By Rhoda Miller and Stephanie Tatum, Dowling College

The Association of Family History Knowledge and Cultural Change with Persistence among Undergraduate Low-Income, First-Generation College Students

Abstract

Using a mixed methodology, this study investigated the association between family history knowledge, the persistence factors of resiliency, institutional engagement, and institutional commitment as well as cultural change in low-income, first-generation college students at a regional four year private college in New York. Fifty-two students participating in a TRIO Student Support Services program at a regional four-year private college returned The Family History Knowledge and Persistence Survey. Through content analysis, the study examined similarities and differences between students' perception and their historical record of the persistence factors. Tinto's (1987) interactionalist theory of student persistence provided the theoretical grounding for this study. The major findings of this study are as follows: students demonstrated awareness of their family history knowledge as well as parental goal setting; students with greater family history knowledge tend to have a strong degree of resiliency; students demonstrated greater family history knowledge in qualitative than quantitative data; and, emergent family history themes were historical background, gender influence, inspiration to attend college, and family commitment to education. Implications are such that pre-college programs with a focus on parent involvement should build on one's family history knowledge as a component of family support, as it has the potential to enhance persistence to graduation of low-income, first-generation college students.

Purpose

For developmental education students, exploration of family history provides personalized and reflective curriculum opportunities for writing, reading skills, research, presentation skills, and technology experiences. Family background components of parental educational attainment and socioeconomic status are notable as important in the success rate of undergraduate students (Astin, 1975; Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004; Canabal, 1995). However, few studies

demonstrated exploration into the family background characteristics from an intergenerational perspective or a sociohistorical context of family experiences beyond the parent generation (Clark, 1983; Cooper, 1992; Henderson & Berla 1994; Macy, 2000). While the literature supports numerous issues relating to college persistence, this study focused on family history knowledge and three persistence factors: resiliency, institutional engagement, and institutional commitment (Werner, 1987; Bernard, 2004; Tinto, 1975, 1987; Tinto & Goodsell-Love, 1993; Astin, 1978; Pascarella & Terenzini 1978, 1979, 1980; Rendon, 1992).

For the purpose of this study, family history knowledge is operationally defined as the ability to relate at least a three-generation legacy in any social, historical, or educational issue. Resiliency refers to the ability to overcome obstacles by meeting challenges and finding alternative ways to accomplishment. Institutional engagement is the student claim of informal or formal relationship with any institutional personnel or campus-based activity. Institutional commitment is student engagement in proactive behaviors to counteract institutional dismissal or locate finances enabling continued attendance at the current institution. Cultural change is the process students undergo as their world expands beyond the family of orientation and community to include a broader range of experiences related to attending college.

Exploration of the impact that intergenerational family stories relate to resiliency and engagement in social institutions adds to the body of literature regarding the family background characteristics of persistence. The results of this study have the potential to impact the curriculum of developmental courses. In guiding the discovery and reflective experiences of students learning more about their family, the instructor will better understand the lifelong holistic experiences students bring to the classroom.

Potential impact exists to curriculum considerations of pre-college programs for disadvantaged students. College access programs provide services to students and their families in preparation for college attendance. Program administrators can use the findings from this study for effective thematic programming in the delivery of services to their student body (Pierce, 1992; Hayes, 1998). Hayes (1998), for example, supported the benefits of a family history project. In that study, the high school family history project occurred in both the history and language arts curriculum. Hayes' study claimed 65 positive results grouped into eight categories: reveals the interconnectedness of human society; builds students' sense of identity; increases sense of family, enhances intergenerational relationships, ameliorates the outlook of life for those involved; and, benefits children of non-traditional parentage. Thus, family history reflected in an educational environment reinforces both psychological and sociological perspectives.

The potential value of family history knowledge lies in undergraduate retention activities, curriculum development, and as a vehicle for adding to the body of knowledge about family history.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical grounding for this study is Tinto's (1987) interactionalist theory of student persistence, which identifies the importance of academic and social integration with the institution for students to persist to graduation. While a

substantial body of quantitative literature describes the role of family support in the retention of low-income, first-generation college students' persistence (Leonard, 2002; Watkins, 1999; Lorenzano-Obergfell, 1997; Mueller, 1997; Bouchard, 1994), lacking in the literature is qualitative identification of the elements of family support as it pertains to family history knowledge (LePage-Lees, 1997).

Intergenerational studies, in disciplines such as sociology and psychology, often focus upon at least three generations of family life. The development of shared systems of belief within a family unit, and family identity, influence the character development of adolescents (McDaniel, 1998; Harvey & Bray, 1991). Wisch (1988) claims that "family myths are vehicles for ideas and directives relevant to the development of individual personalities, and are influential in the formation and maintenance of family-group identities. Influence and directives are transmitted over generations" (abstract, n.p.). Erikson (1975), although only implicating sociohistorical factors, has described the importance of psycho-historical factors.

The transmission of shared values and beliefs occurs via stories. Ott (1993) finds "certain stories preserve family history and identity and are told to reinforce the family ethos – that members of this family are smart, good looking, and hard workers" (abstract, n.p.). Therefore, these influences have an effect on the way individuals perceive themselves and conduct their lives (such as choosing to participate in institutional activities), thereby including behaviors relating to college retention factors of resiliency, institutional engagement, and institutional commitment.

Cultural change is a problem encountered by first-generation students regarding the discomforts that arise upon leaving the social standing of one's family of orientation. Upward mobility, with all its attendant financial and social benefits, is a desirable outcome of education. First-generation college students negotiate everyday outward changes. Family often taunts the student who returns home with new ideas, taste in music, clothing, hairstyle, and other such outward signals that change is taking place. Disorientation occurs with increased estrangement from the comfort zone of the family of orientation. London (1992) discussed these changes in terms of Weber's (1968) theory of social class structure whereby it is the accoutrements of social class, rather than the money, that make a difference to the individual. Accoutrements are the everyday, outward appearances of class such as clothing, cars, grooming, taste in music and recreational activities. London (1992) turns to Goffman's (1973) social theory of self. Goffman expresses that one's sense of self appears in the way an individual represents him or herself to the world. Self-image is a public reflection so that others may attach meaning to that person by virtue of the way that individual displays a persona. Friends, as well as other outward displays, are an important sign of oneself (p. 8). London (1992) concluded that

> It is only when we see that negotiating cultural obstacles involves
> not just gain but loss – most of all the loss of a familiar past,
> including a past self – that we can begin to understand the
> attendant periods of confusion, conflict, isolation, and even
> anguish reported by first-generation students. (p. 10)

A number of researchers have qualitatively explored the conflicts first-generation students have with their families (London, 1989; Rendon, 1992; Ford, 1993; Macy, 2000). London (1989) has had particular interest in examining the

intergenerational family history component of parent support. Using Stierlin's (1974) theory of adolescent separation from the family, London focused on the problems of first-generation college students in terms of the role assignment students have within their family. This role assignment connects with the role assignment that one's parents had within their family of orientation. Children who face the adolescent stage of leaving home (i.e. attending college) carry with them one of three transactional modes: a) a binding mode which keeps children very much attached; b) a delegating mode which allows freedom but keeps some attachment; and, c) an expelling mode whereby children are thrust from the household. While all three modes exist to some degree in most families, one is usually predominant (pp. 147-148). London's study utilized only the perceptions of students towards their parents and grandparents. This approach is justifiable in that "whether or not they have their facts straight, however, may be less important than their belief that they do. It is, after all, their beliefs that shape – indeed, that constitute – their perceptions of their parents and grandparents" (p. 148). This exploration validated the intergenerational continuity of family roles across cultures. The roles were part of family themes and patterns of behavior as also evidenced by Clark (1983) which, in most case studies, referred to the grandparent generation in reference to education and parenting style.

When students choose to attend college, they most likely proceed with an unawareness of the complex intergenerational, sociohistorical characteristics accompanying that decision and the resultant effects on persistence to degree completion. While perceiving college as a route to upward mobility, students face internalized processes of cultural change that can undoubtedly create obstacles to their ability to persist in higher education. These internalized obstacles include the role of family support, the complex interplay of intergenerational relationships, and the conflict presented by students changing their belief and value systems.

Data Sources

The study was conducted using a mixed methodology. The Family History Knowledge and College Persistence Survey was the quantitative instrument created for this study. The results of this survey determined those invited for an interview. Student persistence was determined from the participant's historical record of college registration and Student Support Services (SSS) field notes. Resiliency, the ability to overcome obstacles, was self-reported in the survey instrument and interview. Comparison of traits occurred with the historical record of ongoing field notes created by SSS professional and administrative staff. Institutional engagement, the formal and informal relationship to the people and organizations within the institution, was determined from self-reporting of such activity.

Institutional commitment, engagement in proactive behaviors facilitating continued enrollment, were measured by documented proactive behaviors. Documentation of proactive behaviors, such as academic appeals and actively seeking financial resources, were determined from institutional records and SSS field notes.

Survey Instrument
The survey instrument, Family History Knowledge and College Persistence Survey, was created after a review of the literature. Items for the survey were

adapted from Wisch, 1988; Pierce, 1992; McDaniel, 1998; Hunter; 2002; Astin, 1975; Kinzig & Nakai, 1995; Summers, 1980; Paxton, 1998; Lin and Chen, 1994; Cooper, 1992; Mullen 2001; and Cabrera, Nora, & Castaneda, 1993. The frequency distribution data from the pilot study and a review of each item in relation to the variables of family history, resiliency, institutional engagement, and institutional commitment eliminated 15 items from the survey instrument distributed to the jury for content validity.

A panel of five adult peer judges who are experts in college retention performed content validity by identifying items as belonging in the subscales of family history, resiliency, institutional engagement, institutional commitment, and cultural change. A jury analysis was performed on seventy items from the pilot study. Three of five item response agreements constituted validity for that item. Of those valid, 11 were modified for simplicity or clarity. For the study, 43 additional items were written to operationally target the persistence variables of resiliency, institutional commitment and institutional engagement. The panel of judges reviewed 113 items.

Analysis of the juried results revealed full agreement of the panel in all categories except institutional commitment. The variable of family history demonstrated 23 items in full agreement; resiliency demonstrated five items in full agreement; institutional engagement demonstrated five items in full agreement; and, cultural change demonstrated six items in full agreement. Each dependent variable, with the exception of institutional engagement had several other item agreements in combination with the family history independent variable. The high number of responses in multiple constructs, coupled with the large number of family history items in full agreement by all jurors, prompted a careful item analysis. This item analysis of constructs served to eliminate items not considered important to the variables or were restatements of other items. One item considered important to the study fell equally into the constructs of family history and resiliency. In that item, the word *family* became *relative* to force it into the resiliency construct. Five items for institutional commitment were added from the construct tested by Cabrera, Nora, and Castaneda (1993), which had a 0.75 reliability coefficient for the scale provided by the authors.

The Family History Knowledge and College Persistence Survey has five subscales: family history, resiliency, institutional engagement, institutional commitment, and cultural change. The 50-item survey was administered to low-income, first-generation college students enrolled in a TRIO Student Support Services (SSS) program. Subjects ranked their response on a five-interval Likert scale where 1= Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Unsure, 4=Agree and 5 = Strongly Agree. Because of the high return rate in the unsure category, crosstabulation was used as the procedure for finding the association between the constructs. For the purpose of this procedure, strongly disagree and disagree were combined into one category, as was agree and strongly agree combined into one category. Unsure remained as the middle category. This recoding of data added an extra dimension of being a partially forced-choice scale.

Interview Protocol

The semi-structured interview contained 23 questions based on results from a pilot study and themes identified in the literature on family history, resiliency,

institutional engagement, institutional commitment, and cultural change (Astin, 1975, 1978; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1978, 1979, 1980; Rendon, 1992; Tinto, 1975, 1987; Werner, 1996).

Participants and Site

Selection of Subjects

The target population for this study was 60 low-income, first-generation college students participating in a Student Support Service (SSS) program at a private, non-selective, tuition-driven college located on Long Island, NY. From the target population, 52 students returned the survey. The subjects were traditional-aged college students who had similar financial aid packages. For descriptive purposes, the gender composition was 35 females and 17 males. The ethnic composition was 19 Black, 24 Hispanic, six White, one Asian, and two students reporting more than one ethnicity. Academically, 12 students had probationary status while 40 were in good academic standing. Of those, 13 had a grade point average of 3.0 or above. Regarding class standing, there were 12 freshmen, 15 sophomores, 17 juniors, and eight seniors.

To select interview participants, survey scores were divided into quartiles of the highest to lowest scores. The top 25% were regarded as high scorers and the bottom 25% were regarded as low scorers. Subjects were selected who fell into groups of: high family history knowledge and low resiliency; low family history knowledge and high resiliency; high family history knowledge and high resiliency; and, low family history knowledge and low resiliency. Six students participated in semi-structured interviews.

Data Analysis

Item analysis by construct was performed, resulting in crosstabulation of items found to be high in agreement, unsure, or disagreement. The item analysis for the family history knowledge and resiliency constructs provides an example. However, because of the small number of respondents in the study, caution must be exercised when generalizing the results.

An item analysis describes family history knowledge by identifying the components of the family history knowledge construct with the greatest influence for respondents. For the purpose of analysis, D = disagree or strongly disagree, U = Unsure, and A = agree or strongly agree. Table 1 reveals that student descriptions of their family history knowledge were most in agreement in items seventeen, four, and nineteen respectively.

Table 1

Item Analysis of the Family History Knowledge Construct N=52

Item		D	U	A
17	Ideas I learn from my family have determined my personality.	4	6	42
4	My parent(s) persist in goals they set.	3	6	41
19	My parents tell me stories about my grandparents or great grandparents.	10	4	38
27	I am inspired by the achievements of my ancestors.	7	12	33
25	I enjoy the stories my grandparents or great grandparents tell me.	6	13	31
39	I can recognize themes and patterns through generations of my family.	4	18	29
15	My grandparents persist in goals they set.	4	20	27
21	My grandparents or great grandparents tell me stories about our family history.	20	5	27
43	I put my family's needs before my education.	6	20	25
49	I have learned about participating in activities from family stories.	11	18	22

Item 17, "Ideas I learn from my family have determined my personality," indicates that 80% of the respondents agree that ideas they learned from their family determined their personalities. Item 4, "My parent(s) persist in goals they set," indicates that 78% of the students were in agreement that their parents persisted in goals they set. Item 19, "My parents tell me stories about my grandparents or great grandparents," indicates that 73% of the respondents were told intergenerational stories by their parents. However, item 21 reveals that nearly equal numbers of students agree and disagree that intergenerational stories are told by their grandparents or great grandparents. The difference in response to items 19 and 21 was an indicator that different generations were telling the family stories. The highest numbers of unsure responses in the family history knowledge construct were found in item 15 and item 43 (38%) as well as in item 39 and item 49 (34%). It stands to reason that if students were unsure about grandparent persistence in goals (item 15) that they would be unable to determine themes and patterns through generations of the family (item 39). Persistence in goals can be a theme in itself. In item 43, 38% of the respondents were unsure if they put their family's needs before their education. Perhaps they have not had to make that decision and therefore used the unsure category. In item 49, 34% of the respondents were unsure about whether they had learned about participating in activities from family stories.

Respondents describe the family history knowledge construct as revealing that ideas learned from family were personality determinants and that parents persisted in goals they set. Items with the highest response of unsure arise in questions about the grandparent generation, putting family needs before the respondent's own education, and learning about participating in activities from family stories.

The item analysis of the resiliency construct provided the most agreement among all constructs of the study. This finding points to resiliency as being a critical aspect of persistence for the respondents. In Table 2, item 47, "I am determined to reach my goals," indicates 98% of the respondents agree that they are determined to reach their goals. This result provided strong evidence that respondents were a goal-oriented group of students, which represented one of the strongest items in the study. Upon item analysis, the resiliency construct stood apart from the other constructs of this study in terms of response agreement.

Table 2
Item Analysis of the Resiliency Construct N= 52

Item		D	U	A
47	I am determined to reach my goals.	0	0	51
5	I can usually overcome obstacles.	1	2	49
41	I am proud of my ability to juggle home, work, and school schedules.	2	2	48
34	I would find a way to pay expenses in order to stay at my college.	0	4	48
1	I try harder if a task is very difficult.	3	1	48
3	I want to graduate from the college I am currently attending.	1	4	47
16	I am the one in control of my life.	4	1	46
11	I like to try new things.	2	5	45
32	I ask for help when I need it.	4	5	43
28	I have learned to overcome obstacles from my relative's stories.	6	10	36

An interesting finding is item 28, where 69 % agreed with "I have learned to overcome obstacles from relative's stories," and has the lowest agreement in the resiliency construct. This result is in sharp contrast to item 16, "I am the one in control of my life," where 88% of the respondents agreed with this item. The contrast was more apparent when comparison was made between item 28 and item 5, "I can usually overcome obstacles," where 94% of the respondents felt they could usually overcome obstacles. This finding is an indicator that this group of respondents accepts personal responsibility for control in their lives as well as in overcoming obstacles.

For resiliency, all items in the construct were used in the cross-tabulation due to the high rate of agreement described by the item analysis. The crosstabulation procedure determined the association between selected items of the cultural change construct with items of the family history knowledge and persistence constructs that were important in high agreement, unsure, or disagreement (Miller, 2006). For example, item 48, "I focus on my future," pertains to cultural change and has a strong association with at least one item in each of the persistence constructs. Table 3 provides the cross-tabulation results indicating the positive association between focus on the future with determination to reach goals. That is, item 48, "I focus on my future," is associated with item 47, "I am determined to reach my goals," in that agreement occurred between respondents 92% of the time. The strength of this association maintains itself with the cross-tabulation procedure.

Table 3
Cross-tabulation for Item 48 and Item 47
Item 48: I focus on my future. (Cultural Change)
Item 47: I am determined to reach my goals. (Resiliency)

		Item 47			
		D	U	A	Total
Item 48	D	0	1	0	1
	U	0	3	3	6
	A	0	7	37	44
Total		0	11	40	51

Qualitative Analysis

Themes, patterns, and discrepancies that emerged from the interviews categorize the data. The following are examples of emergent themes: historical background; gender influence; inspiration to attend college and family commitment to education; intergenerational concepts, holidays and family stories; and, family engagement in community activities. Provided is an example of a student response for the historical background theme.

Historical Background: The Ability to Overcome Obstacles
Participant B, an African-American male sophomore, grew up in a household consisting of his great grandmother, a grandmother, his mother and sister – three generations of women. He states his great grandmother continues to be his greatest source of inspiration. He recalls inspirational stories of his great grandmother's migration from Texas to California where she demonstrated resilience in overcoming obstacles to start a new life and eventually to own property containing three homes in which family members lived.
Content analysis of Participant B's historical record of college registration and SSS field notes occurred to determine an association between knowledge of family history and persistence in college.

Participant B: High Family History Knowledge/Low Resiliency

In the interview, Participant B cited his obstacle as his medical circumstance of being legally blind; however, he has not required special services regarding his vision and his academics. In fact, he does not make an issue of it at all. Indeed, his vision was discussed more in terms of the financial and emotional burden it presents to his mother in light of the fact that his sister has alopecia. Participant B keeps the burden of his problem within himself. Perhaps his great grandmother's inspirational stories inspired Participant B to overcome his medical and financial obstacles. In this case, Participant B's survey score indicated low resiliency, the qualitative data revealed exactly the opposite. While the institutional engagement score for B was low, interview data revealed he has engaged in three campus clubs with leadership positions in two of them. Interview data did not reveal information regarding institutional commitment. He indicated his personal commitment to finishing his education rather than loyalty to the institution despite his level of institutional engagement.

Historical Record

According to SSS field notes, peers have encouraged proactive behaviors such as taking the Harrington O'Shea Career Decision-Making System Revised to help determine an appropriate major. SSS self-reporting forms indicate that B has participated in ten campus clubs or activities and three SSS events. Participant B lives in a dorm and has work-study employment. This activity provides a clear example of various types of institutional engagement. According to Tinto (1987), this process leads to institutional commitment which may be why Participant B is resisting family pressure to attend an HBCU.

This historical account serves as an example for the remaining five respondents. While the other respondents themes, patterns, and discrepancies were varied, they all provided similar association between interview data and the content analysis. These findings were not necessarily supported by the survey results. The example of Participant B shows that a student with high family history knowledge demonstrates persistence in remaining at the institution. However, this result needs to be considered in the context of the small sample of this exploratory study.

Conclusions

Description of Family History Knowledge

Family history knowledge, as a component of family background, is an indicator of the support low-income, first-generation college students receive from their families. Family support is a well-searched indicator of success in student academic achievement (Clark, 1983; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Becker, 1999). Clark (1983) and Eagle (1989) further concluded that the quality of the relationship between parent and child was more critical an element than the parental structure of the household itself. The finding of parent commitment to education is an additional component of support in the family background of these students. While the survey respondents as a whole showed slight agreement in their knowledge of their family history, the interview data revealed that these students had family history knowledge well beyond that imparted by the survey through the item analysis and cross-tabulation. Participants told rich accounts of intergenerational family beyond the

parent generation.

Family History Knowledge, Cultural Change, and College Persistence Factors

Of all the constructs of this study, resiliency was described with the most consistent agreement among the respondents. Resiliency is an important attribute for low-income, first-generation college students in their persistence of completing an undergraduate education. Cross-cultural longitudinal studies by Werner (1996) indicate that one aspect in the development of the resilient personality is the development of a close bond with an adult who is available and stable in the life of the child. Providing support to Werner is a review of resiliency literature (Bernard 2004). Research in other aspects of persistence across the Tinto (1987) model – institutional engagement and institutional commitment – spoke to the institution establishing a comfortable environment for students rather than understanding the attribute of resiliency in the student's adaptation to the collegiate environment (Astin 1978; Tinto & Goodsell-Love, 1993; Boylan, Saxon, White, & Redden, 1996; O'Brien & Shedd, 2001). Pascarella and Terenzini (1980) discussed faculty informal interaction as important in educational outcomes but independent of the personality factors a student brings to the college environment. Resiliency emerged in other studies as an unexpected factor in student persistence (Martin & Williams-Dixon, 1991; Felix 2002).

Cultural change was associated with persistence but not in the way it has attention in the literature (Goffman, 1973; London, 1989, 1992; Rendon, 1992; Macy 2000; O'Brian & Shedd, 2001). Cultural change in this study was associated with persistence factors as opposed to personal changes. White (1976) claims that upwardly mobile youngsters often reject what grandparents represent and turn their back on the family, which is not representative of this study population (Miller, 2006).

Implications

With political emphasis on equitable access for low-income, first-generation students to attend college, it is important that college personnel obtain data on this group of students who are increasingly enrolling in college. Both academic and student affairs arms could consider conclusions of this study representing areas of family history knowledge, resiliency, and institutional engagement The academic pipeline can encourage family history reflective activities in applicable credit-bearing coursework and developmental courses. Utilizing concepts of family history such as shared themes, cultural perspectives, oral history, and investigation into primary and secondary sources of family history information all incorporate academic skills while enabling students to build a sense of their socio-historical family history Personalizing content makes academic material meaningful to students. For institutions administering freshman surveys, a resiliency score could be important data. If an incoming class shows low resilient qualities, adjustments can be made in services so that campus offices and routines are more user-friendly

Low-income, first-generation students are increasingly gaining access to higher education through federal and state programs. Accountability in schools is focusing on higher test scores promoting better academic readiness for postsecondary education. As low-income, first-generation students become a larger component of higher education, institutions need to dispel stereotypical ideas about

this disadvantaged group.

Pre-college programs with a focus on parent involvement should not ignore the importance of family history knowledge as a component of family support. Providing activities that promote interaction with multiple generations enables the transmission of stories, values, and positive role modeling, and strengthens student learning. Parents, grandparents, and great grandparents have an opportunity to become engaged in the child's education. Students can explore their family history within an integrative curriculum incorporating oral history, exploration of family photographs and artifacts, as well as document-based activities involving critical analysis. These suggested curriculum changes can provide reflective opportunities. In addition to academic development for students, family history activities enable teachers to gain more insight and understanding to the perspectives students bring to the classroom as well as insight into resolving educational and behavioral problems that might arise. These activities promote positive interaction between the generations and frequently generate keepsakes within a family such as recorded oral histories and scrapbooks. A finding of this study was the importance of the maternal influence for inspiration to attend college. That information may have impact in the forms of parental involvement designed by pre-college programs. For both college and pre-college students, understanding intergenerational differences is a communication asset in the workplace. Development of intergenerational understanding can be fostered by the study of family history via oral histories from elder family members.

This study is a contribution to social action research. As an increasing number of low-income, first-generation students graduate from college, there is an expectation they will break the chain of poverty by improvement in socioeconomic status. Although this study did not characterize itself by demonstration of conflict that this change can create in families, there is substantial literature to indicate that cultural change does happen.

Exploration into the value of family history knowledge and its association with persistence in college is perhaps a new area of research in learning more about ensuring success for first-generation, low-income students. Implications are such that pre-college programs, with a focus on parent involvement, should build on one's family history knowledge as a component of family support, as it has the potential to enhance persistence to graduation.

Rhoda Miller is Director of Student Support Services at Dowling College in Oakdale, New York. **Stephanie Tatum** is Assistant Professor of Educational Administration, Leadership and Technology at Dowling College.

References

Astin, A. W. (1975). *Preventing students from dropping out.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Astin, A. W. (1978). *Four critical years.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Becker, J. (1999, Winter). Partnerships with families promote TRIO student achievement. *Opportunity Outlook,* 13-19.

Bernard, B. (2004). *Resiliency: What we have learned.* San Francisco: WestEd. Retrieved February 16, 2006 from www.wested.org/cs/we/view/rs/712

Bouchard, E. E. S. W. (1994). Fitting in at college: A comparison of first-generation and second/subsequent-generation college students (Doctoral Dissertation, Indiana University, 1994). *Dissertation Abstracts International,* 55, (12A), 135.

Boylan, H. R., Saxon, D. P., White, J. R. & Redden, C. E. (1996, April). *National Study of developmental education: Minority student retention annotated bibliography (Rev.).* Boone, NC: National Center for Developmental Education.

Cabrera, A. F., Nora, A., & Castaneda, M. B. (1993). College persistence. *Journal of Higher Education,* 64, 123-139.

Canabal, M. E. (1995). Hispanic and non-Hispanic white students attending institutions of higher education in Illinois: Implications for retention. *College Student Journal,* 29, 157-167.

Clark, R. (1983). *Family life and school achievement: Why poor black children succeed or fail.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Cooper, D. S. (1992). A case study of the perceived characteristics and life events that enabled four women to become university presidents. (Doctoral dissertation, University of La Verne, 1992). *Dissertation Abstracts International,* 53, (08A), 271.

Eagle, E. (1989, March). *Socioeconomic status, family structure, and parental involvement: The correlates of achievement.* Paper presented at the meeting of the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED307332).

Erikson, E. H. (1975). *Life history and the historical moment.* New York: W. W. Norton.

Felix, O. (2002). Success factors of under-prepared students: A phenomenological study (Doctoral dissertation, Colorado State University, 2002). *Dissertation Abstracts International, 63* (05A), 121.

Ford, D. Y. (1993). Black students' achievement orientation as a function of perceived family achievement orientation and demographic variables, *Journal of Negro Education 62, 47-66.*

Goffman, E. (1973). *The presentation of self in everyday life.* Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press.

Harvey, D. M. and Bray, J. H. (1991, March). Evaluation of an intergenerational theory of personal development: Family process determinants of psychological and health distress, *Journal of Family Psychology* (4)3, 298-325.

Hayes, W. F. III. (1998). Family history study units in secondary school: Their educational impact (Doctoral dissertation, University of West Virginia, 1998). *Dissertation Abstracts International, 59* (06A).

Henderson, A. T. & Berla, N. (1994). *A new generation of evidence: The family is critical to student achievement.* Washington, DC: National Committee for Citizens in Education. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED375968).

Hunter, P. A. (2002). The development of a model and an instrument to measure nontraditional college students' academic persistence (Doctoral dissertation, University of Northern Colorado, 2002). *Dissertation Abstracts International, 63* (11A), 288.

Kinzig, K. & Nakai, J. (1995). *Improving student engagement in social and academic activities.* Master's thesis. Saint Xavier University. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED391583).

Leonard, L. M. S. (2002). Staying the course: Motivational factors affecting persistence of low-income African-American college students (Doctoral dissertation, University of Missouri - Kansas City, 2002). *Dissertation Abstracts International, 63* (11A), 149.

LePage-Lees, P. (1997). *From disadvantaged girls to successful women: Education and women's resiliency.* Westport, CT: Praeger.

Lin, P. L. & Chen, J. (1994). *Characteristics of a healthy family and family strengths: A cross-cultural study.* Indiana. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED377101).

London, H. B. (1989). Breaking away: A study of first-generation college students and their families. *American Journal of Education,* 97, 144-170.

London, H. B. (1992). Transformations: Cultural challenges faced by first-generation students. In L. S. Zwerling & H. B. London, (Eds.), *First-generation students: Confronting the cultural issues* (pp. 5-11). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Lorenzano-Obergfell, N. (1997). A study of the factors which lead to college success for first generation female college students who are of Italian-American descent: A conceptual model (Doctoral dissertation, Indiana University, 1997). *Dissertation Abstracts International,* 59 (02A), 255.

Macy, B. (2000). *From rusty wire fences to wrought-iron gates. How the poor succeed in getting to – and through – college. Policy perspectives.* Washington, DC: College Board.

Martin, O. L. & Williams-Dixon, R. (1991). *The student-institutional fit for the African American student: Do college retention programs facilitate academic and social access?* San Antonio, TX: Paper presented at the meeting of the Annual National Conference on Racial and Ethnic Relations in American Higher Education. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED341351).

McDaniel, S. G. (1998). "It's bedlam in this house!" Investigating subjective experiences of family communication during holiday celebrations. (Doctoral dissertation, Arizona State University, 1998), *Dissertation Abstracts International,* 59(11A), 224.

Miller, R. (2006). *The association of family history knowledge and cultural change with persistence among undergraduate low-income, first-generation college students.* (Doctoral dissertation, Dowling College, 2006).

Mueller, K. L. (1997). Involvement as a critical factor in the persistence of seniors who are first-generation college students. *Masters Abstracts International,* 36(04): 189.

Mullen, D. L. (2001). A matter of honor: The life history of a Navy leader. (Doctoral dissertation, University of Nebraska, 2001). *Dissertation Abstracts International,* 62(08A), 2657.

O'Brien, C., Shedd, J., et al. (2001). *Getting through college: Voices of low-income and minority students in New England. The New England student success study.* Washington, DC: Institute for Higher Education Policy.

Ott, C. A. (March 1993). *Narrative and literacy: The functions of family stories and dialogues.* San Diego, CA: Paper presented at the meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED377513).

Pascarella, E. T., Pierson, C. T., Wolniak, G. C., & Terenzini, P. T. (2004). First-generation college students. *Journal of Higher Education*, 75, 249-285.

Pascarella, E. T.& Terenzini, P. T. (1978). Student-faculty informal relationships and freshman year educational outcomes. *Journal of Educational Research*, 71, 183-189.

Pascarella, E. T.& Terenzini, P. T. (1979). Student-faculty informal contact and college persistence: A further investigation. *Journal of Educational Research*, 72, 214-218.

Pascarella, E. T. & Terenzini, P. T. (1980). Predicting freshman persistence and voluntary dropout decisions from a theoretical model. *Journal of Higher Education*, 51, 60-75.

Paxton, D. A. (1998). The perceived personal characteristics and life-learning experiences that enabled seven African-Americans to become California community college presidents: A case study. (Doctoral dissertation, University of La Verne, 1998). *Dissertation Abstracts International,* 59(12A), 211.

Pierce, L. G. (1992). "Over the river and through the woods": A case study of a family biography project and its relationship to emerging adolescent psychosocial identity formation through grandchild-grandparent interactions. (Doctoral dissertation, University of Oregon, 1992). *Dissertation Abstracts International,* 53 (08A), 353.

Rendon, L. (1992). From the barrio to the academy: Revelations of a Mexican American "Scholarship Girl," In L. S. Zwerling & H. B. London (Eds.), *First-generation students: Confronting the cultural issues* (pp. 55-64). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Stierlin, H. (1974). *Separating Parents and Adolescents.* New York: Quadrangle.

Summers, R. (1980). First generation black baccalaureate graduates and their families (Doctoral dissertation, Indiana University, 1980). *Dissertation Abstracts International,* 41, 126.

Tinto, V. (1975). Dropout from higher education: A theoretical synthesis of recent research. *Review of Educational Research*, 45, 89-125.

Tinto, V. (1987). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Tinto, V. and Goodsell-Love, A. (1993). Building community. *Liberal Education* 79 (4). Retrieved October 4, 2004, from Professional Development Collection database.

Watkins, W. C. J. (1999). The perceived effects of non-cognitive external factors on the persistence of African American college students: parents, an untapped resource. (Doctoral dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 1999) *Dissertation Abstracts International, 60*(08A), 151.

Weber, M. (1968). *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*. Roth, G. & Wittich, C. (Eds.). New York: Bedminster Press. (Originally published 1946).

Werner, E. (1996). How kids become resilient: Observations and cautions, *Resiliency in Action, 1*(1), 18-29.

White, R. W. (1976). *The enterprise of living: A view of personal growth*. New York: Holt, Reinhart and Winston.

Wisch, H. B. (1988). Family folklore and mythology: A naturalistic study of three families (Doctoral dissertation, University of Maryland, 1988). *Dissertation Abstracts International, 51*, 301.