Exploring Student Perceptions of College Readiness: An Examination of the Processes that Impact Factors of Psychosocial Development

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the degree of Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

By
Sivan Lipman

August 2015
Copyright by Sivan Lipman 2015
The dissertation of Sivan Lipman is approved:

________________________________________  __________________
Dr. Wendy Bass-Keer, Ph.D.  Date:

________________________________________  __________________
Dr. Carrie Rothstein-Fisch, Ph.D  Date:

________________________________________  __________________
Dr. Greg Knotts, Ph.D., Chair  Date:

California State University, Northridge
Dedication

The development and completion of this dissertation was in no small part due to the supportive and inspiring community that I have had the blessing of being surrounded by. My husband, Daniel Tarle, with whom I was able to sit across a coffee table for hours in silence working with his knowing smile and support across from me. My family for understanding and encouraging my continued education, while forgiving my tapering communication these past few years. My dissertation chair, Dr. Gregory Knotts, who guided, scolded, and uplifted me in knowing moments, and with which I was able to shape my writing and my work. My devoted committee members, Dr. Wendy Bass-Keer and Dr. Carrie Rothstein-Fisch, who provided poignant recommendations and feedback continuously, all the while encouraging and pushing the boundaries of my research and rationale. Lastly, I would like to dedicate this dissertation to Dr. Bruce Powell, for helping to create an educational environment where a new teacher could hone her skills both in the classroom and in her graduate studies. You have provided a guidepost in searching for continued greatness that can be achieved through passion for family, community, and pedagogy.
Table of Contents

Signature Page iii
Dedication iv
List of Figures ix
Abstract x

CHAPTER 1: STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM 1

Introduction 1
Problem 3

The Three Facets of Psychosocial College Readiness 4
Intrinsic Motivational Factors 5
Non-Cognitive Skills 5
Resiliency 5

Research Questions 6
Conceptual Framework 6
Methodology 8
Definition of Terms 8
Limitations and Delimitations 9
Limitations 9
Delimitations 10
Assumptions 10
Organization 10

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE 12

Introduction 12

Behavioral and Developmental Theories 14
Behaviorism 14
Learning and Development 16
Multiple Intelligence 16
Successful Intelligence 17
Mindset 18

Measurements of Psychosocial Development 19
Intrinsic Motivation 20
Non-Cognitive Skills 21
Extroversion and Introversion 22
Agreeableness 22
Resilience 23

Environmental Roles Impacting Psychosocial Development 25
Parents 25
### Intrinsic Motivation
- Students: 27
  - Students: 27
  - Intrinsic Motivation: 27
  - Non-Cognitive Skills: 28
  - Resilience: 28

### Non-Cognitive Skills
- Students: 27
- School: 29
  - Intrinsic Motivation: 30
  - Non-Cognitive Skills: 30
  - Resilience: 31

### Resilience
- Students: 27
- School: 29
- College Readiness: 33
- The Role of the Secondary School: 38

### Summary
- Summary: 38

---

**CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY**

- **Introduction**: 40
- **Research Questions**: 40
- **Chapter Organization**: 40
- **Research Design and Tradition**: 41
  - Research Design: 41
  - Research Tradition: 42
- **Connection to Purpose and Questions**: 43
- **Research Setting and Context**: 43
  - Ethnographic Research Variables: 45
- **Data Sources and Research Sample**: 47
  - Data Sources: 47
  - Sampling Strategy: 47
    - Students: 49
    - Parents: 50
    - School: 50
  - Sample Characteristics: 50
- **Ethical Issues**: 52
- **Instruments**: 52
  - Interview Protocol: 52
  - Focus Group Protocol: 53
  - Student Survey: 53
  - Document Review: 55
- **Data Collection Procedures**: 55
  - Student Interviews: 55
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-Cognitive Skill Development</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Navigating Institutional Norms</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Management</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resilience</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Meaning</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish Identity and Socioeconomic Status</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consciousness Raising</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Meaning</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ancillary Findings</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drugs</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Media</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future Research</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix C</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix D</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix E</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix F</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix G</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix H</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix I</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix J</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix K</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Tables

Table 3.1 Student Participants: Suggested for Study by Administration Focus Group 49

List of Figures

Figure 1.1 Conceptual Framework for Psychosocial College Readiness 7
Figure 4.1 Student Self Descriptions 77
Figure 4.2 Grit Perceptions 90
Figure 4.3 Student Grit Surveys 92
Figure 5.1 Psychosocial Development for College Readiness 103
ABSTRACT

Exploring College Readiness: An Examination of the Processes that Impact Factors of Psychosocial Readiness

By

Sivan Lipman

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

The purpose of this study is to examine the processes that help develop psychosocial skills for college readiness. Psychosocial skills are defined as: intrinsic motivation, non-cognitive skills, and resiliency. The structural framework, modified from that of Conley (2008), identifies major contributing factors in student readiness for college. In addition, the belief that these factors are most effective when they work together (Epstein, 2011), and rooted in the foundation of behavioral psychology, and the belief that psychosocial skills can be developed. This phenomenological, mixed methods, study examined the impact that parents and the school have on the perceptions of student psychosocial readiness for college and found that consciousness raising, practice, and the development of internal meaning for the importance of psychosocial skill development is critical to the successful transition into a four-year university.

The study was able to identify processes currently in place that impact psychosocial readiness for college, providing an opportunity to identify potential changes in practice. Improving parent communication regarding the importance of developing psychosocial skills in their students, and best practices, including more intentional
programming where students are expected to interact with varying communities, to
practice to develop some of the expressed psychosocial skills, arming students with tools
that could better prepare students for the transition into college.
CHAPTER I

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Introduction

Many of today’s emerging adults are headed off to four-year universities each fall semester, excited, scared, and seemingly ready for whatever will come their way. The reality, however, is that far too many of these emerging adults find themselves struggling to succeed at universities (Yang, 2006). A growing percentage of these young adults move back home and reverse transfer, the experience of being admitted into four-year universities, finding the transition there too challenging, and returning home to two-year colleges (Yang, 2006). This phenomenon seems to be the topic of conversation for many universities attempting to identify how they can best serve their students and improve attrition rates (Perkins-Gough & Duckworth, 2013; Tinto, 1987). The current study seeks to provide a better understanding of the processes within secondary schools that can encourage student development to better prepare students psychosocially for the challenges they face as they transition to a four-year university.

With four-year universities adapting to their new students’ needs, a couple of questions regarding college preparation must be asked. First, in what ways are the current measures of aptitude properly measuring readiness? The Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) was initially distributed as a substitute for the original college boards intending to simplify scoring and develop a scale in which testing could be mathematically calibrated (Atkinson & Geiser, 2009). Research today suggests that intelligence is affected by a combination of genes and environment; that an open mindset will allow intelligence to develop (Dweck, 2006). However, the SAT was created within the era of, and with the
same mindset that the Intelligence Quotient (IQ) test was derived, believing that intelligence is solely genetic and fixed (Atkinson & Geiser, 2009). These exams measure cognitive skills, a student’s aptitude for taking standardized tests, and for obtaining specific content knowledge. They do not test for other necessary psychosocial skills, like resiliency, intrinsic motivation, and non-cognitive skills, which are needed when transitioning into a four-year university. It is clear that the current status quo of solely utilizing aptitude tests is not accurate in predicting all aspects of a student’s readiness for college.

A second question assessed in this dissertation focuses on what secondary schools can do to better serve their students before they leave for college, helping, beyond academic preparation, to ready them for the difficult transition? Arnette (2000) states that the theory of the developmental stage of emerging adulthood begins in the late teens and lasts through a person’s twenties, precisely as they are being prepared for, and are entering, college. Multiple factors are considered when assessing college readiness. Cognitive skills, such as content knowledge and test-taking ability, are already measured with standardized tests, and are typically good indicators of success in various content areas in college (Atkinson & Geiser, 2009). However, it is clear, with the increasing rates of reverse transfer (Phelan, 1999), that other skills, psychosocial skills, must also be somehow addressed and measured.

Presently, these psychosocial factors, considered to be involving both psychological and social components, where social conditions are related to mental health, are not being measured in any systemically explicit way.
The purpose of this phenomenological case study began as an examination of the processes in place at an independent high school designed to help prepare students for the various challenges they will likely face at a four-year university. Through the analysis of interviews, focus groups, and surveys, a better understanding of these processes emerged to recognize the best practices, including the development of consciousness regarding the importance of psychosocial skill development, creating opportunities for students to practice said skills, and allowing for an internalization of the value associated with these skills, at an independent school to encourage psychosocial development in preparation for attending a four-year college.

**Problem**

The national reverse transfer rate in 2005 was 14.4 percent (Hossler et al., 2012). Assuming that the reverse transfer rate has not changed, that would suggest that almost two million of our nearly 14 million college-bound students in 2014 will reverse transfer from their initial college of choice. Moreover, in the last 20 years, more than 31 million students enrolled in four-year colleges did not receive a degree or certificate of completion and there are suggestions that reverse-transfer student success rates are highly impacting of this statistic (Hossler et al., 2012). These staggering numbers should be a national concern regarding the expected successes of our students and the overall success of our citizens in competing with an international market. Scholars attribute the national reverse transfer rate to multiple reasons, among which are psychosocial challenges and insufficient coping mechanisms within students (Yang, 2006).

According to the College Guidance Director at an independent secondary school on the West Coast of the United States, students from the graduating class of 2012 had a
reverse transfer rate more than double that of the national average in 2005. This high reverse transfer rate is particularly concerning, as the students at the research site have access to independent educational programs that are not hindered by governmental budgetary concerns and large student populations. The Center on Education Policy (2007) reports that these students have small classroom sizes, personalized relationships with teachers, high levels of parent-school partnership and family involvement; these factors have been identified to help promote student achievement and success (Epstein, 2011). In spite of so many tools at their disposal, their reverse transfer rate is more than twice the national average, making it important to investigate which components are lacking in their preparation for college.

Educational psychologists have sought out alternative predictors that may enhance the measurements of college readiness. Robbins, Allen, Casillas, Peterson, and Le (2006) explained that the suggested alternative predictors such as: successful intelligence, previous experience, and situational judgments do not take into consideration personality and social factors. Of the many alternative theories Robbins et al. (2006) examined in their work, the focus on motivational theories, as well as Tinto’s (2003) persistence theories, were found to be significant. Robbins et al. (2006) suggested three predictors of college readiness: the traditional, demographic, and psychosocial. In an attempt to address this call for research, this study focuses on the latter, the psychosocial aspects of college readiness.

**The Three Facets of Psychosocial College Readiness**

Three facets of psychosocial development are identified as important for the transition into college: intrinsic motivation factors, non-cognitive skills, and resilience
(Duckworth, 2013; Tough, 2012). All three factors are closely related to one another, and synchronously help in their individual development. An example of this is the dependency and interplay that maintaining an open mindset, a component of non-cognitive skills, has on the development of resiliency and grit (Yeager, Paunesku, Walton, & Dweck, 2006). The terms resiliency and grit will be used synonymously in this research, as they both support and help define one another. Students who have an open mindset, meaning that they are aware of their ability to improve with long-term goals through hard work, are more inclined to be optimistic about their academic work, and therefore more motivated to persist past failures (Yeager et al., 2013). When attempting to identify the many components of psychosocial development, three have been recognized as necessary for smoothly transitioning into emerging adulthood (Duckworth, 2012; Dweck, 2006; Yeager et al., 2013).

**Intrinsic motivational factors.** Intrinsic motivation is a way of describing the drive behind success. If a person does something because of their own enjoyment, or because they personally find the subject interesting, they are more inclined to work harder than if they were incentivized by an outside source, like grades (Deci & Ryan, 1980, 1985; Ginsburg & Bronstein, 1993). Encouraging students to identify their motivation would likely shift their perceptions of why they are doing what they do, and how intensely they would continue in their pursuit for success.

**Non-cognitive skills.** Non-cognitive skills are those referred to as distal personality traits, and include conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism (Komarraju, Ramsey, & Rinella, 2013). Of the four traits that help to define non-cognitive skills, agreeableness is found to be strongly linked to self-regulation, a
factor that many students struggle with, especially in stressful academic university environments (Herrman, Stewart, Diaz-Grandos, Berger, Jackson, & Yuen, 2011).

**Resiliency.** Resiliency is an essential component of successfully navigating through difficult life transitions (Duckworth, 2013; Meyer, Licklider, & Wierseman, 2009; Tough, 2013). Often times referred to as grit, resiliency is a skill that can be learned, therefore, deductively, it can also be taught. This study identifies both resiliency and grit synonymously. Erikson (1950) suggests that much of what children learn about resiliency can occur during childhood. The parenting styles and family structures in which a child is brought up can impact how an emerging adult manages the stressful transition of beginning at a four-year college.

**Research Questions**

This study examined the following questions:

1. How are students psychosocially prepared to transition to college?
2. In what ways do the roles of the school, parent(s), and the individual student impact the psychosocial developmental opportunities of college readiness?

**Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study applies the three factors that influence psychosocial readiness in emerging adults on their way to a four-year university: the family, the school, and the students themselves. Conley (2008) suggests that contextual skills and awareness, academic behaviors, and key content are essential to the development of key cognitive strategies. This research agrees with Conley’s 2008 findings, however the conceptual framework utilized here hones in on the importance of Conley’s discussion of psychosocial skills and is viewed through a three-pronged
approach (see Figure 1). Each lens surrounding the central focus of college readiness represents the potential positive and negative external influences on three important factors in emerging adults at the research site. Listed within each of these external influence(s) are the three psychosocial factors that influence college readiness, emphasizing that each sphere of influence can impact the three identified factors of psychosocial development. Although all three types of contributors are investigated, students are highlighted throughout this study because of the importance of student voice throughout the college readiness process (Mitra, 2006).

**Figure 1.1 Conceptual Framework for Psychosocial College Readiness Based on works by Conley (2008)**
Methodology

Phenomenology was used in this qualitative research approach, in the hopes of developing an understanding of processes in place at an independent school, leading to better student college preparation (Glesne, 2002). This bounded system is delineated by the fact that the researcher conducted interviews, focus groups, surveys, and reviewed extant data. The study focuses on one purposeful sample of alumni who recently graduated high school, through their first semesters in college.

In the current study took place in a private Jewish secondary school located in a suburban population in a large city in the West Coast of the United States. This unique site is one of the largest independent, secondary Jewish day schools in the United States, and the student population is distinctive in specific ways that will be described in Chapter Three. In addition, the school has two college guidance counselors on site that have been developing a four-year program for students and parents to better select and transition students to colleges for which that are uniquely best fit.

Definition of Terms

Emerging Adults- Defined as persons from the age of 18 through their mid-twenties

Reverse Transfer- Students who initially are accepted and attend a four-year university of choice and for a myriad of reasons move home and attend a school locally.

College Match- Students who are accepted to and choose to attend a college that is best suited for their needs.

Grit-This term can be used synonymously with resilience (see definition below).

Millennial- A colloquial term referencing a generation also known as “generation Y” consisting of people born from the late 1980s through the early 2000s.
Psychosocial- A term involving both social and psychological aspects.

College Readiness- Readiness for college has been identified as the, “degree to which previous education and personal experiences have equipped students for the expectations and demands they will encounter in college” (Conley, 2008, p. 3).

College preparatory- A term often used to describe a secondary school’s purpose in preparing their students for college.

Success (as defined by administrative focus group) - A student who will achieve academic social success in the college of their choice.

Resiliency- Hartley (2011) defines resilience as, complex interplay between individual and his/her environment, in which the individual can influence a successful outcome by using internal and external protective factors, defined as the personal qualities or contexts that predict positive outcomes under high-risk conditions. Today, resilience is measured by temperament and personality, in addition to specific skills (p. 596).

Intrinsic Motivation- Simply defined as an inner drive to accomplish tasks, whereas the motivation is brought on by a desire for inner-reward in accomplishing a task rather than an external reward.

Non-Cognitive Skills Non-cognitive skills are those referred to as distal personality traits, and encompass conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism (Komarraju, Ramsey, & Rinella, 2013).

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations

A limitation of this study is that students were interviewed and studied for eight months in total. The process of college applications, and taking SATs and/or ACTs was
not factored in, therefore much of the preparation process was not observed. Another limitation is that focus groups of parents, interviews of students, survey measuring students’ grit created for public use by Duckworth labs at the University of Pennsylvania, and any thematic analysis was directly impacted by my knowledge of the subjects.

**Delimitations**

A delimitation of this study is that it was confined to a particular independent Jewish secondary school, wherein a unique section of families are involved in and invested in the mission of the school. This specific alignment in mission impacts the philosophies in which all participants experienced their lives, and impacted the ways they raised their children and taught their students.

**Assumptions**

The underlying assumption of this study is that the values of both the school and the families were shared, and that they were both open and honest in their answering and sharing of information. Additionally, it was assumed that all student participants in the study would understand the purpose of the study and be honest in their answers.

**Organization of the Dissertation**

This introductory chapter establishes the nature of the study, provides a brief context in the literature, and outlines the research questions and methodology. The next chapter will summarize the important literature, identify the gap within the literature, and develop the foundation for which the current study stands upon. The third chapter describes, in detail, the case study of psychosocial readiness factors and how they are impacted at the school and by the parents of the subjects. The fourth chapter explains the results of the research, and the last chapter discusses the findings of the research and
makes suggestions for applied practices that could be used in transferrable cases.

Ultimately, the findings highlight processes that encourage the development of psychosocial skills (intrinsic motivation, non-cognitive skills, and resilience) in independent secondary schools, further defining how these skills could be practiced and translated to the masses.
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

This chapter looks to best express the components of what makes students psychosocially ready for major transitions in life, such as leaving secondary school and attending a four-year university. Rooted in behavioral theories, the three measurements of psychosocial readiness (intrinsic motivation, non-cognitive skills, and resilience) are expressed in this chapter. Their definition is followed by a closer look at the environmental roles of parents, students themselves, and the school.

Foundational conversations regarding human developmental theory (Erikson 1950, 1968; Marcia, 1967) suggest that there are components of psychosocial development that are crucial facets to the development of a person’s identity. In addition, when assessing these facets, the important work of Skinner (1957) and suggestions of behaviorism theory largely influenced the purpose of this study. This chapter looks deeply into three identifiable facets that encompass multiple theories of psychosocial development, and can serve as predictors for college readiness: intrinsic motivation, non-cognitive skills, and resilience. In addition, through the unpacking of these facts, this chapter better defines the influential roles of parents, students, and the school on this psychosocial development. Students are not raised in a vacuum, and their influencers play a vital role in their development. The literature will highlight the impact that these factors have on the process of psychosocial development in an independent secondary school and the important role they play regarding college readiness.
Ginsburg and Bronstein (1993) suggest that family factors are related to children’s psychosocial development. Though Ginsburg and Bronstein (1993) focus primarily on motivational factors, both non-cognitive skill development and resiliency are impacted by the same factors (the parents and the school). Articles published between 1911 and 2014 focusing on college readiness, psychosocial development, developmental theories, and behaviorism were pooled from databases used to search articles including; ERIC, ProQuest Research Library, JSTOR, and EBSCO Host suggesting that students of a low socioeconomic status would be academically disadvantaged, however there is an unknown number of students of high socioeconomic status, that do well on standardized testing, are getting into four-year colleges, but are reverse transferring out (Yang, 2006) of their four-year colleges. This may be a strong indicator that there are additional factors attributed to students’ success in college not related to the current model of measure.

Intelligence theorists, Gardner and Vygotsky, have suggested that intelligence is multifaceted and impacted through the development of learners’ lives. It could then be inferred that students’ upbringing, their socioeconomic status, and their developmental education would impact their cognitive and non-cognitive skill level. Behavioral scientists believe that through various forms of redirection and conditioning, any skill can be taught (Pavlov, 1927). Therefore, the major constituencies that influence the development of a student for psychosocial college readiness are the parent(s), student, and school. These three entities must work together to ensure that readiness for college is not simply driven by cognitive skill development, but also by the development in:
motivational factors, non-cognitive skills, and resilience (Conley, 2007; Dweck, 2006; Epstein, 2011).

Conley (2007) suggests that these non-cognitive components should be measured as readiness factors by colleges. A structural framework borrowed and modified from Conley (2007) identifies the important roles that parent(s), students, and the school play in the development of three psychosocial benchmarks: motivational factors, non-cognitive skills, and resilience. Though there is no current assessment of these developmental factors impacting college choice today, this research hopes to highlight the necessity for such a protocol and focuses on the following research questions:

1. How are students psychosocially prepared to transition to college?
2. In what ways do the roles of the school, parent(s), and the individual student impact the psychosocial developmental opportunities of college readiness?

**Behavioral and Developmental Theories**

In order to better understand psychosocial development and readiness in relation to motivational factors, non-cognitive skills, and resilience, it is important to understand basic human development. When defining developmental stages, like emerging adulthood under investigation in this study, experts suggest that environmental factors carry much of the responsibility (Dweck, 2012; Gardner, 1983; Piaget, 1964; Sternberg & Grigorenko, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978). In connection with these developmental stages, behavioral scientists suggest that all behaviors, which are influenced by developmental stages, are impacted by environmental factors as well (Dweck, 2012; Herrnstein, 1970; Pavlov, 1927; Skinner, 1957; Thorndike, 1911; Watson, 1930). Thus, it can be
concluded that a sound understanding of both developmental and behavioral theories will function as the foundation for the measures of psychosocial readiness.

**Behaviorism**

Behaviorism states that learning and reinforcement can ultimately influence and change both animal and human behaviors (Skinner, 1957). Through classical and operant conditioning, it is expected that behaviors can be significantly influenced, and that changes in these behaviors and learning can shift the developmental stage of our students (Pavlov, 1927; Skinner, 1957; Watson, 1930). Though both operant and classical conditioning are behavior modification techniques, they specifically differ in the fact that Pavlovian classical conditioning is focusing on involuntary behaviors, whereas Skinner’s operant conditioning focuses on voluntary behaviors (Pavlov, 1927; Skinner, 1957). The essence of behaviorism suggests that we can teach behaviors that are not simply first-order thinking behaviors; we can change psychosocial skill levels and impact a student’s capability to find intrinsic motivation in life, develop non-cognitive skills, and build a sense of reliance in their lives.

In the event that these long-held theories are applicable to psychosocial development, it could be asserted that students can be taught how to build these skills by teachers and adults in their community (Skinner, 1957; Vygotsky, 1978). The complexity of how to go about instilling these values in students can be challenging considering so many of them require the ability to continue persisting past failure, and working for long periods of time toward a specific goal (Dweck, 2012). This challenge is further explained through the work of Edward Thorndike (1911) who suggested the law of effect, where a student’s positive or negative attachment to a situation will impact their
strength in that behavior. Theories of operant conditioning, where behaviors can be
modified by consequences, can best explain the impact parent(s) and the school have on a
student’s development (Herrnstein, 1970; Skinner, 1937; Thorndike, 1911). The reality
of how to best train intrinsic motivation, non-cognitive skills, and rigor is yet to be
determined, however applying a behaviorist approach to the idea of training students to
have these necessary skills to survive the difficult transition into college is worthwhile.

**Learning and Development**

Connections between learning and development have long been a point of
contention between educational theorists. The foundational contradictory works of both
Piaget (1964) and Vygotsky (1978) regarding learning and development are the
underpinning of modern-day theorists. Piaget argued that development precedes
learning, and that children are only able to master skills once their requisite cognitive
structures have been developed (Piaget, 1964). Vygotsky suggested that learning
precedes development and that adults help to internalize and understand the learning
process (Vygotsky, 1978). Though both had differing ideologies regarding the order in
which learning and development occur, both took into consideration the importance of
support systems, whether that be the students’ peer group and/or adults in their
community. Vygotsky coined the term, the *zone of proximal development*, stating that
learning is enhanced and that a learner can reach further with the help of an instructor or
more knowledgeable other (Vygotsky, 1978). Ultimately, it is suggested that educators
have the capability of increasing a child’s capacity to learn by being in their zone of
proximal development.
Multiple Intelligence

When attempting to identify ways to best support learning and development, work by Howard Gardner helped to further pave the way. Gardner (1983) identified that there are eight intrinsic intelligences functioning within each person: linguistic, logical-mathematical, musical, bodily-kinesthetic, spatial, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalist intelligence. His theory of multiple intelligences was built upon the theories of Piaget and Vygotsky. He further delineated the types of learning styles connected to the development of a being. When attempting to better understand the psychosocial development of students in their preparation for college, it is necessary to understand that each individual can reach their appropriate developmental stage for readiness differently. Gardner identified intelligence areas as sections where a person has a strong computational power, but that does not disregard other areas of intelligence that a person may have. He suggests that a learning style is not systemic throughout different areas, but that a person may have one particular style of learning that is used more than others. Ultimately, Gardner developed three primary lessons for educators, further suggesting that education had a place in the development of these styles: 1) individualize teaching for students, 2) teach important materials in multiple ways, and 3) do not utilize the terminology of “styles”, as it tends to confuse students and educators, limiting their ideas of what they can accomplish.

Successful Intelligence

When attempting to dissect the components that help to prepare students for college psychosocially, it would be difficult to not consider the individual nature of personality. Defined by the characteristic patterns of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors
that make each individual, unique, personality tends to play a large role when considering the individual preparation of students for college and beyond. Though each of us has a unique personality, developmental psychologists will say that much of who we are has been affected by the experiences we have had, and that by understanding the impact of these experiences, we can train our personalities and our brains (Sternberg & Grigorenko, 2003).

The theory of successful intelligence suggests that where we place our value will be our emphasis on success. Therefore, if we define success and readiness for college solely upon academic and cognitive capabilities, a child can feel successful and ready for college, but when reaching a four-year university, where success is not solely defined by cognitive or academic achievement, they fail. Successful intelligence proposes that there are four basic understandings: 1) certain abilities are needed to obtain success, and much of this is defined by the sociocultural group of the individual, 2) knowing your strengths and how to utilize them, and being aware of and working on your weaknesses will help you become more successful, 3) successful intelligence means to be able to adapt to changing environments, and 4) balancing the varying abilities you have is an essential component to intellectual success (Sternberg & Grigorenko, 2003). Sternberg and Grigorenko (2003) suggest strategies for encouraging successful intelligence in classroom teaching. They state that covering a broad sampling of topics, reaching out to many different student interests, boosting analytical thinking and practices, capitalizing on the individual strengths and correcting and/or compensating for weaknesses is helpful, as well as developing circumstances where students need to balance an adaptation to varying environments.
Mindset

Carol Dweck, of PERTS Laboratories at Stanford University, has developed a working theory regarding a fixed versus growth mindset. A growth mindset is one in which a child acknowledges that hard work, rather than an innate intellect, are the tools to success in education, translating to success in business and in life (Dweck, 2012). It is expected that students who were influenced by faculty and family that encourage a growth mindset in students will likely work harder and ultimately become more successful when faced with tasks in the future. Dweck’s research has shown an increase in the aptitude of students who have been raised in a community that praises effort over intelligence, suggesting that when giving compliments, they should be based on the effort of work a child puts into what they are doing, rather than complimenting her by stating how smart she is. This form of acknowledgement sends messages early on to a student, letting them know that if they are willing to work hard, they will likely find success.

Measurements of Psychosocial Development

Basic human development and behavior lays the foundation for better understanding psychosocial development. The components of psychosocial development specific to this study can be identified as: intrinsic motivation, non-cognitive skills, and resilience. College readiness testing today focuses on cognitive awareness and academic knowledge, where little to no consideration is given to this psychosocial development (Atkinson & Geiser, 2009). Better understanding the building blocks of psychosocial development in college readiness, and the impact that parent(s), students themselves, and the school have can help to develop these skills.
Salient to the students under investigation in this study, Levine (2006) uncovers a trend in which students who come from homes with high performing, successful parents show that some students experience pressures and stresses compounded by a lack of coping tools. Levine (2006) further finds that children from these homes tend to have parents who have both high expectations for their children, but are also more inclined to be emotionally unavailable. This unfortunate combination can lead to high numbers of students exhibiting emotional problems in high school (Tough, 2012). When connecting developmental theory to the realities of academic pressures, in conjunction with a student’s psychosocial skills, a hurricane of developmental and psychological implications may be at play.

Conley (2008) stated that this readiness is dependent upon key cognitive strategies, key content knowledge, academic behaviors, and contextual skills. These readiness factors, alongside key cognitive strategies, can optimize and better predict student success in college. Conley (2008) also states that to be successful in college, students should be prepared to use many different learning strategies and coping skills that are different from those needed in high school.

Similar to Conley (2007), Paul Tough (2012) wrote regarding the seven achievements psychologists suggest are predictors of college readiness in high school students. The suggested seven were: grit, self-control, zest, social intelligence, gratitude, optimism, and curiosity. The conceptual framework utilized in the study under investigation here borrows from Tough’s ideas regarding college readiness predictors to build the three facets that influence psychosocial readiness for college: (1) intrinsic
motivation, (2) non-cognitive skills, and (3) resilience. Refer to Figure 1.1 when referencing the conceptual framework.

**Intrinsic Motivation**

It is suggested that a child’s motivational orientation plays an important role in their perception of academic capability, and their notions regarding success and/or failure (Dweck & Elliot, 1983; Harter & Connell, 1984). Ames (1990) emphasizes that teachers pay attention to the impact that motivation plays on the development of a child. The distinction between extrinsic motivation and intrinsic motivation is that his/her reason for doing something is either accomplished because of external factors, such as a good grade or some form of praise, whereas the latter is to do with the satisfaction of a challenge and doing something because you enjoy it (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Gottfried, 1985). Challenging environments support autonomous behavior and can help to instill intrinsic motivation. Environments that are perceived by students to be more controlling and provide continuous rewards destabilize this motivational development (Deci & Ryan, 1980, 1985; Ginsburg & Bronstein, 1993). A study conducted by Ginsburg and Bronstein (1993) looked to evaluate the perceptions of parents, students, and teachers, regarding behaviors that would suggest varying motivational factors. The questions concerning parenting, students, and teacher perceptions were built upon research by Baumrind (1971), suggesting that parenting style is linked to behaviors associated with motivation. Students who are intrinsically motivated are more inclined to persist past failures or challenges, express higher levels of creativity, and have a greater sense of self (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Walker, Greene, & Mansell, 2005). Schools that encourage
meaningful cognitive engagement help to promote intrinsic motivation and include the development of self-regulating strategies (Greene & Miller, 1996; Walker et al., 2005).

**Non-Cognitive Skills**

Further, suggestions that there are other predictors indicating college readiness, such as the development of non-cognitive skills, is not quantified or calibrated traditionally (Atkinson & Geiser, 2009). In fact, of all three factors, non-cognitive skills are the least defined in literature. Independent high schools are known for advantageous learning environments, helping each student better identify their learning style, while working in a reassuring and rigorous school atmosphere. These valuable learning milieus are designed to better help prepare students for college. Most independent schools tend to have small class sizes, tailoring programming to specific students, and focusing on student development. Though these environments serve many important academic needs, often promoting the enrichment of cognitive engagement, referred to as the amount, and type of, strategies that learners employ (Walker et al., 2005), non-cognitive skill development should not be ignored.

**Extroversion and introversion.** Most of the listed non-cognitive skills are helpful in developing good study skills, follow through with group projects, and executive functioning processes that require organization.

Extroversion and introversion were first introduced into the lexicon of modern day psychology by C. G. Jung, where extroverts were more focused on the outer world and introverts on their own inner-mentality (Jung, 1921, 1971; Wilt & Revelle, 2008). Jung also suggested that hysteric disorders were associated with extroversion and mood disorders with introversion, and later these terms were viewed more as a measurement
along a spectrum, rather than a type of individual (Wilt & Revelle, 2008). Extroversion is typically associated with high motivation for status and social contact (Olson & Weber, 2004), and for both relationship and interdependence (King & Miles, 1995; Wilt & Revelle, 2008).

**Agreeableness.** Agreeableness has been found in association with positive emotional approaches in social situations and linked to self-regulation (Cumberland-Li, Eisenberg, & Reiser, 2004; Rothbart, Derryberry, & Posner, 1994). These positive approaches to social circumstances are also linked to resilience in regards to keeping to long-term goals (Duckworth & Eskreis-Winkler, 2013). Ultimately, agreeableness, along with extroversion and consciousness, have all been identified as key components of non-cognitive skills.

**Resilience**

The formalized definition of resilience is very rarely agreed upon, however, the general understanding of resilience is that it is associated with maintenance and/or regaining of mental health amidst adversity (Herrman, Stewart, Diaz-Grandos, Berger, Jackson, & Yuen, 2011). Herrman and associates (2011) suggest that resilience can be understood as three general factors: personal, biological, and environmental. Personal factors are impacted by, “intellectual functioning, cognitive flexibility, social attachment, positive self-concepts, emotional regulation, positive emotions, resourcefulness, and adaptability” (Herrman et al., 2011, p. 260). In addition, biological factors impacted by exposure to adverse circumstances can impact neurodevelopment in the brain and ultimately impact brain function (Cicchetti & Curtis, 2006; Curtis & Nelson, 2003; Herrman et al., 2011). Studies also show that cortisol, a hormone associated with
prolonged acute stress exposure, is inversely related to resilience. If a person has a high resilience, they tend to have lower cortisol levels than those with a low resilience (Cicchetti & Curtis, 2006; Curtis & Nelson, 2003; Herrman et al., 2011). In addition, environmental factors are associated with resilience. Children who have had secure relationships from a young age, who have experienced stability in their early lives and have been given access to a good community, are more often associated with high resiliency (Herrman et al., 2011; Luthar & Cicchetti, 2000). However, if our students are not exposed to adversity, they will likely lack the tools to fight when they are faced with adversity later in life (Tough, 2012).

When attempting to better understand the importance of resilience, the concept of grit and the work of Duckworth and her associates are at the epicenter of the conversation, explaining that resilience is typically associated with a positive response to adversity, and then explains further that resilience is a component of grit (as cited in Perkins-Gough, 2013). She further explains that grit is resilience over a prolonged period of time. In fact, that grit is a great indicator of success in academia, because it is a measure of the likelihood to persist past failure, and develop hard working or passionate approaches to issues because of a deep inner drive (Duckworth & Eskreis-Winkler, 2013; Perkins-Gough, 2013). In addition, self-control, once identified as a strong indicator of success, was found to be less of an indicator for success as grit (Perkins-Gough, 2013). Ultimately, resilience and grit are highly related concepts, and for the sake of this specific research, grit will be considered as synonymous with resilience in that it is a form of resiliency that occurs over long periods of time.
Environmental Roles Impacting Psychosocial Development

When assessing the people invested in the interactive process of college readiness at independent high schools, three roles stand above the rest: the student, the parents, and the school (Conley, 2007; Epstein, 2011). Though there are unique facets to a school’s expected learning results and the implementation of the overarching themes intrinsic motivation, non-cognitive skills, and resilience affect a student’s development, the rubber meets the proverbial road with these important constituencies.

Parents

Transitions are challenging for most people, but the process of transitioning to college from high school can be one of the most difficult (Erikson, 1950, 1968; Meyer, Licklider, & Wiersema, 2009). Research shows that emerging adulthood is a time for reinvention and reestablishment of parental roles (Crocetti et al., 2012). However, the styles of parenting can differ based on many factors, some of which are ethnicity, culture, religion, socioeconomic status, and day-to-day familial constraints. This specific generation of people in their early twenties is part of what is commonly referred to as the Millennial Generation. It might be suggested that parenting styles have shifted historically, and this generation of emerging adults have had most facets of their lives scheduled and organized by their parents. Intrinsic motivation is linked to an internal drive and success is typically driven for internal purposes, though this skill is thought to be something that can be honed and strengthened by external factors. It is identified that children who have an intrinsic motivation are more inclined to be successful in their transition to a four-year college. Parenting can impact an emerging adult’s ability to manage the difficult transitional time into college, or as Berman’s article explained, into a
career. For this reason, the role of the parent, when identifying successful transitions into college, cannot be ignored.

**Intrinsic motivational factors.** There is a suggested connection between parental behavior and the development of intrinsic motivational factors, though it is clear that there are other factors involved in the development of these facets of psychosocial development (Ginsburg & Bronstein, 1993). A growth mindset/ malleable (or incremental) theory is reinforced and established in a combination of multiple influences including the influence that every day parenting has on a child. Children who believe that they are only capable of what comes easily to them and that their intelligence is definitive of their capabilities, they have a closed mindset (Dweck, 2006). An open mindset is knowing that even though a skill or a subject matter is difficult, with enough practice, and persistence, they can achieve improved success and intelligence (Dweck, 2006). This mentality is linked strongly to the notion of resiliency and grit and has been suggested to be deeply influenced by language used in the home (Duckworth, 2012; Dweck, 2006; Yeager et al., 2013).

**Non-cognitive skills.** Glaser (2009), in his review of Damon’s (2008) recent work, identified that parents play a large role in the development of children’s locus of intention. Glaser (2009) suggests that parents need to listen closely for the spark within their students, and then fan the flames. He states that parents should take advantage of everyday opportunities to open a dialogue and introduce their children to potential mentors. In addition, he suggests that parents need to express their own sense of purpose and the meaning from work. Parents of students at independent schools are typically indicative of high socioeconomic groups, and have the luxury of being on career paths that are innovative and ones in which they find passion (Glaser, 2009). As parents allow their
children to explore their passions and continue to expose them to new and interesting facets of life, they not only create a dialogue about passion and purpose, they also develop a relationship with their child that values these skills (Damon, 2008).

**Resilience.** It has been suggested that parenting style is linked with children’s self-reliance and inquisitive behaviors (Baurmrind, 1967, 1971). Baurmrind specifically identified three styles of parenting: 1) the authoritarian who lacks in affection and support, 2) permissive, and 3) the authoritarian parent who enforces rules and encouraged individuality and communication (Ginsburg & Bronstein, 1993). Typology of parenting is challenging, as each individual parenting circumstance is unique, however correlative studies suggest that parents who encourage and support children’s autonomy see a greater success in self-initialed regulation academically (Grolnick & Ryan, 1989).

**Students**

It would be narrow-minded to suggest that factors outside of the student are the main contributors to student psychosocial development. When looking at the three factors of psychosocial development, theories regarding nature and nurture are brought into play. Theories regarding learning and development have disagreed upon the placement of developmental stages and learning for decades (Piaget, 1964; Vygotsky, 1978). Independent of opinion, it is clear that developmental stages and learning are linked, and that improving one can impact the other. Developmental theories suggest that environment heavily impacts the progression through developmental stages, and that learning is either a process within developmental stages, or can only occur once reaching specific benchmarks in development (Piaget, 1964; Vygotsky, 1978). Independent of
which processes impact the other, the development of personal identity will impact all psychosocial development.

**Intrinsic motivational factors.** Intrinsic motivation is defined as motivation that is driven by internal rewards. This can be encouraged and developed during adolescence, or it can be stunted and hindered (Ames, 1990). School psychologists suggest that motivational issues account for 25% of student referrals, and that intrinsic behavior helps students become more social. This ability to be independent and to connect with others helps in the transition to college (Froiland et al., 2012).

**Non-cognitive skills.** One explanation of non-cognitive skills is that they are not cognitive, like memory, attention, planning, language, and thinking skills. These skills include emotional maturity, empathy, interpersonal skills and verbal and non-verbal communication, and that these skills influence the overall behavior of a person. O’Connell and Sheikh (2010) suggest that non-cognitive abilities play an important role in the prediction of academic persistence. Conley (2008) identified such non-cognitive skills as self-awareness, self-control, and intentionality, and suggests that they play a significant role in college readiness. These skills are an important piece in the transition to emerging adulthood, and necessary when first attending college at a four-year university. They are also skills that are oftentimes considered to be engrained in an individual and developed beginning at a very influential and young stage of life.

**Resilience.** Dweck (2006) reminds parents that expanding knowledge and developing skills is an important goal to set, where as having an innate talent is not a goal. Resilience can further be described as internal or external, and is identified as being necessary for successfully transitioning into college. Students’ resilience can be
determined within their own instinctive perceptions of the world around them, and it can be encouraged by their environment, whether that encouragement is done through positive or negative reinforcement. The individual student will be impacted uniquely by the environment based on her own nature.

School

Schools play a large role in students’ lives, and should have a responsibility to help develop skills not limited to academia. The most successful ways in which students are impacted by psychosocial and other non-academic processes are when parents partner with the school. Epstein (2011) suggests steps that schools and parents should take to help build their relationship, positively impacting teachers at the schools, and ultimately helping the students. According to Epstein (2011) the first of these steps is to assess present strengths and weaknesses. By observing what processes are currently in place, and by assessing current roles of the families and the schools, we can better identify areas that are successful and areas that need improvement. Secondly, Epstein suggests that both the school and the families identify their hopes, dreams, and goals. Third, a committee should help identify who will have what responsibilities for reaching said goals. When looking at the factors that impact psychosocial development in emerging adults, it is clear that the school can heavily influence both the roles of the families as well as the development of the students. Epstein’s (2011) fourth step is to evaluate implementations and results, and her suggested fifth step is to continue to support programmatic development and activities at school sites.

Intrinsic motivational factors. When identifying important intrinsic motivational factors at school, it is important to identify that school-based research is a wide web of
influential people and systemic expectations that exist outside of the school itself (White & Duckworth, 2014). Carol Dweck (2006) encourages teachers to maintain an open mindset for their students. She states that lowering standards is not serving the students in the same way that setting high standards without suggested pathways to success is also detrimental to student development (Dweck, 2006). Developing intrinsic motivational factors in students can be accomplished by reminding teachers that the mission of educators is to develop the potential of our students (Dweck, 2006). In providing praise that emphasizes the process and hard work, teachers can help shift motivation toward process, rather than end product.

**Non-cognitive skills.** It is suggested that the important characteristics associated with success are acquired through experience, and have a larger impact on performance than initially considered (Ericsson, Krampe, & Tesch-Romer, 1993). Coyle refers to the 10,000 hours measure, and Hayes (1981) refers to ten years of experience as the agreed upon necessary timespan to be considered experienced in any domain of life. Erikson and colleagues (1993) characterize the process of deliberate practice as most effective in improving performance, and have flushed out the basic components of how best to achieve deliberate practice. Deliberate practice, or practice of any kind, is said to improve accuracy and cognition of tasks (Ericsson et al., 1993; Gibson, 1969; Welford, 1968). It is expected that the preexisting knowledge and motivational factors will have an impact on the development of this process at school, but that intrinsic motivation and increased effort will improve overall performance (Ericsson et al., 1993). Subjects should receive a brief period of instruction followed by immediate informative feedback as to the results of their performance, and that these tasks should be conducted repeatedly.
Schools should be able to adopt this formative approach to instruction, assessment, and feedback with students so as to encourage the development of non-cognitive skills and improved performance in all associated subject matter.

**Resilience.** Dweck suggests that schools have the capability of developing a language that encourages incremental trait beliefs regarding intelligence (Heyman & Dweck, 1998). A person who believes that they are only capable of what comes easily to them, that their intelligence is definitive of their capabilities, they have a closed mindset (Dweck, 2006). An open mindset is knowing that even though a skill or a subject matter is difficult, with enough practice, and persistence, they can achieve improved success and intelligence (Dweck, 2006). This mentality is linked strongly to the notion of resiliency and grit (Duckworth, 2012; Dweck, 2006; Yeager et al., 2013).

It is believed that by encouraging language that highlights the belief that such traits are malleable, students are more inclined to approach intelligence with an open mindset, and will likely exhibit a greater resilience and rigor in education (Blackwell, Trzesniewki, & Dweck, 2007; Heyman & Dweck, 1998; White & Duckworth, 2013).

The process of partnership with families and schools has no beginning and no end. Private college preparatory high schools often engage in conversations with the family, educational therapists, and tutors on a daily basis. The constant communication that is already in place at the research site can lend itself to the purpose of examining how the school and the family can partner to progress psychosocial development in the students, better preparing them for the difficult transition into college.

Research regarding successful transitions into college can be categorized differently. Fouad and Bynner (2008) identify two larger types of transitions a person
can experience in their lives, voluntary and involuntary. Some students who go to a four-year university feel unprepared or unwilling to leave their home, in which case they would consider the transition into college involuntary. This is particularly true in the case that their parents took on much of the application role, or in the event that students made a decision to attend a school they did not personally want to attend. The research at this site only included students who selected and willingly attended a four-year university following their independent Jewish day school experience. The study’s attention is focused on students who willingly go to a four-year university, but it is important to distinguish between the two types of methods. A voluntary transition is something you have had time to prepare for, and can make the necessary decisions regarding. Whereas an involuntary transition is sudden, where no one can prepare, like a death, or an unexpected firing. Though all student participants in the study stated that they selected their university by choice, a few did not feel prepared, and as a result, were unable to continue at their selected four-year universities.

One of the major concerns regarding college transitions is the event of a reverse transfer. Reverse transfers are students who were accepted into, and attended a four-year university away from home, and then decided to return. Research findings indicated that of the nine student participants, two did not complete their first year at a university, an additional student is planning to reverse transfer at the end of the year, and another plans to transfer to a smaller liberal arts college. More than half of the student participants in the study either thought of reverse transferring or left their respective universities by the end of their first year. To encourage students to not transfer out, colleges have researched ways in which they can better serve their first-year-student body. Parsons
(1992) identified extracurricular activities as a large factor of persistence rates in their freshmen students. This research is reinforced through the works of Larson and Hansen (2006) and Busseri et al. (2010), who identified the importance in the development of community and how these types of activity involvement may decline slightly during times of transitions. Specifically for students at the research site, much of their community has been developed and established for them, so seeking it out may be challenging. Though all students in the study stated that the community in which they were raised helped provide them a sense of self as they left for college, many students also stated that they were shocked at the difference of community when they moved away for the first time.

**College readiness**

Psychosocial readiness has been explained as it pertains to basic human development, as well as factors that define readiness. The roles that most contribute to psychosocial readiness for college have also been investigated; but what does college readiness actually mean? When attempting to identify best practices for college preparation the process of recognizing factors that are dependent on the student getting into the college as well as being successful once enrolled are essential. Assessment tools, like the SAT, and various standard applications are commonly used to gauge the potential of success at a university. These tools measuring cognitive skill levels fail to measure skills that are equally important to the success of university students’ non-cognitive skills (Wilkes, Brohawn, Mevs, & Lee, 2012). Students who enter colleges and soon after decide they would rather study closer to home, and reverse transfer to junior colleges, or
smaller colleges close to home, have always existed. However, it has become clear that these numbers differ when looking specifically at varying socioeconomic groups.

A college preparatory high school can help to encourage intrapersonal intelligence. Recently the United States has been making note of an interesting phenomenon, where upwards of 12 percent of students who achieve a degree from a public university do so from a university different from the one in which they initially began (Dunfar & Shapiro, 2013). The factors that lead to this national average include academic, financial, or social. Conley (2008) defines college readiness as, “the level of preparation a student needs in order to enroll and succeed, without remediation, in a credit-bearing general education course at a postsecondary institution that offers a baccalaureate degree or transfer to a baccalaureate program” (p. 4). Preparation for the psychosocial challenges that students will likely face has been studied at length in regards to developmental theory (Erikson 1950, 1968; Marcia, 1967; something contemporary here too please), however little research in regards to how specific high school processes has been identified as either positively or negatively impacting of these psychosocial factors.

In a six-year study by the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (2012) the national reverse transfer average to be 11 percent. High reverse transfer rates of more than double that of the national average raised concerns regarding psychosocial developmental processes at this particular independent school. Considering that one of the many aspects marking the legitimacy of private schools are based on their ability to prepare students for college, it is ponderous as to which circumstances would encourage this transfer process. The National Association of Independent Schools reports that AP
scores for independent schools are above the country’s average, suggesting that students are prepared academically for college following an independent secondary school education. Findings also showed that there are increasing rates of, “reverse transfer students, whereby students matriculate out of a four-year college and transfer to a two-year school” (Townsend, 1999, p. 1). These results highlight the gap between what we are assessing for college readiness and what is currently missed in said assessments.

College readiness is a topic that requires the meeting of two parties, the expectations and readiness of the student, and the expectations and measurement of readiness set by universities. One concern is that due to a lack of experience with self-discovery and questioning many student participants found the college selection process challenging. This seemingly simple recommendation can be one of the most frustrating components of the college application process, but also a great indicator of some of the main struggles emerging adults feel as they transition into college. Developing one’s own identity is a major component of emerging adulthood (Erikson, 1950), and much of this development has little to do with the type of formal education most people would typically think of in the classroom.

A study conducted by Guiffrida, in an unpublished dissertation, identified that students from rural communities who attend urban colleges and universities have a tendency to reverse-transfer, one of the largest reasons being a lack of community. In many ways, students from this study felt similarly, in that they were accustomed to the support of a large loving community, and when left at their four-year universities they were ill equipped to manage their life without said support. It is suggested that students developing a sense of belonging, a home base, is an essential component for many first
year university students. Students from rural communities typically have strong familial ties to their community, and similarly, students from private college preparatory high schools do as well.

National reverse-transfer rates are affecting students from private secondary schools in a unique way. The director of college guidance at the research site, in a suburban city along the southern west coast of the United States, revealed that, by the end of their first year, nearly 30 percent of the graduating class from the year 2012 had transferred out of the colleges they initially were accepted, and the same percentage of students in the current study left their universities.

Research suggests that 53 percent of students at four-year colleges took six years or more (Carey, 2004) to graduate. It became clearer that attrition rates in colleges were the focus of many researchers, in that a significant number of college students were not prepared to meet the challenges that they faced when they moved away from home. Identifying the gaps in this preparation has been challenging for researchers. It is expected that almost 20 percent of students who enter a four-year university need to remediate classes upon entering, indicating a deficit in their content knowledge (Complete College, 2013). For years, incidences of transfer and of the reverse-transfer of students among varying socioeconomic groups have been the focus of researchers, and it was found that both social and academic struggles contribute to reverse transfer students (Tinto, 1987). Research by Robbins, Allen, Casillas, Peterson, & Le, 2006, suggested a research gap in looking at the incremental effects of psychosocial factors while controlling for traditional predictors. Current traditional predictors today are GPA, standardized test scores, and high school ranking. There are many more applicants for
colleges than availability and it has been argued that some students are disadvantaged by their test scores (Jencks & Phillips, 1998; Sackett, Schmitt, Ellingson, & Kabin, 2001). American universities use the SAT or ACT to measure students’ ability to master college preparatory material and college readiness, however the test’s acumen has proven to fall short due to unforeseen biases such as socioeconomic factors (Geiser & Studley, 2002). Discrepancies in the gaps between student success on the standardized tests and success in a four-year college have been identified in a study done by Wilkes, Mevs, and Lee, (2012) which addressed the common problem that many students are attending college unprepared outside of the appropriate content knowledge. Conley (2008) argues that, college students should poses both a positive attitude and behaviors of study skills, time management, performance awareness, and persistence. Researchers have found that there is a deeper learning and psychosocial development required in order for students to be prepared for a four-year university (Larson, Hansen, & Moneta, 2006).

The purpose of this study was to better understand the processes an independent high school uses to psychosocially prepare their graduating seniors for the myriad of challenges they will face at four-year universities. Educational psychologists have long been concerned with the psychosocial development of students, specifically in regards to college readiness (Bean, 1980, 1985; Robbins et al., 2005, Robbins et al., 2006; Tinto, 1975, 1993). Noticing trends in reverse-transfer rates and the shortcomings of various standardized testing, questions concerning different modes of measurements for student academic and psychological readiness became pertinent (Le et al., 2005).
The Role of the Secondary School

Schools need to be able to identify and evaluate processes currently in place designed to promote psychosocial skill development in their students. By identifying current processes for students, their parent(s), and the school, best practices in building motivational factors, non-cognitive skills, and resilience can become clearer. Autonomy is a major component of the development of intrinsic motivation and an element of a successful transition to a four-year college (Hafen, Allen, Mikami, Gregory, Hamre, & Pianta, 2012). It is no surprise that adolescents crave autonomy, it is a necessary skill for the process of transitioning into a university (Hafen et al., 2012). It helps to aid in the development of intrinsic motivation, thereby developing a student’s personal identity. This aspect of development was found lacking in many of the student participants in the study. A strong personal identity, and the development of one’s identity, is one of the major goals in adolescence (Erikson, 1960). The ways in which a high school staff provide opportunities for personal identity to form can lend to furthering this development. Shearer (2009) suggests that a strong intrapersonal intelligence, or knowing yourself, can help to ease a person through life transitions. Though Shearer (2009) focused on the transition from college to career, many of the challenges that a person faces as they enter college can be compared to those when they leave. Ultimately, developing these facets in a student’s psychosocial toolkit will help improve their chances of transitioning into college with greater success.

Summary

Psychosocial skills can be developed and honed to better prepare students for the transition into college. Specifically, parents, the school, and students impact the intrinsic
motivation, non-cognitive skills, and resiliency in students. Through a deep understanding of the components that make up psychosocial development, and by further understanding the intrinsic role that parent(s), students, and the school play in the process of psychosocial development, it is possible to identify best practice and propose a more formalized protocol for psychosocial development and assessments as a measure for college readiness nationally. Previous research has suggested that understanding the students’ perspectives will provide a great insight into the processes they experience (Ames, 1990), and being able to juxtapose those insights with that of parents and the school help to paint an even more vivid image of the whole student (Suckart & Glanz, 2010); the research under investigation here offers some insights to those best practices as well as the parental perspective and suggests that students should be given the opportunity to develop and practice the three facets of psychosocial development through the recommendations that will be offered in chapter five.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological case study was to examine the processes that promote college readiness at an independent Jewish secondary school. This study made it possible to generate a more fully formed concept of best practices that can be applied at any independent, college-preparatory high school purposefully strengthening three elements of psychosocial college readiness in high school students. The three elements under investigation in this study are: (1) intrinsic motivational factors, (2) non-cognitive skills, and (3) resilience.

Research questions

This study examines the following questions:

1. How are students psychosocially prepared to transition to college?

2. In what ways do the roles of the school, parent(s), and the individual student impact the psychosocial developmental opportunities of college readiness?

Chapter organization

The methodology of the research focuses on a single instrumental case study where the research is bound by the one case and concentrates on a transferrable issue or concern (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). A purposeful sampling of student participants was selected. In addition, three administrative faculty were selected to be in a focus group and provided insight into perceptions of student college readiness. Nine students were interviewed and surveyed two times (in the summer prior to their attending university and in the winter following their first semester), two parent focus groups were led twice (in
the summer prior to their child attending university and in the winter following their child’s first semester), and one focus group with three school administrative staff.

Document review from student questionnaires given by college guidance at the site were analyzed as well as extant data following student attrition rates at four-year universities over the past five years. Data analysis procedures and triangulation of interviews and document review will be subsequently explained (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). Thematic structuring of field notes and survey comments were cross-referenced with extant data to shed light onto process and procedure that could better serve the student population at this particular site.

The role of the researcher will be further explained alongside ethical considerations, issues of trustworthiness, and limitations of the study. As a teacher at the site of the study, my deep understanding of the culture and community was both a help and hindrance as I constantly strove to maintain consistent awareness of all biases.

Research Design and Tradition

Research design

This research was conducted as a phenomenological case study. This bounded system was delineated by the fact that I am the only person conducting interviews, focus groups, and extant data review. The study focused on one purposeful sample of students between their final semester as seniors and the end of their first semester in college. In addition, this case study was particularistic in that it focused on a specific phenomenon of students who reverse transferred from their four-year universities back home to two-year colleges (Merriam, 2009; Hossler et al., 2012), though not all student participants reverse
transferred while participating in the study, two did, and two more transferred to different schools.

This study is descriptive in nature, consisting of 16 student interviews (two different interviews with eight students), two focus groups with parents of student participants (consisting of both mothers and fathers), a focus group with three administrative faculty, document analysis of a school-created junior surveys, and extant data analysis of college guidance documents, painting a descriptive picture of the college readiness process (Merriam, 2009). Lastly, this case study is heuristic in that it supports and enhances our understanding of this particular phenomenon (Merriam, 2009).

Research Tradition

This study utilized phenomenology, hoping to develop a better understanding of current processes in place, grounded in data and regarding the process of psychosocial college readiness (Glesne, 2011). The results helped to develop a theory regarding school processes, ultimately leading to better student psychosocial development for college. This bounded system was defined by the fact that I conducted interviews, focus groups, surveys, and document review. In addition, the research meets many of the defining components of phenomenological research in that the central focus of the research was to better understand a particular experience and that the collection of data was largely based on the individuals involved in that experience (Creswell, 2013). This theoretical framework is based on the work of Conley (2007), in that multiple factors of student, parent, and school influence student success. In addition, coding categories and theoretical models were developed and compared to existing theoretical models of Conley (2008) (Creswell, 2013). The study focused on one purposeful sample of
students between their final semester as seniors and into their first semester in college, as well as develops a more holistic understanding of the student by interviewing parents and administrators in focus groups.

Connection to Purpose and Questions

The research questions were focused on the process of student readiness; phenomenology lends itself to studying this particular orienting concept. In addition, I wanted to observe the human interaction that either impedes or supports this process. Through observations, focus groups, surveys, and document review from a college guidance survey, the collected data helped to identify best practice for psychosocial college preparation. The importance of creating opportunities for students to recognize that psychosocial skills are paramount to their success in college, and that through communicating with parents and students, the school will be better able to develop successful programming to enable practice and internalization of these skills.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences of students involved in the current processes in place at an independent secondary school and identify best practices to better prepare students for the psychosocial challenges they faced during their first semester at a four-year college. This phenomenological case study encourages an approach that unveiled data suggesting a general processes to put into practice at an independent secondary school. Given this tradition, coding and data analysis will help encourage this process.

Research Setting and Context

Data for this study was collected from an independent Jewish secondary school in a suburb of a large city in the western United States. Imagined and created with the
leadership of the current head of school 13 years ago, this site is one of the fastest growing independent Jewish schools today. As with all independent schools, a founding board participated in the raising of initial funds, and recently, the current board has helped to purchase and renovate the current site. This new site was purchased with the hopes of being an outward expression of the school’s accomplishments academically and aspirations for future growth. Currently, the school has 355 students and 60 teaching faculty. The school currently has two college guidance counselors on site that have been developing a four-year program for students and parents, helping to transition students to colleges that are a best fit. Many of the developmental factors identified in chapter two are taken into consideration when college guidance develops their plan for the students. In addition, their plans to improve school-family communication is in line with the findings of this case study.

The site is a college preparatory independent school and boasts about the number of alumni currently at hundreds of universities nationwide. However, for specific marketing purposes, this particular site, along with others like it, does not provide information regarding the number of graduates who do not complete their degrees at the universities at which they initially enrolled as freshmen. Only recently has this particular site begun to brainstorm ideas of how to track and study this phenomenon of reverse transfer students. This reverse transfer rate is a national occurrence, of approximately 14 percent (Yang, 2006), but it appears that the numbers at this site are more than double the national average.

The purpose of this study was to examine and identify processes that benefit or hinder the development of student psychosocial growth. I selected this specific site as a
representative of criterion-based sampling, where individuals in the study have all experienced the same phenomenon, the independent secondary school they attended (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). This form of sampling, coupled with theoretical sampling, helped to represent a larger phenomenon experienced by this group of people in the United States (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). This school, and the psychosocial developmental patterns that exist within it, is indicative of the hundreds of independent secondary schools in the U. S., catering to elite socio economic groups, and the children who will likely be given access to power in a multitude of ways in generations to come. Because the student population at these sites represents students who have access to opportunities for academic and societal success, it is the responsibility of these institutions to prepare them for emerging adulthood; to understand with what and why they may struggle while away at college. This knowledge can be evaluated and applied to better serve the population at the research site, as well as private schools across the United States.

**Ethnographic Research Variables**

As a teacher at the research site for the past seven years, I have developed a trusting and reciprocal relationship with the principal. The head of school was a professor in my master’s program, and he, too, has become someone from whom I learn and admire. Both of these people are the true gatekeepers at my site. They have relationships with the board, faculty, and with families that allow me access to the resources necessary to conduct this research. In addition, I have developed a relationship with the director of college guidance, and she is both supportive of, and enthusiastic about, benefitting from the research, results, and potential recommendations provided by
this study. In addition, the dean of the senior class helped to provide insight and knowledge regarding student participants and their families that may otherwise be missing from the data. The principal, twelfth grade dean, and director of college guidance comprised the administrative focus group which helped lead to the selection of student participants in the study.

Continuing to develop and maintain the relationships at my site is critical to both my research and my quality of life at work. I spoke with both the principal, twelfth grade dean, and director of college guidance concerning the varying hats I intended to wear during the process and reinforced the confidentiality that will protect the school’s reputation throughout the process (Glesne, 2011). Ultimately, I reminded all participants that this research is for the benefit of the school and discovering ways in which it can best serve our students. Independent schools have a unique ability to communicate with families in a personal and influential way. Having access to student records, college reports, and family interviews was based on the trust that I have developed with all participants and administrative faculty over the past seven years.

Access to student information and documentation was necessary, and was entrusted to me because of purposeful transparency throughout this research and the communicative feedback from both the principal and the director of college guidance. It was essential that all participants were aware of the potential benefit this research could provide. Maintaining this positive and trusting relationship was essential throughout the research process. I needed to ensure that interviews were unbiased and participants were honest, and was wary of the sensitivity of the topic and approached the representation of data and themes in a manner that is authentic, respectful, and rooted in data.
Data Sources and Research Sample

Data Sources

The purpose of this study was to better understand the processes in which schools and families encourage student psychosocial development to help prepare them for the challenges they face at a four-year university. I included nine students, at least one parent of each of the students, three administrative faculty, a student grit survey given to student participants at the beginning and end of the research, and a document review of student surveys distributed by college guidance as my data sources. I collected data from student interviews, family focus groups, and a focus group with the administrators who directly and indirectly impact the college readiness process on site. In addition to digital recorders, interview transcripts, and student demographics, I kept a journal documenting the process.

Sampling Strategy

I used two sampling strategies to identify and recruit all participants at my site. First, the criterion strategy, where the cases of participants meet my specific criteria (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In this case, the specific criterion is that all of the participants are at one location, and have a shared experience regarding the school’s mission and vision. The one exceptions is that they dean of the twelfth grade has only worked with the graduating class for two years, but he knew them and their families very well. The case study research tradition was complemented by criterion strategy, in that it was a bound system within one school site. Secondly, I used a stratified purposeful sample, which highlighted specific sub-groups of graduating seniors, and allowed for comparisons to be made among the student participants and families (Miles & Huberman,
1994). The subgroups were based on suggestions of predicted successful collegiate transitions by the administrative focus group. These predictions were based on academic grade point average, as well as taking into consideration commentary regarding psychosocial development as observed by the principal, twelfth grade dean, and director of college guidance. I selected four female and five male students (see table 3.1 below). Within each gender selection two students were identified as having performed exceptionally well in their four years at the independent secondary school with the anticipation of a successful collegiate transition, and two students who are considered to be lower performing and likely to struggle with their transitions into college. The additional fifth male student was selected because two of the male students ended up attending the same university, and to keep in line with the differing universities attended by other students, it seemed necessary to select an additional male student who was attending a different university. Ninety percent of students attend universities in the fall following graduation. The remaining percent attend gap-year programs and/or join the military or Israeli Defense Force. Phenomenological tradition is devised to identify best practices within a specific group of individuals, and by diversifying my purposeful sample of nine students and comparing some of the document review to the entire class, I was able to further imply the impact the school processes currently have in place (Glesne, 2002).
Table 3.1: Student Participants:
Suggested for Study by Administration Focus Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Female Students</th>
<th>Male Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expected to be successful in their transition</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to a four-year university of choice</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected to be challenged in their transition</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to a four-year university of choice</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The process of accessing the sample of participants was hinged on the approval of the head of school and principal. After meeting with both of them independently and explaining the purpose of this research: analyzing the current processes at the site dedicated to psychosocial development for college readiness, I was given approval. I emphasized the importance of identity protection for both the school and participants, letting them know that I was aware of the potential political pitfalls, and sought to avoid these pitfalls with their help. After meeting with the principal, twelfth grade dean, and director of college guidance to help purposefully select students from the current senior class, recruitment of student participants consisted of emails to students, followed by emails and phone calls to their families upon student acceptance. I also approached families and students during school sponsored events, such as sporting events, or a school gala.

In this specific study multiple sources were used to address the three constituencies evoked by Conley (2008) and used as a conceptual framing of psychosocial development: the students, the parents of the students, and three select
school representatives (the principal, the director of college guidance, and the dean of the twelfth grade). Specific sampling strategies were taken into consideration in choosing these specific participants.

**Students.** The students within my study were all attendants of one particular site, were graduating seniors, and already accepted into different four-year universities. These participants all experienced the same school procedures and development process and differ primarily in individual academic capacity, personality, and family structure. Having the school site as a common denominator proposes that these students are all under the same criterion (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). I selected five male and four female students; within these categories, selected students were indicative of both high and lower academic success and were predicted for varying reasons by administrative staff as to whether or not they would smoothly transition into their four-year colleges. The reasons for administration concern varied from study habits, family structure, and emotional stability of the student.

**Parents.** In student selection, family dynamics were taken into account, as the home environment is identifiably influential in psychosocial development. They highlighted distinct differences that could then be compared and allowed me to identify benefits or deficits to particular components of psychosocial readiness. The agreed upon participation of at least one parent, but preferably two parents, was ultimately the deciding factor in the inclusion of the student’s participation in the study.

**School.** The representatives who were involved in providing insight into the role of the school were the principal, the director of college guidance, and the dean of the twelfth grade. Each of these participants was approached in person and via email, and
agreed to participate in a focus group to identify student participants, best practices at the research site as well has areas where practice could be improved upon.

**Sample Characteristics**

The sample of students consisted of four girls and five boys, each were 18 years of age at the start of data collection. I intended to purposefully select two students from each gender that were high academically achieving, and two that are lower academically. The process of selecting participants occurred prior to one of the male students committing to a university, whereas he selected a site that another participant was already committed to. In response, I returned to the initial list of suggested students and included an additional male participant. The families that were interviewed in focus groups were split up by suggested success and/or failure transitioning to college, and distinctions were made regarding if this was their first child going to college. The administrators who were interviewed included the principal, the grade level dean, and the director of college guidance. Though all three had diverse roles, their perspectives helped to construct a more comprehensive understanding of the readiness process as a whole. These administrators impacted the programmatic dialogue at the research site and held an important role in developing school culture, where faculty were encouraged to value both the academic and psychosocial development of the school. In addition to administrative responsibilities, all administration, except for college guidance, also function as classroom teachers. The important functional role that the school played in encouraging psychosocial development of students was an identified factor in overall college readiness (Conley, 2007).
**Ethical Issues**

The transition into college can be traumatizing for both the student and the family; being allowed into their personal lives during the tumultuous time was not be taken lightly. To put all participants more at ease, I provided them with an agreement that explained the purpose of the study, ensured their anonymity and the use of pseudonyms, and offered them an opportunity to withdraw at any moment during the study. I personally explained the potential significance of the study, and continuously communicated with them throughout the research process. The participants selected have known me in one capacity or another at the school site, and it was important that I distinguished my new role as a researcher in their lives.

Prior to actively seeking participants, I had to receive approval for my study through the Institutional Review Board (IRB) helped to ensure the safety, honesty, and transparency of my research process and participants. In addition, IRB requirements and suggestions regarding participant anonymity, storage of information in a locked and safe location, and the destruction of their documents five years after the study helped to further ensure the protection of privacy throughout the process.

**Instruments**

**Interview Protocol**

I conducted semi-structured interviews to collect data about the thoughts and ideas of students who experienced the process of college preparation through the same lens. The goal was to look both broadly and deeply understand the processes in which students at this site felt prepared and/or unprepared for the psychosocial challenges they faced in a four-year university. The semi-structured interviews not only provided
answers to questions addressing this psychosocial readiness, but also additional information that the students felt compelled to share (Glesne, 2011). Questions were derived from the main research questions and guided by the literature where the three elements of psychosocial readiness were defined as intrinsic motivation, non-cognitive skills, and resiliency (Rossman & Rallis, 2012).

**Focus Group Protocols**

I conducted two separate focus groups with the families of the students. One set of parents were those of students who were identified as potentially struggling with their college transitions (four students), and the other, parents of students who were identified as likely to succeed in their transition to college (five students). It was imperative to have both male and female students in each sub-group to better help clarify any gender-based concerns of successes or failures, as often times families develop different expectations for their students based on gender (Tinklin, Croxford, Ducklin, & Frame, 2005). In addition, it was to the benefit of the groups’ comfort to connect with the fact that they all have children, whether sons and/or daughters away for the first time in college. Each focus group met twice in the time span of six months, and in that time expressed gratitude for the opportunity to communicate their concerns and challenges with other parents sharing in the same experiences. Their first meeting was in the summer following their child’s senior year in high school. The second meeting was in the winter, following their child’s experience during their first semester of college. Though Glesne (2011) suggests that focus groups do not allow for confidential and free conversation in the way that a semi-structured interview does, it does encourage a more diverse communication that might shed light on issues that I, as the researcher, failed to consider.
As with the students, the questions for the focus group addressed the psychosocial factors under investigation: motivational factors, non-cognitive skills, and resilience. They were the types of questions that encouraged dialogue amongst the parents (Glesne, 2011). These focus group interviews shed light on common feelings and opinions regarding students’ high school experience, helping to define the culture of families who send their children to this site. It also led me to narrow my focus slightly for the second round of student interviews. Having the perspective of both the parents and students on the psychosocial developmental process prior to the students’ attendance of college shed light on what is being done currently and what could be done differently in the future.

**Student Survey**

All student participants took the Grit Survey developed by the Duckworth Labs at the University of Pennsylvania. The surveys are suggested to be a good indicator of a student’s grit level. The two surveys measured perceived grit were compared and contrasted, and some patterns of changes in grit perceptions were highlighted in the results. Grit can be understood as the ability to persist past failures and the willingness to set long-term goals, and meet them. This is a necessary psychosocial skill, and considered to be the equivalent to resiliency for the purpose of this research. The students took the grit/resiliency survey after their first interview in the summer following their senior year in high school, and again after their interview in the fall of their freshman year in college. Angela Duckworth and her team of researchers expect that a change in scenery will impact their grit score, and likely impact their own perceptions of personal capabilities was proven to be true.
**Document Review**

Documents containing student surveys from the participants were reviewed by the researcher. The college guidance office gives these surveys to the students at the end of their junior year, and reviewed them to get insight into the ways in which the school can better support the students during the college application process. I focused on three of the survey questions that are indicative of the three facets of psychosocial development: (1) intrinsic motivation, (2) non-cognitive skills, and (3) resiliency and found that the questions of self-perception to be telling regarding students’ self-awareness. This highlighted an issue regarding practice of a specific skill explained in the results of this dissertation.

These surveys were collected and analyzed after the second round of interviews and focus groups. This data was then used to compare and contrast information collected during student interviews. All digital documents were scanned and stored on a password protected computer for further analysis. They were organized by encoded participant numbers, so as to access specific notes of students more efficiently.

**Data Collection Procedures**

I utilized interviews, focus groups, student surveys, and document review research to help better understand the dynamic processes that occur at an independent high school relating to the preparation of psychosocial readiness. This process was done in conjunction with parents of students, as their role has been identified as an integral piece to psychosocial development. In addition, students and school administrators were interviewed, as they too play an important role in the development of psychosocial skills. Their believed perceptions of the current processes, as well as a retrospective look at the
ways students felt prepared after graduation provided insight to the efficacy of processes currently in place. Data collection spanned several months, beginning in the spring of the students’ senior year of high school and extending into the fall of their first year in college. This allowed for interpretation of the preparation process while still in high school, followed by a retrospective analysis of how the preparation was or was not helpful in their transition to college.

**Student Interviews**

Each student participant was interviewed twice, once in the end of his/her spring semester of high school or during their summer before attending college, and once in the end of his/her first semester of freshman year at a four-year college. Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes and was semi-structured so as to allow for freer conversation, encouraging a deeper discussion and understanding of the experiences the participants were having (Glesne, 2011). Interviews were audio-recorded and conducted mostly at coffee shops outside of the school setting to help separate my role as the researcher from my responsibilities as an educator at the site. The interviews conducted in the spring of their senior year in high school (or summer following that year) were conducted at a site off campus, where the students felt comfortable to be candid with the interviewer. However, some students stated that they felt comfortable to meet at the school after hours, and so they did. Working independently with student schedules, I was sure to set aside time for their interviews after school. Food and beverage was brought in for the meetings, and a table and chairs was set up in a manner that encouraged close conversation. Interviews conducted in the first semester of their freshman year in college were conducted in the same fashion. The interview questions were designed to
specifically address the research questions of the study, and were subsequently followed by probing questions to help further understand the participants’ experiences, allowing to better understand processes currently in place. Questions were not provided for students in advance of the interview. No observations were conducted during the study, therefore all coding and thematic analysis of the data were dependent upon interviews, focus groups, and document review to better identify the experiences of the participants (Rossman & Rallis, 2012).

**Parent Focus Groups**

Each student participant had at least one parent who had also agreed to participate in the study. These parents provided insight into the perspective of how outside sources, coupled with the school itself, impacted psychosocial development and college readiness. Being able to hear and understand their experiences offered a broader perspective of the entire readiness process both inside the school and outside. Each focus group consisted of approximately four-to-six parents and lasted between 60-90 minutes. These meetings took place at the school in a large meeting space in the evening, so as to encourage more participation. Group emails using a program known as meeting wizard, were sent to the two groups of parents with potential meeting times within the coming month, and the day that worked best for every participant was scheduled. Food and beverage were brought and all participants were seated around a table. Seeing as there were nine student participants, there were two separate focus groups of parents, consisting of parents of students who were identified by administrative faculty as likely to be successful in their transition to college and students who were identified as likely to struggle in their transition to college. Prior to organizing the groups, I consulted with both the director of
college guidance and the principal of the school to better understand the social dynamics of the home environments of the participants. This prior insight allowed me to be sensitive to any issues that may be brought up in discussion. Each group met twice: once before their child went off to a university, and a second time, once their child had been gone approximately three months, or the entirety of their first semester in college.

Prior to beginning the focus group, I reviewed the adult informed consent and participant confidentiality, so as to help encourage the development of a safe environment where participants feel they can speak freely and with candor. I had the focus groups’ video recorded from an advantageous angle so as to see all facial expressions and non-verbal cues. While interviewing in the focus group, I took brief notes, so that I could be engaged, attentive and aware throughout the focus group. I reviewed the tapes when transcribing and cross-referenced the additional observer’s notes in the process.

**Document Data Collection**

I collected surveys that were conducted through the college guidance office. These surveys are extensive, and therefore I selected only three questions to review. The three selected questions were believed to be the best indicators of the three facets of psychosocial development: (1) intrinsic motivation, (2) non-cognitive skills, and (3) resiliency, narrowing the focus of the questions and allowing me to identify themes that appear common in the grade, and cross-referencing themes that have appeared in interview and focus group transcripts. Prior to obtaining these documents, I asked for permission from the principal to ensure that all identities will be protected and no participant will ever be able to directly be identified in the study. This survey asked
students to be reflective of their college preparation process prior to leaving home and attending a university.

The data collection for this study began to take place in the spring of 2014 and was collected, for the last time, in the winter of the same year. Prior to any of this data collection, final approval was received from the California State University, Northridge Office of Research and Sponsored Projects, and both the principal and head of the research site, in the spring of 2014. A research journal was kept throughout the data collection process to help provide better commentary and transparency throughout the process (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). In addition, member checks were conducted following each interview and focus groups to help encourage a deeper dialogue with participants, keeping communication lines open, and encouraging an introspective analysis of data for both me and the participants.

**Data Analysis**

Qualitative data analysis challenges us to make sense of copious amounts of information by reducing it down to its clearest form and identifying its most significant components (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). Analysis encourages the search for themes or trends that shed light on the current processes, and, hopefully, also shed light on the problem. Merriam (2009) suggests that this analysis and collection process should occur simultaneously so as not to overwhelm with data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). This specific phenomenological case study was analyzed in the following manner: immersion within the data where I wrote and reviewed all transcripts of interviews and focus groups, analysis of the data by organizing chunks, and interpretation of the data (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). More specifically, being that this is a case study, thematic development of
Data was collected, coded, and organized into themes that were pulled from a conceptual framework. The conceptual framework for this study is a rendition of Conley (2008) in that it explores three suggested factors influencing psychosocial readiness in emerging adults: intrinsic motivational factors, non-cognitive skills, and resilience. In addition, the impact of schools, student, and parent(s) influence this development were identified. Participant interviews, focus groups, surveys, and document review were the primary source of data collection for this study and were coupled with multiple member checks, researcher memos, and additional observer feedback (Rossman & Rallis, 2012).

**Preliminary Data Analysis**

Because much of this data was collected and transcribed by the researcher, it is a moral obligation of the researcher to maintain transparency in the effort to uphold trustworthiness throughout the data collection and analysis process (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). The first step in data analysis was to organize the data as it was being collected, incorporate any field notes, appropriately label all transcriptions, documents, and artifacts. I hired a transcription agency to transcribe all interviews, and following those transcriptions, I read and re-read the transcriptions, familiarizing myself with the material. Being able to review all of the data and documents before grouping them into individual thematic evidence allowed me to gain a better sense of the overall emerging themes and how they tie into the conceptual framework (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012).

I used a transcription service to transcribe the focus group interviews. When transcribing participant interviews and focus groups, I took into consideration non-verbal
communication that could impact the interpretation of the data, and I included observer comments. This transcription process took place almost immediately following the interview so as to help recollect the more nuanced components of the conversation (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). I then listened to the digitally-recorded interview and double checked that I had not missed any major pieces. I discussed the overall purpose of the interviews with the transcription service prior to outsourcing my focus group interviews. The protocol being that of a transcriber and an observer, taking into consideration facial expression and body language, and I encouraged the transcriber to include observations in margins that they observed in the video of the focus group. In addition, I reviewed all transcriptions completed by the service and interjected my own observer comments. I used random digit identifiers to de-identify transcripts and will personally remove any identifying information form the transcripts.

**Thematic Data Analysis**

Data analysis is both an inductive and deductive reasoning process, and early definitions of a conceptual framework can help to focus the analysis of the data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). This pre-structured thematic approach to analysis helped continuous reflection and continuity, linking main research questions and problems to the themes being supported throughout the raw data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Rossman & Rallis, 2012).

The first step in this process was to thoroughly understand the conceptual framework driven and supported by the literature. Having the major themes stem from this framework allowed a functioning outline to develop. The second step was to immerse oneself in the data, reading and re-reading the transcripts (Rossman & Rallis,
2012). I coded terms within the text, and as patterns begin to emerge, continuous reference to the conceptual framework ensured that the data was linked to literature (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). I used a case study approach to data collection; therefore, there was a need to emphasize an understanding of the community in which the transcripts were taken, and how they might be interpreted differently because of the unique identity of the community.

I used a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis program, Dedoose, to aid my sorting and evaluation of codes and data. In addition, the program helped to organize any additional codes or commentary I had as the iterative process of data analysis happens in real time. Being able to go back to retrieve this information and categorize it as I best see fit helped to synthesize the information.

This study helps to better understand the impacts external forces have on the three factors necessary for psychosocial development in emerging adults: motivational factors, non-cognitive skills, and resilience. Further, it aids in obtaining a deeper understanding of the best practices regarding school programming as well as school engagement with parents to encourage student development and better prepare them for the challenges they face at a four-year university. Through interviews with students, focus groups of families, and document review of exit surveys, I am hopeful that the data will shed light onto the current process at a private high school.

Roles of the Researcher

I embodied multiple roles as I conducted my studies: as a researcher, as an educational professional, and teacher at the site in which I was researching, and as an advocate for student psychosocial development throughout the college readiness process.
My experiences throughout my teaching career have revealed specific characteristics of school roles, family and student values, and community expectations that I both value and question as both a researcher and an independent high school teacher.

**Researcher Bias**

As a student who grew up in a financially struggling household, I was not afforded the many luxuries and experiences of the students whom I teach today. Both of my parents worked full time jobs, struggling to make ends meet, and most of my afternoons and evenings were spent at the on-site YMCA or in after-school programming. My student participants have been scheduled with dance classes, piano practice, athletics, tutors (subject specific, homework, and organizational), educational therapists, and the list goes on. As a teacher and mentor for many of my students, I become close to their families and have witnessed their passage through high school. I have had my own interpretations of how they have been parented, and have heard in passing conversations with teachers about the difficulties with specific students and/or parents. These expectations had the potential of persuading my interpretation of the data, which I mitigated by doing member checks with all participant groups.

**Participant Reactivity**

It is necessary to understand ways in which my bias could impact my research. One particular necessary piece to identify when seeking to avoid bias was the exclusion of any children of faculty. In addition, I also needed to select subjects who were more impartial to me as a teacher. Over the years I have developed close relationships with specific students and their families, so I only included students who did not have me as
their teacher so as to avoid their desire to give answers that they think I would have wanted to hear.

To help ensure the transparency and clarity of my data collected, I had my interview protocol peer-reviewed (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). In addition, I conducted interviews off campus and at neutral locations and I aimed to avoid seeming like a teacher in those moments. While conducting interviews with both students and parents, I also obviated any and all inflection and ensured that facial expressions remained neutral.

**Effects on the Researcher**

It was critical that I was transparent with my subjects and my school’s principal, who was on my advisory committee, throughout this process. In the event that I came across data that reflected poorly upon current school procedures, it was essential that all results were solidly rooted in data, so as to avoid suggestions of bias. Though I am a leader at the school, I was not officially an administrator during the time of data collection; and this helped me fly under the proverbial radar for much of my research.

I triangulated data from interviews with students, focus groups with parents, student surveys, and extant data, while coding and verified common themes that presented themselves (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). I was able, through this research, to identify processes currently in place that are encouraging psychosocial student development. Through the lens of parents, school administration, and primarily student perceptions, I identified specific areas that are supported or in need of having more support and/or change in the programmatic psychosocial development at the site. It is imperative that the impact of psychosocial skill development not be ignored in the
college readiness process, and that schools will likely better serve their students by encouraging the development of intrinsic motivation, non-cognitive skills, and resiliency.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological case study was to better understand the processes in place at an independent secondary school. It has been identified that psychosocial development preparation is essential to college readiness, and that in addition to cognitive preparation and a focus on academic achievement, secondary schools should be designed to psychosocially prepare students for the various challenges they face as they transition into their subsequent four-year university and into emerging adulthood. The following questions are explored: (1) How are students psychosocially prepared to transition to college? and (2) In what ways do the roles of the school, parent(s), and the individual student, impact the psychosocial developmental opportunities of college readiness? These questions provide insight into the personal experiences of each student participant, and helped me to better understand the aspects that could be improved upon in their high school process. Data sets include student interviews, parent focus groups, an administrative focus group, document review, and an eight-point grit survey.

This chapter discusses key findings from eighteen student interviews, four parent focus groups, and one focus group of school administrators. More specifically, this study examined how three facets of psychosocial skills are developed during formative years at an independent secondary school: (1) intrinsic motivational factors, (2) non-cognitive skills, and (3) resilience, following the experiences of nine graduates, and their families, as they shared in their trials and successes during the first semester of their first year at a
four-year university. When looking at intrinsic motivation, three common themes emerged through the data: knowing yourself, student perceptions, and college guidance. In addition, data suggested that the second facet, non-cognitive skills, was heavily influenced by student time management and skill development. Lastly, the facet of resilience was strengthened through the notions of perceptions of resilience without practice, perceptions of grit in grit surveys, academic resilience, Jewish identity, and socioeconomic status. This chapter seeks to uncover these themes through data collected and ascertain the value of the three facets.

To maintain confidentiality, pseudonyms were used for all participants and institutions. I introduce student participants through descriptions of their background, personal, and school anecdotal experiences. Through thematic categorization, I then reviewed results derived from the data.

Though the student participants went to varying four-year colleges and had unique experiences at each, all student participants attended the same independent secondary school, and were provided similar opportunities in preparation for their transitions to four-year universities. It is important to restate the unique community from which all participants in the study originated. All students are Jewish, and were raised in communities on the southern west coast that had large Jewish populations. Student participants experienced some challenges in re-examining their own identities away from their supportive (and Jewish) communities while away for the first time. All students were given access to the same college guidance counseling office at the school site, as well as access to the community of faculty that worked to support their development.
Independent schools have a unique opportunity, in that they are held accountable by their students and families on a daily basis through constant communication and necessary retention of their families. Often, the notion of customer service is discussed negatively, assuming it requires compromising educational expectations; rather this study discovered that it is an opportunity to improve communication and dialogue with students and families who choose to send students and pay high tuition fees. This aspect of customer service affords independent schools a unique opportunity to work with families more closely than schools may otherwise; and families tend to be more involved self-selecting an independent school choice. The pool of student participants and their families ranged along the spectrum of socioeconomic success, though all students came from families that valued a Jewish, independent school education.

**Participant Profiles**

Individual student profiles provide a perspective expressing some of the unique qualities of each participant, providing a more robust understanding of their unique circumstances that both connect and individualize them. As their teacher and faculty member, I have had unique opportunities to know them and their families. Information was gathered during interviews, but a more holistic view was captured over the course of four years of class trips and school programs where we were able to interact.

The participants selected were a part of a group identified by administration who shared their perceptions of whether or not they would be able to successfully transition into college. Their considerations drove the organization of the focus groups, as described in chapter three. The following chapter will be organized as follows:
participant profiles, and the three overarching factors of college readiness (intrinsic motivation, non-cognitive skills, and resilience).

**Jonny**

Jonny was 18 years old when he graduated from JSSC. He is the older of two siblings, and has a younger sister who is currently a junior at JSSC. I was Jonny’s biology teacher when he was a freshman at the school site, and saw how he struggled to maintain composure and academic rigor when he had to have his gallbladder removed at the age of 14. His medical experience had a profound impact on his social life, and his understanding of his own passions and experiences. Due to his operation he is not able to digest any alcohol, and in his interviews he expressed how it molded his friend group, and played a role in his social experience during his first semester at a university in the southern part of the United States. In addition, Jonny came out as being gay when he was in middle school, and felt very comfortable and accepted in both his home life and school. His sexuality is not something he uses as an identifier, but he was conscious of the fact that moving away from home meant that he would have to reestablish himself in this way.

**Jordan**

Jordan turned 18 his senior year at JSSC, and is the younger of two siblings. His older sister is a high-achieving academically-inclined person, as defined by both Jordan and his parents. Jordan has severe learning challenges, and has always found school to be somewhat challenging, and therefore he chose to not be as concerned with his grades, rather his social and emotional experiences in high school. He found great power through his experiences on the wrestling team and was driven in many ways by his social
influences at school. Jordan was a student of mine when he was a freshman, and he always was considerate and kind to his classmates and teachers, but it was clear that he does not feel successful academically.

**Ethan**

Ethan was 18 when he graduated from JSSC, and is the youngest of three siblings, one of which went to the university he is attending currently. He found that his high school experience was highly socialized, and he felt that he did not have to work too hard to find success academically at JSSC. His parents are both actively involved in his life, and have been divorced since he was young. His father and mother met at the university he is attending currently, and were highly supportive of his going there. Ethan was never my student, but I did chaperone a two and a half week trip to Israel when he was in tenth grade, and we developed a warm mentorship relationship. Ethan also expressed that his high school experience was also heavily impacted by his participation on the school wrestling team, where he found both an inner and physical strength that he attributes to his coach and teammates encouragement.

**Brian**

Brian was 18 when he graduated from JSSC, and is the younger of two boys. He identifies his experiences in high school as being “full of everything”, in that he worked hard, was involved in student life, and he had a colorful social experience. Brian was my student as a freshman at JSSC, and his work ethic was unparalleled. He was always considerate, and courteous, and students looked to him as someone to emulate. His older sibling went to a different independent school that is prestigious for their challenging curriculum, and Brian often looks at who his brother is and sees a very different person
from himself. That being said, both brothers are high achieving, and Brian is attending a
dual program at a prestigious university on the east coast currently.

**Chris**

Chris was 18 when he graduated JSSC, and is the older of two siblings. His
younger sister is still in middle school, and he feels a great sense of responsibility for
being someone she can look up to. Chris was in all honors courses throughout high
school, and felt that he was able to get an education from JSSC that helped to prepare him
for his college experiences. He is attending a prestigious school on the east coast of the
United States, and initially found out about the university through JSSC’s college
guidance office. Chris was happy to become a part of the study, and though I never
taught him as a student at JSSC, he felt comfortable with me since I chaperoned a two
and a half week trip to Israel, where we got to know one another.

**Lisa**

Lisa was 18 when she graduated JSSC, and she is the oldest of three children.
She has two younger brothers who are twins. When the study began, both brothers were
students at JSSC, but through the months of the study, one of her brothers had to leave
JSSC, and his behavior was of a concern both to Lisa and her parents. Lisa was a good
student, someone who would claim to be a homebody, and was always responsible. In
addition, Lisa’s parents are both immigrants from South Africa, and they bring with them
a cultural perspective that is quite different from many families at the school. They felt
that it was unnecessary for Lisa to attend school away from home, and that it was not
necessarily the right thing for their daughter. Lisa shared their opinion, but only decided
that her university of choice was not a good fit after she had committed to attending.
Suzy

Suzy graduated at the age of 18 from JSSC, and is the older of two daughters. Her younger sister is currently in middle school, and Suzy has a close relationship with her. Suzy’s parents are immigrants from Iran who came here as teenagers, and have a strong connection with the Iranian Jewish community locally. Suzy is an independent and open-minded American student. She admits that she was only able to attend JSSC because of the wonderful financial support the school gave her family, and in the same vein, she is going to a private university on the east coast because she was given a full scholarship. She is bright and hard-working, and has always been a great example of what dedication and intelligence, coupled with kindness can produce in an individual. She was never my student, but was always warm and managed to develop relationship with all teachers at the school, as well as her student body.

Jaimie

Jaimie was 18 when she graduated from JSSC, and is the middle child between two boys. Her oldest brother graduated from JSSC six years ago, and her younger brother is a sophomore at JSSC. Jaimie was my student in ninth grade, and was also on the two and a half week trip to Israel I chaperoned when she was in tenth grade. I was a volleyball coach for her older brother, and I also taught her younger brother when he was in ninth grade. I have a close relationship with the family, and they have a wonderful relationship with the school. Jaimie was a hard working student who had good friends throughout school.
Rebecca

Rebecca was 18 when she graduated JSSC, and is the younger of two siblings. Her older brother also graduated from JSSC and is currently attending a small liberal arts university near Los Angeles. Rebecca transferred to JSSC in tenth grade, and struggled with obsessive compulsive disorders that kept her from being able to accomplish all that she hoped to in high school. She is very bright, and works constantly on herself. While moving to her university, Rebecca’s mother sold the home she and her brother grew up in, causing a bit of a hurdle in the transitional process. She is currently attending a large four-year university a couple hours outside of Los Angeles, and is finding academic success, though socially she is struggling.

Commonalities of Student Participants

Student participants in this study, at the Jewish School of Southern California (JSSC), were a representation of the range of students who currently attend. A majority of these participants come from homes that both value and can afford an expensive independent education, however a couple of the participants are on full or partial financial aid. In particular, families who send their students to JSSC share a common value of a Jewish education. The school is located in an area of southern California where there is a large Jewish population, and where the community emphasizes the importance of developing a sense of identity and responsibility to each other.

Though there are students who receive financial aid, the typical student from JSSC comes from a high socioeconomic family; one who can afford the tuition fees being 32,000 dollars annually, and at times even paying tuition for multiple children/students within their family. When interviewing these typical students, most shared an additional
similar experience in that many attend Jewish summer camps. It was identified by these students that the Jewish summer camp experiences as counselors in training were moments where they felt challenged and grew as individuals. In addition, students revealed in interviews that the culture of JSSC, where faculty were supportive, involved in life outside of the classroom, and were encouraging, helped them to grow as well. Though both of these types of experiences are wonderful, all of the students felt that their transition to college was a bit more challenging because they felt unprepared for the independence and anonymity that the college experience and real-world challenges presented.

The students mostly expressed that they felt comfortable navigating their college systems, and attributed much of that understanding to their experiences at JSSC. They felt like they were able to self-advocate, and that they knew what it felt like to create connections with their professors. They were able to identify areas where they could fit in and become a part of a community. Guiffrida suggests, in his unpublished dissertation, that students who are able to identify a home-base in their universities are most likely to continue at the university. This aspect of student development and self-advocacy is likely a contributing factor to the fact that none of the student participants were unsuccessful academically during the first trimester in their four-year universities.

**Major Findings Across Three Themes**

The following is a conversation of the findings with details that support and explicate each finding. By way of multiple participant perspectives, quotations from interviews, data from grit surveys, and results from junior questionnaires, the unique perspectives as well as the complexities of student experiences help shed light on the
importance of understanding distinctive student profiles to best serve their psychosocial development. Within each theme are identifiable problems that can be adjusted to better prepare students for their transition into four-year universities: (1) intrinsic motivation, (2) non-cognitive skills, and (3) resiliency.

Intrinsic Motivation

Much of intrinsic motivation comes from self-knowledge: likes and dislikes are, knowing personal drives and inclinations. For most of the students at JSSC, the process of self-discovery during high school happens in a world where they are protected from the many moments that might ignite an identity defining crisis (Erikson, 1968); moments that require them to look into themselves and ponder who they are. For this reason, and many others, it can become challenging to apply for colleges without a fully formed concept of what you want to achieve and why you want to achieve it. Some student participants were drawn to specific schools because of the academic reputation of the school, some selected colleges because they felt like the best fit for what they wanted to do after college, and some felt that the schools they applied to fit their lifestyle. As is typical at this developmental stage, it became clear in this study that a majority of students were still in active self-exploration. The process is not black or white, but a pathway that is unique for everyone, and is often compounded with the stress of the application process.

Another aspect of concern when looking at intrinsic motivation in students is linked with the extrinsic factors that have been managing and motivating them since they were born. Their parents, families, summer camp programs, and schools have been scheduling and coordinating their lives; managing most free moments. Many of them do
not know how to manage their time and schedules for themselves when they go to four-year universities because they have never had the practice of unstructured free-time.

While away in college many experience, for the first time, not participating in a sport, not being involved in clubs on campus, and not being encouraged daily to be at any particular place at any specific time. Essentially, many students have not developed the tools to learn how to manage themselves, nor had the opportunity to practice being self-sufficient. These challenges concerning practice of intrinsic motivation become defining moments for successes or failures in the college transition, and a major aspect of intrinsic motivation is better understanding yourself and what drives you.

**Knowing yourself.** The ability to know yourself, and to understand what you are passionate about, is not necessarily the reality of most teenagers. In today’s college-driven climate of independent schools, students who are unsure of what they want to do feel pressured to go to college and begin their path toward some obscure type of success. Though there have been factions of families that encourage gap-year programs, most families want their children to go to a four-year university immediately after high school. Both Jordan and Brian decided to move home following their first semester away at university. They both stated that they did not feel ready or committed to the expectations and rigor that was expected of them in their universities. They explained that they simply did not feel ready and therefore could not put forth the necessary energy.

**Self-perceptions.** Student interviews, grit surveys, and junior-year questionnaires, provided insight into the self-perceptions of each participant. When asked to identify self-descriptions in their junior-year questionnaires, students had a range of adjectives that clearly identified who they were, and in reviewing their descriptions, it
was clear that most of the student participants had a deep understanding of the qualities they possessed which in turn showcased the culture of JSSC as well as their home lives (see Figure 4.1). The aspects of who they were and what they valued most helped to explain many of the motivations behind their successes and challenges they faced while in their transitional semester at a four-year university.

**Figure 4.1: Student Self Descriptions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rebecca</th>
<th>Suzy</th>
<th>Jaimie</th>
<th>Lisa</th>
<th>Jonny</th>
<th>Jordan</th>
<th>Chris</th>
<th>Ethan</th>
<th>Brian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Compassionate</td>
<td>Logical</td>
<td>Honest</td>
<td>Trustworthy</td>
<td>Insightful</td>
<td>Ambitious</td>
<td>Social</td>
<td>Determined</td>
<td>Hard Working</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thoughtful</td>
<td>Practical</td>
<td>Caring</td>
<td>Passionate</td>
<td>Creative</td>
<td>Caring</td>
<td>Quirky</td>
<td>Expressive</td>
<td>Ambitious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funny (sometimes)</td>
<td>Open-minded</td>
<td>Supportive</td>
<td>Determined</td>
<td>Passionate</td>
<td>Loyal</td>
<td>Curious</td>
<td>Reliable</td>
<td>Leader</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The challenges that so many of the student participants faced while transitioning into college can seem insurmountable when they are lacking a foundation of passion or direction to guide them. In moments when these student participants found themselves challenged, many of them began to experience the types of existential questions regarding who they are and what they desire. In particular, when students have grown up in the independent school system, and have a bond with a group of friends that they have been close with for most of their lives, their personal identity often is extrinsically motivated by their friends.

Jaimie expressed that, “for the majority of time I had been at school so far, it had been really hard… I would call home crying, minimum once a week, and would just be so sad all the time just feeling like I had a very small group of friends… It was so hard for me coming in and only making a few friends.” Intrinsic motivational development includes the ability for an individual to find happiness in independence, and practicing
not always being surrounded by their friends. Social media has played a role in the added feelings of loneliness for some students. Jaimie explained that seeing her friends at other universities post photos of great times would only make her feel more lonely and miss them more. When so much of a person’s identity is defined by their social group, being able to see yourself in a different light than you had initially envisioned makes the transition into college smoother. Jaimie, like some of the other student participants, had been in the independent school system with the same group of individuals since elementary school, and had been attending the same summer camp each summer since she was a small child. It had been years since she had been put into a situation where she had to develop a new group of friends. She, like many other students from JSSC, was out of practice in doing so, and unsure of the types of friends they would make.

Ethan stated that he felt that his experiences in high school were great, but that he does not, “know if I would have had the motivation to do the things that I wanted to do or have done without going to JSSC”. He also expressed that, “everyone has such a high mindset [at JSSC] and are very driven people… really they just all care about each other and … it makes it work even better… really engag[ing] people and push[ing] people to do better.” There is no doubt that many students at JSSC are gifted and they are supported by a faculty who tend to go above the typical expectations when developing positive, encouraging relationships with students. Many students come back to visit the school year after year, and are always excited to see how it has grown, and how it still feels like home.

Ethan’s description of his supportive faculty at JSSC is a clear example of how some students depended more heavily on the support of faculty for extrinsic motivation
than others. Ethan ended up attending a four-year university with many of his friends, all of which were expecting to rush a fraternity, and knew that they had to maintain a specific grade point average in order to be recruited and accepted. Though Ethan seemingly struggled to achieve some goals in JSSC, and his dependency on the extrinsic motivation of faculty kept him from practicing and honing his intrinsic motivational skills, his direction and desire to join a fraternity became his motivation while at his university. In moments like this, it is clear that student practice in developing intrinsic motivational factors can be superseded by a new endeavor and passion that is discovered early in the college transition. Ethan had intrinsic motivation, and he had friends with him that could help encourage his process along the way.

Another student participant, Jordan, attended the university with Ethan, however he was not able to stay at the school through the first year, and moved back home. Jordan was initially excited to go to school with Ethan and his other friends, and through he struggled all throughout his academic career, due to specific learning differences, he found that his intrinsic motivation was not developed enough when he did not get into the fraternity with Ethan and their other friends. Before attending his four-year university in the fall, Jordan stated that his experiences on the wrestling team taught him that he could do anything he put his mind to, and that even after he quit the team, he was able to then come back, work incredibly hard, and be successful. Jordan stated that if, “I put my mind to it and really motivate myself I knew I could accomplish it.” Again, Jordan’s main identifying moment of development in high school was this experience, and still, much of his dedication was to his friends who were on the team. Jordan realistically developed little intrinsic motivation, and was heavily dependent on his social group to encourage
and drive his actions. This is not uncommon amongst students, but when his friends got into the fraternity and he did not, he did not have an additional passion or internal drive to persist past this particular failure.

Though Jordan, Ethan, and Jaimie are examples of what many students experience, regarding knowing themselves and how intensely they depend on extrinsic motivational factors, there are some students who do not fit the typical mold. The two students in this study who were exceptions to the rule come from completely different backgrounds. One student, Brian, grew up in various independent school systems, and his family is both incredibly successful and financially wealthy. The second student, Suzy, comes from an Iranian immigrant family, attended public schools until her time at JSSC, and has been on full academic scholarship. Though each of them had very different family experiences, their shared opportunities from JSSC, coupled with a deep intrinsic motivation that was expressed differently in each of them, afforded them a seemingly unique transition into their four-year universities.

Both Brian and Suzy were deeply motivated and driven students, and both had the opportunity to practice developing and understanding who they were. Brian struggled with severe dyslexia, and was not able to read until he was much older than most students. He was the younger sibling of a brother who was high achieving academically, and he constantly found himself motivated by his brother’s success. Brian would spend hours reading and working on assignments that would only take most other students a fraction of the time, but it was important for him to be successful academically, and he continued to push himself, taking on more challenging courses, and ultimately finding success academically at JSSC. His struggle was not financial, it was not external; from a
young age, Brian’s struggle was with his own learning differences, and he persevered and developed a strong sense of intrinsic motivation in the process.

Suzy’s issues and concerns were extrinsic, in that she was the eldest daughter of immigrant parents who did not know how to navigate the American educational system, but they found JSSC, and coupled with Suzy’s strong academic background and intrinsic motivation, she was able to get an academic scholarship, affording her the opportunity to attend an independent Jewish day school for the first time in her life. When explaining her concerns in transitioning to college Suzy stated the following,

One factor that's a concern of mine is time management. I mean, I'm pretty good about it; I've never been the type of person to procrastinate really. But I still feel like there might be times where like I'll slip behind, because I don't have anyone telling me where to go and stuff. Honestly, no one does that now either, but like at the same time it's like I have to keep myself in check. And if I ever start slipping, the only person who can do that is me really.

Suzy’s entire life she had to pave the way for herself, seek out scholarships and programs, communicating with and explaining to her parents the intricacies of a system that was so foreign to them. Her deep-rooted intrinsic motivation largely came from her having to bridge the differences between her parents’ expectations, and that of a typical American teen. In addition, Suzy was high achieving academically, and that ability, coupled with her drive, afforded her a full scholarship to a private university on the east coast of the United States.

So much of the process transitioning to a four-year university is challenging because many students do not really know themselves, have not developed an intrinsic
motivation, and do not know what they want to do. Coupled with no real long-term goals, aside from getting into college, students are more inclined to struggle in their transition to a four-year university.

**College Guidance.** The college application process is typically the first time many of the students at JSSC find their first encounter with anything that could challenge their capacity and question their intrinsic motivation. For several students, this is their first time experiencing a tribulation where success is relatively out of their and their parents’ control. Many of the student participants and parents expressed a frustration with the college guidance experience. Though the types of complaints varied, most were to do with accessibility and customized experiences, where students did not feel heard. There seemed to be an underlying issue with the general process, much of which had to do with the anxiety of the unknown. In today’s world, so much of a student’s life is programmed and planned, with much of that structure coming from school and parent planning. The aspect of college applications, and the uncertainty of where a child will live, study, and grow for the next four years of their lives heightens the stakes both for the child and the parents involved. The information regarding college guidance came from discussions during interviews and focus groups. Of the nine student participants in the study, eight of them used an outside counselor to help them through the application and essay process. Their sentiments regarding how the felt their experiences went were largely based on feeling misunderstood.

Jaimie stated the following, “To be honest, I didn’t go to the guidance counselor at school, because I mean at first I wasn’t too happy with them. When I first met with them, I said to them that I didn’t want to stay in state, I wanted to go out of state, and then
when they handed me back a list of schools I was supposed to look into, half were in California, and I was just about, oh, okay…They were just like you have to still consider it, but I knew for a fact that I didn’t want to stay in state. I worked with a college counselor outside of school.” Her first impression in that meeting made her feel overlooked. Though college guidance has specific protocols and is developing programming with the best of student needs in mind, moments like Jaimie’s are challenging to ignore. In reality, the college guidance counselor could have ample reasoning for suggesting in-state schools, and there must have been a breakdown in communication, which ultimately lead to distrust between school and family.

Student interviews and parent focus groups highlight the issues surrounding efficacy and support from the college guidance program at JSSC. In part, the concerns lie in the fact that the process of searching for the best fit school is both time consuming and expensive. Most students do not have the opportunity to visit all of the campuses they are applying to, though college guidance encourages it. Jonny stated that the only issue he had with his experience at JSSC was the college counseling program in general. Additionally, Lisa explained that she was not made aware of grant and scholarship opportunities. Given that her parents are immigrants from South Africa, they felt as though they did not know which questions to ask, and that they were not appropriately guided in the process.

Schools, students, and parents at independent schools have many different pressures regarding college attendance. All families experience community pressures surrounding how success is defined within the community, as well as pressures from their stressed children who add to the concerns regarding where the next four years of their
lives could lead. This experience is coupled with existential questions that both parents and students have to ask themselves; are they ready to live apart; do they want to go to school out of state or closer to home; and what type of school is the best fit for them?

When students and parents are both informed as well as have a great sense of purpose for their college experiences, said experience can be much more smooth and successful. Students need to know who they are, what they are hoping to get out of their four-year university experience, and parents need to know what they feel comfortable with, and how involved they want to be in their children’s lives while they are away in college.

That being said, a college guidance process in independent schools needs to have an open dialogue between counselors, students, and parents.

Non-Cognitive Skills

Time management. One factor that JSSC is known for is the ability to identify the unique quality of each individual student. It is through this connection that faculty can best meet student needs and encourage student development. Student participants in the study all stated that they felt confident in knowing how to navigate school systems, which they understood the importance of developing relationships with their teachers, and they intended to do the same when they went to a four-year university. Jaimie stated that at times she trusted her teachers more than she did her friends. Jordan stated that he “got to know [his] teachers, got to interact… on different levels than kids at different schools could. [He] had those one on one experiences… [and felt that] they knew [his] strengths… [and] weaknesses… [and could] help with the weaknesses”.

Lisa felt that she had to opportunity at JSSC to speak with teaches if she ever felt like she needed or wanted help. The reality of most student experiences after having
attended universities of varying sizes was that students knew they could speak with professors, but many of them did not. The expectations on university professors often can leave them with little time to dedicate towards undergraduate student needs. Often the role of teacher in out-of-class situations falls on teacher assistants.

Jonny stated that JSSC helped to provide him with an understanding of social situations, and that the JSSC culture allowed him to find himself in ways unexpected. Jonny also grew up in the independent Jewish school world, and JSSC’s student population of 400 seemed large to him, and was considered to Jonny as an opportunity to experience a different social setting. After attending his large southern university, Jonny realized that he was now in a much loftier academic setting, and until he started finding trusting people to connect with, he had a difficult experience. He felt that students from JSSC were not made aware of the personal non-cognitive skill challenges that arose for him in the first trimester of his four-year university.

**Personal Skill Development.** The theme of non-cognitive skill development consists of one identifiable area of weakness, the inability to practice skills. Chris stated that “there were a lot of college preparatory programs, but… [there was not]…a lot of personal skill development programs”. Even though Jonny suggested the JSSC taught him how to develop relationships with people and be a part of the community, he also stated that he did not feel prepared to deal with the diversity at his university. Though there are benefits to growing up in a small community, often times those communities can become homogenous, and the experience of developing relationships with people who are different from you are is an essential component of developing non-cognitive skills.
Another reoccurring theme in the data was the issue concerning time management. When asked in a junior questionnaire regarding the amount of time they spent on homework each night, student perceptions of their dedication to homework ranged from one hour and 30 minutes, to six hours a night. The two students who claimed they spent on average 6 hours on homework each night were female. Among the other two female student participants, one stated that she spent four hours each night on homework, and the other stated that she spent 2.5 hours each night on homework. The average range of time spent on homework in the male participants was one hour and 30 minutes to four hours each night. Two male student participants said they spent two hours each night, and the student who claimed to spend four hours on average each night has severe dyslexia and spent typically four hours each night all through secondary school. One male student claimed spending three hours each night on homework, but explained that much of that time was due to the fact that his parents were divorced, and he would have to unpack and re-pack much of his school material daily, leaving him missing materials and frustrated at times. The ability to accomplish work in a truncated amount of time is a skill that most students have to learn in order to find academic success in college, when the work load seems to multiply. The notion of working smarter, not harder comes into frame, and the question of what types of study skills JSSC students are learning is brought into question. In addition, the question of the role of the parent when regulating a student’s distractions while completing homework is brought into the foreground. Are students being given the opportunity to practice good time management and study skills?
The supportive culture of caring at JSSC is a wonderful opportunity for students to grow in an environment where they feel safe to discover who they are. The downside of this nurturing environment is that does not offer students an opportunity to practice dealing with some of the non-cognitive challenges they will face at a four-year university. One participant’s unique experience was that he came out as a gay person when he was in middle school, and though he was bullied when he was younger, he did not have to deal with any discrimination at JSSC. In moving away to a four-year university, where he would be sharing a dorm room with another person, he contemplated whether he should reveal this intimate detail about himself prior to moving in together. Jonny stated, “I haven't had to deal with the angst of the coming out process. I recognize that I'm going to go to school and not everyone's going to know that I'm gay. The hetero-normativity of going into a new situation in college, which I haven't had to deal with before, is going to be a shocker. My parents keep bringing it up... I haven't come out to my roommate. I'm like, it doesn't need to be the first thing he finds out about me... but my parents feel it is.”

Jonny’s realization that he had not ever had to experience the coming out process as an adult created an additional hurdle for him socially. Ultimately, he decided that it would be unnecessary to reveal his being gay to his roommate in advance, and knowing what he did about this person, he felt that he had little to worry about. When reporting about his challenges with his roommate in our follow up interview, Jonny never mentioned if the conversation about him being gay even came up. He had other issues with his roommate, but they were about schedules, personal space, and general dorm-room difficulties. The reality is that Jonny, as well as most of the other student
participants, had little to no experience with social settings that were less homogeneous than their independent Jewish day school.

**Resilience**

Dweck (2006) identified resilience as the ability to persist past failures, and explained the importance that mindset has on the ability for a person to be resilient. When students are stunted in their resiliency development through abundant support that exceeds the need of the child, a mindset of learned helplessness can develop. The idea that someone else will always be able to fix problems for them, coupled with limited experience in personal disappointment, stunts student resiliency. There is a divide between perceptions of resiliency and actual resiliency, and much of that comes from the development of mindset through practice. The obligation of an independent school and parents alike is to develop a strong line of communication regarding the importance of resilience development. By knowing the capabilities of their children/students, schools can do a better job supporting the development of their resiliency.

When perceptions of grit were analyzed, the two male candidates, Jordan and Brian, who reverse transferred, had a 0.6 or a 1.1 decrease in grit score respectively. Both Jordan and Brian scored a 4.2 on their first grit survey, suggesting a high self-perception of grit. These results beg the questions: Where and how did these students gain their sense of resilience, and why does it not seem to serve them while away at a four-year university? The female student, Lisa, who will be reverse transferring at the end of the year, actually experienced an increase in grit score by 0.2. In addition, there are two other female participants who are contemplating transferring from their respective universities, stating that they felt it was not the best fit for them. Jaimie
specifically stated that she had hopes for her social experience in her freshman year that did not live up to her expectations. For Jaimie, this disappointment made her emotionally depressed and she ultimately will be transferring to a different university. Jaimie saw an increase of 0.2 and Rebecca a decrease of 0.3 on their grit scores. The conversation regarding transferring was one that half of the student participants expressed. There may be something to be said regarding a student’s sense of entitlement and disappointment when their experiences were not as planned. Whereas most students are grateful for being in attendance and figure our ways to make it work, students from this school site felt differently about what their educational experiences should be. They felt a sense of entitlement to a particular expected learning and social environment. Initially, it appears that self-assessed grit scores alone are not dependable indicators of student success transitioning into a four-year university. In digging deeper we unearth that there are a few reasons as to why that may be.

A nurturing and supportive community has enveloped the students who attend JSSC. They have been encouraged and sheltered by both their families and their school. Though this warm environment can be beneficial for many reasons, it can also instill a false sense of self in students. Many of the students at JSSC believed themselves to be fairly gritty individuals, with the exception of Suzy, none of them had lifelong experiences that could have helped them to practice their grittiness. Brian and Jonny had to overcome certain learning issues, but their support system created a safe space for them to persevere and stay focused on task. When they left for school, that support system was not there in the same way. Jonny found a connection to his school through music and was able to find success, though he admits to struggling academically. Brian
found that he was not engaged in his work, and that the work was too challenging.

Though he enjoyed the social aspect of college the academic piece was overwhelming.

**Figure 4.2: Grit Perceptions**

Multiple student participants expressed how they felt their experience at JSSC was wonderful, but they were not prepared for the elevated level of expectations at universities. Specifically, students explained that the no-late-work policies of their universities were unexpected. They stated that the amount of reading expected was far beyond what was expected of them at JSSC, and they felt that the academic resiliency they hoped to have developed was not as strong as they needed to find immediate success. Most students learned quickly, and some the hard way, that there were no opportunities for second chances at their four-year colleges, and if they made a misstep, they found themselves struggling even more to ensure they passed their courses.

Resilience is an important skill that should be practiced and honed, both in personal and
academic contexts, however it can be a difficult lesson to learn for the first time while away at a four-year university.

**Perceptions of resiliency without practice.** When asked in a junior questionnaire if they had ever lived away from their homes a significant amount of time, three of the student participants explained that they had lived abroad in Israel for three months while participating in an exchange program. Jaimie, Jonny, Ethan, and Brian, all explained that they had spent a month away from home, typically at summer camp. Only Brian explained that he spent a month living in Africa with his brother, away from their parents. Otherwise, the students had never been away from home, aside from a chaperoned trip through the school that lasted two weeks.

When asked in interviews if there were any moments in their life that they identified as defining, all students who went to camp in the summer explained how they felt their time at camp was helpful in preparing them for being more resilient and independent. Jonny stated that “Going to camp every summer definitely helped me because I am away from home every year, so it’s kind of like a little preparation for how things will be once I’m at school… [and] so busy that I won’t have a lot of time to call home”. The notion that a false reality, such as camp, is a great preparation for the challenges college will likely offer can be misleading, and many of the student participants felt differently when they returned from their first semesters.

Brian explained that the aspects he found most challenging were “dealing with the small things like food and commute time… balancing all that was a little more challenging than anticipated.” He stated that “I found myself needing to find more hours in the day. Even though I had class for less hours, all these things weren't handed to you,
and so if I wanted to go [to the cafeteria on campus] for meals, it's going to take 15 minutes to get there.” These small challenges, with which most adults deal with regularly, are nuanced to students from JSSC who have always been given what they need in a convenient way; they have never been forced to get something fundamental to their well-being.

Jonny explained that his parents are still very involved in his life, and though they recognize he is supposed to make his own decisions, they only now have begun to expect him to be self-sufficient. Jonny’s parents are not the only ones who wait to expect this level of independence from their children until they go away to school. The inability to practice getting self-sufficiency impedes the development of mindset and resiliency. The importance of accurate self-perceptions of both descriptors and grittiness, and the practice of academic resiliency are all identified modules of resiliency amongst our student participants.

**Perceptions of grit.** In addition to reviewing students’ junior questionnaires, Duckworth Grit surveys were given to all nine participants before they began college, and again when they finished their first semester away.

**Figure 4.3: Student Grit Surveys**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grit Survey</th>
<th>Rebecca</th>
<th>Suzy</th>
<th>Jaimie</th>
<th>Lisa</th>
<th>Jonny</th>
<th>Jordan</th>
<th>Chris</th>
<th>Ethan</th>
<th>Brian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Summer 2014</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winter 2015</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results of the survey were inconclusive in that 50 percent of the student participants experienced an increase in grit self-perceptions, and 50 percent expressed a decrease in
grit self-perceptions. One of the students did not change his self-perception of grit. When delving into the aspects of grit, the ability to persist past failures, and to continue to motivate yourself in the face of adversity, it was clear that students who experienced an increase in their self-perception of grit, were more likely to have experienced major challenges while in their first semester at a four-year university. Surprising results were that of the students who identified as being more gritty after their semester, one has already left the school and moved back home, another is already planning to move home at the end of the year and attend a college close to home, and one more is seriously contemplating transferring schools. It was as if they acknowledged the change, but they did not value it and were unable to see how they were better adept because of their trying experiences.

Of the students who identified a decrease in their self-perceptions of grit, one decided to consider transferring to a smaller university setting, where she thinks she will be more comfortable and her social needs will be met better. Each student participant experienced challenges in their first semester away, and their awareness of how gritty they were changed based on their experiences and ability to practice their various psychosocial skills.

**Academic resilience.** More than half of the student participants expressed that the academic rigor and expectations set by faculty in their senior year was not advantageous to preparing them for the expectations set by their universities. Jaimie explained that she “love[d] how much the teachers help their students, but… some students are aware that they’d be helped…[that] other kids might be so dependent on the teachers' help that… going to college [would be] a really big shocker because it's like you
[wouldn’t] have that much support…” Suzy, who was an excellent student expressed that “the teachers babied [them] little bit too much; maybe a lot a bit.” Brian, a student that learned to manage his dyslexia stated that “coming off of senior year and not having really done intense school for the last six months was probably not the greatest preparation for [college]… because senior year is not that hard… second semester is just not that challenging.” Even Jordan, who has serious learning differences, and admittedly stated that he did not try very hard in high school explained that “I could wait until the last day to do an assignment [and] could pull it off … and getting a good grade.” Student participants generally felt that they were not challenged academically in their senior year, specifically second semester of their senior year at JSSC. Though this study chose to not focus on the academic preparation for college readiness, it became clear through the data that questions of academic rigor were raised.

Brian went into detail explaining his biggest challenge in keeping up with the reading in college. He knew that his dyslexia added to his challenge, but claims that the most accountable he ever was for completing reading assignments in his courses was in his biology class, freshman year, where he was required to take book notes from the textbook. His counter example was his AP Government class, in which he states that the teacher broke down so much of the material, that most students did not do the reading, and still received a high grade in the course. In addition, half of the students expressed that the notion of extensions on assignments, and accepting of late work was not a reality in college, and they felt like it was a shock when they began their courses at their subsequent universities, and some actually did poorly in the beginning of their courses because of late work issues.
Academic resilience is about more than creating challenging curriculum for students, it is also about understanding the wants of a student are not always in their best interest, and questioning whether the validity of expectations of students from faculty is in line with the intention to best prepare them for the academic rigor expected at colleges. It was clear that students expressed that they felt they were out of practice academically for their university expectations.

**Jewish identity and socioeconomic status.** When combing through data, it became evident that there were other factors of psychosocial development that were an overarching component of student development. In particular, regarding students from JSSC, their Jewish identity played a major function in their feeling comfortable and happy at their new universities. Each student participant engaged, in some way, with Jewish life on campus. Chris explained that he felt comfort in knowing that there was a Hillel on campus, and that he was going to the AIPAC conference in the coming year. Jaimie is attending a university where more than 15 percent of the student population is Jewish, and expressed that she felt she was surrounded by Jewish influence and friends. Ethan and Brian both joined a Jewish fraternity, Lisa works with a Jewish school near her university, and Rebecca attends the Hillel regularly at her university. There is no surprise that students felt comfortable with people who have a shared history and/or lifestyle, and they looked for the familiar to help them transition into their college experiences.

**Jewish identity.** The importance of student Jewish identity became evident in one particular student’s experience at her four-year university where she encountered an anti-Semitic and anti-Israel professor. This specific student, Lisa, is one of the students who plans on moving home at the end of the year, and this anti-Semitic experience is one of
the many that made her feel uncomfortable and alone at her university. Below is Lisa’s explanation of her experience in this particular course:

I had this Women's Studies class… and… I hated it from the start, and our final projects, which we got two weeks in, was to pick a country to do a whole find a women's movement organization, and she put every country in the world including Palestine but she didn't put Israel. I was like, ‘You know what? I'll put Israel.’ I put it on the list and she made an announcement to class. She's like by the way I don't appreciate you, those people who put countries on the list that don't even exist. I was like, ‘Oh, God. What did I just do?’ But she's like, ‘You can keep it’. Then we had to get into groups with people around our area, so I got paired with a girl who chose Egypt and the one who chose Palestine, and the girl already wears pro-Palestinian shirts every single day, plus she's an RA in my dorm, so I have to see her every day. I was like, ‘This is not going to end well.’ We had to say what movements we're going on and I said whatever and her statement was, ‘I can't find anything because Palestinians are too busy running for cover because the Israelis are bombing them all the time.’ I was like, ‘Oh, my God.’ We got in an argument and she's like, ‘Women in Israel aren't equal.’ I showed her all these facts and I was so angry. I did research the whole night and I called my dad, and the next class I was ready. I told the teacher. I was like, ‘Can I please switch? I'm Israeli. I'm Jewish. I can't be in this thing.’ She's like, ‘Why? She's saying the truth. This is a great teaching moment.

The experience Lisa had at her university made her feel ostracized, and powerless. She had attempted to communicate with the anti-Israeli opinions using facts and anecdotes, of which she herself experienced when living in Israel for three months, but her voice fell on deaf ears. Too many times the pre-conceived notions and opinions of anti-Semitic professors shut down students, and inappropriately sway less-knowledgeable students about the situation. The issue in Lisa’s case was not that people had different opinions, rather that her opinions were discredited by a biased opinion. Delegitimizing a
person’s identity as in the case of students from JSSC, would likely be hugely impactful of his or her identity.

**Socioeconomic status.** Lastly, it begs to be stated that certain socioeconomic realities exist within the high socioeconomic classes, like most of the students at JSSC. Alongside a lack of financial worry comes a freedom to not deal with the tribulations that most other socioeconomic levels have to encounter. Suzy is a student who is attending her university on a full academic scholarship, and her parents don’t have the means to continuously fly her back and forth across the country. When interviewed, Suzy expressed her concerns regarding how she planned to pack in the most efficient way, and was concerned with the cost of shipping anything that she forgot. She explained that it was mostly, “a lot of logistical stuff that stresses me out.” Most of our students do not have to think about these types of logistical issues because their parents can pay for shipping, flights, and in many cases offer to handle the challenging process of moving for their children. Their belongings are packed for them, or bought for them and delivered to them by their parents.

In addition, Suzy was concerned about how she would manage her finances. Because she was not going to have a car, she wouldn’t be able to get a job off-campus, and she knew that on-campus jobs were difficult to get. Before leaving for college, Suzy had already set up a meeting with a financial advisor, who she was hoping would help her open an on-campus account, and would guide her in the ways she could best manage her money. Though she explained in her follow-up interview that she needed some financial help from her parents, and that she had a little learning curve in regards to how she managed her money, she learned a valuable lesson that she knows she will take with her
throughout her life. Most of the other students in the study will likely never have to be concerned about their financial well-being, and certainly not while they are away at university. That being said, Suzy is doing well at her university, and she is looking forward to her years studying and living there. What Suzy’s case highlights in contrast with that of a student like Jordan, who has lofty financial means, and has already decided to return home after first semester, is that socioeconomic status does not guarantee successful college experiences.

**Summary**

When identifying what each theme within psychosocial development looked like, it became clearer that what initially was thought to be the concern, often was something nuanced within the theme itself. Issues concerning psychosocial readiness are intrinsic motivational factors, non-cognitive skill development, and resilience. Within each of these larger conceptual components of psychosocial readiness, more distinct and refined concepts began to emerge.

Within intrinsic motivational issues, knowing one’s self, and knowing what is desired are important. The applied process of these questions is often the greatest challenge for college guidance. If students are unable to answer these fundamental questions about themselves, they are often challenged to find the best university program to fit their needs. When investigating the challenges of non-cognitive skill development, the issues identified by the students and parents were personal skill development, specifically in regards to social diversity and time management. Lastly, the most challenging aspect of psychosocial development for students from JSSC was resilience. The concerns regarding resilience were more to do with the disconnection between their
perceptions of their own resiliency and their inability to practice and identify (or even acknowledge) if they are, in fact, resilient. In addition, Jewish identity and socioeconomic realities came into play when further identifying the components of resiliency in student participants.

Although the voices of all participants contributed to creating a better understanding of the relationship between psychosocial development and autonomously navigating the world, there were two that seem illustrative of the common experiences of these adolescents. Two students in the study, Brian and Suzy, come from opposite experiences in multiple ways; they are opposite genders, they exist on opposite ends of the socioeconomic spectrum, one has a severe learning difference while the other is highly inclined academically, and one student’s parents are immigrants whereas the others are not. Through their differences, both students found their experiences at JSSC nurturing and positive. Currently, the female student who was highly academic, with immigrant parents, and came from a lower socioeconomic status is finding continued success at her university. The male student, who learned to overcome his learning differences, and comes from a high socioeconomic background, is currently taking a leave of absence following his first semester at university. Both students found social, personal, and academic success in their first semester transitions into college, though they both have decided differently in how to move forward. Their profiles are an indication that our current measuring apparatus for expected student success is faulty. It is the intention of this dissertation to identify ways in which schools and parents can partner to help ensure student experiences and processes help to navigate the murky waters of adolescence, and allow for paths of self-discovery.
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to examine the current processes in place which serve to instill and develop psychosocial skills at an independent secondary school necessary for the transition to college. These psychosocial skills are identified as intrinsic motivation, non-cognitive skills, and resiliency. This chapter focuses on the importance of increasing contentiousness regarding the importance of psychosocial development. In addition, the chapter highlights the areas that need to be practiced from each of the three facets of psychosocial development: intrinsic motivation, non-cognitive skills, and resilience. Following the descriptive explanation for the need of these skills put into practice, specific recommendations are offered. Research from Conley (2008) and Epstein (2006) helped to influence the conceptual framework of this study. The study under investigation builds upon that conceptual framework and asserts that psychosocial skills are necessary for successful transitions into four-year universities, and the relationships between independent schools, families, and students can help or hinder the development of these skills. Yang (2006) highlighted and explained the failures surrounding psychosocial development and the various reasons for students to reverse transfer. Through a routine work experience, I discovered that JSSC’s reverse transfer rate was almost double that of the national rate in 2005 (Hossler et al., 2012). As a result, I began to ponder what was being practiced at independent schools, as I predict that this issue does not simply plague JSSC in the independent school world. Specifically, who
were these students and their respective families, and why were so many not finding success at the four-year universities they initially attended?

This chapter focuses on the importance of increasing consciousness regarding the importance of psychosocial development. In addition, the chapter highlights the areas that need to be practiced from each of the three facets of psychosocial development: intrinsic motivation, non-cognitive skills, and resilience. Following the descriptive explanation for the need of these skills put into practice, specific recommendations for the school site are offered.

Students were purposefully selected who represented a range of students at JSSC. They were subsequently surveyed and interviewed, and access to their junior-year questionnaires was provided, which were administered and reviewed by the school’s college guidance office. Additionally, focus groups with the parents of the students, as well as a focus group with the JSSC administration were conducted. Their voices and feedback were used as a reference for the shared student experiences. Most of the time, parents of students were very much aware of their children’s experiences and tribulations. The focus groups also served as a baseline for measuring the type of communication the school and families share. I examined the impact that parents and schools can have on student development and ultimately found that the three aforementioned areas of psychosocial development should be interpreted in a specific and particularistic way. That is, intrinsic motivation is specifically focused on knowing yourself, your self-perception, and is often highlighted as an issue in the college guidance process; non-cognitive skill development is about the practice of developing non-cognitive skills in day-to-day life; and resilience is about students’ perceptions of resilience without the
ability to practice. Further, I found two other sub-findings: Jewish identity and socioeconomic background played valuable, specific and, in some cases, unexpected roles.

Ultimately, the answer to developing all three components of psychosocial development are rooted in the same three-step process: 1) If you are able to make conscious the issues concerning college readiness for students, 2) create practice opportunities for them, and 3) encourage them to make meaning for themselves, the psychosocial development will naturally occur and help create more college ready students. The process of active psychosocial development needs to be intentional. Additionally, to help ensure that these steps are enriched, communication with parents and family buy-in to the process is essential.

**Discussion**

As I approached each area of the framework, both research questions were taken into account: What are the processes by which students were psychosocially prepared for their transition, and what roles do the parents, students, and school have in that development process? The true nature of the identified psychosocial skills, intrinsic motivation, non-cognitive skills development, and resilience revealed distinctive issues within each student participant. Ultimately though, a new suggested model (see Figure 5.1) of harnessing a stronger sense of psychosocial development emerged. Through consciousness raising, practice, and the development of individual meaning, all three areas of psychosocial development would emerge better prepared students of JSSC.
Figure 5.1 visually expresses the recommended steps to improve psychosocial development for college readiness through the process of consciousness raising, practice, and individual meaning. Consciousness raising refers to the importance of discussion and communication between students, parents, and the school regarding issues of psychosocial development for college readiness. Practice refers to the actual aspects of psychosocial development that need to be honed through practice. Finally, individual meaning refers to the development of personal meaning for each student and parent as they experience the programs and processes suggested for the school to develop.
Consciousness Raising

“I kind of get it now; why we do community service… trips… I really liked that and I really liked that my school did that. The importance of [it] in our own country, just realizing… and experiencing it… I really liked that and I think that it carries over…”

Suzy’s quote is a foundational example of one of the issues that retrospectively students were able to identify as problematic in their transition to their respective four-year universities. Due to the heavy focus of academic readiness for college, students are unaware of the psychosocial skills needed to ensure a more successful transition into their next four years. Jaimie expressed that she did not anticipate the feeling of loneliness experienced in her freshman year away. She was blindsided by how important it was for her to have a built-in community, and she decided that she would need to receive that from the Greek system at her school. Without acceptance into a Greek sorority, she feared that she would not be able to have as successful of an experience. Jaimie’s story is one that mimics the sentiments of Lisa and Rebecca, in that they too felt without a community. Increasing conscientiousness about how to develop those connections, and about the importance of doing so early on is important. One specific hindrance for students who were struggling socially in their first semester was social media. They felt as though they saw all of their friends having a great time, and it left them feeling lonelier. Being able to communicate about the value of a shared experience with new people is imperative, and about the realities of social media, and the negative impacts they can have. It may be important to devise plans in advance and communicate with parents about how to guide students through those challenges. Either way, opening a
dialogue with parents and students helps to develop and raise conscientiousness regarding these issues.

**Practice (in Motivation)**

All issues associated with psychosocial development are seemingly best developed what put to use. It is imperative that students have the opportunity to practice honing the skills needed to transition them into their next phases of life. Many students at JSSC have been sheltered from experiencing these things, but exposure to practice can help to build up their psychosocial skills, making them more college ready.

**Intrinsic motivation.** The potential to practice necessary psychosocial skills within the facet of intrinsic motivation were narrowed to the importance of being able to time manage, develop a more accurate self-perception, and understand how the latter would impact their best-fit college selection.

**Time management.** Multiple students stated that one of their toughest challenges in their first semester at a university was time management. Specifically, it was the amount of time it took to complete tasks and fulfill responsibilities that had previously been typically done for them. For instance, Brian explained that he never anticipated the amount of time it takes to cook a meal, eat it, and clean up afterwards. The amount of time it takes to walk to and from the dinning commons for a meal, and taking into consideration the return trip back from the commons, some students traveled even as much as 20 minutes each way. Taking the time to do laundry and cleaning their own dorm space. Even trips to the health center when they did not feel well became a new experience. Scheduling their own appointments, and having to care for themselves when they were not feeling well, these all were new and at times challenging, adjustments to
their lives that had never been discussed and made conscious for these students prior to them living out these experiences for the first time. These seemingly small adjustments to life, when compounded with a new city, new social setting, and navigating new collegiate expectations and workloads often felt insurmountable. If Brian had less scheduled time in his life and was able to practice managing his time in a less structured manner prior to leaving for university, he may have felt better prepared for the overall change.

**Student self-perceptions.** In addition, students seemed to have a difficult time truly knowing themselves outside of their independent, Jewish context. Jonny explained that he personally had grown up within a completely Jewish community, and had never realized how different he was from other people until he moved into the dorm. Student self-perceptions were not necessarily in line with what they discovered about themselves while away for their first semester in college. When coming to realize that they had never experienced a context of self-understanding, they came to question who they were and what they wanted. Specifically Brian and Jordan who moved home by the end of their first trimester, and both explained that they felt that they didn’t really know why they were at their universities, and that made it difficult for them to be motivated to push through the work. Without being able to test their identities and self-perceptions, it may be asserted that students would not have as strong of an understanding of who they are. Individual identity first comes from families and then socialization from peers and school. In this case school and peers were very narrowly specified, intensifying the group identity as central to the individual’s identity. For this reason, counselors at the school should become overtly aware of this and provide classes or workshops to make the
students equally aware of this, suggesting various ways to navigate the new outside school world. This is especially true because all the students were seeking Jewish-affiliated groups in their colleges.

**College guidance.** Through their inability to practice and know who they are and what motivates them, it was no surprise that there were so many frustrations during their college guidance process. Seven of the nine participants (and their parents) expressed a frustration with the school’s college guidance program. Their critical feedback included issues regarding the current communication and planning process. Some students felt that they were not heard, and most of the students admitted to using outside counseling assistance, to which they attribute most of their successes. When assessing the current college guidance process, and after speaking with the director of college guidance in order to gain a better understanding of their internal process, it became clear that there should be better communication practiced, however a large part of the struggles in college guidance are concerned with the general perception of college applications, and specifically with students being able to self-identify what it is they want and why they want it. The college application process is stressful for many reasons; the unknown of where you will get accepted, unfamiliarity with the application process, unfamiliarity with specific colleges, and the general issue of committing to attend a school and study a specific topic when many students don’t know what motivates them or what they want to study.

**Non-cognitive skill development.** When delving into the components of non-cognitive skills that need to be practiced, it became clear that students had a good sense
Navigating institutional norms. When assessing non-cognitive skill development, students expressed a strong capacity for how to develop relationships and navigate student-teacher dynamics. All of the student participants expressed that they felt confident communicating with their professors and/or teachers both at JSSC as well as their respective universities. They expressed in their interviews that the nurturing and open environment at JSSC afforded them the opportunity to self-advocate and, in turn, taught them that their voice mattered. Conversely, some students also expressed that though they knew they could speak with their professors at university, many did not. Several felt that their voice was not entirely encouraged and welcomed in the same way, but they explained that there were other ways to gain academic support at their campuses. Of the nine student participants, eight stated that JSSC taught them the importance of community and they felt they would know how to create that for themselves once they go to college.

Time management. In addition to navigating the intricacies of academic systems, students felt that their opportunities for personal skill development were, at times, stifled prior to attending college. Specifically, students expressed that they struggled with time management as well as some social challenges. Many of the students at JSSC were raised with the privilege of participating in athletics, arts, and other organized extracurricular activities. Though these activities offered them many positive influences, they also created a rigorous schedule with little-to-no down time. Again, time management became something that was managed by others (i.e. parents, coaches,
teachers, and other authority figures) out of their hands. Specifically, with regard to non-cognitive skill development, college was the first time students had so little on their plate. All of the student participants neither played a sport at their university nor became involved in any organized extracurricular programming. Essentially, these students had actual free time for the first time in years. Many of the students expressed that they fell behind in school briefly because they did not know how to manage their time. Although, these students recognized how structured their lives had been before moving onto a four-year college and felt as if their first semester was challenging, they were not entirely sure how to re-develop their daily structure (whether or not that was the best course of action).

Lastly, some of the students expressed they felt they were socially at a disadvantage compared to other students they observed. Multiple students expressed that they felt different from other students at their university because they came from a homogenous environment, and for the first time they were exposed to a more diverse community. However, through their experience and exposure to this new environment, they were able to develop a sense of resiliency by adjusting and adapting to their environments. Some students, like Jonny, Brian, Jordan, and Jaimie, found people who were very similar to themselves, and felt as though they shared a common story and support system. A couple of students experienced anti-Semitism while in their first semester at a university, which revealed an additional example of lack of practice and psychosocial development that was otherwise not anticipated.

In each aspect of non-cognitive skill development, it seems that the concern over practice is brought up. Students are simply not exposed to, nor are they given the
opportunity to develop necessary skills with regard to time management and valuable psychosocial skills.

**Resilience.** Duckworth (2013) explains that grit, a term that can be used synonymously with resilience, helps students achieve long-term goals. In many cases, students expressed getting into a first choice college as a long-term goal. This process can help elevate students’ intrinsic motivation, however this process can also be exhaustive, leaving students uninspired and burnt out by the time they are freshman in college. This was the case for Brian, who, following his first semester at his first-choice school, chose to take a leave of absence. He explained that he did not feel the same drive and dedication he once did at JSSC, and it was challenging to delve into the rigorous academics without his whole heart into it. Students fight through high school to achieve an ambiguous goal without truly knowing or understanding what they really want to gain. In addition, when looking at the perceptions of grit, it was clear that students did not have an opportunity to practice and hone their resilient skills prior to attending universities, and their understanding of their own capabilities was therefore stunted. This study pointed toward three specific areas within resilience that are currently a concern at JSSC: students’ perceptions of grit, the issue with perceptions of grit coupled with a lack of practice, and issues surrounding academic resiliency. Specifically in regards to resiliency, it became clear that without practice a student is unable to begin to form a sense of self that can then be applied to new and challenging settings. It therefore become essential for students to develop an individual meaning and context for who they are outside of their small community and develop individual meaning.
Individual Meaning

In her interview, Suzy stated that “the importance of community service… [and how it was]…incorporated into every year’s requirements… I would go and do it. I kind of get it now; why we do community service… trips, like the South Trip and especially the New Orleans Trip, and how we went and worked in the garden… I really liked that and I really liked that my school did that. The importance of [it] in our own country, just realizing… and experiencing it… I really liked that and I think that it carries over into my college experience; and I know for sure that I want to do some sort of community service, especially in my country, you know, like other places, and [JSSC] did that.” The opportunity to reach out into communities different from your own, to see how other people live, and to become empathetic to the experiences of those who are different from you is an essential component of psychosocial development. Many of the student participants struggle with a general lack of experiences in all issues ranging from the large (anti-Semitism) to small (preparing meals and factoring in food preparation in your day). The process of raising consciousness of others can be done through organized trips like the experience Suzy described. In addition, the trip itself offers an opportunity for practice in engaging with people in differing backgrounds; ultimately developing meaning making, as Suzy clearly did in her explanations.

The importance of understanding the value of psychosocial skills occurs through the practice of said skills. Students in this study were blindsided by their shortcomings in areas pertaining to psychosocial skill development. In particular, their understanding of who they are in a context exceeding their unique, small, and supportive community. When thrust into college, many of the students expressed a new understanding of their
own upbringing, as they were seeing themselves through different peoples’ eyes for the first time. Their religion as well as their socioeconomic status placed them in a category many of them had never experienced, being a minority.

**Jewish identity and socioeconomic status.** Through interviewing students about their first experiences away at college, it became evident that both Jewish identity and student socioeconomic status plays a role in their psychosocial development. All student participants shared their experiences living in their small, cramped dorm rooms, and most of them explained how they were not accustomed to living in such conditions, let alone sharing their space (which had previously and always been their own). Their inexperience living in challenging and even uncomfortable environments created a hurdle that other students may have overcome while in their youth. Aside from Suzy, all students in the study came from homes of fairly high socioeconomic status, and experienced luxuries in their homes that most adults will never experience. These students were accustomed to a specific way of living, and were not used to being required to compromise on many fundamental elements of living in a dorm, such as sharing a room with a person who is messy and who may not respect your wishes. In reality, the issues of socioeconomic status were a reflection on non-cognitive skills that never were developed because they never needed to prior to this unique way of college life.

In addition to struggling to manage cohabitation with strangers, students in the study expressed challenges associated with their Jewish identity. Most participants found themselves flocking to Jewish fraternities or sororities, and some found themselves at Hillel Houses (a Jewish organization coordinating social and religious events) on campus. Lisa found a job teaching art at a local Jewish day school. Lisa also experienced severe
anti-Semitism from both students and her professor while in one of her courses. The experience left her disenchanted and devalued, and was one of the reasons why she felt she was not in the right place and needed to move back home. Lisa, like many of the students from JSSC, attended Jewish day schools her entire life. Moreover, like many other students, she had never been ostracized or made to feel like a minority, nor had ever experienced discrimination on such a personal level. The college experience has, for the first time, exposed them to the harsh realities of anti-Semitism, and as a result, they feel as though they are faced with increasingly overwhelming challenges. When speaking with college guidance at JSSC, they have stated that the quality of Jewish life on college campuses are among their top criteria for universities, and they are fully aware of the dramatic impact it can have on students who, up to their commencement from high school, had no idea they were a minority nor had any clue how to react to anti-Semitism.

**Recommendations**

This study examined how students are psychosocially prepared to transition from secondary school to college as well as how the school, parents, and the individual student impact the psychosocial developmental opportunities of college readiness. An overarching theme in the study’s findings is the need to 1) raise consciousness of necessary skills, 2) practice, and 3) develop salient meaning within students. It is through the recommended pathway that psychosocial development and readiness for college can be reached. It was clear that a conflict between perceptions of how students’ previous experiences prepared them for life beyond high school and the reality of what their experiences has provided. Most students at JSSC have not had practice in overcoming many of life’s challenges that other students of varying socioeconomic status and
religious backgrounds may have faced. Their families and their school have buffered there alleged challenges, and as a result they now struggle not only with managing these challenges but also with understanding them. This section provides recommendations for the aforementioned findings that demonstrate a need to reevaluate current protocol and practice at JSSC.

In general, there is a greater need for improved communication with both families and students regarding the need for psychosocial development and the value added to college readiness. The culture at JSSC is designed with the intention to create an infrastructure where students, parents, and teachers are able to work collaboratively to help best prepare students for college. Though there are many benefits to raising teenagers in such a loving and nurturing community, there are certain practices that the school should adjust in order to better serve their students and families. Since the school claims to be college preparatory, this study has highlighted some shortcomings of JSSC’s protocol that need to be addressed. Recommendations will be made generally regarding the aforementioned three-step process, whereas each facet of psychosocial development will be taken into consideration.

**Consciousness Raising**

Communicating and raising consciousness about the value of independence and the development of intrinsic motivation with both students and families can help emphasize its importance and bridge community expectations and student skill needs. Encouraging students to be more independent, to make their own food, clean up after themselves, do laundry, learn how to call and schedule doctor appointments (once they can drive), buy the groceries, and even wake up without their parents help, are small
examples of how practice can lead to psychosocial development. The school has an obligation to discuss these specific examples with parents in a dialogue regarding psychosocial development. All of these seemingly insignificant moments of practice in their home life can help students develop a stronger independence and sense of self, building upon a major goal of psychosocial development, and gaining an understanding of what it takes to accomplish these daily tasks. The school can select various channels to encourage communication with parents about the issues associated with a lack of independence and how they can directly impede successful transitions into college. In addition, giving students these types of skills and responsibilities may instill a deeper sense of self that could greatly benefit and provide profounder self-understanding.

Issues concerning the college guidance process can too be solved with enhanced communication. In addition, for future professional development, the college guidance office could focus on developing strategic tools to assess where parents and students feel they have not met their expectations. It was clear through focus groups and interviews that communication was the major concern, and It may be helpful to conduct exit interviews and/or surveys for each student of each graduating class honed specifically in on aforementioned issues. Though it may seem too little too late, being able to assess the process each year will help continue to support communication between school and family. There can be specific questions covering the college application process, or more open ended questions pertaining to general opinions about school communication and support. It might be beneficial to have a twitter or blog where college guidance and parents can interface outside of the school site. This digital space can also allow for parents to share experiences regarding college readiness and alumni parent experiences.
Many of the challenges that students face when looking beyond high school stems from larger community pressures to attend college immediately following high school. There are students who feel ill-prepared emotionally and psychosocially, and therefore struggle to manage while away at college. Alternatively, as an attempt to mitigate these pressures, JSSC currently promotes gap-year programs for such students, before students attend four-year universities. Although there is significant value and potential in the benefits of gap-year programs, their reach is still insufficient due to the abovementioned community pressures. The issues surrounding the college process are bigger than the college guidance office and the services it offers. The foundation of these issues is at a community level, and causes added friction in an already discouraging process. Therefore, in order to provide the desperately needed clarity, it is vital to further improve communication between the college guidance office, deans, students, and families. It is recommended that parent workshops be offered bi-annually for parents of ninth through twelfth grade. These workshops should be focused specifically on psychosocial skill development as it could be aligned with general learning expectations and the overall hope to have college-ready students at the end of their four year journey at JSSC.

**Practice**

The last two steps of the recommended process to psychosocial skill development are practice, and individual saliency. Issues concerning non-cognitive skill development are often associated with the ability to practice said skills. One of the primary concerns is associated with students who did not know how to manage their own lives while away from home. Hindered by a life of being over-managed and out of practice, students are
not given the freedom or practice to manage time on their own. Although this is an issue that pertains more to home and family expectations, the school can help prepare students and families by discussing the potential pitfalls to be aware of when thinking of college readiness.

The final recommendations pertain to the concerns regarding student resiliency, both social and academic. My results identified issues with students who demonstrated a sense of self and grit only built upon on their small experiences within a nurturing and forgiving community and school. It was because of this that most student grit perceptions changed after their first semester in college. Student participants were shocked at the lack of communication from universities and the expectation that students would navigate the online systems and other college processes individually. Resilience needs to be developed and if students are continuously allowed to move forward without hurdles and without challenges, they will never have the opportunity to become adept in the required life skills.

Practice again plays an important role in the development of a more resilient student. It is imperative that schools and parents communicate about the issues of resiliency, which in many cases can present themselves as self-advocacy and dependability. It is through a continuous bridging of schools and parents that we are able to work together to understand what students need, not simply what they want, that will help them prepare for their transition into college Epstein (2011). Bridging Cultures authors (Trumbull, Greenfield, Quiroz, Rothstein-Fisch, & Far West Lab for Educational Research and Development, S. C., 1996) suggests a strong parent-school connection in an effort to build resilience. Even though their study primarily addresses Latino culture, it
may also be applied to relationships that are developed between JSSC and immigrant families who do not have experience navigating American college processes and the associated cultures.

Discussions about the importance of practicing resilient skills should occur with parents, specifically about the importance of student dependability; where students are accountable for their work in a way that demands higher expectations than what some teachers and families currently expect. Academic resilience is one of the only types of resilience a school is capable of building, and by not implementing higher standards of academic integrity expectations, schools are doing a disservice to the psychosocial development of the student. It is recommended that JSSC develop late-work policies within grade levels and/or departments that can help to reinforce practice for a more academically resilient student. In addition, it is my recommendation that grit surveys be given to students at the end of each academic year while attending JSSC, providing a tool for college guidance and/or deans to assess psychosocial development as well as serve as a launch pad for parent communication and consciousness raising.

Multiple students stated that they felt their reading requirements as well as their ability to hand in late work was ultimately a disadvantage in preparing them for the rigorous expectations of a four-year university. Specifically, Brian, Jonny, and Jordan expressed that they felt unprepared for the academic rigor they were expected to adhere to in their universities. All three students had learning differences that they needed to overcome, and were given resources while at JSSC (though not through JSSC) that they depended on heavily. In the future, it may be noted that students who receive added help outside of JSSC may need to be communicated with regarding how they plan on
transitioning to college without said added help, or how to they plan to obtain similar help while away at university. It is recommended that the school reevaluate policies across departments and grade levels, and assess whether they are developing academically resilient students. Slightly more rigorous and aligned expectations regarding late-work policies will help students in practicing academic resiliency, serving them as they move on to universities.

**Individual Meaning**

I recommend that schools like JSSC, which have a homogenous student population, to develop programming, projects, and trips that encourage student engagement with communities outside of their own. Social entrepreneurialism can develop partnerships with diverse schools and communities and can put students in touch with people who are different from themselves. Being explicit about the need for students at JSSC to develop understanding and consciousness about how other cultures and communities live; seeing the connections between their values and beliefs, and bridging these different communities to strengthen each other. In addition, these programs inculcate students into experiences that are different from their own, and in for some, these experiences allow for a deeper contemplation and recognition of their own identity as it is framed in varying contexts.

Suzy was able to identify a couple of trips that provided programs where students were required to help in underserved areas, but the trips were short, and students were often not fully immersed in the local culture. It is important that students do not attend university without adequate understanding of what social structures are like outside of their community, where they can experience being different from other people, so that
they can learn to feel proud about shared experiences as well as their differences. Students should be able to identify the many similarities all people share, while still living in the safe environment of their homes. Trips, projects, and community service should be woven into students’ high school experiences to connect them to the outside community and promote more explicit consciousness-raising.

In conclusion, this study demonstrated the intricate relationship between the complex components of psychosocial development, and helped to further explain the importance of developing these skills for college readiness. Through student and parent feedback and analysis it became clear that the school personnel provide numerous important services to prepare students and build humans who can gain a true sense of responsibility to each other and the world. The school has extrinsically prepared students for academic successes; students understand how to navigate academic systems and work hard to get the grade, but they are not entirely clear as to why they are doing so, they are missing intrinsic motivational development. It is recommended that the school take a critical look at how aforementioned practices could be changed to help better prepare students for college. As graduating classes before, the class of 2014 from JSSC continues to have a reverse transfer rate of almost double the national average, a fact that should not be ignored. Students from this specific community and socioeconomic status should epitomize a college ready student. If JSSC students are struggling for successful psychosocial development before heading off to four-year universities, what can be expected of students who are less fortunate? Moreover, the JSSC staff should be proactive in ensuring that it is doing everything it can to help prepare students for life beyond high school. Erickson (1968) states that students should have developed their
sense of knowing themselves through industry an identity. Students need to be aware of what they know about themselves and what they don’t know. Schools need to create an environment where a fixed identity is discouraged, as graduates are going to continue to change as their community expands and their self-exploration begins at university. It is recommended that JSSC develop a four-year trajectory for student psychosocial development, where parents and students are able to collect wisdom through communication and observation of people. If practice changes at JSSC and psychosocial development for college readiness improves, it is expected that these transfer rates will lessen, and could strengthen a national conversation, suggesting that a replication of this practice could significantly influence students from diverse backgrounds and socioeconomic status.

**Ancillary Findings**

In conducting interviews off campus at neutral locations, and for reasons associated with the fact that I have long-standing relationships with most of the students who were interviewed, conversations persisted following interviews after the recorder was turned off. No formal data was collected during this time, but two themes emerged from these informal and relaxed conversations at coffee shops: 1) most of the students were exposed to an environment on campus where abuse of prescription drug was a norm, whether or not they chose to partake, and 2) almost all students expressed the negative impact of social media while experiencing their first semester away at a four-year university.
Drugs

Though it has been a decade since I graduated from college, the party culture is something that many adults (myself included) regard with joy when looking back at nights of off-campus collegiate life. For generations of undergraduates, collegiate parties consisted of alcohol, marijuana, and for some cocaine; however students in college today are regularly exposed to central nervous system depressants, opioids, and stimulants, in short prescription drugs. These drugs are sometimes prescribed to students and then given out to their friends. Some students expressed buying them for social purposes weekly, even bi-weekly, and typically taken in conjunction with alcohol. Some of the drugs being bought from dealers are highly potent, and students who take these drugs recreationally have potentially high addiction rates, and dangerous probable outcomes. Through dialogues with some of these students, it became clear that drug culture at universities have shifted to be medical grade.

Social Media

The second ancillary finding that was surprising had to do with the impact that social media has on students struggling socially to adapt to their new university. Student participants who would feel lonely at times would turn to social media to connect with their not-so-close community, and would be faced with images of their peers at different universities posting images of fun times. A visual reminder of their own loneliness, their reaching out through social media made them miss the comforts of their friends that they have known and relied upon in the not-so-distant past. In some cases, social media became the catalyst to have them change schools. The trend regarding social media and
feeling depressed about a new social setting seemed to resonate more with female students than with male.

**Recommended Future Research**

While reviewing data it became evident that male and female students from JSSC experience various aspects of their college transition uniquely based on gender specific capabilities. In particular, help seeking became a theme in all conversations. Generally, female students had more social issues when transitioning, whereas male students experienced more academic issues. In addition, female students expressed greater capability to seek help than males. Future research may ascertain explicit needs for genders within unique socioeconomic groups.
References


Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. San


Thorndike, E. L. (1898, 1911) "Animal Intelligence: an Experimental Study of the Associative Processes in Animals" Psychological Monographs #8


Dear Student,

I am writing to inform you about a dissertation study that is being conducted at New Community Jewish High School (NCJHS) regarding psychosocial readiness for students graduating from this school. Sivan Tarle, a doctoral candidate, is conducting the study as part of the Ed.D. degree requirements.

The purpose of Sivan Tarle’s dissertation study is to explore the processes in place currently at NCJHS that promote facets which help prepare students for the myriad of psychosocial challenges they will likely face as they transition into life at a four-year college. Psychosocial factors are internal beliefs that help you preserve and stay motivated through an emotionally challenging time, like going to college. This study will add new knowledge to existing information regarding best practice and policy between school, student, and family, through the preparation process for college. Your participation in this study would be to participate in one 45-minute one-on-one interview in your senior year of high school as well as one 45-minute one-on-one interview during the fall semester of your first year in a four-year university.

Any personally identifiable characteristics, such as your name or school, will not appear in the study. Participating in this study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time.

Your time investment in this study is greatly appreciated. If you would like to participate, please contact Sivan Tarle at starle@faculty.ncjhs.org or 707.328.3368. Thank you in advance for considering participation in this study.

Best,

Sivan Tarle
Appendix B: Draft Email Solicitation to Parent Participants  
California State University, Northridge  

EMAIL SOLICITATION TO PARTICIPANTS  
Student Psychosocial College Readiness Study  

Email from the director of college guidance counseling office to high school student when student is a second semester senior and already has been accepted to a four-year college.

Dear Parent,

I am writing to inform you about a dissertation study that is being conducted at New Community Jewish High School (NCJHS) regarding psychosocial readiness for students graduating from this school. Sivan Tarle, a doctoral candidate, is conducting the study as part of the Ed.D. degree requirements.

The purpose of Sivan Tarle’s dissertation study is to explore the processes in place currently NCJHS that promote facets which help prepare students for the myriad of psychosocial challenges they will likely face as they transition into life at a four-year college. Psychosocial factors are considered to be involving both psychological and social components, where social conditions are related to mental health. This doctoral study will add new knowledge to existing information regarding best practice and policy between school, student, and family, through the preparation process for college. Your participation in this study would be to participate in one 45-minute focus group interview in your child’s senior year of high school as well as one 45-minute focus group interview during the fall semester of your child’s first year in a four-year university.

Any personally identifiable characteristics, such as your name or school, will not appear in the study. Participating in this study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time.

Your time investment in this study is greatly appreciated. If you would like to participate, please contact Sivan Tarle at starle@faculty.ncjhs.org or 707.328.3368. Thank you in advance for considering participation in this study.

Best,

Sivan Tarle
EMAIL SOLICITATION TO PARTICIPANTS

Student Psychosocial College Readiness Study

Email from the director of college guidance counseling office to high school student when student is a second semester senior and already has been accepted to a four-year college.

Dear School Administrator,

I am writing to inform you about a dissertation study that is being conducted at New Community Jewish High School (NCJHS) regarding psychosocial readiness for students graduating from this school. Sivan Tarle, a doctoral candidate, is conducting the study as part of the Ed.D. degree requirements.

The purpose of Sivan Tarle’s dissertation study is to explore the processes in place currently at NCJHS that promote facets which help prepare students for the myriad of psychosocial challenges they will likely face as they transition into life at a four-year college. Psychosocial factors are considered to be involving both psychological and social components, where social conditions are related to mental health. This study will add new knowledge to existing information regarding best practice and policy between school, student, and family, through the preparation process for college. Your participation in this study would be to participate in one 45-minute focus group interview during the spring of 2014.

Any personally identifiable characteristics, such as your name or school, will not appear in the study. Participating in this study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time.

Your time investment in this study is greatly appreciated. If you would like to participate, please contact Sivan Tarle at starle@faculty.ncjhs.org or 707.328.3368. Thank you in advance for considering participation in this study.

Best,
Sivan Tarle
Appendix D: CSUN Informed Consent Form

California State University, Northridge

CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

Student Psychosocial College Readiness Study

You are being asked to participate in a research study, conducted by Sivan Tarle as part of the requirements for the Ed.D. degree in program. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything that you do not understand before deciding if you want to allow your child to participate. A researcher listed below will be available to answer your questions.

RESEARCH TEAM

Researcher:

Sivan Tarle

Department of Education

18111 Nordhoff St.

Northridge, CA 91330-8265

818-677-2901

Starle@faculty.ncjsh.org

Faculty Advisor:

Gregory Knotts Ph.D.

Department of Elementary Education

18111 Nordhoff St.

Northridge, CA 91330-8265

Telephone Number

818-677-3189

Email Address

Greg.knotts@csun.edu
PURPOSE OF STUDY

The purpose of this research study is to better understand the perceptions of students and their families as they experience the transition from high school to college. This study hopes to evaluate the processes and conditions in which psychosocial development of graduates is promoted and/or neglected throughout this pivotal time period in an adolescent life. Psychosocial factors are considered to be involving both psychological and social components, where social conditions are related to mental health. The three facets of psychosocial development this study will be focusing on are: (1) intrinsic motivational factors, (2) non-cognitive skills, and (3) resilience.

SUBJECTS

Inclusion Requirements

You are eligible to participate in this study if you are a graduating senior, are already accepted into a four-year university, and are willing to share your perceptions.

Time Commitment

This study will involve approximately two hours of your time over the course of six months.

PROCEDURES

The following procedures will occur:

Students will be asked to:

- complete a 45 minute one-on-one interview in the spring of your senior year at NCJHS
- complete a 45 minute one-on-one interview in the fall of your freshman year at a four-year university
- complete a short survey in the spring of their senior year at NCJHS
- complete a survey in the fall of your freshman year at a four-year university.

Parents will be asked to:

- complete a 45 minute focus group interview in the spring of your child’s senior year at NCJHS,
- complete a 45 minute focus group interview in the fall of your child’s freshman year at a four-year university.

NCJHS Administration will be asked to:

- complete a 45 minute focus group interview in the spring of 2014.
RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS
The possible risks and/or discomforts associated with the procedures described in this study include questions related to experiences with and/or perceptions of psychosocial development and readiness. You may feel uneasy about answering some of these interview questions. You may elect not to answer any of the questions with which you feel uneasy and still remain as a participant in the study. This study involves no more than minimal risk. There are no known harms or discomforts associated with this study beyond those encountered in normal daily life.

BENEFITS

Subject Benefits
You may not directly benefit from participation in this study. However, this study examines the processes of psychosocial development and readiness for college. As a participant in the one-on-one interviews or focus groups, you may develop a greater awareness of the development of your own psychosocial development process, which may facilitate change in you personally.

Benefits to Others or Society
Findings from this study may contribute to our knowledge on the subject. The information gleaned from the study may lead to greater awareness among this process.

ALTERNATIVES TO PARTICIPATION
The only alternative to participation in this study is not to participate.

COMPENSATION, COSTS AND REIMBURSEMENT

Compensation for Participation
You will not be paid for your participation in this research study.

Costs
There is no cost to you for participation in this study.

WITHDRAWAL OR TERMINATION FROM THE STUDY AND CONSEQUENCES
You are free to withdraw from this study at any time. If you decide to withdraw from this study you should notify the research team immediately. The research team may also end your participation in this study if you do not follow instructions, miss scheduled visits, or if your safety and welfare are at risk.
CONFIDENTIALITY

Subject Identifiable Data

All identifiable information that will be collected about you will be removed and replaced with a code. A list linking the code and your identifiable information will be kept separate from the research data.

Data Storage

All research data will be stored electronically on a secure computer with password protection. The audio recordings will also be stored on a secure computer with password protection; then transcribed and erased at the end of the study.

Data Access

The researcher and faculty advisor named on the first page of this form will have access to your study records. Any information derived from this research project that personally identifies you will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without your separate consent, except as specifically required by law. Publications and/or presentations that result from this study will not include identifiable information about you.

Data Retention

The researchers intend to keep the research data for approximately 5 years and then it will be destroyed.

Mandated Reporting

Under California law, the researcher is required to report known or reasonably suspected incidents of abuse or neglect of a child, dependent adult or elder, including, but not limited to, physical, sexual, emotional, and financial abuse or neglect. If any researcher has or is given such information, she may be required to report it to the authorities.

IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS

If you have any comments, concerns, or questions regarding the conduct of this research please contact the research team listed on the first page of this form.

If you have concerns or complaints about the research study, research team, or questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact Research and Sponsored Projects, 18111
VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION STATEMENT

You should not sign this form unless you have read it and been given a copy of it to keep. **Participation in this study is voluntary.** You may refuse to answer any question or discontinue your involvement at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you might otherwise be entitled. Your decision will not affect your relationship with California State University, Northridge. Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this consent form and have had a chance to ask any questions that you have about the study.

_I agree to participate in the study._

___ I agree to be audio recoded
___ I do not wish to be audio recorded

___________________________________________________  ______________________
Participant Signature Date

___________________________________________________
Printed Name of Participant

___________________________________________________  ______________________
Researcher Signature Date

___________________________________________________
Printed Name of Researcher
Appendix E: Semi-structured Student Interview Protocol for Spring 2014

California State University, Northridge

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Student Psychosocial College Readiness Study

I. Pre-interview Session: Introduction/Background

Welcome and introduction:
Good morning/afternoon/evening. Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. Before we begin the interview session, I’d like to give you the opportunity to read and sign the Consent to Participate in Research.

Purpose of the interview:
As we discussed, this interview is a one-on-one interview intended to collect information for a research study that explores teacher perceptions regarding their prior student teaching experiences. During this interview, we will talk about your experiences and attitudes about your college preparation and psychosocial readiness processes.

Timing:
Today’s interview will last approximately 45 to 60 minutes. Are there any questions before I get started?

II. Interview Session

Main Questions:

1. What school will you be attending the in fall?
   Can you tell me a little bit more about the school you will be going to?
2. Given the excitement of this new change in life, what is something you are most looking forward to?
   Why are you most looking forward to those things?
3. How did you wind up selecting this particular school?
   What was the most exciting aspect of the school you applied to?
4. How would you describe your college preparatory experience at NCJHS this past year?
   Can you elaborate more on that?
5. What are some memories you have regarding the college readiness process at NCJHS?
   Which memory stands out the most?
   Why was it so impactful?
6. What would you say was a tool that was most helpful for you through this process?
   Why was it most helpful?
   How would you want to experience and/or learn this in another way?
   Can you explain that further?
7. If you could change something about the program, what would you change?
8. What are things you would do the same?
   Can you elaborate on that?
   Can you walk me through what was helpful about this?
11. What are some concerns you have about the coming year?
   Why is this concerning for you?
   How do you think you will handle those situations?
12. Did you take any courses or participate in any program at NCJHS that is geared to help you prepare for some of the challenges you think you will face?
13. Have your parents talked with you about how they hope you hand things?
14. Have your parents spoken to you about any of the concerns they have?
   What are they?
   Do you find their worries are similar to yours?
   Will you know anyone when you go to your university?

**Closing Questions:**
I would like to give you a final opportunity to help us examine these issues. Before I end today, is there anything that I missed? Do you have anything else to add at this time? Have you said everything that you wanted to say but didn’t get a chance to say? Have you shared everything that is significant about these experiences with me? If there’s anything else that you recall after our interview session, I invite you to share it by contacting me.

**III. Post-Interview Session: Debriefing and Closing**

Thank you for participating in today’s interview session. I greatly appreciate you taking the time and sharing your ideas with me. I also want to restate that what you have shared with me is confidential. No part of our discussion that includes names or other identifiable characteristics will be used in any report or document. Finally, I want to provide you with a chance to ask any questions that you might have about this interview. Do you have any questions at this time?
Appendix F: Semi-structured Student Interview Protocol for Fall 2014

California State University, Northridge

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Student Psychosocial College Readiness Study

I. Pre-interview Session: Introduction/Background

Welcome and introduction:
Good morning/afternoon/evening. Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. Before we begin the interview session, I’d like to give you the opportunity to read and sign the Consent to Participate in Research.

Purpose of the interview:
As we discussed, this interview is a one-on-one interview intended to collect information for a research study that explores teacher perceptions regarding their prior student teaching experiences. During this interview, we will talk about your experiences and attitudes about your college preparation and psychosocial readiness processes.

Timing:
Today’s interview will last approximately 45 to 60 minutes. Are there any questions before I get started?

II. Interview Session

Main Questions:
1. How have you been the past ____ months?
   How was moving in to ________________ university?
   Do you have a roommate?
   Do you like them?

2. Do you have a major?
   What courses are you taking?
   Are you finding any of them challenging?

3. Are you taking any extracurricular courses/activities?
   What inspired you to take them?

4. What has been your most impactful moment thus far?
   What made it so important?
   Why was it so important to you?
5. What has been the most challenging part of moving away from home?
   Why was it difficult?
   How did you deal with it?

6. Did you find anything easier than you anticipated?

7. Did anything surprise you about the transition into college?
   Why was it surprising?

8. How often do you speak with your family?
   Who do you speak with most?
   Do you typically call them or do they call you?
   What do you talk about most of the time?

9. If you could pick two things that NCJHS did to help prepare you for college, what would they be?
   Why?

10. If you could recommend anything your NCJHS to help better prepare students, what would it be?
    How could that knowledge have served you better?

Closing Questions:
I would like to give you a final opportunity to help us examine these issues. Before I end today, is there anything that I missed? Do you have anything else to add at this time? Have you said everything that you wanted to say but didn’t get a chance to say? Have you shared everything that is significant about these experiences with me? If there’s anything else that you recall after our interview session, I invite you to share it by contacting me.

III. Post-Interview Session: Debriefing and Closing

Thank you for participating in today’s interview session. I greatly appreciate you taking the time and sharing your ideas with me. I also want to restate that what you have shared with me is confidential. No part of our discussion that includes names or other identifiable characteristics will be used in any report or document. Finally, I want to provide you with a chance to ask any questions that you might have about this interview. Do you have any questions at this time?
Appendix G: Semi-structured Parent Focus Group Interview Protocol Spring 2014

California State University, Northridge

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Student Psychosocial College Readiness Study

I. Pre-interview Session: Introduction/Background

Welcome and introduction:
Good morning/afternoon/evening. Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. Before we begin the interview session, I’d like to give you the opportunity to read and sign the Consent to Participate in Research.

Purpose of the interview:
As we discussed, this interview is a one-on-one interview intended to collect information for a research study that explores teacher perceptions regarding their prior student teaching experiences. During this interview, we will talk about your experiences and attitudes about your college preparation and psychosocial readiness processes.

Timing:
Today’s interview will last approximately 45 to 60 minutes. Are there any questions before I get started?

II. Interview Session

Main Questions:

1. Is this your first experience helping your child transition to college?
   If not, how does this feel different than the other times?
2. How are you feeling about your child going away to college in the fall?
   Is anyone in your family struggling with this more than the other(s)?
3. What do you anticipate they will struggle with most?
   Why?
   Is this reason something that you feel could have been modified, or is intrinsic to their personality?
4. What do you anticipate they will do well in?
   Why do you think they will be successful at this?
5. How often do you talk to them on the phone typically?
   What do you typically discuss?
Who is typically the person calling?

6. What are you doing currently to help prepare them for the transition?
   Why do you think this is helpful?
   What do you think it will help to prepare them for?

7. Do you feel NCJHS has prepared your child for this transition to college?
   What would you do differently?
   Why?

Closing Questions:
I would like to give you a final opportunity to help us examine these issues. Before I end today, is there anything that I missed? Do you have anything else to add at this time? Have you said everything that you wanted to say but didn’t get a chance to say? Have you shared everything that is significant about these experiences with me? If there’s anything else that you recall after our interview session, I invite you to share it by contacting me.

III. Post-Interview Session: Debriefing and Closing

Thank you for participating in today’s focus group session. I greatly appreciate you taking the time and sharing your ideas with me. I also want to restate that what you have shared with me is confidential. No part of our discussion that includes names or other identifiable characteristics will be used in any report or document. Finally, I want to provide you with a chance to ask any questions that you might have about this interview. Do you have any questions at this time? so you know what you want to do, clearly. It is fine and you should not worry about it – but you have much editing to do.
I. Pre-interview Session: Introduction/Background

Welcome and introduction:
Good morning/afternoon/evening. Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. Before we begin the interview session, I’d like to give you the opportunity to read and sign the Consent to Participate in Research.

Purpose of the interview:
As we discussed, this interview is a one-on-one interview intended to collect information for a research study that explores teacher perceptions regarding their prior student teaching experiences. During this interview, we will talk about your experiences and attitudes about your college preparation and psychosocial readiness processes.

Timing:
Today’s interview will last approximately 45 to 60 minutes. Are there any questions before I get started?

II. Interview Session

Main Questions:

1. Is this your first experience helping your child transition to college?
   If now, what have you experienced in the past?
   Is this child’s transition different from the other(s)? Why?

2. How do you feel about this transitional time in their lives and in yours?
   Is anyone in your family having a more difficult time?
   Why do you think that is?

3. How do you think your child is managing?
   Why do you think that is?

4. How often do you communicate with your child?
   Who typically calls whom?
   What do you typically talk about?

5. Is there something you feel your child has struggled most with during this time?
Why?
How do you think it would have helped?

6. If you could change anything about how you prepared your child for this transition, what would it be?

7. If you could suggest any way for NCJHS to better prepare your students for this transition, what would you suggest?

Why?
How would you suggest to do this?

Closing Questions:
I would like to give you a final opportunity to help us examine these issues. Before I end today, is there anything that I missed? Do you have anything else to add at this time? Have you said everything that you wanted to say but didn’t get a chance to say? Have you shared everything that is significant about these experiences with me? If there’s anything else that you recall after our interview session, I invite you to share it by contacting me.

III. Post-Interview Session: Debriefing and Closing

Thank you for participating in today’s focus group session. I greatly appreciate you taking the time and sharing your ideas with me. I also want to restate that what you have shared with me is confidential. No part of our discussion that includes names or other identifiable characteristics will be used in any report or document. Finally, I want to provide you with a chance to ask any questions that you might have about this interview. Do you have any questions at this time so you know what you want to do, clearly. It is fine and you should not worry about it – but you have much editing to do.
Appendix I: Semi-structured NCJHS Administration Focus Group Interview Protocol

California State University, Northridge

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Student Psychosocial College Readiness Study

I. Pre-interview Session: Introduction/Background

Welcome and introduction:
Good morning/afternoon/evening. Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. Before we begin the interview session, I’d like to give you the opportunity to read and sign the Consent to Participate in Research.

Purpose of the interview:
As we discussed, this interview is a one-on-one interview intended to collect information for a research study that explores teacher perceptions regarding their prior student teaching experiences. During this interview, we will talk about your experiences and attitudes about your college preparation and psychosocial readiness processes.

Timing:
Today’s interview will last approximately 45 to 60 minutes. Are there any questions before I get started?

II. Interview Session

Main Questions:

1. Can you identify areas that you feel are necessary for college readiness?  
   Do you feel the school does already do any of these things?  
   If not, do you have ideas for how they might be able to help prepare students in the future?

2. What are some ways that you feel NCJHS prepares students for college?  
   In what ways do these ways help prepare students for college?

3. Can you give me some examples of programmatic development designed specifically for psychosocial college readiness?  
   In what ways do these programs help?

4. In what ways does NCJHS partner with parents to prepare their students for college?  
   How is this helpful?  
   Are there specific programs that work on this?

5. Are there times where you feel that parent-school partnership may be counterproductive to student development for college?  
   Please elaborate

6. Do you feel NCJHS prepares students for college well?  
   If yes, please explain.
If no, please explain.

7. If you could change anything NCJHS does to help prepare students prepare for college, what would it be?
   Why?

Closing Questions:
I would like to give you a final opportunity to help us examine these issues. Before I end today, is there anything that I missed? Do you have anything else to add at this time? Have you said everything that you wanted to say but didn’t get a chance to say? Have you shared everything that is significant about these experiences with me? If there’s anything else that you recall after our interview session, I invite you to share it by contacting me.

III. Post-Interview Session: Debriefing and Closing

Thank you for participating in today’s focus group session. I greatly appreciate you taking the time and sharing your ideas with me. I also want to restate that what you have shared with me is confidential. No part of our discussion that includes names or other identifiable characteristics will be used in any report or document. Finally, I want to provide you with a chance to ask any questions that you might have about this interview. Do you have any questions at this time?
Appendix J: Student 10-Item Self-Scoring Grit Scale Survey

California State University, Northridge

STUDENT (DUCKWORTH LABS) GRIT SURVEY

Student Psychosocial College Readiness Study

*First, please read the following 10 statements and for each, check the box that best represents you.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New ideas and projects sometimes distract me from previous ones.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My interests change from year to year.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setbacks don’t discourage me. I don’t give up easily.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am an extremely hard worker.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I often set a goal but later choose to pursue a different one.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have difficulty maintaining my focus on projects that take more than a few months to complete.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I finish whatever I begin.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am diligent. I never give up.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have achieved a goal that took years of work.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have been obsessed with a certain idea or project for a short time but later lost interest.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Next, add up all the points for the checked boxes and divide by 10. The maximum score on this scale is 5 (extremely gritty), and the lowest scale on this scale is 1 (not at all gritty). Finally turn the page to compare your score to a large sample of American adults.

How do you compare?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentile</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix K: Student Survey Submitted by College Guidance

California State University, Northridge

DOCUMENT REVIEW

Student Psychosocial College Readiness Study

NEW COMMUNITY JEWISH HIGH SCHOOL

JUNIOR QUESTIONNAIRE

Family/Background

1. Describe your living environment. Who lives in your house? Do you split time between two homes?
2. Do you have any siblings? If yes, please list names and ages. Are you the first of your siblings to attend college? If not, where are/have they attending/attended?
3. Is English your first language? Is it spoken at home? Do you speak any other languages fluently? What ethnic origin will you list on your college applications?
4. Have you ever spent a significant amount of time living away from home? If so, please explain.
5. What do your parents and friends expect of you? How have their expectations influenced the goals and standards you set for yourself? What pressures have you felt to conform?

Academic Information

6. Have you attended any other high school (including summer school)? If yes, list high school(s), city, and state.
7. Have you taken any courses outside of NCJHS, including summer courses? If so, please describe them and give dates.
8. Have you remediated any courses while in high school?
9. If you answered yes to the question above, what course(s) and where did you remediate?
11. Describe an academic experience that has been a highlight in your years at NCJHS (a teacher, project, class, paper, book, etc.).
12. What academic/intellectual skills would you define as strengths? Do you enjoy writing? Are you good at discussing ideas or debating with friends or family? Do you enjoy problem solving or doing research? Explain.
13. How often do you read? What is the book you have read most recently other than one required for school? Do you read the newspaper, blogs, or magazines? Which ones?
14. If you have to study for a major test or write a major paper, under what conditions do you like to work? Under what conditions do you produce your best work?
15. Estimate the number of hours you spend on an average school night doing homework and/or studying.
16. Have you worked to your potential in high school? Is our academic record an accurate measure of your ability and potential? What do you consider to be the best measure of your potential for college work?
17. Are there any outside circumstances that have interfered with your academic performance? Consider such factors as: after-school job, home responsibilities or difficulties, excessive school activities, illness or emotional stress, a learning disability, parental pressure, transferring schools, English not spoken at home, problems with course scheduling or other factors which are unique to your recent experience or background. Is there anything on your transcript that requires an explanation? Please be specific.

Activities

18. Have you participated in any foreign exchange/education programs? Have you hosted any students? If yes, please note dates and places and share a little bit about the experience and what you learned from it.
19. Of the activities in which you are involved, which holds the most significance for you and why? Feel free to discuss more than one.
20. Do you consider yourself to be a college athletic prospect? If so, have you written letters of interest to coaches and developed a sports resume? Have you filled out the NCAA Clearinghouse form? Are you playing in tournaments where college coaches will be watching with the purpose of recruiting?
21. Are you a musician, actor, dancer, photographer, or artist who needs to be thinking about portfolios, CDs, and auditions? The summer between junior and senior year is a great time to start working on your presentations.
22. What do you plan to do this summer? Colleges take a strong look at how you spend the summer between junior and senior year. Make your experience meaningful to you and tie it in with your passion, not just what looks good on a college application.
23. Have you held any paid employment, either during the summer or during the school year (include jobs like babysitting, working for the family business, etc.)? Describe your responsibilities. What have you learned from your work experience?

24. Describe your volunteer or community service work. Did you go above and beyond the graduation requirements?
25. What do you like to do in your free time?

**Personal Assessment**

26. Choose three adjectives that best describe you. Make sure that teachers, friends, and parents would agree with your choices.
27. Describe what you perceive as your personal strengths.
28. Describe what you perceive as your weaknesses.
29. How do you define success? What has been your most important accomplishment to date? Are you satisfied with your accomplishments to date? What do you want to change in the coming year?
30. Where do you see yourself five years from now? Ten years from now?
31. Describe a mistake you made (academic or otherwise) or a challenge you've faced. What did you learn through this experience?

**You and the School Community**

32. How would you describe high school? Is learning and academic success respected there? Has your school environment encouraged you to develop your interests, talents, and abilities? Have you felt limited by your school environment in any way? What would you preserve or change about your school if you had the opportunity to do so?
33. What have you enjoyed most about your high school career? What have you enjoyed the least?
34. What has been an issue in your school or community that you are concerned or passionate about? How does this issue concern or affect you? What has the discussion or conversation around this issue been? What has been your reaction to the issue and the conversations?
35. Who at NCJHS do you think knows you best (teacher, adviser, coach, administrator, peer, etc.)? Please list their names. Feel free to list more than one person.

**The College Search**

36. Do you have any idea what you would like to major in while in college? Have you given serious consideration to any specific careers? Are there any majors/careers that your parents hope you will pursue?
37. Are there colleges in which you are already interested/uninterested? Which ones?
38. Have you have visited any colleges? If so which ones and what were your impressions?
39. Do you expect to apply for financial aid for college? Are you interested in a scholarship?
40. Using a scale of 1-5 with 5 being the "most important" and 1 being the "least important", rate the factors that will be most important in your college decisions? Location Size Cost
Financial aid/scholarships offered
Majors Offered
Athletics
Jewish Life
Support Services

41. Describe your ideal college. Please consider size, campus life, location (rural, small town, urban, near the mountains, near the water, warm, cold, greek life, jewish life, support services, etc.), and any other factors that are critical to your selection.

42. Many colleges require two teacher recommendations from your junior and senior year teacher in core classes (English, history, math, or science). From these recommendations, admissions officers look for signs of your work ethics, analytical, and writing abilities, and evidence of independent thought, initiative, and motivation. At this moment, which of your teachers would you consider asking to write your recommendations and why?

43. Are you considering taking a gap year between high school and college?

44. Besides getting in, what are you most concerned about as you start the college process?

45. Final Thoughts

46. Use this space to tell us anything else not already covered in your responses to this questionnaire that you think we should know, and that you hope colleges will know about you.