Exploring the Nature of Coaching within a College Transition Program

by

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Dedication

This dissertation is dually dedicated to the growing number of first-generation and low-income students pursuing four-year degree programs and the success coaches tasked with providing individualized support to assist these students navigate and obtain their baccalaureate degree. May the validating approaches success coaches leverage serve as a model to frame additional asset-based efforts that inform broader student-centered redesign efforts within higher education towards advancing first-generation, low-income student success.

Don't Quit
by Edgar Albert Guest

When things go wrong, as they sometimes will,
When the road you're trudging, seems all uphill,
When funds are low and debts are high,
When you want to smile, but have to sigh,
When care is pressing you down a bit,
Rest, if you must, but don't you quit.

Life is queer with its twists and turns,
As everyone of us sometimes learns,
And many a failure turns about,
When he might have won if he'd stuck it out,
Don't give up though the pace seems slow,
You might succeed with another blow.

Often the goal is nearer than,
It seems to a faint and faltering man,
Often the struggler has given up,
When he might have captured the victor's cup,
And he learned too late when the night came down,
How close he was to the golden crown.

Success is failure turned inside out
The silver tint in the clouds of doubt
And you never can tell how close you are,
It may be near when it seems so far;
So stick to the fight when you're hardest hit,
It's when things seem the worst that you must not quit.

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"For with God, nothing shall be impossible" Luke 1:37 King James Version

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Abstract

The purpose of this case study is to explore the strategies and approaches success coaches use towards validating first-generation, low-income college student success. This case study was conducted at Terrace University (pseudonym), a public, four-year institution within the Midwest. Since 2008, Terrace University has sponsored Terrace Promise (pseudonym)— a four-year comprehensive college transition program designed to support first-generation, low-income student retention and success. Terrace Promise offers a variety of wrap-around supports to bolster first-generation, low-income student success including four years of financial assistance, first- and fourth-year seminar courses, and most relevant to this study four years of individualized success coaching with a Terrace Promise success coach. Terrace Promise was selected as the research site given the program's strong history of retaining and graduating Scholars from across the socioeconomic spectrum. Three research questions guided this study: (1) What is the program's approach to coaching first-generation, low-income Scholars; (2) How do success coaches describe their coaching approach; (3) How do first-generation, low-income program participants describe their coaching experience. To answer these questions, I collected data during eight focus groups with 45 Terrace Promise Scholars, seven individual interviews with Terrace Promise success coaches, and three observations of program staff meetings.

Findings from this study were analyzed through Rendón's (1994) validation theory. Chapter four outlines themes relevant to the how success coaches described their coaching approach including: (1) Coaching Philosophies; (2) Conceptualizing Support; (3) Strategies for

Cultivating Relationships with first-generation, low-income Scholars; and (4) Influences from Workplace Environment. Chapter five highlights descriptive themes across how Scholars who participated in focus groups conceptualized and described experienced success coaching: (1) Support, Helpful, Resources; (2) The Nature of the Coaching Relationship; and (3) The Role of Validation in Scholar Processes and Outcomes. Chapter six analyzes findings across the entire data corpus to inform the primary research question. Findings highlight seven interconnected domains of success coaching that foster a sense of validation among first-generation and low-income Scholars. I offer examples of how these seven domains appear across the Terrace Promise coaching context as well as extend previous conceptions of interpersonal validation. The study concludes with implications and recommendations for higher education practice and policy as it pertains to promoting and sustaining first-generation and low-income student success.

Keywords: first-generation, low-income college students; success coaching; interpersonal validation

Chapter 1 Introduction

More students from lower-income and first-generation backgrounds are attending four-year institutions than ever before. The Pew Research Center estimates the percentage of undergraduate dependents from low-income families attending public, four-year institutions increased from 11% in 1996 to 17% in 2016 (Fry & Cilluffo, 2019). Furthermore, during the 2015-2016 academic year, an estimated 47% of public four-year college attendees self-identified as "first-generation" whereby neither parent had earned a bachelor's degree (RTI International, 2019). It is tempting to suggest increases in postsecondary access and representation among students from lower income and first-generation backgrounds translates to increases in the number of low-income and first-generation college graduates. Unfortunately, this is not the case. Despite recent increases in the number of students from lower-income and first-generation backgrounds matriculating to four-year institutions, these students continue to earn bachelor's degrees at lower rates compared to their more affluent, continuing-generation peers (National Student Clearing House, 2016). In efforts to close this four-year degree attainment gap, institutional stakeholders have increased focus on how to better retain and graduate students from lower-income and first-generation backgrounds.

1.1 Who are First-Generation and Low-Income College Students?

While "first-generation" and "low-income" are two distinct student populations, research suggest students from low-income backgrounds are also likely to be the first in their families to attempt to earn a four-year degree (Engle & Tinto, 2008). Cognizant of the dynamic ways in which social class (e.g., income level, education level) influence college experiences and

outcomes, it is not uncommon for practitioners and researchers to acknowledge these identities simultaneously and offer similar targeted interventions to support their opportunities for success with the higher education context.

It is well-established throughout higher education literature that students whose parents do not have a four-year degree and individuals from low-income backgrounds tend to have lower four-year college persistence and graduation rates (Perna, 2015; Reardon, 2011; Stephens et al., 2014). For the past two decades, scholars and practitioners have called attention to differences between first-generation and low-income (FGLI) students and non-FGLI student degree completion rates. In their seminal report, *Moving Beyond Access: College Success for Low-Income, First-Generation College Students*, Engle and Tinto (2008) estimated that 26% of FGLI students who began college at a public four-year institution did not return after their first year. Moreover, the authors found only 34% of FGLI students completed degrees within six years; a degree attainment rate nearly half that of higher-income students whose guardian(s) completed a baccalaureate degree (Engle & Tinto, 2008). Today, approximately 25% of undergraduates attending four-year institutions are both low-income and first-generation and their six-year graduation rate is only 41% compared to 73% for students who are neither low-income or first-generation (Cahalan et al., 2018). Persistent gaps between FGLI and non-FGLI student degree completion rates suggest additional efforts are needed to support FGLI student persistence and retention towards degree completion. In order to meet the dual goal of improving retention among the increasing population of FGLI students attending four-year institutions and narrowing gaps in four-year degree completion rates, stakeholders have placed emphasis on promoting student success.

1.2 Student Success

        The phrase "student success" is ubiquitous throughout higher education research and

practice and is particularly relevant for addressing issues pertaining to FGLI student retention

and persistence.[1] Despite widespread adoption of the term "student success", it's often not clear

what the phrase means. Broadly, student success encompasses an intertwined set of student and

institutional outcomes ranging from persistence, retention, attainment of educational objectives,

holistic development, academic achievement, engagement in educationally purposeful activities,

satisfaction, time-to-degree, as well as post-college performance (Kuh et al., 2008). Student

engagement is a primary focal point of student success and is enacted through processes such as

validation, sense of belonging, self-efficacy, active involvement, and self-awareness (Kuh et al.,

2008; Cuseo, 2007). Taken together, student success can be understood as a holistic phenomenon

that encompasses the intersections of student development and higher education goals. Given

several student success outcomes are also key indicators for assessing institutional effectiveness,

researchers, administrators, and practitioners have made concerted efforts to identify and better

understand strategies, practices, and processes essential to helping students succeed, with a

particular focus on understanding how to better support FGLI student populations.

        FGLI students are an important and increasing population within four-year institutions.

Today, a quarter of all undergraduates attending four-year institutions are both low-income and

first-generation; however, less than half will complete a bachelor's degree within six years

(Cahalan et al., 2018). This suggests additional supports are necessary if institutions wish to

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[1] Although often conflated, retention refers to an institution's ability to retain students from admission through graduation, while persistence describes a student's continued enrollment from one phase (e.g., term, year) to the next regardless of institution (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2021). Alternatively, persistence is described as a process involving retention from one semester to the next marked by indicators of success throughout the students' college experiences (Kuh et al., 2008).

increase the number of FGLI students who earn a baccalaureate degree. Assuming higher education stakeholders don't want increases to college access among FGLI populations to go in vain, efforts should focus on understanding how to support and improve FGLI student success once enrolled. Research and literature pertaining to FGLI students' experiences within higher education offer critical insights into the various factors, strategies, and processes thought to promote and hinder FGLI students' opportunities for success within higher education.

1.3 Background

As previously noted, access to higher education has improved for FGLI students, however, these students continue to earn bachelor's degrees at lower rates than their more affluent, continuing-generation peers (National Student Clearing House, 2016). Enduring gaps in four-year degree completion underscores the need for institutional stakeholders to become better acquainted with the both the systemic and personal challenges FGLI students encounter once enrolled and to identify strategies and processes that can promote their success. The provision of tuition assistance —in particular need-based aid— is often proposed as a solution for increasing not only college access among FGLI populations, but also their retention and degree completion. However, based on personal experience working directly with FGLI students in a TRIO program, I can attest that tuition assistance addresses only one component needed to support and retain this population. FGLI students also require structured social and academic support to be successful in higher education. Rather than rely on decentralized, single-strategy interventions to promote FGLI student success, there is increased attention in implementing a set of comprehensive supports tailored to simultaneously address to the multi-faceted needs of FGLI students (Kezar, 2011; Means & Pyne, 2017). Programs that offer a comprehensive set of services and supports are prime for dismantling systemic barriers FGLI students contend with by

offering a holistic approach to promoting and achieving success. In the following subsections, I review some of the common barriers thought to stymie FGLI student success within four-year institutions. I then define what college transition programs are and provide a rationale for how they are thought to support FGLI student success noting common programmatic components and preliminary findings on student success outcomes. I also place emphasis on programmatic features that have yet to be examined within the context of college transition programs and describe the purpose and contribution of this dissertation.

1.3.1 Barriers to First-Generation, Low-Income Student Success

FGLI students face a myriad of challenges that can thwart their success within higher education. Lower persistence and graduation rates among FGLI students have been attributed to individual behaviors, institutional factors, and systemic factors that influence their path to and through college. At the student level, researchers highlight the postsecondary enrollment patterns of FGLI students as a primary reason for low degree completion rates. For example, FGLI students disproportionality delay college entry after high school, are more likely to attend less-selective four-year institutions with low degree completion rates, and more often enroll part-time in order to work to pay for costs associated with earning a bachelor's degree (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Kezar et al., 2015). Furthermore, scholars attribute poor academic performance and underutilization of available student support resources as additional individual characteristics of FGLI students that impede success (Durante et al., 2017; Stephens et al. 2014; Walpole, 2003). Combined, these individual behavioral traits are thought to reduce FGLI student chances for success in higher education settings.

Acknowledging the association between FGLI student enrollment behavior and lower persistence and graduation rates, many scholars recommend full-time enrollment at more

selective four-year institutions immediately after high school to increase FGLI bachelor's degree completion rates. However, this solution does not account for negative psychosocial encounters that also impede FGLI success. It has been well documented that FGLI students enrolled at selective institutions often report feeling a sense of isolation, alienation, and disconnection from the larger university community (Aries & Seider, 2005; Jury et al., 2017; Means & Pyne, 2017; Soria & Bultmann, 2014). Negative psychosocial experiences within institutions can take a toll on FGLI persistence process; thus, contributing to lower retention and degree completion rates.

In addition to psychosocial barriers to FGLI student success, scholars denote various institutional policies, processes, and practices may not be conducive to promoting FGLI student success. For nearly three decades institutional retention efforts were primarily guided by seminal college student persistence theories. For example, Tinto's (1993) Student Departure Theory proposes that in order to persist, students must become academically and socially integrated within the campus culture. Similarly, Astin's (1984) Student Involvement Theory explains how desirable institutional outcomes (e.g., retention; graduation) are a result of the student's level of involvement on campus. Despite widespread application, these theories are often criticized for promoting assimilation and assumptions that every student has the capacity to effectively navigate the campus environment. Furthermore, these theories originated from research conducted over thirty-years ago on student populations well-represented within higher education (e.g., White, middle- to high-income students) which make them insufficient for framing solutions for promoting FGLI success. Understood this way, many of the seminal student persistence theories guiding institutional practice implicate FGLI college students, holding them solely responsible for institutional departure while negating how institutional context (e.g., agents, environments) may also hamper FGLI success.

Another major deterrent to FGLI student success is deficit-oriented perceptions and strategies associated with this population throughout practice and research. FGLI students frequently encounter negative stereotypes and deficit-oriented perspectives regarding their college preparation, competence, and general ability to succeed in the collegiate environment in comparison to middle- and high-income peers (Durante et al., 2017; McKay & Delvin, 2016). The perpetual focus on FGLI students' deficits and gaps in comparison to their middle- to high-income, continuing-generation peers can inadvertently lead to expecting deficiency and failure; thus, fostering invalidating experiences that are not congruent with promoting FGLI student success. Champions for FGLI student success encourage higher education and student affairs educators to consider whether their attitudes, expectations, language, and practices reflect a success-oriented perspective or a deficiency-oriented perspective (Macias, 2013; Martin et al., 2018). For example, FGLI student advocates draw attention the stigmatizing connotation associated with labeling FGLI students "at-risk" and call for the adoption of terminology that promotes the idea of seeing FGLI students as being capable or 'at-promise' of success (Smit, 2012). Similarly, deficit-oriented perspectives that FGLI students are not "college-ready", nor "college-material" are replaced with questions of whether four-year institutions are indeed "student-ready" and prepared to promote FGLI student success (McNair et al., 2016).

In summary, FGLI students contend with a complex array of barriers that may thwart their success within four-year institutions. Collectively, these challenges contribute to a larger systemic dilemma to promoting FGLI success within higher education. Shifting away from primary focus on FGLI students' behaviors and what they may lack, many scholars argue FGLI student challenges in higher education are not the fault of the student, but rather higher education — especially selective four-year institutions— disproportionately caters to the experiences of

middle- and high-income students of continuing-generation status and lack the structure and resources to bolster FGLI student success (Kezar, 2011; Stephens et al., 2012). As more FGLI students enroll in four-year institutions, creating the conditions that foster their success has never been more important. In the next subsection, I offer an overview of how the college transition initiatives have been leveraged to improve FGLI student outcomes.

1.3.2 College Transition Programs

In search of solutions to bolster FGLI student persistence and degree completion, four-year institutions across the country have scaled student success initiatives structured to attend to the multi-dimensional challenges this growing population of students endures. One student success initiative that has garnered the attention of various policymakers, philanthropists, and higher education researchers is college transition programs. Kezar and Kitchen (2020) denote college transition programs represent an "opportunity to structure or coordinate an environment within the larger university community that is explicitly oriented toward the particular needs and success of marginalized student populations (pg. 225)." The structure of college transition programs varies based on the purpose of the program, the student population served audience served, and coordination of resources. However, variability among programmatic structure, size, and supports rendered make comparing findings across college transition programs nearly impossible. Yet, such variability presents an opportunity to increase awareness of processes that may be conducive to FGLI student success.

Recent research suggest college transition initiatives are effective at increasing FGLI student retention and graduation. Page et al. (2017) found Dell Scholars persisted to their third

year of college at significantly higher rates than non-selected finalist eligible for the program.[2] In a similar study, Gershenfeld et al. (2019) found five-year graduation rates among Illinois Promise recipients was significantly higher than the similarly matched comparison group that did not receive the targeted supports offered through the program ($p<0.012$; $n=414$).[3] These findings offer strong evidence that comprehensive college transition programs are effective in improving FGLI student retention and graduation. However, it remains unclear in what ways these programs contribute to FGLI student success.

Scholars propose the unique structure in which services are bundled within college transition initiatives is better suited to meet the needs of FGLI students compared to when these services are offered in a decentralized matter across campus (Holcombe & Kezar 2020; Kezar & Kitchen, 2020). Personally, I attribute my undergraduate persistence and degree completion to my engagement in and support received from a four-year college transition program. The program provided a four-year, renewable tuition scholarship, first-year success seminar, peer mentoring, free academic tutoring, career planning, and community building events. Understanding each college transition programs tailor services based on population served and availability of resources, as research on college transition programs expands, the focus should not be to compare which programmatic resources or arrangements are better or most effective for advancing FGLI student success. Rather, higher education administrators and practitioners would benefit from understanding how FGLI students experience certain programmatic efforts and

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[2] Funded by the Michael and Susan Dell Foundation, Dell Scholars receive up to $20,000 in need-based grants, a free laptop, book stipend, as well as on-going outreach from a Dell Scholars retention specialist who assistance with addressing emotional and lifestyle challenges that may prevent the student from completing their degree. For more information on the Dell Scholars program, visit https://www.dellscholars.org/

[3] The Illinois Promise is a four-year renewable need-based scholarship that combines grants and targeted support services such as mentoring, academic tutoring, career exploration, and advising to promote persistence and improve graduation rates. For more information on Illinois Promise visit https://ipromise.illinois.edu/whats-i-promise

explore the processes that contribute to their success. Therefore, as higher education constituents look to improve low-income, first-generation student success, additional research on how practices and strategies utilized within college transition programs contribute to FGLI student persistence is needed.

1.3.3 Coaching in Higher Education

Longstanding institutional retention services such as academic advising and mentoring provide crucial student services, however, stagnant FGLI student retention and graduation rates suggest there is still a need for additional targeted support. Within the broader higher education landscape, coaching has emerged as the newest student services approach designed to support student success (Bettinger & Baker, 2014; Robinson, 2015; Sepulveda, 2017). With origins traced back to athletics, business, and psychology, coaching is broadly conceptualized as "partnering with individuals in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential" (International Coach Federation, 2019, para 1). Within the context of higher education, coaching is considered a highly customized, student-centered retention effort that places emphasis on helping students take action towards the realization of their goals and desires (Robinson & Gahagan, 2010; Sepulveda, 2017). Common features of the coaching include proactive outreach, relationship building, identifying goals, creating action plans, providing feedback as well as reflection (Robinson & Gahagan, 2010; Sepulveda, 2017).

There is a small, yet growing, body of empirical evidence that suggests positive outcomes of coaching for both students and institutions. Several studies have found coaching to be effective in increasing student academic performance and retention (Allen & Lester, 2012; Barnhart & LeMaster, 2013; Bettinger & Baker, 2014; Capstick, et al., 2019; Sepulveda, et al.,

2020). For example, Capstick and colleagues (2019) found students on academic probation who

participated in a coaching intervention had higher retention rates the following semester

compared to their probation peers who did not participate in the program (38.6% and 17.1%

respectively). Similarly, in an experimental study of InsideTrack, Bettinger and Baker (2014)

found students who received coaching were 5.3 percentage points more likely to remain enrolled

at their respective institution 12 months later compared to similarly situated peers who did not

receive coaching. These findings suggest coaching is a promising retention strategy; however,

there is very little understanding of the mechanisms and processes driving such results.

Several college transition programs offer coaching services; however, the nature of coaching

within this context remains underexplored. More explicitly, scholars have yet to explore FGLI

college students' perceptions of and experiences with coaching administered by full-time

program staff within college transition programs. An understanding of how coaching strategies

employed by college transition program professional staff can help reveal the processes through

which coaching contributes to FGLI student success and college transition program

effectiveness.

1.4 Framing First-Generation, Low-Income Success through Asset-Based Perspectives

University administrators, student affairs educators, philanthropists, and policymakers

have become increasingly concerned with identifying strategies and approaches that can promote

college success among the increasing number of FGLI college students attending four-year

institutions. FGLI students contend with various systemic barriers that impede upon their

success; however, perhaps the most concerning is the perpetual focus on FGLI students' deficits

which often translates to expecting deficiency and failure from this population (Macias, 2013;

Martin et al., 2018). Thus, as higher education stakeholders consider new strategies and

approaches towards improving their persistence and graduation, a paradigm shift is needed. Rather than extensive focusing on "fixing" FGLI students, higher education constituents must begin to leverage and recognize FGLI strengths to promote and sustain their success. Contrary to deficiency-oriented perspectives which frame solutions to FGLI success based on what these students lack, an asset-based perspective shifts the focus of inquiry away from what FGLI students lack and centers on the circumstances and resources that empower, drive, inspire, and promote their success. An asset-based perspective emphasizes achievement rather than failure, shifting the restrictive deficit-based discourse surrounding FGLI students to one of potential and possibility.

College persistence theories such as Tinto's (1987) Student Departure Theory and Astin's (1984) Student Involvement Theory have guided institutional retention efforts for decades. However, these seminal persistence theories are often critiqued for being more indicative of how students from affluent, continuing-generation backgrounds persisted through college and often implicate FGLI students as solely responsible for attrition with little to no attention to how institutional agents could more adequately support FGLI students in the process. In 1994, Rendón introduced validation theory with applicability to outlining how institutional agents can take a more proactive role in promoting success among FGLI college students. Rendón (1994) posited validation is a key process for supporting the FGLI student persistence and retention. Validation is defined as the "intentional, proactive, affirmation of students by in- and out-of-class agents (e.g., faculty, peers, academic affairs staff, family members) in order to validate students as generators of knowledge and as valued members of the college learning community and foster personal development and social adjustment (Rendón-Linares & Munoz, 2011, p. 12)".

Validation theory has been applied extensively throughout the higher education literature to frame educators' approach to supporting FGLI populations and inform the design of various student success initiatives (Rendón-Linares & Munoz, 2011). Widely acknowledged for its interactionist perspective, validation theory takes into consideration how institutional agents can either validate or hinder students' growth and development in ways that previous college student persistence theories failed to address. Moreover, validation theory is lauded for reframing deficit-oriented narratives, ideologies, and approaches historically associated with FGLI students' capacity for success in higher education with asset-based perspectives that place onus on institutional agents to work in ways that leverage FGLI students' agency, sense of self-worth, and liberation from past invalidations that affirm their ability to succeed in college.

1.5 Statement of Problem

Although research demonstrates positive effects associated with college transition programs and FGLI student persistence and graduation rates, it is not well understood nor described how these interventions are effective. Some scholars attribute greater year-to-year retention and graduation rates to the provision of additional need-based aid administered to FGLI college transition program participants (Clotfelter, et al., 2018; Gershenfeld et al., 2019; Page et al., 2017). Yet, the provision of need-based aid addresses only one structural barrier FGLI students contend with in pursuit of a bachelor's degree. Furthermore, crediting the success of college transition programs to aid is inconsistent with the rationale for the holistic set of resources offered to support FGLI students' success. Less is known about if and how non-pecuniary programmatic elements within college transition programs contribute to FGLI student success. Therefore, opportunity exist to expand how college transition programs are theorized and thought to contribute to FGLI student success. Advancing understanding beyond ways in

which college transition programs attend to FGLI students' financial barriers to success, there is an opportunity to understand if and how college transition programs utilize asset-based perspectives to leverage FGLI student success. Theorizing and evaluating college transition programs based on the premise of asset-based perspectives would strengthen stakeholders' understanding of how practices within these programs help FGLI students overcome barriers to success and persist to degree completion.

1.6 Purpose of Study

As institutional investment and research on college transition programs grows, it will become imperative to understand how features within these programs contribute to student success. To date, several programmatic elements within comprehensive college transition programs remain understudied. Of particular interest to this study is coaching. College transition initiatives such as Carolina Covenant and Illinois Promise provide program participants with individualized coaching; however, exploration of coaching within these contexts remain absent from the current literature base. Thus, this study will explicitly focus on exploring and understanding the nature of coaching within the context of an identified college transition program. The following research questions will guide this exploratory study:

Q1. What is the program's approach to coaching FGLI students?
Q2. How do program success coaches describe their approach to coaching FGLI Scholars?
Q3. How do FGLI program participants describe their coaching experience?

These are important questions; especially as institutional stakeholders grapple with identifying and understanding strategies and processes to bolster FGLI student success. These questions are designed to address the overarching purpose of this study which is to widen the knowledge base understanding of the nature of coaching within the context of college transition

program. Moreover, these research questions permit insight into the emerging practice of coaching in higher education with a particular focus on how FGLI students describe their coaching experiences and reflect on ways in which coaching contributes to or detracts from their college experience.

1.7 Overview of Research Design

The aim of this study is to uncover the nature of coaching within a college transition program. Acknowledging college transition programs and coaching are both highly customized approaches, the methodology for this research study will be a qualitative case study. According to Yin (2018), a case study is an appropriate research method when the subject of study is highly contextualized which makes this methodology a suitable choice for the purpose of this study.

Case study methodology requires careful attention to detail in the creation and selection of each case (Yin, 2018). Criteria for site selection include college transition programs that serve FGLI students and provide individualized coaching from full-time program staff. I leveraged a variety of qualitative methods including documents, interviews, observations, and focus groups to develop a rich understanding of the cases and reveal perceptions of coaching among program participants and staff. I analyzed data through Rendón's (1994) validation theory to understand if and how the nature of coaching within this context aligns with an asset-based framework for supporting FGLI students. A full rationale and explanation of the research design is offered in Chapter Three: Methodology.

1.8 Definition of Key Terms

The following section provides clarity regarding terms used throughout this study.

- *Asset-based perspective-* An asset-based perspective shifts the restrictive deficit-based discourse surrounding FGLI students to one of potential and possibility by focusing on the circumstances and resources that empower, drive, inspire, and promote their success

- *Coaching* – Broadly defined as "partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential" (International Coach Federation, 2019, para 1).

- *Deficit-based perspective-* Deficit-based perspectives place emphasis on what individuals lack (Davis & Museus, 2019). In the context of social class, individuals with power and privilege are perceived as the status quo and those not in power are viewed through a deficit lens whereby the focus is on what the individual lacks rather than how systems implicate individuals.

- *First-Generation, Low-income (FGLI)–* the primary student population of interest for this dissertation are those from lower-income background. Acknowledging the intersections between income and education, many low-income students are also first-generation college students (Engle & Tinto, 2008). Today 25% of US undergraduates attending four-year institutions are both low-income and first-generation (Cahalan et al., 2018).

- *Student success* –For the purpose of this study student success is used to describe the interconnected processes of student persistence, retention, and graduation.

- *Validation* – Rendón (1994) describes validation as an "enabling, confirming and supportive process initiated by in-and out-of-class agents that foster academic and interpersonal development" (p. 44).

1.9 Assumptions and Limitations

There are several assumptions embedded within this research study that warrant mention. A primary assumption is that coaching that occurs within college transition programs in some way contributes to FGLI student success. This assumption stems from previous assertions suggesting the structure of these initiatives (e.g., specific services and practices embedded within the program) are a primary rationale for student and programmatic success (Holcombe & Kezar 2020; Kezar & Kitchen, 2020). This assumption is also informed by my professional experience supporting FGLI student populations within a TRIO program and literature that suggest FGLI students benefit from having individuals assist them in navigating their college experience (Rendón, 1994).

In addition to the assumptions embedded within this study, there are a few limitations worth noting. First, it is important to note that college transition programs operate as complex systems that involve various components. The goal of this study is not to disentangle coaching from the larger programmatic structure, but rather, understand the nature of coaching within this context by exploring how individuals within the program understand, describe, and experience coaching. I have purposefully selected case study methodology and qualitative methods to guide this study; however, findings will be limited to participants' ability to recall and reflect upon their current and/or prior coaching experiences. I attempt to overcome this limitation by instructing research participants who receive coaching to draw their current path through college and identify where and how coaching fits into that path. The production of images during the data collection process prompts memory, improves the flow and content of the interview, and helps establish rapport and shared understanding (Harper, 2002; Bagnoli, 2009). Lastly, findings from this study are not intended to be representative of how all FGLI college students experience

coaching within higher education and may not be transferable to other college transition programs within the same or at different institutions. Despite these limitations, this study presents an opportunity to understand the nature of coaching as perceived by FGLI college students and program staff.

1.10 Study Significance

This study contributes to two bourgeoning scholarly domains within higher education. First, this study is designed to expand literature related to college transition programs and offers insight into the perspectives of program participants and staff. While recent scholarship has broadened aspects explored within college transition programs, less is understood about coaching within these interventions and how coaching is thought to support FGLI student success. Second, my study contributes to the growing body of literature on the emerging practice and profession of coaching within higher education. Currently, there are no studies within the coaching literature that exclusively examine FGLI college students' perceptions and experiences with coaching. More explicitly, there has not been an attempt to understand the nature of coaching embedded with a college transition program tailored to promote student success among FGLI student. Due to the focus on unexamined resources within college transition programs, this study will enhance understanding of college transition programs as it relates to opportunities for promoting FGLI student success. Finally, findings may be used to inform the role of coaching within college transition programs by detailing the strategies professional staff members use in daily practice and perceptions of how these strategies are thought to support FGLI student success.

As coaching becomes more popular throughout practice and research, there is an increasing need to identify theoretical frameworks that reveal the processes through which

coaching contributes to FGLI student success. Therefore, this study strategically leverages Rendón's (1994) validation theory as an asset-based perspectives to analyze data collected as part of this case study. Theorizing and evaluating coaching through asset-based frameworks would strengthen stakeholders' understanding of how practices within these programs help FGLI students overcome barriers to success and persist to degree completion.

1.11 Summary and Organization of Dissertation

Despite gains getting more FGLI student in the door, colleges and universities continue to experience challenges related to increasing the number of FGLI graduates. Cognizant that various behavioral, institutional, and systemic factors may thwart FGLI student success, creating conditions that foster FGLI student success has become a top priority among institutional stakeholders. College transition programs present an opportunity to structure an environment within the larger university community explicitly oriented towards meeting the needs of this growing population of students. And yet, many components of these programs remain underexplored. Individualized coaching is a common, yet under examined, resource offered within many college transition programs that warrant investigation. Thus, the aim of this study is to understand the nature of coaching within college transition programs designed to support FGLI students at public, four-year institutions. Findings will contribute to an understanding of how FGLI students and staff within college transition programs perceive coaching as it relates to student success.

This research study is structured as follows. Chapter one presented background information relevant to the topic, the purpose of study, research questions, and significance of the research study. Additionally, I discussed initial assumptions and limitations and defined key terms used throughout the proposal. Chapter two provides an overview of research conducted on

FGLI students' experiences in higher education and synthesizes emerging literature on a recent institutional retention effort designed to promote FGLI student success. Chapter two concludes with a review of the theoretical framework selected to guide this research study. Chapter three describes the research design used to gather and analyze the data relevant to answering the proposed research questions. Chapter four addresses findings relevant to the second research question guiding this dissertation: *How do success coaches describe their coaching approach?* The aim of this research question is to highlight how Terrace Promise success coaches described their approach to supporting FGLI students. Findings are organized into four major themes: "Coaching Philosophies"; "Conceptualizing Support"; "Strategies for Cultivating Relationships with FGLI Scholars"; and "Influences from Workplace Environment". Chapter five addresses findings relevant to the third research question guiding this dissertation: *How do FGLI program participants describe their coaching experience?* Findings are organized into three themes: "Support, Helpful, Resources"; "The Nature of the Coaching Relationship"; and "The Role of Validation in Scholar Processes and Outcomes". Chapter six analyzes findings across the entire data corps– interviews with success coaches, observations of program staff meetings, and focus groups with Scholars– to answer the primary research question guiding this dissertation: *What is the program's approach to coaching first-generation, low-income students?*

Chapter 2 Literature Review

Improving FGLI student four-year degree persistence, retention, and graduation has become a primary topic of concern among higher education scholars and practitioners. It has been well documented that FGLI students experience college in different ways than their affluent, continuing generation peers. In this chapter I synthesized literature relevant to FGLI students' experiences throughout higher education. I provide context to who FGLI students are and their experiences accessing and navigating four-year institutions. I then describe the theoretical framework guiding this dissertation to better understand FGLI students' experiences with certain retention strategies. I then summarize recent findings from research pertaining to programmatic interventions designed to support FGLI students transition and success. More specifically, I reviewed how college transition programs are thought to contribute to FGLI student success and synthesized findings from literature available on coaching in higher education.

2.1 First-Generation, Low-Income Students in Higher Education

FGLI students are an important and increasing population within four-year institutions. Today, a nearly a quarter of all undergraduates attending four-year institutions come from low-income households and self-identify as first-generation (Cahalan et al., 2018). In the following subsections I highlight institutional strategies proven to increase FGLI student college access and enrollment and highlight some of the challenges these students contend with in pursuit of completing a bachelor's degree.

2.1.1 Access and Enrollment Into Four-Year Institutions

A significant portion of research conducted on FGLI student success within four-year institutions focuses on opportunities for increasing their access and enrollment. Historically, students from FGLI backgrounds tend to be overrepresented among community colleges or regional public institutions (Tinto & Engle, 2008). Acknowledging that four-year colleges and universities have a long history of serving students from the most economically advantaged backgrounds (Kezar et al., 2015), higher education stakeholders have implemented policies and strategies to diversify the socioeconomic composition of their campuses. The majority of these efforts have been in the form of offering additional need-based aid dollars and supports for FGLI populations. Several four-year institutions have also implemented loan replacement programs to increase access, affordability, and enrollment of students from lower-income and first-generation backgrounds. No-loan programs replace anticipated borrowing (i.e., student loans) with institutional grants and scholarships that cover tuition, fees, and room and board among students whose family income is below the national median (Hillman, 2013). The first no-loan program was established at Princeton University in 1998 and throughout the early 2000's several public flagship institutions implemented no-loans programs as a way to attract and increase college enrollment rates among FGLI students (Hillman, 2013; Lips, 2011; Fiske, 2010). For example, in their large-scale experiment of the HAIL scholarship at the University of Michigan, Dynarski and colleagues (2018) discovered targeted mailings about the no-loan program sent to eligible lower-income students substantially increased application submission and enrollment rates. Research suggests that no-loan programs have a positive effect on low-income and first-generation student enrollment choices and matriculation into four-year colleges (Hillman, 2013;

Rosinger et al., 2019). However, the empirical evidence highlighting how persistence and graduation rates among no-loan programs recipients remains underdeveloped.

Despite an influx of access and enrollment policies dedicated to improving FGLI students access and enrollment into four-year institutions, researchers note bachelor's degree completion rates continue to be stratified based on family income and education level (Dynarski, 2015; National Student Clearing House, 2016; Whistle & Hiler, 2018). Enduring class-based gaps in four-year degree completion underscores the need for institutional stakeholders and practitioners to have a better understanding of FGLI students' experiences once enrolled to identify strategies, approaches, and perspectives that hinder and support their progression towards earning a bachelor's degree.

2.1.2 Experiences Navigating Four-Year Institutions

While previous literature has focused on improving FGLI access and enrollment into higher education, there is considerable scholarship conducted on understanding their experiences once enrolled. Throughout the literature, scholars have identified that FGLI student contend with a host of psychological challenges in pursuit of completing a bachelor's degree. While navigating the transition from high school to college can be challenging for any student, many scholars draw attention to how the social-emotional experiences of FGLI students differ from their non-FGLI peers and how these differences contribute to lower persistence, retention, and graduation among FGLI populations. Research suggests that FGLI students enrolled at four-year institutions often report feeling a sense of isolation, alienation, and disconnection from the larger university community. For example, Aries & Seider (2005) qualitatively examined how 30 students from lower income backgrounds described navigating different types of four-year institutions and found lower-income students', particularly those who were also first generation,

awareness of class difference increased once enrolled at elite institutions. Participants in the study described feeling intimidated, inadequate, and like an outsider within the institutional culture compared to their more affluent, continuing generation peers. Throughout the literature, scholars frequently refer to how FGLI students continuously navigate two worlds —the academy and their family— and the implications of this disjointedness on their academic and personal success towards earning a degree (Jehangir, et. al., 2012; Stephens, et al. 2012).

Moreover, it has been well documented that the higher education system is "built and organized according to taken for granted, middle- and upper-class cultural norms, unwritten codes, or 'rules of the game" (Stephens et al., 2012, p. 1178). Therefore, many scholars posit the structure and culture of higher education institutions present systemic challenges FGLI students contend with in pursuit of completing a four-year degree. Scholars describe how FGLI students frequently encounter negative stereotypes and deficit-oriented perspectives regarding their college preparation, competence, and general ability to succeed in the collegiate environment in comparison to middle- and high-income peers (Durante et al., 2017; McKay & Delvin, 2016). The perpetual focus on FGLI students' deficits and gaps in comparison to their middle- to high-income, continuing-generation peers can inadvertently lead to students' expectations of deficiency and failure; thus, fostering invalidating experiences that are not congruent with promoting FGLI student success.

In summary, higher education administrators and practitioners have become increasingly concerned with finding opportunities to promote FGLI student success. While four-year institutions have become more accessible to FGLI populations, the unfortunate reality is these students remain less likely than their non-FGLI peers to complete a bachelor's degree (National Student Clearing House, 2016). While prior literature has identified individual characteristics

and attributes that may stymie FGLI students' college graduation rates, a small, yet emerging set

of literature discusses how structural barriers within the higher education also contribute to how

FGLI students experience college and interrupt opportunities for their success (Armstrong &

Hamilton, 2013; Kezar 2011; Soria & Bultmann, 2014). Therefore, understanding how four-year

institutions are designed to support FGLI students navigate the college experience is imperative

to improving FGLI student degree completion rates. If institutional stakeholders are committed

to improving degree completion rates among FGLI students, understanding and improving their

experiences navigating the college experience is crucially important. In the next section, I

review programmatic initiatives institutions have implemented to support FGLI student success

once enrolled.

**2.2 Programmatic Approaches for Supporting First-Generation, Low-Income Student
Success**

Acknowledging that FGLI students continue to graduate at lower rates than their non-

FGLI peers, higher education administrators, practitioners, and researchers have given

considerable attention to retention initiatives that will support FGLI student persistence and

graduation. Early policy interventions for supporting FGLI student college access and retention

centered on the provision of financial aid. Decades of literature reviews highlighting the effects

of financial aid on student persistence suggest loans are deleterious to FGLI student persistence

while need-based aid (e.g., grants) generally have positive effects on FGLI student persistence

and degree completion (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2009; Hossler et al., 2009; Nguyen et al., 2019;

Saunders & Schuh, 2004). As institutions increase the amount of grant aid provided to FGLI

students, scholars and practitioners argue aid only is insufficient for addressing the academic and

psychosocial challenges that also stymie FGLI students' progress towards earning a bachelor's

degree (Jehangir et. al, 2012; Stephens, et al. 2012). Thus, scholars and practitioners alike call for retention efforts more comprehensive in nature that can simultaneously tend to the multifaceted needs of FGLI students.

2.2.1 College Transition Programs

In an effort to mitigate systemic, academic, and psychosocial barriers that hinder FGLI student success, many institutions have created college transition programs (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Perna, 2015). Indicated in name, college transition programs offer dedicated services to aid students' transition to and through college. While commonplace retention strategies such as financial aid and academic advising have historically been offered in a silo fashion, college transition initiatives offer a comprehensive set of support and services within a single initiative explicitly oriented towards the particular needs and success of marginalized student populations (Fiske, 2010; Kezar & Kitchen, 2020). There is emerging evidence that suggests college transition interventions are advantageous for promoting FGLI student success (for example see: Clotfelter et al., 2018; Gershenfeld et al., 2019; Page et al., 2017; Scrivener et al., 2008). Scholars posit the unique ways in which college transition initiatives are structured make them better suited to simultaneously attend to FGLI students' needs compared to stand-alone retention services (Holcombe & Kezar 2020). Yet, variation among the types of services provided, timing, and duration of college transition initiatives warrant further clarification if scholars and practitioners wish to understand how such initiatives are effective.

Given the vast nature and scope of existing college transitions initiatives, Hallett and colleagues (2020) devised the College Transition and Support Programs typology to provide scholars and practitioners with a framework for categorizing and comparing college transition programs. According to Hallett and colleagues (2020), college transition programs vary based on

four key dimensions: student need, focus, timing, and duration. Whereby the initiative's focus is primarily driven by the needs of the student population served which may include but is not limited to academic remediation, social support, or specific major/career placement. Moreover, the college transition and support program typology described college transitions initiatives on a continuum ranging from precollege, first-year, two-year, full-college, and postgraduate (Hallett et. al, 2020).

Summer bridge programs are a popular precollege transition intervention that institutions implement to support FGLI student success (Kallison & Stader, 2012). Generally, summer bridge programs provide academic and social supports before fall matriculation to aid in a successful transition from high school to college. Researchers have compared retention rates and academic progress among summer bridge program participants and similarly situated non-bridge participants and found summer bridge participants were more likely to persist to the second year and have a higher grade point average after their first year of college (Douglas & Attwell, 2014; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Walpole et al., 2008). Results render summer bridge programs an effective strategy for promoting FGLI student success, particularly at the onset of their college career. While bridge programs create supportive academic and social pathways for incoming FGLI students to acclimate to their new college environment, bridge programs are often time-bound and are not designed to tend to FGLI students' needs through subsequent semesters. Additional research is needed to understand how FGLI populations are supported beyond their initial summer transition to college and hence the aim of this dissertation.

Scholars have also demonstrated the effectiveness of college transition initiatives among community colleges as well. For example, the City University New York's Accelerated Study in Associates Program (ASAP) is a two-year college transition program that provides academic,

personal, and financial support to low-income community college students to help them earn an associate's degree within three years. Experimental research conducted on ASAP showed significant improvements among low-income student retention (Scrivener et al., 2008). This evidence strengthens claims that participation in college transition initiatives is beneficial to FGLI student success; however, it falls short of providing a thorough explanation of the possible mechanisms and processes that contribute to increased student retention. Similar to critiques of summer bridge transition programs, two-year college transition programs are also limited in duration of services. This limitation suggests the need for examining full-college transition programs. To date, scholarship on full-college college transition programs that serve FGLI student population remains relatively limited (Hallett et al., 2020). This gap in the literature on college transition initiatives presents an opportunity for additional research to strengthen understanding of college transition program's effectiveness as well as exploration of mechanisms contributing to programmatic success.

Recent literature suggests college transition programs beyond the first year have been an effective means for promoting FGLI students successful progress through college and ultimate graduation (Means & Pyne, 2017; Kezar & Kitchen, 2020). In general, the literature highlights how full-college transition programs cover the financial costs of college attendance—without loans—and provide participating students with additional support services such as first-year seminar courses, peer mentoring, individualized coaching, career counseling, as well as social support. While college transition initiatives are not a new phenomenon within higher education, increasing attention in FGLI student persistence, retention, and graduation, places increased importance on understanding if and how full college transition initiatives contribute to FGLI success.

Research conducted on the University of Nebraska's Thompson Scholars Learning Communities (TSLC) program suggests positive psychological outcomes among FGLI students. Offered across three University of Nebraska campuses, TSLC is a two-year college transition program provides FGLI students a bundled set of evidence-based supports including financial assistance, first-year experience courses, academic support, mentoring, residential spaces, as well as staff and peer support. Recent quasi-experimental studies of TSLC suggest the program's approach to support increases FGLI students' sense of belonging, mattering, and major and career self-efficacy when compared with a control group of students from similar backgrounds (Swanson, et al., 2021; Melguizo et al., 2021).

Perhaps the most well-known four-year college transition programs dedicated to supporting FGLI student persistence and graduation are federal TRIO programs. College TRIO programs such as Student Support Services, were introduced to "overcome the social and cultural barriers to higher education using highly targeted programs that focus on early intervention" (Balz & Esten, 1998, p. 334). Balz and Esten (1998) found that TRIO participants were more likely than non-TRIO participants with similar backgrounds to have completed college and to have been enrolled in a graduate program. Walsh (2000) also reported that the graduation and retention rates and GPAs of TRIO students exceeded those of similar students who were not enrolled in the TRIO program. Data from these studies demonstrate that participation in a TRIO program has a significant impact on the educational outcomes of low-income, first-generation students. However, much of the empirical research published on TRIO programs is dated and does not provide substantial details about the strategies and approach leveraged that contribute to programmatic outcomes.

Institutions have also implemented four-year college transition programs to support racially and socioeconomically underrepresented student retention and degree completion within particular fields. Findings from Holcombe & Kezar (2020) case study research on eight comprehensive college transition programs offered to students enrolled in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) majors attending California State University campuses suggest these programs are effective due to their ability to foster a "unified community of support" among program participants and personnel (pg. 366).

Scaling from specific disciplines, full-college transition programs have also been implemented at the institutional level. Recent literature on full-college transition programs suggests FGLI students who meet aid- eligibility requirements to participate in such initiatives have higher graduation rates compared to similarly matched non-eligible peers   . For example, Clotfelter, Ladd, & Hemelt (2018) examined the effects of receiving the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill's *Carolina Covenant* on low-income students' four-year graduation rates. Since its inception in 2004, *Carolina Covenant* has provided high-achieving, low-income students with four-year renewable grant aid to cover unmet need in the cost of attendance. In 2007, the program supplemented the grant aid received with a host of support services (e.g., peer and faculty mentoring, tutoring) designed to bolster Covenant scholars' retention and subsequent graduation (Clotfelter et al., 2018). By exploiting the income eligibility criteria to receive the Covenant, Clotfelter and colleagues compared four-year graduate rates of eligible Covenant students enrolled between fall 2007 and fall 2010 (n= 2,564), to students whose family income placed them slightly above the eligibility cut-off, thus rendering them ineligible for the award. Results from the regression discontinuity reveal eligible Covenant Scholars were five percentage

points more likely to graduate within four-years relative to the comparison group; however, due to a lack of statistical significance, these results should be interpreted with caution.

In a similar study, Gershenfeld et al. (2019) explored the impact of the University of Illinois Urbana Champaign's Illinois Promise on low-income, first-generation students' graduation rates. Illinois Promise is a four-year renewable need-based scholarship that combines grants and targeted support services such as mentoring, academic tutoring, coaching, and career exploration to promote persistence and improve graduation rates. The researchers compared five-year graduation rates of three cohorts of Illinois Promise students to those of a similarly matched comparison group (n=414) and found Illinois Promise recipients graduated at significantly higher rates than the comparison group (β=2.415, p<0.012). The authors frame their results through the financial nexus model (St. John et al., 1996) explaining that financial factors influence both college choice and persistence decisions particularly among low-income students. This finding suggests renewable grant aid as a mechanism attributing to increased retention and graduation rates among Illinois Promise students. It is also important to note Illinois Promise provides a robust set of services targeted towards FGLI students' needs. In the current study Gershenfeld and colleagues did not obtain data pertaining to how Illinois Promise recipients experience such services and additional mechanisms that contribute to their persistence. Future research on full-college transition programs would benefit from exploration of how participants experience such initiatives in order to understand and identify mechanisms beyond monetary aid that contribute to FGLI student success. This dissertation will contribute knowledge and perspective towards this gap in the current literature.

Page and colleagues (2017) offer supporting evidence regarding the positive impact of selection for the Dells Scholars program on low-income students' persistence and graduation at

four-year postsecondary institutions across the United States. Funded by the Michael and Susan

Dell Foundation, Dell Scholars receive up to $20,000 in need-based grants, a free laptop, and a

book stipend. In addition to the monetary support, Dell Scholars also receive on-going outreach

from a Dell Scholars retention specialist who assists with addressing emotional and lifestyle

challenges that may prevent the student from completing their degree (www.dellscholars.org).

Page et al. (2017) utilized a regression discontinuity design- comparing students selected as Dell

Scholars (n=1,201) to non-scholar finalist (n= 1,818)- and found Dell Scholars persisted to their

third year of college at significantly higher rates than the comparison group ($\beta = 0.046$, $p <.10$).

The authors also matched Dell Scholars to observably similar students within the National

Center for Education Statistic's Beginning Postsecondary Students 2004/2009 (BPS:04/09)

dataset and employed a difference-in-differences strategy to estimate program impact. Estimates

suggest Dell Scholars were substantially more likely to persist and graduate within four years

compared to their similarly matched BPS counterparts. Most noticeably, when disaggregated by

institutional selectivity, Page et al. (2019) found significant retention and graduation gains

concentrated among Dell Scholars enrolled at less-selective institutions. Combined, these results

suggest large-scale college transition initiatives are effective at improving FGLI students'

educational outcomes. However, neither of these studies describe how FGLI students experience

these types of programs. Additional research is needed to understand in what ways programmatic

elements beyond the financial incentive contribute to FGLI student success.

2.2.2 Mechanisms of College Transition and Success Programs

Current research published on full-college transition programs focuses primarily on

program effects on student retention and degree completion. Yet, there is little explanation

regarding how and why these initiatives are effective. Given the comprehensive nature of full-

college transition programs, it is possible multiple mechanisms may contribute to FGLI participants' persistence, retention, and graduation outcomes. To date, research on full-college transition programs has focused predominantly on the provision of grant aid as a primary mechanism contributing to FGLI student and programmatic success. Alternatively, Holcombe & Kezar (2020) propose the unique structure in which services are bundled within college transition programs is better suited to meet the needs of FGLI students compared to when these services are offered in silo. The researchers did not solicited data from students to elucidate potential mechanisms. Moreover, there is a lack of understanding regarding mechanisms that may be contributing to FGLI student participants' retention in addition to the provision of grant aid.

There is limited discussion and theorizing pertaining to how and in what ways non-monetary services within college transition initiatives contribute to FGLI student success. In a descriptive embedded case study, Perez et al. (2021) explored how first-year low-income students experienced an autobiographical reading and writing course within a comprehensive college transition program. The authors learned through a combination of pedagogical practices that FGLI students' writing skills, confidence, and sense of belonging were enhanced (Perez et al., 2021). Future research on full-college transition programs should leverage similar methodologies to explore how other programmatic components contribute to FGLI student success.

Colleges and universities employ a plethora of strategies to support student success. There is growing empirical evidence that college transition initiatives bolster FGLI student retention and degree completion. While college transition initiatives vary in size, target audience, and services, many offer need-based aid as a primary programmatic component to reduce

financial barriers to student success. There has been minimal examination of students'

experiences within these programs with emphasis on understanding how program participants

and coaches describe success coaching. In the next section I describe what coaching is and

review existing literature related to how coaching has been leveraged throughout higher

education and how it is thought to contribute to FGLI student success.

2.3 Coaching in Higher Education

Institutions employ a plethora of retention services to promote undergraduate student

success. While longstanding institutional retention strategies such as financial aid, academic

advising, and mentoring provide crucial services towards enhancing student success, little

change in FGLI student retention and graduation rates suggests these students may benefit from

additional types of support. Coaching is one of the newest retention strategies to emerge within

higher education (Bettinger & Baker, 2014; Robinson & Gahagan, 2010). Hundreds of

institutions across the country have implemented coaching interventions to bolster student

persistence and retention towards graduation (Robinson, 2015), yet questions remain as to what

coaching is, how it differs from preexisting retention services, and in what ways coaching

contributes to student success.

Broadly, coaching has been defined as "partnering with clients in a thought-provoking

and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential"

(International Coach Federation, 2019, para 1). Throughout higher education, coaching is often

described as a highly customized, student-centered retention effort that places emphasis on

helping students take action towards the realization of their goals (Sepulveda, 2017). Despite

coaching's nascence as a student retention service, scholars have studied the effects of coaching

on undergraduate learning, persistence, and retention (Bettinger & Baker, 2014; Capstick et al.

2019; Farrell, 2007; Sepulveda et. al, 2019) as well as students' perceptions of and experience

with coaching (Field et al., 2010: Mitchell & Gansemer-Topf, 2016). Interestingly, a small

number of studies have begun to explore and describe mechanisms of coaching thought to

contribute to student success (Bellman et al., 2015; Parker et al., 2011; Swartz et al., 2005). As

institutions seek opportunities to enhance student success— particularly among FGLI students

— it will be imperative to have working knowledge of the benefits and effects of new retention

strategies such as coaching. In the following subsections I summarize the historical context and

current conceptualizations of coaching in higher education. My synthesis of the literature focuses

on the known effects of coaching on student success and highlights mechanisms of coaching

thought to contribute to student persistence. In addition to highlighting the strengths of available

literature, I place emphasis on opportunities for additional research to expand what is currently

known and understood about coaching in higher education.

2.3.1 Historical Context, Definition, and Purpose of Coaching

Historically, coaching is thought to have emerged from athletics, transferred to the

business sector throughout the 1970s and 1980s, and in the 1990s gained popularity within

education and health (Passmore, 2016). Despite the recent popularity of coaching in higher

education, there is confusion surrounding what coaching is, what coaches do, and how it differs

from or is similar to preexisting retention services (Sepulveda, 2017). Identifying a consistent

definition of coaching throughout the literature proves to be challenging. For example, the

National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) describes coaching as:

> …an interactive process that focuses on the personal relationship created between the
> student and the coach. It is important for the coach to encourage the student to become
> more self-aware of their strengths, values, interests, purpose, and passion- and develop
> these attributes. [Coaching] is designed to help students produce fulfilling results,

improve their performance, and enhance the quality of their lives. (NACADA, 2019, para 1)

Recent scholarship has strengthened conceptualization of coaching within a higher education context by noting coaches often assist students in overcoming previously mentioned academic and life obstacles (e.g., financial obligation) that may stymie persistence (Bettinger & Baker, 2014). Other conceptualizations place emphasis on strategies and approaches used during coaching. For example, Parker and Boutelle (2009) suggest coaches "use specific types of questions that model reflective thinking and prompt students' ability to plan and carry out their goals (p. 205)." Scholars agree prominent features of coaching include proactive outreach, relationship building, identifying goals, creating action plans, providing feedback and reflection (Barkley, 2011; Robinson & Gahagan, 2010; Sepulveda, 2017).

Literature related to coaching in higher education frequently describes two types of coaching: academic coaching and success coaching. Robinson & Gahagan (2010) describe academic coaching as: "a one-to-one interaction with a student focusing on strengths, goals, study skills, engagement, academic planning and performance" (p. 27). Cognizant that college students contend with barriers outside the classroom that can impede their persistence, success coaching has emerged as a form of coaching whereby coaches help coachees identify strategies and resources for navigating beyond academic challenges such as family obligations and navigating financial aid (Ashcraft & Mattingly, 2019; Allen & Lester, 2012; Farrell, 2007; Neuhauser & Weber, 2011).

As coaching gains popularity as one of the newest student retention services, scholars continue to provide clarity regarding how coaching is similar and different from traditional campus support services such as mentoring or advising. While coaching, advising, and mentoring have a similar goal of helping students reach their goals, coaching is viewed as a

process that is fundamentally different from advising and mentoring (Bennett, 2006). Although academic advisors can often facilitate aspects of student development, the primary role of an academic advisor is ensuring advisees understand and meet coursework requirements for their intended major. Whereas mentors tend to have expertise in a particular subject (e.g., major; profession) and impart specific knowledge to support mentees success, coaches rely more on the concept of accountability to help coachees achieve their goals (Bennett, 2006). Moreover, mentoring and advising tend to be authoritative relationships; yet coaching represents an egalitarian relationship that engages the student in a collaborative thought process towards achieving their personal goals (Barnhart & LeMaster, 2013; Grant & Cavanagh, 2004). Swartz et al. (2005) distinguished the role of a coach from that of a counselor and advisor stating: "the coach role is neither counselor nor advisor, but a collaborator who lets the client define [their] own needs and goals…The coach doesn't suggest goals, but helps the student specify goals" (p. 648). Furthermore, Parker and Boutelle (2009) conducted qualitative interviews with students who participated in a coaching intervention and learned that coaches' emphasis on students' emerging autonomy and promotion of their self-efficacy regarding future success were primary components students believed distinguished interactions with coaches from academic advisors. Taken together, current conceptualizations illustrate the goal of coaching is to help coachees overcome challenges by identifying strategies and resources for success (Allen & Lester, 2012; Bettinger & Baker, 2014). While aspects of coaching are often present within preexisting retention services, for the purpose of this study the distinction between mentoring, advising, and coaching comes from the interpretation, frequency, context, and nature of the interactions with the student. In the next subsection, I synthesize findings from research conducted on the effects of coaching on student success.

2.3.2 Coaching Towards Student Success

Despite the recent and rapid proliferation of coaching throughout higher education, empirical research on coaching within the higher education context remains relatively limited. Emerging research summarizes positive effects of coaching on student persistence, retention, credit completion, and graduation rates.

2.3.2.1 Effects of Coaching on Student Persistence & Retention

Farrell (2007) found students who received academic coaching had an increase in persistence from fall to spring semester when compared to retention rates from previous years. Similarly, Robinson and Gallagan (2010) studied a coaching program at a large, public four-year university for first-year students placed on academic probation and found ninety-two percent of those who participated saw improvements to their grade point averages and returned to good academic standing. Echoing previous results, Alzen et al. (2021) found an academic coaching program administered at a large research institution in the rocky mountain region had positive effects on program completer's grade point averages, retention, and credits earned compared to non-program participants. Initial findings offer strong evidence suggesting coaching as an effective intervention towards supporting student academic persistence and retention. However, a common and concerning limitation among these studies is lack of a clearly defined theoretical framework informing the research.

The largest study conducted on coaching in higher education is Bettinger and Baker's (2014) experimental study of InsideTrack.[4] The study's sample consisted of nearly 14,000 undergraduate students across eight institutions selected to receive remote coaching for two semesters. Within each university's sample, InsideTrack randomly divided students into coached and non-coached groups. Bettinger and Baker (2014) found those assigned to an InsideTrack coach were 5.3 percentage points more likely to remain enrolled 12 months after the coaching intervention compared to similarly situated students who did not receive InsideTrack coaching. While this study lacked a clear theoretical framework, the authors speculated the types of conversations InsideTrack coaches have with coachees may be the key element contributing to student retention. Unfortunately, the researchers were unable to explore the nature of coaching conversations as InsideTrack does not disclose information regarding their training or technique. This study suggests leveraging coaching as a retention effort supports FGLI persistence; however, lacks a clearly defined theory to frame findings through a perspective which practitioners can apply perspectives and strategies to towards positive outcomes. This dissertation is designed to fill this gap within the literature by framing coaching within an asset-based theoretical framework to elucidate the perspectives, approaches, and strategies coaches leverage to support FGLI student success.

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[4] InsideTrack matches college students to a potential coach who regularly contact their students via telephone or video conferencing to provide help and support as the students start their college careers and continue through their first year in school. (www.insidetrack.com).

2.3.2.2 Effects of Coaching on Student Learning

In addition to the effects of coaching on undergraduate student academic persistence and retention, researchers have also investigated the effects of coaching on undergraduate student learning. A number of studies report increases to coached students' mean scores on the Learning and Study Strategies Inventory (LASSI) self-assessment.[5] In a 2010 report, Field and colleagues describe results from a study that examined the effectiveness of the Edge coaching model on the academic success of neurodiverse students across ten postsecondary institutions.[6] Similar to InsideTrack, the Edge Foundation randomly assigned participants at each site to receive the semester-long coaching intervention. The researcher collected and compared student responses to the LASSI before and after the intervention semester and found those who received coaching had a mean gain of 183 points on the LASSI, whereas the comparison group's mean gain was only 64 points (n=88 and n= 39 respectively, $p < .01$). Quantitative results from Parker et al., (2011) mixed method study on a coaching intervention for neurodiverse students also demonstrates improved grade point average and positive mean gains between pre- and post-LASSI scores among coached individuals. The authors conducted interviews with program participants to understand their experience within Edge coaching and perceptions of how coaching supported their academic success (n=7). Interestingly, coaching participants placed

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[5] The LASSI is an 80-item standardized self-assessment in which students rate their performance on ten scales: Anxiety, Attitude, concentration, information processing, motivation, selecting the main idea, self-testing, study aid, test strategies, and time management.

[6] Sponsored by the Edge Foundation, Edge coaching is a third-party provider offering college students diagnosed with ADHD coaching services. Edge coaches primarily assist students with planning, prioritizing, focusing, and follow through on their goals (Edge Foundation, 2019).

emphasis on the ways in which Edge coaches supported their emerging autonomy and self-efficacy regarding future success as what contributed to their success in ways other retention services had not. This particular finding addresses a major limitation of Bettinger and Baker's (2014) study with the inclusion of students' reflections. While the length of the coaching intervention and limited sample size calls to question the validity of results from the LASSI, conversations with program participants uncover potential mechanisms of Edge coaching that contribute to student success. The literature on coaching in higher education would benefit from additional exploration of how various student populations experience and interpret coaching.

2.3.2.3 Coaching Marginalized Student Populations

A few studies conducted on the effects of coaching on student success outcomes include samples with a sizable portion of FGLI students. In a quantitative study conducted at a mid-sized, southeastern, four-year urban research institution, Capstick and colleagues (2019) tracked persistence rates over the course of five different semesters among undergraduate students who participated in an academic probation coaching intervention. The sample consisted of 1,434 full- and part-time undergraduate students of whom 68% were Pell-eligible. Their results indicated that participation in coaching was a significant predictor of retention in the semester after the intervention for full-time students. Students on academic probation who participated in the academic coaching intervention were more likely to be retained the following semester as compared to those who did not participate in academic coaching (63.8% and 45.7% respectively). Similar to previous explorations of coaching interventions, Sepulveda et al. (2019) investigated the relationship between coaching, cumulative grade point average, and retention. The study's sample consisted of forty-six first-year students who reported low levels of institutional commitment invited to participate in the coaching intervention at a public, mid-

sized, western university. Sixty percent of the sample were Pell-eligible and one-third were first-generation college students. The researchers found no statistically significant difference in retention or GPA between coached and uncoached students; however, attribute results to low compliance with the intervention.

Recent scholarship on coaching in higher education generally demonstrates positive effects of coaching on student success outcomes such as learning, persistence, and retention. A large majority of empirical research on coaching in higher education leverages quantitative methods to describe the effects of coaching on student retention. The aforementioned results suggest coaching is a worthwhile investment towards bolstering student success. Additionally, these findings offer preliminary evidence of the effectiveness of coaching among a variety of student populations and contexts. While results capturing the effectiveness of coaching on persistence are promising, scholars denote identifying and understanding the mechanisms of coaching that contribute to student persistence warrant deeper investigation (Bettinger & Baker, 2014; Capstick et al., 2019).

2.3.3 Mechanisms of Coaching

The extant literature suggests coaching is a worthwhile investment towards improving student retention. Yet, there is still a need to understand the mechanisms contributing to the effectiveness of coaching. Very few coaching studies have identified and discussed mechanisms of coaching. Some authors propose student individual-level mechanisms such as self-determination, self-efficacy, and observational learning contributing to coached students' persistence. Bellman et al., (2015) administered a survey to explore the efficacy of providing weekly academic coaching sessions to neurodiverse students majoring in science, technology, engineering, and/or mathematics (STEM) fields who reported a need for academic support

(n=41). Understanding that coaching is an on-going process and changes may not be discernible after the initial meeting, the researchers' analysis focused on participants who attended three or more coaching sessions (n=16). Survey data collected at the end of the intervention suggests that the academic coaching increased students' self-confidence, motivation, and determination to succeed. Survey completers reported that they gained skills in time management, studying, note taking, organization, prioritization, writing, self-advocacy, and stress management as a result of participating in academic coaching (Bellman et al., 2015). Similarly, Mitchell and Gansemer-Topf (2016) generated and administered open- ended surveys to explore students' perspectives of how coaching helped them achieve academic success and progress towards graduation. The majority of survey respondents indicated having someone to talk to as the primary reason for choosing to attend and continue attending coaching. Respondents identified that coaching conversations helped them think critically about the strategies they were using and ways to adapt (Mitchell & Gansemer-Topf, 2016). These studies highlight the importance of the quality of the student-coach relationship in the success of coaching intervention.

In a single case study conducted on an eight-week coaching intervention at a large, four-year, public southeastern university, Swartz et al. (2005) explored the process of coaching. Guided by Bandura's (1977) social learning theory, the authors frame coaching as an intervention that empowers students to organize and execute their academic and current life goals. Students not only benefited from increased goal attainment, but also began to learn how to coach themselves towards future goals. The researchers identify observational learning and self-efficacy as primary mechanisms contributing to gains in students' mean scores on the LASSI. According to Bandura (1977), observational learning is the process of learning by watching others, retaining information, and then replicating the behaviors observed; while self-efficacy

refs to an individual's belief that he or she can master a task and bring about desired change (Bandura, 1982). Swatz et al. (2005) posit students who attended three or more coaching sessions were able to learn and retain valuable information related to which strategies and resources helped them achieve their goals and were later able to replicate this strategy-seeking approach once the coaching intervention ended. This explanation provides valuable insight into the process of coaching and an explanation of the mechanisms contributing to student persistence and retention.

I identified one study that employed qualitative methods to investigate college students' perceptions of and experiences with coaching. Parker and Boutelle (2009) interviewed seven undergraduates with ADHD enrolled in a highly competitive university to explore their perceptions of Edge Coaching. Several of the interviewees in Parker et al. (2011) recounted how their goal attainment skills improved by working with their coaches. The authors leverage Field and Hoffman's (1994) model of self-determination to describe the internal mechanism that influences student academic success. Interestingly, participants did not feel that coaching had a direct impact on their grade point average, but rather, coaching changed how they formulated and specified their goals and improved their capacity to attain their goals by writing out the steps to reach their goals and implementing deadlines. These findings describe self-determination as a mechanism through which coached students' persist. Future research is needed to understand additional mechanism of coaching that contribute to student persistence and retention.

In summary, coaching is a relatively new, yet burgeoning retention strategy within higher education. Scholars have identified proactive outreach, relationship building, identifying goals, creating action plans, feedback, and reflection as the key components that distinguish coaching from other retention services (Barkley, 2011; Robinson & Gahagan, 2010; Sepulveda, 2017).

The majority of research on coaching in higher education demonstrates positive effects of coaching on undergraduate student persistence and retention. The literature reviewed includes robust student populations and samples participating in coaching; however, it is still unclear how emerging student populations such as FGLI students perceive, experience, and benefit from coaching. Scholarship on coaching would be strengthened by exploring the delivery of coaching within different contexts. One setting in which coaching is frequently implemented in practice yet remains understudied is comprehensive college transition programs.

Given increasing concerns about improving FGLI student retention and graduation rates, institutional agents are urged to identify and understand which strategies are most advantageous for promoting FGLI student success. Current findings offer strong evidence that coaching is an effective student retention strategy; however, discussion around the mechanisms of coaching remains under-examined. Scholars suggest individual mechanisms such as self-regulation, self-efficacy, and goal attainment are among the most common mechanisms through which coaching contributes to student persistence. Future research on coaching in higher education should strive to identify and examine external mechanisms through which institutional agents administering coaching contribute to student persistence. Lastly, it is also important to note that there is no clear theoretical framework guiding interpretations of coaching outcomes and experiences. Thus identifying a student-centered framework through which coaching can be interpreted is crucial for strengthening the coaching literature base. In the following section, I detail the theoretical framework selected guide my exploration and interpretation the nature of coaching within college transition program.

2.4 Asset-Based Frameworks for Supporting First-Generation, Low-Income Student Success

Existing research offers important insights into the challenges FGLI students contend with as they navigate higher education. While it is critical for practitioners and researchers to identify and understand these challenges, the resulting discussion is often framed in a way that focuses on FGLI students' deficits and how the types of capital they possess are inconsistent with those valued by four-year institution (Bergerson, 2007; Colyar, 2011). It is not uncommon to see researchers and practitioners alike refer to FGLI students as disadvantaged or at-risk. Referring to FGLI students in this manner fosters the tendency to adopt deficit-oriented perspectives that can cause campus agents to view FGLI students as a problem and consequently expect deficiency from these students rather than success (Davis & Museus, 2019). Moreover, deficit-oriented mindsets in respect to FGLI students have a tendency to attribute lower college success outcomes, challenges, and inequalities to the individual rather than highlighting ways institutional agents can foster their success (Marcias, 2013; McKay & Delvin, 2016).

To counter the deficit narratives and mindsets about FGLI students' capacity for success in higher education, scholars have called for the use of asset-based approaches and strategies that focus on leveraging strengths these students possess. Through an asset-based lens, FGLI students' differences are viewed as strengths rather than deficits. In order to reframe prevailing deficit-based narrative and thinking associated with FGLI student success, scholars and practitioners have called for the application of asset-based frameworks that highlight the value these students possess while simultaneously identifying and describing the role and responsibility of campus agents in cultivating their success. In the following subsection I provide an overview of Rendón's (1994) theory of validation, synthesize how the theory has been

leveraged as an asset-based framework towards cultivating FGLI student success, and explain how I will leverage the theory to interpreting how FGLI students describe their experience with coaching offered within comprehensive college transition programs.

2.4.1 Validation Theory

The theory of validation emerged in the early 1990s from the Transition to College Project, a study designed to better understand how student learning and retention was affected by student involvement in curricular and co-curricular experiences throughout college (Rendón, 1994). Guided by Astin's (1985) student involvement theory and Pascarella and Terenzini's (1991) review of the effects of college on students, the Transition to College Project explored how college students became involved and engaged in the collegiate experience. The researchers interviewed 132 first-year students from diverse backgrounds across various institution types and found stark differences between the ways in which FGLI college students became involved compared to their more affluent continuing-generation peers. The researchers discovered affluent, continuing generation students — who were overwhelmingly White— had limited, if any, reservations about becoming involved and succeeding in college while FGLI and students of Color often expressed doubts about their ability to succeed in the college environment (Rendón, 1994).

Upon further analyzing data from the Transition to College Project, Rendón observed multiple instances whereby FGLI and students of Color at some point gained the confidence to succeed in college, despite originally not anticipating to succeed. This key finding prompted Rendón to inquire into possible mechanisms that contribute to helping FGLI and students of Color realize their ability and capacity for success within higher education. Rendón attributed these transformations to encounters where institutional agents, either in- or out-of-class, took an

active interest in the student and supported them in their academic endeavors and social adjustment. Highlighting that FGLI students often relied on interventions (e.g., programs or campus agents) to help them navigate campus life, Rendón (1994) determined external validation from campus agents as a key mechanism in FGLI students' transformation and success in college. These observations led to the development of validation theory which describes how institutional agents can support FGLI students in becoming successful learners and involved students, confident in their ability *through validation.*

Rendón contended that current theories and strategies universities used to foster student learning and growth are outdated and fail to recognize the strengths and needs of today's college students. Thus, Rendón relied heavily on Belenky et al. 's (1986) research on Women's Ways of Knowing in the development of validation theory. Based on a large study of women college students, Belenky and colleagues elucidated how concepts of knowledge and truth have predominantly been framed from the perspective of men and advocate for recognition and value of the multiple ways of knowing of women. Rendón took a similar approach in the development of validation theory whereby she highlighted how prior theories of student success— which were primarily framed from the experiences of affluent, continuing-generation, White students— failed to acknowledge the host of systemic barriers and deficit-oriented discourse that create barriers to FGLI and other marginalized populations success. Moreover, validation theory is informed by the voices and experiences of FGLI students and provides institutional agents with an asset-based framework to curate interactions and interventions that contribute to their success.

As conceptualized by Rendón-Linares and Munoz (2011), *validation* is the "intentional, proactive affirmation of students by in- and out-of-class agents (e.g., faculty, peers, academic affairs staff, family members) in order to validate students as generators of knowledge and as

valued members of the college learning community and foster personal development and social adjustment" (p. 12). Validation plays a key role in understanding how campus agents can support the persistence and retention of FGLI college students. Rendón (1994) posited "when validation is present students feel capable of learning; they experience a feeling of self-worth and feel that they and everything that they bring to the college experience is accepted and recognized as valuable" (pg. 16).

Rendón expanded conceptualization of validation by distinguishing between two types: academic and interpersonal. Academic validation occurs when in- and out-of-class agents take action to assist students to "trust their innate capacity to learn and to acquire confidence in being a college student" (Rendón, 1994, p. 40). Rendón described interpersonal validation encompassing interactions with in- and out-of-class agents, activities, and environments that acknowledge and celebrate the students' social and cultural traditions; thereby, fostering students' "personal and social adjustment" (Rendón, 1994, p.42). There is considerable research conducted on the process of fostering academic validation among various student populations including FGLI students (e.g., Hallett et al., 2021; Rendón-Linares & Munoz, 2011), international students (e.g., Zhang, 2016), as well as Black/African American student populations (e.g., Holmes et al., 2000; Kelly et al., 2021). As scholars continue to leverage validation theory to frame and understand the ways in which institutional agents can take a more active and thoughtful role to promote the retention of marginalized student populations, there is a need to further examine how students and campus agents within particular contexts describe the process, role, and contribution of interpersonal validation. To this end, my dissertation study is intentionally designed to examine how FGLI students' who participate in a comprehensive college transition program describe their experience with coaching. More specifically, I seek to

explore if validation is an underlying mechanism that contributes to coaching within this particular context.

In addition to distinguishing between two types of validation, Rendón (1994) postulates six essential elements of validation. Departing from prior theories stating that college students must actively seek and initiate contact with campus agents to be successful, the first element places onus on validating agents (e.g., faculty; student affairs educators) to initiate contact with students and proactively offer support and encouragement. For the second element, Rendón (1994) stated validation is present when, "students feel capable of learning; they experience a feeling of self-worth and feel that they, and everything that they bring to the college experience, are accepted and recognized as valuable" (p. 44). Based on her analysis of the Transition to College Project, Rendón (1994) claimed when students are consistently validated throughout their college experience, they are more likely to feel confident about themselves and their ability to learn and get involved, which can result in a richer college experience. Third, Rendón declared that, similar to involvement, validation is a prerequisite for student development. The fourth element recognizes the various contexts where validation may occur (e.g., in- class; off-campus). Fifth, Rendón (1994) asserted validation is a continuous developmental process rather than an outcome. Understood this way, validation is a "process that affirms, supports, enables, and reinforces… [students'] capacity to fully develop themselves as students and as individuals" (p.45). Finally, acknowledging FGLI students are likely to benefit from validating experiences, Rendón recommended validation is especially important early in the first year (e.g., first semester). In summary, the goal of fostering validation among FGLI student populations is to provide affirmation of their experiences, mitigate isolation, strengthen self-efficacy, and foster a stronger belonging in the college context.

2.4.1.1 Validation Framing Institutional Efforts for Student Success

Validation theory shifts away from framing student success solely as an individual student responsibility and places greater emphasis on the role of institutional agents leveraging validation to promote student success. For example, according to Tinto's (1987) theory of student persistence, high attrition rates among FGLI students could be attributed to their reluctance to separate from past family loyalties and fully assimilate into their new college environment. Contrarily, Rendón (1994) deemphasizes deficit-based perspectives of FGLI students' opportunities for success and instead highlights how validation is a mechanism through which campus agents bring students strengths to the forefront:

> students, regardless of background, bring a reservoir of funds of knowledge and experiences that render these students open to learning with validating instructors and classroom climates. When validating agents work with students as possessing a reservoir of assets, the dominant view that poor students only have deficits is shattered and decentered. (pg. 25)

Moreover, Rendón (1994) added to Astin's (1985) student involvement theory by suggesting validation was a necessary prerequisite for fostering academic success and involvement particularly among students who have historically been viewed through a deficit lens throughout higher education (e.g., FGLI students). Taken together, validation is a mechanism through which these students are affirmed, supported, and enabled to view themselves as fully developed individuals and students.

While validation theory makes substantial contributions towards decentering deficit-orientation about marginalized student populations' capacity for success within higher education, several limitations of the theory warrant mention. Despite validation theory's emphasis on leveraging students' assets as a means to promote success throughout college, it is not uncommon for critics to associate validation with handholding, coddling, and pampering

students in ways that inhibit their ability to establish independence. In response, Rendón- Linares & Muñoz (2011) clarified that validation is about making students stronger in term of assisting them to believe in their ability to learn, acquire self-worth, and increase their motivation to succeed… and that "validating actions should be authentic, caring and non-patronizing" (pg. 17-18). In her outline of the six elements of validation, Rendón proposed validation as a development process; however, they failed to elaborate on *how* validation occurs in practice (e.g., what strategies institutional agents employ to validate students). A final limitation of validation theory is the specific sample from which the construct of validation originated. The College Transition Project focused exclusively on students' transitional experience during the first-year of college. Rendón (1994) recommended that validation should occur early in the college experience, however, they included no discussion of if and how validating experiences manifest and are sustained throughout subsequent years of the college experience. As future research develops, understanding the nature of validation beyond the first-year will become imperative should institutions truly wish to transform FGLI student success.

Jehangir (2009) leveraged validation theory to explore FGLI students' perceptions of their experience within a learning community. Participants across seven cohorts commented how validating it was to be asked about themselves as individuals and that the process of being recognized was vital to fostering their sense of belonging within their assigned learning community (Jehangir, 2009). Schuetz (2008) relied on validation theory to describe the type of belonging necessary for students to succeed. Schuetz interpreted this explanation as incidents of early outreach to marginalized student populations in order to demonstrate a belief in their ability and to take an active interest in them.

2.4.1.2 Validating Marginalized Student Populations

Validation theory has been applied extensively throughout higher education literature to describe how institutional agents work with marginalized student populations in ways that affirm and liberate them from past invalidations, while supporting their agency and strengthen their sense of self-worth as they navigate the collegiate experience (Rendón-Linares & Muñoz, 2011).

Research suggests that FGLI students benefit from both in- and out-of-class validating experiences as well as communities comprised of validating faculty, counselors, advisers, family, peers, and professionals. Rendón's (1994) research reflects the importance of validation for first-generation students. Rendón (1994) found that first-generation students who reported validating encounters with other students, faculty members, and staff, felt affirmed about belonging at their institution.

Validation theory has also been leveraged to describe how campus agents and interventions bolster academic outcomes among historically marginalized student populations. Acevedo-Gil et al. (2015) used validation theory as a lens to explore the experiences of Latinas/os students in community college English and Math developmental courses. The researchers found that institutional agents provided academic validation by placing emphasis on high expectations, acknowledging students' social identities, and focusing on helping students to improve their academic skills. In exploring multiple ways in which comprehensive college transition programs create academically validating experience for underserved students (e.g., low-income, racially minoritized, and first generation), Hallett and colleagues (2020) discovered that personnel associated with the program took responsibility for creating academically validating experiences for students by reassuring students of their potential and reducing stress

associated with failure which facilitated greater engagement among these students within the academic context.

2.5 Chapter Summary

Despite increases in FGLI student access and enrollment into four-year institutions, these students' content with a myriad of structural barriers that decrease their chances of completing a bachelor's degree. There is strong evidence emerging on the effectiveness of college transition initiatives in supporting FGLI student success. However, much of the research to date places emphasis on how these initiatives meet FGLI students' financial needs without investigating how other programmatic efforts may contribute to their success. Coaching is a common retention service offered within several college transition programs and warrants additional exploration.

Research on coaching in higher education demonstrates positive effects on undergraduate student retention; however, it is still unclear how emerging student populations such as FGLI students perceive, experience, and benefit from coaching. Rendón (1994) argued validation is a prerequisite to student success particularly among those minoritized student populations who are often viewed through a deficit lens. While validation theory has guided prior research related to understanding FGLI students' success, researchers have yet to examine how FGLI students' and coaches conceptualize and experience success coaching. To this end, I leverage Rendón's (1994) theory of validation to guide my analysis of how FGLI students and coaches situated within a college transition program interpret their coaching experience. Research of this nature will expand understanding of how different programmatic elements within college transition initiatives contribute to FGLI student success.

Chapter 3 Research Design

In Chapter one, I called attention to enduring inequities in four-year degree completion rates based on familial income and education levels. In Chapter two I reviewed barriers to retention and graduation among first-generation and low-income students within four-year institutions and introduced an asset-based framework towards understanding how institutional agents can support FGLI students' opportunities for success. I also synthesized findings from literature on recent college transition programs designed to support FGLI student populations as well as reviewed what the literature suggests about coaching in higher education. As the number of FGLI students entering four-year institutions increases, institutional leaders have dedicated considerable attention to identifying and implementing strategies that are effective at improving FGLI students' retention and graduation rates. Given restrictive institutional budgets, illustrating retention program effectiveness is essential. However, institutional leaders and practitioners could benefit from research describing the underlying nature and experiences within these services and how they are thought to cultivate success among FGLI student populations. With this knowledge, institutions would be better positioned to scale the types of environments, interactions, and experiences necessary to transform their institutions to better support FGLI student success.

Several studies have found college transition and success programs to be effective in increasing FGLI student retention and graduation (Clotfelter et al., 2018; Gershenfeld et al., 2019; Page et al., 2017; Scrivener et al., 2008). While results are promising, there is limited

discussion about the nature of program components as well as descriptions of FGLI students' experiences within these programs. More specifically, exploration into the nature of success coaching within these programs is limited throughout the extant literature on college transition programs as well as coaching in higher education. This study seeks to address this gap in the literature by leveraging the voices, insights, and experiences of FGLI students and success coaches affiliated with a college transition and success program. The research questions guiding this exploration are as follows:

Q1. What is the program's approach to coaching FGLI students?
Q2. How do program success coaches describe their approach to coaching FGLI Scholars?
Q3. How do FGLI program participants describe their coaching experience?

Chapter three outlines the research design guiding this study. The chapter begins with a description of my epistemological stance and positionality as it relates to the research study. I then explain the methodological approach selected to examine and analyze the nature of coaching within the case. After providing a description of the research site and participants, I review the data source and how information gathered was analyzed to answer the questions guiding this study. I also detail trustworthiness, ethical considerations, and limitations of this study and how findings are organized in subsequent chapters.

3.1 Epistemological Foundations

As a higher education practitioner-scholar, I seek to study problems of practice in a systematic way which allows me to understand the organizations I hope to improve. Before researchers can understand the issues of practice, we must understand ourselves and how we come to know reality. The foundation of all research is rooted in the beliefs and assumptions of researchers. Glesne (2016) asserted, "Researchers sometimes are not aware of these influences

because they are embedded in the researchers' suppositions about the nature of reality and knowledge" (p. 5). Our thoughts, assumptions, and values impact the ways in which we come to gain knowledge. Torres and Magolda (2002) stated, "Incorporating oneself into the culture being observed is essential" (p. 476). It is crucial that researchers become one with our research by first understanding our philosophical and theoretical beliefs about reality and knowledge.

Given the central aim of this study is to understand the nature of coaching within a college transition and success program, this study is oriented through a constructivist paradigm. In a constructivist approach, the researcher relies as much as possible on the participants' views of the situation in order to interpret the meanings others have about their world. Lochmiller and Lester (2017) outlined constructivism as the assumption "that there are multiple realities that can be studied and that the researcher derives his or her understanding of these realities by working with and through the participants' perspectives of a given phenomenon" (p.13). Through a constructivist lens, value is placed on participants' perspective for understanding, and the researcher is the facilitator who engages in the co-creation of knowledge with participants. This particular interpretative framework relies on broad questions that allow participants to construct the meaning of their situation, which is typically varied and multiple (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

A constructivist paradigm permits me to co-create findings of this research study based on the lived experiences of study participants. I subscribe to the belief that there are multiple realities that could be studied related to coaching, and it is my job to work with and through the participants to understand their perspectives. An interpretivist approach assumes that the meaning of experiences, events, and relationships are constructed by individuals, and that individuals' realities are both socially and historically situated (Charmaz, 2006). Through a constructivist lens, there is an opportunity for varied experiences and interpretations of

validation. How validation shows up in success coaching is determined through the perspectives and experiences of success coaches and FGLI Scholars. From this vantage point, I remained sensitive to the multiple truths expressed by research participants during data collection and analysis. To build rapport and trust with participants to feel comfortable to share their experiences, I incorporated multiple opportunities for participants to engage throughout the research process (Torres & Baxter Magolda 2002).

3.2 Researcher Positionality

This study is birthed from my personal and professional journey through higher education. One of my earliest memories of preparing for college occurred in middle school as a Talent Search program participant. Talent Search is a federal TRIO program that identifies and provides targeted academic, career, and financial counseling to individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds who have the potential to succeed in higher education (US Department of Education, 2022). Unbeknownst to me, my high school was not well resourced to equip me with the skills, knowledge, and experiences to excel within a four-year college environment; thus, I was selected to participate in Talent Search to increase my chances of completing high school and enrolling in college. This was the first of several high-touch educational interventions that acknowledged and invested in my potential for success within higher education.

Talent Search supported my decision to attend college; however, determining where I would attend was heavily influenced by merit- and need-based aid. My undergraduate alma mater awarded me a four-year tuition scholarship and invited me to participate in a first-year transition program designed to support and retain students of Color. As a participant in the LINKS program, I participated in an orientation program designed to help familiarize me with campus building and resources prior to the start of classes; attended academic workshops and

utilized free tutoring to support my academic persistence. As a Scholar in the program, I also benefited from weekly peer mentoring and attended community building events with other LINKS participants. I attribute much of my early college persistence and transition to the bundled set of support services offered through LINKS. This experience would later inform my decision to pursue a career in student affairs with a specific interest in supporting the transition and success of first-generation, low-income, and students of Color.

For more than a decade, I have focused on improving low-income, first-generation, and students of Color access, retention, and graduation within higher education. One of my most memorable roles and genesis of this research study was my experience as an academic success coach for TRIO Student Support Services (SSS) program. The goal of SSS is to increase FGLI student college retention and graduation rates (US Department of Education, 2022). During my time as an academic success coach, I instructed a first-year success course, organized a faculty mentoring program, and helped develop an academic recovery plan to support program participants on academic notice return to good academic standing. I also held individual meetings with program participants where I was able to foster meaningful relationships via listening to their college experiences, finding solutions to financial aid concerns, and connecting them to academic resources (e.g., tutoring, supplemental instruction).

As I reflected on my participation in LINKS and time as an academic success coach, I realize there are several ways in which I am sensitized to the research topic. I used my prior knowledge and experiences in college transition programs to inquire deeper into the various realities of individuals within the research setting in order to describe the nature of success coaching. I gave particular attention to asset-based perspectives, language, and approaches success coaches and Scholars referenced throughout their responses. More specifically, I will be

looking for unique ways in which staff and Scholars describe the nature of success coaching through the lens of validation theory. I expect to hear similar and different perspectives where staff and Scholars describe aspects of coaching that mirror, nuisance, or expanded the six elements of Rendón's (1994) Validation theory. Later in this chapter I describe efforts I will take to monitor imposing my own coaching experience upon the data and rushing to conclusion about the data.

With the recent proliferation of college transition programs and coaching throughout higher education, this research study offers timely contributions to the literature on success coaching in higher education, college transition and success programs, and promoting FGLI student success. My goal is to extend what is known and understood about coaching FGLI student populations. I am intrigued to learn how FGLI Scholars describe and experience success coaching and recommendations they have for practice. I also seek to understand how success coaches describe their approach to coaching FGLI students. This curiosity coupled with gaps in the current body of literature on both college transition programs and coaching informed the conception of this study. In the next section I describe the methodological approach chosen to guide this study.

3.3 Methodology

Case study methodology is one of the many qualitative approaches available to researchers. A qualitative case study approach is appropriate for researchers interested in understanding processes (i.e., how certain things occur) or meanings (i.e., how people understand what is happening) within a particular context (Yin, 2018). Case study methodology is defined as "in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system" (Merriam, 2009, p. 39). The goal of case study research is to provide deeper understanding of the case. In case study methodology,

the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, and inductive strategies are used to generate results that are richly descriptive (Merriam, 2009).

Given the need to expand literature on coaching within higher education contexts, this research study offers a deeper understanding of the nature of success coaching within a singular college transition and success program. My goal was to describe FGLI program participants and staff experiences with success coaching. Conversations with FGLI Scholars who have experienced success coaching within the context will offer insight into "what" success coaching is and the various ways (or "how') it may be experienced (Creswell, 2013). While college transition and success programs are not a new phenomenon, comparing across programs can be challenging given varied programmatic structures. Rather than comparing across programs, this study provides an in-depth examination of the nature of success coaching within a singular context. Conducting a single-case study requires a high-level of attention to how the case is defined and identified (Yin, 2018). One advantage to conducting a single-case study research design is the range of data sources I used to answer the research questions. This descriptive qualitative single- case study offers a contextual understanding of the dynamic nature of success coaching within Terrace Promise at Terrace University (*pseudonym).*

3.3.1 Terrace University

Terrace University is a large, public, predominantly white, research-intensive institution located in the Midwest region. According to institutional data, Terrace University serves approximately 57,000 first-time, full-time undergraduate students. At the time of study, sixteen percent of all Terrace University undergraduate students self-identified as first-generation college students. Less than thirty percent of the undergraduate population is Pell-eligible.

Institutional data highlights nearly half of all Pell-eligible Terrace University undergraduates also self-identify as a first-generation college student.

Terrace University's four-year graduation rate averages slightly below seventy percent and improves to eighty-five percent for six-year graduation rate. Due to data restrictions, I was unable to obtain student retention and graduation rates based on income-level. In lieu of this restriction, I reviewed data available on first-generation college student and discovered first-generation Terrace University undergraduates had lower one-year retention rates as well as four- and six-year graduation rates compared to continuing-generation college students. To bolster the retention and graduation rates of Terrace undergraduates from low-income families who were also the recipient of the state-funded access scholarship, in 2008, Terrace University created Terrace Promise.

3.3.2 Terrace Promise

Terrace Promise is a four-year renewable college transition and success program that supports first-time, full-time income-eligible state residents earn a bachelor's degree from Terrace University debt-free. At the time of data collection, Terrace Promise served approximately 1,200 students (hereafter referred to as Scholars). All Scholars meet program income-eligibility requirement— parental income less than $50,000—and according to program reports, during the time of data collection approximately 70% of program Scholars self-identified as first-generation college student.

Programmatically, Terrace Promise offers a combination of support services and financial aid to support Scholar retention and graduation rates. Financially, Scholars' cost of attendance is covered by state and institutional funds. Tuition funds are covered by a state-funded scholarship and Terrace University covers the remaining cost of attendance for Terrace

Promise Scholars (e.g., housing, meal plan, student fees). Furthermore, Terrace Promise offers a host of non-financial supports to aid Terrace Promise Scholars' transition and success at Terrace University (Figure 1). For example, Terrace Scholars are enrolled in two one-credit hour seminar courses during their time in the program to support their transitions at various stages during their college journey. During the fall of their first-year, Scholars are required to take the program designated first-year success. During the course Scholars review requirements to maintain their scholarship, are introduced to campus resources, engage in group conversations about diversity, equity, and inclusion on campus. In their fourth year in the program, Terrace Promise Scholars complete a senior seminar course designed to prepare them for the next chapter of their professional journey. Course topics include transition into the workplace, financial literacy, and lifelong financial planning. In addition to required seminar courses, Terrace Promise organizes an annual study abroad tour at a significantly reduced cost and continuous academic support (e.g., printing, tutoring) as Scholars persist towards graduation.

Another feature of Terrace Promise– and most relevant to this research study– is each Terrace Scholar is assigned a success coach. Success coaches are full-time professional staff who help Scholars maintain their scholarship and connect to campus resources. The program is staffed by 12 full-time success coaches. Success coaches are responsible for facilitating one to two sections of the required seminar courses as well as the optional study abroad tours. Success coaches are assigned a caseload of 150- 200 Scholars they provide support to throughout their undergraduate career. Success coaches meet with each Scholar in their caseload a minimum of two times each semester of full-time enrollment. Terrace Promise Scholars can request additional meetings with their assigned success coach based on their success coaches' availability. Coaching meetings range from thirty-minutes to one hour in length. If a Scholar is on academic

notice, they are required to meet with their success coach four to six times during the semester to monitor progress and return to good academic standing.

Figure 1 Terrace Promise Infographic*

*Image adapted from original source.

   There are several reasons I selected Terrace Promise as the research site for this study. First, based on personal knowledge of the program, Terrace Promise is well-aligned with Kezar and Kitchen's (2020) description of a college transition and success program. Second, and central to the aim of this study, Terrace Promise has a four-year success coaching model that supports program participants from low-income and first-generation backgrounds. Third, program reports indicate the 2014 Terrace Promise cohort four-year graduation rate exceeded the

overall institution four-year graduation rate by two percentage points. It is important to note the 2014 cohort was the first cohort to receive the Terrace Promise success coaching model all four years. In sum, Terrace Promise's student demographics, programmatic components, and prior success rate position Terrace Promise as an exemplar case study site to explore the aforementioned research questions to better understand the nature of success coaching within the context of a college transition and success program.

3.4 Data Collection

This single-case study examined the nature of coaching within Terrace Promise. A unique strength of case study methodology is the range of data sources researchers can leverage to obtain evidence (Yin, 2018). This study relied on four sources of data to answer the research questions: documents, observations, interviews, and focus groups. After receiving approval for the University of Michigan's Institutional Review Board (IRB) in late November 2022, data collection commenced January 2023 and concluded April 2023. In the following subsections I offer a thorough description of the qualitative methods used to inform the research questions.

3.4.1 Documents

Case study research frequently relies on acquiring numerous documents within the field site in order to situate the case in context (Yin, 2018). Terrace Promise leadership granted me access to previous and current program documents and reports. I reviewed program pamphlets, job descriptions, websites, course syllabi, and program annual reports. Documents were collected throughout the course of data collection and helped me gain a better understanding of the overall program context prior to exploring the nature of coaching. There is immense value in reviewing documentation as part of case study research. Documents can help uncover meaning, develop understanding, and discover insights relevant to the research questions (Bowen, 2009). More

specifically, I paid close attention to whether and how coaching was referenced throughout these documents. Although useful, some documentation and graphs were outdated or only highlighted outcomes rather than shedding light on the processes related to coaching. Therefore, I conducted interviews with program staff to verify and expand upon information found in program documents specifically related to coaching.

3.4.2 Observations

My inquiry into Terrace Promise's coaching approach was also informed by observational data. According to Yin (2018), observational evidence provides additional information about the topic being studied and can yield invaluable data to complement other forms of data collected within the site. While observations of coaching sessions would permit me to witness coaching approaches in action, it presents ethical challenges that could alter the nature of how coaches enact coaching as well as how FGLI student experience the process. To avoid infringing upon Scholars dedicated time with their success coach, I opted to conduct observations of coaching staff meetings. This alternative approach proved to be effective for framing the context of on-the-job training, learning, and collaboration that informed success coaches' approach to coaching Terrace Scholars.

Attending staff meetings permitted me to observe research participants in their work environment, increased time spent at and familiarity with the research site and helped facilitate greater connections between myself and research participants. The Terrace Promise suite is located on the fourth floor of a satellite student union building. The building serves as a hub for collaborative work providing additional space for conference rooms, individual study areas and space for student organizations. The Terrace Promise suite includes ten offices and one large conference room which doubles as a dedicated study space for Scholars. I completed three

observations for a total of 4.5 hours. Two observations were conducted in-person in the program

dedicated conference room and one observation was ed the role of peripheral participant

observer and remained mindful not to participate directly in the meeting (Saldaña & Omasta,

2018). In my role, I focused on listening and observing how success coaches described their role

and learned from one another. One observation was conducted virtually due to university closure

for inclement weather. During each observation, I maintaining the dynamics of the meeting

including language, staff interactions, exchange of information. Appendix A contains the

observation template used to jot notes during observations.

3.4.3 Interviews

Interviews are one of the most important and common sources of case study evidence

often used to provide explanations of "how" and "why" questions (Yin, 2018). Interviews with

staff members informed the second research question guiding this case study: *How do program*

success coaches describe their approach to coaching FGLI Scholars? Success coaches are both

knowledgeable about the overall program and administer coaching directly to Scholars. Thus,

conversations with success coaches offered deeper insights into the program's approach to

coaching and clarified or offered nuisance to information found in program documents and/or

webpages.

3.4.3.1 Interview Recruitment. All full-time Terrace Promise staff members received an

email describing the aim of the study and requesting their consent to participate (Appendix B).

Seven staff members agreed to participate in the study. Five interviews were conducted virtually

via Zoom and two interviews were conducted in-person in the staff members office. Each

interview was guided by a semi-structured interview protocol that focused on learning broadly

about Terrace Promise. I also inquired about staff members' coaching philosophy and coaching

strategies used during meetings. The interview protocol consisted of open-ended questions to understand how success coaches define their practice, execute coaching, as well as perceptions of how coaching is positioned to support FGLI student success. (Appendix C). Interviews lasted approximately 60-minutes in length and were audio-recorded via Zoom. Participants were compensated with a $30 gift card for their participation in the study.

3.4.3.2 Interview Participants. Table 1.1 summarizes demographic information of Terrace Promise staff who participated in the research study. At the time of data collection, years of service among interviewees ranged from less than one year to six years. Worth noting, four of the seven staff interviewed self-identified as a first-generation college graduate and two staff members were Terrace Promise alumni.

Table 1 Success Coach Demographic Table

Pseudonym	Years of service*	Sex	Race/ Ethnicity	Prior low-SES background	First-Gen Graduate	Former Terrace Promise Scholar
Aurora	6	Female	Black	Yes	Yes	No
Dallas	3	Male	White	Yes	Yes	No
Leslie	< 1	Female	White	Yes	No	Yes
Marissa	3	Female	White	Yes	Yes	Yes
Max	< 1	Male	White	No	No	No
Trina	2	Female	Bi-racial	Yes	Yes	No
William	1	Male	White	No	No	No

N= 7
*Years of service at time of data collection.

3.4.4 Focus Groups

Focus groups were the primary source of data collection used to inform the third research question: *How do FGLI program participants describe their coaching experience?* As a method, focus groups are an economical and efficient way to gather relatively large amounts of qualitative data from multiple participants at once (Creswell, 2013). Additionally, during focus groups, participants not only respond to questions presented, but also react, respond, and learn from each other. This creates a unique group dynamic that allows rich conversations and discovery to occur (Hesse-Biber, 2017). The primary aim of the focus groups was to embrace the multiple realities and experiences Terrace Scholars have with success coaching offered by Terrace Promise staff.

3.4.4.1 Focus Group Recruitment. This case study relied heavily on the knowledge and experiences of current Terrace Promise Scholars. After obtaining IRB approval, I made several intentional decisions as to how to recruit Scholars to participate in the study. First, I identified ten dates and times to host the in-person focus groups. Cognizant that Terrace Promise requires success coaching for four years of program enrollment, I designated two sessions for Scholars classified as fourth-years, two sessions for first-year Scholars, and two sessions for third-and second-year Scholars combined. I reserved the remaining four sessions for additional data collection as needed. I intentionally selected this staggered recruitment approach because it allowed me to achieve maximum variation across Scholars based on year in the program and helped reduce instances of overrepresentation of any one classification in the sample. Moreover, this approach allowed for Scholars to meet and discuss their success coaching experience with participants from similar classifications and reduce the chances of a first-year Scholars hesitancy to contribute if in a session with more advanced, experienced Scholars. On average, focus groups attendance ranged between two to thirteen participants per session (See Table 2).

After selecting a date and time for the first six sessions, I worked closely with the program director to begin participant recruitment. The program director generated a list of currently enrolled Terrace Promise participants' emails disaggregated by classification (e.g., first-year, senior; N=1,072). Cognizant that Scholars are more likely to read and respond to emails from program staff, Scholars received an email from the program director inviting them to participate in the research study and register for one of two preassigned focus group sessions for their classification. Registered Scholars received a confirmation email and calendar invite including the location of the session (Appendix D).

Table 2 Terrace Promise Scholar Focus Group Attendance

Focus Group Session	Terrace Promise Target Audience	Number of Participants
1	Fourth Year & Beyond Scholars	5
2	Fourth Year & Beyond Scholars	3
3	Third- & Second-Year Scholars	13
4	Third- & Second-Year Scholars	5
5	First-Year Scholars	5
6	First-Year Scholars	6
7	Fourth Year & Beyond Scholars	2
8	Third- & Second-Year Scholars	5
9	First-Year Scholars	0

Focus groups were held in-person in the Terrace Promise conference room. This location was selected because program participants were familiar with the setting and could increase their sense of comfort participating in the study and being candid (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). While the program conference room proved to be convenient for the purpose of the research study, this choice inadvertently disrupted and inconvenienced some Scholars' access to the space. Despite posted signage to notify community members the conference room was reserved for the focus group, I constantly had to find polite and creative ways to request Scholars vacate the conference room forcing them to relocate their meeting or studies. Moreover, there were occasional interruptions during each focus group from non-research participants looking to study in the conference room. At the conclusion of each focus group, I announced to students in the immediate area that the conference room was open for them to continue their studies. These

instances shed light on the need to think critically about the physical space in which data is collected and to be mindful not disrupt normal flow and use of campus space.

On average focus groups ranged from 60-90 minutes in duration. At the start of each session, participants reviewed and signed a consent form and completed a brief demographic questionnaire that elicited basic background information such as age, race, first-generation status (Appendix E). Each focus group was guided by a semi-structured protocol. The protocol was designed to gain insight into how Scholars describe the ways in which success coaching contributes (or not) to their college experience. The focus group protocol consisted of 16 open-ended and probing questions designed to elicit thick, rich descriptions of participants' experience with success coaching (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). During each session, participants elaborated on their description of success coaching, discussed the nature of their relationship with their assigned success coach, and described the ways in which coaching contributed to their college experience. The use of drawings during the focus group helped participants better recall their experience with coaching and simultaneously placed participants in control of what they shared during the conversation. See Appendix F for the full-length focus group protocol. After completing the initial set of six focus groups, I hosted an additional three sessions soliciting data from classification. At the completion of the ninth focus group, no new insights were discovered. At that point, data saturation was achieved, I concluded data collection and proceeded with data analysis discussed later in the chapter.

3.4.4.2 Focus Group Participants. My recruitment approach yielded a total of forty-four Terrace Promise Scholars participants. More specifically, the sample consisted of 10 fourth-years, 11 third-years, 12 second-years, and 11 first-year Scholars. Majors ranged from Spanish, management, animal science, biomedical engineering, and exploratory studies. In terms of race and ethnicity, 45% of focus group participants self-identified as White (non-Hispanic) and 27% self-identified as Black/African American. When asked about gender identity, two Scholars identified as non-binary and twenty-four percent of participants wrote in "Male". The researcher acknowledges the difference between gender and sex and associated implications of conflating these identity markers. To avoid assumptions about participants gender identity, I made the deliberative decision to report on the data as collected and preserve the language participants selected for themselves. Lastly, while all focus group participants met program income-eligibility requirements, 22 research participants indicated neither parent/guardian had completed a four-year degree. Thus, half of the Scholars who participated in the focus groups held dual identities as first-generation and low-income (FGLI). Participants were compensated with a $30 gift card for participating in the focus group and are referred to by self-selected pseudonyms throughout findings discussed in chapter 5. Table 3 summarizes characteristics of focus group participants.

Table 3 Self-Reported Characteristics of Terrace Promise Focus Group Participants

Demographic Category	Self-Identifier	Percentage	Number
Gender Identity*	"Female"	71%	31
	"Male"	24%	11
	"Non-Binary"	5%	2
Racial Identity	White or Caucasian (non-Hispanic)	45%	20
	Black or African American	27%	12
	Hispanic or Latino	16%	7
	Asian or Asian American	7%	3
	Bi-Racial	5%	2
Classification	First-Year	25%	11
	Second-Year	27%	12
	Third-Year	25%	11
	Fourth-Year	23%	10
Academic College **	Agriculture	14%	6
	Business	11%	5
	Education	7%	3
	Engineering	7%	3
	Exploratory Studies	7%	3
	Health & Human Sciences	34%	15
	Liberal Arts	14%	6
	Technology	7%	3
	Science	7%	3
Residency	In-State	100%	44
Parental Income	< $50,000	100%	44
First-Generation College Student Status	Yes	50%	22
Age	18-19	39%	17
	20-21	50%	22
	22 +	11%	5

N= 44

* The questionnaire asked participants to write in their gender identity; nearly all participants responded with their sex. The researcher does not intent to conflate sex and gender; therefore, made the choice to report on the data as submitted.

** Total exceeds 100% as several participants reported more than one academic major.

3.5 Data Management

This case study produced a large amount of data which required careful organization in order to support data analysis. All data– including audio recordings, drawings, documents, and observational notes- were collected following IRB approved procedures and stored in a password protected, encrypted server provided through the University of Michigan that only the primary researcher has access to. Protecting participant confidentiality is an utmost concern. To ensure participant confidentiality, I redacted real names and identifiable information from the transcripts and replaced them with pseudonyms selected by participants.

3.6 Data Analysis

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) described data analysis as "the process used to answer your research question(s)" (p.202). In a constructivist approach, the researcher relies as much as possible on the participants' views of the situation to interpret the meanings others have about their world. This study draws upon multiple sources of evidence to inform the nature of success coaching within Terrace Promise.

According to Saldaña & Omasta (2018) "analysis is an ongoing progress throughout the research project, not a task undertaken after all the data have been collected" (p. 214). As such, data collected for this project were analyzed in various ways from the beginning of the study. Throughout the analysis process I focused on noticing patterns in textual and visual materials, condensing large amounts of data, and unifying seemingly different concepts across data sources. Data analysis proceeded in four stages: documents and observations; interviews with success coaches; focus groups with Scholars; and synthesis across the data. In the following section I detail the analytic procedures and processes employed during each stage. I leveraged Rendón's

(1994) validation theory to establish convergence and corroboration across the different data sources. My aim was to understand if and how validation shows up within success coaching from the vantage point of success coaches as well as Terrace Promise Scholars. Furthermore, I highlight how the selected analytic methods aided my ability to make sense of the data and informed my synthesis of the collective data to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of the nature of coaching within Terrace Promise.

3.6.1 Stage One: Documents & Observations

Shortly after receiving IRB approval and securing Terrace Promise as my research site, I reviewed publicly available sources (e.g., institutional dashboards, program website) to develop a preliminary understanding of the larger institutional context as well as Terrace Promise program characteristics, goals, and outcomes. I obtained annual reports, position descriptions, and the Scholar contract agreement to familiarize myself with key components of the program. It is important to note program documents were not intended to be a primary source of data for this case study. Rather than conducting document analysis of each source; I used these documents to corroborate and augment evidence from other data sources to strengthen trustworthiness of overall findings (Yin, 2018).

My review of program documents and websites informed subsequent data collection and analysis. For example, at the beginning of each focus group, I asked Scholars to reflect on the overall programmatic structure and share their favorite component, services they believed helped them navigate their college experience, and resources they recommend adding. During this set of questions, I referred to Figure 1 to frame the discussion and support Scholars' reflection. Program reports helped me become familiar with specified program learning outcomes (e.g., increased Scholars' confidence). During interviews with success coaches, I focused intently on

listening to their descriptions of their approach to coaching and analyzed how these strategies contribute to validation as well as stated learning outcomes.

In addition to reviewing program artifacts, I conducted three staff observations during the data collection period. Staff meeting observations permitted me to observe success coaches in their work environment and gain exposure to team discussions that also informed their approach to success coaching. During observations, I tracked and organized notes using the Staff Meeting Observation Sheet (Appendix B). After each observation I drafted analytic memos as an initial form of data analysis. For example, during the first observation I noted how success coaches created mnemonic devices to memorize state and institutional deadlines relevant to Scholar's scholarship requirement. During the second observation, I joined the entire team on a tour of Terrace University's Dean of Students office. During the meeting success coaches met with members of Terrace's critical incident response team and discussed the student of concern reporting process. In my analytic memos I reflected on varied outcomes of staff meetings whether as a form of professional development or training, reflection of practice, celebrating personal or professional accomplishments, or fostering cross-campus connections that support FGLI student success. Observational notes informed portions of my coding process and enhanced the overall methodological rigor as I transitioned between data collection and write up of findings (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). Moreover, analytic memos proved to be instrumental to adding context to themes I identified across staff interviews.

3.6.2 Stage Two: Interviews with Success Coaches

Interviews with Terrace Promise staff were the primary data source of data findings relevant to the second research question: *How do program success coaches describe their approach to coaching FGLI Scholars?* I conducted seven interviews with program staff. Each interview was

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audio-recorded and transcribed through Zoom. After each interview, I played back the audio recording correcting errors or missing information in the written transcript. After transcripts were cleaned, I offered interviewees an opportunity to review their transcript to ensure accuracy and clarify concepts shared during the interview (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2018).

After each transcript was verified by the respective interviewee and pseudonyms were selected, I conducted multiple rounds of inductive and deductive coding. I employed a combination of descriptive, open , and in vivo coding to make sense of how success coaches described their individual coaching philosophy and coaching strategies for promoting FGLI student success. To date, the extant literature on coaching in higher education fails to offer sufficient descriptions of how coaching is delivered in practice specifically among FGLI student populations. Coding the data in this manner permitted me to remain open to what I might find relevant to addressing gaps within the literature. Each interview was coded by hand and logged in a password-protected Microsoft Excel worksheet. Initial in vivo codes included words such as "understand Scholar's why", "trust", "validation", and "focus on immediate concern". The finalized list of initial codes produced from interviews with success coaches is available in Appendix G.

Once the first round of coding was complete, I revisited each transcript a third time and applied focus coding. Focused coding allowed me to focus specifically on initial codes and quotes that helped articulate the coach's approach to coaching (Saldañda, 2016). During this round of coding, I excluded information about role responsibilities– unless applicable– and focused specifically on *how* success coaches described the strategies they leveraged to coach FGLI Scholars. Table 4 includes a list of questions that guided my second round of analysis of each transcript.

Table 4 Focused Coding Guiding Questions

What informs success coaches' coaching approach?
How do success coaches describe their personal philosophy of success coaching?
What negotiations, concessions, or considerations do success coaches make when coaching FGLI Scholars?
What signals of evolution, confliction, or regression are present in success coaches coaching approach?
How (if at all) do success coaches evaluate their coaching approach?
How do success coaches describe their delivery and tone when coaching FGLI Scholars?

Patterning across the transcripts proved to be challenging at times, however, I revisited my research questions often to remain focused on what I was coding for– each participants' description of their coaching approach. During the second cycle coding, several codes generated during initial coding were combined to strength depth within a particular category. After applying focused coding to each transcript, I named each category according to the codes and data in each category (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). For example, the coaching philosophy category included individual codes such as "understanding Scholars why", "big picture", "person-first" and "humanizing". While analyzing each transcript through focused coding, I noticed a pattern of how coaches described the ways in which coaching staff meetings and relationships with campus partners (or lack thereof) influenced their coaching approach. After reviewing the codes related to these categories with trusted colleagues, I combined the two categories into a broader theme titled: "Influences from Workplace and Campus Partners".

Throughout this portion of my analysis process, I documented initial insights, potential themes, and reflections in a journal and revisited the research questions to maintain focus when

making sense of the data. Once the categories and broader themes were developed, I applied theoretical coding to analyze if and how validation occurs within the coach's description of their approach. More specifically, I analyzed if and how Rendón's (1994) conceptualization of validation manifests within each coach's description of their coaching approach as well as how aspects of their coaching approach align with or expand the six elements of validation theory. I concentrated on ascertaining if and how validation operated as a mechanism across the findings. A full write-up of findings are included in chapter 4.

3.6.3 Stage Three: Focus Groups with Terrace Promise Scholars

Focus groups with Terrace Promise Scholars were a primary source of data informing the third research question: *How do FGLI program participants describe their coaching experience?* All focus groups were audio recorded and transcribed through Zoom. After the first focus group, I thoroughly reviewed the transcription against the source recording, correcting any errors or missing information in the written transcript. This step proved beneficial to helping me immerse myself with the data. After verifying the accuracy of the transcription, I began the iterative process of coding the data. During the first cycle of coding, I leveraged a combination of in vivo and structural coding. In vivo codes use the direct language of participants as codes rather than research-generated words and phrases (Saldañda, 2016). Structural coding– or question-based coding– is particularly useful for studies that use a semi-structured protocol to engage multiple participants. Structural coding permits the researcher to code and create initial categories related to answering the research question (Saldana, 2016). "General Descriptions of Success Coaching" and "Coaching Relationship" are examples of structural codes generated to sort focus group responses. Combined, these coding methods proved to be a great fit for this

study as it required me to keep Scholar voices at the front of my analysis while simultaneously organizing large quantities of data in a structured way.

Codes generated from the first transcript were applied to the remaining transcripts. With each transcript, the codebook was amended to incorporate new codes and refine codes as more accurate words or phrases were discovered. I applied more than one code to datum that conveyed multiple concepts and generated subcodes as needed to capture variance within a singular code. After the last focus group transcript was coded, I returned to the prior transcripts once more to recode them according to the most up-to-date codebook. Appendix H contains the list of original codes generated during first-cycle coding.

During second cycle coding, I developed a coherent meta synthesis across all focus groups. The primary goal during this a is to develop a sense of thematic and categorical organization from my first-cycle codes (Saldañda, 2016). Essentially, my first cycle codes were reorganized and reconfigured according to similarities to eventually develop a smaller and more select list of broader categories and themes. The most common codes referenced across each focus group became either a category or theme. During this iterative process, I merged some codes together because they were conceptually similar or provided deeper context to a category. For example, I originally coded responses pertaining to how Scholars described the coaches' physical office space as "coaching environment". Unfortunately, this code appeared less than a handful of times across all transcripts and was later merged the "Personable" code. Finally, I used validation theory as a lens to help make sense of what emerged from the data. Embedded throughout my analysis are interpretations of how validation may operates or contributes to themes identified across focus group transcripts. Themes derived from initial analytic work with codes and categories and were independently constructed from a holistic review of the data

corpus for patterns of recurring ideas. (THEME: NATURE OF RELATIONSHIP; *Category:*

Affable Nature; Codes: Got to know me as an individual; friendly).

In addition to coding, I reviewed visual aids created by focus group participants. Similar to my review of program documents, I did not code nor analyze drawings produced during focus groups. Instead, these drawings were used as a tool to generate discussion rather then focused on Scholar meaning making. I reference these renderings throughout Chapter 5 to illustrate themes relevant to research questions two.

3.6.4 Stage Four: Synthesizing Findings

In the final stage of data analysis, I synthesized across the documents, interviews, observations, and focus groups to answer the overarching research question: *What is the program's approach to coaching FGLI students?* At this stage of my analytic process, I reviewed codes, categories, and themes from interviews and focused on identifying similarities and differences. I dedicated a considerable amount of time to interpreting the data corps through a lens of validation. During this process, I referred back to analytic memos compiled to log my thinking on the conditions necessary for validation to occur, instances where validation occurred in theory or in tandem with other mechanisms within success coaching. These insights are presented in Chapter six.

3.7 Trustworthiness

Ensuring trustworthiness of data collection, interpretation, and representation is a critical aspect of qualitative data analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Therefore, I made several choices to enhance credibility and trustworthiness of findings. Given the volume of research participants (N= 52), member checking occurred informally throughout during data collection. During

conversations, I frequently paraphrased and summarized statements to confirm statements, ideas, and allow for alternative interpretations of the data. Second, I leveraged thick descriptions as a way to increase confirmability of finding. I deliberately chose in vivo coding so that participants' voices would illustrate categories and themes identified. Quotes are used throughout the write up to illustrate findings. Furthermore, I periodically included examples of disconfirming evidence (e.g., contradictory data outliers or extreme cases that vary from the typical or majority of responses) as a way to strengthen trustworthiness of findings.

I also made several analytical choices to enhance confidence in my findings. My interpretation of the nature of success coaching within this case study is informed by data triangulated across three sources: Scholars' experience with success coaching, how success coaches describe their coaching practice, and observations of staff meetings. Each data source was analyzed independently and then combined using the systematic approach detailed in the four-stage data analysis section. In the final report I highlight congruence across the three data sources. Triangulating findings across data sources helped validate findings and reduce instances where I may subconsciously impose my personal experiences and interpretation of coaching onto the data.

As a researcher, I acknowledge that my social identity, past experiences supporting FGLI student populations, as well as our understanding of previous scholarly literature, likely influenced each stage of the research process in this study in obvious and less obvious ways. Notwithstanding, I worked diligently to identify findings independent of my own biases. To this end, I followed Merriam and Tisdell's (2016) recommendations for considering my reflexivity. Throughout the data collection and analysis process I kept a detailed audit trail (i.e., research journal) where I engage in critical self-reflection. Journaling helped me track my thoughts and

reactions as I conducted the interviews and focus groups and analyzed them for themes. Keeping a journal encouraged deep reflection, helped me challenge my own assumptions having served in similar role earlier in my career, and remain focused on answering the research questions. To increase internal validity, I consulted with higher education colleagues to offer insights and challenge my interpretations of findings (Merriam, 1998). Finally, after analyzing that data, I previewed an initial draft of findings with the success coaching staff to review themes and offer suggestions towards alternative interpretations of the data. Combined, these data collection and analytical procedures helped ensure dependability, credibility, and trustworthiness of findings produced from this study.

3.8 Limitations

The aim of this single case study is to offer a comprehensive perspective of the nature of success coaching within Terrace Promise. There are however several methodological limitations and challenges within the proposed research design. Based on prior professional experience as an academic success coach, I made the decision to forego direct observations of individual coaching sessions. I am aware that my presence as a researcher within the coaching session could alter the experience for both the success coach and Scholar. In lieu of conducting observations of individual coaching sessions, I chose to observe program staff meetings to gain a better understanding of how success coaches discussed topics of concerns and brainstormed navigating options for resolutions as well as celebrated personal and Scholar related wins amongst colleagues.

Second methodological choice made with implication related to data collection was my intentional choice to conduct focus group rather than interviews with Terrace Promise Scholars. While individual interviews would offer in-depth details about individual stories the aim of this

study is to under the nature of success coaching which is informed by multiple perspectives of success coaching. Conducting focus group allowed for individuals who have experienced success coaching to not only share their experience, but also hear how other Scholars experience the same phenomenon. Subsequenlty, this choice to conduct focus groups provided an opportunity for Scholars to commune with their peers in a setting beyond the required seminar courses. I intentionally offered two to three focus group sessions per academic classification to increase opportunities for Scholars across classifications to share their experience and perspective of success coaching. Conducting focus groups permitted me to gain insights about the coaching experience from Scholars at various stages within the program. Some focus group times were popular among participants, while others had low participation rate. With larger groups, I created space for each participant's voice to be included by referring to participants names to actively include them in the conversation. Additionally, I relied on the use of Scholars illustrations as a way to capture their experience in ways they may not have been expressed verbally during the session. With smaller groups, Scholars were able to elaborate more in-depth on some of their experiences; however, I also asked them to verify, confirm, or nuance themes I was hearing from other focus groups.

While focus groups increased maximum variation among program participants, I was not able to rule out the possibility of self-selection bias from those who agreed to participate in the focus group. Acknowledging self-selection bias, focus group sessions were more likely to consist of students who enjoyed and/or frequently engaged with their success coach. To mitigate this aspect, I asked all participants to elaborate on a time when their success coach was not as helpful as they had imagined to ensure I received positive and constructive feedback about their coaching experience (See Appendix G).

Finally, researchers may identify similarities between their institutions, programmatic structure, staffing positions, or student populations interviewed as part of this case. However, it is worth noting that transferability of findings is not the goal of this or any qualitative study. Rather, the goal of qualitative research is to understand the meaning-making experience (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I thoroughly outlined my methodological approach so future researchers can replicate these procedures to understand the nature of success coaching within their respective college transition and success programs.

3.9 Chapter Summary

Chapter three outlined the research design guiding this study. Findings are separated into three chapters. Chapter four highlights findings from interviews with success coaches most relevant to answering the second research question: *How do program success coaches describe their approach to coaching FGLI Scholars?* Chapter five reports key findings from focus groups conducted with Terrace Promise Scholars most relevant to answering the third research question in this study: *How do FGLI program participants describe their coaching experience?* Chapter six synthesizes findings across chapters four and five to answer the overarching research question: *What is the program's approach to coaching FGLI students?* In the final chapter I triangulate findings across the multiple data sources, describe the nature of coaching within Terrace Promise, and align findings with current literature. After synthesizing findings across each research question, I offer recommendations current and future higher education professionals should consider as they organize to promote FGLI student success.

Chapter 4 How do Success Coaches Describe their Coaching Approach?

Chapter four addresses findings relevant to the second research question guiding this dissertation: *How do success coaches describe their coaching approach?* The aim of this research question is to highlight how Terrace Promise success coaches described their approach to supporting FGLI students. Chapter three summarized how data pertaining to this research question was collected and analyzed.

Prior to answering the research question, it was essential to understand how success coaches within this context conceptualized success coaching. All six interviewees experienced challenges articulating the dynamic nature of success coaching. Several offered creative explanations for how they think about and describe success coaching. Marissa shared how her description of success coaching developed overtime and relies on offering relatable examples of how she offered support to FGLI Terrace Scholars.

> …actually, it took long time to figure out how I would even respond to that…I ask people who went to college 'what was the hardest thing you ever did in college?' Or if they've never been, 'what kept you from going?' And when they gave me an answer, I would respond, oh, yeah, I've worked with students on that and describe how we managed it. And from there I share how I'm a support.

Prior to becoming a success coach, Max didn't fully understand what a success coach was. When asked to describe success coaching, Max conceptualized his work as "adapting, creating, and just being the support that Scholars need." Max shared:

> So when I tell people what I do for a living now, it usually trails with a bit of explanation [laughter]...I think the part that throws people off is the success part. So, I usually take a lot of time to emphasize the coach part. Do you know what a soccer coach is? And 9 times out of 10 times they do. Well, it's really not that different, except there's no ball or

field involved. A coach– at least my understanding– is designed to help an individual in their arena. So my job is to help my students be successful in the arena known as Terrace University. So that means adapting, creating, and just being the support that the individual needs. So a soccer coach coaches a soccer player; for a student success coach it's a Terrace Promise Scholar.

With these conceptualizations of success coaching in mind, I framed my analysis on interpretations of h*ow* success coaches described the approaches and strategies they leveraged to coach FGLI Scholars. I selected Rendón's (1994) validation theory to analyze findings produced from this case study. Rendón-Linares & Muñoz (2011) conceptualized validation as the "intentional, proactive affirmation of students by in- and out-of-class agents (e.g., faculty, peers, academic affairs staff, family members) in order to validate students as generators of knowledge and as valued members of the college learning community and foster personal development and social adjustment" (p. 12). Marissa and Max's description of success coaching encompass key elements of validation proposed by Rendón and warrant further investigation of how the Terrace Promise coaching team approach to coaching aligns with or extends the proposed elements of validation theory.

Findings are organized into four major themes: "Coaching Philosophies"; "Conceptualizing Support"; "Strategies for Cultivating Relationships with FGLI Scholars"; and "Influences from Workplace Environment". Chapter four begins with a description of three philosophies I identified guiding and informing coaches' approach to coaching FGLI Scholars. I then highlight techniques coaches integrate into their practice to establish and maintain relationships with Scholars in their caseload. My analysis of these approaches suggests how validation might operate within the coaching relationship. I then offer insight into how the coaching staff dynamic and relationships with campus partners influence aspects of coaches' approach to success coaching. The fourth theme describes common pillars of practice articulated

among success coaches and how the culmination of these pillars fosters the conditions for validating FGLI Scholars. Throughout the chapter I include direct quotes from participants to illustrate categories and themes. The chapter concludes with an explanation of how findings resonate with or extend aspects of validation theory and offer considerations higher education professionals can leverage towards validating first-generation, low-income college students towards success.

4.1 **Coaching Philosophies**

In the following section I describe three student-centered philosophies I identified throughout my analysis of Terrace Promise success coaches' approach to coaching FGLI Scholars: "Person-First Approach"; "Understanding Scholar's Why"; and "Seeing the Big Picture". I provide an overview of how success coaches describe their philosophy of practice and analyze how these three philosophies demonstrate, set the context for, or extend portions of Rendón's (1994) theory of validation.

4.1.1 Person-First Approach

Each participant expressed framing their coaching approach and conversations around valuing Scholars as individuals. Trina's emphasis on "getting to know the person who is a student first, rather than the student who is a person" was most indicative of this student-centered approach to coaching. In the following excerpt Trina reflected on the nature and implications of revising her coaching approach to a person-first approach.

> …I put them as a person first and I focus on what matters to them… because a lot of the times that seems to be the issue, they were not being addressed as a person first, then a student… I think that gets severely undervalued. Sure, everyone starts off, maybe asking the generic questions because you don't know the student at first. Even when I started, I asked them to tell me about yourself. I just let them tell me what's going on. What do I need to know about you to be able to help you out and be a good coach to you. And I learned most times it's just letting them be a person. And I feel like that has a little bit

more organic movement, because previously, when I was trying to keep things so structured it felt forced.

Trina posited the 'person-first' approach helps reduce some FGLI Scholars' perceptions that they are "just another number" at Terrace University. Other success coaches echoed how the person-first philosophy coupled with permitting space during the coaching session for Scholars to process their collegiate experiences beyond academics signaled to Scholars they are valued as a person and supported efforts to foster meaningful and validating relationships. Success coach Marissa described how the person-first approach is applicable to supporting Scholars reassigned to her caseload due to staffing transitions.

> This semester I inherited three seniors from a coach who left and the first thing they shared was "I've had a new coach every year". If you're on your third coach, at that point, I know what I need to know about you as a student. Who are you as a person? ...a lot of the times they just share "I'm this age, this major', and I care about that, but I care about who you are past that because you're only a student for four years... So when you look beyond the fact that they're just a student and remember that they're also a person that helps.

Acknowledging the implications high turnover rates among success coaches may have on Scholars ability to feel connected and valued, Marissa strived to get to know Scholars in her caseload by first focusing on who they are as an individual. The person-first approach helps Marissa and other success coaches establish intentional -- rather than transactional-- relationships with Scholars. This approach helped foster the conditions necessary for validation to occur whereby success coaches are able to learn more about and support Scholars beyond academics.

During my interviews with Terrace Promise success coaches, I identified a common theme centered on investing time in understanding who Scholars are beyond academics. My analysis of this theme suggests the person-first coaching philosophy described by Terrace Promise success coaches is an essential practice within success coaching and is the foundation for validation. Rendón- Linares & Munoz (2011) asserted "…when validation is present,

students feel capable of learning and have a sense of self-worth. Whomever the student turns to for validation, the affirming action should serve to confirm that the student brings knowledge to college and has the potential to succeed" (pg 18). Trina and Marissa are able to support FGLI Scholars sense of self-worth by leveraging a "person-first" approach to coaching. Based on my analysis, the person-first philosophy is an essential approach for validation to occur within success coaching. As success coaches learn more about Scholars in a holistic manner, they begin to identify and understand Scholars' assets and opportunities to connect them to resources as they navigate their college experience.

4.1.2 *Identifying Scholar's Why*

The most commonly referenced coaching philosophy among interviewees was "identifying Scholar's why". Building upon the person-first philosophy, several success coaches described focusing exclusively on trying to discover and understand what motivates Terrace Promise Scholars. For example, success coach Dallas was keen on helping Scholars "identify their purpose for practice". During his interview, Dallas shared a short motivational clip related to identifying your purpose for practice (Coach Primetime TV, 2023). Dallas suggested the clip is applicable to FGLI Scholars in higher education, albeit an athletic reference. In the following excerpt Dallas described this guiding philosophy of his coaching practice.

> …I do that with motivation as well when we talk about finding what Deion Sanders calls a purpose for practice... finding your why, that's what motivates you. So why are you doing this? You're not doing this just for a piece of paper. There's another reason why you chose this, and there's a reason why you're here. So, I help students find that purpose.

Dallas acknowledged coaching FGLI Scholars to identify and articulate the reason(s) why they are pursuing a degree can be challenging for some first-year and advanced Scholars. However, Dallas posited this information is an essential component to his approach to helping Terrace

Scholars be successful during their time at Terrace University. As Dallas leveraged this philosophy to guide his coaching approach, he recalled the most common rationales FGLI Scholars identified were related to familial or financial circumstances.

Marissa also identified understanding Scholars' motivation as a guiding philosophy of her approach to helping FGLI Scholars achieve their goals. Marissa reflected on her time as a Terrace Scholar and on how her assigned success coach aided in helping her identify why she selected her major. Marissa's lived experience as a Scholar discovering her personal motivation informed her current practice as a success coach. This is confirmatory evidence that suggests identifying Scholars' why is a foundational tenet of success coaching within Terrace Promise.

> …my first coach was big on questioning me about my whys and wants. I always thought I wanted to be a pharmacist, and she was like 'why', and I was like 'I'm really into Biology and Chemistry'. And she called me out, 'Are you really, though? Because you're failing them.' I appreciated that. And then I realized why I did a lot of things was because I grew up in a low-income family and I wanted to make a lot of money, and I only knew pharmacy as the ability to do that but truth be told, I hated biology and chemistry and I was bad at it. So having my coach be willing to call me out on things that she could see from her perspective helped.

My analysis suggests that success coaches' approach to understanding Scholars' why is emblematic of Rendón's (1994) description of validation. Recall, the purpose of this dissertation is to understand the strategies and approaches coaches employ as they coach FGLI Scholars. Unlike seminal college student persistence and motivational theories that focus on student actions, validation theory is framed through the vantage point of understanding how institutional agents contribute to FGLI student success. A primary strategy employed by success coaches to understand Scholars' why was creating opportunities for Scholars to process and reflect on both their personal and collegiate experiences during the coaching meetings. I contend the process of helping Scholars identify their why establishes the context for validation to occur. That is, as success coaches work to understand Scholars' motivation, they are able to identify assets and

sources of strengths Scholars possess and leverage that information during subsequent meetings

to encourage Scholars to persist.

Furthermore, this coaching strategy offers insight into an underdeveloped element of

validation theory. In the third element of validation theory, Rendón (1994) posits, "validation is

likely a prerequisite for student development (pg. 18)". For Dallas and Marissa, understanding

Scholars' why is essential to helping Scholars be successful at Terrace University. Success

coaches acknowledged that some Scholars were able to articulate what motivated them;

however, many required additional time to reflect on their 'why(s)'. The process of focusing on

understanding Scholars' why is one of many validating strategies embedded with the Terrace

Promise success coaches' approach to coaching FGLI Scholars.

4.1.3 See the Big Picture

The third guiding philosophy of practice I identified is what William coined, "helping

[Scholars] see the big picture." Below, William offered an explanation of how this student-

centered, goal-oriented philosophy is salient to his success coaching approach:

> …My job is not to make you see a little bit of the picture, I need you to see this whole
> thing. It's not just the failed exam, and that's it. There's more of your story not written yet
> that this 1% probably doesn't have a whole lot of effects on. I think that encompasses the
> biggest part of the job, getting them to see the big picture as opposed to only what's
> immediately in front of them. There's more stuff down the line that their decisions will
> ultimately influence.

Similarly, Max expressed that his approach to success coaching consisted of helping FGLI

Scholars execute short-term action steps that help them accomplish long-term goals.

> …being a success coach, it's more of a mindset. It's not like a checklist that you
> follow...whatever their question is, whatever their situation is, you have to give them an
> answer that is good that will give them help in the short term, but also give them a sense
> of what their long-term goal is.

While success coaches spend a considerable amount of time supporting Scholars through day-to-day challenges, William and Max remain cognizant to help Scholars see the value in their pursuit of earning a college degree. My analysis suggests helping coachees 'see the big picture' extends notions of understanding their motivation and applying it towards goal achievement and future endeavors. Later in the chapter I describe how approaches associated with this particular coaching philosophy lend well to fostering interpersonal validation and promoting Scholar personal development and success at Terrace.

Within this section, I analyzed three interconnected student-centered philosophies guiding Terrace Promise success coaches' approach to coaching FGLI Scholars: "Person-First Approach", "Identifying Scholar's Why" and "See the Big Picture". My analysis suggests these philosophies are both developmental and validating in nature. I propose each success coaches' mindset towards their coaching approach as well as empowering Scholars to process and reflect during coaching meetings are critical mechanisms which set the context for validation to occur within success coaching. Success coaches described helping Scholars understand their potential for success by acknowledging their individual personhood, supporting them in articulating their motivation for pursing a college degree, and supporting Scholars as they make sense of their college experience. Finally, these three guiding philosophies of practice support coaches' ability to foster authentic relationships with Scholars which is the foundation of validation theory. In the next section I review how Terrace Promise success coaches described the various types of support they offered to FGLI Scholars.

4.2 Conceptualizing Support

During each interview, success coaches provided insight into their conceptualization of support. Throughout the section I analyzed four themes identified across each interviewee's

description of validating support. I focus especially on the conditions that contribute to fostering

validation for FGLI Scholars during success coaching. Interwoven into each category is my

interpretation of how elements of Rendón's validation theory (1994) is present within success

coaches' description of their approach and contribute to a validating educational experience.

These include being proactive, demonstrating care, trust, and addressing invalidating campus

experiences. This portion of my analysis moves beyond a reductive description of validation and

reveals four mechanisms embedded across interviewees description of support that set the

context for validating FGLI Scholars.

4.2.1 Proactive

Below is a compelling example of validation embedded within Max description of

coaching and words of advice for coaching FGLI student success towards success:

> … every time I meet with a student, I want to get out how they're doing, just to judge what might be going on in their life that they're not comfortable bringing up right away…But I want them to leave knowing something they didn't know when they came in. And for our green students- who are doing very well academically- that's usually resources on campus that can boost their career later in life, because I know they're not going to benefit from anything academic. So I make it my mission to know something about campus, but also something about every major, so that I can bring up a random class that they might want to take, so I feel like I can connect to them… So it's like taking that extra step.

Marissa's description of "proactive" extends beyond Rendón's (1994) conceptualization of

outreach and captures how she is proactive with regards to conversations within the coaching

meeting as well as taking the onus to learn about campus majors so that she can demonstrate

knowledge of the students' academic world. Marissa proactively learns about campus majors and

resources to help guide portions of the conversations she has with Scholars. While this specific

action may constitute as part of Marissa's job responsibilities, it sets the stage for rapport

building to occur given Marissa is taking the onus to seek different opportunities to support

Scholars.

Rendón (1994) conceptualized validation as "intentional, proactive affirmation of students by in- and out-of-class agents (e.g., faculty, peers, academic affairs staff, family members) in order to validate students as generators of knowledge and as valued members of the college learning community and foster personal development and social adjustment" (p. 12). Marissa's description of success coaching encompasses several keywords Rendón used to conceptualize validation theory. While Marissa does not specifically express validation as a part of her practice, I argue throughout my analysis that a number of her strategies, approaches, responses, and reflections exhibit one or more of the elements of validation as conceptualized by Rendón (1994; 2011).

Success coach Max offered a compelling perspective of how he supports Scholars which aligns with Rendón's (1994) theory of validation. Max offered the following words of wisdom for supporting FGLI student towards success:

> My experience has been that a lot of low-income students don't have the support and the lens that some non-low income students have. When I came to college I looked at it different than students I'm coaching right now…I had a different outlook, and a lot of that is the environment I came from. So when you're coaching low income students, you have to be aware that a lot of the stuff that is considered 'standard successful strategies' or 'standard successful college student' is very foreign to them and anybody trying to learn something new it's always a struggle. That's the nature of learning. So be patient and understand where they're coming from, and then try to change. You have to acknowledge the environment they're coming from… And you know what they're gonna run into because we work here so how do you upgrade their skill set? How do you give them the scaffolding needed to take their natural talent and just upgrade to the Terrace model. Because they're not gonna think they have it. They're gonna look at their situation and think they don't have the talent, IQ, or the discipline to be successful here, and that's clearly not the case. They just need to be shown how their skill sets can be adapted…As long as you're trying to upgrade their skills and have them believe that they're upgrading their skills, they'll be successful... You have to let them know their background, their environment does not dictate their future.

In the excerpt above Max articulates a validating mindset which relies on empowering students through an asset-based lens. While Max does not explicitly refer to his approach to coaching as validating, several of his strategies and reference align with several of the elements outlined in Rendón's conceptualization of validation theory. I identified two of the six elements within the excerpt above– namely being proactive and helping students feel capable of learning. When Max stated, "You know what they're gonna run into because we work here" this premise aligns with the first element of validation theory where Rendón asserts that institutional agents take onus to reach out to students and not assume they will ask for assistance. Rendón's explanation of being proactive encompasses " actively reaching out to students to offer assistance, encouragement, and support, as opposed to expecting students to ask questions first". As presented, this conceptualization of proactive as doesn't include demonstrations of being proactive that extend beyond early outreach and not waiting for students to ask questions. In the above excerpt, Max demonstrates that being proactive also encompasses institutional agents leveraging their knowledge and familiarity of the system (because they work there) to help scholars navigate the system more efficiently. Being proactive doesn't mean the institutional agent is making assumptions nor being predictive; but rather using good judgment and recall so they can remain alert and ready to help problem solve and leverage personal or professional knowledge in doing so. But in order to be proactive in this manner, the institutional agent must be willing to acknowledge inequitable outcomes persist in the system and be willing to help those who may be disadvantaged with the system overcome those obstacles. As those solutions are devised they can work to help students who are disenfranchised by validating them. As such, the proactive mindset Max is referring to is both equity minded and validating in nature.

The second element speaks to the notion that when validation is present, students feel capable of learning and have a sense of self-worth. Rendón asserts " whomever the student turns to for validation, the affirming action should serve to confirm that the student brings knowledge to college and has the potential to succeed (pg. 18). When Max stated: "So when you're coaching low income students, you have to be aware that a lot of the stuff that is considered 'standard successful strategies' or 'standard successful college student' is very foreign to them and anybody trying to learn something new It's always a struggle. That's the nature of learning." and followed up with They just need to be shown how their skill sets can be adapted", this is an example of what Rendón (1994) describes as helping scholars recognize they are capable learners. So yeah, validation is up in here, they just "might not call it that" as Max stated.

4.2.2 Trust

Rendón (2011) articulates validation is most critical when administered early in the college experience, especially during the first few weeks of class and the first year of college. Marissa's example below demonstrates the importance of trust as a mechanism that supports validating relationships and validation writ large within coaching. When sharing her reflections on coaching FGLI students Marissa described how trust operates over the course of the coaching relationship particularly from her vantage point as a success coach. Marissa's conceptualization of trust adds context to conditions that foster validation within Marissa's practice and broadens the application of validation theory as a theoretical framework.

> …So I think there's a benefit [to coaching] within reason, I think sometimes we should also listen to what students want and need, and if they say, "If I need something I'll let you know", trust that they will let us know, especially with our I would say our third and our fourth years. if we have been coaching successfully our first and second years, and they know that they can reach out, and we have taught them that when they reach out… I trust that in their third and fourth year they'll do that. They need it. But I don't love the idea of forcing it on them, because it's like you know it's our model, and we're coaches.

What we should do like I want. I know I've done my job well enough, and I trust that if my students need something. They'd let me know. I get enough emails a day to know that. And so I trust that they'd be okay. But also, if I did my job right the first and second years, they know their resources and they know who they can reach out to if they need help.

Findings reveal that trust is another pillar of the coaches' approach and contributes to how validation occurs within coaching. Trust is a key element success coaches work to earn, foster, and sustain while coaching Scholars. While some coaches were able to leverage personal experience to establish trust, sometimes coaches used unconventional approaches to establish trust. In the example below, Max describes his approach to creating space for the Scholar to share their true feelings and foster an environment of trust and comfortability despite having a different stance.

I usually try to figure out something that they want to say, but maybe they're afraid to say and then, once they say it, I tend to affirm or agree, but most times I don't really agree with it, ... They might complain about studying, time management, reading. I'm kind of a nerd, so I like all those things... But in a meeting I'll fake it. I'll come across like, yeah, I think reading is the worst and by letting them say something that they feel kind of comfortable saying at this stage and then I affirm it. That kind of creates this environment that, okay, maybe I can trust this guy with a little more.

Max understands the importance of gaining Scholars' trust and thinks strategically about how his own preferences, habits, or thoughts, might create distance between himself and Scholars he is trying to support. Therefore, Max leverages an approach that attempts to relate more with the challenges Scholars are facing as a way to foster a relationship with them in hopes of establishing trust. While this approach may seem contradictory to establishing trust, Max's goal is focused on getting the Scholars to share more so he can identify where they need assistance rather than telling them whether or not their thoughts are right or wrong. Through this lens, I deem building trust as a key element contributing to how validation operations within success coaching.

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4.2.3 Demonstrating Care

Care was the third mechanism I identified contributing to validation within success coaching. William described care as a dimension of support that ultimately helped strengthen the coaching relationship. My analysis suggests William's demonstration of care is an opportunity for validation to occur. William described that coaching is more than helping scholars maintain their scholarship. Care manifest via helping Scholars succeed. To this end, coaches are likely to leverage validating approaches (e.g., demonstrating care) to help Scholars achieve their goals.

> …[coaching] encompass so much more than just maintaining the scholarship. We do have a lot of care that goes into it to show the students it's not just about the money. It's more so about how to get you to succeed in this situation. That's why we're here. That might be intimidating, and then getting you to move on to a place that you know you could only have dreamed of at one point. So I think it's so much more based on the care that we give. It's not just all about the money. It's all about supporting the students.

Trina's echoed a similar demonstration of care that facilitates her ability to support FGLI Scholars. Trina described her process for intentionally leveraging professional development to provide better support for student aspects of Scholars' identities. In the excerpt below, Trina described how on-campus trainings aid her ability to demonstrate care for FGLI Scholars identities. Trina also describes how she leveraged outreach to Scholars to demonstrate care and support.

> … the training that has helped me a lot was the Safe Zone training for LGBTQ students. I constantly look into diversity, equity, inclusion training opportunities. I have done a few different things where, if something happens externally I'll send a message from my personal email to students, stating if this has directly or indirectly impacted you I condemn this. This let's them know I'm aware and I'm not going to ignore it even if they don't come and talk to me about how they're feeling about it. I want them to know that they have a space where they can just sit and exist.

In summary, the quote demonstrates care through a combination of education, advocacy, ongoing learning, personal communication, and the creation of a safe and supportive space. Trina reflected a commitment to fostering an inclusive environment where FGLI Scholars feel seen,

heard, and supported. The culmination of Trina's actions and demonstration of care support the process of validating FGLI Scholars.

4.2.4 Addressing Invalidating Campus Experience

Across each interview, success coaches described assisting FGLI Scholars navigate invalidating experiences both in and outside the classroom. Coaches made several references to assisting Scholars navigate challenges related to housing security and housing discrimination. A recent surge in campus enrollment resulted in limited on-campus housing. Success coach Dallas described how this process created additional stress for Scholars and some required additional assistance navigating housing discrimination.

> I have students who deal with discrimination…there was a housing group on campus that was owned by an off-campus entity that was very outspoken about their anti-LGBT views and adjusted everyone's lease and made them have to sign an agreement that they will not have any relations with anyone of the same sex that they will not marry anyone of the same sex. that they believe that there are only 2 genders, and that anything else is an act against God. The student is gender fluid and they were obviously taken aback by this. They didn't feel safe living in their own home. So we ended up including several campus entities including off-campus housing, student activities and organizations, to support the student in this situation.

Trina highlighted an example whereby a Scholar encountered an invalidating experiences with a faculty member. Trina disclosed that the majority of her coaching conversations and approach focused on navigating the social implications of race at predominantly white institutions.

> I think, with having a higher population of POC in my caseload, we have completely different conversations when it comes to advocacy. I had a student who ended up not applying for a study abroad program that they really wanted, because her and her friend were the only Hispanic students present and they weren't being talked to by anybody in the meeting, not even the professor running it. I was like No, don't go. They're already ignoring you now for whatever reason. The student looked at me and said "I know why they were ignoring me," and I was like, I know why, too…

These types of support signal success coaches recognize and validate Scholars' individual challenges and are committed to helping them navigate those challenges. This aligns with Rendón's (1994) assertions that validating institutional agents work to liberate FGLI Scholars from invalidating campus experiences and contributes to the process of validation within success coaching.

4.3 **Approaches to Establishing and Maintaining the Coaching Relationship**

A central feature of success coaching is the coach-coachee relationship. Acknowledging Terrace Promise's four-year success coaching model, the relational theme emerged often throughout my analysis. Most interviewees were able to relate to Scholars given similarities in their own personal journey through college (see description of participants in Chapter 3). However, success coaches leveraged more than relatability to establish and maintain rapport with Scholars. While analyzing the data, I identified four essential strategies success coaches utilized to establish and maintain rapport with Terrace Scholars. Findings suggest success coaches frequently seek to understand Scholars needs, diligently navigate identity differences, leverage asset-based language, and establish boundaries as part of their rapport building process. Rendón-Linares & Munoz (2011) asserted "when validation is present, students feel capable of learning and have a sense of self-worth. Whomever the student turns to for validation, the affirming action should serve to confirm that the student brings knowledge to college and has the potential to succeed" (pg.18). Embedded throughout the section is my analysis of how these four rapport building techniques embody aspects of validation and are an example of validating experience within the coaching relationship.

4.3.1 *Understanding Scholars Needs*

Embedded within the person-first coaching philosophy, success coaches described how getting to know Scholars as an individual was fundamental to establishing and maintaining rapport. Success coaches make a concerted effort during coaching meetings to understand who Scholars are beyond their academic requirements. As coaches explore Scholars' personhood, they are intentionally listening for opportunities to address Scholars' needs. Coaches typically leveraged an inquiry-based method to learn more about Scholars circumstances. William, a relatively new success coach, leveraged the Wellness Wheel as a model for identifying and understanding Scholars' needs. The Wellness Wheel highlights eight dimensions of personal wellness including spiritual, emotional, occupational, intellectual, environmental, financial, social, and physical wellness. William shared that he tries to incorporate at least one question from each dimension of wellness into his coaching meetings to demonstrate investment and care for Scholars' well-being and understand areas of need. During his interview, William reflected on how this particular strategy helped him establish and maintain rapport with Scholars who experience challenges adjusting to and navigating their college experience:

> I just met with a student this morning who was in a tough spot last semester. They didn't feel belonging here on campus, and had a rough time going forward and they asked for additional meetings. So I help guide them through that process and ask 'What does your day to day look like? Are you going home between classes? Are you eating and drinking enough water? Are you making sure you're keeping yourself healthy? Those are common things that you don't really think about when you're just running on autopilot. One thing I like to ask my students is, how are you feeling this semester as far as burnout goes? Are you starting to lag. Burnout happens quicker in some students, others are okay, because they're in that good level of stress. So it's really dependent on the student.

William takes a holistic approach to working with Scholars and adjusting as needed to meet their needs. Moreover, William's use of the word "guide" suggests that he is working in partnership

with Scholars to not only understand their needs but to also address wellness-related circumstances that may negatively influence how they navigate and experience college.

Coaches noted understanding Scholars' immediate needs is the focal point of coaching meetings and a primary mechanism for fostering the coaching relationship. Rather than leading with a list of prescribed questions or accomplishing set tasks during coaching meetings, success coaches prioritize identifying what Scholars deem most pertinent for the session. Through this process, coaches could discover which issues are most salient to Scholars then work with them to begin to address those needs as a way to facilitate success. In the expert below, success coach Trina describes her approach to giving Scholars "free reign" over the meeting topic as a way to understand their needs:

> So normally I go out and bring them in, and I don't do the checklist immediately. That's like one of the last few things that I do because I know there's something else on their mind. So I ask them 'What do you need to update me on?' I could go back and look at previous notes and try to cover that, but usually that's not what they want to talk about because they're past that. So I let them have free reign over what we talk about. And then normally, that helps filter out what's going to be important for them to talk about... It's just better to do that first, because that actually lets me know what's important to them and what the meeting should be about… I normally put the checklist last, because I never know what's going to come up, and I don't want this bigger, heavier stuff to come out when I have 5 min left, and I have no ability to actually respond to that in a way that's going to be meaningful.

This approach supports Trina's ability to understand Scholars needs and permits her to tailor her coaching approach to each individual Scholars' needs. Several coaches described this as "allowing Scholars to vent". There was consensus among success coaches that Scholars benefitted from having time during coaching meeting to "vent" about their college experience. Findings suggest success coaches leverage holistic and intentional strategies to encourage Scholars to share challenges they may be facing. Coaches actively listen as Scholars share their experience in order to identify needs embedded within Scholars' experience. My analysis

suggests the process of creating space for Scholars to share their concerns and working together with Scholars to address those needs is a validating approach that demonstrates to FGLI Scholars that their needs are prioritized and can be attended to. Interestingly, Trina attributed her approach to focusing on understanding Scholars' needs as a distinguishing factor that differentiated how Scholars experienced success coaching compared to academic advising offered at Terrace University. I offer additional interpretations of the how Terrace Promise Scholars differentiate success coaching from more traditional student support services in chapter five.

4.3.2 Delivery, Tone & Language

Another finding I identity contributing to how success coaches establish rapport with FGLI Scholars was language and tone of voice. During each interview, participants gave several examples of how their coaching delivery style contributed to and benefited the coaching relationship. Success coach Dallas, who self-identified as a first-generation college graduates from a low-income background, defined his coaching delivery style as "direct" and "blunt". He wants Scholars to understand what he's trying to get across to them and utilize the advice offered. Dallas adjusts his delivery style based on Scholar's preferred communication style discussed during the initial coaching meeting.

> During the initial meeting we talk about communication styles and how they want feedback. Like how are you best going take in what I'm trying to tell you and utilize it? I tell them my way, I'm going to look you in the eye and hold you accountable. I'm a very direct and blunt person most of the time and most of the time they're fine with the blunt, direct approach. But there are some people who don't respond to that very well and I have to use the sandwich method as a way to give them feedback. But either way I'm going to tell you the truth and what you need to do to resolve that issue.

While Dallas' blunt tone may seem contradictory to actions deemed as validating, Dallas is not patronizing or putting students down; rather, he is using a direct approach to offering suggestions

that can help Scholars navigate circumstances. This direct approach hinges on Dallas' ability to first establish rapport with Scholars and understand their preferred communication style.

Findings suggest the lexicon leverage is crucial to rapport building and informs their overall coaching approach. Several coaches leveraged reflective questions to assist Scholars in creating an action plan to address challenges. Moreover, William used language that referred to the coaching relationship in a collaborative, team-oriented demeanor. Framing his coaching approach within the context of a team is crucial to how William is able to encourage and validate Scholars success.

> I always tell them we will do this together, and we will figure it out. But when there's an accomplishment it's always You did this. You did great to just remind them that It's them who is doing it. I'm just helping them along.

Marissa echoed this sentiment suggesting that the coaches language and disposition beyond Scholars identity is crucial to the coaching relationship and coaching approach.

> …a lot of the times It feels like a label for these students, they know their first-gen They know their low income. They don't need you reminding them they need you to remind them of what they are capable of being past that… there is so much more to who they are than those two things. And until they've been told, you know that there's more to you they're never going to accept it and feel comfortable just accepting that…

Rendón (1994) conceptualized validation as "intentional, proactive affirmation of students by in- and out-of-class agents (e.g., faculty, peers, academic affairs staff, family members) in order to validate students as generators of knowledge and as valued members of the college learning community and foster personal development and social adjustment" (p. 12). Marissa's description of success coaching encompasses several keywords Rendón used to conceptualize validation theory. While Marissa does not specifically express validation as a part of her practice, I argue throughout my analysis that several of her strategies, approaches, responses, and

reflections exhibit one or more of the elements of validation as conceptualized by Rendón (1994; 2011).

4.3.3 Navigating Identity Differences

Another commonly expressed rapport building approach was navigating identity differences between success coaches and Scholars. Terrace Promise traditionally hires individuals that have prior experience supporting students from traditionally underserved background or have shared identities with FGLI Scholars. Embedded throughout each success coaches' description of their practice was their approach to establishing rapport across identities. Most interviewees described how personal reflection and professional development contributed to establishing rapport with Scholars from different identity backgrounds. Interestingly, Max vehemently refrained from discussing his personal background with Scholars to mitigate jeopardizing opportunities to form connections with Scholars from different socio-economic backgrounds.

> …growing up as a student is night and day different from most of the students' I ever worked with… I grew up in a rather affluent predominantly white suburb. I try to keep that a secret for as long as I can, because as awful as this sounds, I have students that if they knew I came from an affluent middle-class family they would write me off. If you get put in a box you can potentially lose the connection and it makes your job a lot harder…

Max's quote underscores the nuanced dynamic of the coaching relationship in the context of socioeconomic status and racial differences. Throughout his practice, Max remains cognizant of the diversity among his caseload and therefore is hesitant to disclose his personal background for fear that FGLI Scholars may stereotype or judge him negatively as privileged or out of touch. Max's concern reflects an awareness of potential biases and preconceived notions some FGLI Scholars may hold about individuals from different socioeconomic and racial backgrounds.

Nonetheless, Max remains committed to overcoming these perceptions and fostering a positive

connection with Scholars despite identity differences.

Leslie, a former Terrace Promise Scholar, described how she embraces cultural humility

to support Scholars with different identities than her own. Embedded within her rapport building

approach is a dimension of self-awareness. Leslie describes intrapersonal actions she believes are

fundamental for building rapport across identity differences:

> … you have to be willing to humble yourself. I was a low-income student, but I'm not a
> first-gen. I'm a white female, and I have a lot of privilege there, and so I have to humble
> myself and remember that not all of my students are going to have the same experience,
> and so I have to remind myself that my experiences may come in and help me better
> understand. But you have to be humble, and I think, in like cultural humility, might be a
> good phrase. being able to understand that I'm not going to know everything going on
> with my student. I'm not going to fully be able to understand what hardships they're
> facing, what emotions they're feeling, or what their home lives are like. And I don't think
> every coach has to come from the same background as me or be a former Terrace
> Promise student to be a good coach, but I think they have to be willing to humble
> themselves. If you have that aura that you're coming in here, and save them, you're not
> going to get anywhere with your students.

Leslie actively considers the impact of her personal background on her ability to connect with

Scholars, acknowledging both the potential support and limitations it may pose. This intentional

level of self-awareness plays a crucial role in cultivating a strong coaching relationship and

contributes to creating a validating and affirming experience within success coaching. As Leslie

and other success coaches reflect on how their individual backgrounds shape their coaching

approach, they are mindful to avoid applying deficit-based perspectives to support Scholars. The

outcome of this reflective process is the execution of a coaching approach that prioritizes

constantly monitoring one's assumptions and remaining open to learning how to be a better

support to Scholars from different backgrounds. I argue this process is another example whereby

success coaches create validating experiences for FGLI Scholars.

Other success coaches demonstrated a high level of self-motivation to learn how to act as a validating agent for Scholars from different backgrounds. Trina, one of two interviewees that identified as a person of Color, noted she had a higher number of FGLI Scholars of Color in her caseload. Given this, Trina intentionally selects professional development opportunities that expand her knowledge and awareness of how to become a better support and ally for students from different racial backgrounds than her own.

> I've gone to a few conferences that have helped me get different ideas on how to support Latinx students, because we have a huge population of Latinx students within our program, and that's something I don't know too much about. So I've gone to panels to learn about that. I take a lot of time to reflect on what my caseload is in order to help me know how to work with them…

As coaches described their approach to building rapport with Scholars, participants described their approach to supporting Scholars from different identity backgrounds. Terrace Promise success coaches espoused high regard for demonstrating cultural awareness within their practice. This level of awareness manifested in their approach to thinking about and tailoring their coaching approach to be inclusive of Scholars who may have identities dissimilar to their own including but not limited to race, socioeconomic and first-generation status, and sexual orientation. Several interviewees acknowledged limitations in their ability to support Scholars from different racial or socio-economic backgrounds; however, invested in professional development to enhance their personal awareness and knowledge of opportunities to support FGLI Scholars. Findings suggest success coaches' ability to navigate identity differences between themselves and Scholars is another example of a validating practice within success coaching that contributes to establishing and maintaining the coaching relationship.

4.3.4 Personal Boundaries

A prevailing measure of the effectiveness of success coaching hinges on success coaches ability to get Scholars to share the challenges they are facing. Coaches frequently created conditions for Scholars to share, vent, and process various academic and non-academic experiences. This process fosters the conditions for Scholars to feel valued and comfortable sharing additional information with their coach. However, some coaches experienced challenges navigating conversations when Scholars overshare. To this end, Terrace Promise success coaches expressed the importance of establishing personal and profession role boundaries in their approach to establishing and maintaining rapport with FGLI Scholars.

Two coaches offered insight on the importance of establishing personal boundaries within the coaching relationship. Marissa found this to be particularly important given her prior participation in the program. Marissa elaborated that her approach to setting personal boundaries enables Scholars to learn to advocate for themselves.

> So I feel like a lot of them ask for extra meetings because they like the success they see from the support system, or they at least like being held accountable, and they can recognize that they're not always going to be able to do it on their own. And so that's why they come to us, and I'm Totally okay with it. I allow it for two semesters at most. But then I encourage them to seek out an additional support system past me so I'm not enabling them to just rely on me through the whole experience but building self-advocacy on their part by me having my boundaries. I can only do so much.

Marissa's description of the importance of boundaries had dual motives. While Marissa understands a primary component of her role is to support Scholars, she also remains cognizant to preserve her own well-being by not becoming overly invested in Scholars experiences. As Marissa creates boundaries with the level of support she offers Scholars over time, she simultaneously encourages Scholars to seek out additional campus resources to support their needs. This level of personal boundaries is particularly salient for Marissa given her prior

participation in the program and dual-shared identity as a first-generation college student from a low-income background. Marissa leverages personal boundaries through an asset-based perspective that focuses on increasing Scholar's ability to communicate their needs with other campus professionals.

Similarly, Trina denoted several occasions where she implemented boundaries within the coaching meeting and relationship. These included establishing boundaries as a mechanism to promote student self-agency, reliance on other campus professionals, and compliance with mandatory reporting as necessary.

> I'm all for building self-agency…I do have a few students that lack that self-confidence, and I think a lot of it has been from building co-dependency on previous coaches because there are some students who just will not make a decision on their own. I don't encourage that because one day if I'm not working here anymore what are you going to do? I want them to not feel like in order to make any decision they have to come to me for an answer. I really want them to know that they have the capability of doing that…

Terrace Promise success coaches leverage personal boundaries for dual purposes. First, this approach establishes parameters to protect their personal well-being and reduce feeling overwhelmed or burnout from supporting the needs of 150-200 Scholars within their caseload. Second, coaches leverage personal boundaries as a way to promote Scholars sense of self-agency and personal development. As success coaches balance providing support to Scholars, they remain mindful to encourage Scholars to expand their network of support across campus. As coaches establish boundaries, they simultaneously affirm Scholars can achieve success. This context is another example of how validation manifests within success coaching. Lastly, while success coaches expressed the importance of remaining within the scope of their dynamic role; they did not elaborate on their approach to handling Scholars that may need to be removed from their caseload nor did they offer insight into the process for ending the coaching relationship.

Future research on these aspects of success coaching would increase practitioner-based knowledge relevant to managing relationships with FGLI Scholars.

4.4 **Influences from Workplace and Campus Partners**

In addition to descriptions of their coaching philosophy and strategies for fostering relationships with FGLI Scholars, success coaches also referenced two factors external to the coaching dyad that influenced their coaching approach. Research participants described how the Terrace Promise coaching staff dynamic and coordination with campus partners had significant influence of the formation and execution of their approach to success coaching.

4.4.1 Coaching Staff Dynamic

Several of the interviewees described how casual and formal interactions with coaching staff informed their coaching approach. During individual interviews, coaches emphasized the importance of having an opportunity to reflect on their coaching approach, become better acquainted with campus partners and resources, and exchange ideas during bi-weekly staff meetings. This finding was reinforced by observational data collected during the time of study. I observed three coaching staff meetings and witnessed how coaches described supporting Scholars, learned about campus resources via invited meeting guests, celebrated personal accomplishments with each other, and talked through challenging coaching scenarios. Leslie, a former Terrace Promise Scholar who at the time of the interview had been a success coach for six months, offered an interesting connection between validation and the coaching staff dynamic. Leslie described how validation is not only exclusive to interactions with Scholars, but is visible amongst staff members:

> I think [validation] works in the colleague sense as well. Sharing a stress that you have, or an insecurity you have about How you're doing your job…and then having a co-

worker come in and validate What you're feeling, it's life changing, and it's what we do for students. So that's why validation also works for students. But [coaches] also need to feel validated past [their] insecurities and thoughts.

Prior explorations into the nature of coaching have focused exclusively on the coach-coachee relationship. Moreover, validation was originally conceived from the standpoint of how staff interact with students from marginalized backgrounds. Findings from this study suggest the coaching staff dynamic also contributes to the context and nature of how coaching is delivered and expands the notions of validation to dynamic between colleagues. This suggests validation is embedded throughout the overall program culture. Lastly, success coaches in this study unanimously agreed that bi-weekly coaching staff meetings served as a form of professional development and are a primary mechanism through which they were able to reflect on, hone, and revise their coaching approach.

4.4.2 Coordination with Campus Partners

Another component contributing to interviewees' coaching approach was coordination with campus partners. Several interviewees described how they proactively learned about and engaged with campus partners and departments to be able to make direct referrals for Scholars when needed. While success coaches pride themselves on being a resource for students, Marissa acknowledged there were limitations of success coaching which required reliance on campus partners to provide targeted support. Coaches frequently referenced reliance on staff within counseling and psychological services as well as crisis intervention team to support Scholars immediate mental health concerns. Even still, coaches described spending a significant amount of time visiting and learning about campus support services and units in order to make direct referrals when needed. Marissa describes her approach of referring to campus partners rather than increasing the number of coaching meetings with a Scholar on academic notice:

I have a student who's on their third semester probation. So instead of meeting with me each of those times he's going to also be meeting with a peer success coach in the academic success center… We tried a whole year last year, we gotta try something new. He's receptive to it, which is nice, but it's, I think, a lot of it's pride being willing to say when you've done as much as you can do.

While campus coordination is a vital component of success coaching operations, Dallas posited having better communication and stronger relationships with campus partners would help support FGLI Scholars success. Dallas described how poor triage between success coaches and division of financial aid stymies opportunities to provide targeted assistance related to a fundamental aspect of the program– the four year scholarship. Recent administrative decisions to remove the financial aid personnel embedded within the success coaching unit and restrict success coaches access to Scholars financial aid information have created challenges to how success coaches support students. Dallas describes how these personnel and information restrictions have increased instances of misinformation.

...So, when I was first hired, we had a financial aid administrator in the office. When they left, permission was denied to refill that position. So we no longer have one person that could serve our Scholars directly that knew our program and the state scholarship requirements. So now, we have to go through the entire DFA office, and that means talking to a different person each time explaining the scholarship and the situation. And when Terrace Promise Scholars call into financial aid then talk to student volunteers who don't know the intricacies of both of their scholarships we have a huge problem of misinformation… So if Scholars are told they'd only need to take 12 credits, and then don't meet their 30 credit hour requirement for their scholarship, then we are filing an appeal to the State at the end of the year… So it's not a bad relationship, but there is just a lot less efficient communication.

These examples demonstrate how collaboration and communication between campus units–or lack thereof– influence how success coaching is delivered and can promote or circumvent opportunities for promoting FGLI student success. While success coaches try to remain cognizant of demands on Scholar's time and look for creative ways to maximize time spent navigating university resources, this is not a common practice across campus units. Findings

suggest success coaches have a unique position on campus and can help elucidate areas for improved coordination among various campus partners towards validating FGLI student success As institutions seek to improve FGLI student graduation outcomes, it is important to consider not only the ways in which institutional agents foster meaningful relationships with FGLI students, but also identifying opportunities to increase arrangement and coordination across campus units. Such arrangements would support institutional efforts to bolster FGLI student success.

4.5 Chapter Summary

Chapter four addressed findings relevant to the second research question guiding this dissertation: *How do success coaches describe their coaching approach?* I identified and analyzed three student-centered philosophies guiding Terrace Promise success coaches approach to coaching FGLI students. Coaches thought out and applied these philosophies in tandem to inform and execute success coaching. Coaches described various ways in which they provided support to FGLI scholars. In general, their conceptualization of validating support included being proactive, establishing trust, demonstrating care, and addressing invalidating experiences. Findings suggest the coach's ability to cultivate and sustain relationships with Scholars is an essential component of success coaching. Coaches who participated in this study described a number of strategies and approaches to establish credibility with Scholars ranging from diligent focus on understanding Scholars needs, coaching tone and delivery, navigating identity differences, and leveraging personal boundaries. Coaches also acknowledged how the Terrace Promise staff dynamic and coordination with campus partners influenced their coaching approach.

My analysis of coaches' description of their coaching approach offers new insights into the ways in which validation operates within success coaching. Moreover, findings suggest

validation is embedded within the culture of Terrace Promise as demonstrated through the ways in which coaches approach their work, the coaching relationship, as well as interactions between staff members. In the next chapter I present findings from focus groups conducted with Terrace Promise Scholars to better understand their experience with success coaching and how validation operates within their experiences.

Chapter 5 How do Terrace Promise Scholars Describe their Coaching Experience?

Chapter five addresses findings relevant to the third research question guiding this dissertation: *How do FGLI program participants describe their coaching experience?* Throughout the chapter, I discuss themes I identified through coding focus groups data with Terrace Promise Scholars (*n*=44). In Chapter three I detailed the convenience sampling approach used to recruit Scholars and a description of participants. Focus groups were intentionally implemented by year (e.g., first-year, fourth year) to include perspective of coaching experience from across the undergraduate life-cycle. Data collection was guided by a semi-structured protocol that encouraged Scholars to share their experiences and provide feedback on success coaching offered by Terrace Promise success coaches (Appendix F).

Findings are organized into three themes: "Support, Helpful, Resources"; "The Nature of the Coaching Relationship"; and "The Role of Validation in Scholar Processes and Outcomes". Chapter five begins with an overview of Terrace Promise Scholars interconnected definitions and conceptualizations success coaching. My analysis of these findings demonstrates how Terrace Promise Scholars descriptions of success coaching and the broader context in which success coaching occurs align with notions from Rendón's (1994) validation theory. I then highlight validating and invalidating features of the coaching relationship experienced by Scholars. Validating features experienced by Scholars ranged from coaches' tone and delivery, getting to know the Scholars as an individual, demonstrations of care, as well as instilling a sense of encouragement and hope. Frequent staff turnover and "smooth sailing façade" were among the most common invalidating features experienced within the coaching relationship. I included

direct quotes and illustrations from research participants to provide rich descriptions of each

category and explain how the combination of these aspects of the coaching relationship connect

to validation theory. Finally, I describe Scholars' depictions of how success coaching leverages

validation to enhance several student related processes and outcomes. For each example, I

thought interpretatively about the role and function of validation. The chapter concludes with a

summary of key findings and insights for validating first-generation, low-income college

students.

5.1 Support, Helpful, Resources: Terrace Promise Scholars' Conceptions of Success Coaching

Prior to identifying themes across Terrace Promise Scholars' coaching experience, it is

crucial to gain an understanding of how program participants conceptualize "success coaching".

Understanding how Scholars define success coaching is crucial for placing their experiences into

perspective. Terrace Promise Scholars who participated in a focus group were asked to list three

words they would use to describe success coaching to someone unfamiliar with the concept.

Figure 2 displays sixty-four unique words submitted by 44 Terrace Promise Scholars. Scholars'

conceptualization of success coaching included perceptions of success coaching meetings format

and delivery (e.g., "casual"; "repetitive"), descriptions of the success coach role and

responsibilities ("navigator", "guidance", "mentor"), and components of the coaching

relationship (e.g., "trust"; "care"; "invested"). I also noted congruence among Scholars'

perceptions of their coach's demeanor and behavior (e.g., "friendly"; "personable"; "honest").

Several descriptions depicted emotional aspects and processes Scholars experienced during

success coaching (e.g., "cathartic"; "relieving"; "venting"). I found participants described

success coaching through several asset-framed words; however, some descriptions were

antonyms (e.g., 'consistent'; 'inconsistent'). Later in the chapter I offer an analysis of how

Scholars perceived the frequency of staff turnover creating moments of inconsistency and

instability as Scholars attempted to foster meaningful relationships with their success coach (See

Invalidating Components of the Coaching Relationship).

Figure 2 Terrace Promise Scholars Conceptualizations of Success Coaching

While descriptions of success coaching varied, three concepts emerged frequently when focus

group participants were asked to describe success coaching in three words: "support" (n= 15),

"resources" (n=7), and "helpful" (n=7). Throughout each session, Scholars described and offered

numerous examples of the support received through success coaching. Several Scholars

described their Terrace Promise success coach as their "primary support person" at Terrace

University. Fourth-year Scholar Sally provided the following metaphor and illustration to depict

her experience with success coaching: "I think [success coaches] take the big things that are

mountains that you feel like you can't go over and they make them into hills, and they help you

go over the hills and it's not as scary as it may seem on your own." (See Figure 3)
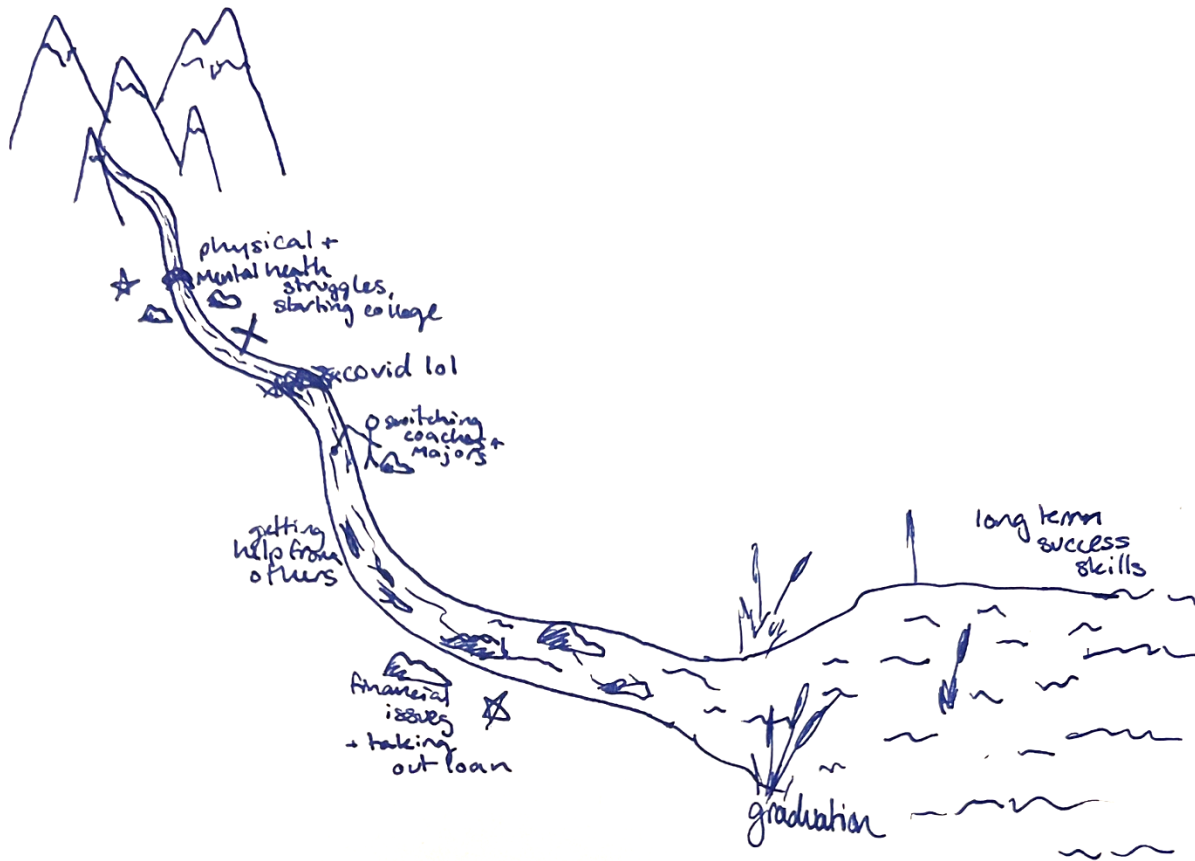
Figure 3 Help Going Over Mountains: Sally's Interpretation of Success Coaching

Sally's metaphorical description and illustration of success coaching illuminates several

aspects of validation; namely how her success coach actively empowered her will and capacity

for success via a confirming and supporting process (Rendón, 1994). Many Scholars echoed

Sally's sentiments of appreciating help navigating the various resources and departments at

Terrace University. Sally described how help from her coach affirmed her ability to "go over

hills" by providing resources along the way. Sally gave an account of her coach researching financial resources for her to consider after losing a portion of her scholarship during her third year due to changes in her family income. Her coach's ability to provide useful resources and help Sally "go over hills" suggest success coaching offered Sally a sense of validation. More specifically, Sally's coach helped alleviate her need to worry and affirmed her ability to continue pursuing her degree despite financial obstacles.

Caleb, a first year Scholar, offered a similar story of how his success coach created a validating environment for his success. Caleb referred to success coaching as a "safety-net that protects you from pitfalls". At the time of data collection, Caleb had recently completed the Terrace Promise first-year seminar course and found the information helpful to his college transition. "I didn't really wanna take a class, but the information was good especially since I don't really know what I don't know" Caleb continued, "and the FAFSA assignment was a lifesaver!" Caleb and other first-year focus group participants expressed immense gratitude for the intentional course design of the first-year seminar. Caleb found the first-year seminar course material beneficial, particularly assignments associated with requirements for maintaining his scholarship. These types of strategies are what Caleb deemed "a safety-net". When analyzed through a lens of validation, Caleb interpreted the intentionality behind incorporating the FAFSA completion assignment into the first-year seminar coursework as a helpful "safety net" that prevented him from missing deadlines to remain eligible for his scholarship.

There was consensus across focus group participants that assistance received from their success coach navigating campus resources was a primary component of their coaching experience. Throughout the data, Scholars shared similar sentiments of how their success coach provided options to consider and explore as Scholars navigated their college experience.

Scholars perceived their success coach as "knowledgeable" and "resourceful". For example, while reflecting on her coaching experience, MiMi, a second-year Scholar and first-generation college student, referred to her success coach as "a book of resources" and "resource navigator". Additionally, fourth-year Scholars (n=11) reflected on the resourcefulness and timing of the fourth-year seminar course. In reflecting on her most memorable experience with coaching, Alexis, a fourth-year Scholars, found the fourth-year seminar course to be resourceful at highlighting career and graduate school information relevant to navigating life after graduation.

> [the fourth-year seminar] taught us life skills you don't get anywhere else; they don't offer a lot of classes like that at Terrace University. At first, I thought it was stupid that I had to take a one-credit hour course but then once I got in there I was like 'oh these are things I can actually use in my life going forward.

Scholars also demonstrated deep appreciation for the information and knowledge their success coach shared via the weekly email announcements. For example, second-year Terrace Promise Scholar Becca explained how she benefited from the information and discussion she had with her success coach:

> I didn't really use [coaching] a lot my freshman year but I have more my sophomore year so just being able to have those meetings. … and the information they share isn't always common knowledge. My coach has helped connect me to so many resources and even find a job. My friends not in Terrace Promise are like "How do you know about all these resources?" And I feel like it's because coaching kinda gives me an edge up...

Scholars' descriptions of how their success coach assisted them navigating campus resources aligns with several tenants of validation theory. Many shared how their coach was most resourceful in supporting and helping them navigate their journey towards achieving their degree. Validation is present during these types of coaching conversations. More specifically, the coach is validating the student towards their goals by sharing resources and options to support

them. Moreover, the coach's presence embodies validation reminding Scholars they are capable of achieving their goals by identifying additional campus resources to aid them in the process. Scholars explained they didn't expect their coach to know everything or support them with everything, however, many found it valuable to have their coach point and guide them to additional resources that could further assist them. This concept with validation builds on increasing and normalizing help-seeking behavior and encourages Scholars to leverage additional resources- beyond their success coach- to achieve their goals.

Throughout this section I provided general insights into how forty-five Terrace Promise Scholars conceptualized their coaching experience. Scholars placed the most emphasis on the support, help, and resources they received through success coaching. Based on the aforementioned excerpts, FGLI Scholars found the support, help, and resources provided through success coaching beneficial as they navigated their college experience. This may suggest that the way in which coaches approach supporting students and types of conversations Scholars engage in with their coach contributes to the process of validation within success coaching. While navigating the college experience can be a labyrinth for any college student, it can be particularly challenging for FGLI students who may not have family members who are familiar with the landscape. The types of conversations were also validating as they centered on what the student needed or wanted to talk about ensuring their needs were met so they could be successful in college.

The reoccurring themes of "support", "help", and "resources" resonated across Scholars' conceptions of how they experienced coaching across time and context including individual meetings, weekly emails, and during required seminar courses. Several Scholars found the interconnected structure of support to be complementary and beneficial as they navigated their

college experience. Finally, Scholars often wanted to meet more frequently with their success coach. While coaches did their best to accommodate additional meeting requests, perhaps exploring opportunities for campus personnel to incorporate validating approaches into their meeting structure with students would help Terrace Promise Scholars feel better supported across campus. In the next section I provide insight into Scholars' description of the nature of the coaching relationship highlighting key approaches Scholars believed to be paramount to their coaching experience associated with validation.

5.2 Nature of the Coaching Relationship

Another theme that emerged from Terrace Scholars' descriptions of their coaching experience was the nature of the relationship with their assigned success coach. In general, Scholars shared feelings of apprehension and reluctancy prior to attending their first coaching meeting. Fourth-year Scholar June reflected: "I thought I was always going to be in trouble. I thought I would come to the meeting and [my coach] would tell me my GPA wasn't high enough." Leah, also in her final year of the program reflected: "I thought [coaching] would be more mundane and pointless… just another hoop I had to jump through because I am a scholarship student." Yet, after weekly interactions with their success coach during the first-year seminar course, receiving weekly email communication with helpful resources, and attending individual coaching meetings, Scholars described shifts in their perceptions and engagement with success coaching mainly based on the relationship fostered with their success coach. A significant portion of focus group participants confessed they initially didn't understand why they had to attend coaching meetings, were unclear on what they were supposed to "gain" from the meeting, and were unsure of what to talk about. Fourth-year Scholar Zoro declared, "I thought I was just supposed to show up [to the meeting] and that fulfilled the requirement. I

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didn't realize I was supposed to build a relationship and [my coach] would help me along the way." Throughout each session, Scholars described how fostering a relationship with their assigned coach shifted their perspectives and experience with success coaching.

In the following subsections I identified validating and invalidating experiences Scholars highlighted about the relationship with their success coach. The most frequently referenced validating features of the coaching relationship include: "Keeping it Real"; "Judge-Free Zone"; "Seeing Me as a Whole Person"; "Demonstrations of Care"; and "Encouragement & Hope". I also highlight Scholars' perceptions of how staff turnover and pending graduation created unintended barriers for Scholars to access the support they desired from the coaching relationship. With each example, I analyzed how Scholars described their relationship with their success coach and offer insight into how these interrelated features contribute to fostering validation within the coaching experience.

5.2.1 Validating Components of the Coaching Relationship

5.2.1.1 "Keep it Real". There was consensus among Scholars that the casual tone and delivery of coaching meetings contributed positively to the coaching relationship and their overall coaching experience. Scholars consistently described their success coach's tone and delivery as "casual" and "genuine". Several fourth-year Scholars described their interactions and relationship with their success coach as "less formal" than academic advising. Many appreciated how "friendly", "personable", and "easy to talk to" their success coach was and positively attributed these characteristics to their ability to foster a validating relationship with their success coach. Fourth-year Scholar Natalie shared: "...coaches are like an advisor I can actually talk to... when I meet with my coach its more about "how am I doing; how are you feeling; she shares things about herself, which makes her more personable, like a human." These moments helped Scholars view their coach as relatable and Scholars valued that their coach would incorporate aspects of their own experience to encourage and validate their success.

In their descriptions of coaching, Scholars expressed an appreciation for having a place to go to discuss and process things occurring during their transition to college. Scholars noted the deliberate care and approach their coach took to be transparent and "kept it real" with them while providing guidance and advice. Julia, a fourth-year Scholar explained,

> I like people who are real with me. And my coach is real with me. I think being in that position, if you are good at it you evaluate who you are dealing with you can say some things to some people and you can't say it to others. And that matters. understanding the person who is in front of you.

Analyzed through a lens of validation, Scholars found their coaches tone and delivery to be a crucial component of the coaching relationship and experience. Scholars interpreted their success coach's affable, genuine, and relatable demeanor as assets that both fostered and sustained the relationship. Scholars described how these features of their coach's approach helped foster affirming and validating experiences in their interactions with their success coach. Several

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Scholars interpreted their coach's ability to "keep it real" akin to familial relationships with older siblings or cousins and attributed this to increasing their connection with their coach. Scholars deemed this particular approach as one of many that positively differentiated interactions with their success coach from other support services on campus.

5.2.1.2 "Judge Free Zone". Another validating feature noted across Scholars' description of the coaching relationship was the non-judgmental nature of their relationship with their success coach. Consistent across descriptions of their success coaching relationship was how their coach's non-judgmental approach helped foster a stronger relationship. Many described challenges they experienced trying to articulate their issues, concerns, or need for advice with parents or friends; however, with their coach they felt more comfortable doing so. Scholars appreciated not being judged for asking questions or sharing their experiences with their success coach. Second-year Scholar Natalie shared "... it's nice knowing [my coaching meeting] a judgment free zone. Sometimes I don't tell my friends things because I'm worried they will view me differently, but when I tell my coach things she is fine with it and she is there for me." In a separate focus group with fourth-year Scholar Freddie expressed similar sentiments, "...coaching is a resource and it's there to be taken advantage of. If I told my friends some of the things I talk to my coach about my friend might laugh at me and ask 'Why are you telling me about your feelings?'"

Focus group participants frequently described coaching as a "judge-free zone". Scholars acknowledged the importance of having a space to "vent" or "ramble" about events happening in their personal and academic lives. While not every Scholars confided in their coach in the same way, several noted the non-judgmental nature of coaching was a key feature that distinguished their relationship with their coach compared to other campus support personnel. Julia described

how she distinguished the role of her mentor and coach for different aspects of her college

experience: "The Dean of [College] is one of my mentors. I wouldn't go to the Dean of

[College] with the same type of questions I'd ask my coach. I'm not going to vent with the Dean

about what's going on in my personal life. And my coach doesn't have an [advanced degree in

field of study] the dean has that experience."

Patterns in the ways Scholars describe the non-judgmental nature of the coaching

relationship signals validation is present not only in coaching action but also in the manner and

tone of how some Terrace Promise coaches approach helping Scholars through their challenges.

Describe conversations with their success coach as "cathartic" which provided them with a sense

of relief to let out stress they felt. These examples suggest opportunities for validating FGLI

students include elements of a non-judgmental approach which help foster validation within the

coaching relationship. Natalie and Freddie felt validated as they shared and worked through their

challenges and by not being judged for experiencing hardships.

5.2.1.3 "See Me as a Whole Person". Another common feature among Scholars' description of

the coaching relationship was their coach's ability to personalize their coaching experience.

Many focus group participants emphasized the effort their coach put into getting to know them

personally, viewing them as an individual, and creating space during coaching meetings to

discuss topics most relevant to them. Primarily, Scholars described how their success coach went

"the extra mile" to relate to Scholars and invest time in learning about Scholars as individuals.

Bradely, a third-year education major, offered:

> For our first meeting I thought we would go over a checklist and in the next meeting she
> would ask how is my progress on the checklist. But when I went to the first meeting and
> she was like "here's some information about me" then tell me about yourself, I was not
> expecting that… And then she asked what I was interested in getting involved in at
> Terrace. I was expecting that. I remember thinking 'what am I going to gain from this?'
> and as I went on I stopped worrying about whether or not I was going to gain any skills

from the meetings and began focusing on the fact I had time to talk to someone invested in learning things about me to help me figure this all out.

A central tenant of seeing the Scholar as a whole person was the investment in getting to know who they were beyond academics. Throughout their stories, Scholars described feeling cared about as a whole person and not just as a student. Several Scholars noted how the structure and focus of coaching meetings differed from meetings with their academic advisor. Rather than focusing on academic or course selection, coaches took a more holistic approach to listening and inquiring about aspects of Scholars' collegiate experiences beyond academics and were actively willing to offer support in the form of empathetic listening, providing useful resources, and campus referrals most applicable to their individual needs. Fourth-year FGLI Scholar Grace perceived her success coach cared a lot more about her as a person than her academic advisor. Grace described feeling like "just another student" in her advising appointments, however appreciated that she could have "non-academic" conversations during her coaching meetings. Grace continued:

> ...they both have a lot of students in their caseload but it seems like the difference is that academic advisors, in my experience aren't really as concerned about your personal life or anything that isn't schedule related. My meetings can be 10 minutes. I don't even get in what I want to say. They don't take the time to get to know you.

Interpreted through a validating lens, providing FGLI students an opportunity to share their experiences is an approach coaches leverage to validate the experiences and individuality of FGLI Scholars. This approach helps create the conditions for success coaches to provide validating responses as a form of support.

Scholars continuously placed emphasis on how their success coach prioritized their individual needs and goals during coaching meetings. Sentiments echoed across all nine focus groups that a fundamental premise of coaching conversations were tailored and adaptable to

what Scholars desired to talk about. Based on these actions, Scholars interpreted their coach was dedicated to "seeing [them] as a whole person" with particular interest beyond academics. Moreover, Scholars' emphasis on how their success coach spent time getting to know them as an individual aligns with success coaches "person-first" coaching philosophy outlined in Chapter four. Therefore, coaches' emphasis on getting to know Scholars as individuals positively contributes to setting the conditions for validation within the coaching relationship and experience.

5.2.1.4 Demonstrations of Care. Scholars across all focus groups shared how their coach consistently placed emphasis on mattering, well-being, and advocacy during coaching interactions. Many described their current and previous success coach as empathetic, caring, relatable, and understanding. Scholars shared how their success coach demonstrated an active interest in their experiences at Terrace University and was supportive of their academic endeavors, social adjustment and overall wellness. Fourth-year Scholar Zoro offered the following towards the theme of care withing the coaching relationship:

> I've had two coaches and both have been personable and it feels like I'm their only student when clearly I know I'm not. The way they go about it makes me feel like I'm special and they care about me and my success as a whole.... Two different coaches from two different backgrounds. They incorporate their own upbringings and make me feel comfortable navigating my journey and sharing with them because they could relate.

Here Zoro described how the dimension of care appeared across both coaching relationships he experienced. This supports the notion that care is not an individual, isolated practice among success coaches, but rather an key component to the practice and delivery of coaching within this particular context. Zoro's assertions of feeling special and comfortable contribute to how validation manifests within the coaching relationship.

Across all focus group Scholars referenced a variety of wellness-focused conversations with their coach ranging from physical wellbeing (e.g., gym workouts, sleep habits); spiritual well-being (e.g., mindfulness and meditation retreats), and financial wellbeing (e.g., identifying affordable housing; managing semesterly scholarship refund check). Common across many of their experiences was a description of how success coaches offered Scholarswith emotional support essential to navigating and making sense of their college experience. Thalia, a third-year FGLI Scholar, shared:

> …for most of my high points at Terrace my coach has been by my side. I feel like he has been a part of all my high moments and when I have my low moments he's also there to support me on my way back up. I'm also first-gen and if it was just up to my academic advisor to give me all the guidance I needed I probably wouldn't be doing as well just because a lot of the reason I am where I am is because I know about the resources and then I use them. But also my academic advisor doesn't give me that emotional support and that's a huge [*emphasis added*] aspect of being a student…people think going to college of well you're doing what everyone wants to do thinking it's a great time but they don't understand that yes I'm intelligent but there is a lot of stress and there is pressure to always be grinding. My coach always asks 'who is taking care of Thalia' not only does he celebrate my successes but he encourages me to take of care of myself so I can continue to celebrate my successes.

In this excerpt, Thalia placed emphasis on the emotional support her coach provides and how it contributes greatly to her college experience. Emotional support was a common theme across many coaching discussions which suggests emotional support is a primary way by which coaches are able to validate Scholars towards success. This example provides greater context to what Rendón (1994) described as interpersonal validation. Thalia described how her coach validates her by not only celebrating her successes, but also encouraging her to prioritize her wellness so she can continue to be successful throughout the journey.

While emotional well-being was a central theme of many Scholars coaching conversations, some Scholars denoted how their coach advocated for well-being beyond individual coaching meetings. Megan, a second-year Scholar, recalled communicating her

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struggles with mental health through a questionnaire administered during the required first-year seminar course. "I don't remember my first meeting with my coach, but I remember having the mental health unit in [the first year success course] . I put that I was suicidal on the questionnaire she gave us and she immediately reached out to me and shared resources that could help me". Later in the semester, Megan was admitted into an in-patient facility and when she was discharged she received support from the dean of students office with making up missed assignments. The following semester, Megan worked with a new success coach to return to good academic standing by the end of her first year. In this example, the questionnaire was leveraged as a proactive measure for Megan to get the mental health support she needed during her first semester of college. Rather than waiting for Megan to tell someone she needed help, the questionnaire was a proactive mechanism towards supporting her. The intentionality of this programmatic structure design aligns with the first element of validation theory: placing the onus on validating agents (e.g., faculty; student affairs educators) to initiate contact with students and proactively offer support (Rendón, 1994). Megan described how the questionnaire was a way for her to communicate early in her college career about her needs and how her coach could provide targeted support–including directing her to appropriate mental health resources. Elaborating on the theme of care, after being discharged from the inpatient facility, Megan received support from a second success coach during her journey to return to good academic standing.

A third example of care within the coaching relationship was Scholar's description of how their coach made them feel like they mattered. Ana, a Latina first-year Scholar described the process of validation as overtime her coach was able to give her more personalized resources to support her during the first year of college.

> " I feel like my coach has been really helpful for the first semester because I really struggled adjusting because I come from a really large family and I came here and I

didn't have anyone and I didn't have a roommate and I was by myself. I felt depressed but I wasn't communicating it to my coach. One day I came to my meeting and she noticed that I wasn't okay and she told me ' its okay not to be okay'. She gave me the resources to ask for help. That helped a lot. So now this semester she gave me information about a stress retreat and I went to it. So it was really helpful all the personalized resources she gave me. She even helped with academic resources. At first I was feeling invisible, and everyone else had other things to do and couldn't help me. My academic advisor has so many students, RAs are always busy, and when my coach noticed that I was not okay that made me feel seen and that I mattered."

During exchanges with her coach, Ana probably experienced validation from her coach acknowledging her mood and affirming Ana that it's not uncommon for first-year students to experience a range of emotions during this transition period. Ana's coach asking the questions rather than waiting for Ana to share that she was not well is another example of the process of validation within success coaching. Ana's coach observed, inquired, and followed up with resources over time to support Ana. Another opportunity in which Ana may have experienced validation from this encounter is through her description of mattering. My analysis suggests connecting FGLI students to useful resources in a caring, non-judgmental way is one of the many mechanisms through which coaches are able to validate Scholars' capacity for achieving their goals, demonstrate that their needs can be addressed and that that they matter as an individual.

Fourth-year Scholar Zoro echoed similar sentiments as Ana. While reflecting on being academically dismissed twice, Zoro shared how his coach went above and beyond to demonstrate that she cared about him and the influence this had on his motivation to persist:

My coach could have quit on me when I was dismissed, I was no longer a student, there was no reason to reach out and still want to help me. But my coach had a genuine interest in me and would still reach out to me and make sure I was on top of the paperwork for reapplying. It felt like she overall cared about me and it motivated me.

In summary, Scholars appreciated that their success coach was someone who was willing to not only listen to their experiences, but also demonstrated genuine care towards them and

advocated for their success. To this end, Scholars viewed their coach as someone who genuinely cared about them and made a substantial contribution to their college experience.

5.2.1.5 Encouragement & Hope. Closely associated with demonstrations of care, focus group participants frequently referenced themes of encouragement and hope throughout the coaching relationship. Scholars described how validation played out in the way their coach shared things about their personal college experience as an opportunity to relate and support them as they navigated college in the present day. Many Scholars appreciated when their success coach shared personal college experiences as it offered a sense of encouragement and hope that they could be successful and overcome challenges as well. This approach embedded within coaching supports the notion that coaching is a humanizing experience whereby individuals are validated as capable of success despite challenges.

Scholars described feeling empowered by their coach in a variety of ways. Many Scholars shared stories about receiving moral support, encouragement from their coach that gave them a sense of hope to persist. Cynthia and Maria, both fourth-year Scholars and first-generation college students, described how their coach encouraged them and gave them hope to continue. Cynthia described coaching as reaffirmation, relief, and encouragement. During the session, Cynthia recounted an example of how her coach encouraged her as she struggled to adjust during her first-year at Terrace University.

> I wanted to go home. I wasn't sure what I was doing here or why I was here. I just wanted to go back home and be with my mother. I just wanted someone to tell me "yeah go back home" and no one did that… And my coach encouraged me that it was going to get better and be worth it in the end. That this was part of life.

Rendón (1994) suggests that validation is important early in the college experience of FGLI students. Cynthia's example supports Rendón's assertions about validating FGLI students

frequently as they adjust to college. For Cynthia, her coach's recognition and encouragement instilled a sense of hope in Cynthia to persist.

Similar to Cynthia, Maria described coaching meetings using the video game reference of save points, "I see the required meetings as save points… I got to this coaching meeting, I'm one step closer to the end." In this example, Maria draws from a video game concept of 'save points' where players progress through a game and are allowed to save points they have accumulated along the way. Maria internalized the coaching meetings as an opportunity to reflect on the progress she has made thus far. Maria expressed while she wasn't always sure of how close or far she was from the finish line, the coaching sessions were a bit of relief along her journey. While on academic notice her sophomore year (2020), Maria shared how the coaching meetings helped to motivate her to continue. My analysis suggests a portion of Maria's motivation may have been ignited by how her coach validated her ability for success during this time. Figure 3 is Maria's diagram which includes her description of her relationship with her success coach.

In summary, I identified five interconnected practices that Terrace Promise Scholars noted contributed positively to fostering and sustaining the coaching relationship. Central to each of the practice was Scholars' description and manifestation of validation throughout the relationship. Scholars described how their coach set the context for validation to occur throughout the coaching relationship via "keeping it real", maintaining a "judge-free zone", focusing on "seeing [the Scholar] as a whole person, demonstrating care, and offering encouragement and hope along their journey. Consequently, as Scholars described how their coach contributed to the coaching relationship, they occasionally highlighted the positive influences these validating approaches had on their openness and personal accountability within the relationship. Several Scholars noted it took time for them to discover how their coach could

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be of support to them and to be able to trust the process of fostering a meaningful relationship with their coach. While Scholars frequently pointed out what coaches contributed to the relationship, Scholars remained cognizant of personal effort required to sustain the relationship. Fourth-year Scholar Zoro offered an exceptional description of the accountability and effort required of Terrace Promise Scholars to maximize the coaching relationship:

> …you get out what you put in, I didn't put in the effort as far as utilizing my resources at Terrace, but once I started to actually utilize coaching, I saw a change.... The more I put in the more I go out of it.
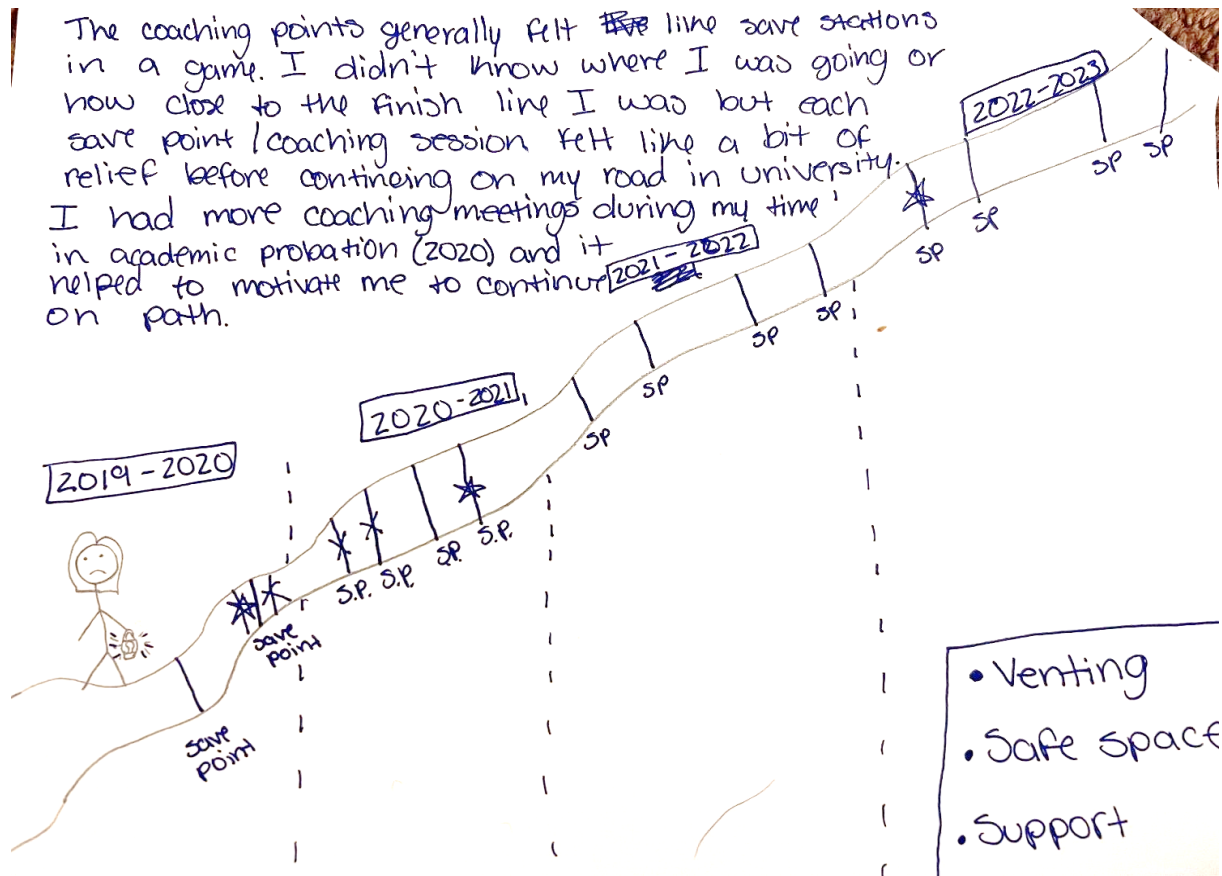

Figure 4 "Save Points" Maria's Coaching Diagram

5.2.2 Invalidating Components of Coaching Relationship

5.2.2.1 Staff Turnover. While many Scholars appreciated the support they received from their coach, a large majority noted coach turnover created challenges to establishing relationships and the continuity of care received. Many of the scholars had been through more than one coaching transition possibly upwards of three. This created challenges to establishing meaningful relationships. While many Scholars noted consistency of care across multiple coaches, one Scholar described their coaching experience as 'inconsistent. The majority of Scholars disclosed having more than one coach and frequently attributed coaching turnover and the inconsistency in the coaching relationship as a challenge to fostering meaningful coaching relationships. Scholars noted the amount of time it takes to open up to a new coach in order to establish the relationship. Doing so each year can be exhausting and causes some Scholars to feel a sense of instability. Lara described how the coaching transition created challenges to the coaching relationship,

> …I've had three coaches since I've been here. I wasn't sure who I was supposed to be talking to. In the middle of my first year I got a new coach and the new one really couldn't support me like I needed... Terrace Promise is like a rock for us and when that rock is shifting it puts that instability on us and we can feel lost.

Lara alludes to an important aspect of continuity of care. Figuratively, Lara described coaching as "a rock" a solid foundation for stability. However, after experiencing multiple coaching transitions, Lara felt moments of uncertainty and instability when staff transitions occurred so frequently. This is an example of unintended consequence of staff transitions that in Lara's case contributed to invalidating experiences throughout the coaching experience. Summer, a third-year, first generation college student echoed similar sentiments: " why get close if they are just going to leave. I'm not upset, but sometimes bouncing from coach to coach makes me feel disposable. I'm still going, but it feels like you're starting all over again". Some Scholars experienced coaching transitions so frequently that they delayed meeting with their new coach.

Third-year Scholar Bradley stated, "I haven't met with my new one yet I just didn't have the energy. Tell me about yourself, the background it seems like a drag at this point.. and then maybe after three meetings we can start having a connection?" Natalie also felt uncomfortable meeting with her new coach who had notes on her, but she knew nothing about, "my new coach had notes from my previous coach and she already knew all this stuff about me and it felt weird because she knew things about me and I didn't know who she was. I like her, but it was just a bit weird at first."

While Terrace Promise Scholars interpreted the coaching relationship as a critical intervention to their success at Terrace University, the overwhelming majority noted that staff turnover had a negative impact on their experience given the need to constantly have to reintroduce themselves to new coaches sometimes each year. Scholars described feeling unstable, disposable, and hesitant to foster meaningful relationships with their new coach as a result of frequent staff transitions. Future research that explores options for coaching transitions would be beneficial not only for success coaching but also other support service roles looking to foster stronger connections with FGLI Scholars.

5.2.2.2 *"Smooth Sailing Façade".* While some Scholars felt confident to navigate new challenges without the support of their coach, one senior felt like their coach stopped supporting them prematurely. Fourth-year Scholar Freddie described his challenges navigating the smooth sailing facade as he approached his final coaching meeting and graduation. "After my internship experience my junior year where my coach supported me, now that we went over that tough experience it's kinda been like 'oh you can handle a lot of things now'. Now that I have my job my coach has mentioned "oh I really don't have to worry about you too much because I know you have it together". Freddie went on to describe how his coaching meetings have steered away from what's going on with him personally. Freddie worried;

> Did I build this expectation that I'm always going to overcome things? But that's not how life works. My coach doesn't ask about those things anymore. Our last meeting was short… but I have a lot of personal stuff going on but we didn't get to it because he thinks I'm already smooth sailing. I wish I could have had that conversation with him.

Freddie's experience describes how some students may need contributed support from their coach. It is also important to consider if and how coaches continue to validate Scholars as they conclude the coaching relationship and what recommendations they offer to Scholars as they prepare for graduation.

In summary, I identified the nature of the coaching relationship to be a central tenant of Terrace Promise Scholars coaching experience. Moreover, the coaching relationship served as a critical intervention for validating Scholars' success at Terrace University. Focus group participants described the coaching relationship as a partnership in which their coach affirmed their ability to be successful at Terrace Promise by being relatable, judge-free, and a safe-space to share their academic and personal challenges as well as their successes. While coaching conversations are uniquely tailored to meet the need of individual Scholars, I identified several validating and asset-based components that resonated across Scholars' descriptions of their

relationship with their success coach. Focus group participants noted coaches' affable nature as a key mechanism towards fostering the relationship but also validating they were capable of success at Terrace University with additional supports. While Scholars did not explicitly define the coaching relationship as "validating", descriptors such as "reaffirmation" and "encouragement" indicate validation is present within the coaching relationship. Despite the presence of validation throughout the coaching relationship, there were a number of circumstances that created challenges including staff turnover and the assumption that Scholars are doing well as they approach their goal of graduation. While staff turnover may be an inevitable phenomenon within coaching, it will become increasingly important for hiring managers to develop innovative strategies for ensuring FGLI Scholars are able to receive high-quality, validating support during such inevitable transitions. Additional research on the structure of coaching programs may lend insights into how to ensure coaching remains student-centered during such transitions.

5.3 The Role of Validation in Personal Processes and Outcomes

The third theme I identified across Terrace Promise Scholars descriptions of their coaching experience was personal gains, processes, and outcomes. Throughout each focus group, Terrace Promise Scholars shared they found coaching to be beneficial and would recommend this type of support for other Terrace University students. In the following subsections I offer descriptive explanations of six intertwined personal processes and outcomes Scholars described experiencing throughout their success coaching experience: learning, development, trust, navigating academic notice, and personal accountability.

5.3.1 Learning

The process of learning resonated throughout Scholars' recollection of their coaching

experience. Scholars held a deep appreciation for the information and knowledge their success

coach shared via the weekly email. announcements. For example, second-year Terrace Scholar

Becca explained how she benefited from the information and discussion she had with her success

coach:

> I didn't really use [coaching] a lot my freshman year but I have more my sophomore year
> so just being able to have those meetings. … and the information they share isn't always
> common knowledge. My coach has helped connect me to so many resources and even
> find a job. My friends not in Terrace Promise are like "How do you know about all these
> resources?" And I feel like its because coaching kinda gives me an edge up!

Becca continued that her coach welcomed conversations that helped deepen her understanding of

privilege, equity, and identity as a White female. This had a pivotal impact on Becca's learning

and development.

> In our most recent meeting, it wasn't what we were supposed to talk about, but we talked
> about what I needed to talk about. I was having an issue with a class, but then the
> conversation went further into what I was learning in this class about diversity. Then me
> and my coach had a really informative talk about privilege and identity and how people
> identify racially...it was an educational conversation that I feel like with my academic
> advisors would never come up. But my coach is there to communicate with me we are
> able to talk about things that are important and relevant and apart of how things are going
> for me at school but also important beyond school."

Becca perceived conversations about privilege and identity with her coach to be important to her

learning and personal development. was something she hadn't experienced with other campus

administrators. Becca's experience provides insights into how success coaches validate the

learning and development of Terrace Scholars. This example highlights how a combination of

validating practices experienced throughout the coaching relationship fostered an environment

conducive for Terrace Scholars to grapple with complex yet important conversations. The

malleable nature of coaching conversations allowed Beeca and her coach to foster an

environment that validated Beeca's inquiry into a topic she had not previously had exposure to nor been challenged to consider. This example extends portions of Rendón's (1994) theory of validation and warrants additional exploration into if and how FGLI Scholars who hold non-marginalized racial and/or ethnic identities are validated as they engage in conversations about equity.

Another common learning experience across Terrace Scholars recollection of their coaching experience was their coach's dedication to answering their questions and providing clarity. Several first- and second- year Scholars articulated having a Terrace Promise coach to answer their questions was helpful as they learned their way around campus – especially at an institution the size of Terrace University. While success coaching is a high-touch practice, I found focus group participants held realistic expectations of the time it takes for success coaches to respond to emails– averaging two to three days. Even more, Scholars explained they were not overly reliant or co-dependent upon their success coach to address every question they had about navigating Terrace University. Bradley, a third-year Scholar stated: "I know she isn't going to know everything but she'll get back to me with a color coded email and I appreciate it. But the effort to try and get me an answer shows an investment in me… and she didn't just settle at guessing, she got me to the people who actually could help." This suggests the clarity Scholars gain from their success coach responding to their questions contributes to their learning process and the ways in which Scholars experience these interactions with their coach is indicative of/contributes to the process of validating Scholars as learners.

Scholars' indicated learning was a fundamental outcome of success coaching which occurred during individual meetings as well as required first- and fourth- year seminar courses. Moreover, as Scholars shared their experiences during the focus group they inadvertently learned

about resources and campus policies from other focus group participants. While existing

literature on coaching focuses primarily on how coaches help students identify and achieve

goals, focus group participants described different types of conversations they had with their

coach. A handful of Scholars shared how their coach actively engaged in dialogue that further

their understanding of equity. These conversations happened primarily during the required first-

year seminar course as well as individual coaching meetings.

5.3.2 Development

Similar to how Terrace Promise Scholars' described learning that took place during

success coaching, they also described success coaching contributing to their personal growth,

development, and confidence during their college transition. Several Terrace Promise Scholars

claimed their coaching experience was beneficial to their development as a person albeit results

were not always immediate. John, a fourth-year Scholar studying kinesiology, described how his

coaching experience included validating experiences and practices that supported his

development. John reflected on how consistent support from his coaches contributed positively

to his maturation into adulthood:

> …we all have stuff going on and having a consistent mentor for my decisions and my life
> has been valuable. Some of us don't have connections to people back at home who have
> been through this. I appreciate my coach has that experience. My coach is my activator,
> because my internal motivation fluctuates but the stability and consistency of my Promise
> coach is always there and is helpful. My parents aren't as stable to help me through this.
> My coaches' advice is incredibly helpful into my maturation of a person.

Development was also the premise of Rose's illustration of how success coaching

contributed to her college experience (See Figure 4). Rose depicted an image of an infant

learning to take their first steps as a metaphor for her development from freshman year and

attributed portions of her transformation to contributions from her success coach. When Rose

arrived to campus she was uncertain about her direction and doubted her ability to be a

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successful at Terrace University. Rose described that she "stumbled" her first year trying to balance the academic demands of college, wanting to change her major, and feeling of isolation. Rose explained how success coaching was instrumental to her evolution from crawling, kneeling, and stumbling her first-year to standing, to taking her first steps during her second-year. Rose attributed portions of her transformation to the support and validation offered by her success coach. Rose expressed a high level of gratitude for the various recommendations her current success coach provided and described how the support from her success coach contributed to shifts in her mindset about her ability to be successful at Terrace University.

> …I continue to come because I want to update [my coach]. I want her to know her advice is working. I'm sleeping eight hours, I joined a club... these things make a difference! I feel like my coach helped me develop a new mindset. Sometimes this scholarship makes me feel like an underdog, but my coach would constantly tell me even if I feel like I don't deserve to be here, I'm already here!
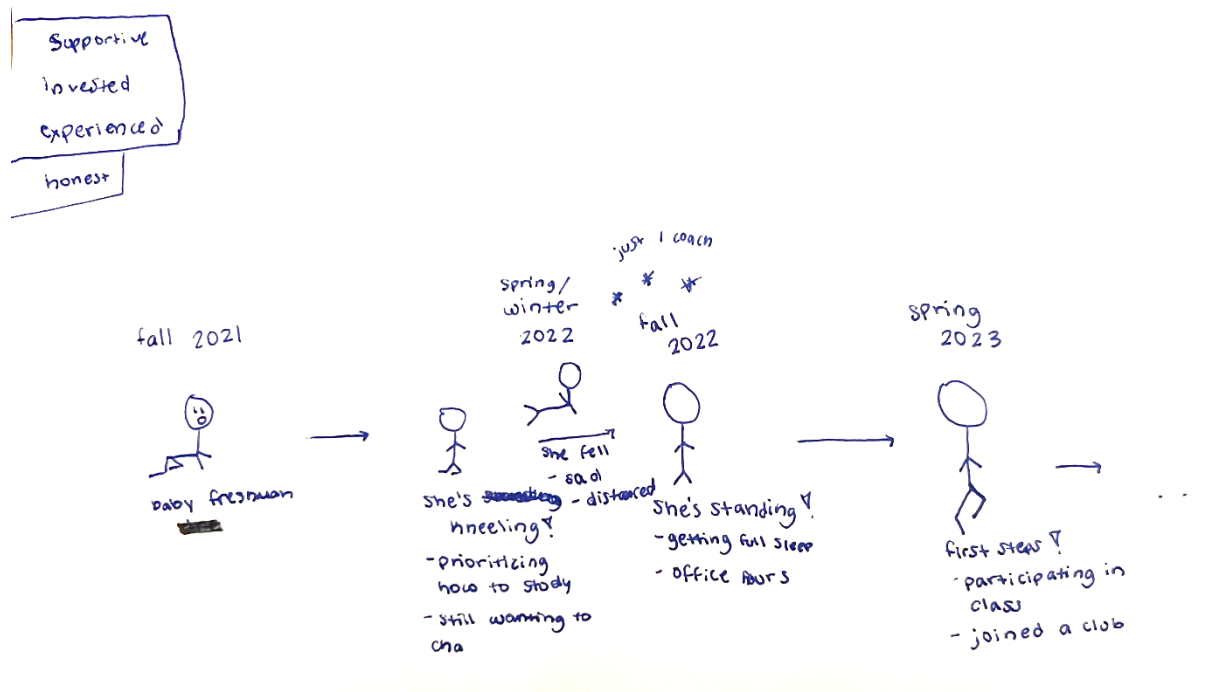
Figure 5 Rose's Developmental Depiction of Success

These examples shed light on how some Terrace Promise Scholars attributed success coaching to their personal development. Rendón (1994) asserted, "validation should not be viewed as an end, but rather as a developmental process which begins early and can continue over time. Numerous instances of validation over the time the student spends in college can result in a richer college experience." (pg.18). While the present case study is not longitudinal in nature, examples offered by John and Rose suggest Scholars are aware of shifts in their personal development and maturation as they take heed to the advice and guidance from their assigned success coach. It is worth noting how the coaching relationship and subsequent coaching experience are designed to validate Scholars personal development towards short- and long-term goals.

Congruent with descriptions of how success coaching contributed to personal learning and development, Scholars associated their success coaching experience with increases in their overall sense of confidence. Validation was present as success coaches encouraged Scholars to celebrate their progress and achievements. Third-year Scholar Zoe, valued her success coach getting to know her as an individual and displaying a dedication to her well-being, shared:

> I feel like my Terrace Promise coach has helped me find confidence in celebrating those wins. Because I thought I wasn't doing enough and [my success coach] reflected to me I was doing way more than enough compared to where I started from.

Analyzed through a lens of validation, I argue that validation is a key mechanism towards fostering Scholars' development and confidence. Rather than an isolated instance, validation is an ongoing process for Scholars as they interacted with their success coach ranging from the types of interactions (e.g., demonstrations of care) and investment in their personal development.

5.3.3 Trust

Another fundamental process of Terrace Promise Scholars' success coaching experience was the establishment of trust with their success coach. As Scholars shared their coaching experience, they frequently described how trust contributed to the overall process of validation within the coaching relationship and broader coaching experience. Across each focus group, Scholars described how comfortable and beneficial it was to share and process their day-to-day experiences with their success coach.

Scholars also described the element of trust within the coaching relationship. Across all focus groups, students echoed how their coach was someone they could turn to for feedback, advice, and encouragement about navigating financial, academic, and social aspects of college. Focus group participants associated their coach with words such as "reliable', "loyalty", "dependable", "vault", and "trustworthy". Many talked about trust as a culmination of multiple aspects of the coaching relationship. For example, fourth-year Scholar Freddie associated trust to efforts his coach demonstrated in getting to know him and recalling information shared during previous meetings,

> seeing them make the effort into knowing who I am. It makes things feel better; recalling what we talked about in our meetings goes a long way. This shows that my coach cares about me. Sometimes I don't remember I told them about some of the things but I'm glad they brought it back up. that helps build that trust, knowing they put in the effort to remember something about me.

Furthermore, Tiana describes how her coach's support and attention to her well-being contributed to trust within their relationship.

> ...life messed up my first semester of college. I got on academic notice because I was always sick, I couldn't get out of bed. In my first meeting at first I thought I was just going to let [my coach] do her job, but she asked me personal questions ' I care about how you're doing' not I'm just trying to get my paycheck questions. I cried in our first

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meeting. Life was life-ing. In our first meeting we didn't even talk about academics

because [my coach] knew it wasn't a possibility. She reassured me at some point we'd

get to grades but right now we are going to focus on my health and how I needed time to

manage what was going on in my life. I felt like that helped build trust that I didn't think

I'd build with her."

Tiana noted she did not expect to build that level of trust with her coach; however, over time it

became salient to their relationship Tiana's coach's ability to attend to her needs in the moment

was a catalyst to helping Tiana feel supported and validated. Tiana's coach may have validated

her by acknowledging that the challenges she experienced were not academic related, but rather

related to her well-being. Over time, Tiana realized she could trust talking to her coach about her

experiences. Moreover, Tiana's excerpt is a great example across many themes that emerged

from the data. The combination of being able to talk about what she needed to talk about in the

first meeting– beyond academics– and conversations about wellness emerged multiple times

throughout the data and helped foster what Scholars referred to as trust within the coaching

relationship.

5.3.4 Navigating Academic Notice

Another common interaction and discussion with their assigned success coach was

navigating academic notice. Terrace Promise Scholars on academic notice are required to

schedule between four to eight meetings during the semester on notice to develop a plan and

monitor progress towards returning to good academic standing. At the time of data collection,

45% of first-year focus group participants self-disclosed they were on academic notice. Many

described how meetings with their coach centered on identifying resources and strategies to help

them return to good academic standing. Aaliyah, a first-year Terrace Promise Scholar and first-

generation college student, described how her coach guided her to specific resources while on academic notice.

> When I was struggling, she would tell me where I could go for assistance or how she could help me. She guides me to people that can be helpful to me as well. So right now, I'm on academic notice and she helped me get connected to the Academic Success Center. She told me about their resources and I'm using them right now and it's really helpful.

Aaliyah also described how her coach recommended academic behavioral adjustments that might support her return to good academic standing: "Last semester I had two science classes and they were kicking my butt. My coach told me to go to the office hours so I did and it didn't help, but she told me to go and I tried it out. But now my schedule is better and my coach is helping me figure out how to keep my scholarship." Aaliyah's description of her experience with coaching connects to validation theory in several ways. Primarily, Aaliyah describes how her coach is working alongside her to help her keep her scholarship, rather than having to figure it out on her own. The support Aaliyah receives- whether in the form of academic behavioral adjustments or connections to resources- helps her feel validated on multiple fronts albeit on academic notice. My analysis suggests Aaliyah's coach did not blame her for her academic shortcomings, but instead, focused primarily on her potential for success which is a key element of validation theory. Aaliyah's positive self-regard about returning to good academic standing could be attributed to validation received from her coach during the first-year seminar course and individual meetings. Many Scholars mentioned discussions in the first-year success course about how to manage academic struggles and how to seek assistance. Perhaps the proactive nature of discussing academic notice and normalization of help-seeking behaviors supported Scholars' belief that they can be successful and achieve their goals. These types of conversations affirmed

for Aaliyah and other Scholars on academic notice that their success coach believed in their ability to return to good academic standing.

Similar to other Scholars who had been placed on academic notice during their time at Terrace University, Aaliyah expressed a healthy attitude towards navigating academic notice in part to the support received from their success coach. Several Scholars credited their positive dispositions of such stigmatizing academic circumstance to early conversations about academic rigor and during interactions with their success coach during the first-year seminar course. With the support of their coach, Scholars began to recognize academic notice was not a setback and didn't have to derail them from achieving their goals. As coaches intentionally work to normalize the reality of setbacks in college, they also simultaneously validated Scholars potential for success by being a supporter and connecting Scholars to resources that will aid in their success.

5.4 Chapter Summary

In Chapter five I addressed the second research question guiding this explorative case study: *How do FGLI students experience coaching?* Findings highlight the dynamic and parallel nature of how 44 FGLI Scholars described and experienced success coaching provided through Terrace Promise. Scholars frequently alluded to the support, help, and resources they experienced during success coaching. Most importantly, Scholars noted that success coaching expanded beyond individual meetings and was evident during other program related requirements (e.g., seminar courses; study abroad opportunities) as well as email communications related to campus opportunities. While a handful of Scholars described coaching as "repetitive" or noted inconsistency in support due to high staff turnover, the majority

found this service to be supportive in their pursuit to obtain a four-year degree from Terrace University.

I identified two themes across the focus group data that were essential to Scholars coaching experience: the nature of the coaching relationship and the role of validation in personal processes and outcomes. Scholars described how success coaching supported their attempts to navigate many of the hidden rules, policies, and procedures of college. During their coaching experience, Scholars described encounter with the following validating experiences: increased awareness of campus resources, demonstrated growth and personal development, enhanced sense of trust in the coaching relationship, and resilience to work through challenging academic setbacks.

In the next Chapter I combine findings from Chapter 4 which highlighted success coaches' approach to coaching FGLI Scholars with findings present in the current chapter relevant to how FGLI scholars describe their coaching experience to inform the primary research question guiding this study: *What is the program's approach to coaching FGLI students?*

Chapter 6 Discussion

The aim of this case study was to understand the nature of success coaching within

Terrace University's Terrace Promise– a college transition and success program. The following

research questions guided this exploratory case study:

> Q1.   What is the program's approach to coaching FGLI students?
> Q2.   How do program success coaches describe their approach to coaching
>   FGLI Scholars?
> Q3.   How do FGLI program participants describe their coaching experience?

Chapter four highlighted how Terrace Promise success coaches described their coaching

philosophy, strategy, and approach to supporting FGLI Scholars and included observations of

program staff meetings to support findings. Chapter five reviewed themes prevalent across 44

Terrace Promise Scholars' coaching experience. In Chapter six, I analyze findings across the

entire data corps– interviews with seven Terrace Promise success coaches, three observations of

program staff meetings, and focus groups with Terrace Promise Scholars– to address the

overarching research question guiding this dissertation: *What is the program's approach to*

coaching first-generation, low-income students? Throughout this chapter, I revisit the stated

purpose of this study and demonstrate how patterns across the data inform findings related to the

overarching research question. Chapter six begins by situating the context of success coaching

within Terrace Promise. I draw upon the conceptualization and experiences of Terrace Promise

Scholars and success coaches to reveal the dynamic conceptualizations of success coaching as

well as the interactions and settings Scholars described experiencing "success coaching". I then

outline seven interconnected elements I discovered contributing to the Terrace Promise Success

Coaching model as described by Scholars and success coaches. I illustrate how each element contributes a sense of validation among Terrace Promise Scholars and situate findings within the prior research. I also demonstrate how this model expands what is currently understood or known about interpersonal validation. The chapter concludes with practical and policy implications associated with these findings, and future research related to validating first-generation, low-income student success.

6.1 Terrace Promise Success Coaching Conceptualization and Context

Coaching is one of the newest retention strategies to emerge within higher education and hundreds of institutions across the country have implemented coaching programs and interventions to bolster student persistence and retention towards graduation (Bettinger & Baker, 2014; Mowreader, 2023; Robinson, 2015; Robinson & Gahagan, 2010). Despite the rising popularity of coaching programs, questions remain as to what coaching is, how coaching differs from preexisting retention services, and in what ways coaching contributes to student success metrics. Broadly, coaching is defined as "partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential" (International Coach Federation, 2019, para 1). Within higher education, coaching is often described as a highly customized, student-centered retention effort that places emphasis on helping students act towards the realization of their goals (Sepulveda, 2017). For the purpose of this case study, my interpretations of coaching rely heavily on the conceptualizations, frequency, context, and nature of coaching experiences described across research participants. Findings illustrated Terrace Promise Scholars conceptualized success coaching as "support", "help", and "resources" while success coaches emphasized the importance of adaptability and creativity based on individual Scholar needs. These descriptions and conceptions align with prior

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definitions of coaching and provide additional context to understanding how FGLI Scholars describe coaching.

A significant finding relevant to understanding Terrace Promise's coaching program was the context in which Scholars and success coaches described success coaching occurring. I found Terrace Promise Scholars descriptions of where they experienced success coaching and subsequent validation was not limited to individual coaching meetings. Interestingly, Scholars described three primary settings they interpreted success coaching happening: individual meetings; required seminar courses; and weekly email announcements. My interpretations of Terrace Promise Scholars coaching experience extends previous conceptualizations of coaching within higher education to include examples of coaching across contexts. These findings suggest coaching as experienced by Terrace Promise Scholars is not reduced to individual meetings, but rather, is a culmination of structural and practical approaches leveraged throughout the Terrace Promise (See Figure 1). Stated another way, coaching is a core component of Terrace Promise model for promoting FGLI student success and is experienced during first- and fourth-year seminar discussions as well as weekly email communications via the exchange of resources, opportunities, and reminders.

Previous researchers identified positive educational outcomes associated with students who participated in coaching programs at large, public, research universities including retention and persistence (Alzen et al., 2021; Bettinger & Baker, 2014; Robinson & Gallagan, 2010), improved grade point averages of students on academic notice (Capstick et al., 2019; Sepulveda et al., 2019) and student learning (Field et.al, 2010; Parker et al., 2011). While these studies produced positive results, they either lacked a clearly defined theoretical framework informing results or failed to theorize how coaching philosophies, approaches, and strategies contributed to

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positive results. Although findings produced from this study align with outcomes explored in

prior research, the aim of this dissertation was not to focus on coaching results, but rather,

understanding the nature of coaching. To this end, I analyzed Terrace Promise coaching within a

framework of validation to identify mechanisms contributing to interpersonal validation across

the coaching context.

6.2 Terrace Promise Success Coaching Model towards Fostering a Sense of Validation

My initial analysis highlighted the ways in which Terrace Promise success coaches and

Scholars alike described success coaching to inform my understanding of the program's

coaching model. My understanding of the coaching model leveraged within this context draws

explicitly from success coaches and Scholars' descriptions of their experience with success

coaching. I then applied validation theory to my findings to illustrate if and how success

coaching contributed to a sense of validation within Terrace Promise. Although Terrace Promise

Scholars did not explicitly name "validation" as part of their coaching experience, I noted several

recurring themes across their conceptualizations of coaching and personal experiences that

contributed to a sense of validation. From my analysis, I identified seven domains of Terrace

Promise's coaching approach towards fostering a sense of validation among FGLI Scholars

(Figure 6). The model is anchored by three pillars of practice articulated by success coaches and

Scholars: Relational, Holistic, and Knowledge. These pillars encompass the foundation of

Terrace Promise Scholars' and coaches' conceptions of success coaching. My analysis suggests

these pillars are not stagnant, but rather, deliberately interconnected and therefore contribute to a

sense of validation across the Terrace Promise success coaching model.

At each intersection of each pillar are opportunities for coaches to reiterate a sense of

validation among Scholars including the deliberate focus on tone and delivery of success

coaching, acknowledging identity through allyship, and advocating for Scholars via sharing of resources as they navigate circumstances. The three pillars intersect at the center of the model on the element of trust. Across the findings, I identified trust as the foundational component of the Terrace Promise coaching model described as a primary component of coaches' individual practice as well as an outcome of the coaching experience described by Scholars. In the subsections below, I describe how this coaching model towards a sense of validation presented across the coaching context.
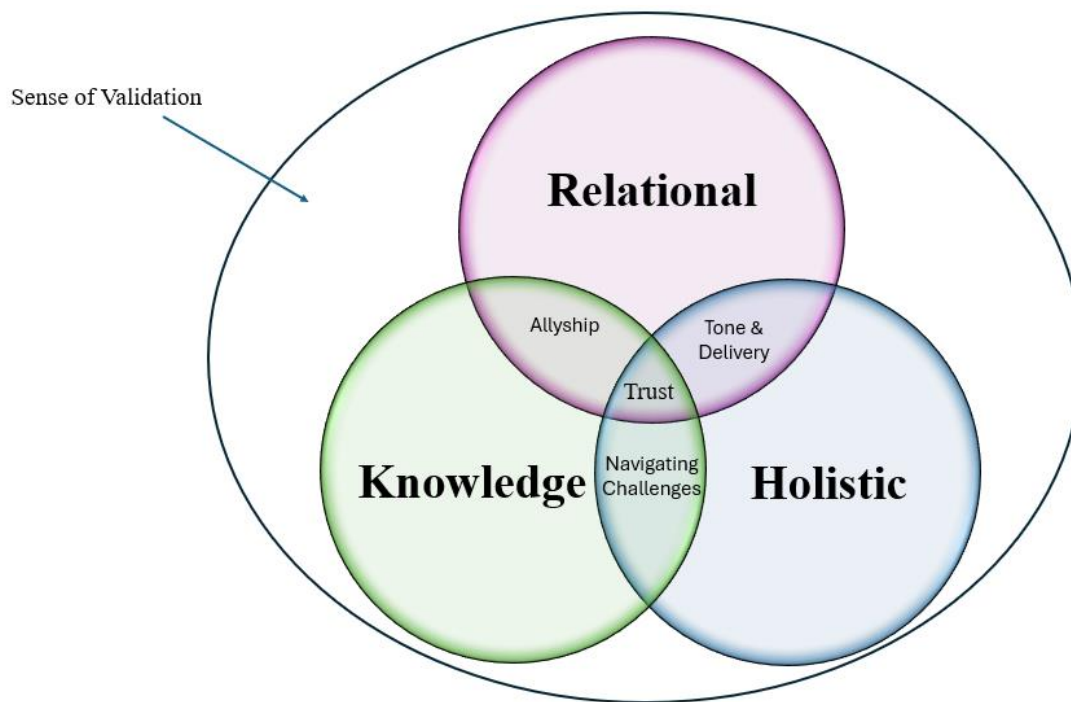
Figure 6 Terrace Promise's Approach to Fostering a Sense of Validation

6.2.1 Relational

One of the most salient themes across the data corps was the relational component of success coaching. A significant portion of success coaches' responses, Scholars experiences, program documents, and staff observations conducted centered on the relational component of success coaching. When analyzed through a lens of validation theory, I discovered how

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establishing and sustaining rapport within the coaching experience created and supported opportunities for success coaches to validate Scholars. As Terrace Promise success coaches employed empathic listening to acknowledge Scholars' feelings, thoughts, and experiences, this helped strengthen rapport and foster a stronger relationship which served as a primary mechanism towards validating Scholars.

Terrace Scholars found the relational component of success coaching to be beneficial to their success and personal development. Over time, Scholars realized the time invested with their success coach across the various coaching contexts was more than just a scholarship requirement, but an opportunity to foster a meaningful connection with a validating institutional agent (Rendón-Linares & Munoz, 2011). While meaningful connections were a value add to Scholars coaching experience, Scholars frequently noted how staff transitions have adverse effects on the relational component of the coaching model. In Chapter five, Scholars described how recurring staff transitions created challenges fostering a deeper sense of trust within the coaching relationship resulting in feeling "disposable" or even delaying scheduling future coaching meetings. In chapter four, success coaches emphasized the importance of establishing relationship boundaries with Scholars in order to promote their self-efficacy and independence,

however, rarely discussed implications of staff turnover on the coaching model. Moreover, I witnessed the resignation of three success coaches that contributed to the study during data collection and analysis. These examples underscore the saliency of the consistency of coaching meetings on the coaching relationship. Additional research on coaching staff retention may be advantageous towards institutional and programmatic efforts to promote FGLI student success.

Scholars also offered examples of how success coaches strengthened the relational component beyond individual meetings. In Chapter five, first- and second-year Scholars detailed enjoying the personal touches their success coach added to the weekly newsletter announcements which included personal life updates (e.g., graduation, engagement), funny gifs and memes, or inspirations quotes. Scholars appreciated the personal touches coaches incorporated into the emails as this helped humanize their coach outside of meetings, increased their likelihood of reading the email, and positively contributed to the relational component of coaching.

6.2.1.1 Coaching Tone & Delivery. I discovered how success coaches framed advice and guidance mattered towards validating Scholars. Scholars lauded coaches' ability to be "real", "honest", and "direct" as assets to the coaching relationship. Simultaneously, success coaches remained cognizant to adjust their tone and delivery in ways suitable for Scholars communication styles and individual needs. In Chapter four, some success coaches described their coaching style as "blunt" while remaining mindful and amenable to Scholars preferred communication style. However, there was consensus across Terrace Promise Scholars that non-judgmental tone success coaches exercised during coaching meetings was advantageous to the coaching relationship. When analyzed through a lens of validation, success coaches' non-judgmental tone reduced the instance of Scholars' perceiving messages communicated in a deficit-based manner. The context of the coaching meetings are thus centered in an asset-based framework where success coaches leverage a humanistic approach to coaching by investing in understanding who the Scholar is as an individual, their motivation, and their needs. Analyzed through a lens of validation, the non-judgmental tone in which success coaches listened to and communicated with Scholars served as a mechanism for fostering a genuine and safe environment within the coaching experience for Scholars to feel comfortable to discuss and disclosing additional aspects of their experience that could potentially implicate their academic performance and college experience. These examples suggest the intentional focus on coaching tone and delivery was a key component towards facilitating a culture of validation within the coaching relationship. The culmination of these actions across the coaching context contributed positively to the coaching relationship, strengthened trust, and supported fostering a sense of validation among Terrace Promise Scholars.

6.2.2 Holistic

The holistic pillar encompasses success coaches espoused coaching philosophies as well as Scholars' descriptions of demonstration of care displayed by their success coach. Findings from Chapters four and five overlapped in terms of success coaches seeing Scholars beyond academics, taking a holistic approach to offering support, and validating their capacity for success at Terrace University.

Success coaches described adopting a human-first approach which translated throughout Scholars' description for their coaching experience as "seeing me as a whole person". In Chapter four, success coaches described monitoring for and navigating "burnout" caused by stress. In chapter five, Scholars placed emphasis on how their success coach inquired about their experiences beyond academic performance and demonstrating care for their well-being. Terrace Promise Scholars also noted how their success coach's approach differed in nature from interactions with their academic advisor or other campus support staff and served to reinforce the relational pillar. Third-year Scholars Thalia captured the essence of validation embodied through the holistic pillar in the following quote:

> …But also my academic advisor doesn't give me that emotional support and that's a huge [*emphasis added*] aspect of being a student**…**people think going to college of well you're doing what everyone wants to do thinking it's a great time but they don't understand that yes I'm intelligent but there is a lot of stress and there is pressure to always be grinding. My coach always asks 'who is taking care of Thalia' not only does he celebrate my successes but he encourages me to take care of myself so I can continue to celebrate my successes.

6.2.2.1 Navigating Circumstances. Sepulveda's (2017) definition of coaching placed

emphasis on goal setting and achievement that occurs throughout the coaching process. Despite

previous literature identifying goal setting and goal achievement as crucial components and

outcomes of coaching meetings, I discovered Terrace Promise Scholars coaching needs

frequently deviated from their original goals. Scholars recounted during initial meetings their

coach focused on getting to know them as an individual and identifying two or three goals for the

semester. This theme across the coaching experience underscores the relational pillar of the

coaching model and overall personalized nature of success coaching. Although Scholars

discussed setting goals with their coach during initial coaching meetings; many described how

subsequent coaching conversations focused on how the Scholar could best navigate resources to

be successful during their college experience. Furthermore, many Scholars had a hard time

recalling the specific goals they established with their coach at the beginning of the semester

given the fast-paced, changing nature of navigating their college experience. Bambi shared, "We

set goals for the semester but I don't get a copy of them so I forget what I told them… I don't

remember the goals we set. And by the next meeting, I'm on to the next thing because things

change swiftly for college students." Bambi recommended reminder emails as a way to remain

accountable to the goals. While goal setting is a recursive feature within success coaching,

findings from this study suggest Terrace Promise Scholars were more likely to leverage coaching

sessions to process their day-to-day experiences in college as well as navigate unanticipated

circumstances that arose on the path towards achieving their goals.

Goal setting was a component of success coaches coaching practice; however, throughout

the case study, I found that coaches ability to quickly adjust to Scholars present needs was more

salient than goal setting. The focus of success coaching meetings was on the process of goal

achievement rather than outcome of achieving the goal. This is not to suggest Scholars goals did

not matter, rather, the emphasis I denoted was on the process of how success coaches help

Scholars navigate a wide variety of circumstances ranging from balancing familial

circumstances, managing burnout, and identifying mental health resources. This holistic

approach to coaching required success coaches to rely on knowledge of campus or community

resources to provide recommendations and encourage Scholars as they attempted to navigate

circumstances.

6.2.3 Knowledge

The knowledge pillar contained Scholars' descriptions of their coaches' awareness and

familiarity with campus resources as well as coaches' deliberate approach towards professional

development. Focus group participants overwhelmingly focused on the resources their success

coach connected them to. Scholars distinguished how success coaches were more "in-tune" or

knowledgeable about the day-to-day realities of college students" compared to interactions they

had with other institutional agents (e.g., faculty, academic advisors). This relatedness helped

strengthen and foster meaningful coaching relationships and contributed to Scholars' sense of

validation.

Scholars benefitted from their success coaches knowledge of Terrace Promise resources

and connections to institutional departments. A lack of coordination and miscommunication

between financial aid representatives and Terrace Promise created challenges for success

coaches to help Terrace Promise Scholars effectively navigate available campus supports.

Findings suggest that cross-unit coordination and communication are vital components for FGLI

navigational support and promoting their success.

6.2.3.1 Allyship. Terrace Promise success coaches were able to demonstrate and refine their knowledge and support of FGLI Scholars via professional development. While coaching certification or licensure was not prioritized within this context, I noted several coaches made intentional decisions to seek local, state, and national professional development opportunities to increase personal and professional knowledge of how to address identity similarities and differences that exist between Terrace Promise success coaches and Scholars. The notion of knowledge as a pillar of foster validation suggests that success coaches understood the importance of honoring Scholars varied and intersecting identities. Terrace Promise success coaches frequently acknowledged identity differences between themselves and Scholars in their caseload. While success coaches Aurora, Trina, Dallas, and Marissa self-identified as first-generation college graduates from low-income backgrounds, they acknowledged these similarities were not sufficient to validate and sustain relationships with Scholars. For example, Trina, a bi-racial success coach of Black and White descent, acknowledged the majority of her caseload consisted of Scholars of Latin(x) descent. Trina described how she actively searched for and enrolled in professional developments opportunities to learn about understand the Latin(x) student experience and gather resources to increase her personal knowledge about their needs as well as strategies and approaches to implement towards their success. Allyship examples were not limited to race and ethnicity and encompassed how success coaches acknowledged Scholar sexuality and gender expression. Success coach Dallas self-disclosed as a heterosexual male from a small rural town who was not privy to the LGBTQ community. As a success coach, Dallas actively sought out opportunities to learn about, engage with, and become an ally to support FGLI Scholars who identified with the LGBTQ community.

6.2.4 Fostering Trust

The three pillars of Terrace Promise's coaching model overlap on the element of trust. Research participants highlighted the role and function of trust within the coaching relationship and broader coaching experience. Throughout my analysis, I identified various descriptions indicative of the importance of building trust within coaching. In chapter five, Scholars used adjectives such as "trust", "vault", and "trustworthy" to describe their coaching experience. Fourth- year Scholar Zoro captured the essence of trust with his quote, "coaching does no harm to me… I just needed to put myself in a position where I was open to letting my coach coach me." As Zoro discovered his coach had his best interest in mind, he was able to benefit from his coaches knowledge, support, and the coaching relationship. Success coaches centered their coaching practice on establishing trust. Throughout Chapter four success coaches described working to earn, foster, and sustain trust while coaching Scholars. Some coaches leveraged relatable personal experiences to establish trust, while others leveraged their institutional knowledge to connect Scholars to resources as they navigated academic and personal circumstances.

Success coaches also centered trust as they delivered coaching. Throughout Chapter four, success coaches described relying on fostering trust and credibility with Scholars whether that be via similar backgrounds or sharing of institutional knowledge. Success coaches frequently referenced making concessions to appropriate balance Scholars' autonomy and encouraging them to commit and follow through on co-created action plans. Many coaches leveraged the relational pillar to nudge Scholars into action, yet others trusted that when Scholars were ready to take action they would execute.

In addition to fostering trust, success coaches also described the importance of remaining cognizant of how they negotiated their own identities and the implications these negotiations have on trust. In chapter four, success coach Max described needing to remain mindful of how his own identity may be perceived as counter-productive to fostering trust within the coaching relationship. Max contemplated if some Scholars doubted whether he really be an ally if he didn't come from a low-income background:

> …growing up as a student is night and day different from most of the students' I worked with… I grew up in a rather affluent predominantly white suburb. I try to keep that a secret for as long as I can, because as awful as this sounds, I have students that if they knew I came from an affluent middle-class family they would write me off. If you get put in a box you can potentially lose the connection and it makes your job a lot harder…

As Max actively works to counter negative perceptions about his commitment to Scholars being successful at Terrace University and counter attempts from Scholars don't "write [him] off" given his background, he is describing the phenomenon of trust within coaching. Prior research has explored college students' perspectives on social class allyship (Bettencourt, 2020), this finding provides the perspective of how institutional agents remain mindful to acknowledge and value potential social class identity differences given the implications it can have on fostering trust across the coaching experience.

6.3 Alignment and Contributions to Validation Theory

Laura Rendón introduced validation theory with applicability to outlining how institutional agents can take a more proactive role in promoting FGLI student success. Validation is defined as the "intentional, proactive, affirmation of students by in- and out-of-class agents (e.g., faculty, peers, academic affairs staff, family members) in order to validate students as generators of knowledge and as valued members of the college learning community and foster personal development and social adjustment (Rendón-Linares & Munoz, 2011, p. 12)". Rendón

(1994) outlined six elements of validation. The first element places onus on institutional agents to initiate contact with students and proactively offer support and encouragement. Secondly, validation is present when, "students feel capable of learning; they experience a feeling of self-worth and feel that they, and everything that they bring to the college experience, are accepted and recognized as valuable" (Rendón, 1994, p. 44). Third, Rendón declared validation as a prerequisite for student development. The fourth element recognizes the various contexts where validation may occur (e.g., in- class; off-campus). Fifth, Rendón (1994) asserted validation is a continuous developmental process rather than an outcome. Finally, Rendón recommended validation is especially important early in the first year (e.g., first semester).

I found several experiences and processes described by Terrace Promise Scholars and success coaches that align with and provide additional context to Rendón's theory of validation. Success coaches offered tangible examples of proactive outreach related to students' needs while Scholars identified learning and being recognized as a "whole person" as key outcomes of their coaching experience. These examples align with the first and second elements of validation theory. Terrace Promise Scholars addressed the various contexts through which they experienced coaching and subsequent validation (e.g., seminar courses, individual meetings, email communication) which supports Rendón's fourth claim of validation's presence across multiple contexts. This finding offers a crucial extension to original conceptions of success coaching being isolated to one-on-one meetings and encompasses additional domains where Scholars are able to learn, develop, and foster meaningful relationships. Study findings also align with the third and fifth elements of validation related to development. In Chapter five, second-year Scholar Rose's illustration is an example of how development is a process of validation within success coaching (Figure 4). Rose described the process of validation in the ways her coach

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affirmed and supported her development and maturation as she transitioned into her second-year at Terrace University after being on academic notice her first-year. Although Scholars did not explicitly indicate their experiences as "validating" their description and examples align with each of the six essential elements of validation outlined by Rendón.

In addition to outlining six elements of validation, Rendón (1994) identified two types of validation: academic and interpersonal. Academic validation occurs when in- and out-of-class agents take action to assist students to "trust their innate capacity to learn and to acquire confidence in being a college student" (Rendón, 1994, p. 40). Research participants' descriptions of navigating academic notice are exemplary examples of academic validation within success coaching. Success coaches approached academic notice as an opportunity to provide additional targeted support to Scholars and validate their ability to return to good academic standing. Alternatively, Rendón described interpersonal validation encompassing interactions with in- and out-of-class agents, activities, and environments that acknowledge and celebrate the students' social and cultural traditions; thereby, fostering students' "personal and social adjustment" (Rendón, 1994, p.42). Unlike academic validation, Rendón does not offer explanations of how interpersonal validation may manifest within student interactions. This study offers tangible examples of the process of interpersonal validation from the viewpoint of Terrace Promise Scholars as well as success coaches. Specifically, the Terrace Promise success coaching model nuances seven domains though which institutional agents can both act and reflect on as it relates to fostering interpersonal validation among FGLI students.

The Terrace Promise coaching model highlights three primary domains in which interpersonal validation occurs within success coaching. The model showcases how relationships (Relational), a holistic approach to support (Holistic), and the coach's knowledge of institutional

resources (Knowledge), operate independently and synergistically towards fostering a sense of validation with success coaching. In Chapter 4 success coaches described how each of the three primary domains are woven throughout their coaching practice. Terrace Promise Scholars offered various examples that reinforced the significance of the Relational, Holistic, and Knowledge pillars contributing to a sense of validation among FGLI Terrace Promise Scholars. Moreover, Terrace Promise Scholars described disconcerted experiences throughout coaching that reinforced the importance of each pillar, yet described how moments of tension and invalidation arose throughout their experience (e.g., frequent staff turnover; smooth sailing façade). The model offers key contributions to understanding interpersonal validation as the interconnected process of affirming relational components, knowledge of resources and institutional landscape, holistic investment in Scholars experiences,

6.3.1 Centering Trust

This study offers new insights into leveraging trust as a primary mechanism towards strengthening interpersonal validation and setting the context for fostering a sense of validation among FGLI Scholars through coaching. Trust was the most salient mechanism across all research participants and therefore was placed at the center of the Terrace Promise Success Coaching Model towards fostering a sense of validation (See Figure 6). When theorizing about validation theory, Rendón identified proactive outreach, development, and affirmation of students' capacity for success as mechanisms towards validation (Rendón, 1994). However, trust was not exclusively described as a component of interpersonal validation nor validation theory writ large. Therefore, findings from this study extend conceptualizations of a critical mechanism that FGLI Scholars and success coaches believed positively contributed to interpersonal validation and fostering a sense of validation within success coaching: trust.

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As aspects of trust emerged as a focal point for fostering validation within success coaching, I identified three key behaviors and perspectives that contributed to building trust as an outcome and process within the coaching experience. The first behavior I identified contributing to trust was demonstrations of care. Terrace Promise focus group participants consistently described their coaches' ability to have conversations that were timely and important to their needs rather than focused solely on academics or routine meeting questions. Scholars described this level of care as one of the primary mechanisms contributing to not only coaching relationship but building trust within the coaching experience. This suggests that as FGLI Scholars recognized that their coach cared and was invested in offering support beyond their academic success, they felt a sense of validation and increased trust in their coach's commitment to their overall success. As a result, Scholars described feeling an increased sense of confidence and comfortability asking for their coaches' assistance and trusting that their coach would not judge them for their experiences and was available to be a resource to navigate the challenges as well as celebrate their successes. These demonstrations from success coaches contributed to building trust as Scholars began to see their coach as reliable, non-judgmental, and a dependable resource for their college experience.

Second, I discovered trust was highly influenced by Terrace Promise coaches' espoused coaching philosophies. In chapter four I outlined common coaching philosophies and approaches among Terrace Promise success coaches (e.g., "Peerson-First"; "Understanding their Why"; See the Big Picture"). Coaches who participated in the study described the importance of leveraging asset-based, humanizing approaches within their coaching practice to simultaneously establish rapport and strengthen trust during their exchanges with Scholars. I found that Terrace Promise coaches' coaching philosophy positively informed their strategies and approaches that

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contributed to trust as a key mechanism of fostering a sense of validation among FGLI Scholars. Throughout Chapter five I highlighted how FGLI Terrace Promise Scholars descriptions of coaching aligned with coaches expressed philosophies (e.g., "they take the time to get to know me as an individual"; "they help me see the bigger picture"). This finding place emphasis on the importance of connecting expressed philosophies to daily practice. Within the Terrace Promise context, this demonstration of trust stemmed from the coaches' implicit focus on humanizing the Scholars experience to establish themselves as trustworthy, reliable, and dependable. More importantly Manifestation of trust often included an element of time (e.g., additional meetings/interactions; consistently attending coaching meetings) for which coaches were had to remain mindful of the approaches and strategies individual Scholars responded which solidified the coaching relationship and strengthen trust.

Third, I noted the frequency of interactions between coach and coachees created opportunities to reinforce trust. FGLI Terrace Promise Scholars articulated how the process of trust manifested during individual one-on-one meetings and extended to interactions with their success coach during required seminar courses and email exchanges. This finding suggest that fostering validation through trust is not an isolated nor automatic process that can be accomplished during a single meeting. Rather, trust must be reinforced across additional contexts for FGLI Scholars to buy in to the relationship. Many FGLI Scholars described positive interactions with their coach across various domains of the program as contributing to strengthening trust and reinforcing a sense of validation. Terrace Promise Scholars emphasized the importance of the frequency and consistency of meetings and the overall structure of the program which reinforced opportunities to build trust. While trust was crucial to the coaching experience and outcomes, Scholars articulated that the continuity of trust was often challenged

due to frequent staff turnover. With these considerations in mind practitioners can work towards building and sustaining trust with FGLI populations as a way to promote interpersonal validation and foster a greater sense of validation towards FGLI student success.

These key behaviors and perspectives were described most frequently as contributing to fostering trust as both an outcome and process within the coaching experience. Moreover, Terrace Promise success coaches acknowledged how these aspects were applied in tandem towards fostering interpersonal validation and promoting FGLI Scholars success.

Finally, this study makes considerable contributions to conceptualizing interpersonal validation. Rendón (1994) posited validation should occur early in the college experience, however, included no discussion of if and how validating experiences manifest and are sustained throughout subsequent years of the college experience. Findings from this study give additional context to understanding processes essential to interpersonal validation among FGLI Scholars across the undergraduate life cycle. While coaching is considered and individualized support service, I found many fourth-year Scholars described trust as a validating approach similar to their first-year program counterparts. Rendón's (1994) claims that validation is important early in the college experience, however, findings from this study suggest validation is not exclusive to the first- and or second-year of college, but is valued by FGLI Scholars at various times throughout their educational journey. Based on these findings, institutional agents could benefit from assessing their relationships with FGLI students beyond the first- and second-year to actively work to continuously infuse aspects of trust during interactions with more advanced FGLI Scholars including relatability, listening, and a non-judgmental demeanor as a means to bolster FGLI student success beyond the first-year.

6.4 Limitations of Terrace Promise Coaching Model

In addition to identifying the model and context of success coaching within Terrace Promise, I discovered several structural and practical limitations of the coaching model and context that implicated Scholars' coaching experience. Findings suggest the frequency of coaching staff turnover and "smooth sailing façade" had a negative consequence on the continuity of the relational pillar of coaching. Throughout the focus groups, Scholars highlighted several structural and practical challenges within the coaching model that warrant further investigation.

6.4.1 Repetition Across Coaching Context

Terrace Promise success coaches had a difficult time describing or naming exact steps or sequences they took when coaching Scholars due to their belief that every student is different. As a result, I leaned heavily on the commonalities Terrace Promise Scholars shared from their experiences with the coaching model. While Scholars appreciated the holistic and casual approach Terrace Promise success coaches used across the coaching context and believed this to be an asset to their coaching experience and personal outcomes. For example, Terrace Promise Scholars made frequent mention of increased learning and knowledge acquisition as part of their coaching experience. These findings support prior research results suggesting positive effects of coaching on student learning (Field et.al, 2010; Parker et al., 2011).

Although Terrace Promise Scholars described learning as a positive outcome of their success coaching experience across the program, some Scholars expressed concern regarding overlap of content during these various touch points of the program. Summer, a second-year Scholar, highlighted repetition between individual coaching meetings, weekly emails, and the first-year seminar course. Although Summer perceived value in the information shared across

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these coaching domains, she believed the first-year course could have been condensed into modules rather than a semester-long course. Summer's suggestion highlights how Terrace Promise programmatic structure is intentionally designed to ensure Scholars receive information and knowledge about resources via multiple avenues. This programmatic approach potentially increases Scholars' awareness of opportunities for engagement, deadlines, and support from their coach. Perhaps repetition across Terrace Promise's coaching context is intentionally designed to create additional opportunities to support and validate Scholars' capacity for success. Alternatively, Summer's perception of repetition across coaching could be interpreted as multiple touch points for success coaches to validate students' knowing and capacity for success. When viewed through a lens of validation, the repetition across coaching aligns with third element of validation outlined by Rendón-Linares & Muñoz (2011) which states, "…when students are validated on a consistent basis, they are more likely to feel confident about themselves and their ability to learn and get involved in college life (pg. 18)." The repetition noted across Terrace Promise coaching model emphasizes that validation is not a one-time occurrence that occurs in one setting within the coaching experience, but rather, validation in this context is continual and multidimensional beyond the first-year.

6.4.2 Scholar Sense of Community

Coaching is broadly defined as "partnering with individuals in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential" (International Coach Federation, 2019, para 1). While the practice of coaching places high emphasis on success coaches meeting students' individual needs, Terrace Promise Scholars frequently noted the lack of community amongst their Terrace Promise coaching experience. Scholars referenced the first-year seminar course was an opportunity to met other Scholars in the

program; however, noted the perceived community disbanded once the course ended. Many interpreted the lack of community with other Scholars as a missed opportunity to sustain validation across the model.

Success coaches acknowledged that the lack of community building activities was a limitation of the program particularly over the past three years for Scholars enrolled during pandemic gathering restrictions. The annual study abroad tour was viewed as an opportunity for Scholars to foster community across the program; however, was postponed for two years due to COVID-19 travel restrictions. Moreover, the annual study abroad tour has limited capacity to serve the nearly 1,200 Terrace Promise Scholars. During data collection, program staff hosted one Terrace Promise Scholar gathering; however, additional opportunities to engage Scholars and foster community across program participants and success coaches would further understanding about fostering and sustaining validation beyond individual interactions.

6.4.3 Addressing Organizational Change

The Terrace Promise Coaching model for fostering validation provides practitioners with seven components to consider towards fostering interpersonal validation among FGLI college students. Prior research supports validation as a crucial component towards promoting FGLI success and outlined proactive outreach and relationship building as a key mechanism towards fostering validating experiences (Rendón-Linares & Munoz, 2011). The Terrace Promise success coaching model identifies additional mechanisms success coaches leveraged directly or indirectly to validate FGLI Scholars capacity for success. The seven components highlighted within the model are representative of approaches institutional agents can consider during interactions with FGLI Scholars and all students towards creating validating environments and experiences.

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Findings from this exemplary case study are not intended to be exhaustive, but rather, provide insight into how institutional agents contribute to student success in validating ways. Further research on this topic can reinforce or expand components identified within the model. While the model is useful towards situating the role of institutional agents in FGLI student success, the model does not contend with addressing necessary organizational changes that create barriers and challenges for FGLI and other marginalized student populations to be successful at Terrace University. Stated another way, the model is not a solution to be used in lieu of organizational redesign, restructuring, or policy changes necessary within higher education institutions to promoting FGLI student success. Instead, the model offers a framework for how institutional agents to consider as they work to support FGLI students in validating ways despite delayed infrastructural changes.

6.5 Implications & Recommendations

6.5.1 Practical Implications

Findings from this study have important implications for practitioners. A recent surge of success coaching positions across higher education indicates a value in this line of work towards promoting student success- and particularly among FGLI populations. Tending to holistic student well-being to ensure students perform well academically, but also are able to thrive personally is a central premise of validation theory and the Terrace Promise success coaching model. Moreover, student success is not the sole responsibility of students. Rather, institutional agents must identify and reflect on how their philosophies, actions, approaches, and role responsibilities work independently and interdependently to validate FGLI students through challenges and successes as they develop, persist, and ultimately graduate. I argue that Terrace Promise's success coaching model can be applied to future training, discussions, and campus forums

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pertaining to promoting FGLI student success. Practitioners may find these findings helpful as they reflect on and seek to reform their current practice. For example, in the present study, Terrace Promise Scholars recommended Terrace University academic advisors consider incorporating a coaching model and approach into the academic advising experience to improve advising relationships, outcomes, and usefulness of the advising experience. Findings from this study established a framework that higher education administrators, practitioners, and researchers of validation may find useful towards understanding and contextualizing validating approaches across the higher education enterprise and as well as identifying which practice may benefit from student-centered redesign efforts.

This study offers insights into real challenges for student success administrators; namely, those responsible for hiring, training, and retaining success coaches. Conversations with the program director highlight how the hiring process places emphasis on intuition about the applicant's dedication to asset-based perspectives, rapport building, inclusion, and self-awareness. While hiring manger are not able to ascertain the extent to which candidates possess and are able to develop these qualities, a large majority of on the job training I observed during staff meetings centered on these aspects. A potential consequence of constant on-the-job training within fast pace, high touch roles such as success coaching is the potential for role ambiguity and employee uncertainty which may contribute to stress, fatigue, and dissatisfaction or attrition. Acknowledging that many success coaching positions are entry level, on average coaches within this context were retained an average two years. During the time of study, three success coaches resigned to an advanced degree or assume a mid-level career role.

As organizations leaders set goals related to student success, they must remain cognizant of the interwoven process of promoting student success and achieving institutional retention

metrics- particularly within roles that place emphasis on relationship building as a mean to bolster student retention. One consideration towards this challenge is adopting a programmatic ethos of validation. This notion moves beyond sole reliance on one coach to support Scholars, but rather an entire suit of services students can refer to in order to successfully navigate their college experience. This ensures students success is not personal dependent, but rather, and that Scholars are able to successfully navigate, identify, and access support personnel across the institution.

Individuals outside the higher education context may also find these findings helpful in their work with supporting first-generation, low-income student populations. High school guidance counselors, college admission coaches, and other community mentors possess the potential to validate (or invalidate) a learner's capacity for success. This model and validation theory can be used as a guide and reflective tool during training and evaluations to establish a focus on student-centered support, self-awareness, and relationship building. Personnel within this context may find that validation manifest in different or similar ways to higher education and highlight mechanisms of focus.

6.5.2 Policy Implications

Finally, this study has important implications related to forthcoming changes to institutional classifications and rankings. The Carnegie Classifications are a national benchmarking tool for categorizing and describing colleges and universities across the United States. Forthcoming modifications to the Carnegie Classifications seek to modernize measures of institutional classification beyond the highest degree awarded and take into consideration how institutions accelerate education and career opportunities for students. In 2025, the Carnegie Classifications will include a new "Social and Economic Mobility Classification" intended to

give the public more information about the ways institutions are contributing to the long-term success of all learners. This new category will classify institutions by a variety of relevant student characteristics (e.g., percent first-generation; percent low-income) and learner outcomes (e.g., persistence; graduation; Riskind & Cetrulo, 2023). This means that institutions will be classified by their ability to recruit, retain, and graduate FGLI populations. Findings from this study speak directly to opportunities to improve FGLI retention beyond relying on implementing costly interventions- which may be a duplication of efforts across campus. Instead, this study offers insights and recommendations into how institutions can prioritize the role of institutional agents in promoting FGLI retention and graduation via a lens of validation. Mechanisms identified within this study can serve as a reference for identifying, scaling, and assessing higher education environments for validation and contribution to student persistence and graduation.

This study will prove to be useful to institutional leaders concerned with institutional rankings. Recent changes to the U.S. News and World Report institutional ranking metric highlight an .5% increase to the percentage weight Pell-eligible graduation rates and graduation performance contribute to an institution's overall ranking score (from 2.5% to 3% respectively; Morse & Brooks, 2023). The newest edition to the 2024 ranking score was first-generation graduation performance and graduation rates comprising five percent points of an institution's overall ranking score (Morse & Brooks, 2023). Incorporating low-income and first-generation population performance and graduation metrics to longstanding institutional classification and ranking metric suggests that institutional leaders would benefit from concerted efforts to identify and scale opportunities for promoting FGLI student success. Findings from this study offer a framework for institutional leaders to consider validation theory as they develop, implement, and

assess academic and co-curricular interventions and approaches to bolster first-generation and low-income student outcomes related to institutional key performance indicators.

6.5.3 *Future Research*

Numerous approaches could be taken to further explore the nature of coaching and validation among FGLI Scholars. After conducting this study, I am most interested to see if the components I identified as salient to Terrace Promise coaching model are similar or related to other four-year comprehensive college transition program coaching models. I would be interested to conduct a similar case study within a different college transition program that offered four-year success coaching to ascertain if and how validation contributes to FGLI Scholars coaching experience.

I made several methodological choices within the present study, that if amended may lend additional insights into the nature of coaching. For example, the present case study was conducted in a cross-sectional fashion. Future researchers may consider carrying out a longitudinal study in order to interpret the nature of coaching through a validating framework. Within the present study, I leveraged focus groups with Terrace Promise Scholars across different classifications to gain a more robust understanding of the nature of coaching. Future researchers may find it more appropriate to conduct a series of individual interviews and leverage narrative inquiry methodology to explore the validating and invalidating components of coaching from the perspective of success coaches as well as FGLI Scholars.

Another limitation of the present study is that Terrace Promise Scholar findings were presented in the aggregate rather than disaggregated by "first-generation" only, "low-income" only, or both "first-generation and low-income". At the onset of this study, I intended to identify how FGLI Scholars experienced coaching. While all focus group participants meet income

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eligibility criteria (e.g., classified as "low-income), only half of focus group participants self-identified as a first-generation college student (n=22). While analyzing focus group data through a validation framework, I found Scholars described coaching successes and challenges in similar ways irrespective of their status as a first-generation college student. Therefore, I decided to broaden the population of focus in order to include sentiments from Terrace Promise Scholars who identified as first-generation and low-income as well as those who identified only as low-income. Researchers seeking to highlight specifically how first-generation, low-income Scholars' experience coaching may find it beneficial to examine this population in isolation in future studies.

Lastly, I would also be interested to understand the mechanisms of validation from the perspectives of different student populations and different institutional agents. According to institutional data, Black/African American undergraduates at Terrace University have lower degree completion rates compared to their undergraduate counterparts. Given the primary role of academic advisors is to help students understand and meet degree requirements, it would be interesting to explore what are Terrace University academic advisors approaches to validating Black/African American students? How do Black/African American students experience academic advising in validating or invalidating ways? Research of this kind would confirm, challenge, or extend findings presented in the current study related to how institutional agent's efforts contribute to a sense of validation and advance overall student success efforts.

6.6 Conclusion

As the number of students from first-generation and low-income backgrounds enrolled in higher education. This study leveraged Rendón's (1994) validation theory as a framework to interpret coaching approaches and experiences. Given the dearth of theorizing throughout the

coaching in higher education literature, future researchers may find the tenants of validation theory useful as they identify and make sense of mechanisms within the coaching process and experience.

Finally, findings from this exemplary case study produced seven interconnected components of coaching essential for practitioners fostering a sense of validation among FGLI Scholars within a college transition program: Relational, Holistic, Knowledge, Allyship, Navigating Circumstance, Coaching tone and delivery, and Trust. Findings nuance original conceptions of interpersonal validation presented by Rendón and give practitioners insight into how their day-to-day interactions, approaches, and philosophies contribute positively or negatively to FGLI student success. These findings are timely and relevant as institutions look to identify and understand processes that contribute to FGLI student success. When paired with institutional structural and policy reform, findings from this study are more likely to bolster and sustain FGLI student success outcomes and increase overall institutional key performance indicators.

Appendices

Appendix A: Staff Meeting Observation Notes

Date of Observation	Location of Observation	Beginning Time	Ending Time

Goal of Meeting & Topics discussed:

Documents/Resources shared during the meeting:

Observational Jottings/Note

    How many people are in attendance

    Verbal and nonverbal communication

    Interactions between attendees

    Others observations

Appendix B: Program Staff Consent Form

1. KEY INFORMATION ABOUT THE RESEARCHERS AND THIS STUDY

Study title: Exploring the Nature of Success Coaching within a College Success Program
Principal Investigator: Nicole J. Wilson, PhD Candidate, University of Michigan
Faculty Advisor: Rosemary J. Perez, PhD, Associate Professor, University of Michigan
You are invited to take part in a research study. This form contains information that will help you decide whether to join the study. Taking part in this research project is voluntary. You do not have to participate and you can stop at any time. Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research project.

2. PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY

To date, several programmatic elements of college success programs remain understudied, mainly success coaching. The research site provides individualized success coaching; however, exploration of delivering success coaching to low-income, first-generation populations remains sparse throughout the higher education literature. This study is designed to better understand the nature of coaching within the research site particularly as it relates to coaching low-income, first-generation program participants.

3. INFORMATION ABOUT STUDY PARTICIPATION

3.1 Who can participate in this study?
This portion of the study is open to full-time program staff members (i.e., director, success coach) employed during the time of data collection.

3.2 What will happen to me in this study?
This study includes interviews as well as observations of staff team meetings. Research activities associated with this study will occur in-person at the research site (e.g., staff member office) or virtually via a designated video- conferencing platform. Participants will receive an invitation to participate in the research study, review and sign the enclosed consent forms, and communicate with the researcher a date and time that works best to conduct the interview.

3.3 How much of my time will be needed to take part in this study?
Participants will be asked to partake in one (1) 60-minute interview as part of this study. Observations of staff team meetings will occur during normal scheduled business hours and do not require additional time commitments from participants.

4. INFORMATION ABOUT STUDY RISKS AND BENEFITS

4.1 What risks will I face by taking part in the study? What will the researchers do to protect me against these risks?

There are no known or expected physical, psychological, or legal risks associated with this study; however, breach of confidentiality (i.e., informational risk) is a potential risk in all research.

Because this study collects information about you (e.g., how you do your job), one of the risks of this research is a loss of confidentiality. Please note you do not have to answer any interview questions you do not want to answer. The researchers will try to minimize these risks by de-identified your name or other information that can directly identify you and reporting findings in the aggregate (e.g., Success coaches). See Section 8 of this document for more information on how the principal investigator will protect your confidentiality and privacy

4.2 How could I benefit if I take part in this study? How could others benefit?
You may not receive any personal benefits from being in this study. However, others may benefit from the knowledge gained from this study.

5. ENDING THE STUDY

5.1 If I want to stop participating in the study, what should I do?
You are free to leave the study at any time. If you leave the study before it is finished, there will be no penalty to you. If you decide to leave the study before it is finished, please tell one of the persons listed in Section 9. "Contact Information". If you choose to tell the researchers why you are leaving the study, your reasons may be kept as part of the study record. The researcher will keep the information collected about you for the research unless you ask for it to be deleted. If the researcher has already used your information in a research analysis it will not be possible to remove your information.

6. FINANCIAL INFORMATION

6.1 Will I be paid or given anything for taking part in this study?
Staff participants will not receive financial compensation for their participation in this study. Instead, the researchers will provide all program staff- including those who may have withdrawn prior to the end of the study- with a comprehensive summary of findings produced from the study.

7. PROTECTING AND SHARING RESEARCH INFORMATION

7.1 How will the researchers protect my information?
Participant records for this study will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by the law. Participants will be assigned a pseudonym, which will be used throughout the study. Participant responses will be saved on a password-protected Google Drive folder. If handwritten notes are taken, they will be saved in a locked physical file in the investigator's workspace. The interview audio recordings, de-identified data, and transcripts will be retained for 3 years and then destroyed.

7.2 Who will have access to my research records?
The investigator will be the only one with access to the data. There are reasons why information about you may be used or seen by others during or after this study. For example, university, government officials, study sponsors or funders, auditors, and/or the Institutional Review Board (IRB) may need the information to make sure that the study is done in a safe and proper manner.

7.3 What will happen to the information collected in this study?
We will keep the information we collect about you during the research for future research projects. Your name and other information that can directly identify you will be stored securely and separately from the research information collected from you. I will not keep your name or other information that can identify you directly. The results of this study could be published in an article or presentation but will not include any information that would let others know who you are.

7.4 Will my information be used for future research or shared with others?
I may use or share your research information for future research studies. If I share your information with other researchers it will be de-identified, which means that it will not contain your name or other information that can directly identify you. This research may be similar to this study or completely different. We will not ask for your additional informed consent for these studies.

8. CONTACT INFORMATION

Who can I contact about this study?

Please contact the researcher listed below to:
- Obtain more information about the study
- Ask a question about the study procedures
- Report an illness, injury, or other problem (you may also need to tell your regular doctors)
- Leave the study before it is finished
- Express a concern about the study

Principal Investigator: Nicole J. Wilson
Email: nicolejw@umich.edu

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or wish to obtain information, ask questions or discuss any concerns about this study with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact the following:

     University of Michigan
     Health Sciences and Behavioral Sciences Institutional Review Board (IRB-HSBS)
     2800 Plymouth Road
     Building 520, Room 1169Ann Arbor, MI 48109-2800
     Telephone: 734-936-0933 or toll free (866) 936-0933
     Fax: 734-936-1852
     E-mail: irbhsbs@umich.edu

You can also contact the University of Michigan Compliance Hotline at 1-866-990-0111.

9. CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. I will give you a copy of this document for your records and I will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign

this document, you can contact the principal investigator using the information in Section 9 provided above.

I understand what the study is about and my questions so far have been answered. I agree to take part in this study.

Print Legal Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date of Signature (mm/dd/yy): _____

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10. Optional Consent

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Consent to use audio recordings for purposes of this research.
This study involves audio recordings. If you do not agree to be audio recorded, you can still take part in the study.

_____ Yes, I agree to be audio recorded.

_____ No, I do not agree to be audio recorded.

Print Legal Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date of Signature (mm/dd/yy): _____

Consent to be Contacted for Participation in Future Research

Researchers may wish to keep your contact information to invite you to be in future research projects that may be similar to or completely different from this research project.

_____ Yes, I agree for the researchers to contact me for future research projects.

_____ No, I do not agree for the researchers to contact me for future research projects.

Appendix C: Success Coach Interview Protocol

Opening
Thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview with me today. I know you have a busy schedule so this interview will not exceed 60 minutes. Does that still work for you?
This interview is a part of a case study designed to understand the nature of coaching within Terrace Promise. I am especially interested in understanding how you define coaching and experiences you've had as a success coach. As mentioned in the consent form, your participation in this interview is voluntary and you are welcome to skip any question asked or stop the interview at any time. Information gathered during this interview will be used to expand what is known about coaching low-income and first-generation student populations. If we record today's interview, I would be the only person with access to the recording. I will save the recording on a password-protected Google Drive folder. I will destroy the recording after 3 years.
Do you have any questions before we begin?

Setting the Stage: Overview of Success Coach Role
1. I'd like to begin our conversation by talking about how you learned about the position and what attracted you to the role?
2. How would you describe/define your role to someone who is unfamiliar with success coaching?
    1. What's your personal philosophy of coaching?
3. How [did you learn/ are you learning] to become a success coach? What types of training, knowledge is provided?
4. How might your personal experience/background influence how you coach?
5. Is there anything else you think is important for me to know about the role of a success coach before we move on to our discussion of coaching sessions?

Experience Coaching Low-Income, First-Generation Students
1. I know each coaching session is different, but can you walk me through what occurs during a "typical" coaching session
2. What are some common concerns or issues you "coach" Scholars through?
    1. How might these issues/concerns vary by classification?
2. What strategies do you find yourself using during coaching sessions?
3. Tell me about a time you had to support a student through a challenging situation.
    1. What strategies did you rely on?
2. I'm curious to know your thoughts on why students return to coaching?
3. What else do you think is important for people to know about coaching low-income, first generation students towards success?

Closing Comments
Thank you so much for interviewing with me today! Everything you have shared has been helpful. May I follow up with you via email if I have any questions?

Appendix D: Scholar Recruitment Emails

<u>Recruitment Email</u>
Subject Line: Earn $30 gift card for talking about your coaching experience

Dear Terrace Promise Scholar,

We want to hear from you! Our staff is dedicated to your success and we're always seeking ways to make sure we're *keeping our promise* to you! You are invited to participate in a 90-minute focus group session. Your comments will help the Terrace Promise team understand what is working and potential areas for improving your experience and those of future Scholars.

 During the session you and other Terrace Promise Scholars will have the opportunity to:
- share your experience as a Terrace Promise Scholar
- provide feedback on coaching offered by Success Coaches
- Recommend additional types of supports needed to support current and future Terrace Promise Scholars

Follow this qualtrics link to register. The first ten Scholars to register will receive a confirmation email including the physical location of the session. As a token of appreciation for your time, **you will receive a $30 gift card.**

Participation is completely voluntary. The focus group sessions are a part of a larger study designed to understand the nature of coaching with Terrace Promise. For more information, please review the Informed Consent form found on the registration page and contact Nicole Wilson (nicolejw@umich.edu) if you have additional questions.

Thank you,

<u>Confirmation Email</u>

Dear Terrace Promise Scholar,

This calendar invite serves as confirmation of your registration for the Terrace Promise focus group session about your experience with success coaching. The session will be held on <DATE> <TIME> <LOCATION>. Please do not forward this invite.

This focus group is a part of a dissertation study titled "Exploring the Nature of Success Coaching within a College Success Program" (HUM00225830). Please review the informed

consent form prior to arriving to the session. I will also provide copies of the consent form at the beginning of the session.

Contact Nicole Wilson (nicolejw@umich.edu) if you have questions or concerns about participating in this research study.

Appendix E: Student Consent Forms

1. KEY INFORMATION ABOUT THE RESEARCHERS AND THIS STUDY

Study title: Exploring the Nature of Success Coaching within a College Success Program
Principal Investigator: Nicole J. Wilson, PhD Candidate, University of Michigan
Faculty Advisor: Rosemary J. Perez, PhD, Associate Professor, University of Michigan

You are invited to take part in a research study. This form contains information that will help you decide whether to join the study. Taking part in this research project is voluntary. You do not have to participate and you can stop at any time. Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research project.

2. PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY

To date, several programmatic elements of college transition and success programs remain understudied, mainly success coaching. The research site provides individualized success coaching; however, exploration of delivering success coaching to low-income, first-generation populations remains sparse throughout the higher education literature. This study is designed to better understand the nature of coaching within the research site particularly as it relates to coaching low-income, first-generation program participants.

3. INFORMATION ABOUT STUDY PARTICIPATION

3.1 Who can participate in this study?
This portion of the study is open all TerracePromise Scholars enrolled during the time of data collection.

3.2 What will happen to me in this study?
This study includes focus groups. During the focus group, you will have the opportunity to reflect on and share your experience with coaching alongside other Scholars. The focus group session will include a mixture of discussion and illustration to understand your experience with coaching. Research activities associated with this study will occur in-person at the research site (e.g., Terrace Promise conference room) or virtually via a designated video- conferencing platform. Participants will receive an invitation to participate in the focus group session, review and sign the consent form, and share their experiences with coaching.

3.3 How much of my time will be needed to take part in this study?
Participants will be asked to partake in one (1) 90-minute focus group session as part of this study. The date and time of these sessions will be predetermined by the researcher.

4. INFORMATION ABOUT STUDY RISKS AND BENEFITS

4.1 What risks will I face by taking part in the study? What will the researchers do to protect me against these risks?

There are no known or expected physical, psychological, or legal risks associated with this study; however, breach of confidentiality (i.e., informational risk) is a potential risk in all research. Because this study collects information about you (e.g., how you do your job), one of the risks of this research is a loss of confidentiality. Please note you do not have to answer any interview questions you do not want to answer. The researchers will try to minimize these risks by de-identified your name or other information that can directly identify you and reporting findings in the aggregate (e.g., Success coaches). See Section 8 of this document for more information on how the principal investigator will protect your confidentiality and privacy

4.2 How could I benefit if I take part in this study? How could others benefit?
You may not receive any personal benefits from being in this study. However, others may benefit from the knowledge gained from this study.

5. ENDING THE STUDY

5.1 If I want to stop participating in the study, what should I do?
You are free to leave the study at any time. If you leave the study before it is finished, there will be no penalty to you. If you decide to leave the study before it is finished, please tell one of the persons listed in Section 9. "Contact Information". If you choose to tell the researchers why you are leaving the study, your reasons may be kept as part of the study record. The researcher will keep the information collected about you for the research unless you ask for it to be deleted. If the researcher has already used your information in a research analysis it will not be possible to remove your information.

6. FINANCIAL INFORMATION

6.1 Will I be paid or given anything for taking part in this study?
Scholars who participate in the focus group will receive a $30 Amazon gift card.

7. PROTECTING AND SHARING RESEARCH INFORMATION
7.1 How will the researchers protect my information?
Participant records for this study will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by the law. Participants will be assigned a pseudonym, which will be used throughout the study. Participant responses will be saved on a password-protected Google Drive folder. If handwritten notes are taken, they will be saved in a locked physical file in the investigator's workspace. The interview audio recordings, de-identified data, and transcripts will be retained for 3 years and then destroyed.

7.2 Who will have access to my research records?
The investigator will be the only one with access to the data. There are reasons why information about you may be used or seen by others during or after this study. For example, university, government officials, study sponsors or funders, auditors, and/or the Institutional Review Board (IRB) may need the information to make sure that the study is done in a safe and proper manner.

7.3 What will happen to the information collected in this study?
We will keep the information we collect about you during the research for future research projects. Your name and other information that can directly identify you will be stored securely and separately from the research information collected from you. I will not keep your name or other information that can identify you directly. The results of this study could be published in an article or presentation but will not include any information that would let others know who you are.

7.4 Will my information be used for future research or shared with others?
I may use or share your research information for future research studies. If I share your information with other researchers it will be de-identified, which means that it will not contain your name or other information that can directly identify you. This research may be similar to this study or completely different. We will not ask for your additional informed consent for these studies.

8. CONTACT INFORMATION

Who can I contact about this study?

Please contact the researcher listed below to:
- Obtain more information about the study
- Ask a question about the study procedures
- Report an illness, injury, or other problem (you may also need to tell your regular doctors)
- Leave the study before it is finished
- Express a concern about the study

Principal Investigator: Nicole J. Wilson
Email: nicolejw@umich.edu

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or wish to obtain information, ask questions or discuss any concerns about this study with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact the following:

    University of Michigan
    Health Sciences and Behavioral Sciences Institutional Review Board (IRB-HSBS)
    2800 Plymouth Road
    Building 520, Room 1169Ann Arbor, MI 48109-2800
    Telephone: 734-936-0933 or toll free (866) 936-0933
    Fax: 734-936-1852
    E-mail: irbhsbs@umich.edu

You can also contact the University of Michigan Compliance Hotline at 1-866-990-0111.

9. CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. I will give you a copy of this document for your records and I will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the principal investigator using the information in Section 9 provided above.

I understand what the study is about and my questions so far have been answered. I agree to take part in this study.

Print Legal Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date of Signature (mm/dd/yy): _____

<div align="center">

10. Optional Consent

</div>

Consent to use audio recordings for purposes of this research.
This study involves audio recordings. If you do not agree to be audio recorded, you can still take part in the study.

_____ Yes, I agree to be audio recorded.

_____ No, I do not agree to be audio recorded.

Print Legal Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date of Signature (mm/dd/yy): _____

Consent to be Contacted for Participation in Future Research

Researchers may wish to keep your contact information to invite you to be in future research projects that may be similar to or completely different from this research project.

_____ Yes, I agree for the researchers to contact me for future research projects.

_____ No, I do not agree for the researchers to contact me for future research projects.

Contact Information

Name: _____

Pronouns: _____

Campus Address: _____

Year/Classification: _____

Major(s):_____

Email: _____

Pseudonym

Please come up with a pseudonym (false name) that I may use if I quote you in the presentation

or publication. Only a first name is needed _____

Demographic Information

Respond to the extent you are comfortable. How would you describe yourself with regards to the

following identities:

Racial Identity: _____

Ethnicity: _____

Nationality: _____

Gender Identity: _____

Sexual Orientation: _____

Religious Orientation: _____

Age: _____

Did your parent(s)/guardian(s) complete a four-year college degree?   Yes   No

Other: _____

_____

Appendix F: Scholars Focus Group Protocol

<u>Opening</u>

Thanks for agreeing to join tonight's focus group session regarding your experiences with the Terrace Promise program. My name is Nicole Wilson and I am the moderator for tonight's discussion. Tonight's focus group is designed to encourage you to share your true thoughts, feelings, and experiences with success coaching offered through Terrace Promise.

I'll review a few logistics before we begin. As mentioned in the consent form, your participation in this focus group is voluntary and you are welcome to skip any question asked tonight or discontinue your participation in the study at any time. I appreciate your honest feedback regarding both positive and negative experiences in the program as well as with coaching. Your participation in tonight's focus group will help the Terrace Promise staff understand what's working and areas they may need to improve upon.

This session will be recorded. Let's try our best not to interrupt or speak over one another and limit any distractions that might prevent you and/or others from focusing on the questions. I encourage you to share your experience and thoughts with each other. There are no right or wrong answers, rather differences in opinions which are valued in this space. All identifiable information will be stripped from the final version of this transcript and none of your comments will be traced back to you. Rather, they will be presented in aggregate when shared in future reports. Being respectful of your time, this session should not exceed 90 minutes. As a token of appreciation, you will receive a $30 gift card for your participation this evening.

What questions might you have before we get started?

<u>Context Setting: Introductions and Overall Impressions of Terrace Promise</u>

1. To begin, let's go around and share our names, major, and <u>favorite</u> components of Terrace Promise and why.
    1. If you need to see a list of services Terrace Promise offers please refer to the image on the screen (Figure 1).
2. Of the services listed, which would you say have <u>helped you the most</u> as you navigate your college experience?
3. What types of resources would you recommend/like to see included that are not currently offered?

Thanks for sharing your feedback on the overall program. For our next activity we will have an interactive discussion about your various experiences with the coaching component of Terrace Promise. In the center of the table I've provided some paper and writing utensils. I'd like us to take the next eight minutes to draw your current path through college highlighting where coaching fits into that path.
[Pause for Scholar Illustration]

Describing Coaching
1. Would anyone like to describe their diagram (in part or whole) to the group?
2. I'm interested to know how you would describe coaching to someone who isn't familiar with it? Take 60 seconds to write three words on our diagram that come to mind when you think about your coaching experience.
    a. Would anyone want to share their three words and why they chose them?
3. In your experience, how is coaching similar or different from academic advising or peer mentoring offered at Purdue?

Coaching Relationship
Let's shift gears and focus on the relationship with your assigned coach.
1. Would anyone like to share what their expectations of coaching were prior to the first meeting?
2. Curious to know what aspects help you feel connected/comfortable with your coach?
3. What makes you feel disconnected or prevents you from establishing a relationship with your coach?
4. Looking back at your diagram, can you draw a star/asterisk next to where you felt like your coach affirmed or supported you throughout your college experience.
    a. Does anyone want to share their experience and what they recall their coach saying/doing?
5. Looking back at your diagram, please draw an "X" along your journey where your coach was not as helpful as you had anticipated?
    a. What do you think created challenges for your coach to help you effectively?

General Coaching Experience
1. What areas of your college experience did you feel stuck and like coaching could not support you?
2. What encourages/motivates you to come back to see your coach?
3. Why (if at all) do you think coaching is important?
4. Would you recommend coaching to other students at Purdue? If so, are there certain student groups you'd recommend it to/for?
5. Is there anything you wanted to share or add to your diagram that we didn't discuss tonight?

Closing
Thanks for taking the time to share your thoughts, reflections, and recommendations for Terrace Promise. Your feedback is appreciated. As we wrap up please take a few moments to fill out the demographic sheet making sure to include your campus address in order to receive your $30 gift card. Thanks!

Appendix G: Success Coaches Initial Coding

Academic notice
Academic separation
Accessibility to students
Accountability
Action-oriented goals
Active listening
Additional support
Advice
Advice, opinion, help, or listen
Affirm
Age similarities
Anchoring programmatic components to coaching
Answering questions
Anti-deficit approach
Appreciative advising
Being an ally
Being real
Benefits of coaching
Bid for connection
Big picture
Blunt
Building rapport
Burnout
Campus partners
Campus resource referral
Coaching Scholars who are doing academically well
Care
Challenges
Coach prior education/career
Coach training/professional development

Coaches' personal background
Coaching approach
Coaching caseload
Coaching checklist
Coaching conversations
Coaching is a mindset
Coaching meeting frequency
Coaching tone
Codependency
Colleague comradery
College adjustment
Comfortable physical meeting space
Common Scholar concerns
Connection with Scholars
Cultural Wealth
Customizing coaching to students needs
Description of coaching
Differentiating coaching from other support services
Empower
Enlightenment
Financial literacy
First-year seminar course
Focus on immediate concern
Follow up
Fourth-year seminar course
General description of coaching program
Getting students to open up
Goal-oriented meeting

Guide Scholars through college
Healthy work-life balance
Helping Scholars negotiate identity
Hide my personal background
Holistic
Humanizing
Humble yourself
Impact of COVID 19
Include
Individuality
Initial coaching meeting
Inquiry form
Institutional aid
Invalidating campus experiences
Investment
Learning style
Managing meeting time
Mandatory reporter
Meeting format
Meeting notes
Meeting preparation
Mental health
Modifying coaching approach
Motivation
Navigating life
Navigation
Negotiating personal identity differences
Normalize challenges
Not just another number
Organic

Personal boundaries
Personal experience as a
Scholar
Perspectives
Philosophy of coaching
Poor campus partner triage
Position appeal
Prioritizing
Proactive
Program mission
Program assessment
Program demographics
Program documents
Program history
Program structure
Progress update
Progression of coaching
relationship
Purpose of coaching

Questions
Relate to Scholars
Relationship building
Remain relevant
Reassurance
Resources
Resource utilization
Role boundaries
Role boundary violation
Role of coach
Role qualifications
Scholar development
Scholar outreach
Self-authored
Self-confidence
Sense of belonging
Share personal information
Social class embarrassment
Space to sit and exist

Student advocacy
Scholar-led conversation
Supervision
Support
Support System
Time management
Trust
Tuition coverage
Understanding Scholars'
why
Unpredictable
Validation
Vent
Wellness
Why Scholars continue to

use coaching

Appendix H: Scholar Focus Group In Vivo and Structured Coding

General Descriptions of Success Coaching

Accountability	Guidance	Relatable
Active listener	Happy	Relationship
Advice	Helpful	Reliable
Advocacy	Honest	Relieve
Adulting	Hope	Repetitive
Available	Important	Resourceful
Beneficial	Inconsistent	Routine
Caring	Invested	Safe space
Check-Up	Knowledgeable	Stable
Clarity	Keep on track	Strength
Consistent	Leadership	Success
Cathartic	Loyalty	Supportive
Casual	Mentor	Thoughtful
Dedicated	Navigator	Tough-love
Empathetic	Non-judgmental	Transparent
Encouragement	Personable	Trust
Excited	Personalized	Trustworthy
Friend(ly)	Progress	Understanding
Genuine	Protect from pitfalls	Venting
Goal setting	Reaffirmation	Vault
Growth	Real	

Coaching Relationship

Beneficial	Help me through things	Someone is proud of me
Care	I can tell when its fake	Staff transitions
Coach as a resource	In my corner	Student effort
Encouragement	Non-judgmental	Trust
Feel supported	Personable	Weekly email
Get to know me	Show me the vision	announcement

Coaching Meeting

Conversation about academic separation

Conversations about academic notice

Conversations about career preparation

Conversations about equity

Conversations about financial aid

Environment

Frequency

I didn't earn this scholarship

Initial Perception

Invalidation experience

Low-income identity stigma

Navigating college experience

Proud to be first-generation

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