HOW THEY STAY IN COLLEGE: A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON THE STAYING-IN-COLLEGE BEHAVIORS OF STUDENTS IN THE POSSE PROGRAM

By

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A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Higher Adult and Lifelong Education—Doctor of Philosophy

2020

ABSTRACT

HOW THEY STAY IN COLLEGE: A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON THE STAYING-IN-COLLEGE BEHAVIORS OF STUDENTS IN THE POSSE PROGRAM

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Despite the greater numbers of underrepresented racial and ethnic minority (UREM) students enrolling in college over the last few years, many disparities still exist between UREM students (specifically Black and Latinx) and their White student peers when looking at grade point average, "staying-in-college," and degree attainment. The purpose of this study was to understand how UREM students in the Posse Program at a midwestern university stay in college. Using a logic model, specifically a theory approach logic model that was adapted to describe the components of the Posse Program, this study used unique purposeful sampling to select 13 participants who identified as Black and/or Latinx. Each student was from the freshman, sophomore, junior, or senior year class and participated in a 90-minute interview where they were asked semi structured questions. Based on the coded analysis, I identified the following themes: student background and characteristics they bring to college; affirmation; and communities of support. These three themes represent how students in the Posse Program at a midwestern university stay in college. The information from this study was used to develop recommendations for Posse Program administrators, higher education administrators and universities, and current and future students.

This dissertation is dedicated to each member of DePauw Posse Chicago 8; Alfredo, Carlos, Cynthia, Isaiah, Jasmine, Kiran, Martin, Ryan, Vince, and Yanina. You all were the original inspiration for this work and being your mentor was one of my greatest joys. Your dedication and tenacity helped shape who I was then and who I am today. I hope that you learned as much from me as I did from each one of you.

This dissertation is dedicated to the 13 study participants who through a pandemic, racial violence, tensions across the United States, and general uncertainty about the world, chose to share their beautiful stories with me.

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Dr. Bobby Beavers and Dr. Marlena Beavers who continue to be my biggest supporters, cheerleaders, and prayer warriors. If you had not shown me that Black people could achieve greatness just like everyone else, I would not have written this dissertation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I want to give glory to God who allowed me to complete this dissertation despite the trials and tribulations that a journey such as this brings. In the last year as I have wrapped up my work, I have faced challenges that were brought on by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and managed general life responsibilities, while experiencing daily racial injustices as a member of the Black community. Through it all, God kept me in good mental and physical health so that I could finish my degree. Had it not been for the Lord on my side, I would not be here.

To my mom, dad, sister, and grandma. Thank you for your support, encouragement, and motivation. You all gave me the space I needed and were always there to listen to my frustrations and concerns while never ceasing to root for me. There is an African proverb that asks, how do you eat an elephant. Thanks to each of you, who continuously reminded me that I can only eat an elephant one bite at a time and that I should approach writing this massive document the exact same way. And to grandma, I appreciate you constantly checking in on me, for your daily prayers, and for sending me money so that you knew I was eating. You have supported me and encouraged me since the day I was born and I thank you.

To my BHALE's, Dr. Chastity Gaither and Terrance Range. Thank you both for being my village, for always being there when I needed advice or to vent, for sitting next to me in class, and for being the first to work in a group with me. I am so glad we got the chance to know one another and that we were able to navigate the terrain together.

To Dr. Amieris Lavender, Dr. Courtney Maudlin, Donald, Julene, and Lorri. Thank you all for being a shoulder to cry on, a safe space, for making sure I took a break to relax, and for

consistently uplifting me. Each one of you was there to tell me that I was going to make it and constantly pushed back each time I showed signs of imposter syndrome.

To my cohort mates Dr. Emiko Blalock and Dr. Rob Hill. Thank you both for taking the time to read and edit drafts and for encouraging me throughout the program. You both made sure I took time off to have fun and even helped me pack up when I moved which was definitely appreciated.

To my supervisor in the Undergraduate Research office, Dr. Korine Wawrzynski. Thank you for hiring this fellow BG alum and for giving me a much needed job for four years. And to Lizzy and my fellow graduate assistants Nadeeka, Emily, Candyce, and Amanda. Thank you for allowing me to be a student while I was working and for helping me process and navigate this program. Your continued support and friendship made the process much easier and I am grateful for the office family that we were able to create.

To Dr. Frazier, thank you for giving me an opportunity to work with your team and gain some additional skills (and funding) as I continued throughout my program. Your daily encouragement helped me remember that I would achieve this goal.

To Dr. Tiffany Juanita Davis, who every so often would nudge me so that I kept striving for the goal. Thank you for including me in writing groups, for reading my drafts, and for answering my random APA questions. Who would have known that when we met at BG so long ago that we would be the best of friends today? Thank you for being my Texas family.

To “The Girls” (Greer, Dana, and Jacqui), thank you for your visits and for being there for me, even when you had no clue why I was frustrated and pulling my hair out. And to Greer, who I am secretly convinced moved to Michigan partially to make sure I was going to be okay,

thank you for always making sure I was taking time to breathe and for helping me clear my head. I appreciate your encouraging calls and for sticking it out with me.

To Kiki and Tiana. Thank you for all of the calls, the visits, and for understanding when I could not always be there for every big event. You consistently encouraged me and were always there to celebrate me and for this I am thankful.

To the staff members at UHCL and in the SDEI office. I appreciate each and every one of you for being supportive during this journey. Thank you for taking the time to listen, for understanding when my writing had to come first, and for stepping in to take on responsibilities so that I had time to accomplish writing goals. And to Angie, I appreciate you consistently pushing me, for supporting my writing endeavors, and for reminding me that I am a scholar.

To my advisor, Dr. Patricia Marin who helped me pull off the impossible over a short period of time to get this dissertation done. From the bottom of my heart I appreciate you pushing me, for your long nights of editing, for your wonderful feedback, and for keeping me on top of deadlines. You helped to make all of this possible.

Finally, to my amazing, diverse, and stellar committee members Dr. Leslie Gonzales, Dr. Kristen Renn, and Dr. Terah Venzant Chambers, who provided great feedback, replaced folks on my committee last minute, rooted for me, and helped me to complete this journey. Thank you!

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Over the last two decades, increasing numbers of students from historically underrepresented racial/ethnic minority (UREM) populations (e.g., Asian, Black, Latinx and Native American) have enrolled in colleges and universities in the United States (Espinosa et al., 2019; Kinzie et al., 2008). In addition, the 6-year graduation rates of Blacks and Latinxs have increased by 2.9% and 9.5%, respectively (Espinosa et al., 2019). Despite these changes, many disparities remain between UREM students (specifically Black and Latinx students) and White students in terms of college grade point average (Fischer, 2007; Gershenfeld et al., 2016), "staying-in-college," and degree completion (Carter, 2006). In 2013, the college enrollment rate for White 18- to 24-year-olds in the United States was 42%, 8% higher than for both Blacks and Latinxs (Musu-Gillette et al., 2016). Additionally, that same year, 43% of White students were graduating college within 4 years compared to only 21% and 30% of Black students and Latinx students, respectively (Musu-Gillette et al., 2016). Kinzie et al. (2008) assert "low persistence rates and college completion rates . . . and the racial/ethnic gap in graduation rates means that too many students do not acquire the desired knowledge, skills, and competencies they need for the 21st century" (p. 22). While understanding why these disparities exist is important, it is also essential to comprehend the staying-in-college behaviors of UREM students.

It is important to understand the staying-in-college behaviors of students of all backgrounds; however, due to the gaps between UREM students and White students, looking at the specific staying-in-college behaviors of the UREM population is necessary. Knowing what helps keep a UREM student in college will provide greater clarity for people who are invested in the success of undergraduate college students, including higher education administrators. With these data, those in a variety of higher education roles can either implement programming that is

specific to what the university has in place to retain students (e.g., a required class, number of credit hours, mandatory mentor) or university staff members can provide support and resources geared toward students helping themselves to continue through college.

My use of the phrase "staying in college" as opposed to the words "persistence" or "retention" is intentional. Colleges and universities retain students, while students do their own persisting (Wyrick, 2014). Therefore, persistence is based on the individual student and how they can maintain a presence at an institution, while retention describes how colleges and universities keep students enrolled (Hagedorn, 2006; Reason, 2009; Wyrick, 2014). Thus, I use the phrase staying in college because it does not make assumptions about whether students stay in college due to their own persistence or due to their college retaining them. However, in discussing existing literature, when an author uses a particular term such as "persistence," I chose to use the original language of the author. I am interested in understanding this topic from the student perspective and each student is different. Additionally, the use of this term supported my methods and methodology because staying in college does not imply the efforts of students over university staff and vice-versa. Thus, by using a staying-in-college framing, I incorporate both persistence and retention into the study instead of choosing one over the other.

Using UREM throughout this dissertation is also intentional. This dissertation explores the experiences of students of different racial backgrounds and there are many words used to describe students from this population (e.g., minority students, underserved students, students of color). I chose this term to decipher between racial and ethnic minorities and minorities who fall into other underrepresented categories such as religion, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and ability. Also, the term UREM typically refers to members of the Asian, Black, Latinx, and Native American populations. Since much of the research shows that the disparities between

White students and Black students and Latinx students are greater than between Whites and other racial and ethnic minorities (Musu-Gillette et al., 2016), when I use the term UREM I am referring specifically to Black students and Latinx students. Additionally, throughout this dissertation I chose to use the racial and ethnic identity term "Latinx," which is a nonbinary term that includes all genders and takes the place of other terms such as Latino, Latino/a, and Latin@. In discussing existing literature about Latinx students, I will use the original language of the author.

Problem Statement

UREM students continue to struggle to stay in college and often need interventions to discourage departure. Some colleges and universities have implemented a range of interventions including mentoring programs and learning communities that seem to support students staying in college (Museus, 2008; Tukibayeva & Gonyea, 2014); however, these interventions may not be effective for UREM identified students. One disconnect may be in determining the approaches that will help support UREM students' staying-in-college behaviors and then implementing these findings into programming. Another disconnect may be that colleges and universities are focusing on general operation and/or implementation of these programming mediations rather than focusing on understanding how these students react to said improved interventions, in addition to whether they are influencing UREM student staying-in-college behaviors.

Researchers argue that comprehensive approaches, along with interventions such as cohort-based programs, can help students become academically and socially acclimated to college, which may lead to staying in college and graduation (Mayhew et al., 2016; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Renn & Reason, 2013). Comprehensive support programs, one type of intervention that has had success addressing the staying-in-college behaviors of UREM students,

are described by Renn and Reason (2013) as interventions for students who traditionally have a difficult time transitioning to college and have a higher risk of not staying in college. This population includes those from lower socioeconomic status (SES), those who come from secondary schools that do not prepare students for college academic rigor, and those in UREM groups (e.g., Blacks and Latinxs).

Drawing on relevant literature from Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), Yorke and Thomas (2003), and Perna (2002), Renn and Reason (2013) deduced that first-year students who come from groups that traditionally have transition issues may experience a successful transition to college and continue to succeed if they are exposed to interventions in their first year. Specifically, first-year students will be successful if they are exposed to interventions that connect them to peers, faculty, and administrators. Though institutions are not the focus of my study, college administrators should have an interest in students at their respective universities staying in college because that is the goal of working in and for a higher education institution. Beyond a desire to see students do well and stay in college to completion, state and federal policymakers are demonstrating a growing interest in students staying in college. Specifically, state and federal policy makers are advocating for using staying-in-college trends along with graduation rates as indicators of institutional quality (Gross et al., 2015) so having a student stay in college is a return on investment for everyone. UREM students should be provided with resources that will encourage them to complete school and to graduate, so they can benefit from their degrees, and others can benefit as well. These interventions may include but are not limited to new student orientation, living-learning communities, and first-year seminars (Tukibayeva & Gonyea, 2014).

As was originally deducted by Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) and reaffirmed by Mayhew et al. (2016), college students who are supported by comprehensive approaches have more positive outcomes such as high academic adjustment, persistence, and degree completion. Other researchers including Locks et al. (2008) have supported these claims; however, this is only one of a handful of studies so more research on interventions is needed. Thus, this dissertation focused on the experiences of students who have had success with a comprehensive intervention program called the Posse Program. As people who stay in college, Posse Program students provided a unique perspective about interventions that work and why. By studying students in intervention programs such as this, practitioners, researchers, and campus administrators can continue to understand the UREM student population and what they need to stay in college.

The Posse Program: A Cohort-Based Comprehensive Support Intervention

The Posse Program, a cohort-based comprehensive support intervention, uses high school age and at times nontraditional aged cohorts to provide holistic support to its students during their educational experience. These cohorts, groups of 10 to 25 students, serve as a type of learning community where members matriculate together and graduate at about the same time (Barnett et al., 2000; Maher, 2005; Nimer, 2009). Deborah Bial, EdD, founded Posse in 1985 after she heard a student say that he would never have dropped out of college if he had his posse[1] with him. Operating for 30 years, the Posse Program has a network of over 4,000 alumni, and in

[1] Throughout this dissertation, Posse is spelled with both a lowercase "p" and an uppercase "P." The lowercase version of the word indicates that I am speaking about a student's posse cohort or their posse community on campus. The uppercase version of the word indicates I am speaking about the national program (including the national staff), the campus program (including the campus staff liaisons), or individuals who are affiliated with other campuses or are alumni (e.g., Posse scholars).

2009, President Obama gave a portion of his Nobel Peace Prize money to aid the efforts of the Posse Foundation (Oguntoyinbo, 2014).

The mission of the Posse Program is to support students before, during, and after their time in college and to help create better environments on the college campuses of Posse partner schools. Program rhetoric supports the idea that as the country becomes more diverse, the leadership should reflect the growing population and the changing social dynamics. Although the Posse Program is not a diversity program but one that focuses on leadership, as of 2014, 74% of Posse Program students identified as Black or Latino (Oguntoyinbo, 2014).

Students who are members of Posse are continuously trained as future leaders and trained to encourage community investment through their works. The program takes place in college environments, which enhances the probability that participants will not only attend college, but also complete their studies in a reasonable amount of time. The Posse Program has three main goals:

1. To expand the pool from which top colleges and universities can recruit outstanding young leaders from diverse backgrounds.
2. To help these institutions build more interactive campus environments so that they can be more welcoming for people from all backgrounds.
3. To ensure that Posse Scholars persist in their academic studies and graduate, so they can take on leadership positions in the workforce. (The Posse Foundation, n.d.-a, Three Goals section)

In addition to the program having the goals of recruiting diverse leaders and building interactive campus environments, one of its aims is to ensure that students “persist in their academic studies

and graduate" (The Posse Foundation, n.d.-a, Three Goals section). The organization uses effective procedures and methods such as cohorts and mentors to address this goal.

Purpose and Significance of Study

The purpose of this study was to gain further understanding of how UREM students in a comprehensive intervention program stay in college. To explore and understand the phenomenon of staying in college, I chose to specifically look at how students in the Posse Program continue to stay in college during their undergraduate careers. Thus, my main research question was:

How do students in the Posse Program at a midwestern university stay in college?

I chose to address this question by conducting interviews with students who currently participate in the Posse Program and by asking them questions related to their first few years in college, activities and involvements during college, and their participation in the program prior to and throughout their time in college.

This information is relevant because when students stay in college, they benefit both their private good and the public good. Private benefits include higher salaries, health care and retirement benefits for an individual as well as their family, job security, and better career opportunities (Loveless, 2017). There are public benefits to students staying in college as well. For example, having a college education raises productivity in individuals, which in turn results in increased productivity in others (Loveless, 2017). Additionally, research has shown that college graduates give back to their communities financially and philanthropically more often than those who did not attend college (Trostel, 2017). Supporting one's community is another private and public benefit of staying in college. While just graduating from college may help a White student, for UREM students, staying in college and obtaining a degree may address social equity issues beyond financial gains and individual productivity.

Often research on student college-staying behaviors focuses on UREM students and institutional mismatch, racial achievement gaps, and lower SES as reasons for college student departure (Harper, 2010). This deficit focus means that the UREM students who do stay in college are rarely studied. Instead of focusing on deficits, my research focused specifically on the experiences of students who participate in the Posse Program, a cohort-based comprehensive support program that has a strong track record of providing access to college for students, supporting these students during their time in college, and graduating them. Posse Program participants graduate from college within 4 years at a rate of 90% (The Posse Foundation, n.d.-a), which is much higher than the national average for UREM students. This is why using the UREM students in the Posse program to shed light on staying-in-college behaviors of UREM students is important. Clearly there is something special about these students or the program, or both the program and the students, that has allowed for these impressive graduation rates; therefore, further exploration of this population is relevant.

This work is also significant because research on how the program contributes to student success may lead to the discovery of practices that can result in higher graduation rates for UREM students. There is little to no research about how comprehensive support programs, specifically cohort programs like Posse, help students stay in college. Although there is some research that the Posse Foundation makes public, all of the research they release is conducted by the Foundation. This study, then, not only offers a different perspective, but it contributes to the knowledge base on student participation in the Posse Program, the methods the program has implemented, and/or the methods these students use to stay in college.

Research Design, Methods, and Methodology

As a researcher with a constructivist perspective, I understand that discovery and interpretation happen in conjunction with one another and that reality is subjective (Stake, 1995). Constructivist research treats a phenomenon holistically and looks at historical, social, and personal contexts (Stake, 1995) so identifying and incorporating methods and a guiding methodology were important for this work. Methods (also described as research tools) and components of research such as interviews were used to help me gather information. Additionally, I formulated my research question and identified a specific program to study student experiences to answer this question. As a result, qualitative methodology was at the center of this work. I also relied on a theory approach logic model to guide my study. Logic models can be used to explain the functions and operations of a program and they explore the underlying assumptions of that program. Theory approach logic models, a specific type of logic model, have two parts: (a) planned work which describes the programmatic inputs and activities and (b) intended results which explore the outputs, outcomes, and impact of a program. In addition to providing foundational support for this dissertation, the logic model informed the methods I used to conduct the research study, how I went about collecting data, and how I analyzed the data I collected. These methods are also connected to my constructivist approach to this study.

I began my research by analyzing the program (via websites and scholarly articles) at the national level (e.g., offices, staff, and general day-to-day). During the next phase of my data collection, I focused on current Posse students to better understand how they stay in college. I chose to address this question by conducting interviews with students who currently participate

in the Posse program and by asking them questions related to their participation in the program prior to and throughout their time in college.

During interviews, I used a semi structured protocol (see Appendix A) with student participants. From recorded interviews, I produced transcripts. For each transcript I followed a two-cycle coding procedure. I began with structural coding (Saldaña, 2012), highlighting the parts of the transcript that seemed to answer my research questions. Second, I used affective coding by adding descriptors to the codes and began to look for patterns and interconnected themes. After completing this analysis, I wrote up my findings.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I provided an introduction to my dissertation and how I conducted this research. I offered a summary of the dissertation background, statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, and research question to provide a foundation for the rest of this dissertation. This chapter also gave a preview of the methodology I used to guide the study. A more in-depth discussion of each of these areas takes place in the chapters that follow.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this literature review is to discuss the research on how students stay in college, specifically how those students from UREM populations stay in college. I begin this literature review with a discussion about staying in college and the research currently available on this topic. I start with foundational research about staying-in-college including information from early research conducted by Vincent Tinto. Next, I provide information about different features that are related to students staying in college and discuss features that are specific to UREM students staying in college. Then, I further synthesize these different features by exploring the research on each individual feature. I conclude the chapter with a summary and literature review findings.

Staying in College

Many researchers have explored ways to help students stay in college, do well while enrolled, graduate, and contribute to society. To have a greater understanding of undergraduate students' staying-in-college behaviors, it is important to look at theories that can help explain undergraduate student behaviors. Over time, the information that researchers have about how students stay in college has evolved, as have the related theories. The foundation for current work on staying in college originated 50 years ago. In 1970, Spady created a sociological model of student dropouts in higher education (as cited in Carter, 2006). Using Durkheim's (1951) suicide model, Spady (1970) concluded that whether a student is socially integrated into the school environment could be tied to student departure. Specifically, the more socially integrated a student is, the less likely they are to leave. Spady proposed that five variables—academic potential, friendship support, grade performance, intellectual development, and normative congruence—played a role in whether a student was socially integrated into the college

community (as cited in Metz, 2005). Shortly after, Tinto (1975) built upon Spady (1970) and suggested that, in addition to social integration, student departure was linked to formal and informal academic experiences. Of the theories about students staying in college that have been created over the last 50 years, Tinto's theory of student departure has consistently been the theory to which higher education researchers refer when discussing this topic. A brief discussion of Tinto (1975), therefore, provides an important understanding of undergraduate students' staying-in-college behaviors.

Tinto

With ideas originating in the anthropology field (e.g., Durkheim, 1951; Van Gennep, 1960), Tinto created the theory of student departure and surmised that the likelihood of a student staying in college is based on how much that student is integrated into the academic and social systems of their campus and how committed the student is to their goals and to their institution. When creating this theoretical framework, Tinto (1975) used Durkheim's suicide model (a study of suicide in human societies; as cited in Carter, 2006) and Van Gennep's study of tribal societies and their rites of passage to membership in a tribal society (as cited in Carter, 2006). In his model, Durkheim (1951) proposed that when an individual is not intellectually and socially integrated into society, it may lead to suicide. Van Gennep (1960) used a model on rites of passage and focused on three stages: separation, transition, and incorporation when youths move into adulthood. Tinto borrowed the integration piece from Durkheim and the three-stage piece from Van Gennep for his framework.

In 1975, Tinto made some initial assumptions about students who enter college. Tinto (1975) surmised that a student's ability to stay in college is based on how students are academically and socially integrated into the college setting and argued that a student's ability to

successfully navigate an institution is related to their ability to disconnect from their prior community and assimilate into the culture of their college or university. The academic integration component of the model relates to grades, personal development, enjoyment of classes, and identifying with one's academic role, values, and norms. The social integration assumption relates to having friends, personal contact with university staff and faculty, and enjoyment of the university. In addition, Tinto (1975) suggested that for students to truly persist, they must go through a three-stage process of separation where they detach themselves from their home communities. Specifically, Tinto asserts that underrepresented students must separate from their cultures and customs and assimilate into the White cultures of their campuses to succeed. Thus, through this model Tinto indicates that when students do not cut ties with their precollege communities and fully integrate into their campus community, they will not stay in college. Once students detach, they can transition from their precollege cultural heritage to the culture of their campus, and then integrate into the culture of their college campus.

Tinto (1975) also assumed that students come into college with individual goals, attributes, desires, and intentions and that these are different for every student. Each characteristic that exists prior to a student entering college can affect the chances they will stay in college and whether they are committed to their goals and the institution. In his model, Tinto demonstrates that as students are navigating their college environment, they are continuously assessing how their values line up with the institution while also evaluating the responses they receive in the areas of academic achievement and social achievement. Students gauge how they have integrated academically in formal ways such as looking at faculty feedback and their academic performance, and in informal ways such as their ability to connect with faculty when dealing with academic struggles. Students base how they have integrated socially in formal ways

through involvement with student organizations and assessing whether they feel they are connected to an institution and its culture, and in informal ways through interactions with peers. Students evaluate whether they have integrated academically and socially and incorporate their precollege goals to determine whether they should continue to stay at an institution. In sum, Tinto (1975) suggests that the more a student is integrated into the social and academic aspects of an institution, the more commitment to that institution they will show which leads to staying in school to graduation. When Tinto (1975) created his model, some of this information may have been relevant to the majority of the college going population at that moment (specifically, White, middle class students), but as time went on, other researchers offered different perspectives.

Critiques of Tinto's Model and Additional Theories

Although Tinto's work has been used to guide many studies, there is also a body of research offering critiques to his work. One major critique of Tinto's theory is his notion that students must disconnect with their precollege communities to stay in college.

Tinto (1987) stated:

> The first stage of the college career, separation, requires individuals to disassociate themselves, in varying degrees, from membership in the communities of the past, most typically those associated with the family, the local high school, and local areas of residence. . . . the process leading to the adoption of behaviors and norms appropriate to the life of the college necessarily requires some degree of transformation and perhaps rejection of the norms of past communities. (p. 95)

Tinto (1993) also theorized that when students are "unable to establish . . . the personal bonds that are the basis for membership in the communities of the institution" (p. 56), they are

more likely to leave after their first year of college than those who have integrated academically and socially. Since Tinto's initial theoretical development on staying in college, many researchers note that disconnecting from precollege communities may harm a student's transition to college (e.g., Cabrera et al., 1999; Nora & Cabrera, 1996). For example, many Latino students are family oriented and the family is considered when making life choices and decisions (Gloria et al., 2005). For these students, severing ties may be more of a hindrance than a help.

Additional critiques of Tinto's (1975, 1987) work have to do with the fact that his model did not take into consideration non majority students. Though a large percentage of the college-going population in 1975 was indeed White, it was not until later that Tinto addressed the fact that his work was based on White students as opposed to all student populations. Researchers such as Braxton and Lien (2000) felt that the model did not account for the experiences of underrepresented students and that universally applying a model that was primarily based on the experiences of White students was problematic. In addition, they determined that Tinto's model was better applied to students at residential institutions as opposed to those at commuter schools.

Through research, Tierney (1999) addresses both of the major critiques of Tinto's (1975) work. Tierney's (1999) concerns on the lack of representation of students who are from UREM backgrounds led him to address certain aspects of Tinto's (1975) model. Specifically, Tierney (1999) challenged the assumptions on severing of ties from precollege communities to integrate into the culture of an institution and the idea that going to college is considered a rite of passage in the United States. Tierney (1999) stated that when students are asked to leave behind their precollege cultures and assimilate, their prior culture is not affirmed. This is a concern and participating in detachment from a prior culture can lead to a variety of other issues including self-hate and a reassessment of the value of one's culture in society. In support of this critique,

Tierney (1999) discussed the idea of cultural integrity, which affirms a student's respective background and uses it to create systems and university structures that accommodate and incorporate student cultures into the existing culture of the campus. This helps students feel they do not have to assimilate into White culture and can lead to feelings of affirmation and respect instead of oppression and lack of cultural relevance.

Though Tinto received critiques from other theorists and some of these critiques resulted in the creation of new theories by other researchers, he also critiqued himself and revised his work as a result. In 1993, responding to criticism and increased knowledge about student behavior on college campuses, Tinto revised his model to acknowledge that connections with family and friends from external communities positively influenced students' departure decisions. However, Tinto maintained that these influences are not as strong as those from the internal communities that students create for themselves on campus. He also stated that African American students, students from lower socioeconomic statuses, and nontraditional students (e.g., adults, transfer students) required interventions and policies that were specific to their needs. Recently Tinto has added some revisions to address some of these limitations. In a 2006 review, Tinto discussed how researchers in the 21st century have an awareness of the experiences of students from different backgrounds and there is a greater understanding that departure can be impacted by institutional type.

Despite critiques of his original framework, Tinto's reworking of his theory happened over time. The revisions made by Tinto may have been in response to those critiques; however, they may have also stemmed from the changing demographics in higher education and a greater understanding of college students in the 21st century. Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993, 2004) models continue to be adapted and built upon by other theorists (Braxton & Lien, 2000; Tierney, 1999)

and these theorists were pivotal in beginning and carrying on the conversation regarding the staying-in-college behaviors of students, specifically UREM students.

In addition to theorist interest, how students stay in college is an ongoing discussion among those who have a variety of roles across higher education. In the last few years, articles have been published in higher education journals such as *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and on websites such as insidehighered.com to name a few. There are differing opinions on college and/or personal characteristics and features that are needed to keep students in school so they can graduate (Berkeley, 2017; Bowman et al., 2018). Some people point to motivation as an indicator for staying in college (Berkeley, 2017), others focus on noncognitive attributes as the reason behind staying-in-college behaviors (Bowman et al., 2018) and some researchers attribute these behaviors to academic preparation (Stewart et al., 2015). Regardless, this is an ongoing topic of interest among scholars and the next section explores some of the specific features related to students staying in college.

Features Related to Students Staying in College

Researchers have identified several factors associated with undergraduate students staying in college. These include academic preparation (Adelman, 2006; Bean & Eaton, 2000; Millea et al., 2018; Stewart et al., 2015; Swail, 2004), academic engagement (Habley, 2004; Kilgo et al., 2015; Tinto, 2004), social engagement (Maramba & Valasquez, 2012; Quaye et al., 2019; Simmons, 2017; Swail, 2004; Tinto, 2004), and financing college (Boatman & Long, 2016; Millea et al., 2018; Swail, 2004; Tinto, 2004). Although these factors are important to consider when thinking about staying-in-college behaviors for students of all backgrounds (race, gender, SES), staying-in-college trends for UREM students differ from White students due to historical factors such as access to resources that will prepare them for college (e.g., academic,

social) and access to universities. Because most students in Posse identify as UREM, I further explore the staying-in-college behaviors of UREM students.

UREM Students Staying in College

Singell and Stater (2006) found that for students to stay in college and graduate, universities must attract students who are more likely to stay in college in the first place. While this finding may seem logical, there is more to student persistence than attracting students who are likely to stay in college and if certain elements such as social and academic support are not in place, even a student who seems like they should stay in college may be met with challenges that lead them to depart college. For example, UREM students face many challenges that can inhibit their ability to stay at a university. When many UREM students enter the college setting, they are often going to places where the majority of the student population does not look like them. These students may experience microaggressions (i.e., small verbal or nonverbal slights directed toward people of color daily; Delgado & Stefancic, 2000) in and out of the classroom and at times they may be inundated with negative images and information about their race and culture (Brezinski et al., 2018). Thus, if institutions are only focused on admitting students who are likely to stay in college and these students are having a hard time staying in college due to some of the barriers, they may be discounted during the college admission process. Regardless, for all students, when they are satisfied with their college experience, they are less likely to leave (Fischer, 2007); therefore, resources need to be in place to allow this to happen.

Spradlin et al. (2010), Palmer et al. (2011), and Baker and Robnett (2012) conducted studies to consider specific features that encouraged UREM students to stay in college. Spradlin et al. (2010) discussed intervention strategies that increase persistence. The researchers studied effective college access and persistence programs for underrepresented populations at colleges in

Indiana. They concluded that transition programs, mentoring programs, learning communities, faculty/student interaction programs, and advising programs helped underrepresented students persist. Palmer et al. (2011) also explored the factors that promoted success of minority students, specifically at a research intensive predominantly White institution. From their qualitative research, four similar themes emerged including student involvement, interactions with faculty, self-accountability, and peer support. Additionally, Baker and Robnett (2012) looked at student retention by conducting a case study which looked at a cohort of exceptional students who were also from underrepresented populations. In a first-year cohort of these students, Black students were more likely than Asian American, Latino, and White students to stay enrolled; however, the findings for Latinos showed they were most likely to leave. One thing the researchers attributed these findings to is the social support the Black students sought and received. The Black students were more likely to have connections to peers, faculty, and staff; participate in clubs; and study more than their Latino peers. They also found that students who are integrated into the school environment are less likely to leave and they persisted if they felt they had on-campus social support.

A more recent study from Bauman et al. (2019) also explored the experiences of diverse students in higher education to understand more about why they attended college and how they experienced success, which the study participants defined as working hard, doing well academically, and finishing their degree. The researchers interviewed students from different racial/ethnic minority backgrounds and determined that like the Spradlin et al. (2010), Palmer et al. (2011), and Baker and Robnett (2012), faculty members played a role in student success, but they also found that precollege characteristics such as high school involvement, high school

counselors and teachers, family, and personal motivation to stay on track, were also involved in how these students reached success.

All of the theorists in these studies concluded that underrepresented students need access to transition programs, ties to others off-campus, social support while on campus in the form of resources such as mentoring programs and learning communities, and access to academic support through advising programs. Additionally, faculty-student interaction programs and a positive perception of the college environment helps UREM students stay in college. Some of these features can happen organically for students, while others need to be implemented or already in place for a student upon their arrival on campus such as transition programs and other interventions. The aforementioned studies also show that there are potential differences between the different racial and ethnic groups that make up the UREM population as it relates to staying in college.

Black Students Staying in College

Pascarella and Terenzini (1978) concluded that students from different demographics such as class, gender, and race stay in college at different rates. Peng and Fetters (1978) also researched persistence and found that Black students specifically at 4-year institutions had greater persistence rates than Whites when socioeconomic status and previous academic achievement were taken into consideration; however, other findings from a similar study conducted later by Braxton et al. (1988) found that underrepresented students are more likely than majority students to leave school. These studies took place within a few years of each other and each subsequent study had different findings, so more investigation is warranted. One thing to note from the Peng and Fetters (1978) study is when academic achievement and socioeconomic status were introduced, Black students were more likely to stay in college. Gross

et al. (2015) conducted an additional study about how student background (identified as gender, race/ethnicity, age, and adjusted gross income) effected student departure and found that African American/Black students were less likely to stay than their White peers (between 18% and 27% less likely). The findings from Braxton et al. (1988) and Gross et al. (2015) were confirmed in a study conducted by Ciocca Eller and DiPrete (2018) who explored the completion rates of Black students. In this study, Black students had lower completion rates than White students and this disparity was attributed to limited access to precollege academic resources and socioeconomic resources. However, despite having limited access, Black students were more likely to enroll in 4-year colleges than White students.

Although each of these studies tells a different story, the Peng and Fetters (1978) study[2] shows that with greater access to resources, students have a better chance of staying in school. Thus, students should have access to support so they can stay in college. Despite increased access to higher education for underrepresented students, studies on students staying in college continue to tell different stories about the staying-in-college rates of Black students. Some researchers have found information that points to Black students staying in college when they have a higher socioeconomic status and are more academically prepared (Peng & Fetters, 1978) whereas other research attributes staying in college to being connected socially and supported by faculty and peers (Baker & Robnett, 2012). In contrast, there are data that show African American students are less likely than their White peers to stay in college (Braxton et al., 1988;

[2] Stewart et al. (2015) conducted a study similar to the Peng and Fetters (1978) and their findings were consistent with the 1978 study. Stewart et al. (2015) surmised that students who had high academic scores from high school typically persisted into their second year of college and, in fact, results showed that higher ACT scores meant a higher likelihood of staying into the second year. High grade point average in the first semester of college also led to a positive effect on persistence. However, findings from part of a National Education Longitudinal study (1988/2000) determined that the quality of a student's respective high school curriculum was a stronger predictor of staying in college in the first year than standardized test scores such as the ACT (Adelman, 2006).

Ciocca Eller & DiPrete, 2018; Gross et al., 2015). The next section provides more information about Latinx students staying in college.

Latinx Students Staying in College

When exploring staying-in-college behaviors of Latinx students, much of the literature focuses on reasons why students from this population stay in college as opposed to the rate at which they stay in college. Arobona and Nora (2007) found that for Hispanic students attending 4-year institutions, the experiences they have while in college are more important than what students bring with them to college when determining their ability to stay in college and degree attainment. Pyne and Means (2013) looked at features for students who identified as Hispanic as well and determined that family, prior academic preparation, feeling a sense of belonging on campus, and the removal of financial barriers all lead to staying in school. Additionally, Wagner (2015) looked at how the 6-year graduation rates of Hispanic undergraduate students were affected by background, academic and social integration, campus climate, and social capital. Both social capital during the senior year of high school and attending a school that is private and/or focuses on the liberal arts had a positive effect on graduation rates. Though not exhaustive, the researchers have used these studies to demonstrate the differing information available about UREM students staying in college. This discussion of current research provides a broader look at the areas that have been determined to impact the staying-in-college behaviors of UREM students, specifically Black and Latinx students.

In addition to the features that encourage UREM students to stay in college, Yorke and Thomas (2003) and Perna (2002) conducted two separate studies and looked more closely at one specific feature, comprehensive support programs, and identified some key components. These components are recruiting students early in high school, offering support and help to students in

the first year of school, discussing all aspects of learning such as social and cognitive outcomes, and providing a liaison between the university and the program.

In the last few sections I discussed the research that is relevant to UREM students staying in college. The research on UREM students staying in college revealed that students from UREM populations may stay in college if they have access to things such as comprehensive support programs, finances to pay for college, transition programs, learning communities, faculty/student interaction programs, mentoring and/or advising programs, and student engagement opportunities that allow them to socially adjust and feel a sense of belonging. In the next few sections I explore these features more in depth.

Comprehensive Support Programs

Comprehensive support programs are designed to serve students who traditionally have had a difficult time transitioning into and graduating from college. Populations include first generation students, those from lower incomes, students who have not had appropriate academic preparation, and members of UREM populations (Renn & Reason, 2013). One type of comprehensive support program aids students in gaining access and in transitioning to college while providing supportive resources throughout the duration of their time in college. Examples of these programs include TRIO Programs and the Chicago Scholars Program. TRIO Programs consist of eight subprograms that are federally funded and targets students from middle school through postbaccalaureate (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education, 2020). Students who participate in these programs have access to tutoring, financial counseling, and other support services, and they are eligible for grants and awards via the program. The Chicago Scholars program is based in Chicago, Illinois, and contains three program phases that are focused on student access to college, student success during college, and student transition to

careers or postgraduate programs after college (Chicago Scholars, n.d.). While in college, students connect with a peer mentor as well as staff members from the Chicago Scholars office who provide resources and these supportive services are available after graduation.

Another type of comprehensive support program also focuses on college access, transition, and support but incorporates a residential component as well. Examples of this type of program are the College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP) and the Charles Drew Science Scholars program. CAMP, a federally funded program, is geared toward seasonal or migrant workers and/or the children of seasonal or migrant workers (Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2020). As a residential program, students are provided with housing, social and academic support, and they have access to a variety of grants and other funding. The Charles Drew Science Scholars (Michigan State University, n.d.) program is dedicated to supporting multicultural students who want to pursue majors and careers in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM). Students who participate in the program live in a learning community their first year and are exposed to academic advising and coaching, community service and engagement opportunities, and a variety of other resources (Michigan State University, n.d.). Through participation in comprehensive support programs, UREM students persist into their second year of college (Lei et al., 2011; Mayhew et al., 2016; Renn & Reason, 2013). There are also comprehensive support programs that are cohort-based. These cohort-based comprehensive programs are grounded in the cohort program model, but they have been charged with providing services beyond academic structure and education.

Cohort Programs

Cohorts are a type of learning community (Saltiel & Russo, 2001) and typically contain between 10–25 students who take class together, attend programming and developmental

activities together, and graduate around the same time (Barnett & Caffarella, 1992; Barnett & Muse, 1993; Lei et al., 2011; Maher, 2005; Nimer, 2009). Cohorts produce a variety of outcomes, are set up in different ways, and sometimes these differences are meant to achieve certain goals. One goal is to promote staying in college and graduation. Other goals of cohort participation include being a member of an environment that enforces positive academic performance, developing critical thinking skills, feeling a sense of belonging, and participating in positive group interactions (Burnett, 1989; Hill, 1995; Murphy, 1993; Norton, 1995). Focusing on these goals, certain desired outcomes are met such as developing trust among the cohort group, having authentic conversations about issues and concerns, and creating close bonds in the cohort group (Lei et al., 2011; Teitel, 1997). As a result of participation in a cohort, students may also engage more with the community, receive academic support, engage more with faculty, and be open to being mentored or to be a mentor to others. This is because often cohort members celebrate milestones, eat together, and support and encourage one another (Lei et al., 2011; McCarthy et al., 2005). They rely on the support of each other and reflect on their learning and experiences (Basom et al., 1996). Members of cohorts also have higher grade point averages than those not in cohorts and members of cohorts have shown an increase in degree completion (Martin et al., 2017; Nimer, 2009; Reynolds & Herbert, 1998).

Many masters- and doctoral-level programs consistently use the cohort concept to make sure students maximize their learning (Cordiero et al., 1992; Nimer, 2009; Norton, 1995) and most of the research about cohorts is based in masters- and doctoral-level programs. Researchers suggest that graduate student cohorts support students personally and professionally (Hill, 1995; Teitel, 1997; Twale & Kochan, 2000). Students in cohorts feel that this model encouraged them to engage more with activities, provided a chance for them to express their thoughts and ideas,

gave them an opportunity for self-reflection, and made them feel as if they belonged at their institution and in their program. Similarly, students in graduate cohorts have reported the creation of an extended family or community. Potthoff et al. (2001) and Unzueta et al. (2008) found that graduate students equated being a part of a cohort with being a member of a family that provided support and that being a part of the cohort helped to build unity in the group that formed bonds like a family would have. Similarly, in a study to explore student satisfaction and engagement in programs that had a cohort component and programs that did not contain cohorts, Martin et al. (2017) found that students in cohort programs had closer bonds than those in noncohort programs and that these bonds influenced student satisfaction and campus engagement. Additional researchers have made findings that point to the cohort helping members feel more closely connected to the program, focus more on academics, have the ability to step out of their comfort zone, and feel included (Maudlin et al., 2017; Ross et al., 2006). When asked about the meaning and influence of being a part of a cohort, students used words like "shared experiences" and "continuity" (Maher, 2005, p. 204) which lends itself to the findings discussed previously.

In addition to benefits of being a member of a cohort, there can be some negative outcomes resulting from membership. At times smaller circles in the cohort can form which leave others out. Conflicts between cohort members can come about, and group dynamics may lead to some individuals overpowering the cohort while others feel powerless or do not contribute (Dinsmore & Wenger, 2006; Hill, 1995; Ross et al., 2006; Teitel, 1997). Maher (2005) also determined that at times there are intellectual mismatches in a cohort group which can lead to conflicts, personality clashes, and unequal participation in group work. Cohorts can also create conflicts due to the many hours members spend together. Students in cohorts have reported they

feel they are assigned roles in the cohort and can become defined by these roles during their time with the cohort (Barnett & Muse, 1993; Teitel, 1997). Although assigning roles to group members is a natural process, some members of cohorts like their role assignment whereas others are frustrated by their assigned role which may bring about more conflict. These negative interactions can also serve as learning opportunities because they can help members learn about team dynamics.

Research shows that participation in cohorts has helped students transition into their first year of college and cohorts can help students persist to their second year (Lei et al., 2011; Renn & Reason, 2013), and though there have only been a few studies at the undergraduate level, cohorts continue to gain popularity in teacher education undergraduate programs (Hasinoff et al., 2003). A study of undergraduate prospective teachers had findings similar to those of studies related to graduate student cohorts in which undergraduate students reported their cohort helped them to build relationships and led to emotional satisfaction due to the support and community in the cohort (Mello, 2003). In separate studies on prospective teachers, Dinsmore and Wenger (2006) and Seifert and Mandzuk (2006) found that relationships with peers as well as emotional and social support (as opposed to intellectual support) were common needs of undergraduate prospective teachers in cohorts.

While some researchers have provided information that shows that undergraduate and graduate student cohort participants may have similar experiences (Dinsmore & Wenger, 2006; Seifert & Mandzuk, 2006) there are some clear differences between these two groups that may impact their engagement with their respective cohorts. For example, graduate students are typically at a different point in their lives when they participate in a cohort program (e.g., older, in or have had careers, more knowledgeable, have families) whereas a cohort model may serve a

different purpose for undergraduates who approach college differently. The studies on cohorts at the undergraduate level are about the components of the academic programs in which these cohorts reside (Martin et al., 2017).

The Posse Program is not alone in their understanding that having a cohort or at least connections to people who are like themselves (i.e., in a program) can potentially support students' staying-in-college behaviors. Research exists on several of these comprehensive support programs. While there has been little research conducted on the Posse Program, there are similar programs with findings that can inform research about comprehensive support cohort programs. The discussion in the next section includes a more in-depth conversation about one program, the Meyerhoff Scholars Program (MSP), which has components and functions that are similar to the Posse Program. The MSP, one of the closest examples to the Posse program, is a comprehensive support cohort program that aids students in gaining access and transitioning into college while continuing to support students throughout the duration of their college career. This program does not necessarily define itself as a cohort program, but it contains similar components and, thus, is identified as such in this discussion.

MSP

Geared toward undergraduate students who are UREM in STEM fields with the eventual goal of students obtaining a PhD in a STEM field, the MSP is most like the Posse Program. Created by the University of Maryland-Baltimore County (UMBC) in 1988, MSP has a goal of "increasing access to and success in STEM for Black students" (Stolle-McAllister et al., 2011, p. 5). While the program continues to focus on serving African American students, it opened to students of all racial backgrounds in 1996. The MSP staff has developed components geared toward supporting and encouraging students. These components include elements such as:

financial aid, summer bridge programming, study groups, personal advising and counseling, tutoring, summer research internships, faculty involvement, mentors, and family involvement (UMBC, n.d.). During their first and second year, Meyerhoff scholars meet with a MSP academic advisor and these meetings focus more on preparing for postgraduation options such as graduate and professional school (UMBC, n.d.).

Though not much research on the success rates of the Meyerhoff scholars exists, Maton et al. (2009) conducted a study which indicates that Meyerhoff scholars are twice as likely to graduate with a STEM bachelor's degree and 5 times more likely to pursue and obtain a PhD than similar students from a comparison sample. MSP staff recognize there are features that help students stay in college and there are four specifically that students say helped them stay in school: family, academics, finances, and mentoring (UMBC, n.d.). These four areas have also been identified as areas similar to those areas that help encourage UREM students to stay in college and are major factors for student success in STEM majors (i.e., academic and social integration, knowledge and skill development, support and motivation, and monitoring and advising; Kendricks & Arment, 2011). Students who are members of MSP often refer to it as a second family (Stolle-McAllister et al., 2011). Family is important to helping students stay in college so whether it is a blood relative or a family of one's own creation, the Meyerhoff scholars find value in it and this may contribute to students staying in college.

The academic component is another feature MSP students attributed to staying in college and their success in the program. Students have access to faculty and academic help so they can develop an understanding of root concepts in STEM fields, enhance critical thinking skills, figure out effective study habits, and find other resources that encourage academic success. Additionally, some students attribute their success to strong financial support. In one study,

students discussed the importance of the free tuition that Meyerhoff students receive (Stolle-McAllister et al., 2011). Because STEM related courses require a huge time commitment, when a student must complete academic work and hold a job, it can take up a lot of time and result in lower achievement; therefore, students who are supported financially are able to be more successful. Lastly, students identified the mentoring component of the MSP as one that helped them find success. Through mentoring, MSP staff guide students and observe their progress through their first few years. If a student looks like they are struggling in a certain area they can address the issue before it is too late (Stolle-McAllister et al., 2011). The MSP is a supportive program that helps students transition to college and stay in college. MSP incorporates many components to support students' academic, personal, and social lives which may be one reason why their students stay in college. Although this program has had a great success rate, it is STEM contingent, so students who do not want to be in STEM fields cannot participate in the program. Also, MSP is only available to students at one institution (i.e., UMBC) as opposed to multiple places but if it could be reproduced at other institutions, perhaps more UREM students could find success.

Few comprehensive support programs come close to what the Posse Program offers and few, if any, programs have reported a 90 % graduation rate and have the additional resources and benefits that the Posse Program provides. Many of them are only at one institution as opposed to partnering with many institutions to provide more opportunities for students, and none of them are able to provide access to over 2,200 students each year, most of whom are in UREM populations. MSP aids the discussion about cohort-based comprehensive support programs for undergraduate students as there is still more research that needs to be conducted on programs of this type at the undergraduate level. This is why further exploration of the Posse Program is

warranted. One area that MSP students expressed helped them to stay in college was the financial support they received as participants. Financing a college education is also a feature related to students staying in college and is discussed in the next section.

Financing a College Education

The ability to fund an education can influence which college a student chooses to attend, the experiences they have while enrolled, and their persistence at that institution (Paulsen & St. John, 2002; Tinto, 1993; Zerquera et al., 2017). When students assess the costs, they must consider room and board, books, computers, travel, and other supplies needed daily in addition to tuition. There are different types of financial aid a student can receive to pay for college. These include merit aid (i.e., given based on a student's academic record), need-based aid (e.g., loans and grants from the university or the government), and some specific loan and grant programs such as Pell Grants, Perkins Loans, and Stafford Loans. Unfortunately, many financial aid packages only cover tuition for classes (Spradlin et al., 2010), which leaves students to find money for the additional items they need through other venues. In fact, some students may equate their ability to pay for a college education as a determining factor in whether they feel they belong on campus.

Researchers are divided on whether a "good" financial aid package will influence students to stay in college. Some say it does (Bean & Eaton, 2000; Ishitani & DesJardins, 2002) while others question whether debt and lack of financial aid awarded overshadows a student's decision to persist while in college (i.e., a student may find fluctuating educational costs and/or changes in amount of aid overwhelming after the first few years and depart because of it; St. John & Starkey, 1995). In one study, Boatman and Long (2016) compared recipients of the Gates Millennium Scholarship (GMS), which is a renewable scholarship for academically talented

underrepresented students of color who have a financial need, to nonrecipients who came from similar backgrounds. Having the GMS, increased student social and academic engagement and determined that students who had fewer financial concerns were able to fully participate in the college community, which may lead to persistence. Amount of financial aid is also a factor when tuition increases are put into place. Gross et al. (2015) found that the likelihood of a student not staying in school increased as the cost of tuition went up, while other studies show mixed results. For example, DesJardins et al. (2002) and Herzog (2005) found positive relationships between financial aid and staying in college. DesJardins et al. (2002) determined that after 2 years, merit-based aid may not be as influential on a student's intent to graduate. Herzog (2005) found that when students applied for aid, they were more likely to stay in school and those students who only received need-based aid such as a Pell Grant had an increased likelihood of leaving. Also, when students had an increase in loans as a part of their aid package, they were less likely to leave an institution and as a student got closer to graduating, they were also less likely to leave college (Herzog, 2005). Another interesting finding from Gross et al. (2015) had to do with the type of aid (i.e., need vs. merit vs. government). The researchers determined that students were less likely to leave an institution if they had aid based on need however findings also showed that the relationship between merit-based aid and staying in college was more complicated and had to do with institutional contexts and how students navigated those contexts. Some of these contexts may be connected to the student demographics on campus.

Baker and Robnett (2012) found that college completion rates for UREM students are related to socioeconomic background and this may influence their rates of staying in college. Fischer (2007) found that Black and Hispanic students use loans and other outside funding to finance a larger percentage of their college education. Typically, minority students receive larger

amounts of Stafford and Perkins loans in addition to Pell Grants than students from majority populations (Chen & DesJardins, 2010).

That being said, there are some things that are out of the control of the university and finances are among some of those things (Baker & Robnett, 2012; Pyne & Means, 2013). St. John et al. (2006) conducted a statewide study in Indiana to explore ideas of staying in college and success. They studied factors that affected underrepresented students, specifically Black and Hispanic students staying at public and private institutions in Indiana. They found that while parental education was not significant, they did determine that high income was a factor for Black and Hispanic students staying in college. Another area in which they found some valuable data related to financial aid and other resources to pay for school. Black students and Hispanic students who had a guarantee of sufficient aid were able to stay in college despite parental education and income levels. High-income levels meant Black and Hispanic students were more likely to stay; however, for Black students, any aid such as grants and loans was positively associated with staying in college. When Hispanic students had work-study eligibility in their financial aid packages, they had greater odds of staying. When students were from low incomes, if their levels of aid were lower than they needed to stay in school or if their work-study was not enough, they were more likely to drop out. Another interesting finding was that student perception of the sticker price of an education verses the actual cost to attend school could affect their decision about continuing on in school, thus affecting students from low SES backgrounds.

The impact of student aid on staying in college varies across racial and income lines (St. John, 2003). Chen and DesJardins (2010) determined that when compared to Asians and Whites, Black and Hispanic students are less likely to stay in college in the first year. Often their decisions to stay or leave were influenced by financial aid and family income in addition to other

factors. When Pell Grants, Subsidized Stafford Loans, Perkins Loans, and merit-based aid were changed in a student's financial aid package, it reduced the departure rates and when minority students get more money in Pell Grants, they are more likely to stay in college. When students do not have to worry about how they are going to pay for their education, they can spend more time on college academics and have a satisfactory college experience. To lay the foundation for a satisfactory college experience, it is important for students to be prepared, thus another feature that is related to students staying in college is participation in transition programs such as summer bridge opportunities.

Summer Bridge Programs

Bridge programs originated in the 1960s and were created in response to the need to address inequities in education among impoverished and academically unprepared students. One of the first federal interventions to address these issues were TRIO programs, specifically the Upward Bound Program. At its inception, Upward Bound was a summer program but it has evolved into a college preparation program for high school students (Kallison & Stader, 2012). SBPs enroll fewer than 8% of their entering first-year class and nationally about 200,000 students participate in bridge programs each year (Douglas & Attewell, 2014). Developed by colleges and universities for their respective incoming students, SBPs are typically geared toward first-generation, low-income, and underrepresented minority students who need additional academic support and help with navigating college life (Allen & Bir, 2012; Kezar 2000; Sablan, 2014). These programs also help students who may need additional academic help as well as guidance on college culture, so student participants have a good foundation when they arrive on campus for their first semester (Bir & Myrick, 2015) which may lead to them staying in college.

SBPs typically take place the summer before a student's first semester of college and they vary in size, timeframe, and content (Gonzales-Quiroz, 2018; Sablan, 2014). SBPs have a few different identifications. Some consider these programs to be a "bridge" from high school to college which assists students with the transition from secondary school academic rigor to college academic rigor (Cabrera et al., 2013; Sablan, 2014) and others refer to SBPs as intensified versions of learning communities (Allen & Bir, 2012). They have also been referred to as academic boot camps, where students take classes to work on math, reading, and writing skills in addition to study skills and time management to get oriented to college life (Douglas & Attewell, 2014). In fact, most SBPs have similar components and can include academic courses, workshops on time management and financial literacy, and short-term academic and social activities. Regardless, most SBPs have a goal of educating students on the rigors of college life and academics and focus on helping students build networks of support while developing self-esteem (Institute of Educational Sciences et al., 2016).

According to Woodall et al. (2017), the function of SBPs is to help combat feelings of imposter syndrome by providing students with the opportunity to create social connections for their emotional and social needs and to provide these students with the skills needed to navigate college life. Some researchers have suggested that when students are exposed to interventions such as bridge programs, prior to their arrival on a college campus, they will be better prepared academically and socially for the demands of college life (Wachen, 2016). This preparation could lead to staying in college. Means and Pyne (2016) conducted a qualitative study to explore student perceptions of an intensive college access and success program, Lakeside Academy, that connected students to academic help and enrichment opportunities. Participants reported feeling that through this program they gained valuable information about college attendance, personal

motivation, and higher confidence in their college attendance ability. On the flip side, students also described concerns and communicated worries about the racial and social economic disparities that existed on campus, along with their level of academic preparedness for college. Unfortunately, researchers cannot agree on whether summer bridge programs contribute to students staying in college or make no difference at all. Some researchers have studies that look at national data (Douglas & Attewell, 2014) whereas other researchers investigate the impact specific summer bridge programs have made on student participants staying in college (Bir & Myrick, 2015; Cabrera et al., 2013; Suzuki et al., 2012).

Douglas and Attewell (2014) used a national sample of first-year college students from the National Center for Education statistics to explore the effects of participation in a summer bridge program on degree completion. Researchers indicated that students from community colleges and 4-year institutions that were less selective were 10 % more likely to graduate within 6 years than non-SBP participants and that Black and Hispanic students had the highest effects on graduation overall. Similarly, Wachen (2018) and Frischmann and Moor (2017) compared the rates students stayed in school and the academic progress of those in SBPs. Wachen (2018) studied the persistence rates of students who participated in a summer bridge precollege program at the University of North Carolina were higher than those who had not participated. Students were exposed to an intense academic experience and it was determined that there was a positive association with program participation and returning for a second year. Frischmann and Moor (2017) looked at four cohorts of students in a 7-week summer program that used an aggressive academic coaching model to help students academically. Results from this study showed that summer bridge programs were an affective intervention and reported increased GPAs for participants post program participation. Other studies have shown similar findings on the

effectiveness of precollege programs (e.g., Cabrera et al., 2013; Douglas & Attewell, 2014; Suzuki et al., 2012) in fact, many of these studies have reported that SBPs have helped students stay in college. Though this information is positive, other researchers have reported that SBPs do not have any impact on students staying in college.

Bir and Myrick (2015) also looked into a specific program and investigated the CHEER (Creating Higher Expectations for Educational Readiness) SBP at a historically Black institution. Students in this program lived in a residence hall, were connected with mentors (who were alums of the CHEER program), and took credit-bearing academic courses. With regard to students staying in college, the women participants had significantly higher first- and second-year staying rates than nonparticipants; however, for the men, while there was a higher staying rate than nonparticipants, it was not statistically significant. When looking at graduation rates, while the women CHEER participants graduated in 4 years at a higher rate than nonparticipants, it was not statistically significant. Unfortunately, the male CHEER participants had lower 4-year graduation rates than non-CHEER male participants. One take away from this study is a positive finding that students who participated in the CHEER program were more likely to be engaged during their first year and stayed in college into their second year. In a similar study conducted by Wathington et al. (2016), students participated in a summer bridge program 5 days a week for 5 weeks. Participants had accelerated instruction classes, had access to student support services, were instructed on college going skills, received credits at the college level, and were offered a stipend. While there was no evidence that the program impacted the staying rates of these students, the students who did participate saw improvements in math and writing courses a year and a half following the program.

While only some of these studies reported that SBPs positively impacted students staying in college and eventual graduation, each study did report that SBPs made positive contributions to a student's overall experience in college including community building, self-esteem, higher grade point average, and confidence (Bir & Myrick, 2015; Cabrera et al., 2013; Frischmann & Moore, 2017; Murphy et al., 2010; Wachen, 2018; Wathington et al., 2016). Also, although these additional outcomes may not be specifically described in this way, much of the positive outcomes from the SBP may contribute to students staying in college. The MSP mentioned in this literature review, like the Posse Program, also had an SBP so this may be a necessary feature to help students stay in college. Summer bridge programs also serve as spaces where students begin the process of participating in learning communities which are also supportive spaces that may contribute to a student staying in college. Learning communities are explored further in the next section.

Learning Communities

Described by Kuh (2008) as a high impact practice for improving student achievement, learning, and success, learning communities have many attributes in common with living-learning communities. Learning communities have components comparable to living-learning communities such as taking classes together centered on a common theme and involvement from faculty, except they do not have a residential component (Pike et al., 2011; Renn & Reason, 2013; Spradlin et al., 2010). Learning communities connect academic and social learning as well as help students adjust to college life (Spradlin et al., 2010). Using learning communities is one way for university administrators to connect students and/or create cohorts of students. Researchers determined that when a student is a member of a learning community, there is a positive relationship between student engagement and learning outcomes. Some of the necessary

components of these learning communities are a course where students participate in discussion groups that allow for the integration of material from classes and required out of class activities (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2007).

Lenning and Ebbers (1999) classified learning communities in four different ways. Some learning communities are curricular where students (sometimes from different majors) enroll in a few courses with common themes and others are classroom-learning communities where a community is built in the classroom. There are also residential learning communities where students live together and take classes together (at times in the same building) and student-type learning communities that are designed for specific student populations such as historically UREM students, women in STEM, or academically at-risk students. Regardless of type of learning community, student participation in this type of intervention has been tied to positive educational outcomes such as successful transitions from high school to college, higher grades, staying in college, and graduation (Baker & Pomerantz, 2000; Beckett & Rosser, 2007; Inkelas et al., 2007; Laufgraben, 2004; Purdie & Rosser, 2007; Soldner et al., 2007; Taylor et al., 2003; Zhao & Kuh, 2004).

A goal of learning communities as stated by the Boyer Commission (1998) is to help students engage in smaller communities on larger campuses where they can interact with students and faculty and make connections with peers. Learning communities allow students to further develop their identity and discover their voice as well as to integrate what they are learning into their worldview (Zhao & Kuh, 2004). In a study conducted by Pike et al. (2011), the researchers confirmed a few things about students in learning communities. For example, being a part of a learning community led to increased academic effort and students who were in their first year, a minority, or a science or arts major had higher-order thinking, more diversity

experiences, and felt that campus was a supportive environment because of their learning community. Similar studies exploring whether participation in a learning community links with student success found that being a part of a learning community was positively related to time spent on academics, integrating academics with other college experiences, interacting with faculty members, and satisfaction with the college experience (Zhao & Kuh, 2004). Students in learning communities are also positively linked to having more interaction with faculty members, participating in diversity activities, and being a part of classes that require higher order thinking (Sears & Tu, 2017). One disconcerting finding was that first-year students in learning communities had lower grades than those outside of the learning community. These low grades could be attributed to students having access to more social engagement activities or be due to students getting too comfortable in their environment and losing focus on the academic parts of college.

Another study yielded similar results. Using National Study on Student Engagement data from Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI), Tukibayeva and Gonyea (2014) looked at students in learning communities that were linked to classes and those in learning communities where the classes had faculty members who worked together across different sections of the same class to combine different types of learning topics and styles. These two different types of communities had little difference in their first year, staying-in-college rates so the IUPUI staff felt that a reason for this could be that being a part of a cohort was enough to augment student persistence. One thing these studies did not include was information related to UREM student experiences in learning communities.

Participating in and being a part of a learning community allows students to be more connected. Some learning communities can provide these as options but not all. As mentioned,

some learning communities take place in classrooms or with a faculty guide, so students who participate in learning communities also begin to develop skills that will help them to engage with faculty members who will be discussed in the next section.

Faculty Interactions

There are a variety of university constituents that can help create an environment that is conducive to UREM students and one of those constituents is the faculty. Students have different types of interactions with faculty members and these can be divided into three categories: personal interactions where students engage with faculty about nonacademic related issues, incidental contact when a student interacts with a faculty member outside of class but in passing, and disengagement, where there is little interaction inside and outside of the classroom (Komarraju et al., 2010).

Students who have personal interactions with at least one professor are more satisfied with their college experience. These students will also do better in their careers, and they are more motivated and engaged in their learning process which can lead to feeling a sense of belonging in the community (Rosenthal et al., 2000; Thompson, 2001), thus resulting in a student staying in college. In a 2008 University of Michigan Lumina Foundation report, students commented that they benefited academically from more interaction with faculty and these interactions helped them feel more connected to the campus, thus leading them to feel they belonged there. Findings have also indicated that students usually have the most contact with faculty members when they are asking questions in class or during their office hours outside of class.

Student-faculty relationships can also predict a student's social adjustment more than their academic performance. Fuentes et al. (2013) investigated first-year student contact with

faculty and whether that had an impact on faculty/student mentor relationships by that student's senior year. Using data from the Cooperative Institutional Research Program, the College Senior Year Survey, the Freshman Survey, and the Your First College Year survey, findings indicated that when students have early faculty interaction, they are more likely to find mentors in professors outside of class and have more meaningful interactions. When students interact more with faculty outside of class and seek faculty input on their educational path, they have higher academic self-confidence and see their faculty member as a role model (Decker et al., 2007; Kuh & Huh, 2001; Plecha, 2002). Another study however, had a different perspective. Wolniak et al. (2012) looked at how students understand persistence between the first and second year, specifically to see if there is a relationship between student learning and persistence based on a student's academic and social integration. The researchers determined that while being in classes where they were exposed to superior teaching contributed to student persistence, having contact with faculty did not increase the likelihood of a student persisting to the second year.

When looking more closely at UREM students and faculty interactions, much of the research about this student population focuses on the specific racial groups of Black students and Hispanic students. In fact, Fischer (2007) found that Black and Hispanic students rated their satisfaction with their college as high if they had more ties to professors. Some of this may be related to the mentoring relationships students have with faculty members as mentoring is also an important aspect of UREM students staying in college.

In a study by Lundberg and Schreiner (2004), researchers found that quality relationships and consistent interaction with faculty predicted learning for all races particularly when the faculty member motivated them to work hard. African American and Native American students had more regular interactions with faculty than others in the sample and worked harder when

they got feedback from faculty. They also asked for help with writing and worked to meet the demands of their respective faculty members more often. However, this population was also found to have less quality relationships with professors so not a lot of them were receiving the necessary benefits. Further, in a study about African American female undergraduates, Booker (2016) investigated how students describe their interactions with faculty and peers in the classroom setting. Students reported that when they were in class with engaging faculty who they could connect with, both during and beyond the classroom, this had an impact on their decision to stay at an institution.

When looking more closely at Latinx students, findings varied. Anaya and Cole (2001) conducted research that focused on Latino/a students and found that the more frequent and higher quality interactions these students had with faculty the higher their grade point averages. While another study focused on Hispanic students, Maestas et al. (2007) found that when students felt their faculty member showed an interest in them, they had a greater sense of belonging. The researchers hypothesized that students saw the faculty's interest in them as humanizing and provided an environment where they felt a sense of belonging thus potentially leading to staying in college. When members of the faculty and UREM students are able to establish productive relationships and create environments to engage in the academic process, UREM students can feel like they belong in a space which can lead to staying in college. At times, UREM students have difficulty connecting with faculty members but if both parties can recognize this and work on improving relationships, students can begin to feel as if they belong in a community. As a result of these relationships, some students find mentors in their respective faculty members, or they are equipped with the skills to seek out other mentors. The next section will explore mentoring and the research to which it is connected.

Mentoring

Mentoring programs exist on college campuses in many forms and this is one mechanism institutions provide that help students stay in college. Some campuses use staff and faculty to serve in mentoring roles while others use upper class students to fulfill peer mentoring roles. Regardless of the format, mentoring programs are in place to help increase the likelihood a student will stay in college and often they are geared toward underrepresented students to meet their needs (Spradlin et al., 2010). Mentoring programs are relevant because they help students with creating a social community when they arrive on campus and they help students find their niche. In a study conducted at IUPUI by Lumina (2008), and in a similar study conducted by Gloria et al. (2005), students who participated in mentor programs or were exposed to mentorship felt they had valuable experiences, showed greater cultural fit with the university, and had higher college and life satisfaction. One reason the students felt this way was because their connection with the faculty mentor showed them that someone had interest and concern for their well-being as a college student. When a student has a mentor to help them make connections, they can begin to create a social community which in turn increases their likelihood of staying in college. When investigating UREM students and mentoring, participation in mentoring programs seemed to play a role in the college staying behaviors of Latino/a students. In a study conducted by Bordes and Arredondo (2005), a follow-up study by Bordes-Edgar et al. (2011), and a study by Salas et al. (2014) each group of researchers found that when Latina/o students were mentored by faculty or staff counselors, their perception of the campus environment was improved. Also, when Latino/a students were connected with peer mentors, participants reported that their mentor/mentee relationship provided them with a sense of community and a family away from their home. A few students even credited mentoring

programs as a reason why they stayed in school. Mentors can also help students as they navigate their college major which leads to a career later. The next section explores this idea a bit further.

Career Services and Development

According to the 2012 Cooperative Institutional Research Program and insidetrack (2015), one reason students attend college is to get a better job. In fact, many students attend college with career development in mind verses academic development (Moxley et al., 2001). This is one reason why university officials and planners should focus attention, programming, and efforts on student career centers, counseling, and development. In addition, research has shown that when students have access to resources that help them plan career goals and take ownership of the curriculum that will help them achieve this success, they stay in college (insidetrack, 2015).

There is still debate over and research being conducted on whether career services and/or career counseling can impact students staying in college. Career services and/or career counseling takes on different forms on college campuses. Some students have easy access to career help, while others may feel disadvantaged when it comes to receiving help. Students who have an idea of where their college journey will take them are more motivated than those who have not been provided with a map. Career services can provide these maps to students by helping them explore why they are in a particular major and the types of jobs that their respective major will lead them to upon graduation (Wood & Moore, 2014). In a study conducted by Reardon et al. (2015), graduation rates of students who participated in a credit-bearing undergraduate career course were examined. Along with grade point average, changes in major, and withdrawals; participation in the course was a predictor of higher 6-year graduation rates. Additionally, cognitive measures such as high school grade point average and scholastic tests

(ACT/SAT) were not predictors of college graduation rates. Instead, noncognitive measures like the completion of the career course were more predictive of graduation rates. This information is congruent with information found in a prior study conducted by Reardon et al. (2011) which found 19 studies that demonstrated the positive impact career development courses had on a variety of college outcomes including staying in college and graduating.

In a similar study conducted by Hughes et al. (2013) to explore career counseling and diverse students, the researchers used narrative counseling to work with students. Some of these students were underprepared academically and needed to participate in English and math remediation courses which extended their time in college and caused stress due to financial burdens (Hughes et al., 2013). Participation in narrative career counseling by these students helped to reduce this stress and students went on to have positive career and personal growth which encouraged their persistence to graduation. Having a career that one does well in and enjoys is important for success so those who find this are able to use their talent to make change and address the issues that affect society daily.

Ultimately for students, especially UREM students, it seems when they are connected to a variety of resources and activities, they are more likely to stay in college because of the support network that is in place for them. Often the university provides some resources that students can elect to use that will help them stay in college but, for some students, it starts with feeling as if they belong on campus. In the next section, I discuss sense of belonging as it relates to college students.

Sense of Belonging

A sense of belonging is described in a few different ways. Some researchers refer to it as a psychological sense of identity and connection to the college community (Hausmann et al.,

2009; Hurtado & Carter, 1997), while others have called it "the experience of personal involvement in a system or environment so that persons feel themselves to be an integral part of that system or environment" (Hagerty et al., 1992, p. 173). Other researchers have discussed it as level of fit or how one's character and values align with those in their respective community (Hagerty et al., 1996) and some focus on whether students do or do not feel supported in their respective community to determine their sense of belonging (Hagerty et al., 1996). While these sentiments are valid, ultimately it is up to the student to determine what will help them feel they belong in a campus community.

For some UREM students, comfort in the college environment plays a role in feeling a sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2012). Students who are in schools where the environment is inclusive and welcoming persist more (Carter, 2006; Strayhorn, 2012) and, in turn, they feel as if they belong; however, if students are subjected to discrimination, their progress may be hindered. Sense of belonging is often based on perceptions of the college environment including the educational setting and relationships students have with their campus peers (Juvonen, 2006; Read et al., 2003). When a student feels a sense of belonging, they are integrated into the university community and in turn they are more committed to an institution and more likely to persist (Hoffman, 2005). Research also shows that when students find a sense of belonging in college, they are more likely to have higher levels of academic engagement, stay in college, graduate, and have success thereafter (Hausmann et al., 2009).

UREM Student Sense of Belonging

The idea of sense of belonging may be overwhelming and/or a difficult experience for students who are from UREM populations. As a member of a UREM ethnic group, a student may find it difficult to feel as if they belong in a place where they do not see people who look

like them. Some students are in college environments where they may experience discrimination or where they are inundated with messages about their level of worth (Grodsky & Pager, 2001; Uhlmann & Cohen, 2005). Some evidence has shown that the inability of underrepresented students to feel a sense of belonging in the predominantly White culture may lead to them not staying in college (Kuh et al., 2000; Nadal et al., 2018; Tinto, 1993). Hurtado and Carter (1997) affirmed this idea after examining the experiences of 273 Latino students who reported that when they perceived a campus climate to be hostile, they felt less of a sense of belonging in college.

Walton and Cohen (2007) suggested that students who are members of groups that have traditionally been subjected to social stigmatization are more apprehensive about feeling like they belong on campus. Coining the term *belonging uncertainty*, Walton and Cohen (2007) surmised that belonging uncertainty leads to differences in achievement based on race. For example, they found that Latino students often experienced isolation and discrimination. Alternatively, when these students felt connections to communities outside of their college environment such as family and religious organizations, they had a positive sense of belonging. These findings were also affirmed by Strayhorn (2012) who found that Latino students had less of a sense of belonging than White students however when they had consistent and positive interactions with peers who are also racial and ethnic minorities, they had a higher sense of belonging. This goes against Tinto who said that outside connections hindered persistence. Museus et al. (2008) also explored how campus racial climate effects degree completion and found that campus climate does indeed affect minority student persistence to degree completion. Feelings about campus climate impacted academic involvement, goal commitment, institutional commitment, and social involvement; however, this impact varied by race. For example, White students reported the highest levels of satisfaction with their institution and their satisfaction

levels were followed by Latino/a students. Asian and Black students reported the lowest satisfaction levels. This finding is connected to a study by Murphy (1993) who argued that sense of belonging holds a different meaning for African American, Asian American, Latino, and Native American students, respectively. These students may have high self-esteem and feelings of self-worth, but stereotype threat (i.e., situations where people feel they are at risk of conforming to stereotypes about their cultural group; Steele & Aronson, 1995) may present itself. This idea was confirmed by Hall (2017) who investigated academic and noncognitive factors that either support or impede the persistence and graduation rates of African American men and Hispanic men. One common theme that consistently came up was how each student had experienced microaggressions and some chose to use these experiences to motivate them while others allowed the situations to impact their ability to persist. This often happens in educational contexts resulting in students feeling like they belong less.

One thing that may aid in UREM students' ability to feel as if they belong is adjusting socially to the campus environment. When students feel a sense of belonging, they are integrated into the campus community and are more likely to stay in college. Some are able to feel a sense of belonging when they find comfort in their college environment and others create a sense of belonging in different ways. For some students it can be difficult to develop a sense of belonging; however, when they are able to find a safe space and adjust socially, they eventually feel as if they belong.

Social Adjustment

Something that impacts whether a student feels a sense of belonging is the ability to adjust socially. Finding social connections can be easy for some students and challenging for others. There are several factors that impact staying in college and becoming socially adjusted

can depend on how a student is able to connect with others and find support, how they feel in an environment, if they can create networks, and if they are in a community of people with which they are comfortable. Research on social adjustment has found that for Asian American, Black, or Latino students, having spaces where they could be socially supported and the resources in those social spaces was important (Baker & Robnett, 2012; Museus & Neville, 2012). In fact, Baker and Robnett (2012) discovered that, Black students were more likely than Asian American, Latino, and White students to stay enrolled when they had social support; however, the findings for Latino students were not consistent with those of the Black students, showing that students from Latino backgrounds were most likely to leave. Researchers attributed the positive enrollment rates of Black students to the social support they sought and received. The Black students were more likely to have connections to peers, faculty, and staff; participated in clubs; and studied more than their Latino peers (Baker & Robnett, 2012). They also found that students who are integrated into the school environment are less likely to leave and they were retained if they felt they had on-campus social support. In similar work conducted by Andrada (2007), the researcher surmised that Latino/a students need to feel comfortable in their environment and need support systems in academic and social realms to adjust socially. Unfortunately, Johnson and Sandhu (2007) concluded that Latino/a students feel socially connected less often than their White peers which can lead to departing from a university. For UREM students, being in spaces where they feel supported and culturally affirmed, may impact their ability to adjust socially.

One way students become socially adjusted is through the creation of networks. In a study that explored how minority students at predominantly White institutions (PWIs) adjust socially, researchers found that when students from this population create networks based on

their social and cultural preferences, they experience more positive outcomes, they can be themselves in networking spaces, and they can get help navigating the academic challenges of being a college student to help them get through college (D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993; Nagasawa & Wong, 1999). Students who strongly agree that socializing with friends on campus is important have an even higher probability of staying in college (Otero et al., 2007).

Some students create networks that help them adjust socially by participating in organizations that are geared toward a student's ethnic identity. In studies conducted by Museus et al. (2008) and Kuh et al. (2000), researchers found that for students attending institutions where most of the population looks different from them, cultural organizations or outlets are necessary to help these students adjust socially. In these spaces, students can express their cultural identities and feel like they, too, are members of their university community where they are in the minority. When students adjust socially, they start to create a sense of belonging so participation in clubs and organizations, leadership roles, and making connections in their college community can help students feel like they belong and stay in college. When students do not have social ties that are significant, they are more likely to leave college than their peers who have established these relationships. For all underrepresented minority students, when they are involved with formal social activities, such as clubs and organizations, they are more likely to adjust socially and stay in college (Bronkema & Bowman, 2019; Fischer, 2007).

Social adjustment is connected to feeling a sense of belonging; and the desire to belong and be socially connected is a basic human need (MacDonald & Leary, 2005; Strayhorn, 2012). Thus, to support sense of belonging, it is imperative to provide a community that will address social inclusiveness. Adjusting socially and academically leads to sense of belonging so, when one feels they belong, they continue to stay in college. Becoming socially adjusted can depend

on how a student feels in an environment, if they are able to connect with a support system, and if they are in a safe space with people whom they are comfortable. Some students have more difficulty adjusting socially than others and underrepresented students face this challenge more often because they are typically in college environments where they are in the minority in most spaces, including in classroom settings. As students adjust socially and are in spaces where they feel a sense of belonging, they are engaging with those on campus and their resources and, in turn, creating a social community.

Student Engagement/Creating a Social Community

One component of creating a social community is being engaged as a student. When students are engaging with others in classes, clubs, and organizations, they begin to build their social networks. Student engagement is described as "participation in educationally effective practices, both inside and outside of the classroom, which leads to a range of measurable outcomes" (Quaye & Harper, 2014, p. 2). Different forms of student engagement exist such as academic engagement, advanced higher-order thinking, collaboration with peers, interaction with peers of diverse backgrounds, and faculty–student interaction (Inkelas et al., 2004; Inkelas et al., 2007; Zhao & Kuh, 2004). There are outcomes related to engagement that impact students staying in college such as intellectual, cognitive, and psychosocial development, college adjustment, ethical and moral development, practical and multicultural competence, and self-esteem (Quaye et al., 2019). Student engagement manifests itself in many ways, including through clubs and organizations, leadership roles, sports teams, study abroad, and learning communities.

Tinto (2000) suggests that a significant indicator of students staying in college is engagement in one's college community. Thus, staying in college is connected to supportive

people such as faculty and staff as well as peers. The outcomes of participation are beneficial; however, for students to take advantage of them, they need to be involved. Unfortunately for some students, especially those in UREM populations, there can be challenges with connecting with a student engagement activity. In a study exploring the academic and social experiences of minority students, Palmer et al. (2011) used in-depth interviews and concluded that students understood the relationship between involvement and academic success, and their connections to social and academic outlets, but becoming involved was difficult for them.

Despite this challenge, several researchers have conducted studies and determined that there has been an increase in the engagement of UREM students over the last few years and more UREM students are becoming involved. However, much of this involvement is in organizations and activities with people who look like them (Patton et al., 2011; Quaye et al., 2019). Some researchers have also found that there are lower rates of engagement of Black students at PWIs than those at Historically Black Colleges and Universities, and the organizations available to Black students at PWIs are not reflective of their cultural interests (Quaye et al., 2019), so they have no desire to be engaged.

A way students can become both socially and academically engaged and create a social community is by participating in programs that serve as a one stop shop for student engagement activities. Kendricks and Arment (2011) explored the phenomenon of underrepresented students staying in college and success from the STEM point of view. Working with a program at Central State University that had the goal of helping UREM students stay in college and achieve, they analyzed student experiences working with mentors and peers who were a part of a program called The Scholars Program. Past research has proven that underrepresented minority students perform better when they are in learning environments with other underrepresented minority

students that address a student's social and academic needs. The Scholars Program had seven mandatory program activities (or traditions) that created a family environment for students. These activities were (a) participation in an academic learning community; (b) participation in a living-learning community; (c) participation in monthly mentoring meetings; (d) participation in the university honors program; I participation in two professional development workshops; (f) attendance at two graduate school visits; and (g) attendance at one STEM research experience. The Scholars Program increased student success and staying-in-college rates for minorities in STEM (Kendricks & Arment, 2011). Through mentoring activities, a more nurturing environment was created in which students felt safe, comfortable, and supported, and through early research experiences, the scholars performed better in their major STEM courses. This program incorporated many of the factors that influence staying-in-college behaviors including mentoring and helping with academic adjustment. It is also a social community already in place for students. These may be a few of the reasons student success and staying-in-college rates increased for minorities in STEM in this program.

Being a member of a learning community is positively associated with a variety of engagement activities. Pike et al. (2011) concluded that participation in certain student engagement activities may enhance participation in a learning community. It was also determined that students who participate in both engagement activities and are a part of learning communities also enhance their learning. These benefits vary depending upon a student's class year. At its core, participating in student engagement activities seems to go hand and hand with student engagement and participating in a learning community seems to boost student engagement which, in turn, leads to a host of positive educational outcomes (Zhao & Kuh, 2004). Museus (2008) examined the qualitative experiences of Asian American and African

American undergraduates and determined that students who are a part of organizations with people who looked like them adjusted better, could advocate for and express themselves, and felt culturally validated which eventually lead to persistence. When a student is involved in a variety of aspects of campus life, they are more likely to do better academically, feel like they belong, and persist (Fischer, 2007).

Students (regardless of their race) can become more acclimated and adjusted overall by finding a "family" or "home" while on campus and/or by engaging with faculty and staff. It has been suggested that being engaged can either contribute to or take away from the student experience. Students who are engaged are participating socially and this is typically where many of them (regardless of their race) start to create their communities. Engagement typically leads to success for students at colleges and universities and being involved brings about positive outcomes such as cognitive development, academic enhancement, and increased leadership abilities. It is also positively correlated with students staying in college (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Quaye et al., 2019). The success of students creating a social community relies on things at the individual level as well as institutional factors that need to be in place. Students need to take the initiative to connect with the resources that will allow them to stay in college, but the institution has the responsibility of having these mechanisms available for students to access. Once students are able to feel as if they belong and are connected with others on campus, they expand their social community by participating in student activities. They will start to exercise the leadership skills seen in the Dynamic Assessment Process (DAP) and precollegiate training, thus leading to positive outcomes.

Chapter Summary and Literature Review Findings

The goal of this review was to gain further understanding of staying in college, more specifically staying in college from the UREM student perspective. I provided more insight on cohort-based comprehensive support programs and explored the features needed for UREM students to stay in college. By reviewing other studies focused on students staying in college (Bauman et al., 2019; Gross et al., 2015; Millea et al., 2018; Pyne & Means, 2010; Quaye et al., 2019; Spradlin et al., 2013; Stewart, 2015; Wagner, 2015), I discussed the college staying ability of students, especially those from UREM backgrounds.

After a review of existing literature, I conclude that more up to date studies on the staying-in-college behaviors of UREM students need to be conducted. Some of the existing literature is 40 years old and there was very little information from the last few years. While this is helpful information to have from a foundational perspective, it is important that more information become available. Additionally, most of the articles only discussed one or two of the factors that impact UREM students staying in college, and there was little information about how each factor was connected to help students stay.

When investigating specific cohort programs, most of the articles and websites explored specific components of a program but little to no information was shared on their rate of success or how students feel their ability to stay in college is impacted because of the resources they get from being in the program. Also, there are not many studies that address cohort programs for undergraduate UREM students. There was some literature about undergraduate cohorts and about how the different factors that have been found to help UREM students stay in college should be components of cohort programs. Not much of the information was about specific cohorts such as the Posse Program. I was, however, able to find some studies about graduate

student cohorts, so I explored those and made comparisons with cohorts at the undergraduate level.

Students in the Posse Program are unique in that they are graduating at very high rates. As opposed to researchers taking a deficit approach to exploring staying-in-college behaviors, I looked at the successful students and determined how they stay in college. At times people feel that once students gain access to college, they have all they need when in actuality they continue to need support to complete college and graduate. Having access to college does not guarantee a student will stay there. In fact, a student can do well in one area (e.g., academically) and struggle in other areas (e.g., socially or feeling a sense of belonging) so having access to a variety of resources may help them throughout their duration in college.

This dissertation focused on participants of the Posse Program (which can be described as an intervention/transition cohort program). This program has many features already built in to support students staying in college. Thus, it could be argued that for UREM students to stay in college, they need to be a part of a program where they will have access to features that support their efforts to stay in college. It could also be argued that programs containing these components should be in place on college campuses to help all students stay there. Thus, I used the information from this literature review to help me understand the staying-in-college phenomenon further. This information, combined with information about the Posse Program, allowed me to create a model, based on the general theory approach logic model, to help me understand how the program and its components work together to support students' staying-in-college behavior. In the next section, I provide an in-depth description of the Posse Program and then I discuss the Posse theory approach logic model which represents how I understand Posse and their efforts to support students as they stay in college.

CHAPTER 3: THE POSSE PROGRAM

Created to help students "persist in their academic studies and graduate" (The Posse Foundation, n.d.-a, para. 2), the Posse Program contains various components which are intended to keep students in college. To help me understand the program more and to provide further clarity about how the different parts of Posse work together, I begin this section with an in-depth description of the Posse Program. After that comes a description of logic models, specifically theory approach logic models (W. K. Kellogg, 2004), which I used to create a Posse theory approach logic model that represents how I understand Posse. I then use the theory approach logic model to describe each of the components of the Posse Program. As most of the work about the Posse Foundation is conducted by the Foundation, I engage in this study to add a different perspective to that discussion.

The Posse Program

"I never would have dropped out of college if I had my posse with me–" - Anonymous Student

These are the words Dr. Deborah Bial heard from one of her students who had returned to their home from college after dropping out (Adams, 2014). At the time, Dr. Bial was working for an after-school leadership program and the idea of having a group of friends to help students stay in college resonated with Dr. Bial. As a result, she created the Posse Foundation[3] with the thought that when you send a "posse" or cohort of students to college together, they can support one another and have each other's backs, which in turn increases their likelihood of persisting in college (Adams, 2014).

[3] The Posse Foundation (or "Posse") is the national office that oversees the day-to-day functions of Posse, such as fundraising. In addition, there are various Posse office locations that run campus-specific Posse Programs.

Since its beginnings in 1989, the Posse Foundation has gained national recognition as a leading educational initiative in the United States, receiving accolades from university presidents, CEOs, journalists, and educational leaders as well as four stars in 2004 from Charity Navigator (a charity evaluator). Further, as a result of her great work developing the Posse Program, Dr. Bial, who is also the president of the Posse Foundation, received a 2007 MacArthur Fellowship, one of the infamous "genius grants." This type of recognition suggests that the Posse Program merits closer examination. Unfortunately, little empirical work has been conducted on Posse. I hope this dissertation will begin to fill this void.

At the core of Posse's mission is the desire to train the leaders of tomorrow and this begins with getting a college education. Broadly, Posse recognizes that the next generation of leaders should reflect the diversity of the United States and that these leaders can be equipped to work on the challenges facing the world. Posse staff members believe that preparation for these roles can begin on college campuses with Posse scholars who have been trained as change agents to help with individual and community development. To achieve its mission, Posse has three stated goals. These goals, as articulated by Posse, include (a) increase the pool of options from which university partners can recruit diverse student leaders, (b) help institutions create environments that are engaging and more welcoming to students of a variety of backgrounds, and (c) make sure Posse Scholars graduate and take on a variety of leadership roles in the workforce by ensuring they persist in their scholastic endeavors.

Posse's first articulated goal is to help diversify college and university settings. As of September 2020, Posse has 58 partner universities including Babson College, Denison University, Pomona College, and Texas A&M University. These institutions pay a university partner fee to the Posse Foundation, cover tuition for all Posse scholars, hire and pay on-campus

Posse mentors, and pay for the cost of the required PossePlus Retreat (Fields, 2002; The Posse Foundation, n.d.-h). The second stated goal of the program is for Posse scholars to help build college and university settings that are interactive and welcoming for all students. Scholars do this by creating organizations or becoming involved with existing organizations that generate change (Posse Mentor Manual, 2016). The third listed goal is to help Posse scholars persist to graduation. This is accomplished by providing Posse scholars with tuition,[4] academic support, a mentor, and the social support of other Posse scholars to help navigate college life.

Overall, Posse's goals benefit both scholars and university partners. For the scholars, they are given college tuition and support while on campus so they can stay in college. For the institutions, they are able to diversify their student body with Posse scholars and enroll students who are responsible for making an impact on campus by being leaders and by working with university leadership to implement change (The Posse Foundation, n.d.-f). While there are three stated Posse goals, the purpose of this dissertation is to explore the third goal, which is how the program is designed to support student persistence to graduation.

With these three goals in mind, the Posse Foundation began its work in New York 30 years ago and maintains its national office there. The first university partner, Vanderbilt University, admitted five scholars from New York who were selected by the Posse office staff in New York City. All five members of this posse graduated with honors in 4 years. Since 1989, the program has expanded to include chapter offices in Atlanta, the Bay Area, Boston, Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles, Miami, New Orleans, and Washington, D.C. Students need to live in or near one of these areas to be nominated for the extensive interview process. The universities the

[4] Some aspects of the Posse Program, like tuition, help Posse accomplish several goals and are, therefore, listed more than once.

students attend are not required to be in any particular city and, typically, universities like to increase their geographic diversity by being partners with a Posse chapter office in a city outside of their campus's respective region (The Posse Foundation, n.d.-f). Since its inception, over 9,000 scholars have been selected for Posse cohorts at some of the top colleges and universities in the United States and students have been awarded over $1 billion dollars in institutional scholarships. Currently the Posse Foundation reports that scholars "persist and graduate at a rate of 90 percent" (The Posse Foundation, n.d.-c, para. 1). The next section takes a closer look at the Posse Program structure and components.

Posse Program Structure and Components

The Posse Foundation has created an organizational structure that incorporates components that contribute to its mission and goals. These components include recruitment (i.e., the DAP), precollegiate training, the on-campus program, and the career program. To begin the process of implementing their three goals (increase the university applicant pool, create engaging and welcoming campus environments, and posse scholar persistence to graduation), staff members in Posse chapter offices identify public high school students with high academic and leadership potential from 10 urban cities across the United States. These students, who might be discounted by customary college admission processes, are put into diverse teams of posses, or cohorts, of 10 to 12 students to attend one Posse partner university on a 4-year full-tuition leadership scholarship ("Here Comes," 2005; The Posse Foundation, n.d.-h). Posse chapter staff recognize that to achieve their goals, one of those being to support scholar persistence to graduation, they must be intentional about who they recruit for the program. Therefore, Posse chapter staff invest a lot of time and energy connecting with community-based organizations, high schools, and other venues in their respective cities, so they can find Posse scholars. As a

result, each year over 16,000 students are nominated for approximately 800 "slots" with Posse partner institutions (The Posse Foundation, n.d.-a). High school teachers, counselors, or a current Posse scholar can nominate a student; however, students can also nominate themselves. Prospective scholars must be in the first term of their senior year in high school; demonstrate leadership in their community, their family, or at their high school; and demonstrate academic potential to be eligible for nomination. Students nominated and selected for Posse are from a variety of backgrounds. These scholars are recruited from urban areas, which are reflected in the cities where Posse chapter offices are located (The Posse Foundation, n.d.-a), they attend public and private schools, and demonstrate high academic and leadership potential.

Posse Selection Process

Once nominated for the program, students participate in the DAP, an evaluation method that is used to identify leaders via noncognitive attributes[5] (Sedlacek, 2004). DAP is a three-part interview process during which students can demonstrate their skills and leadership abilities in team and individual settings. If chosen for the first round of interviews, students participate in a series of group activities where Posse chapter staff members observe and evaluate how they interact with others. If selected to move on to the second round of the process, students have an individual interview with Posse chapter staff. After this interview, Posse chapter staff members narrow down the list of candidates and match students with one university partner. If students make it to this round, they apply to the partner university with which they were matched to

[5] Noncognitive attributes include factors such as self-concept, realistic self-appraisal, handling system/racism, leadership, long-range goals, strong support person, community, and nontraditional learning. The Posse Program ascribes to a noncognitive selection process when selecting students for the program. Using noncognitive attributes in selection processes are considered beneficial for all students. The noncognitive attributes selection process is especially beneficial for nontraditional students whose standardized test scores may not demonstrate their full potential. For students in this population, noncognitive selection processes are even more important (Sedlacek, 2005).

ensure they meet the admission standards of that institution. While the Posse chapter staff base their student selection on noncognitive attributes, university partners must consider a student's academic record in their selection. Should a university partner decide that they are unable to admit a student, they inform the Posse chapter staff and this student does not attend the final round of interviews. Posse chapter staff do, however, attempt to mitigate any of these issues before a student is denied based solely on their academic record. Posse university partners have contracts with one or more Posse chapter locations. During selection, students are interviewing for one slot in a posse at a specific Posse university partner. University admission officers from the partner institution then visit the Posse chapter office in the student's respective city and conduct a large group interview with 20 to 25 students to make their final selections. Students are then placed into a "posse" or cohort of 10 to 12 to attend the respective partner university (The Posse Foundation, n.d.-h).

Posse Staff Roles, Office Structure, and University Partners

The Posse Foundation's staff use the program components to work with students selected to be part of a posse. Posse's three goals are to help institutions recruit diverse leaders, then help these institutions build safe and welcoming environments, and ultimately to help scholars at these institutions persist to graduation. These three goals help achieve Posse's mission which is to create leaders of tomorrow by supporting their persistence in college. There are Posse chapter office locations in 10 cities in the United States. Each Posse chapter office location works with a university partner(s) to recruit members from the city in which the office location resides and they have their own staff who work directly with Posse scholars from that city. Each chapter office location has a director, a career program manager, and trainers. Directors oversee day-to-day functions of the Posse chapter office location in the city in which it resides, and career

program managers work with students from the city where the Posse office location resides and Posse scholar alumni who were from a posse that was recruited from that city. The trainers are responsible for the selection of Posse scholars from the city in which the Posse chapter office resides, they conduct training for Posse scholars, and they work with Posse scholars and mentors once students arrive on their respective college campuses. In addition, Posse chapter offices have university partners, university staff liaisons, and university posse mentors. Universities are partners with one or more Posse chapters in the United States and they select scholars for the posse that will attend their institution as a group. These partners are responsible for tuition and additional costs to the Posse Foundation because of their participation. There are also university staff liaisons who are responsible for the day-to-day function of the relationship between the university, the Posse chapter office location partner, and the Posse National Office. They also manage mentors and Posse scholars, and plan all on campus Posse programming. Additionally, each university partner has an on-campus support person for Posse scholars when they arrive on campus.

With this organizational structure, each Posse chapter staff is able to implement the Posse Program components. The program components support staying in college and, with this support, scholars become leaders in organizations on campus, they excel in internships, and they stay in college so they can go on to serve as leaders and role models. These Posse Program components have been in place since the program's inception. As I have already described DAP (the Posse selection process), I now turn to describing the components of the program that follow student admission: precollegiate training, the campus program, and the career program.

Precollegiate Training

Before arriving on campus, Posse chapter trainers conduct required precampus training for incoming Posse scholars to prepare them to take on leadership roles on campus, to help them navigate the academic expectations of a college setting, and to equip them with tools to help with adjustment to campus life. When students are trained up front to take on whatever challenges they may face, they are set up for success and are more likely to stay in college. Also, many of the universities these scholars will attend are predominantly White, range from rural to urban, and are demographically different from the environments to which these scholars are accustomed. Thus, they need to be prepared for potential culture shock and learn how to support their fellow posse group members (Boyle, 2006).

Precollegiate training takes place weekly during the spring and summer before students start their first year of college classes. During precollegiate training, scholars participate in sessions that help them with team building, cross-cultural communication, leadership, and academic excellence (The Posse Foundation, n.d.-h). At the end of precollegiate training, scholars participate in two activities. The first is a retreat during which they engage in bonding and team building activities and meet the mentor who will work with them on their respective campus. The second activity, the "Test of Fire," occurs during their last few days of precollegiate training. Scholars are given a series of challenges to accomplish together in their city. These culminating events are in place to solidify the posse group bond (Posse Mentor Manual, 2016) before they officially head to their college campuses.

Campus Program

When scholars arrive on campus, their training continues. Posses are given a "name" that indicates their Posse chapter and a number that designates how many posses have come to that

university from that location. For example, the first Vanderbilt posse from New York was "New York 1." Posse cohorts meet weekly along with their mentor[6] during their freshman and sophomore years. During these meetings, scholars participate in training sessions about transitioning to college, homesickness, dealing with being in an unfamiliar environment, and study skills. The posse's campus mentor facilitates these sessions. The mentor's responsibilities include supporting scholars while they are on campus, leading posse group meetings, connecting posse members with campus resources, and helping motivate scholars to stay in college (Posse Mentor Manual, 2016). Posse scholars also have individual biweekly meetings with their mentor.

Despite scholars being on campuses, Posse chapter staff members are still actively involved with them and with their partner university. Posse chapter staff members visit partner universities quarterly to meet with scholars, mentors, and Posse university partner staff liaisons. The Posse chapter staff also have biweekly calls with campus mentors to discuss their respective posse group and individual posse members. During these calls, student assessments are made, and Posse mentors leave the call with recommendations in case a scholar is having academic or adjustment trouble which could hinder their ability to stay in college. Another on-campus program is the annual PossePlus retreat. The university liaison is responsible for coordinating the PossePlus retreat, which is a weekend-long event for all members of a campus Posse to come together and discuss a topic (typically related to social justice). Posse scholars bring a peer (non-Posse member) along with them as their "Plus" and university officials attend as well. In the next section I describe the career program.

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[6] The summer prior to taking on their role as a mentor, the campus faculty mentor (hired by the university partner) participates in a training at the Posse National Office (The Posse Foundation, 2014). Mentors were incorporated into the Posse program in 1993 and Posse staff have said that, in addition to scholar determination, the mentor is pivotal in determining scholar success (The Posse Foundation, 2014).

Career Program

Because one of Posse's goals is to "train the leaders of tomorrow" (The Posse Foundation, n.d.-j), the moment scholars step onto campus, they are being prepared for summer jobs and internships as well as careers after graduation. There are five components to the career program: internships, career development workshops, career coaching, graduate and fellowship programs, and the alumni network. To support the career program components, a career program manager comes to partner campuses to work with scholars. The Posse Foundation has partnerships with a variety of internship sites to which Posse scholars can apply. These internships allow scholars access to upper-level leaders and mentors and is a way companies can help develop the leaders of tomorrow. Posse also provides a variety of learning opportunities for their scholars including career development workshops. Through professional development, résumé writing, and interviewing, Posse scholars can be educated about different fields. These programs take place during precollegiate training, breaks from college, and Posse chapter staff campus visits. Some of these workshops are conducted in collaboration with career partners and include panels and other development activities. Both scholars and alumni can also work with a career coach (a professional who is connected with Posse chapter offices and has been trained to offer support) to receive guidance on careers and being a leader in the workplace. Scholars and alumni can also get help finding the right career for them, networking, practicing for interviews, and developing résumés. Scholars and alumni interested in applying to graduate and professional schools and/or for national awards can be advised by individuals who have been recipients in the past. This program connects scholars and alumni with potential institutions and mentors to help guide their process. As the Posse Program continues to grow, so does the network of alumni resources. Posse graduates have taken on a variety of jobs and opportunities including serving on

the Posse National Alumni Advisory Council, joining the Posse Portal to connect and mentor current scholars on careers, serving as career coaches, and general volunteering.

Additional Career Related Resources

Posse Scholars have access to a few additional career-related resources. The first is the Posse Scholar/Alumni Portal, which is an online community for scholars and alumni to connect about graduate school, career opportunities, and other Posse-related things. The second is a summer leadership award, which helps support scholars who are doing summer work that may not provide enough pay to meet a good quality standard of living. Scholars apply for these awards between January and April after they have received an internship offer (The Posse Foundation, n.d.-j). When a Posse scholar has access to all of these resources, they feel supported and are more likely to stay in college.

Posse Scholars

While Posse scholars have access to all of the program component resources, they also have a lot of responsibilities that come with being a part of the program. When on campus, Posse Scholars serve as leaders and role models, peer mentors, and as supportive members of their respective posse teams. They make an impact on college campuses simply by working with community partners and university constituents (The Posse Foundation, n.d.-a). They serve as ambassadors of the Posse Program and meet with university officials, including presidents and provosts, to discuss issues that affect them and their fellow students.

Throughout their duration in the program, Posse members are supported and support one another while working as a team to impact the campus community (The Posse Foundation, n.d.-a; Posse Mentor Manual, 2016). As Posse scholars continue to stay in college, they become leaders who will contribute to their college communities and to society after graduation (Posse

Mentor Manual, 2016). When Posse alumni join the workforce in a variety of fields, they add diverse perspectives and some even have a seat at the table where they make important decisions about the big issues facing the United States. Most recently, a Centre College Posse scholar alumnus became a legislative correspondent for congresswoman Ayanna Pressley who represents to the 7th district of Massachusetts (The Posse Foundation, n.d.-g). Many other examples of how Posse scholars impact their communities, the United States, and beyond can be found on the Posse Foundation website.

Regarding the student body, Posse scholars provide different points of view in the classroom and they help with the PossePlus Retreat by inviting non-Posse members and facilitating workshops on issues of education, political climate, race, and so forth. Another way they make an impact is by creating their own organizations or by serving as leaders in organizations that are already on campus. In fact, over 70% of Posse scholars are in leadership roles on Posse campuses (The Posse Foundation, n.d.-e). In addition, because Posse scholars are from a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds and come from urban areas, they increase campus diversity. By being community members and having a presence in the university environment, prospective students may see themselves represented and feel more welcome as a result. In turn, current non-Posse students and prospective students who are from diverse backgrounds feel as if they belong. Outside of this, though, the main purpose of being a Posse scholar is to support, encourage, and push along their fellow posse group members. In a magazine article by Catalyst Chicago (Williams, 2005), Tina Andrews, a Posse scholar explained,

> When I got sick, my Posse cared for me. For Thanksgiving, when I didn't have money to get home, one of my Posse bought me a bus ticket. And when I got here and didn't know

> how to work a computer, because I'd never used on [sic] in high school, my Posse showed me how. If I didn't have my Posse, I'd be back home (para. 9).

This is what being a member of a posse is about. Students encourage one another and provide necessary support so that their fellow posse members can stay in college and hopefully graduate to become alumni who give back.

Posse Alumni

Once someone is a part of the Posse family, whether it be as a scholar, a mentor, a university liaison, or a Posse chapter staff member, they are always part of the family. Posse continues to provide resources for their scholars postgraduation. The Foundation staff also use current Posse scholars and alumni as a resource for the organization (The Posse Foundation, n.d.-d). In the next few years, there will be over 6,000 Posse alumni. With the help of these alumni, the Posse Foundation strives to build a professional leadership network that represents the diversity of the United States. To make this happen, though, the organization needs to support their alumni and the alumni need to support the organization. Thus, the Foundation has a few things they offer their alumni. They have a Posse National Alumni Advisory Council that provides alumni support with leadership and professional development opportunities. Posse has also started to partner with institutions to offer graduate student scholarships to support the continued education of Posse alumni. Posse also provides two additional leadership opportunities: Leadership Conference participation and opportunities to join the National Alumni Advisory Council. Over the last 30 years, staff with the Posse Foundation have done amazing work and set the groundwork for scholar leadership moving forward. With the ongoing support of universities, Posse alumni, and other constituents, the Foundation will continue to change the

lives of many scholars. One way the Foundation has started to meet this challenge of changing lives is through the use of specialized programs.

Specialized Programs

As Posse has grown, so has their initiatives. At present, they have three additional programs they are implementing: the Posse Civic Engagement Program, the Posse STEM Program, and the Posse Veterans Program. Some partner universities have signed on to take Posses that have these initiatives at the core of what they do. While these programs are not the focus of this dissertation, it is important that they be noted to reflect Posse's commitment to supporting scholars and helping them stay in college.

Posse Civic Engagement Program

Posse's Civic Engagement Program is designed to support scholars interested in public service and/or social justice careers. This program is in its early stages; however, scholars who are involved in civic engagement work are recommended for posses that have a civic engagement purpose. Its curriculum focuses on fostering civic engagement and awareness. These scholars take on internships with organizations that address these areas.

Posse STEM Program

In response to a 2014 challenge from the White House to do more for underrepresented students in STEM, Posse joined forces with 10 partner universities to create STEM-focused Posses. Scholars are recruited and trained to take on STEM majors at their respective institutions and, in turn, the institutions have higher enrollment from UREM students in STEM (The Posse Foundation, n.d.-i).

Posse Veterans Program

In 2012, to increase the rates at which veterans of the United States Armed Forces attend and graduate from selective institutions, Posse created its veterans program. Posse Veterans is for veterans who want to attend top institutions in the United States. Posse's cohort model prepares students for the college experience, helps support scholar success, and provides a space for those who have had similar experiences as members of the armed forces. Posse Veterans' partner universities can use the GI Bill and Yellow Ribbon (both government college funding programs for armed forces members) to supplement costs and guarantee full tuition (The Posse Foundation, n.d.-i). Unfortunately, not every student will have access to all of these resources because not everyone can become a member of a posse.

Posse Access

The Posse Program staff recently removed Posse Access from their program components and now they discuss this aspect of the program as a stand-alone process that happens after scholars are selected for Posse. Even though only approximately 800 students are able to be a part of the Posse Program each year, Posse staff members are still dedicated to the mission and they want to help all students who cross their path. Thus, the Foundation implemented Posse Access which connects the students who were nominated for the Posse Program and may have attended DAP but were not selected by partner colleges for admission to one of their Posse groups. This component was added in 2008 and allows unselected students to have their application profiles made public on a web portal for partner universities to review. Students can be connected with admission officers from partner universities and from there they can participate in the regular admission process.

In the previous sections, I shared information about all of the resources to which Posse

scholars have access through the Posse Program components. In the next section, I discuss logic models and, by using a specific type of logic model, the theory approach logic model, I represent how I make connections between theory (i.e., existing research on UREM students staying in college) and practice (i.e., the Posse Program components) to understand the Posse Program.

Theory Approach Logic Models

One of the best ways to explain the inner workings, assumptions, and goals of a program is to use a logic model to describe the different components of that program. Thus, logic models provide a rationale for why certain aspects and components of a program are included and give a further understanding of how a program achieves its mission. Logic models also serve as a way to visually share an understanding of the resources to which a program has access, the planned activities to implement that program, and the changes or results the program sets out to achieve (W. K. Kellogg, 2004).

There are different types of logic models. One kind of logic model, the theory approach model, can be used to explain the inner workings of a program and how it functions. Theory approach logic models connect theoretical ideas with the underlying program assumptions (the reason for the initial creation of a program) and they describe why certain solutions were selected. Theory approach logic models also connect strategies that were successful in other programs with potential activities proposed by other initiatives (W. K. Kellogg, 2004) and are built from the big ideas that conceptualize the program, such as the origins of the program. The next section will define each of the parts of a theory approach logic model, from the program beginnings, to the planned work of the program, to the intended program outcomes.

Beginnings

The first part of a theory approach logic model is the program beginnings which is where the program assumptions and corresponding goals are presented. Programs have at their foundation a reason for why they are being established and they create goals to support these reasons. These goals are based on assumptions about an issue the program is attempting to address. Prior to implementing the remaining parts of the logic model, the assumptions of the program should be explained for the remainder of the model to make sense (W. K. Kellogg, 2004). From these assumptions and goals, come the next part of the logic model, planned work.

Planned Work

The planned work part of the theory approach logic model describes the inputs which are the resources needed (including power and finances) and the available community capitals that can go toward completing the work of the organization (W. K. Kellogg, 2004). The planned work part also describes program activities implemented by the organization to use these resources. Program activities include tools, events, and technology and are used to support program results. From the planned work comes the last part of the logic model, intended results.

Intended Results

The third part of the theory logic model, intended results, includes the outputs, outcomes, and impact of a program. The intended results represent what the program shows in response to the implementation of each aspect of the planned work part of the logic model. Outputs of the logic model are "the direct products of program activities and may include types, levels, and targets of services to be delivered by the program" (W. K. Kellogg, 2004, p. 2). Outcomes are described as "the specific changes in program participants' behavior, knowledge, skills, status, and level of functioning" (W. K. Kellogg, 2004, p. 2). The impact is the "fundamental intended

or unintended change occurring in organizations, communities or systems as a result of program activities within 7 to 10 years" (W. K. Kellogg, 2004, p. 2). All of this is tied together, so if one piece does not come to fruition, then the rest of the model may need to be adjusted to meet the end goal.

If . . . Then . . .

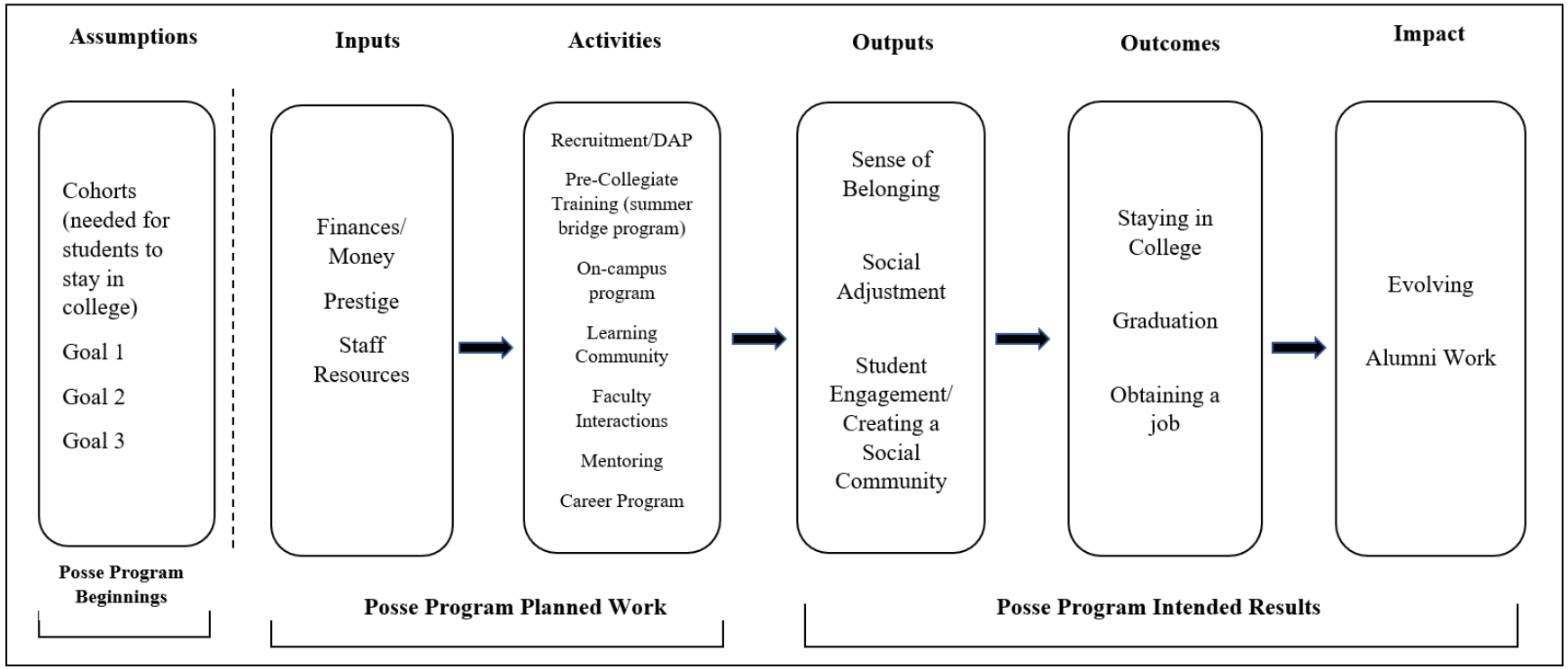
Logic models describe each step of a program over time, from the planning to the implementation to the results. Logic models use "if . . . then . . ." statements to connect the different parts of the program. Assumptions and goals, inputs (resources), activities, outputs, outcomes, and impact are all connected to create the model. For example, if a program has access to resources, then those resources can be used to accomplish planned activities. If the planned activities are accomplished, then outputs are produced. If outputs are achieved, then program participants will benefit from outcomes. If participants benefit from outcomes, then they in turn will impact a community and other systems because of the benefits they received due to program participation. Logic models also provide a map for potential program partners to understand how the planned pieces of a program are connected to its results (W. K. Kellogg, 2004). If partners have a grasp on why a program is organized in a certain way and the desired results of that program, they are more likely to invest resources.

Now that I have given a general overview of what a theory approach logic model is, I will use that model to describe the Posse Program. Figure 1 provides a visual representation of what Posse's theory approach logic model would look like based on a general theory approach logic model structure. I now turn to a more in-depth discussion of the Posse Program by using the theory approach logic model to describe the program and to discuss how the various staying in

college features that were explored in the literature review in the previous section align with/ are related to the program.

Figure 1:

Posse Program Theory Approach Logic Model



Posse Theory Approach Logic Model

To have a general understanding of how the theory and research work with the key elements of the Posse program, I have created a model, based on the general theory approach logic model (see Figure 1). The Posse Foundation describes the Posse program on their organization website and these descriptions provided me with information to develop a theory approach logic model that is specific to their program. Posse's theory approach logic model is similar to a theory of change which organizations occasionally use to systematically and visually present and share an understanding of the relationships between program resources, planned activities, and the achieved results (W. K. Kellogg, 2004). Each program component contributes to the Posse theory approach logic model and further description follows.

Posse Program Beginnings: Assumptions

Program beginnings generally start with the assumptions and goals of the organization and the Posse Program is no different. Based on the information that the Posse Foundation publicly shares, they have made assumptions about institutions of higher education and college going students. Their first assumption is that students will stay in college if they have a cohort of other students there to support them. This idea is at the heart of the Posse Program as Dr. Bial said that the reason she started the program was because one student said they would have stayed in college if they had their posse with them (Adams, 2014). Additionally, the three goals articulated by Posse are guided by other assumptions.

Goal one is to expand the pool from which top colleges and universities can recruit outstanding young leaders from diverse backgrounds; thus, the assumption tied to this goal is that there are top colleges that need help with finding a pool of diverse students from which they can select. This assumption may be based on research because it is also related to the number of diverse

students present on a college campus. There are a variety of schools that will fully admit they have challenges recruiting and or finding diverse students to attend. In fact, in the last 2 years, three institutions recognized their need to recruit more students from underrepresented groups, so they established programs and devoted resources to making their institutions more diverse (O'Donnell, 2018). Kansas State has created Project IMPACT which consists of on-campus summer programs to help ease UREM students into college life. West Virginia University took a different approach and addresses financial and support needs of incoming minority doctoral students. In turn, these students help at undergraduate recruiting events so that potential new students can see the opportunities available to minority students beyond an undergraduate education. North Carolina State University comes at this challenge from a different perspective by focusing on creating a diverse faculty so that students can see representations of themselves on campus (O'Donnell, 2018). These moves by colleges and universities across the United States show how invested they are in recruiting individuals from diverse backgrounds (the purpose of Goal 1) so, some institutions use programs like Posse and others to achieve a diverse population.

Goal 2 is to help partner institutions build more interactive campus environments so that they can be more welcoming to people from all backgrounds; thus, the assumption may be that there are top colleges that need help with building more inclusive and interactive campus environments because it may keep students in college. Recently, the Dean of Admissions and Financial Aid at Centre College reflected on how the environment at Centre has changed since they became a Posse partner school (The Posse Foundation, n.d.-g). Dean Nesmith remarked,

> When I started here, we would count students of color in the entering class in single digits. . . . Diversity was narrowly defined. Changing the profile of who we are has been really important and meaningful work . . . it's significant to have students who come in trained in

> how to talk around diversity issues . . . most students don't develop those skills. . . . Posse Scholars do. What the program has done to transform Centre has been so powerful. (The Posse Foundation, n.d.-g, para. 4)

Goal 3 is to ensure that Posse Scholars persist in their academic studies and graduate, so they can take on leadership positions in the workforce; thus the assumption may be that students are not persisting in their academic studies and not graduating. The assumption tied to Goal 3 is also informed by research indicating the link between student success in academic studies and persistence (Gershenfeld et al., 2016; Musu-Gillette et al., 2016). Goal 3, then, focuses on staying in college and is at the heart of the origins of the Posse program. Posse started because one student said if they had their posse with them while they were at college, then they would have stayed in college (Adams, 2014). These students need help and one of the ways that the Posse Program has chosen to address Assumption 3 and meet its corresponding goal is by creating a cohort of students. Thus, for this study and my interest in UREM students staying in college, I focus on Goal 3 of the program. Another assumption of the Posse Program is the student cohort and the idea that cohorts are needed for students to stay in college. This is an additional part of the Posse Program Beginnings, as it is a key part of the program.

Cohorts

As mentioned in the literature review cohorts can help students as they transition to college and can provide resources and support to students which may help them to stay in college (Lei et al., 2011; Martin et al., 2017). As a cohort-based comprehensive support program, Posse uses cohorts to achieve their foundational goal of seeing students stay in college to graduation. In fact, the creation of the cohort is at the center of what Posse does and is one way they have tried to remove the barriers students face when it comes to staying in college. The cohort was the impetus

for the program, is what provided the Foundation with its name, and is central to its creation. Simply put, the cohort structure is one of the driving forces behind the Posse Program. In this section, I discussed the Posse Program beginnings and went into detail about the program assumptions and associated goals, and briefly discussed why Posse uses cohorts. In the next section, I continue to explain these underlying assumptions, by discussing the planned work part of the theory approach logic model.

Posse Planned Work: Inputs and Activities

After indicating the program beginnings (such as the Posse Program assumptions and goals), the next phase of the logic model is to look at the planned work part of the program. Planned work describes the resources, such as program inputs and program activities, needed to implement the program. The inputs with which Posse has at its disposal are resources such as high school counselors, staff members who serve as trainers for the scholars, campus partners and on-campus mentors, other Posse scholars, the Posse Foundation, donations, prestige, recognition, and money. The Posse Program staff recognize the importance of these various resources and act accordingly. Specifically, Posse program trainers participate in education before they engage with potential scholars, posse mentors are required to attend mentor training sessions and they have ongoing follow up sessions with the staff from their respective Posse chapter, and university liaisons also receive a plethora of information to help them navigate their role as a resource (Posse Mentor Manual, 2016). One of the main inputs the Posse Program has at its disposal is money. With funding from private foundations, corporations, individuals, and some federal grants; as of the 2018 annual report the Posse Foundation had a budget of over 23 million dollars (The Posse Foundation, n.d.-b). When thinking about funding from a student perspective, for many students, having access to a paid-for college education is an incentive and

one way to get them to apply to an institution or, in this case, the Posse Program which connects them with a college that will cover the cost of a student's education. The literature indicates that having the resources to pay for college influences a student's choice of institution, their college experiences, and their persistence (Paulsen & St. John, 2002; Tinto, 1993; Zerquera et al., 2017), so it makes sense that Posse would ensure that students have access to funding as program participants. Ultimately, money allows Posse staff members the ability to create university partnerships to pay for student tuition. The Posse Program staff use these resources for the activities included in the planned work part of the theory approach logic model.

Posse Activities

Posse activities describe what the program implements to realize their goals. Program activities include events, technology, and tools, and these activities are used to support program results. The activities that are incorporated into the Posse theory approach logic model include recruitment, precollegiate training (summer bridge program), the on-campus program, learning communities, faculty interactions, the mentoring that Posse has in place for scholars, and the career program. Each of these activities were also mentioned in the literature review as features that helped students to stay in college and the relevant research about each one can be found there. The sections that follow include further discussion of each of these activities and how they align with the Posse theory approach logic model.

Posse Recruitment

The first activity is recruitment and Posse Program staff use unique strategies to recruit students. Early in their inception, Posse Program staff recruited students by looking at noncognitive attributes which was different from more traditional ways of recruiting such as those based on merit alone. Per their reported graduation rate, the Posse Program has recruited

students who are staying in college and, of those, 90% are graduating. Student recruitment for the Posse program happens in a variety of ways (Posse Mentor Manual, 2016). University partners promote the program through their various institutional offices such as the admission office; and Posse staff members work with community organizations, high school counselors, and other people who have access to high school students. These constituents discuss the Posse nomination process with students, and they talk with them about the different partner schools where Posse is located. Recruiters also help students explore the positive aspects of the program including connection to university and Posse chapter office resources, as well as the financial benefits (The Posse Foundation, n.d.-h).

Once a student is recruited and nominated for the Posse Program, they participate in the DAP. DAP takes place between September and December each year. The assessment is unique in that it is a three-part evaluation process where potential scholars participate in group and individual interviews and interact with staff members from Posse partner institutions (The Posse Foundation, n.d.-h). Instead of basing their selections on academic performance, Posse staff consider noncognitive factors to evaluate whether students are a right fit for the Posse Program (Posse Mentor Manual, 2016). Noncognitive factors relate to adjustment, motivation, and perceptions rather than cognitive measures like those on standardized tests such as quantitative and verbal skills (Sedlacek, 2004). Noncognitive measures are helpful in evaluating all students; however, they have been determined to be particularly helpful when assessing UREM students. Noncognitive variables include but are not limited to positive self-concept, realistic self-appraisal, successfully handling of the system, preference for long-term goals, access to a strong support person, leadership experience, community involvement, and emotional stability (Brown & Marenco, 1980).

Programs and institutions use a variety of evaluative tools including interviews, questionnaires, portfolios, essays, and application review to measure student competency levels in these areas. Noncognitive assessments are an effective way to determine a student's success and some colleges and universities have trained their admission staff members to review applications based on noncognitive variables (Sedlacek, 2004). Using noncognitive variables is an effective method for the Posse Program because one of the student attributes they assess is leadership ability and that cannot be determined by looking at a student's transcript. The Posse Program may be on the cusp of innovative selection processes because they admit students to the program via DAP. After a student is recruited it is important for them to discuss how prepared they are for college life. To lay the foundation for a satisfactory college experience, it is important for students to be prepared, thus another activity that is important to include in this discussion is the precollegiate training that Posse scholars are required to attend.

Precollegiate Training

Once a student commits to an institution as a member of a posse, they are required to participate in precollegiate training (The Posse Foundation, n.d.-h). This weekly training takes place the spring and summer before students arrive on campus and Posse office location trainers conduct each session. During training, students bond and connect as a Posse cohort while participating in educational programming that will help them navigate campus life. Session topics include finances, leadership on campus, study strategies, and homesickness. Posse scholars are also able to perfect the leadership skills they demonstrated during DAP and improve in some academic areas such as writing (Posse Mentor Manual, 2016). Precollegiate training is Posse's version of a bridge program but as opposed to being housed in the university (which is typically where bridge programs reside), it is housed in the program. Posse's bridge program also

has a longer time frame (around 8 months; Posse Mentor Manual, 2016). Posse's bridge program mirrors much of what a student would receive during a summer bridge program, which have been shown to help UREM students stay in college and is an important piece of the Posse theory approach logic model. More information about research related to the effectiveness of summer bridge programs can be found in the literature review and is helpful in providing further understanding about why Posse incorporates precollegiate training into their program. The Posse precollegiate training program (i.e., the Posse bridge program) is an activity that helps students as they begin to navigate their role as a member of a posse and as a future college student. It also starts to prepare students for engaging as a posse member and with their mentor when they arrive on campus.

On-Campus Program

Another component of the activities of the planned work of the Posse Program theory approach logic model is the on-campus program, which is the learning community that starts to form during precollegiate training and is continued once the scholars arrive on campus. Upon completion of the precollegiate training, students attend a partner institution and participate in the campus program (The Posse Foundation, n.d.-h). Ultimately, the precollegiate training (or the Posse bridge program) serves as a connector to the on-campus program by allowing students to begin to form bonds as a cohort group and continue to build when they arrive on campus.

The campus program incorporates many of the features needed for UREM students to stay in college because it is where two of the three program goals of the program are implemented. Specifically, the goals of building interactive campus environments and staying in college to graduation are addressed when students arrive on campus (Posse Mentor Manual, 2016). As a part of the campus program, students participate in weekly meetings with their

respective Posses and have biweekly meetings with their mentors. During precollegiate training, the posse trainer serves in the mentor role and when the campus program begins, this role passes on to the campus mentor. In addition to conducting group meetings and one-on-one meetings, the mentor is responsible for working with university officials in charge of the Posse campus program as well as Posse chapter staff. Often a university faculty member and, at times, a university staff member serves as an on-campus mentor for a posse. The mentor is one of the main components of the campus program and it is important that the mentor create a stable and welcoming environment for the posse group and for individual posse members. They are the main facilitator in the continued cultivation of the learning community that is established in the posse during precollegiate training. As students are participating in precollegiate training (Posse bridge program), they are starting to build this community. While learning communities are typically created in the college setting, this one starts precollege, during training, and then transitions with Posse scholars when they come to campus and participate in posse meetings, mentor meetings, and other posse-related programming. Through preinvolvement with the learning community, scholars can build bonds early.

Learning Community

Students in the Posse Program are also a part of a learning community and this learning community begins to form during precollegiate training and continues after arriving at college via the posse group meetings and being a member of a larger Posse community at their respective institutions. Participation in learning communities allows students to feel more connected and provides opportunities to engage with faculty and student peers (Pike et al., 2011; Renn & Reason, 2013; Spradlin et al., 2011). During their time in college, scholars are beginning

to develop skills that will help them to engage with peers as well as faculty members (Posse Mentor Manual, 2016) who will be discussed in the next section.

Faculty Interactions

Interactions with faculty are another activity related to the planned work of the Posse Program theory logic model. There are a variety of university constituents that can help create an environment that is conducive to UREM students and Posse scholars and one of those constituents is the faculty. Many Posse students have a posse mentor who is also a faculty member, so they begin their interaction in meetings with them. Beyond this, though, posse members are given support by their mentors on working and engaging with faculty members (Posse Mentor Manual, 2016).

Mentoring

Posse mentors at times can step in to help a Posse scholar learn to work with a faculty member. Mentors also may connect students with faculty as well as ease the fear of interaction by discussing their faculty experiences. Posse mentors have been shown to play a significant role in the overall Posse Program structure, thus being an additional piece of the planned work activities in the theory approach logic model. Posse students not only have the privilege of access to mentoring programs, but they also have access to the career program coordinators throughout the duration of college and as alumni of the program.

Career Program

The career program is the final element of the planned work activities and begins while Posse scholars are in college (The Posse Foundation, n.d.-h). During this time, they work with the Posse office location career manager who guides them through the internship process, conducts career development workshops, and provides career coaching and encourages them to

use their respective campus resources. Additionally, career managers work with career services offices on campus to learn about opportunities available to students (Posse Mentor Manual, 2016). After scholars graduate, they remain connected to the program via graduate fellowship programs and involvement with the alumni network. Career programs and services go beyond the Posse Program and the respective posse's needs. One of Posse's goals is for students to persist to graduation. This is why an aspect of the program is to have a career program manager in place to keep students motivated to find a job, to connect students with internships, to help guide the career decision progress, all so they are encouraged to stay. While some campuses offer these services, the career program manager can work directly with Posse scholars as well as career services offices to allow students to have success in finding a career path. Because of this, it is important that a few additional aspects come into play to make sure that the program is a success. With these inputs and activities, the Posse Program theory approach logic model is able to move forward with their intended results.

Posse Intended Results: Outputs, Outcomes, and Impact

The last part of the logic model, intended results, includes all of the program's desired results. The purpose of the intended results aspect of a program is to produce results (e.g., the outputs a program hopes to achieve, the outcomes that happen as a result of these outputs, and the impact that the program will have on participants and on those people that are not affiliated with the organization). Another way to say this is, the intended results are the desires and hopes of the program, why the program exists, and what the program originally intended to achieve. The intended outputs of the Posse Program are sense of belonging, social adjustment, and student engagement/creating a social community. Additionally, the outcomes of the Posse Program

happen over time and are demonstrated when students stay in college, graduate, and obtain a job. The combination of outputs and outcomes creates an impact over time.

Posse Outputs: Sense of Belonging, Social Adjustment, and Student Engagement/Creating a Social Community

One of the first outputs Posse students may experience from participating in the program is a sense of belonging. Engaging with a Posse mentor and members of the Posse cohort can help some students begin to feel as if they belong. Often for Posse students, belonging (to a Posse) starts during precollegiate training and then carries through to campus. When it comes to feeling as if they belong on a campus, the process may be a bit different. The posse group also helps students to begin to adjust socially and engage as students while creating a community. These are two additional outputs of the Posse Program. The posse is always there, and the group can connect posse members with their friends. This carries over from interactions during precollegiate training. There are also other posse members on campus with which scholars can connect.

Posse Outcomes

When thinking about the intended results of a program, Posse staff members can look at program participants' behavior, knowledge, skills, status, and level of functioning to determine the program outcomes. These tangible outcomes include staying in college which leads to the outcome of degree attainment, and after graduation, hopefully obtaining a job. There are many benefits to staying in college and one of those benefits is getting a job after graduation. According to Espinosa et al. (2019), those who have obtained higher education are more likely to be in the labor force, to have lower rates of unemployment, and to be employed full time. In fact, as higher levels of education increase, so do the rates affiliated with these benefits (Turk, 2019).

Additionally, Ma et al. (2016) determined that those who obtained bachelor's degrees and beyond, earned more money, were more likely to be employed, had an increased chance of moving up the social ladder, were less likely to be on public assistance, had healthier lifestyles, were more active citizens, and were more involved with their families than those who had not obtained degrees. While short term outcomes can be attainable in 1 to 3 years, longer term outcomes take between 4 to 6 years and are reflected in the impact within 7 to 10 years. This is why it is important for both the Posse Foundation staff members and members of posses to continue to engage with one another so these outcomes can be observed and documented. These outcomes, seen over time, eventually lend themselves to the impact of the Posse Program.

Posse Impact

Programmatic impacts happen as a result of the implemented activities and typically take 7 to 10 years to be seen. They are often evolving, especially with newer programs, so they may not be seen immediately; however, since the Posse Program has been around for over 30 years, at present we are able to see some of its impact. One of the goals of the Posse Program incorporates the idea that Posse scholars will graduate and take on leadership positions in the workforce and beyond. There are examples of former Posse scholars who are serving as change agents around the world daily. Most recently, a member of the first Posse became the president of Ithaca College, another is now in medical school at Harvard and fighting for the rights of DACA students through peaceful protest, and another is the co-founder of a sustainability startup and recently installed the first "green" roof at the United Nations (The Posse Foundation, n.d.-g). These former members of posses have graduated in the last few years or more and are achieving the leadership goal that was set out for them by the Posse Foundation staff. These Posse alumni are making an impact on immigration, environmental issues, and in education. Beyond these

stories, though, another impact that is continuous is the employment of Posse scholars. Students have access to career assistance while on campus and, as alumni, they can continue to positively impact the reputation of the institution by remaining employed, which in turn is incentive for institutional partners who want to share the success stories of former students.

Another way that Posse can ensure a shorter-term impact is in their Posse Access Portal. When colleges are given access to students who were a part of the Posse interview process but were not selected, they will have a pool of diverse students with which to connect. In turn, the students to which these schools connect can hopefully also attend college and continue to help Posse achieve its goal of diversifying colleges and universities, bringing different perspectives to campus environments, and staying in college to graduation despite not being a member of a Posse.

Chapter Summary

In this section, I provided an in-depth description of the history and components of the Posse Program. Then, I discussed the model I created to understand the Posse Program. This model was based on a theory approach logic model template (W. K. Kellogg, 2004) and was used to explore the different components that the Posse Program has used to impact scholars who participate in the program. I reviewed the three different parts of the logic model (i.e., Posse Program beginnings, Posse Program planned work, and Posse Program intended results) and what the Posse staff have chosen to incorporate into their program to meet their goals and get their results. While Posse Program staff members do not openly tie their program to preexisting theories and theorists (e.g., Spradlin et al., 2013; Tinto, 2004), they do publicly share the different components that are incorporated into their program via their website. By looking into available theories and literature about students staying in college (all of which I discussed in the

literature review), I was able to propose a theory approach logic model to discuss the Posse Program.

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

This chapter provides an overview of my qualitative study and how I went about answering my research question: How do students in the Posse Program at a midwestern university stay in college? Included in this section is information on my biases and assumptions and my philosophical approach. Additionally, I provide a detailed explanation of the methods I used for this dissertation and I give an overview of the data I collected and how I analyzed that data. The chapter concludes with study limitations and a chapter summary.

Researcher Biases, Assumptions, and Philosophical Approach

As the primary instrument of analysis for qualitative research, the researcher has biases. It is important, therefore, to begin my methodology discussion by unpacking those assumptions. Generally, researchers should disclose factors that may influence their work such as gender, race, class, and prior experiences with the topic (Glesne, 2016). Also, when exploring sensitive topics such as UREM populations, readers may question the context of me as the researcher, so they need to understand my intent.

My positionality is salient in this work. I am a Black woman and I come from a middle-class background, which to this day is an environment where education is important. I am a second-generation college student and each of my parents has a Doctor of Philosophy. Because of my belief that everyone who wants access to higher education should have it, I approach this work from a critical perspective. My interest in UREM students staying in college comes from past work in student affairs and from my curiosity about UREM students' staying-in-college behaviors because of how I contextualized my experiences during my education. As a student, I had both positive and negative experiences throughout my undergraduate, masters, and now doctoral levels of education. These experiences helped shape and define me during my education

and my curiosity about the effect my experiences had on my staying in college behaviors led me to this topic.

Another area to address is my connections to the Posse Program. I served as a mentor for a posse at my former institution and still maintain connections to Posse scholars. Additionally, one of my past jobs was as an associate director of admission and I was responsible for selecting students from Chicago and New York for posses at my institution. Since I enjoyed all of my experiences with the program, and hoped that the students who I worked with did as well, as I conducted this research I needed to keep in mind that my questions and general interactions with people affiliated with the program should not be leading nor based on my assumptions about the Posse experience. Just because Posse nationally has a 90% graduation rate does not mean that everyone has engaged with the program in the same ways. I believe in the mission, values, and methods of the Posse Program and I want to see the program succeed. It is because of this belief that, during my data collection and analysis, I had to ensure I was not only looking for positive information but instead investigating the full story. Thus, I relied on others to tease out any biases I had when doing research on this program and I kept my prior connection to the program at the forefront of my mind when conducting research. Acknowledging my biases up front and then addressing them throughout the dissertation holds me accountable as the researcher. Not only does discussing biases give the reader further perspective on why the problem was important but addressing biases (of which I have many) can offer further explanation into why I chose certain methods. Some of my biases are related to people not only going to college but seeing them graduate because I feel it will help students to find a job and be successful. I was a mentor for a posse and got to see firsthand the work of the staff at the Posse Program so I view it

positively, and I am a higher education professional so I have bias toward seeing programs geared toward students staying in college be successful in their efforts.

How I view the world and more specifically my approach to research both lend themselves to my constructivist philosophical approach. Constructivist researchers believe that the truth is relative, is the result of perspective, and that both interpretation and discovery happen at the same time (Boblin et al., 2013). Constructivist researchers also assume that reality is subjective, there is an emphasis on treating the phenomenon holistically, and that a variety of aspects of the phenomena should be explored including economical, historical, political, and social (Stake, 1995). One of the staple components of constructivism is understanding the meaning that a particular phenomenon has for the research participant and how they interpret their experiences, construct their world, and participate in meaning making (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). My constructivist approach is prevalent throughout this dissertation, starting with my research question as well as in the way I conducted interviews (i.e., the way I asked questions) and in how I analyzed the data (i.e., discovering and interpreting at the same time). My philosophical approach, in turn, is connected to how I best feel I can gather information to explore my research question and that is by using qualitative research methods.

Qualitative Research Methods

There are a variety of ways to classify qualitative research. Qualitative research is an inductive process where data are gathered by the researcher to create understanding of a question. It is "richly descriptive" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 17) and uses words and pictures, as opposed to numbers, to describe the topic. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), "doing research involves choosing a study design that corresponds with your question" (p. 1). They also recommend considering whether the design is a comfortable match with your worldview,

personality, and skills. What I explored by asking Posse students how they stay in college aligns with the characteristics of a qualitative study. Since I was interested in information that could only be described by experiences and not numbers, was inductive, had a smaller sample, and relied on rich descriptions, qualitative research methods were a natural fit for this work.

Brief History of Qualitative Research

Qualitative research originated in the fields of anthropology and sociology where researchers asked questions about people, their lives, and the sociocultural context from which they came. In doing so, they observed different cultures, interviewed the people in these cultures, and collected cultural artifacts and documents (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). These processes became what is now referred to as the methods that qualitative researchers use to collect data. Researchers can conduct different types of qualitative studies such as case study, ethnography, grounded theory, narrative analysis, or phenomenology (Remler & VanRyzin, 2015). This dissertation took a basic qualitative approach.

Qualitative Studies

In basic qualitative research, reality is constructed. Basic qualitative researchers are "interested in (1) how people interpret their experiences (2) how they construct their worlds, and (3) what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 24). The goal of basic qualitative research is to understand how people make sense of their lives, experiences, and environment. As I conducted the research, I built upon knowledge of existing literature while I explored the different aspects of the phenomenon I was researching: how do students in the Posse Program at a midwestern university stay in college?

Basic qualitative studies are the most common form of education research that is qualitative in nature. Data collection typically consists of interviews (including focus groups)

and observations and the questions asked in these components are based on the theoretical framework of the research study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To guide my study and represent how I understand the Posse Program, I created a theory approach logic model based on a logic model template from W. K. Kellogg (2004) and used this as the framework for this study. Additionally, document and artifact review as well as visual data can aid the data collection process. These materials often exist prior to the beginning of a research study, come in a variety of forms including newsletters, journals, and promotional materials, and can include online sources as well as hard copies of items.

In basic qualitative studies, the analysis of the data includes finding themes that describe the data collected. These themes are the findings of the study and are supported by data such as interviews and information derived from archival material from the respective study. The researcher compiles the information, and through writing, shares how they understand the way that the study participant makes sense of the area of interest of the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This dissertation took a basic qualitative approach and used basic qualitative methods which included extensive research on staying in college, research on the Posse Program, and interviewing students who are a part of the Posse Program that was easily identifiable and to which I had access.

Pilot Study

Personal experience with the Posse Program represents the foundation and motivation of this study.[7] During the summer of 2015, I used a research fellowship to conduct a pilot study to

[7] Per Merriam and Tisdell (2016), it is important to include this information about any pilot studies affiliated with the dissertation research in the methodology section of a qualitative research study.

determine the viability of this as a dissertation topic. After completing the appropriate paperwork (i.e., institutional review board approval), I contacted a total of 10 students and 6 consented to interviews. Each student identified as a person of color, specifically Latinx, biracial, or of Asian American descent and their respective class years ranged from sophomores to seniors. Students were contacted via email, asked to complete an initial demographic survey, participate in an interview, and asked to participate in a follow-up interview should one be needed. All interviews that had to be cancelled or could not be conducted in person were conducted via online conferencing through Zoom and Skype from my office or my home. After individual successful interviews, students received a $25 Amazon gift card which was sent electronically to their chosen email address.

After all interviews were conducted, each interview was transcribed and uploaded into Dedoose for coding and analysis. Each interview lasted between 75 and 90 minutes to allow for detailed answers and additional questions. During data analysis, initial coding pulled out major themes such as the different paths each student took to college, how each student was a leader before they came to college, and how they continued to be leaders while in college. For the majority of those interviewed, the members of their posses supported them and were a reason they stayed enrolled. Students described that they knew they wanted to go to college but that the institution they ended up at was not on their radar until they got involved with the Posse selection process. Many of the students also expressed that they were involved in their communities prior to joining Posse, so it was a natural transition to be involved while on campus. Three major themes stuck out as salient components of the Posse Program and reasons why students stayed in college: *leadership on campus, the involvement of the mentor, and the*

supportive Posse student network. The pilot study solidified initial thoughts about qualitative research methods being the best fit for my research question and this dissertation.

Qualitative Methods of Data Generation

There are no specific methods of data collection and analysis for basic qualitative research; thus, methods such as interviews with individuals or groups, observations, document analysis, and artifact analysis can be used, and some techniques are used more than others (Merriam, 2009). Not every method must be used when conducting qualitative research; however, for the data to be considered valid and reliable, using at least two methods to collect data is encouraged (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Effective qualitative study relies on multiple sources of evidence (Glesne, 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Stake, 1995) including interviews and documents. In qualitative studies, varied sources of data are often collected and analyzed to obtain multiple perspectives and points of view to gain a holistic understanding of the phenomenon being researched (Stake, 1995). This process, called triangulation, describes this use of multiple data sources to clarify meaning and verify the repeatability of an observation and interpretation (Stake, 2003).

Since a specific program is the focal point to understand student experiences, a theory approach logic model was implemented to guide the study. Logic models can be used to explain the functions and operations of a program and they explore the underlying assumptions of a program. Theory approach logic models have three parts, *beginnings*, which describe the program assumptions, *planned work*, which describes the programmatic inputs and activities, and *intended results*, which explores the outputs, outcomes, and impact of a program. The logic model provides foundational support for this dissertation.

Research Site

The research was conducted with students who were enrolled at Midwestern University (pseudonym). As this dissertation involved human participants, it had to be approved by the Michigan State University Institutional Review Board. All documents were submitted, assessed, and accepted by the board before I began soliciting participants for this dissertation study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Remler & VanRyzin, 2015). Additionally, because data collection required me to work with members of the Midwestern University community, I spoke with a member of the Midwestern University Institutional Review Board staff and was informed that I did not have to submit paperwork through their system because I had already received approval from my host institution.

Midwestern University was chosen as the site for a few reasons. As of September 2020, there are 58 Posse partner schools and 11 of those are in the Midwest. The number of Posse partner schools in the Midwest makes it more difficult to determine which site I used, thus offering increased confidentiality. Also, Midwestern University is a Posse partner school that has Posses from two or more cities, so many students were available to interview. Finally, this campus had a graduation rate over 80% (roughly 5–10% lower than the overall Posse Foundation graduation rate). This demonstrated that students were staying-in-college at a high rate so the students at this site would be able to provide information that would help me to answer my research question.

Work with Posse Program Campus Officials

The first part of the data collection involved connecting with the Posse campus officials to gain access to their respective posse scholars. Due to the spread of Corona Virus Disease[8], corresponding with campus officials was a challenge. Many universities across the United States closed and moved their classes to an online format so it took a few weeks to get a response after multiple attempts. Once I was able to connect with the Posse Program staff at Midwestern University (MU), I asked if there was a newsletter, listserv, social media, or other ways that an advertisement for my study could be posted for the posse scholar community. One person was able to help me to connect with scholars via several avenues. Additionally, I inquired about any data they collected about the members of different posses on their campus and anything they may collect from the big meetings with all of the posse members and from individual posse-specific meetings. I did not receive a response to this request. It was important to connect with these Posse officials because despite being a Posse mentor and serving on posse selection committees in the past, it was still necessary to gain rapport with on campus officials. Thus, I was transparent about the dissertation and offered to share any information with them (that was not confidential), so they knew all aspects of the work.

Desired Sample and Recruitment

Students were recruited from among current sophomore, junior, or senior students in MU's Posse Program. This was to ensure students had been members of the Posse program at MU for at least 1 year because they would have had more experiences than students from the freshman class. Also, using students from these class years indicated they have continued their

[8] Coronavirus spread throughout the world and caused a pandemic beginning in December of 2019 and was ongoing during the time that these students were being interviewed.

academic studies at Midwestern University at least one more year. Participants were from a UREM population and identified as a student of color, so White students were not included in the sample since they are not a part of the UREM population studied. Initially, at least 15 people were targeted for recruitment; however, I anticipated that this number would change based on response rates and the potential need for additional participants once I began data analysis. Campus staff were asked to forward the participant recruitment email to Posse students to encourage increased participation (see Appendix B). In addition, I reached out to 43 students personally via email information gathered from a public website where the university posted student names and Posse group designations. Twenty students responded to the Qualtrics survey link that was listed in the recruitment email and of those respondents, only 15 met the study criteria. All 15 of those students were contacted however one student did not respond to multiple emails to set up an interview and the other student missed their interview and was never able to reschedule it. Due to this, by the end of the study, I had completed 13 interviews.

Sample Selection

Qualitative studies are not required to use one method of sample selection over another; however, there are two basic types of sampling (probability and nonprobability) that are prevalent in qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Since probability sampling is about generalization to the population and that is not the goal of my research, I used nonprobability sampling instead. The nonprobability sampling technique uses a process that does not give all persons in the population an equal chance of being selected (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Not every student can be a member of the population from which I was gathering information (the Posse Program) so, this type of sampling was logical.

The specific type of nonprobability sampling I used was unique purposeful sampling

which assumes the researcher is attempting to answer a particular question and gain insight about that question (Merriam, 2009; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Thus, researchers need to purposefully select a sample to learn the answers to their question. The best way to do this was to select five students per class year (sophomore, junior, senior) so I could learn as much information as possible. This type of sampling is also based on unique and atypical occurrences in a particular population (in this case college students who are Black and Latinx and also members of the Posse Program; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Interviews

The most common form of data collection in qualitative research is interviews. Most interviews are person-to-person where a researcher gathers information from a participant with the goal of collecting a particular type of information. Interviews are necessary when behavior cannot be observed or when discussing events that have already taken place. I conducted semistructured interviews using protocol questions (see Appendix A) and employed effective interview strategies such as asking good questions, using appropriate probes, being a good listener, and adapting to changes while interviewing (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Interviews were conducted and recorded via Zoom.

My main research question was, "how do students in the Posse Program at a midwestern university stay in college?" It was important for me to conduct interviews with Posse students and ask them about what contributed to their staying-in-college behaviors. I used the same interview protocol for each participant. First, they were contacted via email or other social network platform to generate interest for the study. That email included a preinterview survey (see Appendix C) which collected demographic information such as name, class year, major, and ethnicity. This part of the interview process was more structured to ensure that the student met

the participation qualifications of the study (i.e., sophomore, junior, or senior and UREM student). The information from the preinterview survey was also used to create participant biographical sketches for each student. When I confirmed their eligibility for the study, they signed and returned the consent form (see Appendix D) and I preceded to set up times for student interviews.

Each participant was informed that a second interview would take place if more information or clarification was needed. No participant was asked to participate in a second interview since I received more than enough information from each participant during the first interview. Finally, each participant received a $40 Amazon gift card which was sent electronically to their chosen email address.

Archival Materials

Archival materials are another source of data. These include documents and artifacts that are publicly available such as pamphlets and brochures, as well as personal documents and artifacts that are provided by research participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). During my interviews I collected a variety of archival materials and when I spoke with individual posse members I asked if they had any materials they wanted to share with me that could contribute to my study. Of the student participants, four sent me archival materials that included journal entries, informational newsletters, and projects that were completed during weekly posse meetings. All of this archival material was created prior to participant interviews and I used it in comparison when I analyzed the data collected from student interviews.

Data Analysis

My data consisted of directly quoted information from transcribed individual interviews and archival materials such as journals and newsletter which were used as comparison.

Transcribed individual interviews were kept organized by using data analysis software (i.e., Dedoose) and backup documents were saved on password protected computers and on password protected files on an external hard drive. Per Merriam and Tisdell (2016), "Qualitative data analysis should also be conducted along with (not after) data collection" (p. 297). Analysis is conducted in this way to make sure the data do not become too overwhelming and to ensure nothing is missed when collecting additional information. When analyzing the interviews, I used the inductive and constant comparative method, an analytical process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). After the first participant was interviewed, I reviewed the transcript from that interview along with the study purpose. Then I read and reread the data, making notes in the margins as I went along. From the first review, I created a memo to capture reflections, themes, ideas, and anything else on which I wanted to follow up. Then I made note of new discoveries, new questions, and things I would do in the next interview I had with a different student participant. I continued to do this after each interview so when I analyzed the data and, eventually, wrote up the findings, I had already made initial connections and was organizing and refining during data collection as opposed to at the beginning of data analysis.

An example of a method I used to help me as I analyzed the transcript data while they were being collected is presented by Merriam and Tisdell (2016) and adapted from Bogdan and Biklen (2011). Bogdan and Biklen suggested 10 steps to the inductive and constant comparative analysis which include creating analytic questions, basing data collection sessions on what I found from previous sessions, writing as many comments on observations as I could as I went along, writing memos about what I was learning, trying out ideas and themes on participants, exploring literature while I was in the field, playing with different concepts, and using visual devices to provide clarity on my analysis. Using this method helped me to keep the data I

collected organized and helped me to think about what the findings meant. Additionally, I relied on making connections between the information that was being shared with me during interviews and the different pieces of archival materials. When it came to analyzing the data and creating a findings section, some of the connections between what the participants said were already in place.

Coding Schemes

Transcripts were generated from the recorded interviews. For each transcript, a two-cycle coding procedure was followed. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) defer to Saldaña (2013) for good coding practice. Saldaña (2013) described coding as "a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based visual data" (p. 3). Basically, coding uses words, letters, numbers, colors, or phrases to break information into categories. It is "assigning some sort of short-hand designation to various aspects of your data so that you can easily retrieve specific pieces of the data" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 199). I followed a two-cycle coding procedure. During the first cycle of coding, I used a structural coding process (Saldaña, 2012) and with the help of Dedoose, I highlighted the parts of the data that seemed to answer my research question. Then, I used affective coding methods by adding descriptors to the codes. Affective coding methods investigate subjective qualities of human experiences by directly acknowledging and naming them (Saldaña, 2012). As a visual learner and researcher, seeing information laid out in front of me helps me as I analyze information. Therefore, to help me with this process, I printed the codes onto colored sheets of paper which I then cut up into individual strips and began to organize by similarities and differences. After that process was complete, I began to look for patterns and interconnected themes as I grouped and regrouped the descriptors. The purpose of

data analysis is to make sense of data and to interpret what participants have said so that meaning can be made. Thus, from the themes, I made connections between the data I obtained and my research question. I also analyzed the archival materials such as journal entries and newsletters that student participants sent to me and compared the information in these documents with the information that the students shared during their interviews. See Table 1 for each theme and the definition I derived from the coding analysis.

Table 1:

Themes, Related Definitions, and Example Quotes

Theme	Related definition	Example quote
Student Background and Characteristics They Bring to College • Motivation to go to college • Involvement • Salient Racial/Ethnic Identity	Students come to college bringing characteristics with them such as race/ethnicity, gender, scholastic ability, levels of motivation, and extracurricular involvements. Despite not articulating their background characteristics as one of the reasons they stayed in college, this was clearly tied to how these students stay in college.	"There were no ifs, ands or buts about it. It was just something that I knew was going to be the next step in my plan after high school . . . for me there was never any question of whether or not I am going to college." (Mary, freshman)
Affirmation • Affirming Spaces • Affirming People • Identity Affirming People	Receiving emotional support or encouragement and confirmation of purpose, validity, and "right" to be in a space. Students shared that affirmation in the form of being in affirming spaces and/or engaging with affirming people was another way they stayed in college.	"He was the first Black professor that I had and it was so refreshing to see a person of color in that kind of position. It made it a lot easier to be interested . . . and being a person of color in that kind of position was really nice to have and it made me more interested and made me feel more comfortable raising my hand if I had a question." (Cleo, sophomore)
Communities of Support • Posse-Related Communities of Support	Communities where students are able to find support from others. These communities are either in place because of a student's	"Coming here from [my town] and from my high school, which was just so diverse, it was so different, but at least I had my

Table 1 (cont'd)

• Scholars Respective Posse • Communities of support that Scholars Create	participation in the Posse Program or communities that scholars create on their own. Student participants shared that these communities of support they were another reason they stayed in college.	posse to go back to. Not just my posse, but the whole posse community, someone to go back to as a sense of community. That was probably one of the main reasons why I continued to stay after that first semester" (Luna, junior)

I arrived at the themes listed in Table 1 in a few ways. At its inception, this dissertation sought to reject a deficit approach and one way to do that was to think more broadly about how I and others should understand who these students are. Thus, including the student background and characteristics they bring to college made sense, especially as students were sharing information about the array of precollege characteristics including involvement. Even though they were not describing it as one of the reasons they stayed in college, after hearing about their motivations, involvement, and salient racial identities, it was prevalent that these background characteristics contributed to how they stayed in college. When thinking about the second theme, affirmation, students consistently shared stories about situations where they were challenged and questioned their place at college. Most of these events also included information about how they received affirmation from people and others who helped them through, so this was also a relevant theme and also connected to how they stayed in college. When students are in affirming spaces and with affirming people, they feel more connected and staying in college becomes easier. The last theme, communities of support, was interwoven into everything the students did from the moment they came to campus. They had built-in communities of support and often found their community of support with folks who were also affirming their identity and as a result of being in these communities they stayed in college. I used all of these connections to write my findings chapter. Further discussion these themes can be found in Chapter 4.

Validity and Reliability

It is important to conduct research that is valid and reliable. Different researchers use different methods for qualitative work to ensure this happens. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), "One of the assumptions underlying qualitative research is that reality is holistic, multidimensional, and ever-changing; it is not a single, fixed, objective phenomenon waiting to be discovered, observed, and measured as in quantitative research" (p. 242). Validity is determined based on how congruent the findings from the research are with reality (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). One of the best-known ways to support validity is to use triangulation methods (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Remler & VanRyzin, 2015; Stake, 2003). Triangulation is the use of multiple methods in qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). These methods include using multiple sources of data and multiple methods to collect data, which I did by conducting in-depth research about staying in college and the Posse Program, facilitating interviews via Zoom, and collecting archival materials. Another aspect of triangulation is comparing and contrasting different types of data that are collected at different times (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Stake, 2003). Students sent me archival materials such as previously written journals and newsletters and I compared this information to their respective interview transcripts. As I discuss in this chapter, multiple sources of data (extensive research on staying in college, research on the Posse Program, interviews with Posse students, and Posse archival materials) were used for this dissertation to understand the depth and breadth of the staying-in-college issue.

Another way to ensure validity was to seek feedback on the findings from interview participants, or member checking (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This was done by sending a character biographical sketch, a sample of findings from their interview, and an interview transcript to each research participant to review. I asked the participants to look over the

materials and confirm if they were correctly depicted and if I misinterpreted anything they had shared during their interview. Member checking was important because the findings and discussion chapter was based on the information reported via interviews. It was important to ensure data were captured correctly to reflect the participants' responses so that my study did not report incorrect information. If participants had any changes or concerns, those were addressed promptly and appropriately. An additional strategy used was engaging with the data collection at every step of the research process and reviewing it daily. Although I could not get any additional participants for the study, after I had interviewed the 13 participants, I reached saturation and determined I was no longer hearing new things so stopping at that point was warranted.

Discussing positionality was another way to ensure validity and reliability in the research. It was important to discuss how personal biases, assumptions, and prior relationship with the topic could impact the study so it would be accounted for later (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Peer review can also ensure validity, and this was already built into the dissertation committee process where members reviewed drafts of the work and provided feedback (Merriam, 2009). Peer feedback also happened with members of the education community including an adjunct faculty member in psychology, a student affairs administrator who works in a diversity, equity, and inclusion office, and a recent graduate of the Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Education program at Michigan State University. Each person reviewed one transcript along with the codes to evaluate whether I captured everything correctly.

Strategies such as those used for validity (e.g., peer examination, positionality, and triangulation) can be used to ensure reliability. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggested reliability, or the extent to which research findings can be replicated, can be achieved through paying careful attention to how data are collected and analyzed and how the findings are presented.

"Reliability is problematic in the social sciences simply because human behavior is never static, nor is what many experience necessarily more reliable than what one-person experiences" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 250). That being said, to establish reliability I created an audit trail which described step-by-step how the data were collected, how categories were created, and how decisions were made. Finally, per the institutional review board policies of both Michigan State University and Midwestern University, this dissertation complies with all federal, state, local, and institutional policies.

Delimitations and Limitations

As with most studies, my dissertation had several delimitations and limitations which are explained in this section. First, I will discuss two delimitations of which I had control that represent the decisions I made during this research process. When I began this dissertation, I determined that I would only be studying members of posses at one institution. There are over 50 Posse partner institutions and depending on the location and institution type, students may understand staying in college differently. However, for the scope and purposes of this study, I needed to focus on one institution. Additionally, I chose to focus on how students stay in college and none of the other parts of the college experience that the students shared. During interviews, the students shared a lot about their college experiences and the challenges they encountered, however since this was not the focus of my study, these topics will have to wait for future papers. I now discuss the limitations of the study.

The first limitation was the availability of information specifically about the Posse Program and the types of information about the program to which I had access. While I was able to find a plethora of news articles, stories, and even some reports about the program and about students in the program, much of the specific programmatic research on the Posse Program is

conducted in house by the Posse Foundation. During a meeting with Posse Foundation staff in 2017, staff members shared that a large amount of data does exist; however, it has not been analyzed and it is not publicly shared. Additionally, the Posse Foundation chooses which pieces, of their already analyzed data, to share; so, unless data are analyzed by an outside party and released by them, they may lack of objectivity. This is a limitation because not having this information impacts the basis of my study. One of the reasons I selected the Posse Program as the site for this study is because of their reported 90% graduation rate. If the Posse Foundation picks and chooses to share only a small part of their larger story, I may not have all of the facts so I may be basing my study on only half of the story.

The next few limitations are related to sample selection for the study. There are thousands of current Posse Scholars across the country and a good number at Midwestern University. Despite this, the gender breakdown was a challenge. Along with the advertisement that was sent in the Midwestern University Posse campus announcements, I sent an additional 43 emails to posse students. I received 20 responses to the Qualtrics survey and 15 of those respondents fit the criteria for the study. All 15 of those students were contacted to set up times for interviews and, of those, 13 actually completed interviews. There are two men and 11 women participants in this study and of the two additional students who responded but did not participate in interviews, one was a man and one was a woman. If the male student had chosen to participate there would have been at least three male participants. This was also a limitation because having more male perspectives on the Posse Program experience at Midwestern University may have contributed more to the data and analysis. Further, despite the specific instructions in the advertisements, emails, and the presurvey, I ended up with two first-year students as a part of the study. My request was for sophomores, juniors, and seniors because these students had

demonstrated that they had stayed in college until that point and could discuss the things that kept them there. While these first-year students were able to fill in the gaps that the juniors and seniors had difficulty recalling (i.e., the first-year posse experience), staying in college is the focus of my study and these students had not been on campus for a year at this point. That being said, both first-year students were enrolled for the fall semester of their second year at the time of their interviews. Another related area is student geographic location. Of the students who participated in the interview, over half of them were from one city. This may not seem relevant, but these students may have experienced Midwestern University differently based on where they came from in the United States, thus also being a limitation to the study.

The last limitation is related to recruitment for the study. Due to the ongoing coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic which began in December 2019, necessary safety precautions to limit exposure had to be taken by university administrators as well as government officials, resulting in students leaving Midwestern and classes being moved to an online setting. Students who lived in residence halls had to return home or seek other housing arrangements and others stayed in their off-campus residences while they completed the semester. This posed a challenge for finding and connecting with student participants to set up times to meet with them. Additionally, many of the students who returned home also had family members who began to telecommute, so households were facing unknown situations and questions about the health of their family, job security, and general well-being. While the pandemic was occurring, the killings of unarmed Black people at the hands of the police (and nonpolice folk) happened, resulting in widespread protests, civil unrest, and general feelings of anxiety and frustration. This was a stressful time for all and as students were attempting to complete courses on top of dealing with this ongoing unrest, they may not have wanted to add anything else to their agenda including participating in a

research study. This may have been the cause of the lower number of responses I received to my call for participants. When thinking about those students who did participate, a few students communicated that their summer job for was no longer available to them, some had concerns about the outcome of their semester grades since having class in an online setting was not conducive to their learning style, and a few students were concerned about how their upcoming graduate school attendance would be impacted. These situations may have influenced the information they shared during the interview and how they were feeling about Midwestern University at the time.

Chapter Summary

When conducting research, it is important to articulate the methods being used for the research project and to discuss why those methods are best for the research project. This chapter began with a brief discussion about my positionality as a researcher which provided context for why I hold certain philosophies and used certain methods which in turn allowed me to be engaged with my biases and assumptions as I conducted the study. I provided a brief history of qualitative research and explored the different components of this type of research. It was also important to outline qualitative research design and qualitative research methods in addition to how I analyzed the data. Thus, I shared the process in which I participated to collect data and then I gave a description of how I coded the data and included a table to provide further explanation of each study theme. I completed the chapter with an in-depth discussion of how I collected and analyzed data and a discussion about the limitations of this study. The next two chapters explore the findings of the study and offer conclusions, implications, and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to understand how UREM students who are in a comprehensive intervention program stay in college. Specifically, I asked: How do students in the Posse Program at a midwestern university stay in college? To examine this topic, I conducted a qualitative study of 13 students in the Posse Program at Midwestern University. These 13 students were freshmen, sophomore, junior, and senior members of the Posse Program at Midwestern University in 2019–2020. As a result of my data analysis, I identified several themes. Some of the themes aligned with the literature while others were challenged by the literature

As the students were being interviewed, they were making sense of staying in college, by sharing details about their college experiences. From the information they provided, I concluded that precollege characteristics and inputs; affirmation; and communities of support helped students in the Posse Program at Midwestern University to stay in college. From this conclusion, I created the following themes and subthemes: precollege characteristics and inputs such as motivations from family members and themselves to go to college, high school involvement, and salient racial and ethnic identity; affirmation from being in identity-affirming spaces, surrounded by identity-affirming people, or affirming faculty and staff allies; and being a part of communities of support that are either related to the Posse Program or communities that they built on their own. These themes are discussed further in this chapter. Whether it is a combination of all these areas or just one area, students use a variety of support systems and attributes that were attained precollege to help them navigate the university setting so that they stay in college. One thing to note throughout this chapter is that the lives and experiences of

students is complex, so although I have organized this chapter by themes, there is some natural overlap.

In this findings chapter, I begin by presenting biographical sketches of each study participant. Then I discuss the different themes I identified through my analysis, including excerpts from participant interviews and connecting these themes to existing literature. After that, I discuss how these themes support, add to, or conflict with the Posse Program's theory approach logic model which is based on a general theory approach logic model and is my representation of how Posse implements their programmatic elements. I conclude the chapter with a summary of the Chapter 4 findings.

Participant Biographical Sketches

In this section, I briefly describe each study participant, using information they shared during their interview to give insight into who they are. The sketches provide the reader with information about the student's identity prior to arriving at college and who they are as current students exploring how they stay in college. Members of posses come from different backgrounds; however, due to the disparities that exist between White students and UREM students (specifically Black and Latinx students) when it comes to grade point average (Gershenfeld et al., 2016), "staying-in-college," and degree completion (Carter, 2006), I chose to focus on UREM students. Thus, the population for this study is Black and Latinx students and only students who were from one or both of these categories were selected to participate.

The following summaries include information about the background of each student, why they went to college, current involvements, and plans after graduation. To maintain the confidentiality of each student, I have made some changes to the majors that they shared so that they are less specific. Additionally, where possible, I use the words of the participants in the

biographical sketches so I can remain true to the information they provided during their interviews. Before providing each sketch, I provide a summary of demographic information to offer important context about each student (see Table 2).

Table 2:

Study Participant Summary

Pseudonym (self-selected)	Class standing during 2019–2020 school year	Gender (self-identified)	UREM identity (self-identified)
Cleo	Sophomore	Female	Hispanic
Cliff	Senior (1 year left in program)	Male	Mexican American, Chicano, Latino
Gabrielle	Junior	Female	Black
JoJo	Senior (graduating)	Cisgender female	Chicana
Lena	Senior (graduating)	Female	Hispanic/Latino
Luna	Junior	Female	Honduran, Hispanic/Latino
Maria	Senior (graduating)	Woman	Mexican American
Mary	Freshman	Woman	Guyanese American
Maya	Junior	Female	Multiracial (Black and Latinx
Raven	Freshman	Female	Black/African American
Rihanna	Sophomore	Female	Black
Sam	Sophomore	Female	Mexican American
Santiago	Sophomore	Male	African American

Cleo

Cleo is a sophomore majoring in Community and Nonprofit Leadership at Midwestern University. Growing up on the outskirts of a large metropolitan city, Cleo recalled, during her freshman year of high school, "I wasn't really thinking about college, but each year, I kind of made a point to do well because I knew I wanted to get into college." Growing up in a household where education was seen as progress forward in this country, Cleo's El Salvadorian immigrant family members gave her the push she needed to do well in high school so she could pursue

higher education. That being said, Cleo also "realized that college was a safe way to secure something for [herself]."

Cliff

Cliff, also the son of immigrants whose parents came from Mexico, is a first-generation senior majoring in Health Fitness. An avid lover of dogs, Cliff spent a significant amount of time in high school playing a variety of sports including cross country and soccer and he carried on his love of physical activity by participating in a dance team during college. Cliff is also heavily involved in activities related to the multicultural community at Midwestern University and served in a variety of leadership roles in his "Latino based fraternity." Cliff came to college because he "felt like [he] had to and if [he] had the opportunity . . . [he] needed to do it." In the near future, Cliff would like to take advantage of the graduate program that Posse offers.

Gabrielle

Gabrielle is a junior majoring in Political Science and Public Policy. Coming from a family of educators, college was a "next step that made the most sense" and she chose to go to college because she "really liked science." When Gabrielle is not studying or working at her campus job, she serves on the executive board for a minority professional student organization that is related to her major and caters to Black women like her. This past year she served as a co-chair for the groups regional conference. After graduation, Gabrielle is considering pursuing a master's degree.

JoJo

JoJo is a graduating senior who majored in education and culturally based studies. While JoJo describes herself as Chicana, she recognizes that not everyone understands what being Chicana is, so at times she identifies as Mexican American instead. JoJo has lived in different

areas around her home city and received an additional award along with the Posse Scholarship to help fund her college education. Having learned about the possibility of going to college in middle school, JoJo participated in a variety of college head start programs and will be attending graduate school this upcoming fall.

Lena

Lena is a first-generation graduating senior with a major in the sciences. The child of an immigrant mother from Ecuador, Lena "always had an itch to learn" and college has always been something that she wanted to accomplish as well as something her mother wanted her to achieve. Having a passion for her many different research projects and internships, Lena had the opportunity to study abroad and learn more about her field. During her time at Midwestern University, Lena was a member of a variety of professional clubs and organizations and will be taking on a job in her field after graduation.

Luna

Luna is a junior majoring in technology and is one of few Hispanic women who will be entering her field after graduation. During high school, Luna was involved in a variety of science-related clubs as well as team sports and has carried this on to college as she works campus jobs and serves on a variety of campus organizations that are "related to the multicultural community." Striving to be the first person in her family to graduate from a 4-year institution, Luna wants to "land a good career to be able to support the people in [her] family who supported [her] in hard times."

Maria

Maria is a graduating senior who majored in English Journalism studies. Maria always loved to learn and was heavily involved with her school newspaper and other writing

organizations during high school. Living in a "predominantly immigrant . . . Mexican American neighborhood," Maria describes herself as "really passionate about [her] community, about Mexican working class, Mexican Americans specifically, and helping working class and low-income people of color." After graduation, Maria will continue her education in a Master of Arts program.

Mary

Mary is a first-year student with a science major and a language minor. A self-proclaimed soccer lover, she also has an interest in learning more about space. There were no "ifs, ands, or buts" about whether Mary would attend college as her family definitely pushed for her to go. While she did not get involved with many Midwestern University clubs and organizations this year, Mary hopes to be a part of "POC led" clubs over the next few years. In preparation for these roles and to learn more about her identity as a Guyanese woman, Mary is spending time reading books related to race and ethnicity.

Maya

Maya is a junior majoring in English Journalism and Gender Studies. Growing up, her parents instilled in her that education was power so there was never a question of *if* she would go to college, just *where* it would be when she did. Maya is heavily involved in the Midwestern University community and the greater town where it is located. As a multiracial Black and Latinx female, she participates in a variety of activities that benefit the multicultural community including tutoring, student organizations, and student publications. Maya is in the process of determining what her next steps will be after she graduates and has a lot of questions about the

job market after the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic[9] and whether she should immediately go to graduate school.

Raven

Raven is a freshman majoring in Political Science at Midwestern University. Having moved around her hometown a lot while growing up, Raven found that her transition to campus and getting acclimated to her surroundings went smoothly. Not having a lot of family support in her early years, Raven knew that college would be a "steppingstone into [her] personal vision of success." Raven, who identifies as a Black/African American female, enjoys traveling, hiking, and exercising. During her first year in college, Raven focused on her campus job and making sure her academics were going well.

Rihanna

Rihanna is a sophomore majoring in Legal Studies and History at Midwestern University. Growing up in the "White suburbs," Rihanna attended a diverse school and was diligent in educating and understanding herself as a Black woman. She has translated this into her educational passions as she looks at intersections between women's rights and Black rights. Rihanna always wanted to attend college and came from a family that encouraged college attendance with a desire for her to stay close to home due to the cost of out of state tuition but, because she wanted to explore her identity, she decided to leave her home state and was able to afford tuition because of the Posse Scholarship.

[9] Coronavirus spread throughout the world and caused a pandemic beginning in December of 2019 and was ongoing during the time that these students were interviewed.

Sam

Sam is a sophomore majoring in Education and English as a second language (ESL). Her two majors were inspired by her interactions with those in her family and in her community. Sam desires to help other immigrant families grasp the English language. In addition, she has a family member with special needs, leading her to want to learn more about educating members of this population. Growing up, education was "always placed as a priority" and Sam was ready to apply for college when the time came.

Santiago

Santiago is a sophomore Finance and Communication Arts major at Midwestern University. Similar to the other study participants, college was not about *if*, but *where* and *when*, and he knew that going to college would be "a necessary tool to reach success." His current involvements include participation with a Black Male Initiative group on campus, a variety of media including radio show producing, and he is also a musician. Upon graduation, Santiago would like to break into the media industry whether it be as a personal financial advisor, entertainer, or a combination of both.

In this section I provided brief biographical summaries of each student participant and shared some of their demographic characteristics. Having background information about student characteristics is helpful because it provides more clarity on how each student may experience college as it relates to their input characteristics. Therefore, I chose to include the student biographical sketches. I wanted to provide information about the students whose interview excerpts make up the following sections where I discuss the themes that were derived from the experiences they shared with me. This background information gives more context as it is related to how these specific students stay in college. Assumptions about a person based solely on their

biographical sketches should not be made; however, when information from the sketches is combined with direct excerpts from their interviews, a clearer understanding of these student experiences comes about. In the next section, I discuss the three themes and related subthemes I identified as a result of my analysis. I have organized the section according to the three major themes: (a) Student Background and Characteristics They Bring to College, (b) Affirmation, and (c) Communities of Support.

Student Background and Characteristics They Bring to College

As a result of my analysis, the first theme I identified was student background and characteristics they bring to college. When students enter college, they bring characteristics that are connected to how they engage with and in college environments. These inputs include demographic attributes, academic ability and preparedness, and preconceived socialized experiences (Astin, 1984). More specifically, students enter college with characteristics such as race/ethnicity, gender, high school grade point average, academic motivation, degree aspirations, and extracurricular involvements (Astin, 1993). As the participant bio sketches indicate, students came to Midwestern with previously attained values, knowledge, and skills, and these have an impact on student experience thus contributing to whether they stay in college. When speaking with students about their precollege experiences, many of the participants shared that their motivation to go to college was based on at least one or more of the following: motivation from their family because going to college meant success; personal motivation to go to college because it was the natural next step; or motivation to go to college because they wanted to learn more. Additionally, students talked about how heavy involvement during high school lead to continued involvement in college or to their college major; and each participant discussed how their racial and ethnic identity was salient. In this section, I will discuss motivation, involvement,

and salient racial and ethnic identities. I chose to begin the discussion here because, while they may not have articulated it in this way, these students had precollege characteristics that they indicated contributed in some way to their ability to stay in college.

"A Necessary Tool": Motivation to Go to College

Student participants reflected on their precollege experiences and shared that growing up there were a variety of motivations to go to college. Often, students were motivated to go to college by family members who felt that going to college meant they would be successful in life. Some students were in environments where they were encouraged by family members to go to college but were also self-motivated to go because college was the natural next step. Other students mentioned that their motivation came from wanting to learn more, so they chose to go to college to do that. The three subthemes in this section are motivations from family because going to college equals success, self-motivation because college is the next step, and motivation to learn more so I decided to go to college. The participant excerpts provide more information about how students discussed each of these three subthemes.

Motivations from Family because College Equals Success

Many of the students discussed how their families motivated them to go to college because when someone went to college that equated to success. In some participant experiences, the motivation came from the fact that their parent or family member had gone to college and had success, others described the motivation to go to college and find success as a representation of what an immigrant parent saw when others went to college, and another student got motivated to go to college after witnessing family members who had not gone to college struggle. For Santiago, who was raised in a household where the learning continued and was expected of

everyone, getting a college education was engrained in him growing up and he was motivated by his family to go to college to reach for success. He recalled:

> Growing up, college was never really a question of if, it was just where, when, how . . . Growing up, my mother was a nurse . . . and my grandmother, she went to college and she has since then gone back to college for many semesters of just random courses and summer courses . . . so I feel like education has always been a very vital concept in my household and it was always pushed upon me as something that would be a very necessary tool to reach success in this lifetime.

Maya spoke about this as a child of immigrant parents and was motivated to go to college because going to college was the way that her immediate family members had found a better life. She proudly reflected:

> Growing up, it was never a question of if I was going to college, it was more so a question of where I was going to college . . . both my parents are immigrants to the United States . . . and the reason my mom came with her whole family . . . [was to] get a better life and better work and then my dad actually left the island . . . for college . . . so growing up . . . it was always instilled in me.

Cleo, who also has immigrant parents, was motivated by them to go to college because they, too, saw the importance of education and, thus, encouraged her to go. She shared:

> It's something that's always been reinforced from my mom . . . you're going to go to college . . . and that's just what's gonna happen and it needs to happen. I think a large part of that push is because she immigrated here from El Salvador and so did my other family members . . . so, in her eyes, education was a way to progress forward in this

> country, and she wanted her children to do that . . . so that's where that push for higher education came from.

Luna's motivation was directed by observing family members who had not gone to college and an understanding that college means success. She shared that she had seen many of the women in her family drop out of high school to raise children and she saw that their opportunities were limited because of this. Thus, her motivation to go to college came from an understanding that going would lead to better opportunities and success. She goes on to say:

> The drive for me was that no one else in my family had ever been to a 4-year institution. . . . Within my family specifically, I was the first to graduate high school, and so the first to attend college as well. So that was a big driving factor for me. . . . I want to be the one in my family to provide educational and financial access for the future generations to come. . . . That's really my big driving force for going to college and keeping up with my grades and my extracurriculars, so that I can land a good career and be able to support the people in my family who supported me in hard times.

These students were motivated to go to college by their family members because attending college meant success or circumstances with family members motivated a student to go to college. To succeed, though, one has to stay, so this motivation to go to college also leads to a motivation to stay in college. Each of these students was motivated to go to college by family members who saw college as an opportunity to find success and a better life after. The students in the next section of this theme were motivated to go to college on their own.

Self-Motivation because College is the Next Step

For some students, they did not need to be motivated by family members to go to college because the motivation was already inside of them. For both Mary and Gabrielle, while they

were in environments where education was supported and even encouraged, both shared that going to college was a personal motivation because it was a natural next step. Mary shared that there was never a question about going to college and that, while there was family encouragement, she also had her own desire to go. She remembered:

> There were no ifs, ands, or buts about it. It was just something that I knew was going to be the next step in my plan after high school . . . for me there was never any question of whether or not I'm going to college . . . my family definitely pushed college, but they were never like college is the only answer. It was personally me. That's how I saw it for myself.

Gabrielle also saw college as something she wanted to do for herself and despite being from a family that is comprised primarily of educators, she had the option to make her own choice about what would come after she graduated from high school. She shared:

> [I] come from a family with a lot of educators. That includes high school, elementary and collegiate levels. My father, for example, was a world history teacher so, for me, college was the next step that made [the] most sense. Despite the fact that there are plenty of people in my family who did not go . . . everyone went to some form of a school; if it wasn't a university or trade school or vocational school . . . they did some type of . . . apprenticeship.

For these participants, they were motivated to go to college on their own because it was a natural next step. Yes, they were in environments where college was encouraged; however, they were very clear that it was their choice and they were self-motivated to go. Their self-motivation to go to college is one potential reason that they stay. The students in the next section were also personally motivated to go to college but it was because they desired to learn more.

Motivation to Learn more so I Decided to go to College

Student notions, understandings, thoughts, and preconceived ideas about education and learning are formed prior to college attendance (Astin,1993). While gaining a college education can shape or refine these thoughts, motivations to learn are preexisting. Thus, for those students who are motivated to learn more, college is a natural next step. Students described that they "loved to learn" or they loved education which motivated them to go to college. Others described their motivation to learn as it related to gaining information so they could pave the way to a college major or particular career. Additionally, one student was motivated to learn so she could graduate and go back to help her community. Raven describes herself as a lover of learning who is "very curious and very self-motivated. [She] definitely love[s] to learn and have people guide her in the right direction." This self-motivation and love of learning motivated her to go to college so she could enhance her learning. Lena, discussed how she has always had an itch to learn more and after her participation in a precollege program that, firmed up her interest in pursuing the sciences in college. She was motivated to learn more in this area and chose to go to college. She explained:

> I've just always had an itch to learn more . . . it's always been an accomplishment of mine and also my mom's . . . considering that she's an immigrant . . . so kind of giving that to her but also learning something that I didn't know was going to be intriguing to me in the future . . . I got really involved in . . . sciences with a summer program.

Maria also had a love of school which led her to go to college. A teacher took an interest in her writing abilities which led to the choice to become a journalism major at Midwestern. She proudly reflects:

> I enjoyed learning. I enjoyed school a lot. I'[ve been] a big reader and writer ever since I was little . . . those were probably my two favorite things to do: reading and writing. That was always the same in high school. . . . My English teacher really wanted me to be on the newspaper and that's what really introduced me to journalism, which was my major at Midwestern.

Rihanna was also motivated to learn more and chose to go to college. She discussed how she took this love of learning and applied it to both her major and subsequently her career aspirations. She emphasized:

> I've always been really enthusiastic about my academics; I love school . . . that idea of just learning and being in a class setting and taking notes . . . I really love that. I love writing papers . . . that's the liberal arts major in me. Now I'm going to be a Women's Studies major, but as much as I love that, I didn't know if it was challenging me enough in college because I'm very much a nerd. I love education, I love to learn . . . there's a stigma of, that's not a real major . . . but then . . . I started really understanding the legal implications behind things and . . . I realized a lot of my opinion was due to the law. So, I want to be a lawyer now . . . and I love history . . . so, I'm just going to combine it.

Maya shared how she has always been a writer and that was what she was planning to do for her career even prior to college. This motivation to learn more and deciding to go to college was driven by her desire to then move into a career in her chosen field. She recalled:

> I knew early on in high school that I wanted to be something with communications or journalism, something in that field of writing and communicating with people, I'm really a people person. . . . I think that's how my journalism interest started, because I felt like

> writing was something that I love to do. It was something that I was getting told that I was good at, so that obviously pushed me more . . . and really motivated me.

Sam's motivation to learn and deciding to go to college was also driven by a career aspiration even more so because she wanted to take this knowledge back to her community because she wanted to help people who speak English as a second language. She explained:

> Those are the two first languages I learned [Spanish and English] . . . I'm also getting a certificate in teaching English to speakers of other languages due to my background [and] having parents who didn't really have a strong control of English. I really want to help communities [that] need to learn English to be able to get by here [in the United States] because it's hard not [knowing] English here. So, I definitely want to contribute something to the ESL field.

Each of these students had the motivation to learn more so they went to college. Some of these participants expressed that their motivation to learn more about a certain major made them pursue college. Others expressed that they were motivated to learn and take on a certain career, so they went to college, and one participant's motivation to learn more so she went to college was steered by her desire to help her community once she gained the necessary knowledge to do so. A love of learning motivated each one of these participants to go to college and, based on the research (Tinto, 2015; Vega 2016), these types of motivations can encourage students to stay in college.

Involvement

In addition to bringing a variety of motivations to go to college including motivation from family members, self-motivation, and a motivation to learn, student participants described their involvement during high school. Student involvement during high school either led to more

college involvement and/or what students chose as their college major. As an input, involvement is important because when students are engaged with their communities, they have greater college satisfaction and are more likely to stay in college (Quaye et al., 2019). In the discussion that follows, students explored their previous high school involvement and how these involvements led to further involvement in college and/or to their chosen career.

Involvement in High School Leads to College Involvement

Luna was heavily involved during high school and this precollege involvement led to more involvement during college:

> I've always just been the type to really be involved in not only my academics but also in extracurriculars. In high school I was involved in as many extracurriculars as you can think of. I was working, I did softball, track and field, cross country. I was in the environmental club, forensics club, a bunch of other things, like anything you can think of basically . . . I try to still take advantage of as many extracurriculars that I can in college . . . I work two jobs and this past year I was on the e-board for four organizations on campus.

Like Luna, Cliff maintained his involvement momentum from high school and, thus, has many current involvements. Cliff shared:

> I was highly involved during my college career in different things like a dance team, a Latino based fraternity, and my major clubs. . . . In high school, I was also in other things like soccer, baseball, cross country, yearbook, and different things.

Rihanna, who was also involved during high school decided to take her love of lacrosse to college. She says:

> Freshman year . . . I joined club lacrosse because I played lacrosse in high school. I love lacrosse, it's one thing that, makes me excited . . . so I joined but I only did one semester . . . it was very White, which makes sense . . . I'm in the Midwest, but I think I was looking to be around POCs.

For these students, involvement was important during their time in high school, so they chose to carry their involvement through to college. Each student described their continued involvement in different ways. For Luna, involvement was about participating in many extracurricular activities while working two jobs, while Cliff also maintained his high level of involvement during college, and Rihanna focused on continuing her engagement in a sport which she had participated in during high school. The excerpts in the next section also explore high school involvement that led to college involvement however these students' activities were affiliated with a particular field and led to students selecting a college major.

Involvement in High School Leads to College Involvement and College Major

Not only can involvement during high school lead to involvement during college, but for some students, their respective involvements may be affiliated with a certain career area thus leading to students selecting a college major as a result of their involvement. In participant excerpts, students shared how their high school involvement not only led to further involvement in college in a related area, but they also explain that their involvement lead to them selecting a particular major. Many of Santiago's extracurricular involvements had a media and entertainment focus. Through his involvements, Santiago realized that he could go to school and major in an area that would use the skills he learned from participating in extracurricular activities. Santiago goes on to say:

> In high school, I was the broadcast anchor . . . [and] I did some of the editing for that broadcast . . . I was in a band playing the piano and . . . making YouTube videos with friends. So I was always kind of in this media and the arts world . . . and coming into the university . . . and then hearing about the Communication Arts major, it kind of clicked and, I [thought] this is what I was actually looking forward to.

Santiago continued to be involved in similar activities while in college including serving as a staff member at one of Midwestern's media stations and by working as a media consultant which is also related to his college major. Maria was also involved during her time in high school and participated in a precollege program. Through this participation she was able to enhance her writing skills and discover that she wanted to major in journalism during college. Maria proudly reflected:

> After my freshman year [of high school] I started a journalism program . . . specifically for high school Latino students who are interested in journalism . . . I really kind of stayed on that track and I knew that I wanted to go to college and I knew I wanted to study journalism, so I got more involved in different programs.

Maria also shared that during her time at Midwestern, she worked for a local Spanish and "bilingual publication . . . for Latino communities," so she also translated her high school involvements into both a continued involvement as well as a career as she is an English Journalism major.

Overall, these students emphasized that being involved was important to them, so they continued to participate in a variety of extracurricular activities during college. Additionally, for some students, their involvement in clubs and organizations that were related to a career field, not only led to continuing to participate in these types of organizations during college, but they

also led to students selecting a college major as a result. Research ties involvement to staying in college which makes these involvement input characteristics important. When students take their precollege involvement and translate that into a major, they are demonstrating a desire to stay in college. Since precollege characteristics are shaping students as are their involvements, when they carry these involvements on to college, and involvement is tied to staying in college, these students are more likely to stay. Also, when students love to learn and have a passion to go into careers that require a college education, this may be a factor in why they continue on to complete a college education.

Racial and Ethnic Identity is Salient

An area that consistently came up throughout each interview was each student participant's connection to their racial/ethnic identity. In fact, as students introduced themselves, it was one of the first few things they mentioned. Students enter college with ideas and understandings about race and ethnicity and how this identity plays a role in their lives and in the world. Racial and ethnic identity salience references the significance and level of relevance one places on race and ethnicity as a salient identity (Hurtado et al., 2015). Since racial/ethnic make-up is an identity that can rarely be hidden, it is salient due to its constant presence. Being a UREM was an identity that immediately presented itself when students entered a space, and they knew it. For many of these students, their race and ethnic identity was directly tied to their community and, for others, the salience of their racial and ethnic identity is connected to perception of self. The following sections describe how students discussed their racial/ethnic identity background characteristics as they explored how they stay in college.

Racial and Ethnic Identity is Connected to the Community

For a few of the study participants, when they spoke of their racial identity salience, it was clearly tied to their community. JoJo immediately shared her identity and how it is connected to her community. She shared that she grew up "in a predominantly Black and Brown, low-income community [which made her] very aware of the demographics of where [she] went to school. [She is] Mexican, identif[ies] as Chicana specifically but Mexican American is what [she] usually identif[ies] as, especially . . . when [she is at Midwestern] because not many people know what Chicana is." Similarly, Maria discussed her identity in relation to her community and described her racial identity as one of the things that pushes her forward. She shared "I'm someone that has always been really passionate about my community, about working class Mexican Americans specifically, and helping working class and low income, people of color."

Rihanna also discussed the salience of her racial and ethnic identity in relation to being a member of her community at home and how this played into her choice of high schools. She stated:

> I got to pick between which three schools I wanted to go to, so that's how I ended up at my school. People in the county called it the ghetto school because there were a lot of Black kids and I was like "I want to be there; I want to be with all the Black people, sign me up" . . . it was just amazing, understanding myself as a Black woman, trying to really grow into my Blackness and understanding, how that all works and being around Black kids.

Student participants in this section described having salient racial and ethnic identities and these identities were tied to their communities. Thus, these students demonstrated that because of this tie, they wanted to give back to their home communities and be surrounded by those who shared

their identities. These ideas translate into staying in college in a couple of ways. Two students shared that they wanted to return and give back to communities that share their racial and ethnic identities but to do that, they have to stay in college. Additionally, many of these students shared a desire to be in communities with people who looked like them. As will be noted in later sections of this chapter, because of this desire, many of these students chose to be members of organizations and to surround themselves with people who shared their racial/ethnic identity while in college and these people and organizations were reasons they stayed in college.

Racial and Ethnic Identity is Connected to Self-Perception

When some students mentioned their salient racial and ethnic identity, they referred to it in relation to their individual self-perception. Rihanna shared how salient her racial and ethnic identity is in relation to how she shows up in spaces as a Black person and how others view her. In this excerpt she discusses a pro-Black sticker that she has on her laptop and how others responded. She explained:

> I'm always very self-conscious about putting out my laptop because these kids are just, blatantly seeing it. It's funny because I see them reading it and I never want to be the angry Black girl or the Black girl that looks upset or mad and my hair is naturally very short . . . sometimes I feel I'm giving off vibes but I'm a very nice person. Yes, I'm pro Black, I love Black people, I want them to succeed, I want women to succeed . . . so that's how I personally feel.

For Maya, her salient racial and ethnic identity was very present as a person who is biracial. She goes on to share that one way that she explored being bullied because of her race was by expressing herself through writing. She explained:

> Growing up I had personal experiences with being bullied a lot. I struggled with my identity as a biracial individual who was not considered full Black and not considered full Latina. I think writing and expressing myself was a way for me to handle that and I just grew really fond of writing and storytelling and communicating with people.

College is a time when students begin to develop their adult identities. One part of this growth is exploration of identity, including racial and ethnic identity; thus, racial and ethnic identity salience is important. According to the research, racial and ethnic identity salience is necessary for students to move through the different stages of racial identity development models such as Cross's (1971/2001) Black identity development theory, Ferdman and Gallegos's (2001) Latino racial identity development, or Poston's (1990) biracial identity development theory. Black racial identity research findings also suggest that African American college students with strong racial identities experience beneficial psychological and academic outcomes (Smalls et al., 2007) which leads to staying in college. Black and Hispanic students already graduate at lower rates (Musu-Gillette et al., 2016), so having a salient racial and ethnic identity prior to college and then working through the developmental stages during college will support students as they stay in college. As reflected in the previous discussion, the study participants have strong relationships with their racial/ethnic identities, and they communicated how their racial/ethnic identity is tied to their home community as well as how their identity is connected to their self-perception. When students have strong racial/identity salience that is connected to their home community or perception of themselves, they know who they and are more likely to be strong in themselves, thus leading to the likelihood that they will stay in college.

Connection to Literature

In this section, I shared study participant excerpts related to the background characteristics students shared in their interviews and specifically discussed three themes: (a) motivation to go to college, (b) involvement, and (c) racial and ethnic identity salience. According to Astin and Antonio (2012), when researching student college outcomes, it is important to consider three phases: prior to college, during college, and the environmental effect on student learning while in college. The things that students bring with them to college are considered inputs, and include background characteristics such as race/ethnicity, gender, and academic ability/preparation. When students enter a space, these traits, abilities, skills, and socializations have influenced them for years prior to attending school. I explore these themes further (i.e., how Posse Program students at Midwestern stay in college) and discuss how they align with or challenge what scholars have identified in existing literature as reasons why students stay in college.

Motivation to go to College

Prior to college, students are exposed to a variety of experiences and people, so their characteristics and skills are often influenced by these situations. Many of the study participants shared that they were motivated to go to college and that these motivations were from family because going to college meant success, motivation from themselves because college was the next step, or they were motivated to learn more so they decided to go to college to do that. These experiences align with findings in research literature. One example of this alignment can be found in Matos's (2015) study, which used a community cultural wealth framework to explore the influence of family on success and how family is used to help Latino/a students persist in college. Matos (2015) used this framework to look at the cultural capitol that students

determined helped them get to and through college. One of three findings was "the presence and manifestation of aspirational capitol" (Matos, 2015, p. 442), which refers to the way that family structures (blood related or not) motivate students toward academic success. Specifically, Matos's (2015) framework describes that motivation toward academic success was communicated by most of the participants as they shared how their parents wanted them to do well by going to college.

Additionally, the importance of college being stressed while they were growing up was mentioned by the majority of the participants in this study. This idea, along with being motivated to go to college by family for success, is supported by Brooks (2015) who explored African American family influence on college attainment. Findings from that study suggest that the importance of college attendance was communicated from family during childhood and that there was a sense of pride and expectation tied to it. Similar conclusions were made by Marrun (2018) about family engagement in the success of Latino/a college students. The parents in that study placed a high value on education and set college attendance as a standard for success. Additional studies conducted by Vega (2016) and Simmons (2017) produced similar results and concluded that motivations and encouragements from family members are tied to why students stay in college and graduate.

Current research also aligns with the subthemes of self-motivation to go to college as a next step and going to college because they were also motivated to learn more. In a recent study, Tinto (2015) determined that the motivation to go to college to achieve a variety of goals, including getting to the next step in their life or learning more, is directly tied to persistence in college. Tinto (2015) goes on to surmise that there are goals that lead students to college and that "the impact of college student experiences on motivation can be understood as the outcome of

the interaction among student goals, self-efficacy, sense of belonging, and perceived worth or relevance of the curriculum" (p. 255). Vega (2016) also explored student motivations for attending college and found that internal motivation to learn more and self-motivation to go led to their persistence. Student motivations for going to college are vast, but already having the motivation is connected to the ability to stay in college.

A few of the study participants also mentioned a love of and passion for learning. Although a few students used this to catapult them through school, others took their passion and wanted to pursue a major which would lead to a career. When students love to learn and have a passion to go into careers that require a college education, this may be a factor in why they continue on to complete a college education (insidetrack, 2015; Moxley et al., 2001).

Involvement

Previous studies have indicated a connection between students staying in college and involvement (Astin, 1999; Fischer, 2007; Quaye et al., 2019; Simmons, 2017; Swail, 2004; Tinto, 2004). Many student participants shared that, prior to college, they were heavily involved in a variety of organizations, clubs, sports, and jobs. For some students, this high involvement led to high involvement when they went to Midwestern and, for others, this high involvement led to not only high involvement when they went to college, but it also led to their chosen college major. According to the research, in a Cruce and Moore (2012) study that examined whether participation in community service during high school led to continued participation in service related programming during college, results indicated that high school involvement leads to involvement during college. Students with moderate to high levels of precollege service were also more likely to be involved in service at that same level during college. In another study, Rosch and Nelson (2018) researched how leaders developed via involvement during high school

that then translated over to involvement with collegiate student organizations. Findings from this study also aligned with the findings from this chapter and previous studies and showed that students who were active in organizations during high school were also active and involved in organizations during college. When considering a student's involvements during high school, many of the study participants shared that they were heavily involved in high school. This translated to the college setting and may have an impact on why they stay. My research yielded a variety of information about how precollege involvement affected involvement during college; however, there was little to no information about how this high school involvement leads to a college major broadly. This involvement contributed to them staying in college, and this is where my findings from this chapter add to the literature in this area.

Racial and Ethnic Identity is Salient

Students are also coming to college with a set of racialized experiences and for many of these students, their race is a salient part of their identity as it is tied to their communities *and* how they engage with their identity salience and their self-perception in day-to-day living. A salient racial and ethnic identity is important so that students can move through the stages of different identity development models (Cross, 1971/2001; Ferdman & Gallegos, 2001; Poston, 1990) and findings suggest that students with strong racial identities have greater psychological and academic outcomes which can lead to staying in college to graduation (Hurtado et al., 2015; Smalls et al., 2007). Additionally, identity development, described by Hurtado et al. (2015) as a long-term process, surmises that when salient identities are a focus, campus professionals can support student development easier.

Maramba and Velasquez (2010) explored racial and ethnic identity salience and how it impacts students as they navigate academic and social demands of an institution. They

determined that students with high racial and ethnic identity salience wanted to continue to develop their ethnic identities as it was a large part of who they were and impacted their sense of belonging at the institution, their interpersonal relationships, as well as the development of their analytical and critical thinking skills and motivation to achieve academically. This achievement lead to staying in college. Similar findings came from Bowman and Felix (2017) and Johnston et al. (2015). Bowman and Felix (2017) surmised from previous research that when a student's identity is salient, this may encourage students to stay in college when combined with involvement and commitment. When identity is centered, staying in college becomes crucial for oneself and it is related to goal commitment as well as commitment to the institution.

According to Johnston et al. (2015), students with high racial and ethnic identity salience consider race to be a pertinent aspect of who they are. Many of the students that discussed their identity in detail during their discussion of their background were also heavily involved in high school and this transitioned over to college involvement. Student participants put this strong connection to ethnic identity together with an active interest in being involved precollege as well as during college and joined organizations where they could celebrate their heritage while continuing to be involved. From how the students talked about their experiences, these connections also have an impact on why they stay in college because when students are involved, they are connected with the college community and this connection leads to staying in college (Astin, 1999; Fischer, 2007; Quaye et al., 2019; Simmons, 2017; Swail, 2004; Tinto, 2004). As previously mentioned, because students' lives are fluid, some of the different pieces of each theme may overlap with others. In the next section, the affirmation theme is explored and some connections between affirmation, racial and ethnic identity salience, and involvement are made.

Affirmation

The second theme that came from my analysis was Affirmation. Affirmation is emotional support or encouragement, the assertion that something exists or is true, and confirmation. When people are affirmed, they feel heard, seen, and understood. When speaking with students about how they stay in college, many described various forms of affirmation as one way they stay in college. Students indicated that this affirmation came in two forms: affirming spaces and affirming people.

The study participants are underrepresented racial and ethnic minorities attending Midwestern University which is a predominantly White institution. Thus, having their racial and ethnic identity affirmed in campus spaces, being with other UREM students who are affirming, and being connected to faculty and staff allies who affirm them was important to these participants. While students were not required by the posse campus officials (e.g., mentors and liaisons) or the program to engage in affirming spaces and/or with affirming people, through the weekly posse meeting and other components of the program such as the PossePlus Retreat, students were encouraged to use resources such as multicultural centers and faculty/staff on campus. Additionally, students shared that some of the buildings on campus housed multicultural centers as well as the offices of the on-campus Posse liaisons so if a posse scholar went to visit a Posse staff member, they may also visit one of these affirming spaces. In the sections that follow, I describe subthemes related to affirming spaces and affirming people, and I share participant quotes about how these are tied to staying-in-college behaviors. In the excerpts, students discuss how having their identity affirmed in spaces and how having people who affirmed their existence (at times in conjunction with their racial and ethnic identity) helped support them and led them to continuing with their college education.

Affirming Spaces

When discussing affirming spaces, student participants mentioned two realms on campus in which this exists: (a) the Multicultural Living and Learning Community and the cultural centers on campus, and (b) identity-affirming student organizations. As a community that students could apply to participate in, the Multicultural Living and Learning Community is a living-learning community that focuses on diversity and social justice. The cultural centers include the Black Cultural Center, the Latinx Cultural Center, and the Multicultural Resource Center. Finally, a variety of student organizations that focus on racial and ethnic identities provided affirmation for students who participated in them. The sections that follow provide further detail on how, as students explored how they stay in college, these affirming spaces were included among the list of items that help them stay.

Identity-Affirming Spaces on Campus

At Midwestern University students can select to be a resident of a living-learning community and one of these communities has a multicultural focus. Many of my study participants who applied and were selected to live in the community described feeling safe and affirmed around others who also shared a UREM identity when they were in this space. Sam describes the learning community as a place that "focuses on social justice, multiculturalism and intersectionality . . . there's a seminar for the learning community that students could take, and it covers the ethnic studies requirement . . . it was nice having classes with the people you live with." Sam goes on to say that living in the learning community was the highlight of her first year and noted how the space was affirming for her identity as a person of color. She expressed:

> I feel like the highlight of my first year in general was being a part of the Multicultural Living and Learning Community. It's an affinity space . . . all of us are pretty much POC

> . . . and I was able to find my community. It was just nice coming home to familiar faces and people who actually treat you like family, so that was definitely my family away from home . . . especially since all of us went through the same struggles of being one of the only POC in our classes . . . coming back to the Multicultural Living and Learning Community, we're definitely able to see people who look like us and just chill . . . people from the Multicultural Living and Learning Community have been a good support system for me. Especially because we face similar experiences, so just seeing people in the Multicultural Living and Learning Community makes me really happy.

Sam felt so supported and affirmed by the living-learning community throughout her time in college, that she decided to fight for other students to have the opportunity to be in this community as well. She shared:

> We've been going to meetings with housing representatives . . . and we've made a list of demands for housing to improve the Multicultural Learning Community . . . so they considered opening up spaces for other students of color who need to . . . seek the Multicultural Living and Learning Community as a refuge . . . but also provide more resources . . . a resource room . . . and to make it more inclusive by portraying more POC student art work.

Like Sam, Maria too found the Multicultural Living and Learning Community to be a place where her identity was affirmed. She conveyed:

> I think that being on the floor itself was really helpful my freshman year. It was like a really good ease-in because there was just Black and Brown students there, too . . . so it was a really helpful for me because I couldn't imagine just being in a random dorm with no one around me who I could really connect with right away.

Even students who did not live in the community felt that they could connect with others there and have their identity affirmed. Cliff did not live on the residence hall floor where the learning community was housed; however, he had posse members who lived there, and he had access to the community because he lived in the same building. He explained: "The highlights were being able to go and hang out, luckily there were people from my posse and people from a different posse and POCs in general; when I was with them I was able to be social as well."

Sam, Maria, and Cliff all felt that the Multicultural Living and Learning Community affirmed their identity while they were on campus. A second space on campus that participants highlighted as identity affirming is the cultural centers that are at Midwestern. When study participants were not engaging with or living in the Multicultural Living/Learning Community, they were involved with the Cultural Resource Center and its various subcenters/offices across Midwestern's campus. Many students sought out a space on campus that affirmed their identity and for many, this space was the cultural centers on campus. These were consistently mentioned as spaces where the study participants felt affirmed as they were able to gather and connect with other UREM students, staff, and faculty in a place where their identity was represented. Cliff shared how he was connected to the identity-affirming space. He goes on to say:

> It was finding relatability within. Aside from the posse, there was . . . the Multicultural Student Center. When I started off, there was a Black Cultural Center . . . [and offices that] catered to some marginalized groups as well, so Asian Pacific Islander Desi American, then the Latinx Student Union was also started and those were available for support.

As a senior who had been at Midwestern for a while, Cliff went on to say that "the only space on campus that was actually considered a good space was the Multicultural Student Center. Everything else was kind of like . . . No."

Along with Cliff, Maya and Cleo found themselves at the center as well and felt that their identities were affirmed when in the space. As a bi-racial person, Maya found affirmation of her different identities in a few spaces on campus including the Black Cultural Center, the Latinx Cultural Center, as well as the Multicultural Student Center. She shared:

> I think other people or groups that helped me really build community [included] the Black Cultural Center; that was a big thing. The Black Student Union threw a lot of events, the Latinx Cultural Center threw events and just always had different things. The Multicultural Student Center was probably the biggest one I think helped build community. They're the ones who threw the most events. And I think they just really put all those resources at our fingertips, not just resources to help us but I think to help build community. That's what helped me.

Cleo also enjoyed going to the space and her identity was affirmed because she got a sense of diversity each time she went. She goes on to say:

> I know my first year I would go to the MSC a lot, which is a Multicultural Student Center, and I would hang out there a lot. A lot of other students would hang out there as well and I think that's one of the biggest ways I got involved. Even though it was small, I kinda wanted to have a sense of that diversity on campus, being connected to that because that's one of the things I missed most.

Student participants at Midwestern have their identity affirmed in spaces on campus and the majority of them found these spaces in the Multicultural Living and Learning Community and in the various cultural centers across campus. These student perceptions align with research findings that have also determined that students find comfort in affirming spaces (McShay, 2017;

Museus et al., 2020) and when students are engaged in spaces where their identity is affirmed, they are more connected with an institution and are more likely to stay in college.

Identity-Affirming Student Organizations

The other affirming space that student participants reflected on as they discussed staying in college also happened to be related to student identity and was identity-affirming student organizations. About 1/3 of the study participants are involved in culturally based fraternities and sororities so many of them talked about their supportive experience in these organizations. Additionally, students were involved with other identity-affirming student organizations such as culturally based student unions, educational diversity programs, as well as student clubs that were focused on a UREM population. These organizations may have had members who were a part of posse, but the organizations were not affiliated with the Posse Program. Santiago was surprised that even though he had a good transition to Midwestern, breaking into groups with non-POCs was difficult and he found the only spaces that were accepting of his full self were organizations that had other UREM students as members. He recalled:

> Even despite me saying that I felt that I was prepared to transition to the university through my other experiences back [at home], it is a challenge to break into groups at the university. It is a challenge to break into a community and feel like you are genuinely wanted . . . because it's rarely said . . . [no one is] intentionally saying . . . "we want you to be here" or . . . "this is a group for you, too." If it's not a person of color organization, if it's not a Black Greek fraternity, if it's not Black Student Union or Hispanic Student Union or Filipino Student Union. If it's not something like that, it's not very obvious that you're specifically wanted there.

As Santiago mentioned, the Greek organizations are welcoming spaces where identity is affirmed and both Luna and Cliff found connections there. Luna shared that by joining a Latina sorority, not only did the organization affirm her identity, but she got connected with other identity-affirming organizations. She goes on to say:

> I started interacting more with organizations that I wanted to be in my sophomore year. That's when I joined my sorority, it's a Latina sorority, so that definitely exposed me to a bunch more of the multicultural community because there's so many sororities on this campus that you naturally interact, you make events with them, you get to really build bonds with the people in those other organizations as well, which is super nice.

Cliff also joined a Latino-based fraternity and found a space where he could connect with others about culture thus affirming his identity. Cliff goes on to share:

> As a Latino-based fraternity . . . anything that we put on was some type of cultural awareness for the campus . . . and socially it was a way that we were able to put out our own culture, and learn about other people's cultures as well. We had different brothers who were Mexican, Peruvian, Black, Filipino, all these different backgrounds, so socially it was like swinging by other people's cultures.

JoJo was also involved in a Latina-based sorority as well as another identity-affirming student organization. She shared:

> My sophomore year, I was part of the Multicultural Greek Council. I held a cabinet position as part of being a sister of my Latina sorority. I also sat on the board for the multicultural grant council which was out of our Multicultural Centers, and it funded different events for different organizations that were affiliated with the Multicultural Student Center.

JoJo goes on to say:

> Junior year I became academic and inclusion programming assistant at one of Midwestern's cultural enrichment centers, which is kind of like the Multicultural Student Center, but a lot smaller and based in one of the dorms. I was also a student facilitator for a class about students who wanted to learn more about equity and social justice.

While Mary was not involved in anything directly yet, she communicated a desire to get involved with UREM groups because she saw them as safe spaces for her identity. She shared hopefully:

> I also want to be more involved in POC led clubs [because] there's just not that many of us on campus. . . . I realized that I can't rely on those safe spaces to come to me, I have to search for them. So, I'd like to have to actively put myself in those positions.

Rihanna had a different experience and shared that she found the Black Student Union, a space that should have been affirming for her as a Black woman, to be cliquey, so she had to find another organization where her identity was affirmed. Rihanna goes on to say:

> I was gonna join the Black Student Union, but it's very cliquey and I think that's [one of] the issues of social life on campus. We're so small [referring to the Black population at Midwestern], but somehow, it's still so cliquey. I feel like posse's my community of POCs but I feel I haven't necessarily met people outside of the posse community but posse people know me. . . . Sometimes people call posse exclusive . . . and we stick together because I just . . . I don't know other people. I'm very open but living where I lived freshman year, I just feel I didn't get to bond with the Black students as much as I wanted to. I'm part of the African Student Association [though]. I don't know where in Africa I'm from, but I love being a part of the ASA. I go to all their events; I love that I feel more welcome [there] than with the BSU.

Maya also participated in two organizations that are identity-affirming spaces. She proudly states:

> I'm a contributor for the [name omitted] newspaper. I'm also contributor, and I'm the social media director, for a student newspaper that is catered to the Black community. I'm also the recruitment and retention intern for an association that is an initiative for Black men on campus.

Santiago was also involved in an identity-affirming organization, the same that Maya mentioned. He shared:

> I passively am sort of with the initiative for Black men on campus and it's one of those kinds of organizations where if you want to say you're a member, you can be a member. Or if you know the people in the club, you'll probably end up doing stuff with the club, even if you don't know you're doing stuff in the club, because all the people in the club are friends and it's all Black men, which is not a lot of them.

Maria was able to find an identity-affirming organization in the community as well. She shared:

> For 2 years I wrote for this small local publication for community news. It was a Spanish and bilingual publication that was distributed near Midwestern and Latino communities throughout the state would get that newspaper. I write a lot of stories in Spanish and in English, which was great because I needed a lot of practice writing in Spanish.

These participants were able to find support in identity-affirming organizations and this helped to support them during college. In these excerpts, students demonstrated their desire to be in spaces that were identity affirming. Studies such as a 2010 inquiry by Maramba and Velasquez determined that club involvement was affected by student ethnic identity and that the majority of their peer groups consisted of people of their own ethnicity or other students of color.

Additionally, findings from Patton et al. (2011) and Quaye et al. (2019) indicate that many UREM students are involved in organizations with other people who look like them; however, increased involvement leads to campus connectivity which in turn leads to students staying in college. These students were connected to spaces that also all happened to have clear ties to identity by nature of their name/title thus allowing students to know what they would be receiving when they entered a space. These spaces also had identity-affirming people in them, which is the topic of the next subtheme.

Affirming People

When on campus, and at times when in identity-affirming spaces, student participants also shared that they were able to connect with different people who would affirm their identities and who were affirming allies. Students discussed connecting with UREM faculty who were identity affirming, identity-affirming peers and classmates, and affirming university faculty and staff allies. Additionally, both posse mentors and Posse campus liaisons were mentioned as affirming people. As students shared how they stayed in college, they discussed how these individuals helped them during difficult times, supported them, and affirmed their existence and their place in the university. This in turn, encouraged them to stay in college.

Identity-Affirming UREM Faculty

Many of the student participants sought out UREM faculty members as those were people who not only looked like them and affirmed that students' identity, but through their interactions, students were encouraged to stay in college. Students discussed how their faculty members of color were the ones who continued to maintain a connection with them, served as role models, and shared experiences that affirmed a student's identity due to their own experiences during college and in the work force. These UREM faculty members served as

mentors, inspirations, and supporters as they affirmed student identities.

Rihanna discussed a faculty member of color who she only had one class with, but he still went out of his way to connect with her. She shared that the professors who are also people of color were the ones who tried to get to know her beyond the classroom:

> I think he is probably one of my favorite professors because he just he really cares . . . you can tell when professors really care about you as a person. . . . I [would] see him walking in the streets at Midwestern and he always stops to give me a hug . . . it's always been the POC professors, like he was from . . . I want to say Spain. And then my sociology professor she was from Chile. I feel it's always the POC professors that you really see . . . they care . . . they genuinely want to get to know me as person. I've asked them for recommendations and for scholarships and stuff, those are people that I definitely feel I can go back to.

Sam also had a positive experience with a faculty member of color of her same background and she felt that he took the time to listen to her and to support her when she needed it. She excitedly shared:

> When it comes to my faculty, I really appreciate my faculty, especially my advisor for the School of Education. He's also Latinx. He understands my experiences and he's very understanding of whenever I have a problem and I need to talk to him about my situations or feeling anxious on this campus, so I have a positive relationship with my advisor. He always just makes me feel at ease whenever I'm talking to him, or when I'm worried about my classes.

Santiago also found comfort and an identity-affirming person in a UREM faculty member whom he describes as an asset. She shared his same ethnic background and after he stopped doing research projects with her they continued to work together on other projects. Santiago stated:

> She is in the department of African American studies . . . and I was doing research with her my freshman year and then after we stopped doing research together, I never lost contact with her and I still contact her on a regular basis throughout the semester. I actually helped her with another research project she was doing this year. She has definitely been an asset and a resource that I have been so blessed to have because if anybody knows the stuff that's going on, on that campus, it is her because she has seen it all and she knows it all. She is a very powerful Black woman.

As a first-generation student, Maria initially felt uncomfortable approaching faculty members but, due to encouragement from Posse campus officials, she had to engage with them. She found that she had a positive experience engaging with faculty members of color and her identity was affirmed due to coming from similar backgrounds. Maria reflected:

> As a first-generation student it's intimidating too because you see your professor and [they're] so smart and [have a] PhD . . . [it was] very intimidating to try to talk to them. Posse always pushes office hours, which can build those connections. I really tried and I did, especially my Chicano Studies program, [that] was where I connected with way more faculty. It's just easier for me because of similar backgrounds . . . so it was refreshing to be able to have a whole department with a lot of faculty who come from backgrounds like me.

Cleo also felt initial discomfort with interactions with faculty; however, this changed when she had her first Black professor during college. She shared that she felt more affirmed in her identity and participated in class as a result:

> He was the first black professor that I had and it was so refreshing to see a person of color in that kind of position. It made it a lot easier to be interested . . . and being a person of color in that kind of position was really nice to have and it made me more interested in learning and made me feel more comfortable like raising my hand if I had a question or going to his office hours.

Maria sought out a faculty member who is from the same background as she is so that she could hear about her experiences. After their conversation Maria felt affirmed in her identity and realized that her experiences were normal and that there was a supportive faculty member who would be there for her. She passionately shared:

> One of the first Latina faculty members that I talked to . . . I didn't have her as a teacher, I just looked her up and saw her research and her interest and I emailed her . . . she knew who I was . . . she knew my background, too. We really connected easily . . . she was just someone who really just made me feel like everything I was going through was normal . . . we would have conversations about imposter syndrome . . . just hearing about her experiences and how she felt. . . . It really didn't make me feel alone and made me realize . . . a lot of people go through this and it's just something that you have to fight against and constantly remind yourself that you belong here . . . this is someone who came from my background who understands who I am.

Luna also connected with a professor who not only shared the same background, but who is also in the same field as her. For Luna, seeing that faculty member in a role that she wanted to hold one day was affirming for her identity as well as her future career path:

> My HR professor this semester, I reached out to her asking for advice from her because she worked in an executive management position. I wanted to see what advice she had for me pursuing a similar career path with technology and in management. She's also a Latina woman, so she kind of just served as a role model, someone I could see as inspirational for me to kind of follow along with her path in a way. I'm lucky enough that I was able to build those relationships.

Lena also felt identity affirmation and shared that getting help from advisors who were also from UREM backgrounds really helped her. She reflected:

> Having advisors [at the Multicultural Resource Center] really helped as well. Just seeing people that look like me and that came from similar backgrounds as me was really helpful and having my posse as well as other students that were around my same background helped a lot. Even if they didn't directly help me out, just being in their presence relaxed me a little bit considering I go to a PWI [predominantly White institution] . . . to show me that I'm in college for a reason and I got this scholarship for a reason. Just reminding me along the way that I gotta push through it, it's gonna be difficult, but I'm not the only one going through it. Just having that support system . . . just having them there in my presence was really nice.

Each of these participants shared that their identity was affirmed by UREM faculty members. Some faculty members were from the same background as the participant, while others were just identity affirming for students as members of UREM groups. These students needed their

identity affirmed and many of them sought out people who were examples of who they wanted to be after graduation. Seeing these UREM faculty members doing the thing that they wanted to do after graduation and in careers encouraged these students to stay in college.

Identity-Affirming UREM Peers and Classmates

For some of the student participants, being on a predominantly White campus as an underrepresented racial and ethnic minority presented challenges when it came to making connections with others. Each of the three students who describe their experiences either attempted to engage with White students on campus and were met with resistance or they were not comfortable with White peers. As a result of these situations, participants connected with other UREM students and had their identity affirmed. Rihanna experienced not being acknowledged by White people and was only one of two Black people on her residence hall floor. She describes coming to terms with this and feeling that her identity was affirmed by another Black woman on campus:

> My roommate was Black, but we were the only ones on our floor and our floormates did not mess with us at all. It's not that they were rude . . . but they didn't acknowledge [us] as human beings. . . . I didn't feel people were seeing me. At one point I was walking down the street and this other Black woman saw me and she said "hi" and it [felt] . . . good, [because] she [saw] me. Just getting that acknowledgement . . . you definitely don't get that experience at Midwestern.

Luna experienced similar interactions in her residence hall with White residents who did not acknowledge her existence or the existence of other UREM students on their floor. Luna chose to engage with her roommate who was also a student from a UREM population as well as other

UREM students in the hall. Connections with these people helped Luna to find affirmation and support. She shared:

> My roommate and I made friends with not only ourselves [but] with the other POC on the floor. . . . She was also dealing with the same thing as me . . . we were [some] of the only . . . people of color [on the floor] . . . we just weren't invited to a lot of social outings with the rest of the floor who happened to be White folk. They would go out constantly, like almost nightly. Just to go out to eat, go to parties together and they'd invite other people on the floor, but they wouldn't invite my roommate and I . . . Then we ended up just making friends with people on another floor, who also felt the same way. They were also POC and they [didn't] ever get invited to things with other people on their floor.

As a Latina, Sam did not feel connected with White students because of previous negative experiences she had with White students in class. Thus, when she entered into new classroom spaces, she immediately flocked to identity-affirming UREM students in her classes for support:

> Definitely culture shock my first semester being the only Latina. One of my classes was very challenging for me because I didn't really feel like I connected with the White students. Again, I never went to school with White students . . . and they didn't sincerely want to work with me. I was able to find people in my classes. . . . I usually stuck with POC in the classes because that's who I know best . . . and it felt really comforting finding POC in my classes that I could lean on.

These three students experienced situations where their identity was not being honored by White peers. The situation Sam experienced is related to findings from a Booker (2016) study. African American upper class female students perceptions of sense of belonging in academic settings was the topic of the study and findings determined that experiences with classmates, both

negative and positive, affected their perceptions of their peers but it did not weigh on their decision to persist in college. Sam's perception of her peers was not a good one. As a result of her experiences and the experiences of the other study participants, each person made sure to connect with other UREM peers in class or where they lived to have their identity affirmed and to find much needed support. This support contributed to the reason they stayed in college. In the next section, I share how students engaged with other university faculty and staff allies who provided affirmation in other ways.

Affirming University Faculty and Staff Allies

Faculty and staff of color were not the only people who affirmed these students' identities and made them feel supported to stay in college. Student participants also talked about affirmation they received that was not related to their racial and ethnic identity. These students indicated that they received general praise and affirmation in their day-to-day interactions with faculty and staff members, most of which do not hold a UREM identity, as well as from posse mentors and Posse campus liaisons who are also paid university professionals. Since these people were non-UREM faculty and staff members and were affirming students in ways that were not related to their racial and ethnic identity, they are in a separate subtheme. In the sections that follow, I share excerpts where students discussed how they stay in college through interactions with faculty and staff allies of all racial and ethnic backgrounds.

Mary had a White faculty member who had conversations with her about race and helped her to think about the social awareness of her White peers in a different way. Mary felt affirmed by this professor because he was willing to talk with her and give her advice. She goes on to say:

> My environmental studies professor my first semester, I remember I went to talk to him about different things. Coming into school I had a perception that almost all the people

> there who are White . . . weren't as socially aware as maybe some of the people that I'm used to . . . But [that] wasn't very open minded of me because . . . everyone has diverse experiences. My professor is a White guy and he was talking to me about it [this perception] and it made me feel comfortable enough to talk to him about my experiences. He did give me some advice on how I was feeling about certain things and it definitely was not about environmental studies.

Lena also had a positive experience where she was affirmed by a faculty member. She had a science professor who invested in her and was excited to help her explore and learn more about the field of science and she credits him with helping her decide on a job which was a reason she stayed in college and was about to graduate. Lena excitedly shared:

> He was a science professor and I did research with him in his lab for a semester which is really exciting because it was the first time I was ever really involved in undergraduate research and in something that I was intrigued by. He was super excited to have someone that had no idea what she was doing in her research lab, and he was excited to teach me to use all of the instruments and [to help me learn] how I can directly apply what I'm learning in class to a big research project. He's also the reason why I took my new job [after graduation] because in 2 or 3 years they'll be able to pay for my master's . . . it's nice to have that connection and he definitely [pushed me in the] direction of higher education.

Like Lena, Gabrielle was also affirmed by a faculty member. She discussed an appreciation for one of her bosses and advisors as she navigated her major and potential career in STEM after graduation:

> My advisor knows quite extensively what happens in my personal life, mainly because she's always been someone who's very open to talk about any and everything during the meeting. She's given pretty solid advice on both school stuff such as trying to figure out what I'm going to do after college. I never envisioned myself graduating without a STEM degree . . . and she's really been helpful with trying to figure out what might be an option and what might be the best to do based on what's going on in my personal life. That goes to both of my bosses as well. I have an interesting relationship with my supervisor. . . . she's someone that usually has pretty good advice and is willing to lend an ear.

Maya shared that she had faculty members who were willing to get on the front lines with her and her fellow students, to affirm their existence on campus:

> Oftentimes faculty will join in on the protests, they won't get involved as far as putting it together or anything but they might go out and march with us or whatnot . . . [there is a faculty member who] has tenure at the university and a distinguished professor in all this. She lets us know if [we] ever need to file a bias report, or if there's ever an extreme microaggression in class, she's basically down for the cause . . . and she wants us to know that she's an ally for us.

Students felt affirmed when faculty members would engage with them in dialogue about perceptions, when they took an interest in making sure they were on the right track regarding their college major and career choice, and they went as far as to stand up *with* and *for* students so they could affirm their place and existence on campus. The next two sections, affirming posse mentors and affirming Posse campus liaisons have been separated from this section because while the faculty members in this section are not required to engage with students in supportive and affirming ways, mentors and campus liaisons are specifically hired by Midwestern university

to work with posse students; thus, the student experiences with these affirming people can unfold in different ways and be perceived differently. Student participants did not disclose the racial/ethnic identities of the posse mentors or the campus liaisons so the people being discussed in participant excerpts may or may not have a UREM background. As a reminder, the posse mentor facilitates weekly posse meetings and one-on-ones with individual posse members, while the campus liaisons are responsible for working with the Posse Program chapter offices and at times the national office while serving as the connection between the program and their respective campus.

Affirming Posse Mentors

As a university funded program, the Posse campus liaisons and mentors are considered an arm of the university. Posse campus professionals, including the liaisons and posse mentor, work with the Posse Program on posse-related job duties, but they work for Midwestern and, thus, are employees of the institution as they serve in these roles. Thus, they are also considered in this broader theme of affirming university faculty and staff allies. Since posse mentors are assigned to work directly with a cohort of posse scholars and there is a designated relationship between posse mentors and posse scholars, I have also separated that topic from the campus liaisons as they have similar but different responsibilities. Johnson (2016) asserted that being in a mentor/mentee relationship is reciprocal and that the mentor is to guide, provide knowledge, support and challenge, and contribute to their respective mentee's development. Students who may not have received the support they needed from their respective posse or during weekly meetings also had a mentor with whom they could connect and who were affirming. As demonstrated in participant excerpts, each student had affirming experiences with their mentor and these experiences contributed to how they stay in college.

Raven, who normally is not a sharer, opened up to her mentor more because she felt affirmed to do so. She shared "My mentor is someone that I talked to more openly about things that I was experiencing, because in our one-on-ones he asked questions in a way where I felt comfortable to open up and share those things." Cleo, who was having a hard semester and was trying to determine if she was going to stay at Midwestern, spoke with her mentor about how she was feeling. Not only did Cleo's mentor affirm her feelings, her mentor encouraged her to stay through the semester and determine how she felt after it was over. Cleo's mentor's affirmation helped her to determine that she wanted to stay. She shared:

> I spoke with my mentor a lot my second semester about what was going on and she encouraged me not to make any hasty decisions . . . [she] recommended seeing the whole semester out and through the summer to see how [I would] feel after. I agreed, even though it was still really hard to go through the entire semester, feeling how I did. She was really helpful, even during the times that I felt like I didn't want to be at Midwestern anymore. I grew to have a really close relationship with her and to rely on her for support as well for whatever I needed academically or when I was just having a bad day on campus.

Mentors work with posse scholars during their first 2 years on campus and after that they no longer serve as paid posse mentors unless they choose to take on another posse. That being said, Luna, Cliff, and Gabrielle all remained connected to their mentors who continued to provide affirmation and support long after their commitment to posse as a mentor was over. Luna shared that her mentor still checks in on her:

> My mentor, she was a huge help, she's someone I still reach out to for support. Even though she's not [facilitating posse meetings] every week, she still checks up on me once

> a month just to make sure that I'm doing all right . . . in school [and] on a personal note mentally because . . . there's a lot of times when I do put my mental health on the back burner . . . she puts me in my place [and asks], "what are you doing to help yourself mentally or emotionally?" She was a huge supporting person. Most of the time I go to her when I have issues and worries about my professional life with my major. I tend to consult with her and ask if I am making a good choice, what she would recommend, and whether I should pursue something or not. A lot of the times it is for professional help, but I have come to her for some personal problems as well, such as with family to get someone else's advice. She's already been through a good portion of life so I like to see what her perspective is, because I know that she's had some experiences similar to mine.

Cliff is also still connected to his mentor and felt the support throughout their relationship:

> We felt like we had one of the best mentors, he did such an amazing job [and] he is always available to us now, even though it's not his job . . . [he] was amazing. I [can] still say that now, I would've said that in the beginning . . . our mentor, luckily for us was great.

Gabrielle, who at times doubted herself, credits her mentor with giving her a needed push from time to time. She affirmed her ability to succeed:

> My mentor definitely helped give me a push because I'm the type, [if I] feel like I'm under qualified for something, I 100% will not apply or reach out. She tells me that [I will] never know if [I] don't try, so she's definitely a reason that I've applied or reached out to different things that I normally wouldn't have.

The majority of the posse students shared that they felt supported, affirmed, and heard by their posse mentor. Some still have another year left with their mentor, others will have to transition to

a new relationship with their mentor, and still others shared that despite the fact that they are no longer required to meet with their mentor, they are still connected with them whether it is the mentor reaching out or the posse student reaching out. Regardless of their current situation with their mentor, these students felt affirmed and appreciated by the mentor. This affirmation was supportive, and the support was a reason they stayed in college.

Affirming Posse Campus Liaisons

Even though mentors and liaisons are in place to work with posse scholars, these students have to choose whether or not they will be supported by these campus officials. In addition to sharing that they felt affirmed by posse mentors, Posse campus liaisons also received praise from the study participants who felt they were affirmed via interactions with them. While mentorship is seen as a relationship that just encompasses one mentor and mentee, Johnson (2016) surmised that to be an effective mentor or to be truly served as a mentee, a network of others who serve in a mentoring capacity in different spaces and at different avenues in life is important as well. This is where the campus Posse liaisons come in. Many reported feeling as if the liaisons were always there to listen and that they were there to affirm them in a variety of situations.

Rihanna shared her praises for the office staff and really felt supported by them. Despite the staff being busy, she felt affirmed when they would give her time. She shared:

> That's why I love the Posse staff, they really do care. If you need something, they are always there for you and [even though] they are definitely very busy . . . they will always make time for students and you can really feel that Posse love radiating through them. Always knowing that you can count on someone, knowing someone has your back . . . is really important.

Lena also connected with the Posse liaisons when she could. Here she describes how she is affirmed when engaging with one of the liaisons who is always interested in her major and wants to learn more about all that she is doing:

> One of the Posse liaisons [has] helped me a lot. I always just go into his office randomly and update him about where I was class-wise and where I was going for my internship in the summer and stuff like that. Since I'm one of the only posse students [in my] major, he's always so intrigued about what I'm doing because it's completely different than what everyone else was [doing] . . . so being able to ask him for advice and stuff like that, especially when I was going abroad, that was really helpful.

She goes on to share that, beyond academics, the Posse liaisons have been affirming and helped her deal with frustrations surrounding incidents of bias on campus as well as when Corona Virus Disease ended in-person classes and other activities on campus. Lena shared:

> In my 4 years here, there's been a lot of hate against minority groups on campus and they've [the Posse campus liaisons] been super supportive. They provide resources we can use and if we just need a quiet space or if need someone to talk to, they've always reached out to us on a personal level. If we have any problems or anything like that we can go to them. It's been really uncomfortable, and even though I know that stuff's going to happen, like people saying things . . . you kind of become used to it. I know posse's gonna be there to support us through that. Especially with this whole COVID thing, they've been super supportive sending us emails, especially to the seniors. They feel really bad about not being able to celebrate us. But again, they're making us aware that they still care about us and that this wasn't their decision, so they've been super helpful, just like emotionally as well with all that's going on.

Maria got affirmation in her ability to succeed when going to the Posse liaisons for support. She was nervous about applying to graduate schools with journalism programs and received the affirmation she needed from a Posse liaison who told her that she could achieve this goal and get into a school. Maria exclaimed:

> I remember [stopping by to see the campus liaison] and saying, I really want to apply to . . . schools for journalism. And I told [the liaison where] and [the Posse liaison said] "you know, you can do it right?" and I started crying so hard because I really needed to hear that, because I don't think I would have applied to be honest . . . just hearing that from someone . . . after that, my perspective changed. I [told myself] I'm gonna apply and I'm gonna do it. If I don't get in, I don't get in, if I do, then I do. If they believe in me, then I'm gonna do it.

Santiago shared how he feels supported and affirmed by the liaisons and has seen this support in action with his posse scholar friends who are in trouble. He shared:

> I've had close friends that have interacted with the [Posse campus liaisons] in their time of need, they [friends] really should have been in a far worse position. They were vulnerable enough to share something with [the liaisons and they were] able to guide them through a process, otherwise they would have not made it out on the other side.

JoJo describes the affirmation that is available to students should they choose to accept it but goes on to say they have to make that decision for themselves. She summed this up nicely when she shared:

> Posse staff have been supporting us in any way that we wanted to accept support from them. Sometimes it wasn't the support that we needed, but it was the support that was there, so we took it, or at least I took it. Without it [Posse], I don't think that I would have

had the same support system that I do now, because of the people that I have in my life who are also affiliated with Posse.

By being there for posse scholars, affirming their college major and general campus existence, letting them know that they "could do it" and that they could succeed, and through observing others as they received help from the Posse liaisons, students felt that the Posse on-campus liaisons served as affirming people. With this affirmation, students received messages that supported them and contributed to their ability to stay in college.

Connection to the Literature

In this section, I share excerpts related to identity-affirming spaces such as Multicultural Living and Learning Communities and Multicultural Centers and excerpts on identity-affirming people including UREM faculty, UREM peers, and classmates; affirming faculty and staff allies; and affirming posse mentors and on-campus Posse liaisons. As students described their on-campus experiences, they gave details that pointed to various forms of affirmation as one of the reasons they stay in college. This affirmation came in two forms, when they were in affirming spaces and from affirming people.

Affirming Spaces

As previously mentioned, students' racial and ethnic identities are salient and when these students entered Midwestern, a predominantly White institution, relevance of their identities was heightened. This led to a few students seeking an identity-affirming space in the form of a living-learning community and at Midwestern this is the Multicultural Learning Community. According to the literature, participation in learning communities contributes to the success of college students (Sears, 2017; Spradlin et al., 2010) and comments from study participants support this idea. As a high impact practice (Kuh, 2008), learning communities can improve student learning,

achievement, and success. Similar to how Midwestern creates their living-learning communities, other institutions create cohorts of students and connect them with others (Spradlin et al., 2010) around a particular theme. At Midwestern, the theme of one of their living-learning communities is a multicultural learning community. Sears and Tu (2017) conducted a study on a learning community that was focused on social justice and social change issues. Students in that 2017 study used terminology such as "family," "home," and "safe space," as well as ideas around someone "having their back" when they were describing these communities. This is similar terminology that the participants in this study used to discuss their identity-affirming spaces. The participants discussed that being members of these communities helped support them in their identity and these feelings describe how they stay in college.

Another identity-affirming space that gave students a feeling of family, home, and safety are the multicultural resource centers present on campus. According to Patton Davis and Ladson-Billings (2010), since their inception, multicultural centers have served as spaces where students felt safe and at home while at predominantly White institutions. With a mission focused on community development, identity exploration, leadership, and connections, these centers (e.g., multicultural centers, Latinx Cultural Center, Black Cultural Center) have been in place to help UREM students as they navigated PWIs. Many of these centers use models that place staff members into positions that share their same cultural connections (e.g., a coordinator of Black student programs would be a member of this racial/ethnic group; McShay, 2017) so seeing staff members that look like them not only affirmed student identities but affirmed their existence in predominantly White spaces on campus. In a study conducted by Black and Bimper (2017) about the experiences of African American men at a historically White institution, findings determined that one of the ways these men found affirmation after a negative experience was by

participation in programming that was sponsored by culturally based centers and focused on topics such as heritage month celebrations and the Black experience on campus. Additionally, multicultural centers allow for students to work on campus and in community to process issues happening in local communities and to build community for themselves and others on campus (Lozano, 2010; McShay, 2017; Museus, 2008). These research findings align with the information that study participants shared about their experiences in these identity-affirming spaces at Midwestern because they also described feelings of being in safe spaces and at home. However, these findings challenge other research findings in which participants felt cultural centers were no longer relevant due to being in a postracial era (Harris & Patton, 2017). When students' identities are affirmed, they feel like they belong and are more likely to stay in college (Strayhorn, 2012). The student participants in this study communicated similar sentiments. They were resilient and found people and spaces that affirmed their identity, and this helped them stay in college.

Students also found identity affirmation in student organizations that were centered on cultural awareness and history, and that also contained people from UREM communities. Three students, Cliff, Luna, and JoJo each shared that they are members of historically based Latinx fraternities and sororities and that these are spaces in which they find identity affirmation. Membership in fraternities and sororities has been shown to increase the likelihood that a student will graduate within 4 years and maintain full-time status while doing so (Routon & Walker, 2014). Additionally, Ribera et al. (2017) surmised students who became affiliated with fraternities and sororities in their first year of college had a greater sense of belonging than their nonmember peers. Each of these students communicated that their identity-based fraternity or sorority was a place where their identity was affirmed through connections and other research

has confirmed this information. Delgado-Guerrrero et al. (2014) looked into why women of color join affinity-based sororities and determined that these women desired familial relationships and a sense of belonging, in addition to having a need for social support. Having ethnic peer support was reported to be one of the most important benefits that women received from joining their Latina-based sorority (Orta et al., 2019). This study also concluded that, as a result of the larger sorority community outside of their respective organization, students felt wider support from others in the community and that these organizations foster persistence because graduating is an expectation of membership. Delgado-Guerrero and Gloria (2013) also looked specifically at Latina sorority members and how their academic persistence decisions were influenced by self-beliefs, social support, and cultural fit. Findings from that study also pointed to participants believing that their sorority had helped them to persist in higher education.

For those students in this study who were not affiliated with fraternities or sororities, they participated in other identity-affirming organizations such as the Black men's empowerment group. In the previously mentioned Black and Bimper (2017) study focused on African American men, findings also concluded that one of the strategies these men used to persist and graduate was seeking support from affinity groups and organizations. This finding also aligns with the culturally engaging campus environments model of college success (Museus et al., 2016) which surmises that external influences, precollege characteristics, and campus environments positively influence student persistence. The cultural relevance part of the model states that it is important for students to connect with faculty, administrators, staff and peers who share similar backgrounds, and that participation in ethnic student organizations has a positive impact on these students overall.

Affirming People

Student participants also discussed how they stay in college as they talked about the people who affirmed them. Comments made in student excerpts elaborated on different types of affirming people including identity-affirming UREM faculty; identity-affirming peers; university faculty and staff allies who affirm, as well as affirming Posse officials on campus which included posse mentors and Posse campus liaisons.

Identity-Affirming UREM Faculty. As described in the excerpts, connecting with and finding affirmation in identity with faculty and staff of color was a prevalent topic with many of the participants. In a Stout et al. (2018) study, there were indications that higher graduation rates for UREM students were connected to having more diverse faculty members on campus. Additionally, in a Booker (2016) study on African American women and a Simmons (2017) study on African American men, higher levels of satisfaction with school were tied to positive interactions with faculty and staff members from White and UREM populations. Another study from Brooms and Davis (2017) examined the role that relationships play in Black male students' persistence efforts. Findings from this study concluded that students relied on mentoring from Black faculty and these relationships were not only essential to their persistence, but they also helped them to navigate the campus more and helped them as they prepared for their careers. These four studies align with how participants engaged with faculty who shared their identities, as well as those who served as allies.

Identity-Affirming UREM Peers and Classmates. Student participants also described experiences where their identity was not being acknowledge and these situations led to them seeking out UREM peers and classmates so that they could feel affirmed in their identity while also being supported. Much of what the students communicated about affirmation, in this case

identity affirmation, is related to sense of belonging. According to Strayhorn (2012), there are many definitions of sense of belonging, but terms connected to this definition include community, acceptance, and support. Additionally, as it relates to college students, sense of belonging references feeling connected, accepted, and valued on campus as well as having social support. Strayhorn (2012) asserted feeling a sense of belonging is a basic human need and that this may be more salient for students from UREM populations. When students feel a sense of belonging and like they are a part of the university community, they are more likely to stay in college (Gopalan & Brady, 2019; Hausmann et al., 2009; Strayhorn, 2012) which is why it is important for this conversation. The students who described their experiences shared that they were not feeling support or affirmation in their identity with White peers, so they connected with UREM peers and classmates and felt this connection. Maramba and Valasquez (2010) conducted a study related to sense of belonging and determined that identity affirmation is related to feelings of sense of belonging and had an impact on the quality of their interpersonal relationships while in college. The student participants in my study communicated that they desired to have a sense of belonging and many of them had this desire met by students who are also members of UREM populations. Researchers have also made assertions similar to these. Gopalan and Brady (2019) researched whether first-year college students felt a sense of belonging and questioned whether a student's UREM status impacted feelings of belonging. They concluded that sense of belonging desires were the same for students of all racial and ethnic backgrounds and that students from UREM backgrounds reported lower levels of belonging to their institution than their non-UREM peers. In a similar study conducted by Ribera et al. (2017), the researchers wanted to know whether first-year students had different experiences with institutional acceptance and peer belonging based on certain characteristics

including race and ethnicity. Like the Gopalan and Brady (2019), UREM students had less of a perception of peer belonging and African American students had a significantly lower sense of peer belonging than their White counterparts. Overall, studies align with how student participants stay in college and the importance of the presence of identity-affirming peers and classmates to help support them.

Affirming University Faculty and Staff Allies. Beyond UREM faculty members and UREM peers who affirmed their identities, participants also talked broadly about affirmation they received from university faculty and staff allies on campus, and from Posse officials. The majority of these people were not members of UREM groups. Students spoke about how faculty members affirmed their thoughts and perspectives about the university environment, some took an interest in helping them become acclimated to a particular majors and others served as advisors as well as affirming their place at an institution by protesting with them. Student–faculty interactions are an important part of students staying in college (Booker, 2016; Bowman & Felix, 2017; Fuentes et al., 2013) and the participants experiences are aligned with this as well. When looking at the research, the Booker (2016) study on African American upper-class females also concluded that professors who related to students as well as engaging and connecting with them during class and outside of the classroom setting had an impact on whether they chose to stay in college. Students also shared that they had a desire to be incorporated into classroom discussions beyond times when the conversations were related to race. By showing an interest in these students, faculty members made them feel as if they belonged and feelings of belongingness led to staying in college. Bowman and Felix (2017) also found a positive association between faculty and staff validation and commitment to an institution and goals. In another study on early faculty contact and first-year college student socialization, Fuentes et al.

(2013) determined that early faculty interaction leads to greater faculty mentorship which also leads to students staying in college. These sentiments were shared by student participants in this study as well. There is however one study that challenges the idea that affirming relationships with faculty members contribute to a student staying in college. Wolniak et al. (2012) determined that having faculty contact did not increase the likelihood of a student persisting to their second year.

Affirming Posse Officials. Student participants reported having positive and affirming relationships with both their respective posse mentor as well as with the Posse campus liaisons at Midwestern. While each student was assigned a mentor and they met with that person during posse meetings and for one-on-one sessions, students also had access to Posse on-campus liaisons. Both of these Posse officials were described by students to be affirming and they served in mentoring capacities in a variety of ways. Students described how they stay in college and affirmed that Posse officials contributed to their ability to stay. These ideas align with a Hu and Ma (2010) study about a cohort of scholarship recipients and the impact of having a mentor. Findings concluded that having a mentor impacted their persistence and even more so when there was consistent interaction between the mentor and the mentee. Spradlin et al. (2010) found that mentoring programs geared toward underrepresented students meet their needs and increased the likelihood that they will stay in college. Separate studies by Bordes and Arrendondo (2005) and Salas et al. (2014) found that Latina/o students mentored by faculty and staff members had an improved perception of campus environment which may also be connected to staying in college. This is in line with the information that the study participants shared. In another study by Baier et al. (2017), an investigation about the perceptions of mentorship and its influence on a freshman student's intentions to persist, similar conclusions were made and determined that perceptions of

mentorship did impact a student's choice to persist. Finally, Brooms and Davis (2017) examined how Black men's racial identity, gender, and their relationships played a role in their intent to persist. Student participants reported that their relationships with faculty who served as mentors, specifically African American faculty members was imperative to their success, success being defined as persistence in college in this case. Each of these studies align with how the students in this study articulate their experiences and their understanding of their ability to stay in college.

Communities of Support

The idea of community is another theme that is interwoven throughout how students described how they stay in college. In the previous sections, student excerpts highlighted spaces and people who are affirming. As these students were engaging in these spaces and with these people, they were becoming a part of and building their community of support. Student participants highlighted their communities of support in two ways. The first way was by describing Posse-related communities of support. These Posse-related communities include the student's respective posse, the posse learning community that exists during the required weekly meeting with the posse in which students participate their first 2 years on campus, the extended posse community on campus, and posse Bigs. The second way that students described communities of support was in how they created their own communities of support. These self-built communities include peers in academic classes and communities of support that were built in student organizations and through social activities with other UREM peer students. In participant excerpts, students explore how they stay in college and describe the Posse-related communities of support and the communities of support that they create.

Posse-Related Communities of Support

One of the main purposes of the Posse Program is to send students to school as a cohort so that they can support one another, be a resource, and have each other's back with the hope of staying in college. Some students choose to use their posse in this way, others are challenged by this part of the program, and other students find it difficult to connect with their posse. If a student does not receive support day-to-day from their posse, another opportunity to have access to this is during the weekly required posse meetings that are facilitated by the posse's respective mentor. Additionally, some students indicated that they were unable to find their community of support in neither their respective posse nor during the weekly posse meetings so they branched out to create communities of support with members of the extended posse community or with their posse Big. Ultimately, students shared information about their posse-related communities of support in a few ways: some participants' primary posse-related community of support was with their respective posse, for others their primary posse-related community of support was the extended posse, and for many, their posse-related community of support contained a combination of members of their respective posse and from the extended posse community. In participant excerpts, students describe their experiences with Posse-related communities of support and share how being a part of a posse, participating in the required weekly posse meeting, or engaging with the extended posse community including with posse Bigs has helped them stay in college.

Scholars' Respective Posse

Scholars are intentionally sent to school in posses by the Posse Program, whose founder surmised that doing so would increase a student's likelihood of staying in college. Each scholar is a member of a posse with at least nine others and they have a goal to support and encourage

one another so they stay in college. In the following excerpts, scholars share that this community of support has kept them from leaving college, had their back during difficult times, and increased their success. For those students who are juniors and seniors, they shared that while they see less of their respective Posse members now than in previous years, they try to be intentional about still connecting with one another and they are dedicated to continuing to be a supportive community. Luna described her posse as supportive and she shared that she appreciates that they can joke together as a group. She goes on to say that while not everyone is best friends in the group, they still support one another in their own way:

> My posse, we're a really solid group, we really never fight, they really did choose a good posse when it came to mine . . . we don't argue with each other, at least not in a serious sense. It's kind of more just jokingly teasing one another and all of us get along really well. I wouldn't say that we're all best friends or anything . . . it's a solid group of friends [and] people to lean on. Even the people that I'm not especially close with in my posse, I still talk to them to make sure that they're doing okay . . . we support each other in our academics.

Luna also shared that she had a difficult time transitioning from her diverse home community but that she had a community of support when she came to Midwestern and credits staying in college to her posse community of support:

> Coming here from [my town] and from my high school, which was just so diverse, it was so different, but at least I had my posse to go back to. Not just my posse, but the whole posse community, someone to go back to as a sense of community. That was probably one of the main reasons why I continued to stay after that first semester, because I didn't want to let other people down by leaving so soon. I just think the relationships, whether

> it's with the people in older posses who kind of try to guide you in the right direction. . . . That was a huge part of my growth throughout my college journey.

JoJo shares similar sentiments and stated that she wouldn't have had as much success without her posse. She goes on to say that this community of supportive people helped meet her needs:

> I don't think that I would have been as successful at [Midwestern] had I gone there without a posse. I think it also provided a lot of stability . . . with Posse you go into college with a core group of people, or at least some form of a core group of people. I think they're just a really good program . . . if I'm feeling really alone . . . even though they might not be doing everything they can for me now, I know if I were to go to them and tell them I need this, they would at least attempt to meet my needs.

Like Luna and JoJo, Santiago agrees that having a posse is helpful and contributes to his community of support:

> Posse [is] set up where you have this group of 10 and that's the basis, this group of 10, that is going to one university as a group, to hopefully build each other up in hopes of making sure nobody drops out. Nobody leaves the posse, nobody leaves the university, we are here to support each other no matter what.

Maria also finds her respective posse to be a community of support. She shared two incidents that she experienced on campus where her posse demonstrated that they had her back and that they were there to be her community of support when she needed. Sharing these two incidents where she was surrounded by her respective posse community of support allowed Maria to articulate what allowed her to stay in college:

> We [in class] had to peer review speeches and I was in a group with two White guys. When I read [my speech], they gave me no feedback . . . [instead they told] me to speak

> slower because of my accent. I kind of just froze there and class ended right then . . . [Later on] I told her [my posse member] the story . . . [and how] I never knew I had an accent . . . and I started crying and she cried . . . my whole posse came in the room and they were just trying to make me feel better. I was just thinking if I didn't have them there, I would have just been crying in my room alone.

Maria shared another incident when members of her posse were there and circled around her as a community of support during an incident on campus:

> We had just came back from a party . . . and [some White men] start . . . trying to holler at me . . . and I'm ignoring them . . . and one of them says "speak to her in Spanish, so she can understand." I was just so angry. One of my posse members comes running in . . . and chased the guys off the floor . . . nothing bad happened . . . they [the posse members] came back . . . but I just have never felt that taken care of in a long time.

For Sam, it was a bit different. While it was initially difficult for her to use her posse as a community of support, she recognized that they were still forming as a group and determining how to best support each other. However, once they determined how they would support each other, they were in a better space and found a way to be this community for one another:

> First semester was challenging with my posse, we were just trying to figure out who we were and I felt like there was a lot of expectations on us . . . but then we realized that we're all really different and we all have our different ways of showing love towards each other . . . it's okay if we can't make it to every event, because we all have our own stuff to do . . . eventually, we became more understanding and our relationship has gotten better since then.

For Raven, the community of support was different in her mind than the reality of how it turned out. Like Sam, Raven shared that while there were initial challenges, she was able to find common ground and redefine what the supportive community of her posse was going to look like. Raven shared:

> They're supposed to be supportive. . . . I felt like it led me to having a lot of expectations of them, that they didn't really know how to live up to . . . I think in that aspect, that was something that I had to reflect on and that I had to take ownership of . . . when we first got together, I really wanted to force these friendships . . . I really wanted us to be a family, I really wanted us to all be on the same page and happy . . . I think that definitely accepting that not every relationship is gonna be peaches and cream all the time. It's not always going to be perfect.

Cliff was pleased that his relationship with his posse had remained supportive but had moved into a different space: "Yeah, the relationships that stayed strong in the posse, it's remained stronger now, because it's more of a willingness to reach out to each other. We want to hang out as opposed to, we're forced to hang out." Similarly, Lena also discussed the community of support that her posse developed into once they were no longer required to be together weekly:

> We've been pretty close, but we're a posse that we don't need to talk every single day to know that we're still there to support each other. I know some other posses talk every day, but they told us when we first came, that every posse is different, has a different dynamic. I was totally okay with our posse being a little bit more low key and showing support in different ways as opposed to just talking to them every day . . . I really like that about my posse.

While posse is meant to serve as a support community, not all members felt they had that and, unfortunately, Rihanna did not feel supported by her posse. She only connected with one person:

> I don't mess with my posse as much because I know freshman year I was really going through it and everyone was going through it . . . but I think those people that should have supported me, especially my posse, they weren't there for me when I really needed some support and some help and so I think right now I'm really only close to one girl in my posse. She's been my rock since Day 1. . . . she's really held it down for me . . . but she was really one of the only people on campus aside from Posse staff that was really supporting me when I actually needed some help.

Each of these student participants shared that their entire posse or at least one member was a part of their community of support. Some of the students described wonderful relationships with posse peers who helped them stay in college and others shared that their posse members were supportive and are a greater piece of a bigger puzzle. For the students who did not find what they were looking for from their posse in nonorganized times, another Posse-related community of support to which scholars have access is the posse learning community which comes in the form of a once-a-week meeting during the first 2 years of college. I discuss that subtheme in the next section.

Posse Learning Community: Weekly Meetings

As members of posses, students meet once a week with their posse group for the first 2 years so they can support one another. During these meetings, scholars engage in sessions that are facilitated by their mentor and sometimes other scholars on a variety of topics including transitional issues, time management, and academics (Posse Mentor Manual, 2016). If students did not have the opportunity to engage outside of the weekly meetings or did not make the time

to connect, they at least had these learning communities of support in place. This was a community of support that is Posse-related and, as the excerpts support, for some scholars these meetings were helpful but for others they provided no added value. Santiago really found value in the weekly meetings as he explored how he stayed in college. Recognizing early on how important these meetings were, he found this community of support helpful for his physical and emotional well-being and determined that this supportive community was a large part of his transition:

> Once we got to campus, we understood ourselves to be a group that was lifting each other up, or a group that was in place to build upon each other and to keep each other going, despite whether or not we were friends. Despite whether we had the same interest or major, the posse meetings were set up in a way that you could come in and if there was something that was bothering you, you could talk about it and nobody was going to shoot you down for talking about it . . . That was really important for that first semester, because there's so much going on and a big part of transitioning successfully and being a college student is maintaining that level of mental and physical health . . . and taking care of yourself that can go unnoticed, for so long, if you do not have a way to express your feelings or if you do not have a safe space to go to, to really think about what you're going through and how you were feeling.

Maria viewed the meetings as a weekly time to check in with her posse and to hear what was going on with everyone else. She saw this as a community of students who supported each other's accomplishments and were there for a needed therapy session as well:

> Every posse meeting we'd come in and we would start ranting about what we were frustrated about or . . . someone would share that they got an "A" on their midterm and we would all be so happy . . . so it was kind of like . . . our therapy session of the week.

For Gabrielle the meetings served as a place when she could engage with both her posse and her mentor along with gaining valuable skills through the workshops in which they participated. This is how she described her community of support. She explained:

> That was a really effective way to see my posse and then be able to, as a group, interact with our mentor to discuss things that as a group affect us, and also we did things like resume workshops, small presentations, stuff like that. I don't want to say it was career readiness, but I guess kind of like enrichment in a way.

Unlike Gabrielle who got both enrichment and connection with her other posse members in the meetings, Cleo saw the meetings more as a learning community where she could gain helpful information from the variety of workshops verses a place where she could get specific support from her respective posse community. She emphasized that there was not a lot of deep conversation from her posse and that the meetings were different from when she went through precollegiate training with her posse:

> A big part of the posse experience at Midwestern . . . [is] the weekly posse meetings. They're once a week on a specific day for 2 hours. During [the meetings] we meet with our posse cohort and our mentor . . . first year was a lot of workshops involving clean eating or financial based workshops [or] stress related workshops to help us on campus [it was an] opportunity for us to discuss things as a cohort . . . every meeting would start off with "how's your week going?" . . . I would say . . . it's a lot of give and take. You get what you put in and, if [the] group is really cohesive and close, and I'm sure it looks a lot

> different than what other meetings would look like . . . it was really hard to get really deep involvement from each one of us, which was a lot different from what our PCT [precollege training] looked like.

Despite their mandatory nature, Rihanna looked forward to the meetings as at least a way to connect with her posse mates once a week. In the previous section, Rihanna discussed how she only felt that one person from her posse served as a community of support for her and this is reflected here as she describes these meetings as the one time she gets to engage with her posse so she takes advantage of that:

> It's required for the first year and second year for you to meet with your posse. You just talk and discuss all of the college stuff. Definitely having that because, it's mandatory, but of course, you also wanna hang out with them . . . but that was definitely a big support system on campus.

Maya did not consider the meetings to be a community of support. In fact, she shared that when the 2-year requirement for the meetings was over, everyone was happy to part ways. This dynamic between Maya and her posse plays out here and in an additional section of this theme:

> My freshman and sophomore year, when we had our weekly meetings, I wouldn't say those were really effective in any way. For some posses, when it comes to the end of your required meetings, it's a really sentimental thing for them [because they are] not going to see [each other] on a regular basis anymore. For my posse, it was very much like, "thank God we don't have to sit in these 2-hour meetings."

Even if a scholar did not connect with their posse on a regular basis, they were still required to participate in a once-a-week meeting which included the mentor who facilitated it as a guideline of the program. Since these meetings occur only during the first 2 years of school, it also starts to

prepare scholars for how to support their fellow posse members after the 2-year meeting requirement is over and the meetings and general engagement with their respective posse provides a way for students to learn how to engage with others beyond their respective posse.

The Extended Posse Community of Support

Posse members at Midwestern come from more than one city and a new class of posse scholars enter the institution every year; thus, the extended posse community of support includes members of other posses outside of a scholars respective posse. These scholars may be from the same class year but a different city, from a different class year but the same city, or from both a different class year and a different city. The community is available to students, but it is up to posse students to decide whether or not they choose to include extended posse members in their respective community of support. There were some participants who reported that while they did not necessarily feel that direct support from their respective posse, they did get it from members of other posses in the posse community. Most felt this was fine and did not have hard feelings toward their respective posse because, most of them agreed that their posse would be there in an emergency and if they were needed. Luna made a concerted effort to connect with and build community with members of posses outside of her respective posse. She shared:

> I've definitely built good relationships with other people and other posses. I made sure that I branched out . . . making sure if I know someone from posse's in my class, I [sat] next to them, talk[ed] to them, we'll hang out and whatnot, because it was just a nice way to get to know them better on a personal level.

Like Luna, JoJo describes how she built her community of support by picking and choosing who she wanted to connect with and she did this intentionally:

> I picked and chose which people I wanted to form relationships [with] that were part of the posse community but not a part of my posse. A lot of that revolved around our similar interests or living in the Multicultural Learning Community and being involved in the Multicultural Greek Council, [because] a lot of those communities intersected. I think the people who whose interests intersected with mine are the ones that I typically formed the biggest connections with, or the strongest connections with.

Both Maria and Cleo were also intentional about including members of the extended posse community in their personal communities of support. Each scholar shared that their roommates, who are members of other posses, are their favorite people and have been supportive of them. For example, Maria raved about her roommates and shared how they have been her community of support. She expressed:

> My two closest friends have been there for me for everything. They're the ones that hear everything before I talk to anyone else, they're the first ones always, because we live together and we're best friends. I owe them a lot because their friendship and their support and their love has been so important to me.

Cleo, who also lives with roommates who are members of other posses shares that these extended posse members have been a part of her supportive community and they make her feel safe and help her to not fall apart while she is at Midwestern:

> I think my most important interactions would stem from the interactions that I've had with my roommates. I think having them as close people has really made it easier to feel like things are not falling apart [at Midwestern]. They've been really important in making me feel . . . safer while I'm away from home . . . so that's been really important . . . when

> it came down to me being alone at night, knowing that I had two people across the apartment that I know that I could go to, that really helped a lot.

Maya discussed how her main friends are in other posses due to the poor relationship she had with her own posse. She reluctantly shared:

> I don't talk to anybody in my posse . . . I don't really communicate with [them], I communicate with people in other posses in my cohort more than I do people in my own posse, but I think it's just different for [everyone]. I don't really think my posse personally has supported me in the way that people from other posses have supported me . . . some of my best friends now . . . [are members of other] posses in my cohort.

Cliff shared how he included a member of the extended posse community in his community of support. He goes on to share that this posse scholar pushed him and checked in on him to make sure he was being mindful of his mental and physical health. He shared:

> Older posse members, specifically one woman who used to work for the Multicultural Office, she was an older posse scholar. She was really tough and told me I needed to be on my [profanity] and to do my stuff . . . she was definitely one of the bigger influences . . . she was definitely on us. She also helped me with my emotional/mental health as well . . . she was also a good source for that. Some of the older posse on campus, they're also like really great to talk to. When you get that genuine conversation aside from all the partying, the school [work], when you have a genuine conversation with them, that's probably the best interaction that I've had with posse.

Gabrielle summed these ideas nicely when she shared her thoughts about how she has an entire community to connect with, because the Posse Program sends students to schools with networks that are in place. She shared:

> They're very good with their mission of not sending the scholar up there alone, sending them out there with an established network. Even if you might not bond as deeply with your individual posse, there's still a lot of people on the specific campuses that are . . . more inclined to talk to you because you're in the Posse Program, but you have a higher opportunity of interacting with them because you're in Posse, and they're also posse as well. Even without my posse, there's still a pretty wide community of scholars on campus that always look out for other scholars pretty well. So, they definitely, don't send you out there alone. Even if you might feel like you're alone at any point in time, you never really are, so they do well with that part of their mission.

Each of these students chose to use the extended posse community for their community of support. Many of them were intentional because they wanted to make sure they had a strong community of people to support them throughout their time in college and they knew this would help them. Others were able to make an organic connection via roommates and older members of posses who took them under their wing. Regardless of how they went about it, these scholars created communities of support that contributed to them staying in college. The next section explores this last thought that Cliff mentioned about how older scholars can have an impact on younger members of posses.

Posse Bigs. Another way that posse scholars described Posse-related communities of support was through the informal posse "Big/Little" program on campus. Similar to a mentor relationship but much less formalized, older posse students are paired with a younger posse student from the same city so that they can serve in a peer mentoring role. As Sam describes it,

> It's just informal within the city cohorts . . . it isn't enforced by Posse itself, but we wanted to take care of our littles and take care of [the] underclassmen who come to

> Midwestern, who share similar experiences. When we do our Bigs and Littles, we do it based off our cities and it's just something we do by tradition.

This is not a required element of the Posse Program; however, this process happens on different posse campuses and is another form of communities of support for the students. When it came to posse Bigs, the participants had a lot of positive things to say about how they contribute to their communities of support.

For Raven, because her Big hails from her respective city, she felt that they had "similar experiences coming from their hometown and relocating to Midwestern." She goes on to say:

> My Big, she was definitely someone that I talked to a lot and asked a lot of questions . . . about different things. If I didn't know about things, I would ask her. We hung out a lot, so we're pretty close. I think in that aspect our relationship was really good . . . she was definitely someone I could go to, to ask about things.

Like Raven, Cliff also felt that good advice came from Bigs and that they were supportive and helpful members of his community of support. He shared:

> When we actually stepped onto campus, our Bigs, the year before us, they were very welcoming. They always invited us over . . . to hang out . . . or go to these places on campus. They would tell us places to avoid for [our] own safety. They were very welcoming.

Sam also looked up to her Big and used her as a sounding board and for emotional support. She shared that having her Big as a supportive member of her community helped her navigate college life. She passionately reflected:

> I really want to follow her footsteps but also be my own person. I really look up to her and everything that she does on campus . . . to make her voice heard on campus. She's

> very vocal, and I really want to be someone who's vocal like that. My Big also helped me when I wanted to talk to my boss about things that were going on with me during my freshman year. She was there [to] hear me out, but we'll also hang out. It was nice having that emotional support of a Big.

Each of these scholars benefited from the extended posse community and were part of various communities of support. Whether it was by connecting with members of other posses through intentional relationship building, or with roommates who are also members of posse or by connecting with a posse Big, they had communities that supported them and helped them stay in college. Communities of support that scholars create are discussed via student excerpts in the next section.

Communities of Support that Scholars Create

Posse scholars have Posse-related communities of support that are in place for them when they come to campus. These communities include the scholar's respective posse, the required weekly meeting that students attend, the extended posse community, and posse Bigs. As these student participants navigated these Posse-related communities of support, they were also learning the skills to build communities on their own. In the excerpts that follow, students describe how they created their own communities of support. Some students chose to create communities of support in their academic classes, while others created communities of support via student organizations and social activities with other UREM students. In the sections that follow, students describe how they stay in college by creating communities of support in academic spaces and with UREM students in student organizations and in social activities.

Communities of Support in Academic Classes

Scholars discussed how they created communities of support in their academic classes. Some of these communities that were created included classmates who are also members of posses, others were created with students who were not affiliated with the Posse Program, and one student participant shared that because of the small number of students in her academic major, these people were also her close friends. Luna felt supported by other posse members who were her friends and also a part of her community of support in her classes. She credits these people with helping her to do better academically and to bring her grades up:

> The friends that I had within posse were definitely a huge support system. Not only within my posse, but from other posses as well. I made really close friends through classes that I had with them, they were huge in supporting me that second semester to get my grades back up [by] studying together [and] just hanging out. It helps so much to have that social life and academic life type of balance. That helped me a lot . . . it was just really nice to have someone be there for me emotionally when I didn't do well on the exam or didn't do too well on a quiz. It was nice to support one another in that sense.

Like Luna, Santiago found camaraderie and help from another member of his posse as he created an academic community of support. He shared:

> One of the guys that's in my posse, we have the same major. The past three semesters I've had two or more classes with him which has been an amazing experience because I don't have to learn all of this material alone. I literally have somebody that I've known since I got to campus that's right next to me and he happens to be one of my close friends that's in the posse as well.

For Mary, she was actually able to connect with a few classmates and shared how she was able to create an academic community of support through a study group:

> I've spent a lot of time studying with these people [her classmates] and it helped me a lot. The guy that I had studied with for math, we [studied] together 5 days straight and I got above the curve, which wasn't something I was doing beforehand . . . I ended up having the same chemistry class [with another girl] and we studied together [for] 4 days straight and I got a B on my chemistry exam, which was not something I was getting before. Knowing that they're competitive and that they're trying, also pushed me and has definitely been beneficial to me.

Gabrielle also created an academic community of support and shared that most of her friends were actually from her classes due to the nature of the academic program:

> Most of my friends are actually within my [academic] program, which isn't always intentional. I mean, I do have some friends that are in posse, but if they're not in posse, they either know someone that's in posse that I know and we met that way or they're in a different [scholarship] program here . . . most of my peers and friends are from those or just mutual friends that I meet that way.

These student participants were able to create a community of support via their respective academic spaces. Some of them continued to connect with members of their respective posse or extended posse members, while others branched out and found folks who were not affiliated with posse with which they could create this type of supportive academic community.

Communities of Support Built via Student Organizations and Social Activities with Other UREM Students

Another way that student participants described how they stay in college is by building communities of support via student organizations and through social activities with other UREM students. This theme is separate from the "identity-affirming student organizations" theme, the "identity-affirming spaces on campus" theme, and the "identity-affirming UREM peers and classmates" theme in the affirmation section because that section focused on identity affirmation in those spaces and with certain people. This section however, is about building community on their own and it just so happens that the community includes UREM students, UREM organizations, and spaces that are identity affirming. Maya shared that through joining organizations and attending events that were held on campus, she was able to create her community of support. She shared that she "joined a couple of organizations [and] . . . started going to a lot of events that really just allowed [her] to build a community" as she was on campus. Like Maya, Maria built communities of support through interactions and engagements with her friends as they worked with their respective organizations. Maria shared:

> I have the greatest friends and with all the multicultural work I did, I was never alone. I was always with my good group of friends who were all also very involved. We were all in there trying to get organizations to help out and come to the community meetings so we could talk about what we want in the center [the campus cultural center] and stuff like that.

When students were not creating communities of support through their organizations, many of them were on campus engaging with others and connecting with people in a variety of ways to create their communities and support systems. For Santiago, it was great that the UREM

community came together to participate in social events with one another. He shared "as far as the people of color community, we do have our own little subset of parties and people throw parties and do stuff and have events and get together." He goes on to say that one of the ways he has created a community of support with other UREM students via social activities is by engaging with the Black community:

> There's a nice sense of community on campus, specifically with the Black population because that's what I can speak to the best. Every group is really trying to create a sense of community for the entire population, which is great. All the fraternities really go out of their way to make sure . . . [they are] throwing a party for people that we know . . . we hear that somebody's throwing a party [and we know that] at least the majority of the people that are throwing the party are gonna actually be at the party and it's a great experience.

Sam, who shared similar sentiments, also found communities of support via social activities specifically with the multicultural community on campus. She shared:

> I usually hang out with other people from posse and whenever my friends aren't busy, I just hang out with them. I would also go out to multicultural parties. I would go with people from the Multicultural Living and Learning Community but also posse people go out to parties. We also have kickbacks, so we watch movies together and hang out with our Littles, too. We did a lot of that this year especially since we just got to know our Littles. We've been pretty good at also celebrating our birthdays together.

Luna shared that she was intentional about creating her community of support with other students and focused specifically on the relationship she had with her roommate. She goes on to

share how she created this community of support via social activity with her roommate who was also a UREM student:

> The relationships that I started freshman year specifically with my roommate and her friends were important because she is from here . . . it was one of my goals when I came into college . . . to not just stick with people that I already knew . . . obviously I got posse, we were all sent here from the same area . . . So I relied on them a lot, that first semester, but it was a goal of mine after that to kind of expand my network as well. . . . I always would have my posse, but I needed to know people from [the city where Midwestern is located] . . . just to build friendships as well. I really did get to cultivate that with my roommate and to this day . . . we just kind of both helped promote growth within one another . . . she just introduced me to a lot more people that she already knew who attended Midwestern, so that just helped me expand that network a lot.

In this section, I shared excerpts from student participants who indicated they created communities of support in a variety of ways including in academic classes and via student organizations and social activities with other UREM students. In the next section, I will discuss how the overall theme of communities of support from this section challenges, aligns, or adds to related literature.

Connections to the Literature

In this section, I share excerpts about communities of support. Specifically, students described how they stay in college by participating in Posse-related communities of support and communities of support that scholars create for themselves. When thinking about the communities of support that are related to Posse, both the posse scholars respective posse and the posse learning community; which comes in the form of the required weekly meetings; are in

place because of the idea that the cohort will impact and support students in the college setting to graduation.

Researchers who have studied cohorts report that members of cohorts support and encourage one another, celebrate milestones, and that participation can lead to degree completion (Lei et al., 2011; Martin et al., 2017; Nimer, 2009). In a 2017 study, Maudlin et al. looked at three types of social ties among students in a cohort-based social work program. Findings indicated that students had a large number of ties with their cohort and that while these ties typically existed between students from the same racial or ethnic background, people had more ties with people of a different racial and ethnic background than they did the previous semester. These ties can lead to greater satisfaction with school thus leading to a student staying in college. Additionally, students in cohorts have also reported feeling like they were a member of a family or community (Unzueta et al., 2008). Many of the student reflections are in line with this research; however, there were a few students who did not have these experiences. Some participants reported not feeling connected to or not supported by their respective posse and this would be in line with what Maher (2005) referred to as personality conflicts and other challenges in a cohort group. Additionally, some students reported a need to figure out the dynamic of the posse when it came to supporting one another after the 2-year meeting requirement. This is also supported in the research. For those students who found support in the cohort, some shared that this was a contributing factor to why they stay. For the students who did not find support in the cohort, it was found somewhere else and some of these scholars may have found their community of support with members of other posses.

Students in this study also communicated that they engaged with the extended posse community which included posse Bigs. The relationships that student participants have formed

with members of the extended posse community and subsequently posse Bigs can be connected to peer mentorship. These supportive communities align with a Yomtov et al. (2017) study that explored a peer mentoring program for students in a first-year seminar that was related to their college career. When compared with students who did not participate in the peer mentor program, those who were mentored felt more integrated into the university environment, felt more connection to the university community, and overall felt they had greater support. Similar findings came from a Fox et al. (2010) study as well as a Zevallos and Washburn (2014) study. In the Fox et al. (2010) study, students who participated in a peer mentoring program during their first year had better academic performance than those who did not participate. Zevallos and Washburn (2014) found that an increase in student motivation for academic success and skills; and a greater familiarity with the college environment were additional benefits that students who were mentored by their peers received.

When thinking about the communities of support that posse scholars created for themselves, the findings in this study also align with the literature. Students in this study communicated that they created their own communities of support in their academic classes, in student organizations, and in social activities with other UREM students. Participants discussed how they created each of these communities so that they could navigate the campus easier and shared that they in some way felt supported which, in turn, for some led to graduation and for others led to them staying in college year after year.

In a 2012 study, Baker and Robnett determined that having social support from a variety of networks, being integrated into the environment, and having on-campus support led to Black students staying on campus. Findings from Quaye et al. (2019) also affirmed this need for support by Black students on campus. Andrada (2007) found similar information during a study

about Latina/o students. These students reported that they felt supported, encouraged, and motivated by these individuals in different ways and some of them outright said that they would have left college if it had not been for certain individuals who supported them in their time of need. In the next section I will explore how the identified themes align with or challenge the theory approach logic model I developed (and discussed in Chapter 3) to describe the posse program.

Posse Theory Approach Logic Model

In the following sections, I will discuss the three themes I derived from an analysis of the information students shared regarding their ability to stay in college and I will explore whether they align with or challenge Posse's theory approach logic model. To recap, there are three parts to logic models: beginnings, which is where program assumptions and goals are introduced; planned work, which are the inputs and activities needed to move a program forward; and the intended results which include the outputs, outcomes, and impact of the program. Posse inputs include high school counselors, staff members, campus partners, mentors, other posse scholars and money. Activities are what the Posse Program implements to achieve their mission and goals and include recruitment, precollegiate training (summer bridge program), the on-campus program, learning communities, faculty interactions, the mentoring that Posse has in place for scholars, and the career program. The intended results of the Posse Program consists of the outputs, which are a sense of belonging, social adjustment, and student engagement/creating a social community; outcomes, which are staying in college, graduation, and obtaining a job; and impact, which is continuously evolving work and alumni work.

Student Background Characteristics and the Posse Logic Model

Broadly, students discussed student background and characteristics they bring to college and these are related to a component of the Posse logic model, which is the DAP. Posse scholars do not choose to be members of posses. Instead, they go through a rigorous recruitment and interview process where their skills, leadership abilities, involvement, and other noncognitive skills, along with their academic record, are assessed. This is a three-part interview process that culminates with a final group interview. While Posse and staff members from the institution ultimately get to decide who they will admit to the posse and the university, student admission to the posse is based on the background characteristics that students already have.

As previously mentioned, these students are already coming into college excited and motivated about college, they want to learn, they are heavily involved, and they have an awareness of their racial and ethnic identities. Thus, the Posse Program is already selecting from a pool of students who are already talented in various ways When students were sharing their background characteristics, they were inevitably sharing with me much of the information that they shared with Posse Program staff members as they were being interviewed, not realizing that these were probably some of the attributes related to why they became members of posses. DAP is an important part of the Posse logic model because, without this component, the Posse staff would not be able to select the skilled students that they do for the program. When students enter a space with great skills, they may be more likely to stay in college because of it.

Affirmation and the Posse Logic Model

When thinking about the second theme of affirmation, students discussed the on-campus program, mentoring, faculty interactions, and sense of belonging, which are related to four components of the Posse logic model. When looking at the on-campus programmatic element as

it relates to affirmation, students spoke of affirming on-campus Posse liaisons. The participants had very positive things to say about how they engage with the liaisons and many of them described these staff members as people who supported and encouraged them and considered them to be a helpful part of their experience as members of posses. Another part of the on-campus program is the respective posse member's mentor. Each student participant discussed their mentor and most had kind words to say about their respective mentor. Some really felt connected to the person and, for others, despite no longer having to go to required meetings, they still engaged with their mentor. Additionally, when I asked about trusted advisors, the mentor was regularly mentioned, making this component another important piece of how students felt supported while on campus and contributes to how students stay in college.

Faculty interactions are another aspect of the Posse logic model related to affirmation. Many students had positive interactions with faculty members and a few even had mentors who were also faculty and taught classes. Members of posses are encouraged by their mentors and Posse on campus liaisons to engage with faculty members on campus either during their office hours to seek help, or to receive information on their progress in class (Posse Mentor Manual, 2016). Students talked about this component in two ways. The first was in their interactions with UREM faculty members who affirmed their identity and the second was the general affirmation they received from faculty allies who were also affirming. Many of these students were able to connect with a faculty member of color and this was beneficial to them as they discussed how they stay in college. Also, when students discussed their connections to faculty allies, they processed it in a way that showed they desired this support from these allies because they provided a sense of belonging.

Students also discussed how they were able to stay in college and described this in

relation to the sense of belonging they felt that came in the form of being in identity-affirming spaces on campus, connecting with identity-affirming organizations, and engaging with affirming people, some of who shared their identity and some who did not. From what the students shared about on campus programs, faculty interactions, mentoring, and sense of belonging as it related to affirmation, these components are also important to students as they described how they stay in college and should continue to be a part of the components that the program implements.

Communities of Support and the Posse Logic Model

Students also discussed the third theme, communities of support and provided information about cohorts, learning communities, social adjustment, and student engagement/creating a social community. These are also related to four components of the Posse logic model. The main assumption of the Posse Program is that, to stay in college, students need to be sent to school with a cohort of people, or a posse, to support them as they navigate campus. Most students discussed their cohorts, or posses, and shared that they felt a connection with members of their posses and that they were supported. Not every student felt a connection with their posse. Those students who did not connect with their respective posse did communicate that they were able to connect with members of other posses, and shared that despite the lukewarm relationships with their posse, they knew that their posse would always be there for them if they needed them. From the excerpts in the previous sections, it seems as if students find value in being placed in cohorts for support during college because this support helps them stay in college.

As students discussed their posse cohort, their weekly posse meetings, and the various other communities of support they created in academic classes and during social and

organization activities, they were discussing them as learning communities. These learning communities also helped students as they explored how they stay in college and are another important piece of the Posse logic model. Students also feel a sense of belonging and adjust socially simply by being in identity-affirming spaces, engaging with those who affirm their identity, and by the allyship that is shown by faculty and staff. When looking at how students were engaged and creating a social community, all but two of the scholars who were interviewed shared that they were involved in some way during college and one of those two had plans to be involved, specifically in the POC community in the future. Both sense of belonging and student engagement/creating a social community are components of the Posse logic model. Prior to college, all of these students were engaged in extracurricular activities and creating social communities through those activities. This, along with the additional components are also important and effective programmatic elements of Posse.

Additional Components of the Posse Logic Model

There are additional components of the Posse logic model however no one mentioned them as reasons they stayed in college. That being said, as programmatic elements of the Posse logic model, they are important to mention. These additional components are finances, prestige, staff resources, precollegiate training, and the career program. When mentioning the full tuition they received for being posse scholars, needing loans, or having to work to pay for school, participants had varying thoughts on how they financed their college education. Ultimately, these students appreciated and knew they benefited from the full tuition they received; however, the extra costs that were not covered by the Posse scholarship such as room and board were considered a burden and was covered in a variety of ways such as loans, a campus job, or money that was previously saved.

With regard to prestige, the Posse Foundation is well known in certain circles and they are influential. Between their corporate partnerships, Dr. Bial being awarded the McArthur Genius Grant, and receiving part of President Obama's Nobel Peace Prize award money, being a member of the Posse Program comes along with privileges. Some of the student participants shared instances of when this was demonstrated to them on campus; however, students did not credit program prestige as a contributor to staying in school.

When thinking about how the staff resources programmatic element is related to the model, the resources that students receive from the Posse Foundation National office in New York, NY; the local office in their respective city; and the Posse campus liaisons; were all addressed by student participants in some way. Prior discussion explored relationships with mentors and Posse on campus staff and the biggest impact that students reported on was the on-campus Posse liaisons to which they had access. The staff resources from the national office and the Posse cities were not a reason they stayed in college.

A few scholars also mentioned the precollegiate training throughout the interview and some stated that they thought the purpose was valid. A few of the scholars felt it helped them transition to college and/or to get to know their posse and others thought that it was an effective way to learn how to support other posse members. Nevertheless, others felt there was no purpose to the precollegiate training. Again, while participation in precollege programs has been shown to help students stay in college, for these students this was not a reason they credited for staying in college.

The career program was not mentioned in interviews with the first few participants, so I started to incorporate it as a part of my other questions and even at that point the participants barely had anything to say about it. I do not know what that means. One possibility is that

students are receiving jobs and internships other ways. A few of the scholars mentioned they received opportunities via connections from others in Posse and that they rarely used the Posse Portal. The career program may be more valuable to Posse alumni.

The outcomes that students gain as a result of program participation are ongoing. Most of the student participants I interviewed were still in college and planned to return the following semester. However, there were three seniors who, at the time of their interviews, had stayed in college and planned to participate in graduation exercises at the end of their last semester, so these three students were examples of the graduation outcome. The impact that the Posse Program has had and will have on these students is yet to be seen. From my research via the Facebook group for posse students at Midwestern, there were a lot of alumni highlights and these people in a matter of a few years had already made an impact. When asked what the future holds for them as it relates to the Posse Program, some of the scholars shared that they would continue their relationships with other posse scholars, their mentor, and the Posse liaisons however some went further and explored their future alumni work.

Other than speaking with the three graduating seniors about their next steps such as taking a job or graduating and hearing explanations about what careers could be derived from particular majors, the scholars did not say much about the impact that posse has had or will have on their ability to obtain a job. Some did mention that they would use the resources offered to posse alumni should they need it. Ultimately, this could be because participants did not worry about gaining a job because between their connections and education, they figured they would be successful.

Some of the elements that Posse and, thus, the Posse logic model says are needed for students to stay in college are a cohort of posse members, a posse mentor, faculty interactions,

and a social/learning community. While some students are finding these things in the posse components (such as their own posse, the campus staff liaisons, and posse mentors) many of them have found these things in faculty/staff on campus as well as in friend groups, in extracurricular activities, and in multicultural learning communities that are unaffiliated with the Posse Program. Thus, I would argue that yes, Posse has determined these are the needed things and they have found a way to ensure that they are there for students. However, they also give students the tools to create these communities for themselves, with the hope that they either have their posse, Posse staff, and posse mentors to fall back on, or that by the time the 2-year requirement of meeting with the posse group and posse mentor is complete, they will have whatever supports they need in place to help them during their remaining years on campus.

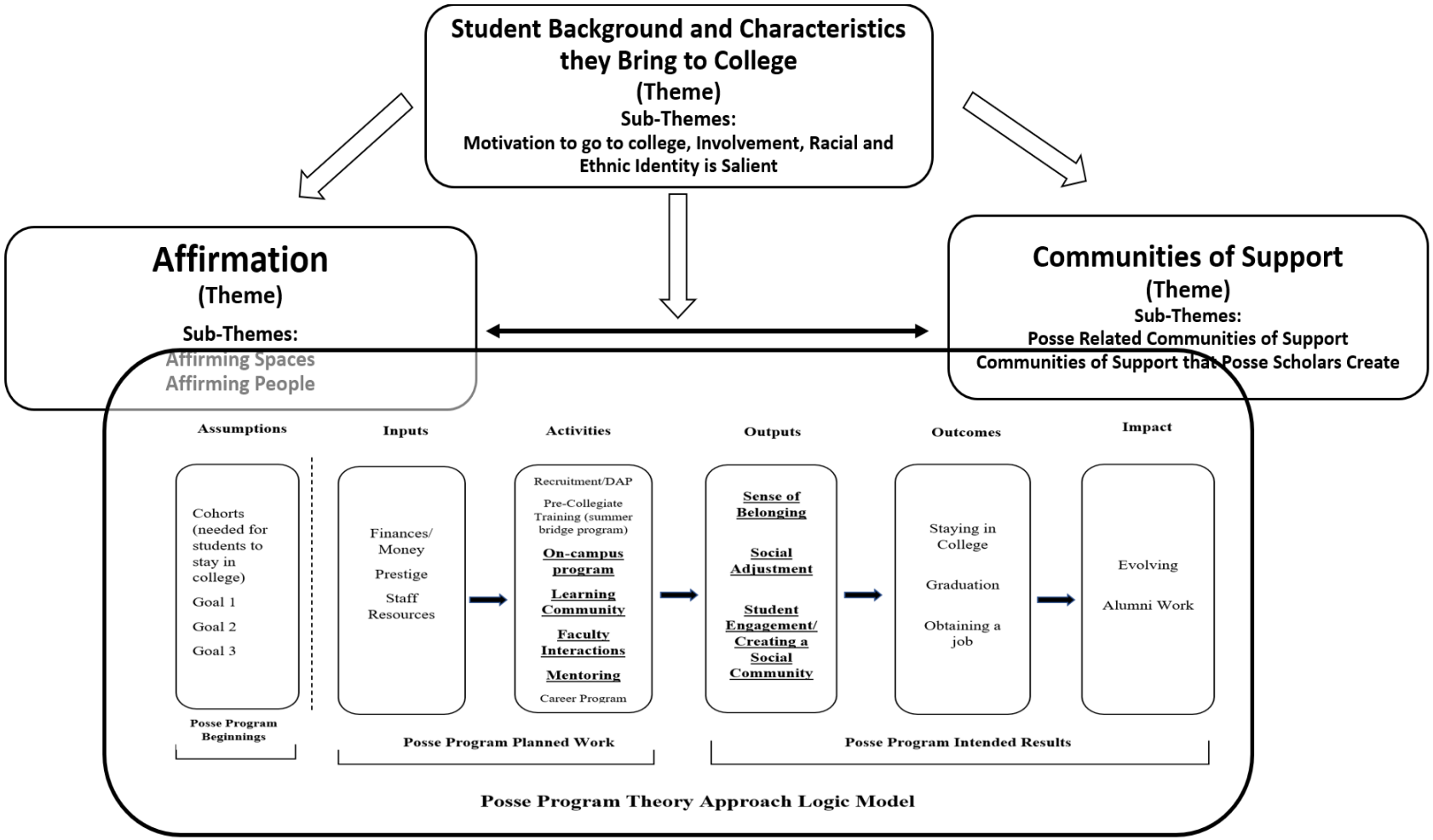
Student Background and Characteristics They Bring to College, Affirmation, Communities of Support, and the Posse Theory Approach Logic Model Revised

This dissertation aimed to determine how students stay in college. Thus, I present Figure 2 to discuss how the student participants communicated that they stayed. Figure 2 is a representation of the findings from Chapter 5. From analyzing the data, I identified three themes that reflect how students stay in college: student background and characteristics they bring to college, affirmation, and communities of support. Thus, with Figure 2, I offer added components to the Posse logic model I provided in Chapter 3 and, in doing so, expand how to think about the Posse Program and how posse scholars stay in college. At the top of the figure I added the first theme, student background and characteristics they bring to college. Student background and characteristics are placed at the top for two reasons. First, this theme encompasses who the student is and what they bring to college. Second, the college going process starts with the student so the model should begin here. From my analysis, I determined that background

characteristics play a role in how students stay in college. These students were already coming to college with a variety of motivations to learn and be successful, skills they attained from prior involvement, and salient racial identities. These characteristics were not only influential during Posse Program recruitment and the Dynamic Assessment Process selection, but they also influenced the additional themes from the findings section. This is why student background characteristics are placed at the top of the diagram and has arrows pointing toward affirmation, the Posse logic model, and communities of support.

Figure 2:

Combined Logic Model and Themes



Student background and characteristics are connected to the affirmation theme because of the salient racial and ethnic identities with which these students enter college. Specifically, much of what students talked about when they were discussing affirmation was related to identity-affirming spaces and identity-affirming people and these identities were specifically racial and ethnic identities. There is an arrow that connects student background and characteristics to the Posse logic model as well. The motivation to go to college that students discussed is connected to the DAP which is in the activities part of the Posse logic model and both the involvement and salient racial and ethnic identity aspects of the student background characteristics theme are related to the student engagement and sense of belonging parts of the outputs part of the Posse logic model. The student background and characteristics are also connected to communities of support because of both the involvement part of the theme as well as the racial and ethnic identity part of the theme. These students communicated that they were building communities of support via their involvements that carried over to high school and often these involvements were with other UREM students again indicating a connection between salient racial and ethnic identity.

Moving down in the model, starting from left to right, the next part of the diagram is affirmation, and it intersects with the Posse logic model. Affirmation was also mentioned as a theme that helped students stay in college and the intersection with the Posse logic model is important as well. Students mentioned that affirming spaces and affirming people were features that helped them to stay in college. Additionally, affirming spaces are connected to learning communities located in the activities part of the Posse logic model as well as each of the components of the outputs part of the Posse logic model (i.e., sense of belonging, social adjustment, student engagement and creating a social community). The affirming people theme

is also connected to the activities part of the Posse logic model because students discussed faculty, the on-campus program, and mentoring as a part of their descriptions of how affirmation helps them to stay in college. Moving to the next box, the Posse logic model, as students described how they stay in college, they highlighted certain features that helped them to stay and these are related to the areas of the Posse logic model that are bolded and underlined (on-campus program, learning community, faculty interactions, mentoring, sense of belonging, social adjustment, student engagement and creating a social community).

Last, there is a connection between the communities of support, which is the third theme that was derived from the analysis of the data, and the Posse logic model. The connections between the Posse-related communities and the Posse logic model are related to how students discussed cohorts, located in the assumptions part of the Posse logic model, learning communities, located in the activities part of the Posse logic model, and all three of the areas (i.e., sense of belonging, social adjustment, and student engagement and creating a social community) located in the outputs part of the Posse logic model. Last, while there was not a lot of overlap, there is an arrow between the affirmation and the communities of support themes. This connection was made to acknowledge that many students were creating their communities of support as they were engaging in affirming spaces and with affirming people.

Conclusion

There are several factors that seem to answer my research question: How do students in the Posse Program at a midwestern university stay in college? For example, many of the participants discussed faculty and staff members who were a part of their communities, thus making them stay in college, or they mentioned living and learning residence hall communities and centers that may also contribute to them staying. While facilitating interviews, I learned a lot

about these participants and their experiences in college. These students have stayed in college and, unless they are graduating, they are coming back and plan on staying to finish. All of the features they shared make up their experiences and these are experiences that have either contributed to them staying in college or have not gotten in their way of staying (e.g., microaggressions or not feeling connected to their residence hall community). One of the reasons that students have not let challenges get in their way is because Posse teaches them how to support one another and how to engage and build community.

With all of the information presented in this chapter, I would assert that the logic model which Posse uses is only partly right and that it is about building of skills; however, many of the students also said "at least I would have my posse" so staying in college could also be about building skills that will allow them to build community beyond Posse, while also having their respective posse and the extended posse community as back up. This was communicated multiple times in excerpts from students. The student participants in the study identified primarily as Black and Latinx and when many of them entered Midwest, a PWI, they had only ever attended schools that were predominantly UREM. Thus, I would also make the assertion that the supportive cohort/posse element goes beyond grades and social engagement; it is also about creating a group of people who will be supportive as scholars navigate a PWI and deal with microaggressions and racist incidents. Ultimately, people and components are in place for posse students. Some of these things may be provided by Posse, some by the university, and some by the respective student. These students talked a lot about the support and where they get it. Regardless, some get support just from Posse, some get it from a combo of Posse and other students, faculty, and staff; and others do not get it from Posse but from other people. As long as

they get support from somewhere, they are finding success which may lead to them staying in college.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I provided information about my findings and discussion of those findings. I began with a brief description of each participant in the study and provided information on the themes. Then, I discussed those themes in more detail by presenting excerpts and rationale behind those themes. The chapter ended with a section on how the findings support or take away from the theory approach logic model and I concluded with a section that explored the connection between the three themes and the Posse theory approach logic model. In the next section, I discuss implications and recommendations for higher education professionals and students, and I shed light on interventions that can be used by college administrators to help underrepresented students stay in college and methods that can be used by underrepresented students who are not a part of the Posse Program so they can also in college.

CHAPTER 6: IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND FURTHER RESEARCH

The purpose of this study was to learn how students in the Posse Program at a midwestern university stay in college. More UREM students are attending college but disparities related to grade point average and degree completion remain between UREM students and White students. As a result, many students are not receiving the competencies necessary for success in the 21st century. Approximately 90% of the students in the Posse Program graduate from college. That percentage is drastically different than the national graduation rate of 21% and 30% respectively for Black and Latinx students. This suggests there is something unique about the Posse Program, Posse Scholars, or a combination of both. With the graduation rate information as well as prior knowledge of the Posse Program and research about what the literature says keeps students in college, I hoped to find out how students described their college experiences and how they stay in college. Specifically, I wanted to learn more about student background characteristics, their first few years on campus, their activities and involvements, their day-to-day interactions with others, and their participation in the Posse Program. Not only do I want to add to existing literature, I also want to this information to be available so that higher education administrators and professionals can be informed about how students stay in college and for current and future students to also have resources.

Using qualitative methods framed by a theory approach logic model, I explored the research question: How do students in the Posse Program at a midwestern university stay in college? Through conducting interviews with members of posses and asking them questions related to the program and their college experiences, I was able to start to answer this question. When students stay in college to graduate, not only are they benefiting themselves by obtaining higher salaries, benefits, job security, and better job opportunities, but they are also giving back

to their communities through philanthropy and financially. That is why the recommendations based on this research are important. The information that I found can help administrators create programming, policies, and procedures to support UREM students. Additionally, for students who are not able to participate in posses or in similar cohort programming, this information can help them as they navigate through college and stay to graduation.

The findings of this study demonstrate that student background and characteristics, affirmation, and communities of support contribute to how students in the Posse Program stay in college. Each participant shared what had an impact on them and what encouraged them to stay in college. I was able to create themes to help explain the information they highlighted. When thinking about background characteristics, many of these students were already motivated to go to college either by family members or themselves. Additionally, each participant was heavily involved during school which translated into involvement in college and/or choosing a major, and many participants had salient racial and ethnic identities that connected to their community as well as their self-perception. Students also highlighted some areas that helped me to determine that affirmation was something else that supported them during college and made them return each year. This affirmation existed in identity-affirming spaces and in identity-affirming student organizations; in identity-affirming people such as faculty of color and faculty allies; and in affirmation they received from faculty, staff, and other university administrators who were also allies but not necessarily members of UREM populations. The last area that students emphasized was that they had communities of support that helped them stay in college. Some of these communities of support were Posse-related and others were communities of support that posse scholars created for themselves. The communities of support that were related to Posse were the result of their participation in the Posse Program and consisted of the participants' respective

posse, the posse learning community which is the weekly meeting, the extended posse community, and posse Bigs. In addition to this community of support that was Posse-related, some scholars created their own communities of support that helped them to stay in college. These communities were built in academic spaces, and via student organizations and social activities with other UREM students.

Knowing how students from UREM populations stay in college is important for higher education administrators so they can support students and implement programming to help UREM students stay. Additionally, this is important information for current UREM college students as well as UREM students who intend to go to college so they can gain the necessary knowledge and skills that will help them stay in college and graduate. The next section will highlight the implications and recommendations for Posse Program Administrators. I begin here because as the initiators of the program, they are the ones who have authority to make certain programmatic changes at their level.

Implications and Recommendations for Posse Program Administrators

The Posse Program clearly made an impact on these students and the excerpts from their interviews demonstrated this. The students' respective posse, the posse mentor, the Posse on-campus liaisons, and the posse peer community were helpful to the study participants in different ways. Posse sends students to college with the assurance that a posse member or someone from the posse community will have their back if needed. By doing this, they are fostering a long-term connection to the program and each participant shared that in the future they planned to continue to be a part of Posse in some way. From providing a connection to on-campus mentors and liaisons who affirm students, to creating communities of support for students via the students respective posse and weekly required meetings, the Posse Program does an excellent job of

capitalizing on the community piece of the program and of creating a community of scholars. Additionally, they provide the skills to students to create their own communities of support. From information I gathered during my interviews with the student participants, it can be surmised that many of the programmatic elements of the Posse Program align with what the literature indicates helps students to stay in college. Thus, when connecting the research explored in the literature review, the information about the Posse Program, and the findings from the student interviews, it can be surmised that being a Posse scholar adds value to a student's overall college experience and that this value contributes to them staying. From the communities of support that being affiliated with the Posse Program provides, to the skills and traits that students are able to develop as a part of the Posse Program, Posse demonstrates that students have added value as a result of being a part of the program. That being said, as previously discussed, students are already coming into school with traits and characteristics that were present before their affiliation with the program, so while being in college and being a member of a posse may enhance these, ultimately this is something that was already there and contributes to a student's staying ability as well.

When thinking about this from a university perspective, the efforts of the university are not replaced; however, the Posse Program can support university efforts. As the literature review chapter and the Posse logic model chapters demonstrated, many of the features that students communicated helped them to stay in college, some of which were specifically implemented by universities or are in place as a result of being in the college setting, overlapped and were mentioned in both the literature review and in the discussion about the Posse logic model. Thus, both the institution and Posse are incorporating the same elements, however Posse is packaging their programmatic elements in a way that can target students, specifically Posse scholars in one

setting. On the other hand, a student at a university who is not a posse member would have to find these features and gather resources from various places across campus and that may be a more difficult process than having it all in one setting. Ultimately, being a member of a posse made the difference for some and enhanced these student experiences; however, I also surmise that many of the participants in this study would have stayed in college if they had not been participants in the Posse Program, it just may have been a much more difficult transition due to the limited access to resources.

With the information from the previous discussion in mind, there are two recommendations that Posse Program administrators at the national level, those in the respective Posse cities, as well as campus officials can take away from this study. The first takeaway is related to the college setting into which these students entered. Many students attending PWIs are facing challenges. As one participant said, Posse prepared them to go to college but not for a specific college environment. Thus, some scholars experienced situations where their identities were not acknowledged which led them to needing affirming spaces. Additionally, students were not seeing a lot of people who looked like them when on campus, which encouraged them to seek out identity-affirming people as a result. Although most of the participants found affirmation, prior preparation for dealing with situations related to racial and ethnic identity could be helpful. One recommendation is to have more discussions about predominantly White campus environments and microaggressions with UREM students. This could be incorporated into precollegiate training as well as the training in which the mentors participated and also be incorporated into the weekly posse meetings after students come to campus. This preparation may ease the transition to college and help students to stay

The students who participated in this interview also talked about how being in spaces that were identity affirming, such as the campus cultural centers and the living-learning community; helped them stay in college. Thus, another recommendation for Posse Program administrators would be to work with each campus administrator to set up a space that is similar to a culture center or identity space but is specifically a space for the posse campus liaisons and posse mentors to work. This center could also serve as a meeting space for Posse students to gather and connect. That way, if there is no cultural center or space where students can go to feel comfortable, they would at least have a Posse office where they could retreat. This second recommendation requires the help of the universities where Posse Programs exist. Recommendations and implication for higher education administrators and universities is the topic of the next section.

Implications and Recommendations for Higher Education Administrators and Universities

A variety of important findings led to the implications and recommendations for higher education administrators and professionals, as well as university leadership. This dissertation included participants who are in the Posse Program and this program has many features already built-in to support students and their ability to stay in college. As individuals who tend to stay in college, Posse Program students provided a unique perspective about how and why they stayed in college. Unfortunately, there are posse students who also left college, so understanding what has worked for these students which has allowed them to continue on in school could potentially help others in the future. It could be argued that for UREM students to stay, they need to be a part of a program where they will have access to services that will support them. It could also be argued that programs containing these components should be in place on college campuses to help all students stay and graduate. Based on the findings from this study, I explore a few areas

that I recommend either continue to be on the list of programming and services that colleges and universities provide or be added to this list of services so that students can stay in college. In the following section I describe some recommendations focused on capitalizing on student background characteristics, affirmation, and communities of support.

Capitalizing on Student Background Characteristics

Students enter college with background characteristics and experiences that may contribute to how they stay in college. The presence of these background characteristics and experiences speaks against the deficit approach that some of the research on students' college-staying behaviors tends to cover and that at times is used by university administrators to implement policies and programming. This is another reason that student background characteristics and experiences needed to be addressed in this dissertation and why universities should engage students in conversations so that both can recognize how important these characteristics are to the success of the student as well as to the respective institution. Discussing these characteristics not only expands how these students are understood but adds to the anti-deficit approach that practitioners should take when working with students.

The study participants highlighted three areas related to background characteristics: motivations to go to college, involvement, and salient racial and ethnic identity. Although K–12 administrators and educators are not in control of a student's home situation (social services and other community organizations would need to provide programming and support in this area), what they can control is how students are socialized during their K–12 education. Specifically, they can encourage students to seek knowledge, promote out of classroom experiences, urge students to participate in extracurricular involvement, and require curriculum in the classroom to incorporate history and information from a variety of different ethnic groups to encourage pride

in one's self. If students like the participants in this study are already coming to college with these characteristics, it is important for institutions to capitalize on them. For students who do not have these experiences prior to college, it is important to introduce them so that students can be supported and potentially stay in college. The results of my study suggest that there are a few actions that can be taken to capitalize on the input characteristics that these students are bringing to campus.

Many of the study participants were motivated by their family to go to college. This demonstrates that family is important to these students and that they will most likely be included in their college decisions as well as in their college experience. For Latino populations, having the family involved from the beginning of the college process is important as members of this community tend to look to family members when making these decisions (Marrun, 2018; Matos, 2015). Additionally, the UREM students in the population noted how important their families were to their development so continuing to incorporate them after they get to college is key as well (Brooks, 2015). Based on what the students shared about their family and their involvement, I would recommend that university professionals ensure that members of students' families are included in admission and orientation events at an economical rate or for free. This way the family will feel a part of the process and students will be supported. Additionally, events like family weekend, sibling visits, and other family friendly programs should be incorporated or continue to happen at institutions. This way family members who want to support their student during their time in college will have the opportunity to do so and they will also feel included. Students should be encouraged to have their family members participate in these and other opportunities and it should be advertised in an inclusive way.

Many of the student participants communicated that they were heavily involved while in

high school which translated into involvement in college. Museus et al. (2020) asserted that students find support in organizations, specifically in those that are affinity-based which can lead to staying in college. Various universities tout the high number of clubs and organizations in which students have the opportunity to participate. Thus, a recommendation tied to this area is to encourage students to continue their involvement when they come to college and/or to encourage them to become involved in at least one extracurricular activity. These engagements could include but are not limited to being a member of a major related club or activity along with something that is considered extracurricular. One simple way to do this would be to host activity fairs for all students and another recommendation would be to have activities fairs that are catered toward identity-based clubs and organizations. Additionally, if they are not already participating in out-of-class activities, institutions need to educate students about how involvement contributes to their satisfaction with college and how it helps them build community (Baker & Robnett, 2012; Renn & Reason, 2013).

UREM Identity Affirmation

Every student who was interviewed for this study is an underrepresented racial/ethnic minority and they each discussed how their identity is salient, especially at a predominantly White institution. In fact, all of these students were extremely aware of their salient racial identities. Thus, affirming students' racial and ethnic identities is also a key component that administrators should be in tune with as they should find ways to specifically support the UREM student population. There are a few simple actions that university administrators can make to affirm UREM student identities. Students need to see examples of themselves on campus. Whether it be in advertisement, pictures or images placed in buildings around campus and in all ways that the student population of the university is represented, these depictions should be all

over campus and not just in the cultural centers or in culturally centered spaces such as learning communities.

When approaching this at a more systemic level, university communities need to also think about the spaces and people that need to be in place to ensure that students are feeling affirmed in their identity. Student participants mentioned two spaces at Midwestern University where they felt their identity was affirmed: in multicultural learning communities and in cultural centers. When students are able to participate in a learning community that is identity affirming, they find community and a safe space which may encourage them to stay in college. Additionally, in a Sears and Tu (2017) study, when these learning communities are paired with an academic component where students are able to explore their identity, students are able to reflect and learn more about themselves and how their identity shapes who they are. Cultural centers are also spaces of identity affirmation where students can learn about themselves and others (Lozano, 2010; McShay, 2017; Museus, 2008). Some universities have increased services and spaces related to culture while others have cut back on them as a result of feeling as if we are in a postracial society and that these things are no longer needed (Harris & Patton, 2017). Student participants in this study would say otherwise, so another recommendation is to continue with these services or bring them back if they have been cut. Since students are in need of identity- affirming spaces, another related recommendation would be to ensure that students are either in a learning community or a first-year seminar (at times a first-year seminar is connected to a living-learning community) so that they can continue to explore their background characteristics and ethnic identity and how these positively contribute to their success

Another systemic change that is recommended but may take some time is making sure that the faculty, staff, and student populations are ethnically diverse. Beyond clubs and

organizations and learning communities and cultural centers, students are engaging with the peers, faculty, and staff and when these populations are diverse, students are affirmed in their identity and feel wanted in a space because they see more people like them. Thus, my next recommendation for higher education professionals would be to hire and subsequently retain diverse faculty and staff members. Students who feel more connected to campus are more likely to stay (Booker, 2016; Simmons, 2017; Stout et al., 2018) and one way the student participants in this study shared they feel more connected is when they are able to engage with faculty and staff members who look like them. Also, students who are affirmed in their identities by faculty allies and who receive day-to-day affirmation also feel supported and are more likely to stay (Quaye et al., 2015). So, an additional recommendation would be to provide opportunities for White faculty and staff members to be trained as allies and supporters. There should also be opportunities for faculty and staff members to learn how to engage with and mentor UREM students.

Finally, something that university administrators need to consistently be aware of is how the environment that students are in can send messages about how they are perceived when they are in that environment. For example, these students are already coming to college with strong ties to their identity and they are dealing with microaggressions, racism, incidents of bias on top of managing school, work, and other responsibilities. This can be both a deterrent to applying to an institution as well as grounds for leaving one institution for another or for leaving school entirely (Brezinski et al., 2018). Universities need to address racist incidents that take place on campus as well as any missteps made on the part of the university in handling these situations. Further, when things happen nationally related to UREM populations, university administrators need to make statements of support, so students feel affirmed in their identities. This is also an example of affirmation and can make a campus climate feel safer. Additionally, if a student also

has a cultural center to go to or faculty and peers they can turn to who share the same or similar identities, they are more likely to feel supported and stay in college. These are just a few examples of what can be put in place at a university if they want more of these students to come to campus and if they want to keep them. It is important to spread the word about different programs and services and to be in tune with what students need in the first place.

Communities of Support for Students and Opportunities for Students to Create Their Own Communities

Members of posses are privileged in that upon arrival on campus, scholars have their own respective posse, they have a mentor, and they have an extended posse community which includes posse campus liaisons as well as members of other posses on campus. Since not everyone can be a member of a posse, there should be programs and services in place that provide students with similar experiences. Some campuses already have a requirement that is similar to this, but my recommendation would be to ensure that students in their first year are a part of a first-year seminar, an orientation group and/or first-year experience group, and/or a living-learning community. The student participants described similar spaces that helped them to stay in college and corresponding literature confirms that these environments support student retention and persistence (McShay, 2017; Sears & Tu, 2017; Spradlin, 2010). These should incorporate a time to meet at least once a week via class or general group gathering so students can have a place of support. This is especially important during the first and second year of college as this is the time students traditionally leave. All posse students have a mentor and many of those who were no longer required to meet with their mentor shared that they were still connected with their mentor. Some students are able to find a mentor on their own and some do not have the skill set to do so. Thus, another recommendation would be to have a student's

academic advisor serve in this role. This would mean that more advisors would need to be hired at institutions so that they could have a lighter case load and be able to advise and mentor concurrently. Additionally, posse scholars are paired with a Big and many of the participants discussed this as a positive relationship. Perhaps orientation leaders could serve as peer mentors and university administrators could also provide more money that would allow for more peer mentor programs and students would have to opt in.

Posse-related communities of support are available to students because of their affiliation but being a member of a posse also provides scholars with the skills to go and create communities on their own. University administrators can follow suit by providing the communities for students and to allow students the opportunity to be involved, by encouraging campus involvement, by allowing for students to be able to be involved and not just work because school is too expensive. Additionally, it is important for administrators to share the importance and impact of involvement outside of the classroom with students. Specifically, university officials can support their UREM students by addressing the reasons for lower numbers of diverse students on campus and then providing solutions that will result in an increase, by doing better with recruiting and getting UREM students to attend, by being transparent about steps being taken and programming being offered that address the racial climate on campus, and by explaining why there is an emphasis on the UREM community in the first place.

The practices, policies, and components that ensure the Posse Program's success can be adapted and used by UREM college students and administrators who are invested in seeing these students through to college graduation. As opposed to taking a deficit approach to exploring staying in college, I focused on successful students and asked what they thought was helping

them to stay. Having access to college does not guarantee that a student will stay and as my findings demonstrate, there are many different features that help students as they stay in college and graduate. If researchers and administrators implement at least some of the interventions mentioned here, they can help students and their institutions. Additionally, students can learn methods that help them stay in college to graduation.

Implications and Recommendations for Current College Students and Potential College Students

For those who are selected to be members of posses, in addition to all of the attributes that they bring with them to college, they also have the added support of the Posse Program and its components. While Posse plays a role in how these students stay in college, there are other pieces that help students stay including background characteristics, affirming people and spaces, and communities of support that are accessible. Thus, I make a few recommendations to current students and potential students based on the themes that are not related to being a member of a posse. First, each student who enrolls in college is bringing a set of motivations, skills attained from involvements, and a variety of identities. Each one of these inputs should be tapped into to find success. Getting into college is a process so actually going and achieving in extracurricular activities and in the classroom should be considered an accomplishment and an investment. Thus, admission counselors and other university administrators need to highlight this and encourage students to capitalize on what they are already bringing to college. Second, the student participants in this study found affirming spaces and affirming people, and I recommend non-Posse students do the same. When these students were in spaces that affirmed who they are and with people who were affirming, they felt supported, thrived, and stayed in college. As was demonstrated in this study, affirmation comes in all forms so whether it is identity affirmation or

being in a space or with people who are generally affirming, it is important to find that for yourself. Last, it is important for students to find a community of support during college. Many students are required to participate in first-year seminars and can find their community in that academic space, or they choose to find it in a residence hall or through participation in a club or activity. Regardless, having a community of people to support in difficult times can help students stay in college.

Further Research

While this study covered a lot of ground and gathered a plethora of information, I was left with some questions that I was unable to explore. One could argue that since Posse has a significant recruiting and selection process (the DAP) that they already find students they know will both succeed in college and stay thru graduation. That being said, there are incidents of posse scholars who have left and not graduated so there is that element, too. This could lead to future study about why the posse students left. Another area of further research is related to the gender breakdown in posses. Why did more women than men participate in the study? Are there more women in Posse nationally? Do more men leave the posse and university without graduating?

An additional area of research could be further study cohort programs similar to the Posse Program and investigate what their graduation rates are, the different components that are a part of the program, and the similarities and differences between them. Last, many students participate in the final round of Posse selection, but only half of those are actually selected to attend school as a member of a posse. Another research area could be to gather information on students who went through the Posse process but did not get selected. What happened to them? Did they still go to college? Is the Posse Portal, which is the program that connects students who

do not get chosen for posses with institutions, effective? It is important to conduct additional research on this program so that we can understand comprehensive support programs and how they can contribute to the staying in college behavior of students. Regardless, continued research on UREM students is important so that the gap between UREM students and White students regarding grade point average, staying in college, and degree attainment decreases.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I provided a recap of the research findings. After that I reviewed key findings along with the implications and recommendations based on each finding for Posse Program administrators, higher education professionals and universities, and current or potential college students. I concluded the chapter with a description of possible further research related to this study. Because the Posse Program has national attention, additional research on this project is essential because with more knowledge more schools may become partners meaning more students can potentially participate in this program and greater understanding of the things beyond the Posse Program that keep students in college can be found and applied.

Dissertation Summary

Disparities between UREM college students and White college students exist and this is a concern. Because of this disparity, I chose to explore how students stay in college. As opposed to taking a deficit approach and looking at why UREM students leave college, I chose to investigate how they stay to provide further understanding of the staying in college phenomenon. Thus, this dissertation aimed to answer the question of how students in the Posse Program at a midwestern university stay in college.

Participants' college experiences and the themes I derived from how they described those college experiences revealed that student background and the characteristics they bring to

college, affirmation, communities of support, along with some of the components from the Posse theory approach logic model all play a role in how they stay in college. I am not suggesting here that for college students to stay in school that they have to be a part of a cohort-based comprehensive support program like Posse, but what I am saying is that for these students, the Posse Program, along with the characteristics they brought to college, affirmation, and communities of support were elements that helped them to stay in college. The Posse scholars who participated in this study came to Midwestern University with skills and talents that were only enhanced during their time in college and one of the reasons I chose to interview Posse scholars was because I knew they would be able to shed light on how they stay in college with the hope that I could disseminate this information to help others stay in college as well.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A:

Student Experiences with the Posse Program

Welcome and thank you for your time and willingness to participate in this interview. The purpose of my study is to better understand the college experiences of Posse students in the Posse Program. This meeting will last approximately 90 minutes and all the information will be confidential. I will not use names in the report. If you want to mention something off the record, please let me know during the interview. Your participation in this study is completely free and voluntary. You may choose not to answer any question you do not want to answer and you can withdraw from the study at any time. Our time together will be audio recorded. Is that alright? Please respond with a Yes or No.

If they say yes: I will now start the recording. First, I will ask again if you give me permission to record our conversation. After your response, I will begin the interview.

<u>Part A: Broad/General Questions</u>

To begin our interview, I am going to start by asking you some general questions about you.

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself. (Possible prompts: Where are you from? What high school did you go to?)

2. What brought you to college?

3. What is your major? How did you choose it?

Next, I am going to ask you some questions about your first few years on campus.

4. Think back to your first term on campus. What were some highlights? (Possible prompt: Describe your successes within the first few years on campus and tell me what made them successes.) What or who provided you with the support to be successful?

5. Describe some challenges you encountered within the first few years on campus. What made them challenges? What or who provided you with support?

6. Tell me about how your classes have been going (Possible Prompts: e.g., the college classes in which you are/were enrolled, are you doing well, have you faced any challenges, do you enjoy the work).

Moving forward, let us talk a little bit about your activities and involvements beyond the classroom.

7. Tell me about your experiences outside of the classroom (Possible Prompts: e.g., how are you engaging with the campus community, what types of social experiences do you partake in? Clubs? Lectures?).

8. What activities are you involved in on campus? (Are you involved in any activities outside of campus or in your home community?).

9. Have you enjoyed your time in college thus far? Why?

10. As a Posse Scholar, you receive tuition and fees from the institution. I understand that some institutions also pay for room and board but that may not be your case. Tell me about how you are paying for the additional college costs beyond the tuition and fees (i.e., how do you finance your living expenses, outside of what being in Posse covers such as room and board?).

Now I am going to ask you some questions about day-to-day interactions with other people.

11. Tell me about your experiences with people who are trusted advisors and/or have guided you or helped you along the way? (such as a mentor; Mentors can be anyone such as campus faculty, staff, or other students on campus, a leader in your faith community, a supervisor for your job)

12. Tell me about your experiences with faculty on campus. (These could be faculty members who teach your classes or advisors to your student organizations.)

13. Tell me about your experiences with peers on campus. (Peers can be classmates, people who live in your residence hall, or friends). Are there any peers who have left college without graduating since you started?

14. Tell me about your most important interactions with others. (Possible Prompts: Were some of these already mentioned or do you have a different example?).

<u>Part B: Posse Specific Questions</u>

For this next phase of the interview, we are going to talk more specifically about the Posse Program.

15. Tell me about your participation in the Posse Program. (Possible Prompts: Describe some of the experiences you had during the weekly posse meetings. With your mentor. With the on-campus liaisons.)

16. Tell me about your relationship with the other members of your posse.

17. Tell me about your relationship with student members of the Posse Program who are not in your respective posse.

18. Tell me about any ways you have seen the Posse Program have an impact on you .

19. What do you think your future holds as it relates to Posse and the impact of the program?

20. Now that we have discussed your college experiences and your experiences as a member of a posse, is there anything you would like to share about how you experience college as a member of the posse program?

21. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience with the Posse Program?

APPENDIX B:

Research Participant Recruitment Email

Dear (Insert Name of Participant),

My name is Aliya Beavers and I am a doctoral student at Michigan State University. This email is being sent to you because I am looking for participants for my dissertation research study. The purpose of my study is to better understand the college experiences of Posse students in the Posse Program and as a member of a Posse, you can provide a unique perspective. Posse Program members who would like more information will complete a brief demographic survey and if you meet the criteria for the study, you will participate in a confidential, 90-minute individual interview over the phone or via video conferencing. There are no costs associated with your participation in this study. After completion of the survey and first interview you will receive a $40 Amazon Gift card via email.

If you are interested, please follow this link which will take you to a student participant survey:

https://msu.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_exENWk9eTfVWKTX

If you have any questions about this study, please contact me, Aliya Beavers, by phone: (937) 974-0463 or email at beaver12@msu.edu, or contact my faculty advisor, Dr. Patricia Marin, by phone: 517-432-9616 or email: pmarin@msu.edu.

If you have questions or concerns about your role and rights as a research participant, would like to obtain information or offer input, or would like to register a complaint about this study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program at 517-355-2180, Fax 517-432-4503, or e-mail irb@msu.edu or regular mail at 4000 Collins Rd, Suite 136, Lansing, MI 48910.

Thank you for your time and consideration of my request.

Sincerely,

Aliya Beavers

APPENDIX C:

Study Participant Survey

First name and last initial (***this will be changed to a pseudonym for the study***):

Date:

Email address by which you can be reached ***(this will not be shared with anyone but the researcher***):

Gender:

Ethnicity:

Current Class year (sophomore, junior, senior):

Posse City and Number ***(i.e., Posse Chicago 8)***:

College Major (and minors):

Home State:

Are you the first in your family to attend college? Please explain your answer.

General Questions:

1. What are some days and times you will be available to be interviewed over the phone, in person, or via video conferencing? (There is a possibility we can meet in person; however if we do not, we will conduct the interview over Skype or Zoom)

2. Have you participated in a research study before?

3. Are there any questions you have about participating in this study that I can answer?

APPENDIX D:

Research Participant Information and Consent Form

Title: Student Experiences with the Posse Program
Researcher: Aliya Beavers. Higher Adult and Lifelong Education Doctoral Program
Researcher contact info: beaver12@msu.edu
Faculty Advisor: Patricia Marin, PhD, pmarin@msu.edu

I am conducting a research study on the experiences of students in the Posse Program. You have been identified as a member of the Posse Program who is an undergraduate learner. I would like you to complete a short demographic survey and participate in one interview (and a possible follow-up if I need clarification on information from the first interview). Your responses, along with those from other students, will help me understand how students stay in college and will hopefully improve experiences for future students.

What you will do if you choose to participate

If you are interested in participating, you will first complete a brief demographic survey. If you meet the criteria for study participation, you will participate in an individual interview over the phone, via video conferencing, or in person. You can choose not to answer any of the questions on the survey and during each interview. I am interested in your honest answers to questions about your experiences as an undergraduate student and a member of Posse. The survey should take no longer than 10 minutes and each interview will last no longer than 90 min. You will have the opportunity to review your interview transcripts to check for accuracy. Looking over your interviews will not be required but the researcher provides this as a courtesy to the participant.

Potential benefits and potential risks

You will not directly benefit from your participation in this study. However, your participation may help us improve the undergraduate experiences for college students as well as enhance the skills and knowledge of college administrators. There are no foreseeable risks associated with participation in this study.

Privacy and confidentiality

Your privacy and confidentiality are important to me. Any identifiable information (i.e., your name) will be not be used in reporting the findings of my research. Your confidentiality will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law.

Your rights to participate, say no, or withdraw

Participation in this research project is completely voluntary. You have the right to say no. You may change your mind at any time and withdraw, with no penalty. You may choose not to answer specific questions or to stop participating at any time.

Costs and compensation for being in the study

There are no costs for your participation in the study. After completion of the survey and first interview you will receive a $40 Amazon Gift card via email.

Contact Information

If you have any questions about this study, please contact Aliya Beavers, by phone: (937) 974-0463 or email at beaver12@msu.edu, or contact my faculty advisor, Dr. Patricia Marin, by phone: 517-432-9616 or email: pmarin@msu.edu.

If you have questions or concerns about your role and rights as a research participant, would like to obtain information or offer input, or would like to register a complaint about this study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program at 517-355-2180, Fax 517-432-4503, or e-mail irb@msu.edu or regular mail at 4000 Collins Rd, Suite 136, Lansing, MI 48910.

By signing below, you automatically give your consent to voluntarily participate in this study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

I agree to conduct and report this research according to the above terms.

Investigator's signature: _____ Date: _____

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