

TEMPLATE

The pages in this template are correctly formatted and organized.
Refer to the Dissertation Chapter Guide for Qualitative Studies and the Dissertation Format Guidelines.
Replace text as instructed. **Delete** all instructions and template notes. **Delete** all text in yellow.

DISSERTATION TITLE

by

STUDENT NAME

Dr. Clifton Shaw, Instructor

Dr. Jackie Sumpter, Instructor

Steven D. Huntley, Pastor

Dr. Acquanetta M. Pinkard, Dean

Excel Bible College

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Theology

Excel Bible College

Branch Campus of Midwest College of Theology

Month Year [of final school approval]

© STUDENT NAME, Year

Abstract

The purpose of the abstract is to provide a concise and accurate synopsis of key elements of your dissertation. The suggested length is 400 words or less. **Format** the abstract as one double-spaced paragraph without an indented first line and without a justified right margin. Do not include the headings shown below, and also do not use bullets or bold. Include the following information:

- **Research topic summary (1-5 sentences).** Provide a concise summary of your dissertation research topic. Explain the rationale for your study and the gap in the literature or field your dissertation addresses. Indicate your research questions, matching the wording used in your dissertation chapters.
- **Research methodology (1-2 sentences).** Summarize the research methodology used in the study.
- **Population and sample (1-2 sentences).** Describe the population and sample, including high-level demographic information regarding your participant pool. If secondary data was used, describe the data set.
- **Data analysis (1-2 sentences).** Provide a concise summary of your data analysis.
- **Findings (1-3 sentences).** Provide a concise summary of your research findings and conclusion(s). If relevant, you may also briefly note recommended future research associated with your own findings.

Tips for developing a quality abstract

1. Keep in mind that the abstract is representative of your work. Researchers will review your abstract to determine whether your dissertation is worthy of reading and relevant to

their literature review. Employers may review your abstract to learn more about the nature and quality of your doctoral work. The abstract should therefore represent your most polished and well-written work.

2. Guidelines for development of an abstract are in section 2.04 of the *APA Publication Manual*, 6th edition.
3. References are generally not used in the abstract, as the focus is the study, the research, and the findings.

ONCE YOU'VE WRITTEN THIS PAGE, DELETE ALL INSTRUCTIONS.

Dedication

This page is optional. The dedication is the writer's personal acknowledgment indicating his or her appreciation and respect for significant individuals in the writer's life. The dedication is personal; thus, any individuals named are frequently unrelated to the topic of the dissertation.

Typically, the learner dedicates the work to the one or two individuals who instilled in the learner the value of education and the drive to succeed in educational pursuits. Learners often dedicate dissertations to relatives, immediate family, or significant individuals who have supported them or played a role in their lives.

Note: if the Abstract is two pages long, change the page number of the Dedication to iv.

ONCE YOU'VE WRITTEN THIS PAGE, DELETE ALL INSTRUCTIONS.

Acknowledgments

The acknowledgments differ from the dedication in one significant way: The acknowledgments recognize individuals who have supported the writer's scholarly efforts as they relate to the dissertation or who have held a role in the writer's academic career as it relates to the research of the dissertation. This might mean your mentor and committee members, dissertation advisor, online or colloquia faculty, and other support people from Capella or other organizations. If you received financial support from fellowships, grants, or other organizational support, it should be noted in this section.

ONCE YOU'VE WRITTEN THIS PAGE, DELETE ALL INSTRUCTIONS.

Table of Contents

These contents are automated. To update contents and page numbers, locate "Update" in the Table of Contents menu. Only the main headings (level 1) from the chapters are required; delete the rest if you wish. If you wish to disable the automated contents, delete the text or locate "Remove Table of Contents."

Acknowledgments	4
List of Tables	8
List of Figures	9
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION	1
Statement of the Problem	1
Purpose of the Study	10
Research Design	12
Research Question	14
Assumptions and Limitations	14
Assumptions	14
Limitations	17
Definition of Terms	18
Organization of the Remainder of the Study	20
Research Question	64
Research Design	64
Target Population and Sample	64
Population	64
Sample	64
Procedures	66

Participant Selection	66
Protection of Participants	66
Data Collection	66
Data Analysis	67
Instruments	69
The Role of the Researcher	69
Guiding Interview Questions	71
Ethical Considerations	73
Summary	77
Introduction: The Study and the Researcher	78
Description of the Sample	78
Research Methodology Applied to the Data Analysis	78
Presentation of Data and Results of the Analysis	78
Summary	78
Summary of the Results	79
Discussion of the Results	79
Conclusions Based on the Results	79
Comparison of Findings with Theoretical Framework and Previous Literature	79
Interpretation of the Findings	79
Limitations	79
Implications for Practice	79
Recommendations for Further Research	79

List of Tables

Table 1. Add table title [single-spaced if longer than one line], and add the page number xx

Table 2. Title xx

Leave one full space between entries.

List of Figures

Figure 1. Add figure title [single-spaced if longer than one line], and add the page number xx

Figure 2. Title xx

Leave one full space between entries. Do not remove the section break that follows this paragraph.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Historical Background of the Problem

Inequality in higher education has been an overwhelming concern in the U.S Higher education system for decades, and despite some attention, has been substantially stable over time (Weiss & Roksa, 2016). Equality in higher education is an ideal that would be manifested when diverse groups are proportionally represented in access, retention, and degree completion statistics. However, this ideal is far from being realized (Malcom-Piqueux, Robinson, & Bensimon, 2017).

Statement of the Problem

A number of factors are associated with or predictive of the inequities experienced by students. The socioeconomic characteristics of students' families directly affect their educational experiences and academic achievements (McFarland, 2017). In fact, according to Stephens, Markus, and Fryberg (2012), socioeconomic status or social class background is one of the most influential predictors of educational attainment and academic performance. In effect, social class membership creates a divide in the educational attainment of our youth (Lopez & Nastasi, 2012). Decades of sociological study have shown that social class contributes many factors that hinder educational access or determine the experiences individuals face when accessing education, contributing to an *intergenerational transmission of inequality* (e.g., Coleman, 1966; Alon, 2009). More generally, social class is closely related to educational community conditions that support—or fail to support—individual and family well-being in general (Lareau, 2011).

Purpose of the Study

The literature reviewed briefly here and detailed further in Chapter 2 highlight how first generation low socioeconomic background students experience challenges in entering higher education, and once there, lack resources to persist. Unfortunately, many of these factors were identified a generation ago (e.g., Coleman, 1996); but have persisted for subsequent generations of students despite actions taken in higher education to reduce their impact (Engle & Tinto, 2008) and remain a problem today (DOE, 2015; Shen, 2017).

Significance of the Study

According to Caelli, Ray, and Mill (2003), research should add to a body of knowledge and assist in developing meaningful change for a population. This study aligns with this goal by adding descriptions of how these low-income first-generation students participate in higher education to existing literature. These themed descriptions equip counselors and educators with a better understanding of the obstacles to the educational attainment of low-income first-generation students and the behaviors and attitudes they use to overcome them.

Through the exploration of low-income first-generation college students and experiences and views of their preparedness to enroll, attend, and complete college successfully, this study will shed light on the barriers and obstacles that hinder post-secondary degree attainment for this population and potential resources needed to increase the rate at which these students obtain post-secondary degrees. These findings can subsequently be used, in conjunction with the statistical reports of student characteristics and success rates regularly

published by various entities (e.g., DOE; OECD), to create a holistic picture of these students and their current challenges.

This study aids researchers in closing the knowledge gap between the educational and social and behavioral science professions by highlighting the student's vantage point. Findings provide an understanding of the barriers to education faced by low-income students, coupled with an understanding of the economic challenges faced by their families. This knowledge provides a foundation for making recommendations for education-based community resources that can move these students and their families forward.

Thesis Question

The research question to be explored is “What are the views of contemporary low-income rural first-generation college students regarding college access and degree attainment?”

Assumptions and Limitations

Assumptions

This study was constructed upon several sets of assumptions, which will be reviewed below. First, because a generic qualitative approach was used to answer the research question, an assumption was made that the experiences described by participants could be recorded and analyzed to provide new knowledge currently missing from existing literature. The testimonies of the participants were assumed to be valid representations of their experiences.

Study-Specific Assumptions

Using a generic qualitative research method, coupled with a semi-structured interview process allowed the researcher the flexibility to explore the research participants' original stories regarding their educational pursuit without restrictions imposed by any other qualitative methodologies (Caelli, Ray, & Mill, 2003). The researcher used a set of guiding questions that probed for information or knowledge about the phenomena, which created opportunities for gaining clarity or a more broad perspective.

Limitations

Every choice of method for a scientific study has particular limitations in addition to its strengths. In a qualitative study utilizing a generic qualitative research design, the interview

Definition of Terms

The list below contains terms relevant to the study.

College readiness benchmarks are the set of minimum ACT assessment scores which determine the likelihood of a student being successful in college (ACT, 2013).

College readiness defined as the level of preparation a student needs to be academically ready to compete at the post-secondary level based on the established benchmarks as developed by ACT (ACT, 2013).

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review will provide an appraisal of the current scholarly research relevant to low-income first-generation college students and the barriers they face in attaining education. The literature provides strong evidence that low-income first-generation students' experiences obtaining education continues to be different from that of other students who are considered continuing generation (Atherton, M.C., 2014, Bettinger, E.P. & Long, B.T. 2009, Byun, S.Y., Meece, J.L. & Ivrrin, M.J., 2012, Carlton, M.T., 2015). The review is structured to provide a discussion of five overarching points to inform the readers of what is know about the research topic. These include 1) the methods of searching, 2) the theoretical orientation of the study, 3) the review of the literature, 4) a synthesis of the literature, and 5) a comprehensive critique of the research methods used in the study. Also, the literature review evaluates the gaps in the current literature highlights the need to close the gaps in the knowledge base relevant to professionals in education and counseling who support these students, and serves as a resource for developing adequate programs to assist low-income first-generation students in their quest for higher education.

Methods of Searching

The primary source for conducting relevant research for sources regarding the dissertation topic is the Scholarly Databases used to search scholarly peer reviewed journal articles included Theological Database, ProQuest, PsycArticles, PsycInfo, Google Scholar, Psychology Database, and Sage Journals. Literature reviewed is based upon current articles, primarily those published after 2010, to develop a foundation that guides the study. Additionally, due to its seminal nature, the work of Bronfenbrenner (1977-1979) and Engle

and Tinto (2008) is used as theoretical sources. The use of keywords such as *low-income*, *first-generation*, *students*, *higher education*, *poverty*, *education inequality*, *generic qualitative*, *educational disparities*, and *academic preparedness* helped to produce scholarly articles to garner information regarding low-income first-generation students and college access.

Review of the Literature

The dissertation topic is “An *exploration of the views of low-income first-generation college students regarding college access and degree attainment.*” The research question to be explored is “What are the views of low-income first-generation college students regarding college access and degree attainment?” As mentioned in chapter one, first-generation low-income students are those students who do not have a parent who attained a bachelor’s degree from an institution of higher learning and who are living in homes of low-socioeconomic status. According to the U.S Department of education, *low-income* is the designation applied when a family’s taxable income does not exceed 150% of the poverty level (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

Closing the Gaps

The literature review confirms there is an expectation that students from low-income first-generation backgrounds will have a delay in educational preparedness and cannot complete secondary school and access and persist through post-secondary education due to economic impact and cultural and social barriers they experience. There appears to be research that dates as far back as the 1960’s that is relevant to understanding the culture of

low-income first-generation students. The research also provides an assortment of avenues to understanding the cultural and behaviors factors of the low-income first-generation students and the issues they face accessing and obtaining higher education degrees. However, nearly all of the research provided focus on the professional perspective (i.e., teachers, school administrators, counselors, and educational policymakers) of how to assist students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds.

Ethical Concerns

Regarding ethical issues found in the literature, Trevino Scheele, and Flores (2014) conducted reach to explore the role of college access interventions in the enrollment and persistence outcome of low-income students. The main ethical issues encountered by the author were just the mere fact that the research was conducted using students from vulnerable backgrounds. Therefore, to prevent the rise of additional ethical issues, the authors have taken precaution and tailored the research design to address the possible ethical issues, in addition to following the standards outlined in research. Also, Martin (2015) highlighted the positionality of the researcher as the human research instrument as an ethical issue. The researchers' socioeconomic and cultural background is similar to that of the study's participants, which warrants incorporating methods in the research process which help to distinguish any personal bias such as recording their reflection after each interview session.

Implications of the Study

As indicated, the literature review provides an overall confirmation that low-income first-generation students struggle at accessing, enrolling and attaining higher education degrees. The literature also indicated that the disparities among low-income first-generation

students are consistent across racial and cultural lines. Further, while some resources for academic preparation exist outside of the classroom, community-based resources are limited. However, to provide data to serve as a foundation for developing adequate community resources calls for a holistic review of this underrepresented population.

Synthesis of the literature Findings

According to the literature reviewed, all have developed similar definitions for defining first-generation and low-income students. These definitions based on the guidelines for determining low-come status as offered by the U.S Department of Education (2015). Also, all of the literature reviewed indicates there are educational disparities for low-come first-generation students as well as the potential lack of ability to access, enroll and complete

Summary

Educational disparities within our nations educational system has been a concern for decades. These disparities have prompted many studies regarding the sociological, physiological and cultural implications of these challenges. It has long been observed that low-income first-generation students experience varying challenges to accessing, enrolling and obtaining higher education degrees that their continuing education counterparts do not experience (Tinto & Engle, 2008). In addition, students from low-income backgrounds typically have deficits in academic preparedness that allows them to compete at the post-secondary level (Carter, 2013; Morrison 2015). Additionally, numerous studies have found that the ecological influences on these students can be seen as responsible for these challenges. For example, low-income first-generation students are often residents of inner

cities and rural communities with disparities in education, limited community resources and access to financial resources (Means, et al., 2016). Families are faced with generations of

CHAPTER 3. Discussion

Purpose of the Study

Research Question

CHAPTER 4. PRESENTATION OF THE DATA

Presentation of Data and Results of the Analysis

(What does the data and the scripture say concerning the topic?)

Summary

CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of the Paper

Discussion of the Results

Conclusions Based on the Results

What do you want the reader to know and do as a result of reading your paper?

How should the body of Christ approach being involved with your topic?

Limitations

Implications for Practice

Recommendations for Further Research

Conclusion

References

- ACT. (2013). Readiness matters: The impact of college readiness on college persistence and degree completion. Retrieved on October 23, 2013 from <http://www.act.org/research-policy/>
- Aguirre, G. C., & Hyman, M. R. (2015). Ethics in qualitative consumer research. *Qualitative Research Methods in Consumer Psychology: Ethnography and Culture*, 2, 16. Retrieved from http://www.academia.edu/download/43551677/Ethics_in_Qualitative_Consumer_Research_-_Aguirre_Hyman.pdf

STATEMENT OF ORIGINAL WORK

Academic Honesty Policy

Excel Bible Academic Honesty Policy holds learners accountable for the integrity of work they submit, which includes but is not limited to discussion postings, assignments, comprehensive exams, and the dissertation or capstone project.

Established in the Policy are the expectations for original work, rationale for the policy, definition of terms that pertain to academic honesty and original work, and disciplinary consequences of academic dishonesty. Also stated in the Policy is the expectation that learners will follow APA rules for citing another person's ideas or works.

The following standards for original work and definition of *plagiarism* are discussed in the Policy:

Learners are expected to be the sole authors of their work and to acknowledge the authorship of others' work through proper citation and reference. Use of another person's ideas, including another learner's, without proper reference or citation constitutes plagiarism and academic dishonesty and is prohibited conduct. (p. 1)

Plagiarism is one example of academic dishonesty. Plagiarism is presenting someone else's ideas or work as your own. Plagiarism also includes copying verbatim or rephrasing ideas without properly acknowledging the source by author, date, and publication medium. (p. 2)

Excel Bible College Research Misconduct Policy holds learners accountable for research integrity. What constitutes research misconduct is discussed in the Policy:

Research misconduct includes but is not limited to falsification, fabrication, plagiarism, misappropriation, or other practices that seriously deviate from those that are commonly accepted within the academic community for proposing, conducting, or reviewing research, or in reporting research results. (p. 1)

Learners failing to abide by these policies are subject to consequences, including but not limited to dismissal or revocation of the degree.

Statement of Original Work and Signature

I attest that this dissertation, capstone, or thesis project is my own work. Where I have used the ideas or words of others, I have paraphrased, summarized, or used direct quotes following the guidelines set forth in the *APA Publication Manual*.

Learner name: _____

Date: _____

—

APPENDIX A. TITLE

APPENDIX B. TITLE