the French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu.
This chapter will provide information on my background and motivations for pursuing this area of research, a statement of the problem, the purpose of this study, the limitations of the study, and information on the mentorship programs that were included as part of this study. The next section will describe the statement of the problem including a broad overview of participation in postsecondary education in Canada and why this study is important in this respect. Next, I will outline the purpose of my study and what I plan to explore followed by the research questions that I will be examining. The following sections will explain the significance of my study particularly in the field of student affairs and the methodology I chose to frame my approach. The final sections will go over the limitations of my research and how the remaining chapters of the document will be organized.

1.2 A Personal Motivation

Much of my later childhood was spent growing up in a household in the Greater Toronto Area with five siblings and knowing that my parents were doing their best to support from afar. During that time, they were working in San Antonio, Texas to support their children living in Toronto. My parents had left their home country, South Korea, with my eldest sister during a period of political and economic turmoil in the 1960s to pursue the possibility of a better life in Canada. With few resources and no English language fluency, they managed to settle into the City of Toronto to begin their new life. The awareness that I was to pursue a postsecondary education was never in doubt as I grew up. However, beyond my aspiration to pursue a higher education, there was not much more substance below the surface. Being a first-generation student, I didn’t know much about what my postsecondary career would look like or how I would go about entering and navigating this foreign world. As I was growing up, many of our weekends and evenings were spent working at the family convenience store that was slowly nearing the end of its financial viability due to the recession in the 1980s and early 1990s and challenging economic environment following that period. Recognizing that the business would no longer be able to support the family financially, my parents made the incredibly difficult decision to leave their six children in Canada so that they could move to the United States to seek and establish a more viable opportunity. Although I would gradually see each of my three older
sisters move off to pursue their respective education and careers, I can’t say I had the benefit of learning from their tacit knowledge and experiences from their time in college or university. There were times when I would look at friends with envy as I would see the opportunities they had to learn from their parents and family by virtue of physically being together and having experience with postsecondary education. Without a doubt, my high school years were a challenge. Growing up separate from my parents and having to work to support myself financially were difficulties I don’t think I fully appreciated until much later. When it came time for me to apply to university, I had no idea about which institutions or programs I would apply to. I also did not know enough about the programs or schools themselves, so I did what I thought was best at the time: I asked my guidance counselor to copy the content from my friend’s application.

Over a year later, after having enrolled in university at the start of the academic year, I had somehow scraped by with two credits as a result of dropping one course and failing two others. The death of a friend and my father over the first two years of my undergraduate studies and the subsequent personal difficulties contributed to my unfortunate academic outcome. That being said, I believe that if I had a better knowledge of the resources, administrative structures, and available options at the university, I may have avoided some of the unfortunate decisions I made both leading up to, and following, my situation. My experiences were motivations for me to pursue my current career and field of study.

For the past 15 years, I have worked in the field of education, with 11 of those years at the University of Toronto (U of T). The motivation for my career choices stemmed from the sacrifice of my parents for my education and the challenges I experienced during my years of study. The ability to contribute to the experiences of students with similar circumstances is an incredible opportunity for me to “pay it forward” as others have done in my own life. My journey has taken me along many routes that have been unexpected, challenging, and personally fulfilling. At the same time, I also acknowledge that I work with a predominantly privileged group that has had the opportunity of pursuing a postsecondary education. For example, the 2014 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) results for U of T indicated that approximately 65% of the respondents’ parents had an education at the postsecondary level (University of Toronto, 2015). As a first-generation student, who has experienced circumstances that made my
own pursuit of higher education challenging and at some points seem almost unattainable, I have always been drawn to the issues of access and equity. I have many family members who have completed some level of postsecondary education, but many more who have pursued alternative pathways or completely dropped out. I realize that in addition to needing some level of academic achievement and confidence in order to be admitted, the challenge of navigating a complicated, bureaucratic, and seemingly overwhelming system can be enough of a deterrent for many to turn away. I recognize that the lens with which I view postsecondary pursuit and attainment has been shaped by my experiences which have not been easy, but I have managed to persevere despite the obstacles. However, in my circumstance, I have also had the privilege of knowing key individuals who have helped me navigate the turbulent waters.

With the growing recognition in today’s economy that a postsecondary degree is almost a standard requirement for entry, into let alone success, in the working world, universities are seeing an increase in the diversity of previously marginalized students on their campuses. First-generation students face a number of barriers to their entry to and success within the postsecondary education realm. As we see more students entering universities and colleges, understanding the barriers and supports needed will be important in shaping how we work with these students.

This study is being undertaken to explore the experiences of first-generation students who have already been admitted to university. It is my hope that we will gain a better understanding of how their identity as a first-generation student and their participation in a mentorship program has influenced their experience.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

According to a 2015 report by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the rate of postsecondary participation in Canada (57%) exceeds the OECD average (39%). As the pursuit of higher education has become more commonplace and accessible, colleges and universities have experienced an increase in the diversity of their student bodies. Postsecondary institutions in Canada continue to enroll a more diverse student body that is comprised of previously underrepresented groups, including first-generation students (Strange & Cox, 2016).
However, there are still several demographic groups in Canada that experience low rates of participation in postsecondary education, including Aboriginal students, those from low-income families, and students who have parents without a college or university education (i.e., first-generation students) (CCL, 2009). There are numerous reasons for non-participation; some of the barriers include: financial resources, academic preparation and performance, and motivation (e.g., individuals may skeptical of the cost-benefit balance) (CCL, 2009). More first-generation students, or those whose parents do not have a postsecondary education, are pursuing higher education in Canada. A Statistics Canada report released in 2011 showed that among people aged 25 to 39 whose parents did not have a university degree (or didn’t know), 23% held a university degree in 2009 as opposed to 12% in 1986. It has been predicted that in 2021, enrolment rates will be 60,000 to 100,000 higher for universities and 35,000 to 50,000 higher for colleges than in 2007 (Clark, Moran, Skolnik, & Trick, 2009). The authors added that the new entrants would include more individuals from moderate and low-income families as well as those whose parents did not attend college or universities themselves.

In a 2010 Speech from the Throne, the Ontario Government stated that over 70% of all new jobs will require postsecondary education (Breaking Barriers, 2011). This was further supported by a 2009 report from the Canadian Council on Learning, which stated that nearly 70% of a projected 1.7 million new jobs in Canada will be in occupations requiring postsecondary education. The same 2010 speech from the Ontario Government also stated that the province had a goal of raising the postsecondary participation rate to 70%. With such a high target of participation in postsecondary studies, it would seem that first-generation and other non-traditional students would be a growing part of that population. These projections underscore the significance of ensuring that higher education is both accessible and supported for the general populace. Finnie, Childs, and Wismer (2011) have stressed the importance of a system that highlights access to postsecondary education. They state that this is critical for Ontario’s future competitiveness on the national and international fields. Due to the potential benefits that may be derived from continued education, equitable access to anyone with academic ability and aspiration is also essential. This applies especially so for students that may be considered non-traditional in the postsecondary education realm (Finnie et al., 2011).
As previously mentioned, recent reports have highlighted the need for advanced education in order to be considered for many future employment positions. According to a Statistics Canada study (Uppal & LaRochelle-Côté, 2013), between January 2011 and January 2013, occupations requiring a college or university education rose by 5% and 4%, respectively. Moreover, according to a survey of more than 400 employers across Canada, 36% of managers and human resource professionals indicated that they are hiring more college graduates for positions that may have previously been held by high school graduates. Nearly four in ten employers are now hiring college graduates for jobs that were primarily held by high school graduates. A 2017 report from the OECD provides data looking at the relationship between educational attainment and employment across the OECD countries. The report indicates that, on average across OECD countries, the employment rates are: 85% for tertiary-educated (postsecondary) adults aged 25-64 years, 75% for secondary or postsecondary-educated (with a vocational focus) adults, and less than 60% for adults who have not completed secondary education (OECD, 2017). More specifically, the employment rates in Canada for adults aged 25-64 years in the three educational levels are: 82% for postsecondary, 74% for secondary or postsecondary (vocational), and 55% for below secondary.

Recognizing the need to support the growing number of previously marginalized students, the Ontario provincial government produced a budget in 2005 that included a move to invest $10 million in 2005-06, rising to $55 million by 2009-10 for new programs and outreach initiatives for under-represented groups which includes first-generation students. The budget was entitled “Reaching Higher: The McGuinty Government Plan for Postsecondary Education” and boasted the largest multi-year investment in 40 years. This was a significant move that highlighted the government’s efforts to improve access and quality in postsecondary education. Under the plan, there were five major areas of focus with specific objectives for each: a) Access – Student Financial Assistance; b) Access – Enrolment and Outreach; c) Quality; d) Accountability; and e) A Responsive Training and Apprenticeship System (2005). One specific objective is of particular importance in relation to this study and is listed under “Access – Enrolment and Outreach” and reads as follows: “Invest $10 million in 2005-06, rising to $55 million by 2009-10, to undertake new programs and outreach for under-represented groups such as francophones, aboriginals, people with disabilities and those who would be the first in their family to attend college or university.” (p. 2). In line with the funding, several initiatives have
been introduced to support first generation students. In 2006, the provincial government established an advisory committee to advise the Minister of Training, Colleges, and Universities on issues relating to first generation students and to identify priority areas for research and action (McGuinty government expanding postsecondary opportunities, 2007). Bursaries have also been established to provide financial support for first generation students who wish to pursue postsecondary studies such as the Ontario First Generation Bursary for first-generation students attending college or university in Ontario. Lastly, among these initiatives, mentorship programs specifically geared to first-generation students were implemented with the objective of providing peer-to-peer support.

It is important to note that although there are more non-traditional students pursuing postsecondary studies, the challenges they face in terms of their transition and adjustment to the climate of these institutions are pervasive. Research has shown that first-generation students have shown lower levels of involvement in campus activities as well as lower academic achievement as compared to their peers (Grayson, 2011). Moreover, due to challenges with acclimatizing and “fitting in” with the campus climate, this group of students has shown a greater proclivity to drop out of their studies (Lehmann, 2007). Their persistence while in college or university has been an issue to note. The three-year persistence rates show a 15% gap between first- (73%) and second-generation (88%) students (Warburton, Bugarin, & Nunez, 2001, as cited by Pike & Kuh, 2005). This demonstrates that although they are entering postsecondary institutions, challenges during their studies are forcing them to drop out.

With the changing demographics of postsecondary institutions, the ways in which we engage with students also need to change. This includes how we communicate, recruit and retain, educate, and invite them to participate in the various resources, programs, and activities that we offer. As institutions of higher education move to increase their numbers, students from non-traditional backgrounds will enroll in higher numbers. First-generation students will be amongst those that choose to pursue a college or university degree, and it is important to recognize that their circumstances and backgrounds are different from others. It is important for postsecondary institutions to offer an array of activities and opportunities for these students to find a place where they can engage in meaningful ways. Our institutions also have a responsibility to respond to the different needs and challenges of these groups as they engage in activities outside of the
classroom. It has been shown that participating in extracurricular activities can contribute to student learning, career-related skills, and cognitive and intellectual growth – so it is especially important that the opportunities offered are equitable and accessible to all students. As Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini (2004) put it:

Access to higher education must be understood to mean not only admission to some postsecondary institution, but also “access” to the full range of college experiences and to the personal, social, and economic benefits to which those experiences and degree completion lead. (p. 281)

To ensure that opportunities for success both in the classroom and around campus are accessible may be a challenge for colleges and universities, but the potential benefits for our student population will have long lasting and far reaching effects.

1.4 Purpose

According to a survey conducted by the Canadian Undergraduate Survey Consortium in 2013, about one in four first-year university students who were direct-entry from high school students had parents with no postsecondary education (Strange & Cox, 2016). Despite the increasing number of first-generation students enrolling in universities and colleges, research has shown that they are less likely to persist and succeed. So, although we are doing better at getting them in the door, there are still issues with supporting students in their pursuit of a postsecondary education. As such, gaining a better understanding of how they overcome the barriers to their success is an important step for policy-makers and practitioners as they work to improve the experience of this group of students.

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of first-generation students at a large urban Canadian university in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) and to examine how being a first-generation student has shaped their experiences. By interviewing students who identify as the first in their family to attend university, I hope to gain a better understanding of the various factors related to being first-generation that may have acted as barriers or contributed positively to their experiences. Additionally, this study will examine the impact that participation in a mentorship program geared to first-generation students has had on their experience. In order to
better understand the impact on their experience and identity, I have also focused on how their first-generation background and participation in the mentorship program impacted their habitus, cultural capital, and sense of self-efficacy – three concepts that comprise the conceptual framework of this study and have been defined in the next section.

This study focuses on mentorship programs offered at the three campuses of one institution. Each campus has a distinctive character, with the largest campus being located in the downtown urban core and the two other campuses located in suburban areas. As put forth by Rahilly and Buckley (2016) (as cited in Strange and Cox, 2016), there is “little overt outreach to or support of this important group of students; many support services do exist but embedded in other campus offices” (p. 165). Examining the participation of students in a mentorship program specifically created for first-generation students will provide insights on some of the benefits and challenges of offering programming and services specifically for this population. Additionally, this study will contribute to the limited Canadian research that focuses on the experiences of first-generation students. My hope is that the results of this study will provide some further insight in the Canadian context for researchers and policy-makers who work with this particular population of students.

1.5 The Mentorship Programs

Three mentorship programs are included in this study. The programs are administered within the student affairs departments on three separate campuses of one large urban university located in Southern Ontario. All of the programs run during the months of September to April and are specifically for first-generation students in their first year of study. However, first-generation students in their upper years are also welcome to participate in the programs. The program coordinators on each campus oversee outreach for the recruitment of mentee participants which occur in the summer months by sending out communication to all students in the form of emails and through the use of social media. The messaging includes information on the program details and invite students who identify as first-generation students to apply. Each program incorporates a formal mentorship element which involves having an upper year student paired with one or more first-generation student mentees. The form of mentorship varies on each campus and even within the programs in that communication ranged from use of social media,
contact through cellular devices (e.g., phone calls or use of text messages), and in-person meetings. Additionally, each program has varying numbers of participants and different criteria for determining whether a participant successfully completes the program. By fulfilling the criteria set out by the program coordinators for completion of the program, each student was eligible to receive a notation on their Co-Curricular Record. Each program coordinator acknowledged that they had official numbers for program participants, attendance at events, and feedback/survey completion, but keeping track of the participation details was a challenge.

1.5.1 Campus A Details

Campus A is a suburban campus with a total enrolment of about 14,000 students in 2015. The program did not run on this campus during the 2014-15 academic year as they were conducting a program review, so participants from the 2013-14 program were contacted to participate. In terms of participants, there were 10 mentors and 218 first-generation mentees registered in the program.

All mentors were required to attend a one-day training program that took place during the month of August in preparation for the start of the academic year that began in September. The training covered topics such as: a program overview, how to run the first meeting, professionalism, communication styles, and other resource-specific content.

The mentors were required to be in regular contact with the groups of mentees and led a regular series of group mentoring sessions that occurred bi-weekly. The program also offered specialized academic, social, and co-curricular workshops that were led by student peer leaders, their mentors, faculty, and other university staff members. For program completion, mentees were required to have attended a minimum of 10 sessions over the course of the academic year. These standards were outlined by the program coordinators. Of the total number of registrants, 56 were identified as having successfully completed the program.
1.5.2 Campus B Details

Campus B is an urban campus located in the downtown city centre with a total enrolment of about 60,000 students in 2015. In terms of participants, there were 28 mentors and 209 first-generation mentees registered in the program.

All mentors were required to attend a three-day training program that took place in early September in preparation for the start of the academic year that began that same month. The training covered topics such as: an overview of the first year experience, balancing one-to-one and group mentoring, religious diversity, program roles and responsibilities, academic mentoring, and other program/campus-specific details.

The mentors were assigned a group of mentees and were required to be in regular contact with them. This form of contact varied depending on the preference of the participants and included the use of social media, phone calls, messages sent through cellular devices, and in-person meetings. The program on Campus B ran a regular series of events that occurred almost weekly and ranged in content, including: social gatherings, academic workshops, and alumni events. All program participants were invited to these events, but participation was not required. To be considered for successful completion of the program by the program coordinators, mentees were to have had at least 12 points of contact including contact with their mentor or attendance at events during the course of the academic year. Of the total number of participants, 52 mentees had no contact at all with the program after registering.

1.5.3 Campus C Details

Campus C is a suburban campus with a total enrolment of about 13,000 students in 2015. In terms of participants, there were 19 mentors and 255 first-generation mentees registered in the program.

All mentors were required to attend a one-day training program that took place during the month of August in preparation for the start of the academic year that began in September. The training covered topics such as: the definition of mentoring, a program overview, mentor expectations, mentoring skills (e.g., active listening), and other program/campus-specific details.
The mentors were assigned a group of mentees and were required to be in contact with their mentees at least once a month. The form of communication between mentors and mentees included the use of social media, sending messages using cellular devices, phone calls, and the use of a dedicated phone line in the mentorship office where mentors were also able to host office hours for mentees to drop by. Similar to the other two campuses, the program on Campus C offered regular workshops and events that covered topics related to academic resources, as well as social and co-curricular opportunities. Campus C required participants to maintain contact with their mentor for seven months as well as completion of a written reflection component for completion of the program requirements as outlined by the program coordinator. Only 36 participants of the 255 mentees met these requirements.

1.5.4. Program Surveys

The program coordinators at each of the three campuses created and administered a survey to all program participants in an effort to evaluate the program and gather feedback. The program surveys were administered twice in the academic year, once at the middle and once near the end of the academic year. Campus A, however, only administered the survey once at the end of the academic year. Of the three campuses in the study, the program survey at one campus (Campus A) was completed in the 2013-14 year, whereas the program surveys at the other two campuses were completed in the 2014-15 academic year. The survey for Campus A can be found in Appendix A and the surveys for Campus B and C can be found in Appendix B and C, respectively. The questions asked covered topics that included: how the mentorship program influenced their experience with respect to accessing services on campus, how the mentorship program influenced their interactions on campus with other students, staff, and faculty, what their interactions with their mentors and other people in the program was like, and feedback for suggested changes to the program. All surveys contained a common set of questions to allow for comparison between their respective programs and the remaining questions were determined by the program coordinator at each respective campus.
1.6 Definition of Terms

The three concepts that comprise the conceptual framework, habitus, cultural capital, and self-efficacy are defined here and further outlined in Chapter 2:

**Habitus:** “An internalized system of beliefs, experiences, and values from the social environment, including the family, school, and work environments” (Padgett, Johnson, and Pascarella, 2012, p. 246).

**Cultural Capital:** “Cultural capital is comprised of ‘linguistic and cultural competence’ and a broad knowledge of culture that belongs to members of the upper classes and is found much less frequently among the lower classes” (Dumais, 2002, p. 44).

**Self-Efficacy:** “Beliefs about one’s ability to successfully execute a behavior required to produce a certain outcome” (Bandura, 1997) (as cited by Ramos-Sanchez and Nichols, 2007, p. 2).

These terms will be further defined in Chapter 3.

For the sake of the study, a definition of the term first-generation student will be offered here.

**First-Generation Student:** “a college or university student from a family where no parent or guardian has earned a baccalaureate degree” (Choy, 2001) (as cited by Pike & Kuh, 2005, p.277).

Much of the current literature relating to first-generation students originates from studies in the United States where the terms “college” and “university” are used interchangeably. The focus of this study is on the experience of students attending a Canadian university where the following definition of first-generation is used: “Students whose parent(s) or guardian(s) did not pursue post-secondary education or pursued post-secondary education outside of Canada. Even if your sibling(s) attended post-secondary, you are still first generation” (Mentorship and Peer Programs, 2018).
1.7 Research Questions

In this thesis, I explore the experiences of participants of three separate mentorship programs that operate at one institution on three different campuses. Although they fall under one overarching institution, they operate independent of each other although with some crossover and collaboration.

My overarching research question is: In what ways does participation in a mentorship program for first-generation students impact their experience? This will frame some of the more specific research questions, including:

1. How does being first-generation impact students’ academic engagement in university?
2. How does being first-generation impact students’ social engagement in university?
3. How does being first-generation impact students’ involvement and extracurricular participation in university?
4. How does being first-generation impact students’ habitus, cultural capital, and sense of self-efficacy in university?
5. How does participation in a mentorship program for first-generation students impact students’ academic engagement in university?
6. How does participation in a mentorship program for first-generation students impact students’ social engagement in university?
7. How does participation in a mentorship program for first-generation students impact students’ involvement and extracurricular participation in university?
8. How does participation in a mentorship program for first-generation students impact students’ habitus, cultural capital, and sense of self-efficacy in university?

The study involves both mentors and mentees of the programs. The reason I have included the mentors as part of this study is due to the fact the program coordinators recruit first-generation students to fill this role. Thus, their experience as mentors is still shaped by the fact that they are also first-generation.
1.8 Significance of the Study

This study could have significant implications for the field of student affairs practitioners as well as research related to first-generation students because programs targeting first-generation students have only been introduced at colleges and universities in the province of Ontario in recent years. As such, practitioners would have much to learn from the successes and failures of these programs as they work to further develop initiatives to support students. The results will help to inform practices within higher education institutions to better engage first-generation students. Having a better understanding of the experience of first-generation students would help to inform policy makers and program developers of strategies that have been successful for positively influencing such students’ experience. Also, it would assist with gaining a better understanding of the factors impacting their experience in university. This information would be useful within the academic and non-academic realms of their experience beyond mentorship programs as faculty and administrators alike may gain from knowledge about factors that may support or hinder the student experience.

It is important to note that the experiences of each individual are unique and that the factors influencing their experience vary greatly. However, the study focuses on these mentorship programs because they all have first-generation students as the key participants.

1.9 Summary of the Methodology

The study employed a mixed methods approach that blends the secondary data analysis with qualitative interviews. The secondary data were supplied by the program administrators on each of the three campuses in the form of surveys administered to the mentorship program participants. Segments of each survey were examined to determine overarching themes that would further inform the other results of the study. Additionally, I conducted interviews with a group of students who participated in these programs from each campus. The interviews provided qualitative results that were analyzed to determine prevalent themes that emerged.
1.10 Limitations

The main limitation is that the study findings are no generalizable beyond the students in the mentorship programs included in this study since the participants were a sample of convenience and not randomly selected.

There were several other limitations to the study related to institutional limitations, self-selection of the interview participants, the period of data collection, the students’ ability to distinguish elements that relate to being first-generation, general study parameters, and the participants’ understanding of their first-generation identity.

By studying students at only one institution, the results may have been influenced by the lack of differentiation in their experience as compared to students at other institutions. Certain geographical and institutional characteristics may have contributed to their experiences in ways that would not have been consistent with students at other universities. Although the study encompassed students at three campuses, each with their own distinct character, the fact that they were all at the same institution may have influenced their responses.

Another limitation is that the data were collected from a group that represents a limited proportion of the actual first-generation student population at the institution. The individuals were self-selected in that they had chosen to participate in the program for a variety of reasons. Information from individuals who did not participate in the program due to choice, lack of knowledge, or inability was missing from this study. Given that the participants chose to participate in the study, this may have influenced the results in several ways. The individuals may be those who are involved at their institution and better integrated, thus influencing their experience. Also, the results would not include the perspectives of those who would have left the university for whatever reason.

There were two factors related to the mentorship programs themselves which limit the results of this study. Firstly, the secondary data used was obtained from the program administrators on each of the three campuses. The surveys were designed to contain a certain number of questions that were consistent between the three locations while allowing for some differentiation so that they could explore campus-specific issues. By using surveys created for
the purpose of evaluating the program and student experiences, I was limited in terms of what topics I could explore in relation to this study. Additionally, the timing of the survey data collection was not consistent so depending on the timing of the survey, participants’ experiences may look different. Secondly, the call out for interview participants was conducted by the program administrators rather than me. As such, my ability to recruit interview participants could have influenced the willingness of students to volunteer.

Throughout the course of the interview process, I found that both the length of the interviews and ability of students to articulate their thoughts varied greatly. One of the shortcomings of the interview methodology was that conducting only one interview with each participant limited my ability to further delve into issues and lines of thought that seemed to emerge upon analysis of the interview results. Additionally, the interviews involved asking questions about themselves as individuals and their experience as participants in the mentorship programs as well as about their experience as first-generation students and how participation in the mentorship programs influenced their experience in university. The former questions were more introductory in nature and were not meant to inform the main parts of the data. Thus, in order to create more opportunity for time in the interview to focus on the main questions, the first part of the interview questions were sent by email to the students in advance of the interview. Thus, I was able to spend more time on the questions that informed the qualitative results of this study.

Another limitation was that students identify in numerous and different ways. For example, one student had started to speak about their experience as a first-generation student in terms of having immigrated to Canada from another country. I had clarified the meaning of the term to bring the interview back into the scope of their experience as the first in their family to attend university, but their response still related much to having come to Canada from another country. As stated by Strange (cited by Cox & Strange, 2016), more recent theories in student development have advanced an understanding of the “whole and complex nature of students’ lives” (p. 17). There is a better understanding that students do not identify themselves strictly in binary ways, but that their identity is very intersectional and comprises of various elements such as gender, sexuality, being racialized, being an international student, socioeconomic background, and others.
In some cases, despite having a good understanding of the meaning of being a first-generation student, several of the students had a difficult time identifying elements of their experience that would have been related to being the first in their family to pursue a postsecondary education. In these cases, additional question prompts were used to further explore some of the possible connections and how they related to their first-generation identity. Again, this may be due to the intersectional nature of the various identities with which they identify.

However, despite these acknowledged limitations, the study findings may be of interest and value to other universities and colleges as they seek to address the needs of first-generation students.

1.11 Organization of the Study

The thesis is organized into six chapters. The second chapter provides an overview of the literature related to the study as well as the concepts used in the conceptual framework. The literature is comprised of research predominantly from the United States due to the fact that most research content has been produced there. I have made an effort to include relevant Canadian research in the literature review chapter. Chapter three gives detail on the methodology used for this study. It is a mixed methods approach that includes both secondary survey data analysis as well as qualitative interviews involving participants from the mentorship programs on each of the three campuses. This chapter also includes the steps used in the data analysis process both for the surveys as well as the interviews. Chapter four presents the results from the surveys and interviews. The survey results focus on questions that have been selected for the sake of this study and that relate to the interview questions. The interview results present the prevalent themes that emerged from the data. Chapter five provides an analysis of the interview data through the lens of the conceptual framework. In this chapter, the qualitative content of the interviews have been related to the concepts of the conceptual framework – cultural capital, habitus, and self-efficacy and analyzed for prevalent themes that emerged. Chapter six presents the findings of the interviews in terms of how being a first-generation student impacted cultural capital, habitus, and self-efficacy and how participation in the mentorship programs impacted
these three areas. The chapter ends with recommendations for policy-makers and practitioners and areas for further research.
Chapter 2
Literature Review

2.1 Chapter Overview

This section will provide an overview of the literature that will cover four major areas in relation to this study. The first part will go over some of the existing literature related to access and the barriers to participation in postsecondary education for marginalized groups. The second section will provide an overview of the literature related to first-generation students and their experience. The third section will go over some of the literature related to attrition, Vincent Tinto’s Theory of Student Departure, and the importance of the first-year experience and social support in student persistence. The fourth section will describe how Bandura’s Social Learning Theory relates to this group and how they learn and develop their identities while in university. The fifth section will cover Alexander Astin’s Theory of Involvement and how this relates to the first-generation student experience in university. The last part will provide an outline of the conceptual framework – cultural capital, habitus, and self-efficacy – and how these three concepts shape the student experience within the context of this study.

The literature regarding first-generation students tends to be written in a deficit model in which the experience, knowledge, and skills they bring to the higher education landscape are treated as “less than” their non-first-generation peers. The end of the chapter offers a commentary on this perspective which is problematic and may contribute to some of the barriers experienced by this group of students.

2.2 The Difference between “Participation In” and “Access To” – Type I Access

In Canada, the rate of participation in postsecondary education is increasing as more people choose to attend college or university. However, despite the increasing enrolment numbers, there is still concern that individuals from the following groups are still at a disadvantage with regards to access to PSE:

i. Low-income families;
ii. First-generation students;
iii. Families living in rural areas or areas that are far from campuses;
iv. French-speaking individuals;
v. Individuals from single-parent families;
vi. Aboriginal or First Nations; and
vii. Individuals with disabilities (Finnie, Childs, and Wismer, 2011, p.3)

This information provides some insight as to how “participation in” and “access to” higher education differ. In discussing the term “access” in relation to postsecondary education, there are two types that have been identified by Anisef et al (1985) (as cited by The Educational Policy Institute, 2008): Type I and Type II. Type I access refers to the number of people attending/participating in PSE, or in other words, the “how many”. This type speaks to the “participation in” element of attending a postsecondary institution. However, the overall number of individuals attending colleges and universities does not provide any information on their background, what demographic groups are included, or whether particular groups are increasing or decreasing in numbers. Type II access refers to the composition of the students attending postsecondary institutions and their relationship to the larger population. In other words, this group is considered as the “who” and is related to the “access to” element. Although it may be expected that by increasing the overall numbers of students (Type I), the number of individuals from the various groups in Type II will also increase, we cannot expect that the increases will be in proportion to the overall numbers or that the level of access is equitable for all groups. Some of the groups listed above are included in the literature relating to Type II access to higher education.

2.3 Barriers Associated with Type II Access

In order to better understand the reasoning behind the barriers related to Type II access, it is important to provide some detail underlying the challenges that are faced by the various groups. According to The Educational Policy Institute (TEPI) (2008), barriers can be divided into three broad “types” – barriers of information or knowledge or motivation, academic barriers, and financial barriers. Each of these in some way may affect groups that have been shown to be underrepresented in colleges in universities. The first type of barrier,
information/knowledge/motivation, refers to the lack of information and knowledge (e.g.,
process of applying, what to study, financial costs and benefits, career goals) that students have
when they are thinking about or actually attending college or university (TEPI, 2008). When
individuals lack knowledge about how to apply to college or university, how to navigate the
system, and how to see the benefits of their educational pursuits for their own goals, these factors
can act as barriers to one’s pursuit of further learning. Linked to information is the motivation
factor. Students who feel uninformed or unprepared may feel unmotivated to pursue PSE studies
(TEPI, 2008). This has been related to individuals from lower income families. In some cases, it
may be that these individuals are not exposed to others who can provide motivation due to their
own lack of experience; for example, first-generation students would not have family members
who could describe the benefits of postsecondary education that would be based on their own
experience. Research has shown that for first-generation students attending university,
relationships with family and friends in their home environment can work to further discourage
them from continuing with their postsecondary education (Lehmann, 2007). In these cases,
students may feel a disconnect between the culture of their postsecondary environment and the
values and support expressed at home.

The second type of barrier, academic barriers, refers to the academic performance and
preparation of students before entering college or university. In a 2002 Canadian study, Barr-
Telford, Cartwright, Prasil, and Shimmons (2003) found a relationship between grades in the
final year of high school and the likelihood of continuing on to postsecondary studies. Those
who reported grades below 70% were less likely (about one-third) to continue on in their studies,
whereas 80% of the participants whose grades were 80% or more and about two-thirds of those
with grades between 70-79% pursued some form of PSE. One’s academic performance (i.e.,
grades) while in high school functions as a determinant of whether they will be admitted to
college or university, and the grades one achieves may be influenced by the student’s attitudes
towards and experiences while in school.

Lastly, financial barriers describe two parts of the problem for individuals who wish to or
are thinking about postsecondary studies. For some, the cost of attending college or university
outweighs the short and/or long-term benefits. In these cases, the barrier is rooted in the belief
that the financial outcomes of a degree is not enough to compensate for the financial investment.
The second part of the problem is in actually obtaining sufficient funds to pay for the fees associated with attending a postsecondary institution along with the burden of having to manage a job while in school.

2.4 First-Generation Students

Past research (Levine and Associates, 1989, as cited by Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella & Nora, 1996) has shown that the demographic profile of students in college and university will change such that there will be more students from low-income families and that these individuals will be the first in their family to pursue postsecondary education. Lehmann (2007) stated that policy and scholarly concerns have shifted to university-access barriers for working-class youth because of research showing that social class and parents’ level of education are still the strongest determinants of educational and occupational expectations and attainment.

As defined by Choy (2001, as cited by Pike & Kuh, 2005), a first-generation student is “a college or university student from a family where no parent or guardian has earned a baccalaureate degree” (p.277). A number of researchers have found some consistent characteristics of first-generation students: they are more likely to come from low-income families, to have lower academic grades than their non-first-generation peers, to have lower degree aspirations, to be less involved in opportunities at their institution, and to be less involved with peers and others on campus (Terenzini et al., 1996; Grayson 2011; Pike & Kuh, 2005; Pascarella et al., 2004). It has been argued that part of the disadvantage is due to the fact that first-generation students have had less exposure to individuals who have had experience in the postsecondary education landscape. Without the benefit of access to the intrinsic knowledge that comes along with attending college or university, first-generation students generally are unfamiliar with many elements of attaining a postsecondary education, including: the cost-benefit perspective, how engagement can benefit them, how to navigate campuses and how to manage the academic rigors.

It is generally pointed out in the literature that first-generation students are at a disadvantage in many aspects of their experience in colleges and universities as compared to their non-first-generation peers. According to Engle and Tinto (2008), low-income, first-generation students face challenges in adapting to the culture of their new environments even
after they’ve enrolled in college or university. This is due to the disparities between their own familial culture, which includes the norms, values, and expectations, with the culture that they find on campus. As quoted by Rendon (1992, as cited by Engle & Tinto, 2008), first-generation students face problems “that arise from [living] simultaneously in two vastly different worlds while being fully accepted in neither” (p. 56). As they transition into university, students find it difficult to balance the identity they associate with their home life with that of their new environment. Terenzini et al. (1996) found that first-generation students tended to come from low-income families, to have weaker cognitive skills in reading, math, and critical thinking, to receive less encouragement from their parents to pursue college, and to take longer to complete their degree programs. They added that first-generation students worked more hours off-campus and were less likely to perceive faculty members as concerned with their students’ development. Terenzini and Associates (1994, as cited by Grayson, 1997) also indicated that first-generation students may find it difficult to balance their academic demands in addition to the expectations of family and friends. A more recent study conducted by Grayson (2011) at four Canadian universities corroborated some of the previous findings. In particular, he found that first-generation students reported the least positive classroom experiences, had levels of academic involvement below their peers, were the least involved in campus events, reportedly met the fewest new friends, and worked more hours than others. As found by Billson and Terry (1982) (as cited by Grayson, 1997) and as may be expected given their experiences, first-generation students have lower levels of academic and social integration. Tinto (2012) stated that as students interact with the social and academic systems of the institution, they slowly become integrated with these systems. The level of integration with the institution positively correlates with the individual’s level of commitment to completing their education. Consistent with this model, first-generation students have also been found to have higher attrition rates (Pascarella et al., 2004).

Part of their negative social experience can be attributed to the additional cultural boundaries they face in postsecondary institutions. Lundberg, Schreiner, Hovaguimian, and Miller (2007) stated that the characteristics (e.g., female, nonnative English speakers, older, enrolled part-time, and from a lower family income level) of first-generation students do not align with the dominant higher education culture. Consequently, these students have greater boundaries to overcome to have similar college experiences as their peers. Hertel (2002) found
that first-generation students reported higher levels of support from their friends who were not enrolled in college as compared to their non-first-generation peers who received more support from friends who were enrolled. Having less access to other individuals who are familiar with the dominant culture of higher education further adds to the extent of the cultural boundaries that they face.

2.5 Attrition

From a report produced by the Canadian Millennium Scholarship Foundation, studies from the United States and Canada have found that approximately 20-25% of all first-year students do not continue to their second year of study and of the group that does continue, 20-30% more will leave their institution (Grayson & Grayson, 2003). It is important to note, however, that the report adds that many of these students do return to university to complete their studies at a later time.

Before providing a discussion of the factors that influence student attrition, it is important to highlight some of the terminology that will be used to describe this group of students. Tinto (2012) makes a distinction between students who leave higher education altogether (system departure) versus those who temporarily withdraw from the system (stopouts). The latter group may include individuals who return to their original institution after a period of time, or enroll in another institution. Either way, stopouts have not completely withdrawn from their pursuit of higher education. For the sake of clarity, I will use the term “stopout” in reference to those who leave the system but return at a later date, and “stayout” for those who do not return (Horn, 1998). Persistence is another term that is often used in the literature in reference to students who continue on in their studies. Barr-Telford et al (2003) define persistence as the pursuit and successful completion of postsecondary education (as cited by The Educational Policy Institute, 2008).

2.6 Tinto’s Theory of Student Departure

It is important to point out that the same barriers to access to postsecondary education apply in the retention of a student after they begin their studies (The Educational Policy Institute,
2008). In order to further explain the dynamics of these barriers, Tinto’s Theory of Student Departure will be outlined in the next section.

Vincent Tinto is well known for his work related to persistence and retention. In a book that he published in 2012, he wrote that student departure takes two forms: academic dismissal and voluntary withdrawal. In the case of academic dismissal, the student may not have been able to or perhaps chose not to perform the academic duties required to meet the academic requirements needed to remain at the institution. For the sake of this study, I will focus on the elements that seem to be more closely related to the act of voluntary withdrawal – something which occurs when students experience a change in their intentions or commitments or are unable to integrate themselves into the academic and/or social spheres of the institution. The roots for departure as provided by Tinto are: intention, commitment, adjustment, difficulty, congruence, isolation, obligations, and finances (2012).

The first two roots, intention and commitment, are more applicable before entry or around the time of entry to a postsecondary institution. A student’s intentions and goals will influence their field and place of study and the path that they choose to pursue. However, many students entering college or university do not have clear educational and/or occupational goals and intentions. In fact, nearly three of four college students will face uncertainty about their educational and/or occupational intentions during the course of their postsecondary careers (Tinto, 2012). Whether an individual chooses to remain enrolled in their studies also depends on his or her commitment to individual goals as well as the institution. Commitment to one’s academic/occupational goals requires effort and a willingness to work towards those goals.

The next four roots, adjustment, difficulty, congruence, and isolation were highlighted by Tinto for their impact on student retention after entry to postsecondary. Adjustment refers to the challenges of separating oneself from past associations (e.g., high school, old peer groups) as well as the challenge of transitioning to the social landscape and academic rigors of postsecondary education. Beyond adjustment, difficulty occurs when students are unable to meet minimum standards of academic performance in order to “survive”. As such, lack of academic preparation in terms of past performance or skills development may also be reasons for student departure. Perhaps one of the most significant factors, the integration of a student into the social
and intellectual life of the institution plays a large part in terms of their retention. Tinto’s model of academic and social integration is often cited by researchers in works related to retention theory. Two elements of this theory, incongruence and isolation, are key in explaining cases where a student does not successfully integrate into their institution. Cases of incongruence occur when there is a mismatch between the needs, interests, and preferences of a student and those of the institution. Students may feel a lack of “fit” with the social and intellectual landscape of their institution. The perception formed by the student may be rooted in interactions with faculty, staff, or other students. In other forms, it can be received through communication, publications, and rules and regulations, among others. Students who feel isolated in their experience at the institution may also choose to withdraw. In these cases, there is an absence of sufficient contact with other members of the social and academic communities which prevents the student from becoming integrated. Pascarella and Terenzini (1979, as cited by Tinto, 2012) found that the lack of contact with other members of the institution is the single most important predictor of student withdrawal even when considering the independent effects of background, personality, and academic performance. These points demonstrate the powerful influence of social integration on the retention of students. Put simply, if students are not engaging with other people on campus, whether they are other students, staff, or faculty, in meaningful ways, they are less likely to stay.

### 2.7 Research Related to Causes for Student Attrition

As stated in a report on retention and attrition produced by the Canadian Millennium Scholarship Foundation (Grayson & Grayson, 2003), there is limited research on attrition in Canada as compared to the United States. However, this section will provide some of the major factors involved in student attrition from three Canadian studies: two from Statistics Canada (Barr-Telford et al., 2003, Lambert, Zeman, Allen & Bussiere, 2004) and one by Finnie and Qiu (2008). Two of the studies are based on data collected from the Youth in Transition Survey (YITS) and one uses data from the Postsecondary Education Participation Survey (PEPS) – both surveys administered in Canada. The Youth in Transition Survey is a Canadian longitudinal survey administered in two cycles to 30,000 youth aged 15 and more than 22,000 youth aged 18-20 in 2000 and again to over 40,000 youth aged 17 and 20-22 in 2002. The purpose of YITS was to examine the patterns and influences on major transitions in young people’s lives with respect to education, training, and work. The Postsecondary Education Participation Survey is a survey
designed to collect information from youths in Canada on themes in postsecondary education related to access, persistence, and financing. The survey was administered in 2002 to over 5,000 Canadians aged 18-24 (17-24 in Quebec) and was focused on individuals who were not in high school at the time of the survey. The questions examined individuals’ educational background, whether they had pursued postsecondary education, and other factors related to their education.

Lambert et al. (2004) produced a report that outlined students’ reasons for leaving their postsecondary studies using data from the Youth in Transition Survey. The reasons for leaving postsecondary education prior to completion were determined among a group of 121,000 respondents. Some of the top reasons included “Didn’t like it/not for me” (32%), “Not enough money” (11%), “To change school or program” (9%), and “Wanted to work” (7%). Along the same lines and using data from YITS, Finnie and Qiu (2008) also highlighted some of the same reasons for leaving PSE: “Not enough money” (9.0% college and 15.2% university), “Wanted to work” (9.9% college and 7.8% university), and “Didn’t like it/not for me” (37.0% college and 30.5% university). These results demonstrate two major points: the idea of “fit” plays an important role in determining whether a student persists, and financial reasons continue to have an influence on retention. In the first case, students may feel a lack of fit due to a lack of commitment to the educational program or path or perhaps due to the social landscape of the institution (including faculty and peers). In terms of financial factors, students may see the costs as outweighing the short- and long-term benefits or they may have other commitments outside of the institution that act as deterrents to their study (e.g., requiring more work hours, supporting dependents, etc.).

Barr-Telford et al. (2003) presented data on the reasons why students chose to drop out based on data gathered from PEPS in 2002. The survey involved contacting over 5000 18-24 year olds across Canada to ask questions about their involvement in postsecondary studies. From this study, it was determined that about a quarter of a million 18-24 year olds in Canada first began their postsecondary education in September 2000 and by about March 2002, about 16% had left their studies prior to completion. The main reason cited for leaving was “lack of fit” with the related issues being: lack of interest or motivation, uncertainty of what they wanted to do, a desire to change programs or that the program was not what they wanted. The next reason for
leaving was due to finances with the underlying issues being: the individual’s financial situation, inability to get a loan, and wanting or needing to work.

Another element that has been found to have a strong influence on whether a student chooses to leave or stay is the support provided by a network of peers and family. Lambert et al. (2004) found that parental educational attainment levels and the attitudes that youths’ parents had toward postsecondary education were associated with leaving postsecondary education. Students whose parents had a high school diploma or less were more likely to leave their studies than those whose parents had a postsecondary certificate or diploma. Additionally, students whose parents did not think that a postsecondary education was important were more likely to leave than those whose parents viewed this education as important. Lehmann (2007) similarly found that a student’s influences in their home environment, whether it is friends or family, had a strong effect on a student’s decision to discontinue their studies. Lehmann argues that students who leave make the decision based on feelings of class-cultural discontinuities where they don’t feel like they fit in.

Finnie and Qiu (2008) pointed out an observation from YITS data in Canada that parental education influences student persistence rates and this is particularly applicable in the case of college students as opposed to university students. It is important to note that in the Canadian context, colleges have typically referred to institutions that grant diplomas and certificates and focus on specific employment skills, career training, and trades. Universities, on the other hand, are degree-granting institutions that provide bachelor’s, master’s, and doctoral degrees. Using data from over 6500 college and about 5000 university students, it was found that 25.7% of those who left in college had parents with no postsecondary education as opposed to 18.8% in university. They put forth the assertion that this may be due to selection effects in which the admission requirements for university are more difficult. Thus, students who have been admitted to university may have the ability to overcome some of the additional barriers faced by first-generation students as opposed to those who have been admitted to college.

In summary, the research has shown that there are a number of factors that determine whether a student will continue in the pursuit of their postsecondary studies. Although studies have shown that 20-25% of first-year students in the U.S. and Canada will leave their studies,
many will eventually return. It is the group of students (stayouts) that choose not to return that is of particular interest. Although financial considerations continue to play a factor, the perceived lack of “fit” experienced by first-generation students also appears to be a prevailing theme.

2.8 Importance of the First Year and Social Support

Most of the literature on the first-year experience is consistent with the idea that the first year is critical for a student’s persistence. In fact, Upcraft, Gardner, and Barefoot (2005) state that the largest proportion of institutional leaving occurs during the first year and prior to the second year. Upcraft and Gardner (1989) asserted that student success in the first year is the most significant institutional priority for student persistence. This is the most tumultuous period for the majority of students, where the risk of dropping out is at its highest. It is during this time that the student is trying to find a balance with their new social environment and the academic rigor of higher education. Add to that the dynamic of being a new face within a campus population, the size of a small city in some cases, and it is no wonder that many students find it difficult to find a comfortable niche in university. Myers (1981, as cited by Upcraft & Gardner, 1989) found that of the first-year dropouts, half drop out during the first six weeks. Furthermore, in examining data from individual institutions, Upcraft and Gardner (1989) found that attrition generally decreases by almost 50 percent after each year of a student’s education. These findings suggest that the institutional focus for improving freshman to graduate retention should be on the first year. Myers (1981, as cited in Upcraft & Gardner, 1989) conducted a three-year Minnesota study and found that more than half of the students who did not have some kind of significant contact with a teacher, adviser, or dormitory counselor during the first three weeks would not be enrolled the following year. This is consistent with Goodsell, Maher, and Tinto (1992), who found that issues of social membership may be more important than academic membership during the first several weeks of college (as cited in Tinto, 2012). What does all this mean? Students entering college seek out social connections to help facilitate their transition into higher education.

Tinto (2012) posits that when students enter university, they bring their background characteristics and attributes that help form the expectations they have of postsecondary institutions. As students interact with the social and academic systems of the institution, they slowly become integrated with these systems. The level of integration with the institution
positively correlates with the individual’s level of commitment to completing their education. Tinto also presents the idea of incongruence in which a general mismatch exists between the needs, interests, and preferences of the individual and those of the institution. In these situations, withdrawal from university is a decision resulting from the perception that further attendance is not in the individual’s best interest. Rather than being forced to leave due to poor academic performance, the individual may decide to end their studies because the social environment does not “fit”. Lehmann (2007) found that some first-generation students left their Canadian institution voluntarily because of not “feeling university” (p.105). In one case, the subject’s working-class background was incongruent with the academic environment of university: “Well, in the end I discovered that [university] wasn’t for me. That’s not the kind of person I am. … I’m a more hands-on type of person, not one to sit down and think about things” (p. 105).

The support of one’s peers, especially during the adjustment to university life, can be pivotal in the decision to continue. Know (1991, as cited by Gilbert, Chapman, Dietsche, Grayson, and Gardner, 1997) found that at Queen’s University, classmates and friends were mentioned as the most frequently sought after sources of help for first-year students. In a study of first-year science students at York University, Grayson (1993, as cited in Gilbert et al., 1997) found that 88% would turn to their classmates first, and 85% would choose friends second. Professors and lab demonstrators were chosen by 55% of students, and parents came in last at about one quarter of students. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991, as cited in Upcraft et al., 2005) found that the frequency and quality of students’ interactions with their peers positively affected their persistence in college.

2.9 Bandura’s Social Learning Theory

Bandura’s Social Learning Theory is particularly relevant for first-generation students because they may not have had sufficient contact with individuals who have attended college or university to understand the nuances associated with a postsecondary education. There are numerous points of intersection that demonstrate how Bandura’s theory applies to first-generation students. According to Bandura, the behaviours one learns through observation will be limited to the people with whom they associate most often (1977). If that’s the case, students who are raised in a family where no one has attended college or university are at a disadvantage
for learning the ins and outs of applying to, attending, and navigating the PSE system. This has been demonstrated in a study by Lehmann (2007) where the students expressed feelings of “not feeling right and not fitting in” (p. 99) that may be attributed to their lack of PSE-related habitus or cultural capital. Bandura also states that observing models engage in actions that can be perceived as threatening without any adverse consequences can help to lower one’s inhibitions in performing the same actions. For an individual who may be hesitant about studying or engaging in activities at college or university, being exposed to this could help to reduce anxieties or inhibition. Bandura posits that self-esteem results from the difference one experiences between their behaviour and the standards of merit that they have personally set. If a first-generation student has not had sufficient interactions with postsecondary educated individuals and have not had the opportunity to set reasonable standards, they may feel lower levels of self-esteem and self-efficacy. It may be the case that a first-generation student would conceive the standards of performance in college or university to be beyond their capabilities. If that were the case, lower levels of self-efficacy may be experienced. In short, without sufficient contact with role models who have PSE experience, first-generation students may not be able to develop the habitus or cultural capital to enable themselves to confidently navigate the college and university environment. The concepts – habitus, cultural capital, and self-efficacy – form the basis for the conceptual framework that will guide this study and will be further explored later in this chapter.

2.9.1 Possible Selves

Markus and Nurius (1986) introduced the concept of “Possible Selves” which relates to how an individual thinks about their potential and future. The idea of possible selves centers on an ideal concept what an individual would like to become, but this can also include the selves that are considered failures. One’s possible selves are influenced by personal experiences, models within one’s life, and the surrounding sociocultural influences. Each of these factors shapes how the possible selves are formed and the expectations one has with regards to how achievable they may be. As put forth by Bandura (1997), “They provide a conceptual framework for interpreting our experiences. They influence the way we think about our potential and options. And they guide our courses of action and motivate our pursuit of selected goals” (p. 25). In other words, our possible selves shape the way in which we view our interactions and experiences in the everyday world and how these influences guide our own personal
development toward a particular envisioned model of possible self. Markus and Nurius stated that the possible selves are directly related to social comparisons that an individual makes in which their own thoughts, feelings, characteristics, and behaviours are contrasted to another individual. In their words, “What others are now, I could become” (p. 954).

The concept of possible selves is relevant in the context of this study because of the mentor-mentee relationship that the first-generation students experience in the mentorship program. As mentees, the students are able to interact with and learn from an upper year student mentor who has had the opportunity to experience and learn from one or more years in university. In most cases, the mentor is also a first-generation student so it is easier for the mentee to relate to their experiences on a personal level. By having a model from which the mentee can observe, learn, and seek guidance, the first-generation mentee’s possible selves with respect to their success in university is much more salient.

2.9.2 Vicarious experiences

Bandura (1997) wrote that modeling is a form of vicarious experience that can influence the behaviours of individuals who observe the modeling behavior. By observing their mentors and hearing of their experience, the student mentees are offered a method of social comparison in the form of peers who are similar to themselves. Thus, they are provided with a means for determining their own capabilities for achieving similar goals via the performance outcomes of their mentors. Bandura (1977) had indicated that observed outcomes can alter behaviours in a similar way as having directly experiencing the consequences oneself. Moreover, behaviours observed to lead to successful outcomes leads to an increase in the same behavior by the observer, while the same can be said for behaviours that are observed to lead to unfavourable outcomes. Vicarious reinforcement occurs when behaviours are adopted upon observation that they lead to positive results. This may also occur when the behavior is perceived by the observer as unfavourable. For example, a student mentee might sacrifice a good night’s sleep to ensure that they are prepared for an examination if they observe this behavior in their mentor with a positive consequence. Conversely, vicarious punishment occurs when an individual observes a negative result from a particular behavior and this makes them less likely to repeat the same behaviour. Again, using the same example, the mentee would be less likely to lose a good night’s
sleep to prepare for an examination if they observed a negative result from the mentor’s same behaviour.

2.10 Astin’s Involvement Theory

Astin (as cited by Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005) provided a model known as the input-environment-outcome (I-E-O) model to explain the three sets of elements that contribute to college outcomes. He proposed that inputs are made up of the demographic characteristics, family backgrounds, and academic and social experiences that students bring to college. The environment is made up of the people, programs, policies, cultures, and experiences that students encounter in college, both on and off campus. The inputs and environment influence the outcomes, or students’ characteristics, knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviours after college. This model provides a framework for understanding the various factors involved in shaping the student’s development during their time in college and the areas that are impacted upon their completion of postsecondary studies.

Astin’s (1999) theory of student involvement states that the amount of student learning and development is related to the amount of physical and psychological energy that a student puts into their academic experience. This experience includes out-of-classroom experiences, including participation in volunteer opportunities, athletics, working on campus, student government and clubs, and other similar activities. Alexander Astin’s Involvement Theory is relevant for the experience of first-generation students because first-generation students can compensate for their lack of postsecondary experience and knowledge by becoming more involved in their college or university environment. As Astin states, “Student involvement refers to the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience” (1999, p. 518). The theory shifts the focus from what is being taught to how students are becoming involved in their learning. Astin’s theory argues that to achieve the intended learning and development, curriculum must sufficiently engage the student through the investment of effort and energy. In other words, the student must be actively participating in the learning process. Lundberg et al. (2007) have found that by engaging with staff, faculty, and other personnel at the university, first-generation students can gain the necessary knowledge, perspective, values, and socialization that they may have lacked before entering the institution.
This supports the idea that being involved in multiple forms (e.g., in the class, extracurricular, academic clubs) can facilitate the transition for first-generation students. Rather than focusing on developmental outcomes, the theory is centered on the “how” of student development. In other words, the question becomes “what behaviours and processes lead to certain outcomes?” (Astin, 1999). This applies to first-generation students in particular because the mechanisms of effectively engaging them may require different approaches from those that are applied to non-first-generation individuals.

2.11 First-Generation Students and Involvement

Previous research has shown that involvement in out-of-class experiences can have several positive impacts on student development. Upcraft et al. (2005) asserted that academic and cognitive domains are positively affected by involvement in the campus community. Interpersonal interactions, whether with peers, staff, or faculty, seemed to have the strongest influence on student learning. As Kuh (1995, as cited by Grayson, 1997) had stated, “The more time and energy students expend in educationally purposeful activities, the more they benefit” (p. 660). The benefit comes in the form of intellectual and social development – two key components for successful integration in the higher education community. Students have also been shown to demonstrate development of career-relevant skills, such as leadership and public speaking skills, as a result of their participation in certain extracurricular activities (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). In summary, the evidence shows that involvement in campus life positively influences the growth and development of students in postsecondary institutions.

According to Lundberg et al. (2007), campus involvement can play a significant role in the success of first-generation students, but they exhibit low levels of engagement as compared to those who have college-educated parents. In their study, first-generation students’ perceptions of the college environment were also more negative and they were less adept at integrating the various aspects of their college life successfully. In a Canadian study, Grayson (2011) found that first-generation students were less involved on campus than their peers, and despite being offered more opportunities than other groups, these students were still less than likely to participate. He also found that Canadian domestic (i.e., born in Canada) first-generation students were less involved in campus activities than others at the end of their first and third years.
Tomlinson-Clarke and Clarke (1994, as cited by Hertel, 2002) found that social-extracurricular activities are stronger predictors of students’ adjustment to college than academic measures. Given the higher levels of cultural capital, or degree of familiarity one has with their environment, of students with college-educated parents, their social adjustment challenges would presumably be less than those whose parents are not college-educated. First-generation students are less likely to engage in the social-based and extracurricular activities on campus which would lead to developing relationships with students in their respective institutions (Pike & Kuh, 2005, and Engle & Tinto, 2008). Some of these activities may include studying in groups, interacting with faculty, seeking out services and resources offered by the institution, and joining extracurricular activities. As such, these students may not experience the same degree of social integration as their non-first-generation counterparts, and this can inhibit their successful college experience even if they perform well academically. Even with the opportunities on campus, first-generation students are not typically invested in seeking social bonds on campus and they generally find more friends who are not enrolled in college (Hertel, 2002). A well-known student development theorist, Arthur Chickering, posited that “it is student engagement, not the college environment, that affects integration” (in Pike & Kuh, 2005, p. 281). However, if first-generation students are not engaging despite the institution’s efforts to provide opportunities, the gap may not be bridged.

First-generation students differ from their non-first-generation peers in several respects that may impact their extracurricular participation rates. Pascarella et al. (2004) found that they had greater work responsibilities, more lived off campus and commuted, and greater numbers were part-time students. In terms of on-campus involvement, they participated less in extracurricular activities, had less participation in athletics and volunteer work, and interacted less with their peers. Padgett et al. (2012) found similar results, and participants in their study indicated having fewer resources to help them manage the rigors of their coursework. Given the conflicting priorities and challenges that they face, their comparably lower level of engagement is expected. However, other studies have also offered other explanations as to why first-generation students are not participating at the same rate as non-first-generation students. Engle and Tinto (2008) found that students preferred to get “their academic lives under control” (p. 21) before initiating any involvement in extracurricular activities and campus life. Understandably, the time required to adjust to the academic aspects of campus life would be longer than that of
their peers who would have access to college-educated parents. Another reason offered is that first-generation students would lack the knowledge of how participation in campus life can positively benefit them and how they could actually initiate their participation (Pike & Kuh, 2005). Conversely, non-first-generation students may have had parents or other role models who could convey the importance of engagement and how to navigate the system in order to participate in campus events and activities. An additional reason is based on the past practices and behaviours of students. First-generation students were found to be less likely to have participated in high school activities and maintained positive relationships with their teachers (Grayson, 2011). These same students were also less likely to significantly change these behaviours once they entered college or university.

Although first-generation students were less likely to engage in extracurricular activities, their involvement can have positive outcomes. In fact, Pascarella et al. (2004) found that participation in non-course activities tended to have stronger benefits for this group in areas such as critical thinking and preference for higher-order cognitive tasks. It has been posited that the positive effects may be attributed to the increase in social capital due to the added peer networks and social-extracurricular activities. First-generation students who previously lacked the networks of college-educated role models would gain from their networks developed while in college. As put by Pascarella et al. (2004), their college experiences have a “bigger bang-for-the-buck” (p. 278) in terms of the impact on their cognitive development and growth in other areas. This evidence supports other research that has shown that activities within universities can impact outcomes despite their association with background characteristics (Grayson, 2011). For example, having effective instructors and participating in sports and cultural events may have positive effects for a student whose background characteristics may normally be associated with negative outcomes. Grayson also found that desired educational outcomes are more of a possibility if students are more involved in campus activities and receive support from others, whereas first-generation students may have lacked the social supports and social capital to effectively engage in and derive benefits from non-course activities – the more they participate in and learn to navigate the higher education system, the better their sense of self-efficacy and effectiveness at drawing from their experiences.
2.12 Conceptual Framework

From the review of the literature, three key concepts emerged that provide the conceptual framework in which the study is situated: cultural capital, habitus, and self-efficacy. These concepts have been chosen because they provide a lens through which a student’s sociological development can be viewed, and their influence on one’s interaction with their postsecondary environment which includes the people, programs, and culture of their institution can be viewed.

2.12.1 Cultural Capital

In introducing the concept of cultural capital, Bourdieu has expanded the concept of capital beyond a strictly economic form. As economic capital can be gained through some form of investment, the same can be said for cultural capital where the “investment” is equated to formal education that is measured by quality and duration (Moore, 2004). Cultural capital has been viewed as that which is associated with more affluent culture, which includes fine art, classical music and ‘good’ literature (Grayson, 2011). As such, only those from privileged classes would have the benefit of acquiring cultural capital and deriving from its benefits. However, the forms and significance of capital varies depending on the context and place in time. The idea of cultural capital has been extended to include an understanding of the customs, etiquette, and standards of the educational system (Grayson, 2011). Bourdieu (1986, as cited by Richardson, 1986) described cultural capital in the embodied state as culture, cultivation, and Bildung – a German term for self-cultivation. He stated that it requires a period of inculcation and assimilation that must be invested personally by the individual who transmits the cultural capital. If knowledge of the systems and practices of higher education is a form of cultural capital, first-generation students would lack the cultural capital that other non-first-generation students are able to benefit from. As put forth by Lundberg et al. (2007), the information which references the norms and culture of postsecondary institutions may be framed in terms of cultural capital. This information, which may be used to help students negotiate the college experience, is lacking in first-generation students – putting them at a disadvantage compared to their peers.

For the sake of a better understanding of the term, two definitions will be offered. Bills (2000, as cited by Pascarella et al., 2004) defined cultural capital as the “degree of ease and
familiarity that one has with the ‘dominant’ culture of a society’” (p. 252). Dumais (2002) offered the following definition: “Cultural capital is comprised of ‘linguistic and cultural competence’ and a broad knowledge of culture that belongs to members of the upper classes and is found much less frequently among the lower classes” (p. 44). Attewell and Lavin (2007) added that a family’s cultural capital has no utilitarian purpose. Instead, it is a reflection of the “lifestyle, tastes and manners of the family’s social class” (p. 81). They cited Bourdieu, who emphasized the transmission of cultural capital within families and its significant influence on educational outcomes: “the best hidden and socially most determinant educational investment, namely the domestic transmission of cultural capital” (p. 82). Since students with parents who are university educated would more likely have higher cultural capital than those whose parents are not, they would have an advantage in terms of understanding the culture of universities and colleges as well as the value of postsecondary education and its long term benefits for career and personal development. This understanding can also benefit in terms of its role in personal and socioeconomic development (Pascarella et al., 2004). Non-first-generation students would have a better understanding of the value of postsecondary education and its long term benefits for career and personal development.

Pascarella et al. (2004) stated that individuals with highly educated parents have an advantage over their first-generation peers. It is implied that they would have a better understanding of the role of higher education and its influence in personal and socioeconomic development. Due to being raised by parents with less than postsecondary education, first-generation students enter the field of higher education at a disadvantage in terms of their knowledge of the social environment (Bui, 2002). However, by nature of being in the same family, college-educated parents function as human and cultural capital for their college-bound kids. Consequently, they can guide their children as they navigate information and attitudes related to important decision-making situations. Pascarella et al. (2004) added that lacking this resource, first-generation students may experience lower levels of growth in the cognitive, psychosocial, and status attainment-oriented outcomes of college.

While students come to institutions of higher education with levels of cultural capital that have been shaped by their previous experiences, this does not mean that they would be congruent with the culture found at each institution. Jehangir (2010) asserted that institutions espouse
multicultural values and inclusivity without communicating what diverse students can contribute to the academy. Once they arrive at the institution, the cultural capital of higher education does little to acknowledge their cultural experiences. Rather, an expectation to change themselves and “adapt to the rules of academia” (p. 33) occurs for many students. This can prove to be a challenging process as this requires a “reinvention of the self, and oftentimes this demands cutting off, disguising, or undermining parts of their racial, ethnic, religious, or class identity” (Jehangir, 2010, p. 33). This process leads to feelings of isolation and marginalization in the classroom, co-curricular involvements, and home life.

Several methods of increasing the cultural capital associated with postsecondary education have been introduced in the literature. Lundberg et al. (2007) posited that first-generation students could benefit greatly from engagement with faculty and other university personnel. They stated that students can gain the necessary information, perspective, values and socialization from these relationships that were previously lacking before entering the postsecondary institution. Bourdieu (1986) and Coleman (1988, cited by Pascarella et al., 2004) added that the college experience itself provides a mechanism for building on one’s cultural capital; academic and social engagement will have stronger impacts on cognitive and non-cognitive outcomes for first-generation students as compared to their peers. It is by virtue of being exposed to people and experiences that were not previously present in their lives that first-generation students can learn and benefit quickly.

Cultural capital – and, in particular, that which is associated with higher education – is a key concept with which the experience of students in the mentorship program will be explored. The assumption is that, as per the literature, first-generation students would have lacked the opportunity to learn information that would benefit them during the course of their postsecondary studies. However, by participating in the mentorship programs geared toward first-generation students, these individuals would benefit and learn from their peers who have experience with and knowledge of many of the intricacies associated with being in a college or university. Therefore, they would have the opportunity to acquire much of the cultural capital that would assist them with their postsecondary experience, which includes how they interact with staff, faculty, and other students, how to manage their academic work, and other opportunities (e.g., jobs and extracurricular activities) that are available to them.
2.12.1.1 Cultural Capital and Field

The concept of “field” is important in understanding the concept of cultural capital because it places a particular relevance on one’s capital in relation to a space that is within a specific historical, local/national/international, and relational context (Grenfell, 2008). When one brings a particular capital that is relevant to the field, they are at an advantage as compared to those who do not bring the same level of relevant capital. (Grenfell, 2008). This advantage can continue to enable the individual to accumulate more capital, thus assisting them in advancing further. Naidoo (2004) described field as being structured in hierarchy whereby the agents and institutions are situated at various hierarchical levels of influence. Within the specific field, individuals’ positioning is impacted by the capital that they possess. Bourdieu uses the analogy of a game where the game represents the field within which there are particular norms or “regularities” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 98). Within the game, capital functions “both as a weapon and as a stake of struggle, that which allows its possessors to wield a power, an influence (p. 98). Thus, wielding capital that is relevant to a particular field is important for where the individual sits in the hierarchy.

2.12.2 Habitus

Padgett, Johnson, and Pascarella (2012) provide a definition of habitus: “an internalized system of beliefs, experiences, and values acquired from the social environment, including the family, school, and work environments” (p. 246). From a study at a large Canadian institution, Lehmann (2007) used the notion of habitus as introduced by Bourdieu (1977), which is described as “the active presence of past experiences within individuals in the forms of schemes of perception, thought and action” (p.72).

Padgett et al. (2012) also describe habitus “as a mechanism by which an individual assesses his or her social environment in an effort to rationalize decision making” (p. 246). The latter description implies that habitus plays an important role in influencing the decision-making process of individuals. As for how habitus is formed, Pierre Bourdieu (1990) provided a description in the following passage:
Unlike scientific estimations, which are corrected after each experiment according to rigorous rules of calculation, the anticipations of the *habitus*, practical hypotheses based on past experience, give disproportionate weight to early experiences… the structures characterizing a determinate class of conditions of existence produce the structures of the *habitus*, which in their turn are the basis of the perception and appreciation of all subsequent experiences. (p. 54)

The preceding quote demonstrates the weight of past experience and how this shapes one’s perception and management of future experiences. Wacquant (2016) described Bourdieu’s concept of habitus as a “mediating construct” (p. 65) whereby the external sociosymbolic structures of society become internalized in the individual through the ways that they think, act, and feel and, in turn, become externalized by the way they respond to the environments they experience on a day-to-day basis. The notion of habitus is used to explain how students develop dispositions to act, interpret experiences, and think in certain ways (Lehmann, 2007). In simpler words, it can be thought of as a way of thinking, perceiving, and interacting with events based on one’s past experiences.

One of the misunderstandings of habitus pointed out by Wacquant (2016) is that it exists in isolation from the social world and is a self-sufficient mechanism that influences one’s actions and behaviours. Wacquant uses the analogy of a spring that requires an external trigger in order to be activated and likens this to habitus and how it is influenced by the experiences and stimuli of the individual’s environment.

Dumais (2002) added that one of the consequences of the development of habitus is the reproduction of the social structure. This was explained using the example of an individual born into the working class. Because the individual develops ideas about their individual potential based on the class they were born into, this translates into actions that continues the cycle of remaining within that class. This also applies to the level of educational achievement. Bourdieu (1973, cited by Dumais, 2002) asserted that the development of one’s habitus occurs in relation to their level of cultural capital. For example, an individual from a lower class would be aware that the class has less cultural capital than those in more affluent classes. This would influence
the development of their habitus negatively as the individual is aware that without cultural capital, there is less opportunity for educational success.

Lehmann (2007) posits that as students experience the culture of college or university, they encounter a phase of discontinuity between their social origins and educational destinations. In other words, students undergo a period of uncertainty during which they are attempting to identify a balance between what they were raised to value and the values they are learning as postsecondary students. By pursuing a postsecondary education, Baxter and Britton (2001) describe them as being on a “trajectory of class mobility” in which their education sets the individual on a path of class differentiation. However, this experience can also result in an experience that has been termed as “habitus dislocation” which is defined as “a painful dislocation between an old and newly developing habitus, which are ranked hierarchically and carry connotations of inferiority and superiority” (p. 99). For the student, this manifests in the experience of intimidation, inferiority, and feeling like a “fish out of water” as they navigate a foreign institutional environment and the social settings that may seem unwelcoming and unfamiliar. Baxter and Britton have also described this experience as a “splitting of the self” (p. 101) in which the individuals find themselves negotiating between the different parts of their identity. Due to this challenge, Lehmann (2007) has found that some students will drop out of university as a way to settle the discontinuities between their old habitus and newly forming habitus. By leaving the environment that contributes to the internal conflict, they are able to alleviate the stress that is created. This stress is rooted in a feeling of alienation where first-generation students question their suitability for university – especially in comparison to their non-first-generation peers. However, Lehmann (2009) has also found that some first-generation students feel that their circumstances have lent themselves to some moral advantages. For these individuals, they feel that their position has enabled them to build a stronger work ethic, higher levels of maturity, and a better sense of responsibility and independence.

As compared to their peers with college-educated parents, first-generation students are at a disadvantage in terms of their experiences, values, and resources before arriving on campus (Padgett et al., 2012). They possess less knowledge of the system and benefits of higher education and are already aware of their limited opportunity for success. Their non-first-generation peers have benefitted from learning about the unfamiliar workings and complexities
of the first year of university and are less pressured to learn how to navigate the college system. Ramos-Sanchez and Nichols (2007) found that non-first-generation college students perceived themselves as more capable and were more confident in their ability to succeed in college as compared to their first-generation peers. This leads to the final concept – self-efficacy – and its relation to the academic performance of first-generation students.

2.12.3 Self-Efficacy

Tinto (1993) identified three stages of passage in the transition from high school to college: separation, transition, and incorporation. In short, the first stage, separation, involves the disassociation of the individual from their past communities. The second stage, transition, involves the introduction to new social values and behaviour, and the third stage, incorporation, is where the student finds or adopts the new values and behaviours to adjust to the college environment. The second stage is typically characterized by disorientation due to the difference between one’s past norms and patterns of behaviour and the ones being integrated. Students who experience a discord between their old and new habitus or have greater differences between their past and new circumstances, experience the most difficulty in adjusting to their new environments. Entering postsecondary education, these students are already at a disadvantage in terms of how they have adjusted to their new setting. With less familiarity of the processes, culture, and expectations of universities, first-generation students face challenges in two key areas: their sense of belonging, and their sense of self-efficacy and how they will perform in their new arenas of learning.

In a study of how ethnic minority first-generation freshmen coped in their first year of college, Phinney and Haas (2003) found that self-efficacy and social support were the most important factors for successful coping. Within the group, they found that the perceived ability to succeed was closely related to the more successful students. Jehangir (2010) also asserted that first-generation students enter the postsecondary education field filled with self-doubt because they question whether they have the ability to manage the academic demands of higher education. Self-efficacy is defined as “beliefs about one’s ability to successfully execute a behavior required to produce a certain outcome” (Bandura, 1997) (as cited by Ramos-Sanchez and Nichols, 2007, p. 2). Vuong, Brown-Welty & Tracz (2010) offered the following definition
for college self-efficacy: “a student’s degree of confidence in performing various college-related tasks to produce a desired outcome, such as passing an examination” (p. 52).

One’s self-efficacy influences the courses of action they choose to pursue, the amount of effort to be exerted, the level of determination and resilience for different challenges and failures, and how they will manage the demands of their actions. In a study of self-efficacy of first-generation and non-first-generation students, Nichols and Ramos-Sanchez (2007) found that non-first-generation students had a higher sense of self-efficacy than their first-generation peers at the start and end of their first year of college. The levels of self-efficacy did not increase significantly for either group for the course of the year, suggesting that exposure to higher education does not increase initial confidence levels. However, it was suggested that having parents who could guide them through the experience of the first year contributed to the higher confidence levels of the non-first-generation students. Chemers, Hu, and Garcia (2001) found that academic self-efficacy had a strong effect on academic expectations and performance. In fact, it was also a stronger predictor than past performance on academic tasks. Self-efficacy was found to be the strongest predictor of GPA even when taking demographic variables and past performance into consideration (Vuong et al., 2010). This concept aligns with Dumais (2002), who found that people had preconceived ideas about their own potential based on the class position they were born into. He went on to state that these beliefs are externalized into actions that perpetuate the class structure. In the case of first-generation students, they may have preconceived ideas about their potential based on their background. This could affect their sense of self-efficacy and have a detrimental effect on their performance and outlook.

Students with a higher sense of self-efficacy felt more confident and optimistic about their abilities to respond to the various demands of college life (Chemers et al., 2001). Higher levels of self-efficacy along with confidence help to shape a student’s perception – threats are perceived as challenges and this has a positive effect on expectations and performance. Students with college-educated parents are more likely to have a challenge perspective as they start their postsecondary education with higher levels of self-efficacy than non-first-generation students. Although this may not be the norm, it is more likely that students who have some previous knowledge of the workings and nuances of higher education may feel more confident in their abilities to deal with challenges in this arena.
The research relating to self-efficacy has consistently shown that first-generation students exhibit lower levels of self-efficacy in comparison to their non-first-generation peers (Vuong, et al., 2010; Nichols & Ramos-Sanchez, 2007; and Wang & Castaneda-Sound, 2008). McConnell (2010, cited by Davis, 2010) also put forth that first-generation students enter college with the expectation that they will make lower grades – which suggests that self-efficacy is a relevant issue for this group. Due to the assumed difference of cultural capital and conflicting habitus of first-generation students as compared to their non-first-generation peers, this group of students is more likely to experience a lower degree of college self-efficacy. Vuong et al. (2010) found an association between self-efficacy, academic performance, and persistence. In this study, it was found that students with lower self-efficacy were more likely to have lower first-term GPAs and overall GPAs and were more likely to perceive themselves as leaving the institution in the first or second term. Furthermore, Bandura (1997) (as cited by Wang and Castaneda-Sound, 2008) reported that the degree of self-efficacy in a particular area of behavior influences persistence and performance in that area. This raises the concern that if first-generation students are already entering the postsecondary arena with lower levels of self-efficacy, how are they able to find strategies to cope and succeed? Referring back to Bandura’s Social Learning Theory, without the opportunity to develop the postsecondary-associated habitus and cultural capital by observing and learning from college or university educated parents, first-generation students will most likely be at a disadvantage. One mechanism found to be successful is that of social support (Phinney & Haas, 2003). Pascarella et al. (2004, cited by Lundberg et al., 2007) asserted that first-generation students may contribute to their cultural capital through academic experiences while in college. If that were the case, relevant academic experiences that also provide significant social support may be worthwhile areas of exploration and engagement for first-generation students.

As previously stated, students lacking habitus oriented to higher education may feel a disconnect between their past and new circumstances. For some students, this can lead to a sense of “transforming their self-concept in a manner that requires ‘leaving off’ and ‘taking on,’ a shedding of one’s social identity and the acquisition of another” (Jehangir, 2010, p. 41). This can be a difficult process that results in some students disguising their circumstances and feeling a sense of “imposter syndrome”. Davis (2010) provided a perspective that describes this phenomenon as “more serious than the typical vague feelings of not fitting in” (p. 49). First-
generation students can have firm beliefs that they have taken a place that should be given to “more worthy” individuals, or that their acceptance had been a mistake. This outlook, when firmly rooted, can significantly affect one’s participation as there is a constant feeling of insufficiency. Establishing a healthy identity is crucial to how successful first-generation students develop a sense of competency and find a comfortable place within the campus community (Vuong et al., 2010). Part of that identity development involves finding purpose and direction on campus – this may include lifestyle choices and recreational interests. First-generation students may need to explore new experiences that will help them to develop a new identity in order to feel a sense of fit on campus.

The effects of self-efficacy go beyond the classroom. First-generation students who feel that they do not belong on campus may also feel socially inadequate to engage in the various services and activities that are offered. If they doubt their ability to participate in class and academically, these doubts may also percolate into the realm of social opportunities on campus. However, Phinney and Haas (2003) put forth that social support – which can often be found through extracurricular activities – can have a positive effect on the levels of self-efficacy. Having peers that are supportive and provide a resource for feedback and insights helps to alleviate the individuals sense that they do not have the ability to perform a particular task or activity.

2.13 A Critique of the Literature

At this point, it is important to note that the exploration of the concepts – cultural capital, habitus, and self-efficacy – and their relation to the study exist within a context in which there is an inherent and implied value placed on higher education. This produces a problematic misperception that individuals, and students in particular, who do not have the capital that is relevant to this field (i.e., higher levels of education) are at a disadvantage and negates the fact that these same individuals have other forms of capital that are also relevant. Bourdieu (cited by Richardson, 1986) put forth that the educational system contributes to the reproduction of the social structure and the inequalities within that structure. Naidoo (2004) refers to Bourdieu’s work on the social reproduction function of higher education. She refers to higher education as a “sorting machine” (p. 459) in which students are selected according to an implicit social
classification and reproduced according to an explicit academic classification. This explicit academic classification is essentially analogous to the implicit social classification. In effect, the implication is that students from higher social echelons are selected for higher education and the cycle reproduces the perpetuation of social elitism. As put forth by Moore (2004), “the work that cultural capital does is mainly within and through education” (p. 451). This refers to the assertion that individuals are able to accumulate cultural capital through further education, thus enabling themselves to increase their value within the field of education. Moore goes on to describe cultural capital as “socially conferred” in that the value of the capital developed through education is a perceived value and not through any intrinsic worth. Additionally, the social structure further feeds into the reproduction of its own structure through the “domestic transmission of cultural capital” (Bourdieu, 1986, cited by Richardson, 1986). In other words, individuals with higher levels of cultural capital (i.e., education) are able to pass along knowledge to others in their close social networks that “privilege individuals in the micro politics of everyday life” (Moore, 2004, p. 451). Moore provided the example of parents who are able to deal with issues pertaining to their children’s schools.

Despite the increasing diversity of students who were previously under-represented in postsecondary education, the distinctions within the field of higher education persist (Webb, Schirato & Danaher, 2002). For example, perceptions of merit between elite universities and polytechnic colleges are constantly perpetuated. The role of the university in the production of knowledge is highlighted. This raises the question: How can the field of higher education remain objective when the capital (i.e., knowledge) being produced by universities influences the perceived value of the universities themselves? Therein lies part of the issue: “the intellectual field of university education is conceptualized as a field with a high degree of autonomy in that it generates its own values and behavioural imperatives that are relatively independent from forces emerging from the economic and political fields” (Naidoo, 2004, p. 458). Although society may be informed that a university education and the generation of knowledge is unbiased and founded on the understanding of “truths”, it is an ecosystem that reproduces and reinforces its own hierarchical stature.

As previously mentioned, literature related to first-generation students and their out-of-classroom involvement has shown that they are generally less involved in extra-curricular activities than their peers (Lundberg et al., 2007, and Grayson, 2011). Although the findings
suggest that the reasons associated with lower of participation generally include having more work responsibilities, commuting more, having fewer resources to manage their academic work, and having less awareness of the benefits of participation among other things, the research is lacking a critique of the existing social structure in universities. Given that the cultures within universities including the extracurricular culture and even the activities that are offered have been formed predominantly by non-first-generation individuals, there is an implicit bias that naturally benefits non-first-generation students. This, in effect, may lead to a secondary consequence which is the exclusion of first-generation students from extracurricular activities.

2.13.1 The Problematic Deficit Model of Thinking

Wilson (cited by Passow, 1963) also wrote about the “social function of screening and sorting the oncoming generation into different streams of life according to impartial criteria of achievement” (p. 234). This further emphasizes the points made by Naidoo and Bourdieu in that the field of education reproduces and reinforces the social stratification of society. Riessman (1962) wrote about the concept of “cultural deprivation” which refers to “aspects of middle-class culture – such as education, books, formal language” (p. 3) from which lower socio-economic groups have not benefited. In his book, Riessman argued that using the term “culturally deprived” to describe those from this group was inappropriate because these individuals possess a culture of their own that is comparable in worth. He went on to describe the tendency to view “the underprivileged” – or in this case, the first-generation students – as deprived and disadvantaged. Within this ideology lies the fundamentally problematic and reinforcing deficit model of thinking in which first-generation students are perceived as culturally deprived and “less than” their non-first-generation peers when in fact, they come to postsecondary institutions enriched with their own forms of cultural capital that hold value and further contribute to their own experiences.

2.14 A Comment on the Literature

It is important to note that most of the literature found on the background and factors influencing first-generation students has come from research based in the United States (e.g., Upcraft et al., 2005, Pascarella et al., 2004, and Engle & Tinto, 2008). Little Canadian research
exists that explores these same elements. However, there is some Canadian research that examines the experiences of first-generation students once they have entered postsecondary institutions (e.g., Grayson, 2011, Lehmann, 2007).

Little has been studied with regards to how interventions (such as mentorship programs) shape the experiences of first-generation students, so this research study will add relevant details that will help practitioners and researchers alike better understand what programs and supports are either ineffective or helpful in the academic and social success of this population. It is the hope of the researcher that this information would be used to continually develop better programs that will help first-generation students to succeed.
Chapter 3
Methods

3.1 Research Design

For this study, I used a mixed method research design (Creswell, 2009) that incorporated quantitative and qualitative data collected from program participants. The study covered mentorship programs administered at each of the three campuses at a large urban university located in south-eastern Ontario. The quantitative component of this study was based on survey metrics provided by the administrators of the mentorship programs.

The process involved the secondary analysis of survey data to determine major areas for further exploration in the qualitative interviews. The surveys were created and administered by the program coordinators as part of their annual program evaluation efforts. The surveys were completed in the 2014-15 year at two campuses and in the 2013-14 year at the third campus. The participants for qualitative interviews at all three campuses were recruited and collected in the 2014-15 academic year. It had not been determined whether the interview participants had completed the program surveys, but it is possible that their participation in the surveys may have occurred.

The qualitative component involved face-to-face interviews with mentor and mentee participants. The interviews provided an opportunity to explore how their first-generation identity and participation in the mentorship programs impacted their experience in university. To better inform the construction of the interview questions, I conducted a small focus group and interviewed some test subjects to explore my use of terminology and question types.

My overarching research question is: In what ways does participation in a mentorship program for first-generation students impact their experience? This will frame some of the more specific research questions, including:

1. How does being first-generation impact students’ academic engagement in university?
2. How does being first-generation impact students’ social engagement in university?
3. How does being first-generation impact students’ involvement and extracurricular participation in university?
4. How does being first-generation impact students’ habitus, cultural capital, and sense of self-efficacy in university?
5. How does participation in a mentorship program for first-generation students impact students’ academic engagement in university?
6. How does participation in a mentorship program for first-generation students impact students’ social engagement in university?
7. How does participation in a mentorship program for first-generation students impact students’ involvement and extracurricular participation in university?
8. How does participation in a mentorship program for first-generation students impact students’ habitus, cultural capital, and sense of self-efficacy in university?

3.2 The Data

3.2.1 Survey Responses

The first part of the data consist of survey responses collected from both mentors and mentees of the mentorship programs by the program coordinators of the mentorship programs on the three campuses. For this study, I collected survey data from Campus B and C that came from surveys administered to program participants from the academic year spanning September 2014 to April 2015. The data from Campus A were from the September 2013 to April 2014 academic year because they were conducting a review of the program during the 2014-15 year and the surveys were not being administered that year. The surveys designed by the program coordinators were administered to the mentees of the program during the fall period and again during the winter period to assess any changes in their responses. The questions cover a range of topic areas, including: access of university resources and services; frequency of interaction with faculty and Teaching Assistants (TAs); participation in extra-curricular activities; confidence levels in performing different functions; preparedness to perform different functions; and number of hours outside of school for school work and employment. The surveys were administered to the mentors of the program during the winter program and the questions covered the following
topic areas: experience as a first-generation student; development of academic, time management/organizational, and communication skills; understanding of registrarial and faculty policies; personal development; relationship-building; connection to the campus; and perceived effectiveness of the program for mentees. Surveys for both groups include qualitative questions to further assess perceptions of self and of the program, recommendations, and feedback.

The survey data consisted of responses provided by program participants across the three campuses. Although each program had specific criteria to be considered for successful completion of the program (outlined below), the surveys were sent out to all program mentees in order to solicit their feedback and assess their experience. As such, the data included responses from mentees whether they successfully completed the program or not.

After receiving approval of my ethics application during August 2015, I contacted the program coordinators for each campus during the month of September to inform them of the purpose of my study including the ethics information; my intent to interview them for information on each campus’s first-generation mentorship program; and the proposed process for contacting mentorship program participants. The email communication and consent letter can be found in Appendix D and E, respectively.

3.2.2 Interviews

The second part of the data consists of qualitative interviews conducted with mentees and mentors of the mentorship programs on the three campuses. The interviews were conducted during the period of November 2015 to January 2016. The interviews provided an opportunity to ask questions about participant background, their level of involvement in the mentorship program, how their identity as a first-generation has impacted their university experience, and how their participation in the mentorship program has influenced their experience.

3.3 Sample and Recruitment

The sample for the qualitative component of this study was a convenience sample (Creswell, 2009) whereby an email was sent from the program coordinators on each campus to
all program participants that invited them to participate in the study. Individuals who received the email invitation and were interested in participating in the study contacted me directly by email to indicate their willingness to volunteer. The sample consisted of 5-6 program participants from each of the three campuses for a total sample size of 16 individuals. Each group included both mentors and mentees of the programs.

Eligibility criteria to participate in this study included: being a program participant during the 2014-15 academic year at the institution being studied; completion of the mentorship program during the 2014-15 academic year; being a student during the course of the 2014-15 academic year; and being a first-generation student. The same criteria applied to participants from Campus A for the 2013-14 academic year.

Recruitment of interview participants took place by first contacting all program coordinators during the beginning of the 2015 fall term. The coordinators were asked to inform mentorship program participants that they would be invited to participate in the study in the coming months. The purpose of this initial contact was to allow an opportunity for students to be aware that a study would be conducted and to build interest. Shortly thereafter, program participants were invited to participate in the interviews through an email invitation that was sent by each program coordinator during the months of October and November. Interview participants were contacted by the program administrators at each campus using the invitation email (Appendix F) and invitation letters (Appendix G). My contact information was provided in their communication so that interested participants could contact me directly. A follow up email (Appendix H) was also provided to remind students of the invitation to participate in the interviews.

3.4 Campuses

For Campus A, 10 mentors and 218 mentees were contacted. The criteria for successful completion of the program were that participants had to attend a minimum of 10 sessions. Of the total number of participants, only 56 individuals met the criteria.

For Campus B, 28 mentors and 209 mentees were contacted and invited to participate in the research study. Of the total mentees, 52 mentees had no contact with the program after
registering so their participation level was undetermined. For successful completion, 12 points of contact between the mentee and mentor as well as between the mentee and program (e.g., participation at workshops) were required for successful completion of the program.

For Campus C, 19 mentors and 255 mentees were contacted. Successful completion of the program required participants to have contact with their mentor for seven months as well as completion of a reflection. Only 36 participants completed validation through the university’s Co-Curricular Record, a document that records university-recognized co-curricular involvements for students.

On all campuses, completion of the mentorship program as per the criteria established by each program provided students with the opportunity to have a notation included on their institutional Co-Curricular Transcript. Additionally, it indicates students’ relative favourability toward the program and commitment to the various opportunities offered such as the workshops and group mentoring sessions.

3.5 Qualitative In-Depth Interviews

In conducting in-depth interviews, I aimed to understand and capture: 1) the general experience of each participant; and 2) what is common/unique about the experiences. I conducted each interview 1-on-1 in a private room on the campus that students attended that was identified to each participant in advance. The interview followed a semi-structured format in which “all of the questions are flexibly worded or the interview is a mix of more and less structured questions” (Merriam, 2009, p. 90).

An interview protocol (Creswell, 2009) was used to facilitate discussion and included the following:

1. A heading with information about the interview (date, place, interviewer, interviewee);
2. Instructions to follow to ensure consistency with each interview;
3. The list of questions to be used;
4. Additional probes for the questions to elicit further information; and
5. A concluding statement to thank the participant and with information regarding next steps.

The following notes further built on the detail used in each protocol step:

1. **Heading** – The date range of the interviews which were during the months of November 2015 to January 2016. It was preferred to keep the interviews closer together in time to avoid any lapses in the protocol and to keep the interview approach as consistent as possible. The locations of the interviews which were venues on campus that were booked in advance. This was also useful in ensuring that all participants were in the same place in their experience across the year.

2. **Instructions** – The instructions included details for the interviewer to cover including a description of the study, the next steps, and relevant parts of the ethics approval for the participant to be reminded of.

3. **The list of questions** – Given that the interviews were in a semi-standardized format, the core questions to be used were the same for each set of instructions.

4. **Concluding statement** – The concluding statement informed the participant of the next steps of the study and how the final report would be distributed and shared. It also ensured that the participant had the contact information of the researcher, the study supervisor, and the Research Ethics Office at the University of Toronto.

The interview guide can be found in Appendix J. The guide contained 20 questions that were asked in the interview. The initial 14 questions were meant to provide an opportunity for the participant to “warm up” to the interview session while providing me with an opportunity to learn a little more about the participants and their general experience with the program. The first six questions related to the individual (e.g., year of study, living in residence or commute, etc.) and the next eight questions were about the program (e.g., their level of involvement, what they liked/disliked about the program, suggested program improvements, etc.). The final six questions were meant to explore the student’s experience in relation to three key areas in the context of being a first-generation student and their participation in the mentorship program:

a. Participation in extracurricular activities such as intramural sports, student government, student clubs, and part-time employment;
b. Confidence and ability to meet and interact with different people on campus, including students, staff, and faculty; and

c. Confidence and ability to perform successfully with academic responsibilities, including tests and exams, papers and lab reports, and participating in class.

In order to respect the limited time that students had to participate in the interview, the first 10 questions were sent to all participants. This way, they had the opportunity to fill out the questions in advance so that the interview could be focused on the remainder of the questions. Of the 16 participants, six chose to complete the 10 questions in advance.

Each interview started off with an introduction to the researcher and the purpose of the study. This was followed by a review of the Informed Consent Form (Appendix I) which indicated that the interview would be audio-recorded, the voluntary nature of the study, and how the data would be stored and used. All participants signed the Informed Consent Form prior to starting the interview and were provided with a copy for their reference. The interviews ranged in length from 21 minutes to 57 minutes with an average of 33 minutes and 30 seconds.

The interviews provided an opportunity to explore the impact of the mentorship programs on the participants’ level of involvement and engagement in the university community and how this affected the development of their perceived self-efficacy. The questions used in the interviews explored several areas of the students’ experiences, including: how being a first-generation student affected their participation in extracurricular activities, social interactions on campus, and management of academic responsibilities, and how participation in the mentorship program affected the same areas.

In order to minimize potential sources of error, a total survey error approach was employed. As put forth by Groves, Fowler, Couper, Lepkowski, Singer, and Tourangeau (2009), “Rather than focusing on just one or a few elements of a survey, all the elements are considered as a whole” (p. 34). The total survey error perspective encompasses observational and non-observational errors, including: construct validity, measurement error, processing error, coverage error, sampling error, nonresponse error, and adjustment error. This section will provide an overview of the strategies that were used in order to minimize the different sources of potential error.
3.6 Minimizing Measurement Error

In an effort to minimize measurement error, two steps were employed. The first step was to conduct a focus group with three students. The purpose of the focus group was to determine how potential respondents understood the term “extracurricular activities” and what types of activities would be considered as such. The participants were asked what activities they would constitute as extracurricular and their understanding of the different categories of activities. It was important to ensure that the terminology used for each category would be recognizable. An additional purpose of the focus group as stated by Groves et al. (2009) was to determine reactions to the recruitment protocols for the survey. Since the participants would be students, it was assumed that they would have a fair understanding of how the communication methods and incentives used may be received by future participants.

The second step to evaluate the instrument prior to data collection was to conduct several cognitive interviews. Cognitive interviews involve asking respondents how they interpret the questions being asked and the phenomena they consider when formulating a response (Groves, 2009). Using cognitive interviews allowed me to ask two separate individuals how they interpreted and understood the questions being asked. It also allowed an opportunity for me to identify some potential follow-up questions and prompts that could be used in the actual interviews. The cognitive interviews also assisted in better understanding how participants’ thought processes affected their actual responses. Providing an electronic version of the cognitive interview was found to be helpful as it allowed participants more time to process the questions without the added pressure of having an interviewer in the room.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Several ethical issues were considered: consent from minors, perceived responsibility to participate in the interview, the option to withdraw from the study, and potential conflict of interest. Since many students coming from high school into their first year of university are under the age of 18, the age of consent to participate in research was an important consideration. However, referring to the University of Toronto’s “Office of Research Ethics Guidelines and
In Canada, there is no definitive age below which parental/guardian consent is required in order to participate in research. Whenever children (under 18 years of age) are to be included as participants, the researcher must consider the risk of the research, the maturity level of the children, and any potential risks versus benefits associated with parental knowledge of the research (e.g. research looking at drug use in youth). (p. 49)

Additionally, the following text was also used for reference from the same manual:

“Adolescents that do not live with their parents can consent for themselves. Similarly, university students are considered to be adults, whether or not they live out of the home” (p. 49). However, although the age of participation was not a potential barrier for proper consent, providing an informative introductory letter was still important. Participants were informed that they can withdraw from the study at any point if they so wished. Lastly, given that the primary researcher is an employee at the University, there was a potential conflict of interest as I might possibly work with, supervise, counsel, or train some of the participants. Therefore, it was important to stress that the participants would be kept anonymous and steps would be taken to ensure that happened, including the use of unique identifiers rather than student names and contact information. None of the student participants were supervised by me in any other context.

3.8 Data Analysis

3.8.1 Survey Data Analysis

Since the surveys administered in the mentorship programs included questions in multiple areas, several questions were selected due to their relevance in relation to this study. Mentees are required to fill out a survey at some point of their participation in the program that assesses how the program impacted them in several categories. The questions selected included responses that were of two types: a) Likert scale responses and b) Yes/No options. For the sake of simplifying the data for analysis, the Likert scale questions were organized by me by combining the “Strongly Agree” and “Agree” responses into “Agree” and the “Strongly Disagree” and “Disagree” responses into “Disagree”. Responses where “Neutral” was selected were not included in the analysis. In cases where Yes/No questions were used, responses where
“Yes” was selected were put into the “Agree” category whereas responses where “No” was selected were put into the “Disagree” category. For these types of questions, responses where “Unsure” was selected were not included in the analysis. The “Neutral” and “Unsure” categories were excluded from the analysis because of two main reasons. Firstly, the students may not have been able to determine an appropriate response option based on the question asked. For example, for the statement pertaining to the use of the library on Campus A, “I feel more confident using the library and/or its website to do research”, the student may not use the library for this purpose. Secondly, without additional data that qualifies their responses, I was unable to determine the motives they had for choosing the “Neutral” and “Unsure” options. The data from the surveys were analyzed by examining the mean scores for each question and determining which areas had the highest levels of agreement or disagreement. These results helped inform the questions used by the researcher in the qualitative interviews and complemented the data collected in the interviews.

3.8.2 Interview Data Analysis

Prior to analyzing the interview data, there were several steps involved in preparing the data and preparing for the process of coding the interview data.

**Step 1: Interview transcription**

In the first step, the data were organized and prepared by transcribing the interviews and initially scanning the material. The transcription was performed by an independent contractor hired to transcribe each interview into text that could be used for the analysis. Upon completion of the transcription, all data were then returned to myself in order to maintain the privacy of the interview participants.

**Step 2: Initial read through**

Next, I read through the transcripts for each interview in order to “get a feel” for the interview flow, the general experience of the student, and any initial impressions of themes that appeared to emerge. In order to link the content to the interview itself, the audio portion was also used at this stage. This ensured that I would be able to identify any errors in the transcription that may
have occurred. By listening to the audio of the interview while reviewing the transcripts, I was able to better immerse myself into the content and follow the pace of the conversation.

**Step 3: Sample coding**

Before commencing with the sample coding, I prepared the interview text by separating it out line-by-line in order to parse out the points made by the speaker. In order to assess the coding strategy, I used a sample of two questions from seven interviews and employed a chart that identified the major points made for each question. The points were identified through a process of open coding in which notes were jotted in the margins of the transcripts (Merriam, 2009). This process also involved underlining the sections of interview text that appeared to be in response to the interviewer’s questions. The underlined sections of text were truncated and copied into a chart. By reviewing the text that was extracted from each interview, I then made notes on the themes which appeared to emerge. In order to maintain the context of each piece of extracted text, the original transcript was referred to continually throughout this process. The chart and noted themes were then used to provide a count indicating the number of times a particular theme emerged. Another graduate student in the doctoral stream of the same program was enlisted and employed the same strategy. The results from both of our analyses were compared to assess the consistency of this coding strategy and whether the same points were identified in the open coding process. After several iterations of this process and reviewing both the number of points and themes identified by each individual, I was able to develop a process to continue with the analysis.

**Step 4: Coding**

The interview data were analyzed using a modified multi-step process that was outlined by Creswell (2009):

1. In the first step, I initially read through the text to determine any common themes that emerged across the participants’ responses. These themes were then used in the coding process.
2. In the next step, I read through the text four to six times to identify responses that matched the codes.
3. The next step of the coding process involved grouping codes that overlapped – a step referred to as axial coding (Merriam, 2009). In this step, the notes were collected and reviewed in comparison to each other. I also made sure to consider the context and content of each interview to ensure that the point being made for each note was related to others in the same grouping.

4. The text was again read through between four and six times to further connect and identify broader themes that were more common across the responses and to be used in the qualitative narrative. This step is similar to the process of categorization which involves the creation of categories – otherwise referred to as “conceptual elements that ‘cover’ or span many individual examples” (Merriam, 2009, p. 181).

5. Additionally, in the process of performing steps two to four, counts were made to quantify the number of times points or themes were identified in the responses.

The aforementioned data analysis steps were conducted in three different stages: by question, by category (first-generation experience and mentorship program participation), and in relation to the conceptual framework. In the first stage, the analysis was conducted by individually analyzing the following six questions:

1. Do you think being a first-generation student has affected your motivation and ability to participate in extracurricular activities such as intramural sports, student government, student clubs, part-time employment, etc.? If so, how so?

2. Do you think participation in the mentorship program has influenced your involvement in the university community? For example, participating in extracurricular activities such as intramural sports, student government, student clubs, seeking part-time employment, etc.? If so, how so?

3. Do you think being a first-generation student has affected your confidence and ability to meet and interact with different people on campus, including other students, staff, faculty? If so, how so?

4. Do you think participation in the mentorship program has influenced your confidence and ability to meet and interact with different people on campus, including other students, staff, and faculty? If so, how so?
5. Do you think being a first-generation student has affected your confidence and ability to perform successfully with your academic responsibilities, including tests and exams, papers and lab reports, and participating in class? If so, how so?

6. Do you think participation in the mentorship program has influenced your confidence and ability to perform successfully with your academic responsibilities, including tests and exams, papers and lab reports, and participating in class? If so, how so?

I was able to determine how often a theme arose due to the number of times it was referred to by each participant. Upon determining the themes that arose from the participants’ responses for each question, the top three to four were outlined in the results.

The second stage of analysis involved using the five analysis steps to analyze the data using two lenses: based on the impact of being a first-generation student and based on the impact of the mentorship program. In this stage, the responses from the same six major questions were used and divided based on their focus: There were 186 responses based on questions related to being a first generation student, and 178 responses based on questions related to the mentorship program. This step was performed in order to examine any themes that may have crossed questions within each category. In this case, the top three themes that arose for each category were further outlined in the analysis.

The third stage of analysis involved a modified approach to the analysis offered by Creswell (2009) which is outlined below. In this stage, only the responses related to the students’ participation in the mentorship program were analyzed. This is because I was hoping to determine how their participation in the mentorship programs would have affected their experience.

1. The text was read through initially four or six times to determine if any of the responses were related to any of the concepts from the conceptual framework (i.e., habitus, cultural capital, and self-efficacy). In cases where they were found to be related, these pieces of text were separated out for further analysis;

2. Using the text identified from step 1, I read through the data to determine any common themes that emerged across the participants’ responses. These themes were then used in the coding process.
3. In the next step, I read through the text four to six times to identify responses that matched the codes.

4. I then grouped codes that overlapped making sure to consider the context and content of each interview to ensure that the point being made for each note was related to others in the same grouping.

5. The text was again read through four to six times to further connect and identify broader themes that were more common across the responses and to be used in the qualitative narrative.

6. Lastly, in the process of performing steps three to five, counts were made to quantify the number of times points or themes were identified in the responses.
Chapter 4
Results and Analysis

4.1 Overview

This chapter will present the findings of the study which focused on the experiences of mentors and mentees of a first-generation mentorship program at a large urban Canadian university located in southeastern Ontario. The university has one main downtown and two satellite suburban campuses. The mentorship program ran during the academic year (i.e., September to April on the three campuses of the university. The aim of the study is to explore the experiences of first-generation students at the postsecondary level and how mentorship programs influence their transition, experience, and engagement. The chapter is organized into two major parts, a presentation of the selected themes from the survey results and a review of the themes that emerged from the participant interviews.

4.2 Program Surveys

As part of their effort to assess pre-identified outcomes of each program and to solicit feedback from participants, the program coordinators on each campus administered a survey to students who were involved in the mentorship programs during the academic year which runs from September through to April. Campus A only ran the survey at the end point which was during the month of April whereas Campus B and C ran the survey twice with the mid-year evaluation during the month of October and the final survey during the month of April. Looking at completion of the end of year evaluation, Campus A had 46 students fill out the 21-question survey out of a total of 218 registered mentees (21% completion). Campus B had 54 students participate in the 33-question survey out of a total of 209 registered mentees (26% completion). Campus C had 40 students fill out the 16-question survey out of a total of 255 registered mentees (16% completion). Survey questions cover a range of topic areas, including: access of university resources and services; frequency of interaction with faculty and teaching assistants (TA); participation in extra-curricular activities; confidence levels in performing different functions;
preparedness to perform different functions; and number of hours outside of school for school work and employment. Each survey also included qualitative questions to further assess perceptions of self and of the program, recommendations, and feedback.

4.2.1 Themes relevant to this study

For the sake of this study, eight questions were used as the point of focus from the surveys administered at the end of the academic year for each campus. These questions were selected because they best represented the themes being explored in this study. Broadly, they covered five theme areas: Use/access of services on campus; community/relationships and interactions; sense of preparation; involvement; and whether they would recommend the program to others. Some of the questions were phrased in such a way to denote a change in behaviour or perception as a result of participation in the mentorship program. For the sake of ensuring clarity of each theme area, the exact wording of each question is provided in this section.

4.2.1.1 Use of Library

The first question referred to the use of the library system on each campus. The question asks each participant about their level of comfort or confidence with use of the library system. The phrasing of the question used for each campus is as follows:

A. Campus A: “Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: - I feel more confident using the library and/or its website to do research.”

B. Campus B: “Please respond to the following statements: - I know how to use the library database to find scholarly sources.”

C. Campus C: “Please indicate your level of agreement with the following: As a result of participating in the First Generation Program . . . - I feel more confident using the library and/or its website to do research.”

The results below indicate that overall, respondents on all three campuses are fairly confident with the use of the library system. The overall average for the percentage of respondents that
agree was 77.27% as compared to 6.17% that do not agree. There were zero respondents on Campus C who had indicated any disagreement related to the question.

![Use of Library](image)

**Figure 1. Confidence with use of library**

### 4.2.1.2 Approaching Professor or TA

The next question referred to how comfortable the student felt approaching his or her professor or Teaching Assistant (TA). The phrasing of the question used for each campus is as follows:

A. Campus A: “Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: - I feel more comfortable approaching my professors and teaching assistants to ask questions about my courses.”

B. Campus B: “Please indicate how often you do the following: - I feel comfortable approaching my Professor or TA with questions outside of class.”

C. Campus C: “Please indicate your level of agreement with the following: As a result of participating in the First Generation Program . . . - I feel more comfortable approaching my professors and teaching assistants to ask questions about my courses.”
Campus B showed the lowest percentage of respondents that agreed with the response with a 52.94% response and 19.61% that disagreed. The overall average for the percentage of respondents that agree was 66.34% as compared to 12.77% that do not agree.

\[\text{Figure 2. Comfort with approaching professors and teaching assistants}\]

### 4.2.1.3 Accessing Services

A. Campus A: “Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: - I feel more comfortable accessing student services at [Campus A], including but not limited to the Career Centre, the Health and Counselling Centre and the Recreation, Athletics and Wellness Centre.”

B. Campus B: “Please indicate how often you do the following: - If I have a question or concern, I feel comfortable asking for help from departments and services at [University].”

C. Campus C: “Please indicate your level of agreement with the following: As a result of participating in the First Generation Program . . . - I feel more comfortable accessing student services at [Campus C] including but not only Academic Advising & Career Counseling, Athletics & Recreation and Health and Wellness services.”
Campus B showed the lowest percentage of respondents that agreed with the response with a 49.02% response and 19.61% that disagreed. The overall average for the percentage of respondents that agree was 74.38% as compared to 8.71% that do not agree.

![Bar Chart: Accessing Services]

**Figure 3. Comfort with accessing student services**

### 4.2.1.4 Sense of Community

A. Campus A: “Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: - I feel more connected to my campus because of my involvement in the program.”

B. Campus B: “Please indicate your level of agreement with the following: I have found a supportive community somewhere on campus.”

C. Campus C: “Please indicate your level of agreement with the following: As a result of participating in the First Generation Program . . . - I feel more connected to my campus because of my involvement in the program.”

Campus B showed the lowest percentage of respondents that agreed with the response with a 41.67% response and 25.00% that disagreed. The overall average for the percentage of respondents that agree was 65.19% as compared to 15.91% that do not agree.
Figure 4. Sense of community and connection on campus

4.2.1.5 Making Relationships

A. Campus A: “Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: - I have made relationships in the program that I expect will continue into my upper years.”

B. Campus B: Not Applicable

C. Campus C: “Please indicate your level of agreement with the following: As a result of participating in the First Generation Program . . . - I have made relationships in the program that I expect will continue in my upper years.”

This question was not included in the survey administered on Campus B. The overall average for the percentage of respondents that agree was 75.71% as compared to 8.10% that do not agree.
4.2.1.6 Recommend Program

A. Campus A: “Please respond to the following statements: - I would be likely to recommend the program to another student looking for similar services.”

B. Campus B: “Please indicate your level of agreement with the following: I am likely to recommend the program services to someone looking for similar services.”

C. Campus C: “Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: - I would be likely to recommend the mentorship program to another student looking for similar services.”

Campus B showed the lowest percentage of respondents that agreed with the response with a 68.75% response and 10.42% that disagreed. Of the respondents who participated in the survey, both Campus A and C had a very high percentage who agreed that they would recommend the program with 93.48% and 94.87%, respectively. The overall average for the percentage of respondents that agree was 85.70% as compared to 5.65% that do not agree.
4.2.1.7 Better Prepared

A. Campus A: “Please respond to the following statements: - I am better prepared to successfully complete the academic year because of my involvement in the program.”

B. Campus B: “Please indicate your level of agreement with the following: I am better prepared and more able to successfully complete my academic year as a result of the program services provided.”

C. Campus C: “Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: - I am better prepared to successfully complete the academic year because of my involvement in the mentorship program.”

Campus B showed the lowest percentage of respondents that agreed with the response with a 56.25% response and 6.25% that disagreed. The overall average for the percentage of respondents that agree was 73.77% as compared to 8.61% that do not agree.
Figure 7. Sense of preparation for successful completion of the academic year

4.2.1.9 Involvement

A. Campus A: “Please respond to the following statements: - My involvement with the program has encouraged me to pursue leadership opportunities during my time at [Campus A].”

B. Campus B: Not Applicable

C. Campus C: “Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: - My involvement with the First Generation Program has encouraged me to pursue leadership opportunities during my time at [Campus C].”

This question was not included in the survey administered on Campus B. The overall average for the percentage of respondents that agree was 88.16% as compared to 5.44% that do not agree.
4.2.2 Overall Results

The next three graphs depict the results for each category by campus. Campus B did not include two of the categories, “Making Relationships” and “Involvement”, in their survey. Campus C had the highest overall average for the agree percentage response with 82.08% and Campus B had the lowest overall average with 58.17%.

On Campus A, the overall average that agreed with each question category was 81.25% and 10.60% for those that disagreed. The top 2 categories with the highest agree percentage response were “Recommend Program” and “Accessing Services” and “Involvement” (both had 89.13%). The bottom categories with the lowest agree percentage response were “Library”, “Sense of Community”, and “Making Relationships” (all three had 73.91%). Of the three bottom categories, it should be noted that the category “Sense of Community” had the highest disagree percentage with 15.22%.
Figure 9. Overall results for all questions for Campus A

On Campus B, the overall average that agreed with each question category was 58.17% and 15.12% for those that disagreed. Two of the question categories, “Making Relationships” and “Involvement”, were not asked on this campus. The top two categories with the highest agree percentage response were “Library” and “Recommend Program”. The bottom categories with the lowest agree percentage response were “Accessing Services” and “Sense of Community”.

Figure 10. Overall results for all questions for Campus B

On Campus C, the overall average that agreed with each question category was 82.08% and 3.13% for those that disagreed. The top two categories with the highest agree percentage response were “Recommend Program” and “Involvement”. The bottom categories with the lowest agree percentage response were “Approaching Prof or TA”, “Library”, and “Making Relationships” (the last two had 77.50%).
Figure 11. Overall results for all questions for Campus C

The graph below depicts the averages for all three campuses by category. As shown, the top two categories with the highest agree percentage response were “Recommend Program” and “Involvement”. The bottom two categories with the lowest agree percentage response were “Approaching Prof or TA” and “Sense of Community”.
4.2.3 Differences in Results Between Campuses

In reviewing the overall campus-specific results in Figures 9, 10, and 11, it can be observed that Campus B has lower scores in several areas as compared to Campuses A and C: Approaching Prof or TA, Accessing Services, Sense of Community, and Better Prepared. As previously mentioned, Campus B is a large urban campus which is located in the downtown urban core, whereas the other two campuses are located in suburban areas. A 2011 report put out by the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (Conway, Zhao & Montgomery, 2011) presented results that demonstrated how student engagement within postsecondary institutions varied by the size and character of the institution. The pattern they noted was that NSSE scores indicated a general decline in engagement levels as the institutional enrolment increased. In the case of this study, the findings were consistent with respect to the perception of the survey participants who were at Campus B. Although the survey results did not provide additional details to qualify the scores, there are several possible reasons why Campus B showed lower
scores in these four areas. Firstly, a larger campus may be correlated with larger class sizes. In these cases, students would have fewer opportunities for interactions with their professor, TA, or even their peers in the classroom which may inhibit their confidence in approaching these individuals. Secondly, a larger campus would more likely have a greater number of services spread over a larger geographical area which may make it more difficult for individuals to become acquainted to the physical environment and to orient themselves to the various services offered. Lastly, if the campus is primarily a commuter-based population, it may be more difficult for students to navigate the campus environment – especially if they are commuting to campus and generally spending less time in the spaces.

Given the lack of additional information from the data provided, further exploration of the reasons why we are seeing differences in scores between the campuses would be worthwhile in future studies.

4.2.4 Summary of Survey Results

As identified from the results from the three campuses, the categories that showed up in the bottom two categories on at least two campuses were: “Library”, “Making Relationships”, and “Sense of Community”. The only category to appear again in the overall campus averages with a low score was “Sense of Community”. This information assisted in informing the interview questions that were then asked of the participants. One of the interview questions related to the students’ ability to meet and interact with different people on campus and my follow up questions enabled me to further explore some of the responses provided by the participants.

4.3 Participant Interviews

In order to explore the lived experiences of first-generation students who participated in the mentorship programs on the three campuses, interviews were conducted with a sample group of program participants from the 2014-15 academic year. On Campus A, the program did not run during the 2014-15 academic year, so participants from the 2013-14 program were contacted to participate. Due to the lapse in time between the completion of the program and the current study, I chose to pursue a convenience sample which relies on the availability of subjects who
volunteer for a study (Berg, 2004). The program coordinators facilitated the process of participant recruitment by sending out communication inviting students to take part in the study. In total, 16 students from all three campuses participated in the interviews.

4.3.1 The Sample

Of the 739 mentors and mentees from the three campuses, there were 17 respondents to the call for study participants. Of the 17 respondents, 16 participated in the interview process. One individual had initially replied to the call for participants but did not follow through with any other communication after several attempts to contact the individual. From Campus A, 10 mentors and 218 mentees were contacted and invited to participate in the research study. There were six participants from Campus A. From Campus B, 28 mentors and 209 mentees were contacted. There were five participants from Campus B. From Campus C, 19 mentors and 255 mentees were contacted to participate in the study. Campus C had five students participate.

4.3.2 Campus Participation Details

It is important to note that all students registered in the first-generation mentorship program on each campus for the year of study were contacted, but each registrant list had varying levels of participation in the program. Participation for each program included: attendance at program events such as seminars, social outings, and receptions; contact with program administrators; contact with mentors or mentees; and completion of administrative duties. There was limited data on the specific level of participation for each student on all three campuses, but all program coordinators noted significant levels of program attrition as the school year progressed. The main criterion for completion of the program for Campus A was attendance at a minimum of 10 sessions with their mentor. Of the total number of participants, only 56 individuals met the criteria. At Campus B, 12 points of contact were required for successful completion of the program. This included attendance at workshops or program events as well as contact with their mentor. Of the total number of participants, 52 mentees had no contact at all with the program after registering. Campus C required participants to maintain contact with their mentor for seven months as well as completion of a written reflection component for completion.
of the program requirements. Only 36 of the 255 mentees met these requirements.

4.3.3 Participants

Sixteen individuals participated in the interviews. In order to have a better understanding of each student’s background, a number of questions were asked with regards to: campus, year of study, gender, whether they participated as a mentee and/or mentor, level of involvement in the program as a mentee primarily (or mentor if that was their only role), their family background (where they live and education), their own area of study, whether they lived in residence or commuted during their time as a mentee, how long they had participated in the program, whether they had attended school outside of Canada themselves, and whether their parents had any sort of postsecondary education outside of Canada. Three of the 16 participants indicated that both parents had some postsecondary education experience outside of Canada, but they still identified themselves as first-generation students due to the fact that they have not had any postsecondary experience in Canada.

Of the 16 participants, six were from Campus A, five were from Campus B, and five were from Campus C. The information that follows is captured in Table 1 below. There were three males and 13 females in the sample. There was one person who had participated only as a mentor whereas five participated as both a mentee and mentor and 10 had participated as a mentee only. Participants were asked about their level of involvement in the program during their time as a mentee (or mentor for the individual who had only participated in this role). They were asked to choose a number between one and five where one represented “not at all” and five represented “very much”. Most participants reported a fairly high level of participation in their respective program with three reporting a level of two, two reporting a level of three, two reporting a level of 3.5, five reporting a level of four, and four reporting a level of five. The average level of involvement for the entire group was 3.7 out of 5 which represents a moderate level of involvement overall. Participants were also asked whether they had lived in residence or commuted during the year of interest. Only one of the participants had reportedly lived in residence that was provided and managed by the university. The students interviewed were asked how long they had participated in the program. Several of the respondents indicated that they were still involved in their respective mentorship program as a mentee or mentor. Of the 16
students, eight were involved for one year as a mentee, one was involved for one year as a mentor only, four were involved for two years with the first year as a mentee and the subsequent year as a mentor, two were involved for two years as a mentee for both years, and one was involved for four years with the first year as a mentee and the subsequent three years as a mentor. In terms of having been raised and educated for part of their lives outside of Canada, six of the participants indicated that they had this experience. And lastly, three of the participants indicated that their parents had attended an institution of postsecondary education outside of Canada.

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<th>Involvement Level (1-not at all; 5-very much)</th>
<th>Residence or Commute</th>
<th>Participant for how long (years)</th>
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Table 1. Interview participant details

For the sake of understanding a little more about some of the participants, three will be described in further detail. In addition to the variety of programs, year of study, and other factors related to their education, it was observed that there was significant variation in terms of their history, upbringing, and life circumstances.

Participant B was a third year female student who had participated in the mentorship program on Campus A for one year. She had first learned about the program when
representatives from the university attended her high school and included details on the mentorship program in their presentation. Her motivation to sign up for the program was rooted in her understanding that interactions in university would be different from her experience in high school. Her expectation was that it would be more socially challenging given the change in environment. Her hope was that the mentorship program would provide some support in that regard. She was born in Vietnam and moved to Canada at the age of six or seven along with her mother and father. She described how her parents did not have any postsecondary education because of the post-war conditions that existed at the time in Vietnam and that this contributed to the ongoing difficulty she experienced in describing some of the challenges she faced in university to her family. She enjoyed participation in the program as it allowed her to interact with peers in a relaxed and supportive atmosphere. She also described how the mentorship program helped her to explore other opportunities that aligned with her interests in the area of social justice. She explained that the program and other participants were useful guides and provided information that facilitated in her pursuit of other activities.

Participant G was a second year male student who had participated in the mentorship program on Campus B for one year. He had learned about the program through an email he had received and was motivated to sign up so that he could benefit from any academic guidance offered. He met with his mentor bi-weekly throughout the academic year and spoke of the social support offered by the program. His main area of concern through the year was regarding his academic performance and felt that the program could have offered more support in this regard. Participant G was born and raised in the area close to the university and commuted to campus. During the interview, he spoke several times of his family background and how he grew up in a single parent and low-income household. This required him to work while pursuing his studies, further adding to the elements he had to navigate. Additionally, he spoke of the frustration he would feel when he saw how other peers seemed to overlook the opportunities presented to them due to their more fortunate circumstances. He described how lucky he felt to have the opportunity to be in university and took every opportunity to be involved in extracurricular activities.

Participant M was a third year female student who had participated in the mentorship program on Campus C for two years, one as a mentee and another as a mentor. She first heard about the program through an orientation session and thought that she could benefit from
learning with a mentor who was studying in the same area. Her family had immigrated to Canada from South Asia and she was born and educated in the area close to the university campus. She spoke of how she didn’t come to realize her first-generation identity until she actually began participating in the program. Upon realizing what this meant, she began to understand why some of her challenges and experiences were different from her non-first-generation peers. She described how others around her during her high school years fed into an expectation that she would not be able to succeed in university. This perspective motivated her to challenge herself to find opportunities for involvement in university even before she began her studies. She added that there were moments where she experienced a “love-hate” relationship with her first-generation identity because she recognized that this element of her identity made some things more difficult. And yet, she also appreciated the moments where she was able to accomplish things despite this dynamic.

4.3.4 Themes that emerged for each major question

The first stage of coding provided the researcher with an opportunity to identify themes that emerged for each of the six major questions that were asked in the interviews. The questions cover three primary areas – participation in extracurricular activities, interactions with other people on campus, and performance with academic responsibilities – and are meant to draw upon the participant’s experience with each area in two ways: as a first-generation student and as a mentorship program participant. The top three responses for each question will be highlighted in the results below in order from the most frequent response to the least frequent response. In some cases, more than three responses are identified because two or more have appeared the same number of times. I had chosen to highlight the top three responses for each question in order to focus on the prevailing themes that emerged from all or most of the participants in relation to the questions.
4.3.4.1 Participation in extracurricular activities

Question 1: Do you think being a first-generation student has affected your motivation and ability to participate in extracurricular activities such as intramural sports, student government, student clubs, part-time employment, etc.? If so, how so?

In this case, there were four top responses:

1. Encouraged participation
2. No family example
3. Feeling of uncertainty
4. Focus on academics

Of the 16 respondents, five (31%) had indicated in their response to this question that being a first-generation student had somehow encouraged their participation in other extracurricular activities while in university. Several reasons why this occurred were identified, including a feeling that they had to figure out things on their own and couldn’t rely on help from others. Other reasons were: a drive to take advantage of opportunities that did not exist for their parents or because of an awareness that these activities would benefit them in some way. In the words of one participant:

There's a reason you come here and that's to increase opportunities so if you don't jump at those opportunities, you're kind of wasting your time in my head. Every opportunity that I have, I have to jump if I can obviously. (Participant P)

Four (25%) of the participants said that they did not have an example in their family to motivate, guide, or demonstrate how they could participate in these areas. Some of this experience was rooted in a feeling of not having any parents with experience to ask or explain what they could do.

Three (19%) spoke of a feeling of uncertainty that influenced their participation. Part of the uncertainty was related to whether they would be able to interact with the others in these
activities. As stated by one student: “I just didn't know, I didn't know if I could actually do it. It was just one of things like, is it possible to get along with these people?”. (Participant B)

The last response also had three (19%) participants indicate their focus on academics as the main reason for their lack of participation in extracurricular activities. Two of the participants spoke of the perceived negative impact on their academic performance if they participated in other activities, and one mentioned that this was rooted in a sense of having to be grateful for their education so they “shouldn’t waste time on leisure activities”.

Question 2: Do you think participation in the mentorship program has influenced your involvement in the university community? For example, participating in extracurricular activities such as intramural sports, student government, student clubs, seeking part-time employment, etc.? If so, how so?

The top three responses for this question were:

1. Feeling of support
2. Information sharing
3. It was the first step

Ten (63%) of the 16 respondents indicated that the mentorship program provided a feeling of support. The support was described as the student’s mentor, peers, or general connection through the program. One student described her feeling of support through these words:

I feel like that part of me that's not really affected by my status as a first-generation student is probably because I was part of the mentorship group. I mean, I didn't feel too much of that jogging because I also hit the ground running, because I had someone running next to me. (Participant F)

The student had used the analogy of running earlier in the interview to describe how it felt to perform in the university as compared to her non-first-generation peer: “I think just at the beginning it's like a race where she took off running and we kind had to jog and then speed up to match that”. Additionally, several of the participants referred to the idea of community to
describe the support they felt through the program. One of the participants said the following: “They were all like we’re all in it together, kind of. Because a lot of the - all the mentors, they are first generation too, so it's kind of like having that support around you” (Participant O). The feeling of being “all in it together” allowed the students to feel that they were already connected to a community of peers that would be there to support them through their experience.

Eight (50%) of the participants provided responses that suggested the role their mentorship program had in providing information that motivated or supported their involvement in various extracurricular activities. This may have been through the provision of information on societies, events, or opportunities by their mentor or the fact that the program provided some general direction for the students.

Lastly, six students (38%) shared how their participation in the mentorship program was the first step to further involvement of some kind in the university community. The students’ very act of being in the program provided them with the opportunity to gain different skills, learn about potential next steps, and actually led to many of them initiating participation of some kind in another activity. In the words of one student: “And once I’d joined that program, I pretty much broke the gateway – I got all the opportunities I needed” (Participant D).

4.3.4.2 Interaction with different people on campus

Question 1: Do you think being a first-generation student has affected your confidence and ability to meet and interact with different people on campus, including other students, staff, faculty? If so, how so?

The top three responses for this question were:

1. Impact on confidence
2. Lack of awareness and feeling of fit
3. Contrasting identity

The first response, impact on confidence, was identified by 10 (63%) of the 16 participants. Of the 10 responses, two indicated that being a first-generation student had a
positive impact on their confidence. One felt an increased sense of confidence because she was proud of being the first in her family to attend university. This encouraged her to meet other people, although she did explain that it was easier for her to meet faculty and staff than other students. The other student who described a positive impact on her confidence explained this was the case because she is more empathetic with the students she meets: “But it's made me more confident talking to other students because it makes me more empathetic, it makes me wonder if the person I'm talking to is in the same boat and they're also just like navigating waters blindly” (Participant F). The other eight students experienced a negative impact on their confidence due to being a first-generation student. Most felt that their peers were more advanced or “knew what they were talking about”, and as such, they felt a sense of inferiority as compared to those around them. One student used the term imposter syndrome to describe her situation: “I think a little bit of it is that impostor syndrome, or that somehow I'm here - I don't know, whether I belong here. But yeah, you know - because they seem like they fit into the atmosphere” (Participant J). Some also described their low levels of confidence with respect to a feeling of intimidation or apprehension when interacting with or meeting faculty members.

The second response, lack of awareness and feeling of fit, was also brought up by 10 (63%) of the 16 participants. These two elements were paired because the students often associated their perceived lack of awareness concerning social norms with a feeling of fit. Some of this was associated with etiquette, how to dress, knowing what was socially acceptable, or what “lingo” was more appropriate. All of these elements contributed to their feeling of not being able to fit in to their classroom environment or other social environments. One student, Participant K, described it as feeling like he’s “going into uncharted territory” where he felt that he did not have enough experience to know how to fit in.

The last response, contrasting identity, was described by six (38%) of the participants. The term contrasting identity was chosen mainly because the students would describe a feeling of conflict with their first-generation identity and that of being a university student. This seemed to be rooted in an inner desire to rise above the limitations and lowered expectations placed upon them due to being a first-generation student and to excel. One of the participants shared that being a first-generation student has trained him to fight against assumptions that he comes across
in school. Other students describe the pressure – whether it’s due to having more to lose or some intrinsic desire – to outperform their peers.

Question 2: Do you think participation in the mentorship program has influenced your confidence and ability to meet and interact with different people on campus, including other students, staff, and faculty? If so, how so?

The top three responses for this question were:

1. Exposure to others
2. A normalizing effect and a sense of relatability
3. Feeling of confidence

Of the 16 participants, seven (44%) mentioned that the mentorship program led them to be exposed to other people in some way. Students spoke of how the program not only created opportunities for interaction, but also how it allowed them the opportunity to learn how to communicate and interact with students with different backgrounds and experiences.

Six participants (38%) described how participation in the mentorship program helped them to normalize other students and created a sense of relatability due to the fact that they were also first-generation students or going through some similar struggles. As stated by one student, “I felt that we were on the same boat. We know, there are things we don't know, and we know that we don’t know it. So, it's more comfortable for us, I guess” (Participant B). Her statement demonstrates how having a shared experience of uncertainty with her peers helped with her own experience.

The last response, feeling of confidence, was brought up by six (38%) of the participants. The increased confidence was attributed to the fact that students were able to meet peers in the program and because they were supportive. This was also rooted in the ability of students to relate to their peers, which allowed them to realize that they could also fit in. One student described her experience of discovering that she could be herself: “I realized that I don't have to be formal on campus because this is my university, right; I can be who I want to be in this place, and it's okay for me to just be comfortable...So when that comfortableness was really instilled in me, and I realized that it was okay for me to be who I am” (Participant D).
4.3.4.3 Performance with academic responsibilities

Question 1: Do you think being a first-generation student has affected your confidence and ability to perform successfully with your academic responsibilities, including tests and exams, papers and lab reports, and participating in class? If so, how so?

The top three responses for this question were:

1. Feeling alone
2. Lack of knowledge
3. Role of family

Eight (50%) of the participants spoke of feeling alone or a sense of solitude. Some of the students described how they had to attempt or learn to do things on their own without any assistance or support from others – especially family. This latter point will be explained further as the issue of family came up frequently in their responses. Some of the participants also spoke of how they had no one to ask or talk to with regards to their academic responsibilities.

Of the 16 participants, eight (50%) brought up a lack of knowledge as an issue they had to navigate with regards to their academic experience in university. Students described not knowing what to expect, or how to approach the academic material. As stated by one student, “I remember before my first week of midterms in first year, I was like - oh my god, what's gonna happen? It's just like gasping for air because you have no idea what's gonna come and hit you” (Participant F). For this reason, they had to spend more time figuring out how to do things on their own.

The last response, role of family, had seven participants (44%) comment on its role in their experience. Most of this was attributed to the fact that their parents were unable to provide advice or direction, but it was also due to the pressure of knowing that they were the first in their family to attend university. This caused several of the students to add additional expectations upon themselves to excel in their work: “It’s kind of like I’m the only one so gotta make it count type of thing” (Participant A). On a positive note, this additional pressure also functioned as a motivator for some of the students to work harder and have a desire to do well.
Question 2: Do you think participation in the mentorship program has influenced your confidence and ability to perform successfully with your academic responsibilities, including tests and exams, papers and lab reports, and participating in class? If so, how so?

The top responses for this question were:

1. A sense of fellowship
2. Having help
3. Information sharing

Nine (56%) participants identified a sense of fellowship as something they experienced as a result of participating in the mentorship program. This was due to the bond they shared with their mentor and with the other students who were in their group or program. Having this experience made them feel more secure and helped with their confidence levels with regards to their academic responsibilities. Also, being able to see other first-generation students who were able to manage the academic rigour of their studies helped to instil a sense of possibility. As put by one student,

I guess it just made me feel valued on campus... when my mentor would come to me and listen to me specifically, and listen to my interests specifically, and every week she’d come back with recommendations for things I could do that were tailored to my interest, it really made me feel like I was important... So, in that sense, I guess I felt really important and like I had a true friend on campus. (Participant H)

This sense of camaraderie provided a stabilizing effect that gave participants a strong feeling of support and that someone cared about them.

The next response, having help, was provided by six (38%) of the participants. The students explained that having someone – either a mentor or fellow participant – that they could go to with questions about their academic work, course selection, program choices, paper writing, and others was a helpful resource. This also gave them the ability to check their understanding of things with someone who understood or at least could listen when that was needed.
Five (31%) participants spoke of the benefit of having useful information shared with them by their mentor or through programming organized through the mentorship program. The key difference between this response and the previous, having help, is that the information shared was intentionally provided through the program whether it was through the mentor, workshops, or other planned activities. This demonstrates the usefulness of planning a program curriculum that covers certain elements to support the academic efforts of student participants.

4.3.5 Themes that emerged from the overall results

During the interviews, six questions were asked of each candidate that explored their campus involvement, social engagement, and performance with respect to their academic responsibilities from the lens of being a first-generation student as well as their participation in the mentorship program. In order to determine the prevalent themes that emerged from their experiences, the questions were pooled based on whether they were related to being a first-generation student or to being a participant in the mentorship program. Upon review of the transcripts, I determined that there were 186 responses related to being a first-generation student and 178 responses related to participation in the mentorship program from the 16 participants. The results below examine the categories that were identified as part of the analysis.

4.3.5.1 First-Generation

4.3.5.1.1 Lack of preparation / awareness / support

From the responses to questions related to being a first-generation student, this was the most prevalent category that emerged with over half the participants identifying an overall lack of knowledge or support. A total of 51 comments (27% of the overall number) were made with an average of 58% of the participants over the 3 questions identifying this category. In many cases, the participants described a feeling of being on their own or even of loneliness. This also applied to contexts where things had to be learned or attempted. For example, students talked about the challenge of learning how to navigate their academic materials on their own. As stated by one participant:
I guess I would say, on one hand, in terms of navigating, it was really difficult. Just because, you mentioned before, first generation students, our parents don't know the university system, and that's very true. If you ask me, 'oh how did you pick your courses, and pick your clubs', my parents didn't help me at all with that. In fact, when it came to picking universities my parents didn't help me at all. I really did it all by myself, which was a huge responsibility to be in charge of all that. So that was a huge burden on me in first year, just navigating the system. And it took up a ton of my time just researching all the different avenues, like academic avenues I could take. When I came to actually doing the work again, I just felt I was kind of alone. (Participant H)

This quote highlights the fact that many first-generation students are unable to seek input from their parents. Several subjects in this study pointed out that they were not able to ask their parents or family for help in the form of advice or insight. In the words of one participant, “I also think there is a lot of loneliness. It’s not loneliness, it’s just... I can’t really rely on my parents for support when it comes academically” (participant F). Jenkins, Belanger, Connally, Boals, and Duron (2013) found that first-generation students experienced significantly less support from their family as compared to their non-first-generation peers. This is consistent with earlier literature in which Terenzini et al. (1996) found that first-generation students were less likely to receive encouragement from parents to attend college. Research has shown that even if parents wished to support their child, their knowledge of the postsecondary landscape can still be perceived as less supportive as they have not had direct prior experience in this field (Jenkins et al., 2013). This further demonstrates the challenge that first-generation students experience in terms of feeling a sense of support while pursuing their studies. They will either feel that they cannot rely on their parents for insight or advice, or they may feel that the support is just not there.

The sense of being unprepared or unaware also applied to how they felt with respect to interacting with others in the campus environment including faculty and other students. One student, Participant B, spoke about feeling unprepared in terms of her ability to communicate and approach others: “They would know the type of lingo that would be used, whereas since I'm coming in, I'm not sure what would be socially accepted by them. That just makes me kind of hesitant to approach them”. She also described her hesitation in approaching faculty members
because she believed that there was a particular way to communicate with them: “I still have some difficulty approaching professors. And I know that I shouldn’t, but at the same time I'm not sure how to talk around them because I know that they're regular people, but there's a way to talk to them as well”. Collier and Morgan (2008) have indicated that non-first-generation students are likely to have more appropriate approaches for dealing with educators and other institutional agents in the postsecondary system due to their upbringing with college-educated parents. If that is the case, then the sentiment expressed by the student with respect to her ability to approach faculty members may be rooted in a legitimate concern due to her not having prior knowledge in this regard.

4.3.5.1.2 Sense of inferiority / lack of confidence

Some of the comments made with respect to the previous category fed into the participants’ sense of inferiority or feeling a lack of confidence. Of the total comments made, 23 (12%) referenced this category. On average, from the responses to the three questions asked regarding the participants’ experience as a first-generation student, 31% brought up this category.

One element of this category was the sense of inferiority experienced by participants due to their perception that other students were more prepared and had a better foundation for the postsecondary environment. Lehmann (2007) found that first-generation students have a more difficult time integrating into university due to their unfamiliarity with the culture and demands. As stated by one student,

It makes me feel like I’m not equal to other students who have that example at home of somebody with a career and stuff like that. So, it's impacted my confidence, honestly. That impacts of course, from there, it ripples to you meeting people and stuff like that... I guess what I mean by that is, not having that firm foundation in the back of your mind that I could do it because if you see your father or your mother have the education, then at the back of your mind, you're like - oh this is meant for me. You know? This is gonna happen, whereas for me, I feel like I’m going to uncharted territory. It's new for me.

(Participant K)
This individual makes reference to the expectation that students with college-educated parents would have with respect to their own education. Knowing that their mother or father had previously attended college or university makes them feel that the opportunity applies to them as well. However, by not having that reference, first-generation students feel like they are entering “uncharted territory” that emphasizes the sense of inferiority.

Several participants described feeling intimidated by their peers. This did not appear to be due to any overt behaviours from their counterparts, but rather due to the perception that they were lagging behind in terms of knowledge and awareness. One student (Participant C) shared that they felt more intimidated due to the “extra step” because they would need to figure out things on their own before taking on any other responsibilities. Similarly, Wang and Castaneda-Sound (2008) found that first-generation students experienced lower levels of academic self-efficacy than their non-first-generation peers. Their research found that first-generation students were less prepared for the demands of university and also exhibited more somatic symptoms possibly due to the academic stress. As such, the experiences shared by the participants in this study are consistent with previous literature.

Another concept that was mentioned by several participants was that they did not seem to fit the environment and a feeling of being an imposter in their university setting. As shared by Participant J: “I think a little bit of it is that imposter syndrome, or that somehow I’m here. I don’t know whether I belong here. But yeah, you know, because they seem like they fit into the atmosphere”. Soria and Stebleton (2012) wrote about first-generation students who experienced imposter syndrome where they may never feel grounded or socially connected to their campus environment. The authors described the feeling of alienation as a dissociative state. Another term which describes a similar experience is that of habitus dislocation where an individual experiences a dislocation between an old and newly developing habitus where each are associated with a sense of inferiority and superiority (Baxter & Britton, 2001). First-generation students entering a new landscape (i.e., university) feel a sense of dislocation between their newly forming habitus which is being influenced by the campus setting and their old habitus which has been formed by their home and previous schooling environments. Due to their familiarity with the old habitus, they feel a sense of disconnect in the campus setting. The feeling shared by several interview participants that they didn’t fit in the campus environment may be
related to habitus dislocation. Although the individuals may have felt that they did not fit into the university environment due to their own backgrounds, it is important to recognize that they brought knowledge and experience that helped them to successfully navigate the new landscape and culture.

4.3.5.1.3 Trailblazer / higher expectations / resourcefulness

Despite the challenges facing the first-generation participants of this study, almost half (46%) of the students made reference to their increased sense of drive or having higher expectations of themselves. Of the total comments made, this category represented 22% of the responses.

A number of descriptors have been referred to for this category: trailblazer, higher expectations, and resourcefulness. All of these things describe the disposition as expressed by participants when asked about their experiences as a first-generation student. One individual, Participant F, stated:

I guess there’s a sense of pride in it too because I’m like – well, no one’s figuring this out for me, I’ve gotta figure it out myself. That has made me keen to look for opportunities more than other people who might be waiting for opportunities because I know it’s not just gonna be handed to me so I’m primed to do the searching.

This student believed that their experience was going to depend on their own ambition and resourcefulness in order to succeed. Moschetti and Hudley (2015) had found that first-generation students in their study were similarly driven by a belief that it was their individual responsibility to make it through college. Some of this is also rooted in a determination to create opportunities that will lead to a better life as found by Blackwell and Pinder (2014). Participant J expressed their determination as motivated by this sense of survival:

I think being a first generation student, at least for me, it makes me a lot more determined to achieve success like in the conventional sense, the financial stability and the future and getting a degree, going to grad school. So, I definitely think it makes me more driven at university, that I’ve noticed more so than other students, like it makes me more assertive
because there's no, sort of, there's nothing to fall back on there. I know that I have to do this basically.

This student felt that they did not have any supports on which they could rely and, as such, pursuing a degree was critical to ensure a more stable life.

For some, seeing themselves as disadvantaged due to being first-generation fed into an outlook that they had to fight for their opportunity:

Once I became aware of the first-gen factor and the fact that things aren’t equally accessible to first-gen students, that’s something I’ve actively fought against, I guess, in the sense that, yes, I am first-gen, but that does not mean I cannot achieve just as much. And I think I truly have a love-hate relationship with my first-gen identity. (Participant M)

These students demonstrated an outward confidence that they had the resourcefulness to be successful in the university environment. This “can do” attitude despite the odds faced from the outset was also found by Vuong et al. (2010) whose study found that students with a high sense of self-efficacy view difficult tasks as challenges rather than threats. This outlook was also influenced by their feeling of being a trailblazer as shared by one individual:

And then other times when I'm just like, I did this? I am a first gen student... Once I became aware of my first gen identity, a lot of days I find myself telling me, it's okay, I'm a first gen trailblazer that it's going to work out. (Participant M)

Knowing that they were on a path that their parents were not able to experience motivated these students to be successful. They seemed to understand that it was not going to be easy, but pursuing a degree was important for their sense of pride and to prove a point:

And also, it encourages me to work really hard for it because I think for our generation of students, there is something to prove, not just to our parents who expect a lot out of us, but to the people around us. (Participant H)
4.3.5.2 Mentorship Program

4.3.5.2.1 Social support / community

From the questions related to participation in the mentorship program, the most prevalent category to emerge was the level of social support and sense of community provided by the experience, with 44% of the comments making mention of these elements. From the three questions asked in relation to participation in the mentorship program, 88% of the participants identified this category which points to its significance.

Most of the comments made spoke to the importance of having someone they knew who was there to support them and answer their questions. Understanding that they were part of a program with other individuals provided a sense of community and collective support that they felt they would be missing otherwise due to their first-generation roots. In a 2011 study of first-generation students’ engagement at four Canadian institutions, Grayson found that they are less involved in the various elements of university activities than their non-first-generation peers. Typically, students meet friends and other peers through participation in university activities and these contribute to the formation of a network or community with which they can identify and feel supported. However, if first-generation students are not engaging in these opportunities, they are less likely to form these networks. The mentorship program by virtue of providing a mentor creates a community from which the student can further grow. From the words of one participant (Participant K):

Just from the moment I arrived, it was clear that I had some level of support. That helps a lot. And to be in contact, knowing I was in regular contact with somebody who has big goals in terms of their academics, I think it brushes off on you as well.

They spoke of the benefit of just knowing that there was someone there who was dedicated to supporting him and easing his transition into university.

As described earlier in this section, some students spoke of the challenge of feeling behind compared to their peers in terms of knowing how to navigate the university environment, whether it was related to performing their academic duties or getting involved. One analogy used by Participant F was that they felt like it was a race where non-first-generation students started
off running while they and their first-generation peers could only jog. However, being part of the mentorship program alleviated that perceived feeling of deficiency:

I feel like that part of me that's not really affected by my status as a first-generation student is probably because I was part of the mentorship group. I mean, I didn't feel too much of that jogging because I also hit the ground running, because I had someone running next to me.

So, although the mentorship program didn’t necessarily enable them to “run” with their peers, it encouraged them to know that their mentor was there with them. In a study of the coping strategies of ethnic minority first-generation students, Phinney and Haas (2003) found that the most successful factors in successful coping were self-efficacy and social support. The students who were more successful felt that they were not short of social support and this positively influenced their sense of self-efficacy, or ability to succeed.

Soria and Stebleton (2012) conducted a study that examined the academic engagement of first-generation students. Their results showed that first-generation students were less engaged in the classroom environment and with faculty than their peers. One of their recommendations to alleviate this issue was the idea of providing first-generation students with access to communities of belonging where they would have the opportunity to interact with peers in academic settings such as first-year seminars. Similarly, Birani and Lehmann (2013) wrote about bridging social capital whereby networks beyond family, neighbours, and friends, or in this case, new friends or networks in university can contribute to one’s successful integration into university. In the case of the mentorship programs, having a mentor and activities geared to first-generation students and the issues they face creates a form of bridging social capital. As shared by Participant O:

So, it was kind of like, they were all like – we’re all in it together, kind of. Because a lot of the - all the mentors, they are first generation too, so it's kind of like having that support around you.

In this case, the student was referring to the other mentors in the program and the support they had provided in addition to her own mentor. She was also referring to the fact that they were
One other element related to social support and community provided by the mentorship program was the sense of relatability and normalization provided through the students’ interactions with the mentors and other participants in the program. As shared by Participant D:

“I realized that, you know, it's not just me, and there are other people who - we can help each other, to get better than this low point... and it was kind of like, you get me. If that makes sense. And it's like that fellowship there.

Several students spoke of the benefit of being able to relate to their mentors and the other students as this encouraged them to know that if others can succeed, they could as well. This was demonstrated by a point shared by Participant M:

Meeting other first gen, upper year students who have negotiated first gen struggles that are still on their way to graduation is something that motivates me to continue getting involved when I see other people who identify as first gen continue to get involved while balancing academics.

This also provided them with courage in their interactions with other students including upper year students:

In the mentorship program, I had a personal connection with my PAL, an upper-year student. That kind of helped me be like, okay, I can actually talk to upper-year students. They're normal students. They're older, but they’re okay. It's not that hard to talk to them. Having that connection made it easier for me to talk to whatever upper-year student” (Participant C).

At this point, it is important to note that the category “Sense of Community” had scored the lowest overall average in the survey that had been administered to the mentorship program participants on all three campuses. This is contrary to the emergent theme I found with respect to the participants’ interview results, however. It is possible that this difference is observed because the questions asked in two out of the three surveys made reference to feeling a connection to the campus rather than a community of people. The students may not feel connected to the campus
necessarily but experiencing this sense of community from their peers is a possibility and one that was observed with the interview participants.

4.3.5.2.2 Role of the mentorship program

Of the total comments made for the three questions related to participation in the mentorship program, 35% made mention of two elements which are associated with the role of the mentorship program: encouraging engagement in the university community and providing information that may be useful for the first-generation students as they navigate the social and academic domains of the institution. Of the 16 interview participants, 63% brought up either or both of these points in their responses.

One of the points raised by the students was the encouragement provided by the mentorship program to get involved in other areas of the university – whether it was through the influence of their mentor, the community of support provided by their group, or the initial experience of being a participant in the program. As put forth by Pike and Kuh (2005), first-generation students may be less engaged in university activities than their peers because they are less aware of the benefits of participation as well as how to go about initiating their involvement. Participant P stated:

The campus itself doesn't seem as foreign to you. I guess approaching other clubs and speaking up for yourself and going to debates seem less difficult because you've already had a taste of a little bit of involvement on campus, even though it's not you who has the dominance, you're still a part of something and you can identify by it. So that's a stepping-stone to getting more involved on campus, I thought.

Their experience speaks to the decreased apprehension they felt in approaching other activities because they already had an initial experience through the mentorship program which acted as a “stepping stone”.

For some, their mentor or peers in the program also encouraged them to explore other opportunities which included options that they may not have normally considered. As stated by Participant D:
The mentorship program was the thing that got me involved, which is why I like it so much to be honest. I wouldn't have been involved otherwise... And she encouraged me to join the Leadership Program... And once I’d joined that program, I pretty much broke the gateway. I got all the opportunities I needed.

The encouragement provided by the mentorship program to get involved is significant because of the potential benefits this provides to first-generation students. In a study of first-year college students in the U.S., Pascarella et al. (2004) found that first-generation students experienced stronger positive benefits from extracurricular and non-course-related involvement than their non-first-generation peers. They also found that engagement in academic or classroom activities such as hours studied and numbers of reports or papers written had more positive benefits for first-generation students perhaps because it had a strong incremental contribution to the development of their cultural capital.

A major part of the mentorship program is that it provides information to the participants – in particular, information they may not have been privy to due to being a first-generation student, such as writing academic papers, choosing a major, pursuing extracurricular activities, and other tacit information that would normally come along with first-hand experience. Moschetti and Hudley (2015) wrote about the idea of “institutional agents” which are defined as

Individuals who communicate or facilitate the transmission of opportunities and resources available at the institution, can be a source of social capital upon entry into an institution. Creating social capital through relationships with institutional agents can provide encouragement and information about personal or academic decisions, as well as additional assistance with coursework. (p. 237)

The mentors function as institutional agents and are able to provide encouragement and transmit information to their first-generation students that includes tacit knowledge and other information that is useful for navigating the university environment. This information sharing would complement the prior knowledge and experience that the first-generation students bring to the university campus. This was demonstrated through a comment made by Participant H:
She referenced me to a lot of clubs like Hart House with free massages or whatever, she told me to go there. She also told me to go get a learning strategist. So, in that sense, she was really good at helping me to keep my mental health in check, by encouraging me to join those sorts of things.

4.3.5.2.3 Confidence / self

The final category identified from the responses to the questions related to participation in the mentorship program was sense of confidence and understanding of self that developed within the participants. Of the total comments made, 31% referred to this category, while 63% of the participants mentioned these elements at some point during this portion of the interview. Considering two of the three categories related to being a first-generation student were lack of preparation, awareness, and support and a sense of inferiority and lack of confidence, this category points to the significant of the mentorship program and how it positively affects the participants.

In terms of developing a better understanding of self, the students touched on two key elements: An improvement on their communication and social interaction skills; and having a better understanding of their place in the university which included their role as a pioneer. Participant E explains how their participation helped them to become more aware of differences and improved their communication skills:

You just become more confident, I guess, because participating in that allows you to meet different people and different personalities and different cultures. And so, you become more aware of the differences and you know how to okay, I need to, that's how we should communicate with this person but for this person, I need to communicate with in a different way. It did enhance my confidence that like, okay, I can do it.

Padgett et al. (2012) conducted a study of first-generation undergraduate students that employed two different measures which assessed a student’s intercultural effectiveness and six dimensions of psychological well-being. Their results showed that first-generation students experienced positive effects in both domains from frequent interactions with peers as well as participation in academic challenging experiences.
The statement shared by Participant D exemplifies the effect that the mentorship program had on her development of identity on campus and where she felt that she fit in: “I realized that I don't have to be formal on campus because this is my university, right; I can be who I want to be in this place, and it's okay for me to just be comfortable.” Part of their realization was that they realized they could be who they wanted to be rather than a model that they may have preconceived. In a study of mature students and the impact of participation in higher education on their identity, Baxter and Britton (2001) identify a concept, habitus dislocation, that is described as a dislocation between an old (pre-university) and newly developing habitus. This experience creates a feeling that the authors describe as a splitting of the self which can be equated to a disorientation of one’s identity. On the other hand, Pascarella et al. (2004) wrote that the level of extracurricular involvement of FGS had positive effects on critical thinking, degree plans, sense of control over their own academic success, and preference for higher-order cognitive tasks. Similarly, Participant D went on to explain how their participation in the mentorship program led them to feel more comfortable in their campus and to be who they were:

But I realized that, at that point that, after the Mentorship program, that it was okay for me to be comfortable in the campus that I chose because I didn't choose to go to this university specifically just because, oh well, it's number one. I wanted it to be my university. So, once I accepted that it was my community, my university, it's what I'm a part of, I became more comfortable in the area... So, when that comfortableness was really instilled in me, and I realized that it was okay for me to be who I am.

One other element relating to the sense of identity and how they fit into the university was the feeling of being a pioneer with respect to their first-generation identity. Wang and Castaneda-Sound (2008) postulated that first-generation students are self-conscious about their role as a “pioneer” in their families and, as such, are more susceptible to their influence. This pressure was evident in one student’s (Participant F) experience:

For a first-generation student, we have the hopes of our parents riding on us because they don’t really understand how this works. I guess a lot of parents or immigrant parents even who haven't had higher education kind of believe it to be like the golden gate, the portal from which your children will return as holy beings with wings and fly to new heights. It
was very strange going back to my parents' house, they could tell that I was changed. But it wasn't the way that they were expecting. I became more critical.

They were one of several participants who spoke of the pressure they felt due to being the first in their family to attend university. For some, it was experienced as pressure associated with high expectations, while others referred to the increased feeling of motivation they felt due to this knowledge.

One other element of this category was the positive effect on confidence experienced by the participants. As put forth by Bandura (1997, cited by Elliott, 2014), vicarious experiences such as the modeling provided by mentors contribute to the self-efficacy of first-generation students. By being exposed to the attainments of their mentors, they are able to envision their own capacity for achieving the same or similar feats. This point was demonstrated by a comment shared by Participant J:

I guess just being able to see that there are plenty of people at [University] who are also first generation, and seeing, especially through talking to other mentors and seeing what mentors are doing; being able to see the big pictures, sort of. These people are first generation but look at what they're doing, anyway. So, my confidence level, I think, in that area, has increased because of the program.

Similarly, Participant O spoke of the increased confidence they felt due to the support provided by program and their exposure to different people and experiences:

It's (participation in the mentorship program) definitely impacted me. Just having that confidence that 'I can do it', and that they were there for me during my first year... the events, you kind of learn how to socialize within the university setting and the environment... you kind of integrate yourself, and then eventually I guess through classes and all that, you met friends, and you were kind of that way, and you were more confident about approaching it.

This is consistent with the findings of Phinney and Haas (2003) whose results showed that one’s self-efficacy is positively associated with their perception of social support. They also wrote that
social support may be of particular importance for students who have less family members who are college educated.

4.3.6 Themes that emerged related to the mentor experience

Of the 16 students who were interviewed, six had participated in the mentorship programs as mentors. For the most part, their responses focused on elements related to their experience as students and mentees in the programs. However, upon being prompted as to how their role as a mentor may have impacted their experience, two themes appeared to emerge.

Firstly, four of the six respondents spoke of the satisfaction they derived from being able to contribute to the experience of other first-generation students in the program. Participant I spoke about how her ability to help her mentees instilled a sense of accomplishment:

And just that sense of accomplishment, that I’ve been able to help them, the fact that I do keep in contact with some of them and just seeing them in the hallway, and they’re always really happy to see me, and that’s just really nice for me.

This same sentiment of enjoying the experience of helping mentees was also stated by the other three individuals who had mentored in the program.

Secondly, three of the six students spoke about how being a mentor helped them to improve their interpersonal and communication skills. Participant N stated that, as a mentor, she had to talk and get out of her comfort zone. But this experience, also led to an improvement in her public speaking skills and confidence in this regard.

4.4 Summary

This chapter presented the results from two areas: selected sections from the mentorship program surveys that were administered by the program coordinators on each of the three campuses; and the themes that emerged from the interview results. The chapter began with an analysis of the results from the surveys. First, the results from the program surveys were analyzed by comparing the scores for each question between campuses. Next, the results were analyzed by determining the top and bottom question scores at each campus. Finally, the averages for all the selected questions were analyzed to determine the top and bottom question
scores amongst all three campuses. The results showed that the top two categories for all three campuses were “Recommend Program” and “Involvement”. The bottom two categories for all three campuses were “Approaching Prof or TA” and “Sense of Community”. These results were used to inform the qualitative results from the interviews.

The second part of the chapter focused on the themes that emerged from the participant interviews by: identifying the top themes that emerged from each question; and then examining the top themes that emerged from the overall interview results in relation to the students’ first-generation identity as well as their participation in the mentorship programs. In examining the themes that emerged from each question, the first question regarding the impact of being a first-generation student on their involvement had the following four top responses: a) encouraged participation, b) no family example, c) feeling of uncertainty, and d) focus on academics. The second question regarding the impact participation in the mentorship program had on their involvement had the following three top responses: a) feeling of support, b) information sharing, and c) it was the first step. The third question regarding the impact of being a first-generation student on their interactions with people on campus had the following three top responses: a) impact on confidence, b) lack of awareness feeling of fit, and c) contrasting identity. The fourth question regarding the impact participation in the mentorship program had on their interactions with people on campus had the following three top responses: a) exposure to others, b) a normalizing effect and a sense of relatability, and c) feeling of confidence. The fifth question regarding the impact of being a first-generation student on their academic performance had the following three top responses: a) feeling alone, b) lack of knowledge, and c) role of family. The sixth question regarding the impact participation in the mentorship program had on their academic performance had the following three top responses: a) a sense of fellowship, b) having help, and c) information sharing.

In examining the themes that emerged from the overall interview results in relation to the students’ first-generation identity, the following three top themes emerged: a) lack of preparation/awareness/support, b) sense of inferiority/lack of confidence, and c) trailblazer/higher expectations/resourcefulness. With regards to their participation in the mentorship programs, the following three top themes emerged: a) social support/community, b) role of the mentorship program, and c) confidence/self.
Chapter 5  
Analysis through the Lens of the Conceptual Framework

This analysis involves looking at the data through the lens of the conceptual framework and how this applies to the experiences of the first-generation student participants. In order to better understand the role of the mentorship programs on the experiences of the students, the responses provided for the three questions related to the mentorship program were first explored to determine if any references to the three key concepts – cultural capital, habitus, and self-efficacy – were made. The responses identified from this first step were then reviewed to ascertain the overarching themes.

5.1 Interview results relating to the conceptual framework

From the three questions asked of the participants related to their experience with the mentorship program, there were 178 responses provided. In order to determine if the responses were related to any of the three elements of the conceptual framework, I created a simplified reference guide that breaks down some of the key elements of each concept. The following guide was used as a reference for examining responses and any potential relation to either concept:

1. Cultural Capital (skills, knowledge, competencies)
   a. Cultural and social competencies, intellectual and social skills (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014, p. 196)
   b. Linguistic and cultural competencies (Dumais, 2002, p. 44)
   c. Knowledge of contexts, processes, and expectations (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014, p. 196)

2. Habitus (disposition, preferences, perceptions)
   a. A learned set of preferences and dispositions by which a person orients to the social world (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014, p. 195)
b. Creates dispositions to act, interpret experiences, and think in certain ways (Lehmann, 2007, p. 92)

c. Internalized system of beliefs, experiences, and values (Padgett et al., 2012, p. 246)

d. An individual’s perceptual schemes which shape their sense of agency and possibility (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014, p.195)

3. Self-Efficacy (belief in one’s capabilities)

   a. Beliefs in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments (Bandura, 1997, p. 3)

   b. College self-efficacy: “Degree of confidence in performing various college-related tasks to produce a desired outcome” (Vuon et al., 2010, p. 52)

In order to determine if any of the 178 responses were related to any parts of the conceptual framework, I read through each of the responses and cross-referenced them with the points identified in the guide above. Of the 178 responses, 44 (25%) were related to cultural capital, 72 (40%) were related to habitus, and 23 (13%) were related to self-efficacy. In total, 127 comments overall were identified as having been related to one or more of the concepts. Since an individual may have referred to a concept more than once in their response, these numbers were further distilled to reveal the average number of respondents that touched on each concept. From these results, it was found that 58%, 67%, and 35% of the individuals made comments related to cultural capital, habitus, and self-efficacy, respectively.

5.2 Themes that emerged from the results related to the conceptual framework

Using the process of axial coding and categorization (Merriam, 2009) as described in Chapter 3, the responses were analyzed to identify prevalent themes that emerged. From this process, three key themes were identified:

1. Sense of encouragement related to peer support;
2. Sense of possibility, direction, and opportunity; and
3. Identity development and how the individual relates to others and to the institution.
The section below will further describe some of the key points that I identified in this part of the analysis including some of the more specific experiences of the students and how this relates to the literature.

5.2.1 Sense of encouragement related to peer support

Of the 127 comments, 21 (16%) were found to be related to the participants’ sense of encouragement related to peer support. Elements of this theme were brought up by 11 (69%) of the 16 participants at some point during their interview. Overall, the students described experiences that highlighted the feeling of support they felt from knowing they had a specific point of contact, the sense of community provided by the program and the people in the program, and the individual support they felt from their mentor. They also commented on the sense of security felt by the knowledge that they had a group of peers there to encourage them in their involvement as well as the feeling of motivation this provided.

One of the dynamics described by the students was the sense of security provided by their peers and how this acted as a “safety line” for them. In the words of Participant B:

It's just that safety line. You already have a group of people you interact with that you’re friends with, that you know how to act around, and then with that, I personally – I used it as a jumping-off point of how to act around people.

This feeling of a “safety line” points to the feeling of support provided by a group of peers and the important role this plays in encouraging their participation in the social opportunities of the institution. This aligns with the assertion from Sarason, Sarason, and Pierce (1990, cited by Phinney, Dennis & Chuateco, 2005) that social support is important in providing a “safety net” that allows an individual to explore and try new things. Furthermore, in a study of first-year, first-generation students at a large, public research university in the U.S., Soria and Stebleton (2012) found that first-generation students were less engaged academically and could benefit from having access to communities of belonging where they could be embedded into programs that encouraged interaction with peers. This idea of “community” was emphasized by a number of participants who spoke of the positive impact felt by knowing they had a group of peers with which they could relate and feel supported. In the words of Participant F, “I think it’s made me
more secure. I think because I really like feeling part of a community”, knowing that she was part of a community provided the security needed to feel grounded in her university experience. This is supported by Wilcox, Winn, and Fyvie-Gauld (2005) who found that new students need social support in order to cope with the academic adjustment to college or university as well as the emotional shock of this move.

The feeling of support provided by peers was also underscored with respect to the individual connection they had with their mentor. In the words of Participant H: “So in that sense, I guess I felt really important and like I had a true friend on campus”. One student, Participant F, used the analogy of running and how that made her feel as compared to her peers:

I feel like that part of me that’s really affected by my status as a first-generation student is probably because I was part of the mentorship group. I mean, I didn’t feel too much of that jogging because I also hit the ground running, because I had someone running next to me.

Phinney et al. (2005) found that first-generation students perceive their peers as better equipped to support them in their adjustment than family due to their understanding of the specific challenges they face as students. The awareness of these individuals in having at least one specific person of support is significant for the role this plays in their adjustment to the university environment.

Lastly, in addition to feeling encouraged by the sense of security, several participants spoke of an added feeling of being motivated to try new things and actively pursue involvement. This was influenced not only by the feeling of a “safety line” provided by their peers, but also by the encouragement they received from their mentor and other program participants. For Participant D, the motivation was influenced by discovering that there were things on campus outside of the academic responsibilities that spoke to her interests:

I could come to school and actually enjoy what the campus had, because I knew what the campus had, and now, I knew that other people were here that felt the same way that I did, and like, didn’t really know what was going on, so it was okay for me to reach out, and like, ask really dumb questions if that makes sense.
Increasing the involvement of FGS in extracurricular activities and non-course-related interactions with peers has been found to have a positive effect. Pascarella et al. (2004) found that students who were involved showed positive effects in several areas including critical thinking, preference for higher-order cognitive tasks, and how they recognize the reasons for their academic success.

5.2.1.1 Relation to the conceptual framework

This theme is significant in its relation to the conceptual framework because it demonstrates an impact on the participants’ habitus. Lehmann (2007) had described habitus as creating “dispositions to act, interpret experiences, and think in certain ways” (p. 92). By recognizing the support provided by their peers in the mentorship program and feeling encouraged to be involved, the students’ disposition to act and think about their involvement in a certain way had shifted. They felt more empowered and motivated to engage with other individuals at their university and to pursue different extracurricular activities. Perhaps the experience of participating in a formal program had also given them insight into how to navigate the extracurricular and social spheres of university. Birani and Lehmann (2013) had written about bridging social capital which includes new friends at university and leads to the development of new forms of cultural capital. By meeting other individuals in the mentorship programs, the students were able to further build on their knowledge relating to different activities, what is offered, what to expect, and how to pursue them. This enabled them to be better equipped to deal with the unknowns when considering participation in other university activities and programs.

5.2.2 Sense of possibility, direction, and opportunity

Of the 127 comments, 18 (14%) were found to be related to the participants’ sense of possibility, direction, and opportunity. Elements of this theme were brought up by 10 (62%) of the 16 participants at some point during their interview. The students touched on several points including the perception that, upon seeing how the other mentors have been doing, being a successful student whether it was in relation to academic work or extracurricular involvement might be possible despite having the odds against them. They also felt that participation in the
mentorship program gave them a sense of direction whether it was through the provision of information about other opportunities or the act of being involved in the program itself as a first step. Finally, the participants spoke of the feeling of fair opportunity that the mentorship program offered by providing them with support through the mentor partnership and information about opportunities and accessing resources.

One of the points brought up by several students was the feeling of possibility that was evoked upon seeing their own or other mentors in the program who appeared to be succeeding in their studies and/or involvement outside of the classroom. This was exemplified in the words of one participant:

I guess just being able to see that there are plenty of people at [University] who are also first generation, and seeing, especially through talking to other mentors and seeing what mentors are doing; being able to see the big pictures, sort of. These people are first-generation but look at what they're doing, anyway. So, my confidence level, I think, in that area, has increased because of the program. (Participant J)

This opportunity to interact with and hear about individuals who were “just like them” had a significant impact on their own sense of potential and confidence.

The second part of this theme is with relation to the sense that participation in the mentorship program provided direction to the students. This feeling of having more direction was influenced by two dimensions: already having gone through a program, so the feeling of inhibition to pursue other opportunities was diminished; and being introduced to other opportunities that they may not have known about or considered otherwise if not for their participation in the mentorship program. The first part was demonstrated through the words of Participant P:

So, I guess being introduced to that community you felt not as lost. The campus itself doesn't seem as foreign to you. I guess approaching other clubs and speaking up for yourself and going to debates seem less difficult because you've already had a taste of a little bit of involvement on campus, even though it's not you who has the dominance,
you're still a part of something and you can identify by it. So that's a stepping-stone to getting more involved on campus, I thought.

This idea of having “had a taste” helps to alleviate the unknown factors associated with getting involved – whether it’s knowing how to start a conversation, how to ask questions, finding the space, and others. Grayson (2011) had found that even when presented with more opportunities for involvement, first-generation students still demonstrate a lower level of involvement as compared to their peers. The author also found that they reported the least positive classroom experiences and that this worsened between their first and third years. As such, encouraging their involvement in campus activities would be an important step for improving their transition to university. Participant D explained how her involvement in the program improved her overall campus experience:

And because of that mentorship program, I find that, if anything, that that - that was the factor that made me like school. Because before the mentorship program- even though I didn't like the mentorship program itself, it was how I got involved, and the people in the mentorship program that I loved. Because I was able to just stop coming to school for class and going home to do homework; I could come to school and actually enjoy what the campus had.

Again, participating in some form of campus activity not only reduces students’ reservations for further involvement, but it may also assist in creating a more positive postsecondary experience.

The other part related to the sense of direction had to do with being introduced to opportunities that they may not have known about or considered otherwise. This was shown through the comments made by Participant P: “So whenever there's social gatherings, you get to know other clubs, other students in those other clubs... it kind of opens the door to so many things that you wouldn't have been a part of.” Just the fact that they are hearing about and being pointed in the direction of other activities and programs helps to facilitate their involvement in the campus community. Pike and Kuh (2005) had found that first-generation students may be less involved because they are less aware about the importance of engagement and how to get involved on campus. Without knowing how to get involved or what opportunities are available, getting to the point of understanding how it benefits them may not happen.
The last part of this theme, opportunity, is exemplified by the words of Participant K:

I think a lot of students who have parents who are more financially successful and educated have more resources than students like me. And I think it does impact, it does make a difference in performance, so when I have something like First in the Family program that helps, in my opinion, bridge the gap in a sense, so that we get more of a fair chance.

Using the previous analogy of “running” used by Participant F, first-generation students may feel that their non-first-generation peers have an advantage that enables them to run in a race that leaves the first-generation students lagging behind. So, feeling that they have more of a fair chance contributes to their sense of possibility at being successful in their postsecondary journey.

5.2.2.1 Relation to the conceptual framework

This theme touches on two parts of the conceptual framework: The impact of the mentor on the students’ habitus development; and how the idea of “possible selves” influences their sense of self-efficacy.

As previously mentioned, first-generation students can experience habitus dislocation (Baxter & Britton, 2001) which is a disruption between an individual’s former habitus and their newly forming habitus that is being shaped by the university environment. By having little to no knowledge or experience related to the university experience before entering the postsecondary landscape, students have no point of reference with which they can shape their new habitus. However, interacting with role models who have the experience presents them with an invaluable resource. The students can now refer to their first-generation mentors almost as a check point as their habitus continues to develop as their mentors would have gone through a similar experience of change.

Bandura (1997) (as cited by Elliott, 2014) wrote that modeling promotes self-efficacy by providing individuals with “vicarious experiences” through which they can learn by making comparisons to others that are similar to themselves. In the case of the mentorship program participants, the first-generation students are able to view other upper year students including
their mentors and determine what they may be capable of through exposure to others’ accomplishments. This also relates to another concept, “possible selves,” that was put forth by Bandura in which an individual is able to perceive a possible version of him or herself by being exposed to others who have achieved feats that they may aspire to.

5.2.3 Identity development and how the individual relates to others and to the institution

Of the 127 comments, 21 (16%) were found to be related to the participants’ sense of identity development and how they relate to others in the institution and to the institution itself. Elements of this theme were brought up by 14 (88%) of the 16 participants at some point during their interview. Overall, participants spoke about things that they realized about themselves including the fact that they have a shared experience with the other mentees and mentors in the program. The individuals also spoke about how the mentorship program shaped the way they perceive their relationship with others at their university as well as how it influenced the way in which they interact with others. Lastly, they spoke about how the program made them realize more about their fit in the campus environment.

Several individuals explained how they realized that they were having a shared experience with others in the program. This is different from the idea of community as explained in the section which spoke about peer support and its role in creating community. This shared experience was more about understanding how they and others in the program identified as first-generation and were navigating similar challenges – something that led to a feeling of kinship. This was demonstrated in the words of Participant O:

So, it was kind of like, they were all like – we’re all in it together, kind of. Because a lot of the - all the mentors, they are first generation too, so it's kind of like having that support around you.

She explains the feeling of being “all in it together” and knowing that they are there to support each other. Having the knowledge that they have the support of their peers and that they are in a community that is sharing similar experiences is one of the most successful factors in successful coping according to Phinney and Haas (2003).
Participants also spoke of how their involvement in the mentorship program helped to raise their awareness of the differences between diverse groups of people in university, such as individuals from different cultures and with different personalities. This awareness made them more cognizant of the way in which they communicate with and interact with different individuals. This was shown through the comments shared by Participant E:

And so, you become more aware of the differences and you know how to okay, I need to, that's how we should communicate with this person but for this person, I need to communicate with in a different way. It did enhance my confidence that like, okay, I can do it.

This point is consistent with the accounts cited by Lundberg, Schreiner, Hovaguimian, and Miller (2007) in that first-generation students’ interactions with individuals who are different from themselves contribute strongly to “critical thinking” (Pascarella, Palmer, Moye & Pierson, 2001), gains in learning (Hu & Kuh, 2003), and openness to diversity (Pascarella, Edison, Nora, Hagedorn, & Terenzini, 1996)” (p. 74). Lundberg et al. (2007) found that first-generation students, however, are not engaging in these activities as often as their peers and this is having a negative impact on their learning. Moreover, Pike and Kuh (2005) found that first-generation students were less engaged with fewer diverse college experiences and this contributed to their perception of a college environment that was less supportive. Therefore, it seems that continuing to encourage interactions with a wide diversity of individuals would be an important element to maintain within each of these programs.

The last part of this theme is derived from participants’ comments about their feeling of being valued by their university as well as how they “fit” in the campus environment. Participant H spoke about how the relationship with her mentor made her feel valued:

I guess it just made me feel valued on campus. It's really easy to just feel like you're a number... and it's so difficult to carve out your specific identity in the midst of all that, that when my mentor would come to me and listen to me specifically, and listen to my interests specifically, and every week she'd come back with recommendations for things I could do that were tailored to my interest, it really made me feel like I was important.
The thoughts shared by this student reflect the findings of Moschetti and Hudley (2015) who found that first-generation students were not forming important relationships in university and carried a belief that it was their own responsibility to succeed. Her participation in the mentorship program enabled Participant H to overcome this obstacle and form a meaningful relationship. In another interview, Participant D spoke about how she found her fit on campus:

I realized that I don't have to be formal on campus because this is my university, right; I can be who I want to be in this place, and it's okay for me to just be comfortable... But I realized that, at that point that, after the Mentorship program, that it was okay for me to be comfortable in the campus that I chose because I didn't choose to go to this university specifically just because, oh well, it's number one. I wanted it to be my university. So, once I accepted that it was my community, my university, it's what I'm a part of, I became more comfortable in the area.

Lehmann (2007) had found that first-generation students struggle with not “feeling right” and not fitting in. This experience was strongly contrasted with the experience of the non-first-generation students in his study who expressed an overall sense of belonging. Similarly, Davis (2010) wrote that many first-generation students suffer from imposter phenomenon in which they experience a feeling of not belonging both in and out of the classroom. However, as stated by Participant D, participating in the mentorship program was the catalyst that helped her to realize that she could just be herself and that it was her university. Lastly, Participant P also wrote about her feeling of being an outsider: “So I guess being introduced to that community you felt not as lost. The campus itself doesn't seem as foreign to you... you’re still part of something and you can identify by it”. In his study of the experience of first-generation students, Lehmann (2007) had found that they had a difficult time integrating into and accepting university due to their unfamiliarity with the institutional culture and demands. In contrast to Lehmann’s findings, Participant P’s experience speaks to the importance of the mentorship program in helping to bridge those gaps so that students can be better integrated into their campus community.

5.2.3.1 Relation to the conceptual framework

This theme intersects with all three concepts from the conceptual framework: Participation in the mentorship program leads to the development of the students’ cultural capital
through their learned ability to communicate and interact with others; participants’ sense of self-efficacy improves through their confidence to communicate with others; and their habitus is influenced by their feeling of fit and belonging in the university environment.

Firstly, several students spoke of their improved ability to communicate and interact with peers in the program as well as on campus. This is consistent with the findings of Lundberg et al. (2007) who found that the relationships first-generation students form with other individuals on campus help to contribute to the development of their cultural capital through the learned knowledge of important information, perspectives, values, and socialization skills in the university context. This was the case with many of the program participants who learned not only about how to communicate and socialize with their peers, faculty, and staff, but also how to approach them from different perspectives.

Secondly, experiencing an increased confidence in their ability to communicate with others through their participation in the mentorship program reflects on the impact on the participants’ sense of self-efficacy. Learning how to better communicate with others on campus – whether it may be other students, faculty, or students – better equips these students with the know-how required to navigate the numerous academic and non-academic avenues they will encounter.

Lastly, Baxter and Britton (2001) wrote about the phenomenon of habitus dislocation experienced by first-generation students in which they endure the difficulty of balancing between their old habitus and new habitus which is being shaped by their university experience. This relates to the challenge they face in which one of the products of this balancing act is the feeling of not fitting into their campus environment. However, Birani and Lehmann (2013) had written that first-generation students are able to develop forms of bridging social capital such as friendships and involvements with university clubs that allow for a habitus transformation. This was found to be the case with participants in the mentorship program who were able to create relationships with their mentors and other mentees and eventually find a niche for themselves in their campus environment.
5.3 Summary

This chapter presented an analysis of the interview results using the conceptual framework as a guide for examining the participant responses. By cross-referencing the responses to the questions related to participation in the mentorship program with the three concepts – cultural capital, habitus, and self-efficacy – I was able to identify the responses that were related to the conceptual framework. Using the process of axial coding and categorization previously described in Chapter 3, I was then able to identify the prevalent themes that emerged from the participants’ responses in relation to the conceptual framework.

The first theme, sense of encouragement related to peer support, was related to the habitus development of the students. The second theme, sense of possibility, direction, and opportunity, was related to the students’ habitus development as well as their sense of self-efficacy via the effects of “possible selves”. The final theme, identity development and how the individual relates to others and to the institution, was related to all three concepts of the conceptual framework: habitus, cultural capital, and self-efficacy.
Chapter 6
Findings and Conclusions

6.1 Overview

With the increasing rate of participation in postsecondary education in Canada, universities are seeing more students from previously under-represented populations, including those that are the first in their family to attend university. Previous research has found that first-generation students are at a disadvantage compared to their non-first-generation peers. They have been found to come from low-income families, to have lower grades, to be less involved in campus, and to have less involvement with others on campus (Terenzini et al., 1996; Grayson 2011; Pike & Kuh, 2005; Pascarella et al., 2004). Additionally, it has been found that first-generation students are more at risk of dropping out of their postsecondary studies compared to their non-first-generation peers (Finnie & Qiu, 2008). With the introduction of funding by the Ontario provincial government in 2005 directed at new programs and outreach initiatives for under-represented groups, universities began to introduce mentorship programs directed at first-generation students. These programs are meant to provide support for first-generation students as they make the transition into university.

This study provides an analysis of the experience of a group of students from three campuses at one university with respect to their first-generation identity and their participation in a mentorship program and how these two factors shaped their experience in university. The overall research question was: In what ways does participation in a mentorship program for first-generation students impact their experience? My methodology included a mixed methods approach in which I conducted a secondary analysis of surveys that were administered to participants of the mentorship programs on each of the three campuses by the program coordinators. The results provided me with details related to their experience and further informed the information that emerged from the qualitative aspect of this study. Additionally, I conducted interviews with a group of 16 students in total with representation from each of the three campuses. These interviews were meant to explore the more detailed research questions which were as follows:
1. How does being first-generation impact students’ academic engagement in university?
2. How does being first-generation impact students’ social engagement in university?
3. How does being first-generation impact students’ sense of self-efficacy in university?
4. How does participation in a mentorship program for first-generation students impact students’ academic engagement in university?
5. How does participation in a mentorship program for first-generation students impact students’ social engagement in university?
6. How does participation in a mentorship program for first-generation students impact students’ sense of self-efficacy in university?

The analysis of the interview data included the identification of emergent themes as well as an analysis through the lens of the key concepts in the conceptual framework – cultural capital, habitus, and self-efficacy.

The framework for this chapter will be outlined here. The first section will offer the findings related to how the students’ first-generation identity and their participation in the mentorship program impacted cultural capital, habitus, and self-efficacy. This section will include a brief description of the relationships that were found within the conceptual framework. The next section will outline some of my recommendations for policy-makers and practitioners within the field of student affairs as a result of my findings. The final two sections will provide some ideas for future research and my concluding thoughts.

6.2 Findings

Based on the data provided in the interviews, the following sections provide an analysis of the findings in relation to: how being first-generation impacted the students’ cultural capital, habitus, and self-efficacy; and how participation in the mentorship programs impacted the students’ cultural capital, habitus, and self-efficacy.
6.2.1 How being FIRST-GEN impacted cultural capital, habitus, and self-efficacy

All 16 study participants identified as first-generation students although they came into university with a variety of backgrounds and experiences – international, extracurricular participation, and family upbringing among others. Several of the students indicated that their parents had received postsecondary education abroad, but they still considered themselves to be first-generation due to the fact that their parents were not educated in Canada. The definition of a first-generation student used by the university in this study is: “Students whose parent(s) or guardian(s) did not pursue post-secondary education or pursued post-secondary education outside of Canada. Even if your sibling(s) attended post-secondary, you are still first generation” (Mentorship and Peer Programs, 2018). As such, the students in this study were considered to be first-generation according to this definition.

All of the students believed that the experiences that they had in university were influenced by their upbringing and how this affected and informed their knowledge, skills, and personal values. Being a first-generation student shaped their disposition and sense of confidence when entering university and how they navigated the physical and social spaces. With little to no access to family members who have gone through Canadian postsecondary education before, they were forced to learn on their own and through peers and others in the university environment. As one student had put it, the experience was comparable to being in a race where the students who were non-first-generation had the advantage. This section will explore how being a first-generation student impacted the participants’ cultural capital, habitus, and self-efficacy. The inferences were drawn from the 16 participants’ interviews and the experiences they shared for the purpose of this study.

For first-generation students, the impact of their experience started with not having access to family members with the tacit knowledge of a university experience that they can learn from. In the case of the study participants, it was found that all three concepts – habitus, cultural capital, and self-efficacy – were intertwined and influenced by their first-generation position. Figure 13 below depicts the various relationships between the three concepts and the directional influence that one concept has on another. The figure shows the following relationships that will
be further explained in this chapter: how cultural capital influences habitus and self-efficacy; how habitus influences self-efficacy; and how self-efficacy influences habitus.

![Concept map showing the relationship between cultural capital, habitus, and self-efficacy for FGS.](image)

For the most part, everything starts with the individual’s cultural capital. Non-first-generation students presumably would have had the opportunity to build on the cultural capital associated with the field of postsecondary education by interacting with family and other networks to build on their knowledge and skills. Furthermore, knowing that you have support, informed (by their own experiences) guides, and others at home that can relate can contribute to one’s sense of confidence. The first-generation students in this study, on the other hand, did not possess the same levels of cultural capital associated with going to university and were faced with the challenge of adjusting to the field of university and developing cultural capital that would enable them to better navigate the landscape.
Observed Impact 1

Figure 14. Observed Impact 1: The impact of cultural capital on habitus

The first observed impact (see Figure 14) was that the cultural capital of first-generation students influenced their habitus and how they perceived the postsecondary environment. Whether they were first-generation or not, all students’ habitus had been shaped and ingrained through their upbringing thus shaping perceptions of thought and dispositions that informed their postsecondary experience. For many of the participants, their habitus was oriented in a way such that the way they thought, interacted, and interpreted experiences often led to feelings of opposition, shortcoming, or incongruity in relation to their peers. This was rooted in their cultural capital that had not developed in a way that would have equipped them with a better awareness of how to navigate the university landscape. These students felt that they had a more difficult time managing their academic responsibilities, meeting and interacting with other students, pursuing extracurricular opportunities, and traversing the administrative offices and duties of the institution.
**Observed Impact 2**

![Diagram](image)

*Figure 15. Observed Impact 2: The impact of habitus on self-efficacy*

The second observed impact (see Figure 15) was that because they felt hesitant or inadequately capable of managing these elements, these students had a habitus orientation that impacted on their self-efficacy in which they felt inadequate or less able than others. They felt an inherent lack of confidence in their ability to perform the array of functions and responsibilities including those that were non-academic in nature. In this case, the fundamental factor which seemed to drive the sense of self-efficacy seemed to be the perception they had of themselves and their ability as compared to their non-first-generation peers. Seeing themselves as less capable than their peers fed into their lack of confidence.

**Observed Impact 3**

![Diagram](image)

*Figure 16. Observed Impact 3: The impact of cultural capital on self-efficacy*
The third observed impact (see Figure 16) is related to the impact the students’ cultural capital had on their sense of self-efficacy. All students would have had an inherent sense of self-efficacy develop over time with respect to their social disposition and academic skills. However, in the case of first-generation students, the sense of self-efficacy in relation to university is different. Due to the fact that they had less knowledge about how to interact with the various facets of university the students had a general feeling of being less confident in their approach.

*Observed Impact 4*

![Diagram](image)

**Figure 17. Observed Impact 4: The impact of self-efficacy on habitus**

In several cases, there was an unexpected and converse effect of the students’ self-efficacy on their habitus, thus leading to the identification of the fourth observed impact (see Figure 17). In these cases, students fed off of their first-generation identity. Knowing that their cultural capital differed from their peers provided them with a stronger sense of self-efficacy and motivation to succeed. They had an awareness that they were able to “make it” this far in their education and that their success was due to their work ethic, resilience, and innate fight to succeed. In these cases, it was observed that this dynamic – knowing that they were able to succeed despite the odds – further motivated them and encouraged a habitus orientation that can be described as a “can do” attitude. This translated into an approach into other areas of their university experience that was encouraging and with a positive outlook. In these cases, students felt encouraged to pursue participation in extracurricular activities. Additionally, participation in the mentorship program seemed to support this sense of drive.
As mentioned, the cultural capital of the students was the starting point for how the first-generation participants’ experiences were formed. The impact on their habitus in addition to the points mentioned previously was significant in several respects. Firstly, several participants highlighted the sense of loneliness and of being on their own. Although they had friends at school and peers in the program, there was still this pervasive feeling of being alone or set apart from others. In relation to their peers, they spoke of an uncertainty of their ability to interact with others which was rooted in the lack of cultural capital oriented to higher education and knowing how to act, speak, dress, and generally behave with other university students. They also spoke of the sense of loneliness on the home front because of the feeling that their family didn’t know how to relate to their experiences and couldn’t support them on the issues they were facing. Moreover, several students spoke of how they didn’t feel that they fit in the institution. This speaks to the incongruity that first-generation students may feel with their habitus and the culture of the university and the people within the institution. This latter part highlights the second point regarding the impact on habitus. Most of the students had spoken of how they weren’t aware at first that they were first-generation students or even that such a “thing” had existed. For them, it had always been a part of their experience although they didn’t know what this meant in terms of effect on their experience. In several cases, they spoke of having a feeling that they were different – often highlighted by the difference in experiences they had compared to their peers. However, in the cases where we explored what this meant, they said that putting a name to it helped. Being able to identify and define the experience and the impacts this had on them provided a sense of reassurance because it rationalized the feelings that they were having.

6.2.2 How participation in the mentorship program impacted cultural capital, habitus, and self-efficacy

From the interviews with the students in the study, it was found that participation in the mentorship programs provided two key elements: the program structure and the individuals in the program. Having a program that was targeted specifically for first-generation students helped to encourage their participation in the mentorship program. By virtue of identifying as first-generation students, the barriers that would typically apply to participation in extracurricular activities including the feeling that they had to have specific skills or characteristics were not an
issue in this case. Additionally, the individuals in the program (i.e., mentors, staff, faculty, and fellow mentees) impacted the mentees’ experience in numerous ways. This section will further detail the findings of how participation in the mentorship program impacted the participants’ cultural capital, habitus, and self-efficacy (see Figure 18). Figure 18 shows the various pathways starting with the students’ participation in the mentorship programs. Figure 18 shows the two main pathways of influence resulting from the students’ participation in the mentorship programs: participation in the program and the exposure this provided to other students, staff, and faculty as well as the feeling of having a connection point with the university; and the program participants and sense of community provided by the programs. The figure also depicts the relationships these two pathways have on habitus and cultural capital as well as the resulting influence on their sense of self-efficacy.

*Figure 18. Concept map showing the impact participation in the mentorship program had on first-generation students’ cultural capital, habitus, and self-efficacy.*
Observed Impact 1

Figure 19. Observed Impact 1: The impact of participation in the program on habitus

The first observed impact (see Figure 19) was how participation in the program and the structure it provided influenced the students’ habitus in several ways. By virtue of being a participant in the program, students are provided with a sense of “place” in the university. This impacted their habitus disposition in that they felt more grounded with respect to their relationship with the institution. This also helped to lower their inhibitions with respect to pursuing other opportunities and to realize that being involved in other realms of the university outside of their academic work was a possibility. As described by one student, subscribing in the program acted as a “stepping stone” into other involvements in the university. Additionally, beyond allowing students the opportunity to safely try things out, the mentorship program went even further – it encouraged students to get involved and push their own limits. Their participation in the program also contributed to how they saw themselves and their “fit” with respect to the university. One of the observations regarding how being a first-generation student impacted the students’ habitus was the incongruity they felt with their habitus and the culture of the university. In this case, being part of something formal and structured offered the students something to orient to and feel a sense of fit.
**Observed Impact 2**

*Figure 20. Observed Impact 2: The impact of participation in the program on cultural capital*

The second observed impact (see Figure 20) was how participation in the program influenced the participants’ cultural capital. Participation in the program exposed the students to the faculty and staff that were associated with the program in various ways – the administration, delivery of workshops, and social activities. By virtue of being mentees, this provided them with a conversation starter when they met with staff, students, and faculty, and they regularly received various forms of communication from the program administrators and mentors. The content of the communication tended to contain useful information that was crafted for them and from the perspective of experienced “insiders” (i.e., other first-generation students or those who were familiar with the program), thus further building on their cultural capital.
Observed Impact 3

Figure 21. Observed Impact 3: The impact of program participants/community on cultural capital

The third observed impact (see Figure 21) was how the sense of community in the program and the other program participants influenced the students’ cultural capital. Firstly, in addition to the knowledge that was shared amongst program participants, they were able to develop their communication skills with individuals from different backgrounds. Also, having a mentor and a community of support from others in the program helped to reduce the effects of having less cultural capital. They were constantly interacting with and learning from their mentor and other peers in the program.
Observed Impact 4

The fourth observed impact (see Figure 22) was how the sense of community in the program and the other program participants influenced the students’ habitus. The access to mentors and peers in the program positively contributed to the students’ habitus in several ways. Firstly, the community offered a “practice court” for students to try out social skills and other things before going into the “real world.” They were less inhibited to initiate other interactions because they would have had the opportunity in a safe and welcoming environment. In the words of one student, it provided them with a network of peers that provided a “safety line.” Additionally, the interactions with others assisted in normalizing their own experiences. Being able to see others “just like them” made them realize that the experiences they were having were not unique to them and that they had a community of support and resources. Seeing others like themselves – like the mentors and other students – be successful encouraged them and fostered a sense of possibility.
**Observed Impact 5**

![Diagram of Observed Impact 5]

*Figure 23. Observed Impact 5: The impact of program participants/community on cultural capital, habitus, and self-efficacy*

The aforementioned impacts on cultural capital and habitus increased the students’ sense of self-efficacy, thus leading to the identification of the fifth observed impact (see Figure 23). By providing them with avenues for building on and developing their cultural capital, the participants were able to more confidently navigate other spaces in the university. Having access to other students who were able to provide advice and guidance based on their own direct experiences assisted in reducing the information barriers that they may have otherwise faced. Moreover, being able to “practice” or in other words, ask, try things out, seek clarification, and explore before diving into a real situation contributed to the students’ heightened sense of self-efficacy.

Finally, some of the students spoke of how their participation in the mentorship program contributed to a better understanding of their place in the university and their role as a “pioneer”. Being able to identify as a first-generation student helped to explain some of the feelings they were having regarding their sense of fit in the institution and with respect to their peers. Although they may have experienced a conflict with their habitus and that of the university,
knowing that they were pioneers in their own respect gave a sense of encouragement and possibility.

6.2.3 Relationships within the Conceptual Framework

The three concepts of the conceptual framework, cultural capital, habitus, and self-efficacy have been shown to have relationships in some cases within the literature. In particular, several authors have shown a relationship between cultural capital and habitus in which one’s habitus can be influenced by changes in their cultural capital. Additionally, there is some limited research of the effect that cultural capital can have on self-efficacy. The next section will outline these details as well as the additional findings of this study.

6.2.3.1 The relationship between cultural capital and habitus

According to Bourdieu (1986) (as cited by Grenfell, 2008), the following equation demonstrates the relationship between habitus and capital: 

\[ \text{practice} = (\text{habitus} + \text{capital}) + \text{field} \]

(p. 51). In this case, the formula essentially puts forth that one’s practices (or behaviours) are a result of the relations between their dispositions and position in a field and all within the current state of that social arena. In other words, the dispositions one has to act, think, and make decisions is related to their status within a particular social arena, thus leading to their behavioural outcomes. Wildhagen (2009, cited by Gaddis, 2013) and Gaddis (2013) have found that cultural capital can have a positive effect on the Grade Point Average (GPA) of students and that this is mediated by habitus. Gaddis found that cultural capital can alter a student’s view of their own ability to succeed academically (habitus) and thus have a positive impact on their GPA. This is consistent with previous findings by Horvat and Davis (2011) who found that participation in a youth development program provided the participants with opportunities and experiences (cultural capital) that altered their habitus and enabled them to incorporate into new visions of themselves. The influence that cultural capital can have on habitus has also been highlighted by Edgerton and Roberts (2014) who stated “that the habitus is not immutable, but open to evolving incremental change in the face of new experience, and that it operates not only at an unconscious, pre-reflective level but also at a conscious, deliberative level” (p. 201). In
effect, as one has new experiences and acquires new knowledge and skills (cultural capital), there will be a resulting change in their habitus which will further influence how they think, reason, and behave.

6.2.3.2 The relationship between cultural capital and self-efficacy

Another relationship that has been explored in the literature but with very little information is that between cultural capital and self-efficacy. Tavakoli, Pahlavannezhad, and Ghonsooly (2017) examined the effect that increased cultural capital would have on senior high school English teachers’ self-efficacy in English language classrooms in Iran. Questionnaires were used to assess the participants’ cultural capital and sense of self-efficacy and the results showed: As the cultural capital of the teachers increased, their self-efficacy would increase as well; and exposure to various cultures can increase one’s cultural capital which can in turn increase their self-efficacy. In sum, the authors found that an increase on one’s cultural capital for a particular field can have a positive effect on their self-efficacy.

6.2.3.3 Relationships within this study

Previous studies have not collectively examined the relationships between the three concepts in this study: cultural capital, habitus, and self-efficacy. As outlined in this section, previous research has explored the impact that cultural capital can have on habitus as well as self-efficacy, however this study suggests two new findings: a. The effect that cultural capital can have on self-efficacy via habitus; and b: The effect of self-efficacy on habitus.

6.3 Recommendations

The findings of this study lead to a number of recommendations for universities with regards to policies and programming related to first-generation students. The first part of this section will outline some recommendations with regards to addressing accessibility as a policy issue, followed by additional recommendations for student affairs practitioners and higher education administrators.
6.3.1 Addressing Accessibility as a Policy Issue

Addressing accessibility will require policy changes at both system and organizational levels. Without a framework for implementation, policies introduced at the government level may lack the guidance required for effective implementation. Conversely, without a well thought out system of oversight, accountability, and incentive, policies introduced at the government level may lack the motivation for colleges and universities to put them into practice. When policies are created far from the individuals that are affected, the resulting effect is that the expert knowledge held by the organization or individuals is excluded from the making of the policy or the conceptualization of the potential implications. Even though a policy may be implemented, there is a risk that school administrators tasked with implementation may interpret the parameters and expectations differently from those who created the policy.

Two policy-related recommendations for addressing accessibility with respect to first-generation students are: the inclusion of statements in policy documents and ensuring policies impacting students are created in a way such that they may accommodate some of the access issues for first-generation students. The first point about the inclusion of statements in policy documents speaks to the need for having explicit statements that detail the institution’s commitment to access and inclusivity. Having these statements in plain view for members of the university community demonstrates that the institution is committed to supporting first-generation students. Although translating this commitment into practice is a whole other thing, the presence of this text in policy documents acts as a reminder for institutional actors. The second recommendation is that policy-makers should make a conscious effort to ensure that as they create policies that affect students, access issues related to first-generation students (e.g., financial support needed to participate in co-curricular activities) should be addressed wherever possible. Furthermore, it would be beneficial to consult with first-generation students specifically as these policies are being created.

6.3.2 Recommendations for Student Affairs Practitioners and University Administrators

With the increasing numbers of previously underrepresented groups in postsecondary institutions, there has been a growing recognition that “staying the course” with regards to how
universities engage with and support these students just doesn’t work. Consequently, colleges and universities are attempting to implement strategies to better support first-generation students and the mentorship programs highlighted in this study are just one example. In this next section, I will outline several recommendations for student affairs practitioners and university administrators.

The first recommendation is to ensure that information is available to students and their families prior to their arrival on campus. This information can cover a range of topics, including: academic responsibilities; a general description of the day-to-day life of a student; supports and services; and extracurricular opportunities. Because first-generation students’ cultural capital associated with a postsecondary education differs from their non-first-generation peers, they experience more uncertainty regarding what to expect once they start their postsecondary studies. As such, providing information to students before they arrive will help to alleviate some of these anxieties and better inform them of some of the opportunities and resources available on campus.

The second recommendation is to offer the information from the first recommendation to students using modes that will reach the students based on their unique circumstances. Given that first-generation students tend to be less familiar with or less present on campus, providing information in the form of in-person information sessions or at venues physically on campus can be limiting with respect to how they are reaching students. Therefore, offering information through other media (e.g., online) and perhaps in a personalized format would increase the reach to first-generation students.

The third recommendation is to determine a method of proactively engaging with and enrolling first-generation students in programming that involves checking in with them at the start and other key points of their time in university. Given that first-generation students tend to be less involved with extracurricular activities and yet can gain from their involvement, programs that automatically enroll or contact students may be helpful in offering potentially useful information and supports without requiring students to take it upon themselves to seek out this resource. For example, universities can offer a program that has mentors, or a designated staff team reach out to students during the first few weeks of each term as a checkpoint to assess
how things are going with respect to their academic work and ability to access other resources and opportunities.

The next recommendation is to tap into first-generation students as a key resource when planning or implementing these programs. Given their knowledge of the nuances of the first-generation experience and the strategies that have worked or failed in their own experience, enlisting students in roles where they can contribute can benefit the development of policies and programs. This also provides first-generation students who enroll in these programs with models from whom they can learn. Involving upper year first-generation students in programs that are developed provides the first-generation participants with models for their own learning and development.

The last recommendation requires looking at the deeply-rooted systems within universities, or using a term from Bourdieu, the field. As mentorship programs for first-generation students seem to be based on a deficit model that assumes that first-generation students come to universities with a lack of knowledge and experience associated with the postsecondary education field, it may be worthwhile to explore how the field – or the institution – can be changed. Building on the previous recommendation, there may be an opportunity to transform the field by introducing more staff and faculty that also identify as first-generation. This strategy, however, would also require re-examining the practices used to develop and recruit individuals into these roles as well as how they are continually supported and promoted. By increasing the diversity and representation of first-generation individuals in the institution, this may assist in the gradual development of the university environment so that it better complements the increasingly diverse student body it serves.

6.4 Future Research

This study has provided further insights into the experience of first-generation students once they have begun their studies in university and the impact that participation in a mentorship program can have on their experience. The focus was predominantly on the individuals and their experience during the first year of study. Due to the reliance on students to volunteer for the interviews, I was limited in terms of representation from the participant group. Given the scope
of this study, there are several areas of research that may be worth further consideration, including:

1. Although the group of students interviewed identified as first-generation students, their individual circumstances varied significantly in terms of birthplace, upbringing and time spent in Canada prior to starting university, parental education, socioeconomic background, and other factors. One area of further research may be to further parse out some of these factors, such as birthplace and upbringing in another country, as this would further impact one’s cultural capital and habitus with respect to their knowledge and experience in a Canadian context.

2. Another area of research may be in the area of parental/family support. Given that the parents of first-generation students would not have a university education, their knowledge of the university environment including the people, academic and administrative requirements, social dynamics, and opportunities would be nearly non-existent. Conversely, universities are now making more efforts to provide information to parents and families about the student experience through family-focused orientation programs and websites. Exploring the impact of these programs and how that influences the student experience would be another worthwhile area of research.

3. A third area of research would be to do a longitudinal study comparing the experiences of students who participated in the mentorship program with those who did not. Examining their participation rates in student services, activities, and opportunities as well as their academic performance would be potential markers for comparison. This would provide further information on the potential long-term impact of participation in a mentorship program on their experience.

4. A fourth area of research would be to explore what aspects of the mentoring programs are the most useful for impactful for first-generation students (e.g., having a mentor; the larger community; participation in workshops) and which are the least useful or impactful to their experience.
6.5 Conclusions

As I have worked through this study, I can say that there have been many points where the experiences shared by the interview participants have resonated with me. Each of the individuals took the time to reflect on their identity as individuals and their own unique circumstances, as students, and as the first in their family to pursue higher education (in Canada in some cases). The incredible personal and systemic challenges and barriers they have faced have been identified in previous research in some cases and have provided further insights into specific nuances. This information may be helpful as policy-makers and student affairs practitioners continue to develop and refine their areas of work in universities. Additionally, these same students have shared the tremendous resourcefulness and dedication that they have been able to discover and apply in order to make it this far. As found in this study, this resourcefulness and internal drive can even influence an individual’s sense of self-efficacy and subsequently their habitus and how they can perceive their ability to perform in university in a positive light.

Ultimately, the results of this study point to the benefit of establishing a community for first-generation students, so they have peers to go to for information and support. This experience can also act as a “door opener” to further opportunities in other areas of the university such as involvement in student clubs, athletics, employment, and other activities and programs. By demonstrating their support and commitment to first-generation students through policies and programs such as first-generation mentorship programs, universities can move towards creating a better sense of “in this together” for their students.
References


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Appendices
Appendix A: Campus A Survey

Campus A: Year-End Evaluation

Q1. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: - I feel more comfortable accessing student services at [Campus A], including but not limited to the Career Centre, the Health and Counselling Centre and the Recreation, Athletics and Wellness Centre.

Strongly disagree
Disagree
Neutral
Agree
Strongly agree

Q2. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: - I feel more confident using the library and/or its website to do research.

Strongly disagree
Disagree
Neutral
Agree
Strongly agree

Q3. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: - I feel more comfortable approaching my professors and teaching assistants to ask questions about my courses.

Strongly disagree
Disagree
Neutral
Agree
Strongly agree
Q4. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: - I have a better idea about where to go to ask questions about my academic program.
   Strongly disagree
   Disagree
   Neutral
   Agree
   Strongly agree

Q5. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: - I know when to go to the Office of the Registrar and what services the registrar provides.
   Strongly disagree
   Disagree
   Neutral
   Agree
   Strongly agree

Q6. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: - I have done better on at least one assignment, test or exam because I attended a seminar, facilitated study session or met with my peer academic leader.
   Strongly disagree
   Disagree
   Neutral
   Agree
   Strongly agree

Q7. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: - I have made relationships in the program that I expect will continue into my upper years.
   Strongly disagree
   Disagree
   Neutral
   Agree
Strongly agree

Q8. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: - I feel more connected to my campus because of my involvement in the program.

   Strongly disagree
   Disagree
   Neutral
   Agree
   Strongly agree

Q9. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: - I now feel better prepared to balance academic and personal commitments.

   Strongly disagree
   Disagree
   Neutral
   Agree
   Strongly agree

Q10. Please indicate how many times you did the following: - I had contact in an individual meeting with my peer academic leader.

   0 times
   1-3 times
   4-6 times
   6+ times

Q11. Please indicate how many times you did the following: - I had contact in a group meeting with my peer academic leader.

   0 times
   1-3 times
   4-6 times
   6+ times
Q12. Please indicate how many times you did the following: - I communicated with my peer academic leader by telephone, e-mail, online, text or chat.

- 0 times
- 1-3 times
- 4-6 times
- 6+ times

Q13. Please respond to the following statements: - I would be likely to recommend the program to another student looking for similar services.

- Yes
- No

Q14. Please respond to the following statements: - The program would be valuable to me in the future.

- Yes
- No

Q15. Please respond to the following statements: - I am better prepared to successfully complete the academic year because of my involvement in the program.

- Yes
- No

Q16. Please respond to the following statements: - My involvement with the program has encouraged me to pursue leadership opportunities during my time at [Campus A].

- Yes
- No

Q17. Please describe below what you found to be the most beneficial aspect of the program for you:
Q18. Please describe any components of the program that you think could be improved:

Q19. Please describe what impact program participation had on your student experience at [Campus A]:

Q20. Please respond to the following statements: - I am interested in volunteering as a leader with the Department of Student Life programming and would like more information.
   Yes
   No

Q21. Please respond to the following statements: - I would like to be entered in the draw for a gift card prize for completing this survey.
   Yes
   No
Appendix B: Campus B Surveys

Campus B: Mid-Year Evaluation

Q1. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following: I have developed a time management system to balance my personal and academic commitments.
   1-Strongly agree
   2
   3-Neutral
   4
   5-Strongly disagree
   N/A-No opinion

Q2. I spend this many hours studying each week:
   0-5
   6-10
   11-15
   16-20
   25+

Q3. I can focus in class and understand the material presented.
   1-Not at all
   2
   3-Sometimes
   4
   5-Usually

Q4. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following: I have developed an effective system of note-taking for lectures.
   1-Strongly agree
   2
   3-Neutral
   4
   5-Strongly disagree
N/A-No opinion

Q5. I am able to identify and synthesize the key ideas from readings.

1-Not at all
2
3-Sometimes
4
5-Usually

Q6. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following: I have developed an effective system of note-taking for readings.

1-Strongly agree
2
3-Neutral
4
5-Strongly disagree

N/A-No opinion

Q7. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following: I am keeping up-to-date with my readings, ideally doing them before class.

1-Strongly agree
2
3-Neutral
4
5-Strongly disagree

N/A-No opinion

Q8. Please indicate how often you do the following: I review my notes from class and readings regularly/systematically.

1-Not at all
2
3-Sometimes
4
5-Usually
Q9. Please indicate how often you do the following: - When I write a test, I can remember what I have read or learned in class and from readings.
   1-Not at all
   2
   3-Sometimes
   4
   5-Usually

Q10. Please indicate how often you do the following: - I practice anticipating test questions or practice past tests/exams.
   1-Not at all
   2
   3-Sometimes
   4
   5-Usually

Q11. Please indicate how often you do the following: - I understand my assignment guidelines (writing assignments, lab reports, group projects) and know what is expected.
   1-Not at all
   2
   3-Sometimes
   4
   5-Usually

Q12. Please indicate how often you do the following: - I can break down the components of an assignment and create plan to complete it on time.
   1-Not at all
   2
   3-Sometimes
   4
   5-Usually

Q13. Please response to the following statements: - I know what scholarly/peer-reviewed sources are.

   Yes
Q14. Please respond to the following statements: - I know how to use the library database to find scholarly sources.
   Yes
   No
   Unsure

Q15. Please indicate how often you do the following: - I feel comfortable asking questions in class.
   1-Not at all
   2
   3-Sometimes
   4
   5-Usually

Q16. Please indicate how often you do the following: - I feel comfortable approaching my Professor or TA with questions outside of class.
   1-Not at all
   2
   3-Sometimes
   4
   5-Usually

Q17. Please indicate how often you do the following: - I achieve the grades I expect on my tests, exams and assignments.
   1-Not at all
   2
   3-Sometimes
   4
   5-Usually

Q18. Please indicate how often you do the following: - I know which resources to use for academic support.
   1-Not at all
Q19. I have used these supports:
Q20. If I have a question or concern, I feel comfortable asking for help from departments and services at the university:
   1-Not at all
   2
   3-Sometimes
   4
   5-Usually
Q21. I have used these services:
Q22. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement: My high school education adequately prepared me for university.
   1-Strongly agree
   2
   3-Neutral
   4
   5-Strongly disagree
   N/A-No opinion
Q23. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement: So far, my university experience is what I expected it to be.
   1-Strongly agree
   2
   3-Neutral
   4
   5-Strongly disagree
   N/A-No opinion
Q24. Please explain your response:
Q25. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement: I have found a supportive community somewhere on campus.

1-Strongly agree
2
3-Neutral
4
5-Strongly disagree
N/A-No opinion

Q26. Please explain your response:

Q27. How can the mentorship program best support you?
Campus B: Year-End Evaluation

Q1. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following: I have developed a time management system to balance my personal and academic commitments.
   1-Strongly agree
   2
   3-Neutral
   4
   5-Strongly disagree
   N/A-No opinion

Q2. I spend this many hours studying each week:
   0-5
   6-10
   11-15
   16-20
   25+

Q3. I can focus in class and understand the material presented.
   1-Not at all
   2
   3-Sometimes
   4
   5-Usually

Q4. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following: I have developed an effective system of note-taking for lectures.
   1-Strongly agree
   2
   3-Neutral
   4
   5-Strongly disagree
   N/A-No opinion

Q5. I am able to identify and synthesize the key ideas from readings.
Q6. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following: I have developed an effective system of note-taking for readings.

1-Strongly agree
2
3-Neutral
4
5-Strongly disagree
N/A-No opinion

Q7. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following: I am keeping up-to-date with my readings, ideally doing them before class.

1-Strongly agree
2
3-Neutral
4
5-Strongly disagree
N/A-No opinion

Q8. Please indicate how often you do the following: - I review my notes from class and readings regularly/systematically.

1-Not at all
2
3-Sometimes
4
5-Usually

Q9. Please indicate how often you do the following: - When I write a test, I can remember what I have read or learned in class and from readings.

1-Not at all
Q10. Please indicate how often you do the following: - I practice anticipating test questions or practice past tests/exams.
   1-Not at all
   2
   3-Sometimes
   4
   5-Usually

Q11. Please indicate how often you do the following: - I understand my assignment guidelines (writing assignments, lab reports, group projects) and know what is expected.
   1-Not at all
   2
   3-Sometimes
   4
   5-Usually

Q12. Please indicate how often you do the following: - I can break down the components of an assignment and create plan to complete it on time.
   1-Not at all
   2
   3-Sometimes
   4
   5-Usually

Q13. Please response to the following statements: - I know what scholarly/peer-reviewed sources are.
   Yes
   No
   Unsure
Q14. Please response to the following statements: - I know how to use the library database to find scholarly sources.

   Yes
   No
   Unsure

Q15. Please indicate how often you do the following: - I feel comfortable asking questions in class.

   1-Not at all
   2
   3-Sometimes
   4
   5-Usually

Q16. Please indicate how often you do the following: - I feel comfortable approaching my Professor or TA with questions outside of class.

   1-Not at all
   2
   3-Sometimes
   4
   5-Usually

Q17. Please indicate how often you do the following: - I achieve the grades I expect on my tests, exams and assignments.

   1-Not at all
   2
   3-Sometimes
   4
   5-Usually

Q18. Please indicate how often you do the following: - I know which resources to use for academic support.

   1-Not at all
   2
   3-Sometimes
Q19. I have used these supports:

Q20. If I have a question or concern, I feel comfortable asking for help from departments and services at the university:

1-Not at all
2
3-Sometimes
4
5-Usually

Q21. I have used these services:

Q22. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement: My high school education adequately prepared me for university.

1-Strongly agree
2
3-Neutral
4
5-Strongly disagree
N/A-No opinion

Q23. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement: So far, my university experience is what I expected it to be.

1-Strongly agree
2
3-Neutral
4
5-Strongly disagree
N/A-No opinion

Q24. Please explain your response:

Q25. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement: I have found a supportive community somewhere on campus.

1-Strongly agree
Q26. Please explain your response:

Q27. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following: I am likely to recommend First in the Family services to someone looking for similar services.

1-Strongly agree
2
3-Neutral
4
5-Strongly disagree
N/A-No opinion

Q.28. Please explain your response:

Q29. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following: I am better prepared and more able to successfully complete my academic year as a result of the program services provided.

1-Strongly agree
2
3-Neutral
4
5-Strongly disagree
N/A-No opinion

Q30. Please explain your response:

Q31. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following: I want to continue using the program services.

1-Strongly agree
2
3-Neutral
4
5-Strongly disagree
N/A-No opinion
Q32. Please explain your response:
Q33. How can the mentorship program best support you?
Appendix C: Campus C Surveys

Campus C: Mid-Year Evaluation

Q1. Name of Peer Academic Coach:
Q2. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following: I have developed a time management system to balance my personal and academic commitments.
   1-Strongly agree
   2
   3-Neutral
   4
   5-Strongly disagree
   N/A-No opinion
Q3. I spend this many hours studying each week:
   0-5
   6-10
   11-15
   16-20
   25+
Q4. I can focus in class and understand the material presented.
   1-Not at all
   2
   3-Sometimes
   4
   5-Usually
Q5. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following: I have developed an effective system of note-taking for lectures.
   1-Strongly agree
   2
   3-Neutral
   4
5-Strongly disagree
N/A-No opinion

Q6. I am able to identify and synthesize the key ideas from readings.
   1-Not at all
   2
   3-Sometimes
   4
   5-Usually

Q7. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following: I have developed an effective system of note-taking for readings.
   1-Strongly agree
   2
   3-Neutral
   4
   5-Strongly disagree
   N/A-No opinion

Q8. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following: I am keeping up-to-date with my readings, ideally doing them before class.
   1-Strongly agree
   2
   3-Neutral
   4
   5-Strongly disagree
   N/A-No opinion

Q9. Please comment on any of your above responses:

Q10. Please indicate how often you do the following: I review my notes from class and readings regularly/systematically.
   1-Not at all
   2
   3-Sometimes
   4
5-Usually

Q11. Please indicate how often you do the following: - When I write a test, I can remember what I have read or learned in class and from readings.

1-Not at all
2
3-Sometimes
4
5-Usually

Q12. Please indicate how often you do the following: - I practice anticipating test questions or practice past tests/exams.

1-Not at all
2
3-Sometimes
4
5-Usually

Q13. Please indicate how often you do the following: - I understand my assignment guidelines (writing assignments, lab reports, group projects) and know what is expected.

1-Not at all
2
3-Sometimes
4
5-Usually

Q14. Please indicate how often you do the following: - I can break down the components of an assignment and create plan to complete it on time.

1-Not at all
2
3-Sometimes
4
5-Usually

Q15. Please response to the following statements: - I know what scholarly/peer-reviewed sources are.
Q16. Please response to the following statements: - I know how to use the library database to find scholarly sources.
  Yes
  No
  Unsure

Q17. Please indicate how often you do the following: - I feel comfortable asking questions in class.
   1-Not at all
   2
   3-Sometimes
   4
   5-Usually

Q18. Please indicate how often you do the following: - I feel comfortable approaching my Professor or TA with questions outside of class.
   1-Not at all
   2
   3-Sometimes
   4
   5-Usually

Q19. Please indicate how often you do the following: - I achieve the grades I expect on my tests, exams and assignments.
   1-Not at all
   2
   3-Sometimes
   4
   5-Usually

Q20. Please indicate how often you do the following: - I know which resources to use for academic support.
Q21. I have used these supports:
Q22. If I have a question or concern, I feel comfortable asking for help from departments and services at [Campus C]:
   1-Not at all
   2
   3-Sometimes
   4
   5-Usually
Q23. I have used these services:
Q24. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement: My high school education adequately prepared me for university.
   1-Strongly agree
   2
   3-Neutral
   4
   5-Strongly disagree
   N/A/No opinion
Q25. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement: So far, my university experience is what I expected it to be.
   1-Strongly agree
   2
   3-Neutral
   4
   5-Strongly disagree
   N/A/No opinion
Q26. Please explain your response:
Q27. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement: I have found a supportive community somewhere on campus.

1-Strongly agree
2
3-Neutral
4
5-Strongly disagree
N/A-No opinion

Q28. Please explain your response:

Q29. How can the mentorship program best support you?
Campus C: Year-End Evaluation

Q1. The name of my Peer Academic Coach (PAC) is:

Q2. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following: As a result of participating in the mentorship program . . . - I feel more comfortable accessing student services at [Campus C] including but not only Academic Advising & Career Counseling, Athletics & Recreation and Health and Wellness services.

   1-Strongly agree
   2
   3-Neutral
   4
   5-Strongly disagree
   N/A-No opinion

Q3. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following: As a result of participating in the mentorship program . . . - I feel more confident using the library and/or its website to do research.

   1-Strongly agree
   2
   3-Neutral
   4
   5-Strongly disagree
   N/A-No opinion

Q4. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following: As a result of participating in the mentorship program . . . - I feel more comfortable approaching my professors and teaching assistants to ask questions about my courses.

   1-Strongly agree
   2
3-Normal
4
5-Strongly disagree
N/A-No opinion

Q5. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following: As a result of participating in the mentorship program . . . - I have a better idea about where to go to ask questions about my academic program.

1-Strongly agree
2
3-Normal
4
5-Strongly disagree
N/A-No opinion

Q6. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following: As a result of participating in the mentorship program . . . - I know when to go to my registrar and what services the registrar provides.

1-Strongly agree
2
3-Normal
4
5-Strongly disagree
N/A-No opinion

Q7. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following: As a result of participating in the mentorship program . . . - I have done better on at least one assignment, test or exam because I attended a session with or met with my Peer Academic Coach.

1-Strongly agree
2
3-Normal
Q8. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following: As a result of participating in the mentorship program . . . - I have made relationships in the program that I expect will continue in my upper years.

1-Strongly agree
2
3-Neutral
4
5-Strongly disagree
N/A-No opinion

Q9. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following: As a result of participating in the mentorship program . . . - I feel more connected to my campus because of my involvement in the program.

1-Strongly agree
2
3-Neutral
4
5-Strongly disagree
N/A-No opinion

Q10. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following: As a result of participating in the mentorship program . . . - I now feel better prepared to balance academic with personal commitments.

1-Strongly agree
2
3-Neutral
4
Q11. I had contact in an individual meeting or group session with my Peer Academic Coach:

0 times
1-3 times
4-6 times
7+ times

Q12. I communicated with my Peer Academic Coach by telephone, email, text or chat:

0 times
1-3 times
4-6 times
7+ times

Q13. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: - I would be likely to recommend the mentorship program to another student looking for similar services.

1-Strongly agree
2
3-Neutral
4
5-Strongly disagree
N/A-No opinion

Q14. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: - The mentorship program’s services would be valuable to me in the future.

1-Strongly agree
2
3-Neutral
4
Q15. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: - I am better prepared to successfully complete the academic year because of my involvement in the mentorship program.

1-Strongly agree
2
3-Neutral
4
5-Strongly disagree
N/A-No opinion

Q16. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: - My involvement with the mentorship program has encouraged me to pursue leadership opportunities during my time at [Campus C].

1-Strongly agree
2
3-Neutral
4
5-Strongly disagree
N/A-No opinion

Q17. What did you find to be the most beneficial aspect of the mentorship program?

Q18. Are there any components of the program you think could be improved?

Q19. Please describe what impact the program participation had on your student experience at [Campus C]:

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**Subject:** Request for Information – Research Study

[Insert Date Here]

Dear [Name]:

My name is David Kim and I am a doctoral student at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) at the University of Toronto (U of T). I am conducting a study that explores the experiences of mentors and mentees who participate in mentorship programs focused on providing support for first-generation students enrolled in university.

The study involves conducting 1.5 hour interviews of participants of the First-Generation Mentorship Programs. I am contacting you because I am seeking your consent to have access to:

1. The surveys that were administered to both mentors and mentees of your program during the 2014-15 academic year; and
2. The contact information for mentors and mentees that participated in your program during the 2014-15 academic year*.

   *If you would prefer to send out my request directly from your administrative staff accounts, I am happy to work with that approach as well.

The data will be stored on an online storage site hosted by the Canada Post Vault Service (https://www.canadapost.ca/cpo/mc/personal/epost/vault/default.jsf). All data stored on the site is kept in Canada. No data is replicated across the border. The files are encrypted when uploaded and downloaded (128-bit SSL) and privacy is ensured with encryption inside the vault (256-bit AES). The login information to access the data will only be accessible to the researcher and supervisor.

This study has been approved by the Office of Research Ethics at U of T (Protocol Reference # 31986) and I am happy to provide any documentation related to this. A letter with further details related to this request has been attached to this message. Please feel free to contact me directly at dy.kim@utoronto.ca or 647-505-6280 if you have any questions regarding the interview or the study.

Thank you,

David Kim
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
University of Toronto
Title of Study: An Evaluation of Three Mentorship Programs for First-Generation Students at one Ontario University

Researchers: David Kim (PhD Candidate) and Professor Nina Bascia (Thesis Supervisor)

Dear [Name]:

My name is David Kim and I am a doctoral student at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) at the University of Toronto (U of T). I am conducting a study that explores the experiences of mentors and mentees who participate in mentorship programs focused on providing support for first-generation students enrolled in university. I am contacting you because I am seeking your consent to have access to:

1. The surveys that were administered to both mentors and mentees of your program during the 2014-15 academic year; and
2. The contact information for mentors and mentees that participated in your program during the 2014-15 academic year.

The study involves two parts: Analysis of the survey data to determine if there were any areas that experienced a significant difference from the pre- to post- program responses; and 1.5 hour interviews that will be conducted with 5-7 participants of the program. The interviews will seek to explore the impact of being a first-generation student and participation in the First-Generation Mentorship Program on their academic and out-of-classroom experiences. Subjects will be well informed about the nature of the study and their participation, including the assurance that they may withdraw at any time. Participants will at no time be judged or evaluated, and will at no time be at risk of harm.

The information gathered from the surveys and interviews will be kept in strict confidence and stored on an online storage site hosted by the Canada Post Vault Service (https://www.canadapost.ca/cpo/mc/personal/epost/vault/default.jsf). All data stored on the site is kept in Canada. No data is replicated across the border. The files are encrypted when uploaded and downloaded (128-bit SSL) and privacy is ensured with encryption inside the vault (256-bit AES). The login information to access the data will only be accessible to the researcher and supervisor. All
information will be reported in such a way that individual persons cannot be identified. All data collected will be used for the purposes of a doctoral thesis and potentially for subsequent research articles. All raw data will be destroyed five years after the completion of the study.

This study has been approved by the University of Toronto Research Ethics Board #______. If there are any questions/concerns regarding this study, please feel free to contact me at dy.kim@utoronto.ca or 647-505-6280 or Professor Nina Bascia at 416-978-1159 or nina.bascia@utoronto.ca. If you have any questions about the rights of study participants, please contact the Office of Research Ethics at U of T (ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3273).

Thank you,

David Kim
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
University of Toronto
Appendix F: Invitation Email

Subject: Invitation to participate in a research study

[Insert Date Here]

Dear Prospective Participant:

I am writing to invite you to participate in an interview that will inform my research which explores the experiences of mentors and mentees who participate in mentorship programs focused on providing support for first-generation students enrolled in university.

My name is David Kim and I am a doctoral student at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) at the University of Toronto (U of T). I am conducting this study under the supervision of Professor Nina Bascia at OISE, U of T.

In an effort to study the impact of being a first-generation student and participation in the First-Generation Mentorship Program at [University], we are seeking study participants who:

1. Identify as the first in their family to attend a postsecondary institution (first-generation); and
2. Participated in the First-Generation Mentorship Program on any of the three campuses at [University] during the 2014-15 academic year as a mentor or mentee.

All data collected will be stored on an online storage site hosted by the Canada Post Vault Service ([https://www.canadapost.ca/cpo/mc/personal/epost/vault/default.jsf](https://www.canadapost.ca/cpo/mc/personal/epost/vault/default.jsf)). All data stored on the site is kept in Canada. No data is replicated across the border. The files are encrypted when uploaded and downloaded (128-bit SSL) and privacy is ensured with encryption inside the vault (256-bit AES). The login information to access the data will only be accessible to the researcher and supervisor.

I invite you to participate in the 1.5 hour interview by contacting me directly at dy.kim@utoronto.ca or 647-505-6280. A letter with further details related to this request has been mailed to you as well. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions regarding the interview or the study.
Thank you,

David Kim
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
University of Toronto
Appendix G: Invitation Letter

[Insert Date Here]

Title of Study: An Evaluation of Three Mentorship Programs for First-Generation Students at one Ontario University

Researchers: David Kim (PhD Candidate) and Professor Nina Bascia (Thesis Supervisor)

Dear Prospective Participant:

My name is David Kim and I am inviting you to participate in my study. I am a doctoral student at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) at the University of Toronto (U of T). I am conducting this study under the supervision of Professor Nina Bascia at OISE, U of T.

In an effort to study the impact of being a first-generation student and participation in the First-Generation Mentorship Program at [University], we are seeking study participants who:
1. Identify as the first in their family to attend a postsecondary institution (first-generation); and
2. Participated in the First-Generation Mentorship Program on any of the three campuses at [University] during the 2014-15 academic year as a mentor or mentee.

This research will explore the experiences of mentors and mentees who participate in mentorship programs focused on providing support for first-generation students enrolled in university. I am inviting you to participate because you have been identified as an individual who has participated in a mentorship program on one of the three [University] campuses as a mentor or mentee.

All data collected will be stored on an online storage site hosted by the Canada Post Vault Service (https://www.canadapost.ca/cpo/mc/personal/epost/vault/default.jsp). All data stored on the site is kept in Canada. No data is replicated across the border. The files are encrypted when uploaded and downloaded (128-bit SSL) and privacy is ensured with encryption inside the vault (256-bit AES). The login information to access the data will only be accessible to the researcher and supervisor.

I invite you to participate in the study by contacting me directly at dy.kim@utoronto.ca or 647-505-6280. This study has been approved by the University of Toronto Research Ethics Board #____ and no research participants will be identifiable in any reportings.
of the findings. If there are any questions/concerns regarding this study, please feel free to contact me or Professor Nina Bascia at 416-978-1159 or nina.bascia@utoronto.ca. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study, please contact the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Toronto (ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3273).

Thank you,

David Kim
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
University of Toronto
Appendix H: Invitation Follow Up Email

**Subject:** Invitation to participate in a research study

[Insert Date Here]

**Title of Study:** An Evaluation of Three Mentorship Programs for First-Generation Students at one Ontario University

**Researchers:** David Kim (PhD Candidate) and Professor Nina Bascia (Thesis Supervisor)

Dear Prospective Participant:

I am writing an email invitation as a follow up to a letter that has been mailed to you on [date].

My name is David Kim and I am inviting you to participate in my study. I am a doctoral student at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) at the University of Toronto (U of T). I am conducting this study under the supervision of Professor Nina Bascia at OISE, U of T.

In an effort to study the impact of being a first-generation student and participation in the First-Generation Mentorship Program at [University], we are seeking study participants who:

1. Identify as the first in their family to attend a postsecondary institution (first-generation); and
2. Participated in the First-Generation Mentorship Program on any of the three campuses at [University] during the 2014-15 academic year as a mentor or mentee.

This research will explore the experiences of mentors and mentees who participate in mentorship programs focused on providing support for first-generation students enrolled in university. I am inviting you to participate because you have been identified as an individual who has participated in a mentorship program on one of the three [University] campuses as a mentor or mentee.

All data collected will be stored on an online storage site hosted by the Canada Post Vault Service ([https://www.canadapost.ca/cpo/mc/personal/epost/vault/default.jsf](https://www.canadapost.ca/cpo/mc/personal/epost/vault/default.jsf)). All data stored on the site is kept in Canada. No data is replicated across the border. The files are encrypted when uploaded and downloaded (128-bit SSL) and privacy is ensured with encryption inside the vault (256-bit AES). The login information to access the data will only be accessible to the researcher and supervisor.
I invite you to participate in the study by contacting me directly at dy.kim@utoronto.ca or 647-505-6280. This study has been approved by the University of Toronto Research Ethics Board #_____ and no research participants will be identifiable in any reportings of the findings. If there are any questions/concerns regarding this study, please feel free to contact me or Professor Nina Bascia at 416-978-1159 or nina.bascia@utoronto.ca. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study, please contact the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Toronto (ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3273).

Thank you,

David Kim
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
University of Toronto
Appendix I: Informed Consent Form

[Insert Date Here]

Title of Study: An Evaluation of Three Mentorship Programs for First-Generation Students at one Ontario University

Researchers: David Kim (PhD Candidate) and Professor Nina Bascia (Thesis Supervisor)

Dear Prospective Participant:

My name is David Kim and I would like to invite you to participate in my study. I am a doctoral student at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) at the University of Toronto (U of T). I am conducting this study under the supervision of Professor Nina Bascia at OISE, U of T.

In an effort to study the impact of being a first-generation student and participation in the First-Generation Mentorship Program at [University], we are seeking study participants who:

1. Identify as the first in their family to attend a postsecondary institution (first-generation); and
2. Participated in the First-Generation Mentorship Program on any of the three campuses at [University] during the 2014-15 academic year as a mentor or mentee.

This research will explore the experiences of mentors and mentees who participate in mentorship programs focused on providing support for first-generation students enrolled in university. I am inviting you to participate because you have been identified as an individual who has participated in a mentorship program on one of the three [University] campuses as a mentor or mentee.

The study involves two parts: Analysis of the survey data to determine if there were any areas that experienced a significant difference from the pre- to post- program responses; and 1.5 hour interviews that will be conducted with 5-7 participants of the program on each campus at [University]. The interviews will seek to explore the impact of being a first-generation student and participation in the First-Generation Mentorship Program on their academic and out-of-classroom experiences.
Participation in this study is completely voluntary; you are free to withdraw from the study without any explanation or penalty. If you choose to withdraw at any point, your information will be deleted from the data that is used for this study. You are also free to not answer any questions you do not wish to answer. At no time will you be judged or evaluated, be put at any risk of harm, and no value judgment will be placed on your responses.

The information gathered from the surveys and interviews will be kept in strict confidence and stored on a secure online storage site. All information will be reported in such a way that individual persons cannot be identified. All data collected will be used for the purposes of a doctoral thesis and potentially for subsequent research articles and presentations/posters at educational conferences. In all cases, participants' information will be kept confidential and identities will be replaced by the use of pseudonyms.

All data collected in this study will be kept secure until the study is completed and only my supervisor and I will have access to the data. Upon completion of the study all data will be completely deleted and destroyed. The data will be encrypted and stored on an online storage site hosted by the Canada Post Vault Service (https://www.canadapost.ca/cpo/mc/personal/epost/vault/default.jsf). All data stored on the site is kept in Canada. No data is replicated across the border. The files are encrypted when uploaded and downloaded (128-bit SSL) and privacy is ensured with encryption inside the vault (256-bit AES). The login information to access the data will only be accessible to the researcher and supervisor. If the results of this study are used in any reports, publications, or presentations, the names of the participants will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms.

This study has been approved by the University of Toronto Research Ethics Board #_____ and no research participants will be identifiable in any reportings of the findings. If there are any questions/concerns regarding this study, please feel free to contact me at dy.kim@utoronto.ca or 647-505-6280 or Professor Nina Bascia at 416-978-1159 or nina.bascia@utoronto.ca. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study, please contact the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Toronto (ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3273).

Thank you,

David Kim
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
University of Toronto
If you agree to the terms above and are willing to participate in the study, please sign below.

_________________________  ______________________  ______________________
Signature                   Name (please print)       Date

Please initial the box below if you are willing to have the audio portion of the interview recorded for the purposes of this study.

- I agree to have the audio portion of the interview recorded for the purposes of this study:
Appendix J: Interview Guide

Title of Study: An Evaluation of Three Mentorship Programs for First-Generation Students at one Ontario University

Researchers: David Kim (PhD Candidate) and Professor Nina Bascia (Thesis Supervisor)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Date</th>
<th>Interview Location</th>
<th>Interviewer’s Name</th>
<th>Interviewee’s Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Part A: Introduction and Informed Consent Form

1. Introduction
   a. My name, academic department, and purpose of the study
   b. Interviews taking place between the months of November – January
   c. Length of the interview: Approximately 1-1.5 hours

2. Informed Consent Form
   a. Go through information on the form
   b. Explain that the interview will be audio recorded (with consent)
   c. Highlight the following points:
      i. The interview is completely voluntary and the participant is free to withdraw at any point without explanation or penalty.
      ii. If the participant chooses to withdraw at any point, the interview information and results would be deleted from the data collected.
      iii. The participant is free to not answer any questions they chooses.
      iv. At no time will the participant be judged or evaluated, be put at any risk of harm, and no value judgment will be place on the responses.
      v. All data collected will be stored on an online storage site hosted by the Canada Post Vault Service (https://www.canadapost.ca/cpo/mc/personal/epost/vault/default.jsf).
         All data stored on the site is kept in Canada. No data is replicated across the border. The files are encrypted when uploaded and downloaded (128-bit SSL) and privacy is ensured with encryption inside the vault (256-bit AES). The login information to access the data will only be accessible to the researcher and supervisor.
   d. Provide a copy of the form to the interviewee

3. Other
a. There may be hesitation for some questions – everything kept confidential and pseudonyms used.
b. Gap between 1st-Gen and “Traditional students” – the idea is that the mentorship program would help bridge the gap.

Part B: Questions

A. Introductory:

1. What is your name?
2. What is your year of study?
3. What are you studying (major/minor)?
4. Do you live in residence or do you commute to campus?
   a. Where do you commute from?
5. How long have you been a participant of the mentorship program for first-generation students at your campus?
6. Are you currently a mentor or a mentee/protégé/participant?

B. About the Program:

7. How did you hear about the mentorship program?
8. What made you sign up for the mentorship program?
9. On a scale of 1-5 (1-not at all; 2-very little; 3-somewhat; 4-high; 5-very high), how would you rate your involvement in the program?
10. Why was this the case (referring to Question 2)?
11. What did you like about the program?
12. What did you dislike about the program?
13. What do you think the program administrators could do to improve the program for First-Generation students at your campus?
14. Are you currently participating in the program?
   a. If yes – What brought you back?
   b. If no – Why did you not continue with the program?

C. Being a First-Gen Student and the Mentorship Program:
(Starting Question: Can you tell me a little bit about yourself including how you identify as a first generation student?)

15. Do you think being a first-generation student has affected your motivation and ability to participate in extracurricular activities such as intramural sports, student government, student clubs, part-time employment, etc.? If so, how so?
16. Do you think participation in the mentorship program has influenced your involvement in the university community? For example, participating in extracurricular activities such as intramural sports, student government, student clubs, seeking part-time employment, etc.? If so, how so?
17. Do you think being a first-generation student has affected your confidence and ability to meet and interact with different people on campus, including other students, staff, faculty? If so, how so?

18. Do you think participation in the mentorship program has influenced your confidence and ability to meet and interact with different people on campus, including other students, staff, and faculty? If so, how so?

19. Do you think being a first-generation student has affected your confidence and ability to perform successfully with your academic responsibilities, including tests and exams, papers and lab reports, and participating in class? If so, how so?

20. Do you think participation in the mentorship program has influenced your confidence and ability to perform successfully with your academic responsibilities, including tests and exams, papers and lab reports, and participating in class? If so, how so?

Part C: Conclusion

1. Next Steps
   a. Finish up with interviews
   b. Analysis
   c. Write up of conclusions (Tentative end date: __________)
   d. Distribution of the final report
   e. Draw for 1 of 5 $20 gift cards to Amazon.ca or Chapters
      i. All participants will be contacted regardless of the outcome
      ii. Names will be drawn at the conclusion of the interviews

2. Thank you and Contact Information
   a. Contact information:
      i. Researcher (dy.kim@utoronto.ca or 647-505-6280)
      ii. Office of Research Ethics (ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3273)