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Divergent Pathways: How Pre-Orientation Programs Can Shape the Transition to College for First-Generation, Low-Income Students[1]

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First-generation, low-income (FGLI) students attend college at historically high rates in the United States. However, FGLI students continue to struggle in transitioning to college, particularly in elite universities. In this article, we engage with interview and supplemental survey data from 40 FGLI students at an elite university to demonstrate how self-advocacy skills—conceptualized as a form of cultural capital—can support FGLI students' transition into college. We do this through the case of pre-orientation programs, which are increasingly offered across universities, where half of the sample participated in pre-orientation and half did not. We interviewed both subsets at the start of their first academic year, as well as during their COVID-19-induced departure from campus residences. In response, we argue that students who participated in pre-orientation more often demonstrate self-advocacy skills, both in-person and online, especially in comparison with those who did not participate. We show that forming relationships with peers, as well as faculty and staff, during pre-orientation is key to enacting self-advocacy. Lastly, we also respond to previous studies that typically associate self-advocacy skills with the cultural competencies of higher-income and continuing-generation students, while making clear how these skills can benefit FGLI students in transitioning into school.

KEYWORDS: COVID-19; cultural capital; education; first-generation, low-income (FGLI); pre-orientation; self-advocacy.

INTRODUCTION

More first-generation, low-income (FGLI) students attend college today than ever before (Checkoway 2018). While access to higher education has increased for FGLI students, those from the highest family income quartile still attain their bachelor's degree by age 24 at rates five times greater than those from the lowest family income quartile (62% vs. 13%) (Cahalan et al. 2021). FGLI students also continue to report greater struggles in acclimating to college than their continuing-generation and higher-income peers, particularly at elite colleges and universities (Jack 2019).

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Previous research shows that FGLI students report lesser engagement with academic and social opportunities and describe experiences of exclusion that create a sense of alienation from campus (Checkoway 2018; Reay 2018). Lastly, even when resources may be available to address such issues, this student population reports struggling with how to navigate institutional spaces in ways that can respond to their needs (Jack 2016; Lareau 2015). Preliminary research on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on higher education also suggests that FGLI students' difficulties in college were compounded. FGLI students reported struggling to access resources needed to counteract experiences of housing uncertainty, food insecurity, or disrupted income issues—even though some colleges made such resources available (Kiebler and Stewart 2022).

Building on the work of scholars interested in how institutions like schools maintain the privileged position of the upper class (e.g., Bourdieu 1977), Lareau and Weininger (2003:569) highlight how lower-income students struggle to acquire the "cultural capital"—what they define as "the knowledge, skills, and competence [that] come into contact with institutional standards of evaluation"—critical to the successful navigation of these institutions. As the specialized skills and forms of knowledge that make up cultural capital are transmissible across generations, middle- and upper-class families often monopolize this capital in ways that reproduce their class-based advantages (Lareau and Weininger 2003). Students from higher-income backgrounds typically gain access to cultural capital in their early years with their families and continue to accumulate advantages via this capital in K-12 and college (Jack 2019). Showing how cultural capital can take the form of self-advocacy in educational domains (Calarco 2018:132), students from higher-income backgrounds are more likely to seek assistance from authority figures or attend office hours than their FGLI peers (Jack 2016). Students' abilities to engage with authority figures, self-advocate, and seek assistance are critical to their long-term upward mobility, as these skills are needed to access resources from many institutions throughout the life course, including healthcare, the criminal justice system, the workplace, and more (Lareau 2015).

Educational institutions can ideally operate as a mechanism for transmitting cultural capital to FGLI students (Lareau 2015). Recent work demonstrates that FGLI students can be supported in developing forms of cultural capital, such as help-seeking, that ease their transition into higher education (e.g. Schwartz et al. 2018). A larger emphasis on the transition into college responds to the fact that FGLI students were found to be nearly four times more likely to leave higher education by the end of their first year than their higher-income, continuing-generation peers (Engle and Tinto 2008). In response, more universities are offering transitional programs, such as pre-orientation programs, to ensure that FGLI students become acclimated to the university prior to the beginning of school. Early research into pre-orientation programs suggests these initiatives can buttress FGLI students' social and academic relationships, as well as their sense of belonging on campus, even before they begin their academic courses (Kezar and Kitchen 2020).

Building on this work, the research question motivating this study is: How can participation in a pre-orientation program support the procurement of cultural capital among FGLI students during the transition to college? We examine this question

primarily through interviews with 40 first-year FGLI students at an elite college (named "Midwest Elite"). Twenty students had participated in a pre-orientation program before the start of their first year in college in the 2019–2020 school year, and the 20 other students had not participated. With this research design, we aimed to identify how these programs—which are increasingly posed as possible ways to disrupt the challenges associated with FGLI students' transition into college (Hallett et al. 2020; Kezar and Kitchen 2020)—may support this particular student population. We first interviewed students at the start of their first year in college in Autumn 2019. Then, when Midwest Elite sent students home unexpectedly in March 2020 to curb the spread of COVID-19, we did virtual follow-up interviews to learn how students were adjusting to this unexpected disruption.

Unlike many of their peers, FGLI students were less likely to have consistent internet access during the pandemic and were more likely to face issues with their living space that made pursuing an education difficult (Casey 2020). FLGI students were also less likely to have parents or guardians who could advocate on their behalf with educational institutions (Casey 2020). COVID-19 operated almost as a quasi-experiment in relation to our question about cultural capital, as the students we interviewed were forced to interact with the institution in new and unexpected ways as they returned home, often without many resources, and began to navigate their freshmen year in isolation. The move to fully online courses further increased the need for students to engage in proactive help-seeking and self-advocacy to get the education they deserved. We supplemented our interview data with background information such as student enrollment status, which we collected through surveys conducted at the end of students' first, second, and third years of school.

Taking the COVID-19 campus shutdown as a "stress test" for students' ability to self-advocate for their educational needs, we argue that resources such as pre-orientation programs can support the procurement of cultural capital among FGLI students transitioning to both in-person and online college spaces. More specifically, we demonstrate how pre-orientation participants develop peer, faculty, and staff supports that undergird FGLI students' procurement of self-advocacy as a form of cultural capital, even before the start of school. The unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic and resulting move to online classes for first-year students in early 2020 allowed us to show how these supports that were formed prior to the start of classes held steady for students in ways that were critical to their ability to navigate the institution during a time of crisis. Our work further responds to studies that delineate how cultural capital is typically associated with advantaging higher-income and continuing-generation students in school (Lareau 2015; Richards 2022). Our focus on self-advocacy also contributes to nascent studies interested in supporting FGLI students during this tenuous phase, as situated in the context of an increasingly common college student intervention program (Tinto 2017). Finally, success in higher education and the ability to navigate institutional spaces is central to FGLI students' long-term upward mobility. Buttressing this population's procurement of cultural capital—particularly in the area of self-advocacy—in this pivotal institutional space offers the opportunity to facilitate FGLI student success in college and beyond (Lareau 2015).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Cultural Capital, Self-Advocacy, and the Transition to College

Where many scholars emphasize how economic factors lend to disparities in educational outcomes, Annette Lareau (2003) shows that children from low-income families often do not have access to the cultural knowledge that is essential to navigating institutional expectations. Lareau underscores that cultural capital, or knowing how to make institutions work for oneself, is essential to having a person's needs accommodated by these institutions, yet lower-income families often raise their children in ways that do not afford them advantages in school. These differences in cultural capital begin at a young age, when lower-income parents often teach their children to treat teachers with respect, prioritize self-responsibility, and manage problems independently as early as elementary school. Higher-income parents, however, begin coaching their children to secure desired advantages by using their teachers as resources, avoiding consequences, and asserting themselves when seeking support. Here, higher-income children learn to exert "strategies of influence" through practices like persisting in making requests or asking teachers questions. Lower-income children, however, learn "strategies of deference," such as not asking follow-up questions even when they remained confused (Calarco 2018:29). Where higher-income students' strategies are already more advantageous in these early years, this gap in how students acquire advantageous cultural capital persists in high school and college. Here, higher-income and continuing-generation students typically maintain cultural backgrounds that benefit them in negotiating with the expectations of dominant institutions like colleges, yet FGLI students often do not have the same sense of the "rules of the game" in regard to how to proactively engage with authority figures or how to secure exemptions from rules (Calarco 2011; Jack 2016).

Given these disparities, educational scholars consistently foreground how higher-income and continuing-generation students benefit from previously acquired cultural capital that buttresses their ability to navigate college prior to entering school. Compared with their FGLI peers, continuing-generation and higher-income students often remain more accustomed to practicing help-seeking behaviors, knowing how to time and understand the requirements associated with institutional requests, and more (Jack 2019; Lee 2016). Studies focusing specifically on FGLI college students indicate their difficulties adjusting to the dominant cultural frameworks that organize institutional expectations (Jack 2016), while also experiencing class- and race-based microaggressions (Armstrong and Hamilton 2013) and struggling to build essential social supports in school (Reay 2018). Related studies highlight how various forms of cultural capital, like self-advocacy, more specifically undergird students' ability to effectively navigate university spaces (D'Alessio and Osterholt 2018; Daly-Cano et al. 2015). In line with these studies, we define self-advocacy as the ability to communicate one's needs and wants and to make decisions about the support needed to achieve them (D'Alessio and Osterholt 2018). As with other forms of cultural capital, higher-income and continuing-generation students have often already been socialized into self-advocating by the time they enter higher education—thus

benefitting them in effectively engaging with authority figures and institutional resources throughout college (Lee 2016:164).

Most studies underscore what FGLI students lack, especially as foundational work on cultural capital aimed to pinpoint institutional factors related to the intergenerational transmission of inequality (Bourdieu 1977). Still, nascent research highlights how FGLI students' can be supported in procuring beneficial forms of cultural capital that can transform their college experience (Kornbluh et al. 2021; Schwartz et al. 2018). For instance, previous work shows how FGLI students can learn to better enact help-seeking through participation in precollege curriculum focused on creating individualized learning plans and practicing egalitarian relationship-building with teachers. Students engaged in this curriculum became more comfortable interacting with authority figures, a skill that is critical to help-seeking. FGLI students who attend more elite high schools or who continue to receive support from high school teachers and administrators during their transition to college also often engage in more strategic help-seeking behaviors than their counterparts without such support (Jack 2016; Richards 2022).

Building on the receipt of help, we emphasize how, even though FGLI students usually do not enter college with valuable cultural capital, they can benefit from acquiring forms like self-advocacy during this transition. Previous examples detailing the benefits of supporting self-advocacy among marginalized students'[5] more generally include FGLI students' creating and participating in counterspaces[6] (Lee and Harris 2020) and students of color creating and participating in multicultural centers (Kornbluh et al. 2021)—where these actions offered students needed social relationships in elite spaces. We draw from such studies to provide novel insights into how learning to self-advocate can support FGLI students in accessing needed resources, along with how these skills can persist in the context of unanticipated changes to the institutional space. Lastly, where studies often focus on FGLI students receiving institutional support, we show how FGLI students' self-advocacy can transform the institutional space in ways that respond to their personal backgrounds (Khalifa 2013). Accordingly, even though most studies emphasize how FGLI students struggle to self-advocate at school, this vein of work provides a fertile foundation for demonstrating how self-advocacy—as a form of understudied cultural capital—can be central to FGLI students' college transition, as well as how these skills can be buttressed in the process.

From Access to Support: Pre-Orientation Programs

For most undergraduate students, the availability of academic and social supports (e.g., tutoring, study groups, transitional programs, etc.) is critical to transitioning into and becoming engaged in college (e.g., Hallett et al. 2020). Transitional

[5] In this study, the term marginalized refers to groups or communities that experience discrimination and exclusion due to unequal power relationships across economic, political, social and cultural dimensions (e.g., race, gender, class, and more) (Case and Hunter 2012).

[6] Here, counterspaces refers to "settings [that] promote positive self-concepts among marginalized individuals . . . through the challenging of deficit-oriented dominant cultural narratives and representations concerning these individuals" (Case and Hunter 2012).

programs, typically referred to as summer bridge programs, can offer students support even before the onset of the first year, the time when the development of academic and social supports is the most crucial (Chambliss and Takacs 2014). Such programs are largely derived from the original formalization of TRIO Programs in the 1960s, which were implemented to address expanded college access to more diverse student populations like FGLI students (Kallison and Stader 2012; Sablan 2014). Since then, colleges have instituted a range of interventions aimed at supporting FGLI students, including peer mentorship models, shared housing, academic advising, financial support, and more (Tinto 2012).

Following in this legacy, pre-orientation programs mark a more recent addition to summer bridge programs. In fact, pre-orientation builds on college orientation programs, where educational researchers Perigo and Upcraft (1989:82) originally defined orientation to a college as "any effort to help freshmen [sic] make the transition from their previous environment to the collegiate environment and enhance their success." Orientation programs at elite colleges are typically a weeklong collection of mandatory and voluntary activities offered to all incoming first-year students before the start of classes (Kuh et al. 2005; Tinto 2012). Developed with the hope of offering students a smoother transition into school, orientation programs are generally considered to have mixed results, with pre-orientation programs developed to further buttress students' persistence and engagement in college (Kallison and Stader 2012).

Whereas orientation programs are designed for the entire incoming class, pre-orientation programs are designed to facilitate the transition more intimately to college among smaller cohorts (Hallett et al. 2020; Kezar 2000). Here, pre-orientation programs are expected to serve as preventative interventions and aim to introduce students to a "scaled-down" version of college (Chambliss and Takacs 2014; Walpole et al. 2008). Incoming students typically apply to pre-orientation, and, if accepted, move to campus for a few days to several weeks prior to the start of the academic year. Program activities regularly include team-building exercises among participants and upperclassmen, campus tours, and opportunities to interact with faculty and staff (e.g., guest lectures, QandAs with professors, etc.). Through these academic and social experiences, pre-orientation programs are expected to preempt the initial transition shock and provide necessary academic and social precursors prior to the start of school (Arendale and Lee 2018; Sablan 2014).

Studying Pre-Orientation: Buttressing Self-Advocacy

Research on programs like pre-orientation is largely fragmented, despite the presence of these programs across colleges and universities. Most of this research highlights quantifiable outcomes associated with pre-orientation participation, such as increased GPA and retention rates (Holcombe and Kezar 2020). As most elite colleges generally maintain high retention and low attrition rates, however, these studies are less useful in understanding how to support FGLI student transition to such spaces—particularly given FGLI students' continued difficulties in engaging with campus resources, procuring academic and social opportunities, and struggling with

feeling a sense of belonging (NCES 2022). Instead, additional research is needed to understand how these programs shape FGLI students' procurement of cultural capital to effectively navigate this transitional process. Given the unanticipated rise in online programs due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is also particularly important to understand how cultural capital can support students in remote settings. Foregrounding critical forms like self-advocacy can bolster FGLI students' abilities to address their needs across settings, while also renegotiating how the institution responds to such needs (Holcombe and Kezar 2020; Tinto 2012).

Qualitative studies of precollege preparation programs often focus on the formation of four skills: academic self-efficacy, sense of belonging, academic skills, and social skills (Millett and Kevelson 2018). Such studies emphasize the relational component offered via programs like pre-orientation, where connecting with other students, faculty, and staff can buttress students' sense of belonging to school (Kezar and Kitchen 2020). In gaining this social, as well as academic, head start to college, students are expected to adjust better than those who do not participate (Arendale and Lee 2018; Douglas and Attewell 2014). These findings build on past research which emphasizes the significance of interventions occurring earlier in students' transition to support them in building skills that are essential to their college careers (The White House 2014).

Past work also addresses students' perceptions of the programs themselves, which include reports of these programs as beneficial to gaining both academic and social exposure before the onset of school. For instance, such studies highlight the usefulness of these programs in acclimating students to navigating the overarching structure of the institution (Holcombe and Kezar 2020; Millett and Kevelson 2018). While these studies expand beyond the more common focus on retention, very few studies of transitional programs use qualitative methods to provide in-depth insights into how FGLI students can acquire beneficial forms of cultural capital via these programs (Sablan 2014). Through a focus on self-advocacy, this study addresses this qualitative gap, explicates the mechanisms through which FGLI students acquire cultural capital that is often associated with the advancement of their continuing-generation and higher-income counterparts, and makes clear how forms of cultural capital like self-advocacy are relevant to navigating both in-person and online school—even in times of crisis (Calarco 2014; Kornbluh et al. 2021). Lastly, studying these processes at elite universities—which claim to offer the most robust forms of support, and yet continue to produce gaps between student groups—also offers the opportunity to identify how FGLI students can benefit from cultivating self-advocacy during the transition to school, particularly in response to the ongoing structural inequities that were exacerbated in the context of COVID-19 (Holcombe and Kezar 2020; Jack 2019).

METHODS

Methodological Approach

To cultivate qualitative insights regarding pre-orientation and cultural capital, we employed semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 40 incoming FGLI students,

20 of whom had participated in pre-orientation and 20 of whom had not. FGLI students are reported to struggle during this transition, and, in response, universities are more often offering support for FGLI students (Tinto 2012). Since many universities are working to provide better support to FGLI students, we chose to interview these two subgroups to clearly understand how pre-orientation participation shaped students' experiences in the same college environment. To develop a sample of FGLI students who also varied in terms of identities that significantly shape the college student experience (i.e., race/ethnicity and sex), we used purposive sampling, a nonrandom approach to recruit a particular category of case that is critical to one's theoretical questions (Mason 2002:124). As such, we can provide in-depth insights into how FGLI students can be supported in enacting self-advocacy as related to an increasingly common college intervention—in relation to FGLI students who are based in the same environment yet do not receive the same level of support.

Data Sources

Prior to conducting interviews and surveys, we observed and took detailed field notes during pre-orientation programming to better understand the pre-orientation context. The first and second authors also conducted eight focus groups with pre-orientation participants, and two research assistants conducted 20 pilot interviews with pre-orientation participants and nonparticipants at the start of their first year of school, which provided groundwork for our interview guide. We recruited interviewees on the incoming student Facebook page, posted fliers throughout the campus, and advertised the opportunity to a designated student representative from each dorm. This call for participants linked to a screener that assessed student pre-orientation participation and gathered demographic information, including each student's age, race/ethnicity, sex, and FGLI status.[7] A total of 129 first-year students responded to the call for participants.

We took several steps to address possible selection bias, working to minimize the differences between the two groups of 20 outside of participation in pre-orientation. For one, all 40 FGLI students included in the sample were selected on the basis that they had applied and been accepted into pre-orientation. We, thus, interviewed 20 FGLI students who participated in pre-orientation—as well as 20 nonparticipants who reported that they did not attend due to more minor issues like previously scheduled family events or surgeries. Students were also informed that their participation would be covered in the case of financial barriers. Nonattendance, thus, was likely not associated with significant barriers to access. Interviewing students at the same university, some of whom participated in pre-orientation and some of whom did not, allowed us to address how pre-orientation participants in particular come to enact self-advocacy as a form of cultural capital. It also allowed us to better identify how pre-orientation participants' enactment differs from FGLI students who enter college without the same level of support.

[7] As per the U.S. Department of Education, students were considered FGLI if neither of their parents had received a bachelor's degree, and they were receiving a Pell Grant (as the Pell Grant is the largest federal grant program offered to undergraduate students from low-income households) (The White House 2014).

As discussed, we used a purposive sampling technique to formulate the final 40-person FGLI student sample, in which we sought variation along axes of pre-orientation program participation, sex, and race/ethnicity. According to the university, the demographics of this incoming class were roughly 50% men and 50% women, 10% first-generation, and 10% Pell Grant recipients. Additionally, the university reported the racial composition of this class as 20% Asian, 10% Black, 15% Latinx, 40% White, and 15% other. As such, we used purposive sampling to mirror the demographics of the university at-large. Based on responses to the categories we provided to students in our recruitment screener, the demographics of the final sample included the following: 4 African American/Black, 12 Asian/Asian American, 5 Hispanic/Latinx, 3 Middle Eastern/North African, 3 Multiracial, and 13 White; 25 Female and 15 Male (see Table A1). Furthermore, the 20 FGLI students who participated in pre-orientation represent an even split across the five pre-orientation sub-tracks offered by the university (i.e., leadership; outdoor skill-building; social justice, technology and society; and policy, history, and culture in the local city). The 20 FGLI nonparticipants represent an even split in interest in the five sub-tracks as well. Despite varying in topic area, each track follows a shared overarching pre-orientation structure, which includes 1 week of meeting other incoming students, forming relationships with upperclassmen mentors, interacting with faculty, visiting campus resource centers, and more. These sub-tracks are also reflective of programs offered at similar universities, both in topical focus and goals for participants (Hallett et al. 2020).

Data Collection

The first author conducted two waves of in-depth semi-structured interviews with the 40 FGLI interviewees at Midwest Elite. The first wave of interviews took place with all 40 students at the start of their first year in the 2019–2020 school year, and the second wave of interviews took place with 35 of those original 40 students who agreed to participate in a follow-up interview at the end of their first year in 2020 (at which point they had left campus due to COVID-19).[8] Interviewees were primarily asked about their perceptions of their pre-orientation programs and of the university, relationships with friends, family, and faculty, and their experiences transitioning to both in-person and online school. In line with previous studies of FGLI students' cultural capital (Jack 2016), we asked students, "Tell me about your interactions with college officials." We draw mostly from this set of responses across the two waves of interviews in this article. All interviews were about 1 hour in length and took place either in-person at the campus library or online via Zoom. With permission from respondents, all interviews were recorded and transcribed. As 33% of FGLI students leave college within 3 years, we also administered follow-up surveys with all participants at three time points, which occurred at the end of their first, second, and third years of college (i.e., until 1 year after they had returned to campus)

[8] Of the five students who did not complete a second interview, four had not participated in pre-orientation (two of whom withdrew from school). The fifth student who did not partake in a second interview had participated in pre-orientation (for more information, please refer to Table A1).

(Cataldi et al. 2018). Supplemental survey questions assessed student enrollment statuses (i.e., leave of absence, medical leave, etc.), as well as their social and academic relationships (e.g., who do you talk with about your personal life?). All 40 study participants completed the survey at each time point.

The first author, a White, female graduate student who attended an elite college as an FGLI undergraduate student, conducted the interviews that inform this work. At the time of the interviews, the first author was a second-year Ph.D. student and relatively close in age to the interviewees. In introductions, the first author introduced herself and identified as an FGLI college graduate. While the first author did not share the same racial, ethnic, or gender identities as some of the respondents, many did express a sense of comfort in knowing about her FGLI background. Time was made available for open questions or comments at the end of each interview, and interviewees often remarked that they appreciated talking with a recent FGLI college graduate who could relate to their experiences of transitioning into college. Respondents' willingness to participate in a follow-up interview and to complete a survey each year also suggests a sense of comfort with the project and the interviewer. The first author was additionally supported by the pilot work of two White, male non-FGLI undergraduate research assistants who were familiar with college life at Midwest Elite, as well as the second and third authors, one of whom is a White, male FGLI professor, and the other of whom is a White, female non-FGLI professor who has worked with FGLI students throughout her tenure.

Data Analysis

To track significant patterns and themes in the data, as well as how the focus of observations shifted over time, the first author produced analytical memos following each interview. She consulted with the research team to use these memos to re-direct interview questions to focus on what interviewees found to be significant within their experiences, particularly those that challenged the team's prior understandings and assumptions (Timmermans and Tavory 2012). Using Dedoose, the first author and research assistants explored the interview data together using open coding to generally assess overarching themes and patterns that are often central to the study of cultural capital (i.e., peer relationships). After discussing the key themes with the research team, the first author then moved to focused coding, as related to the emergent themes in our data, during later cycles (i.e., institutional transformation) (Saldaña 2015).

As the first author developed new codes, she consulted with the research team and returned to previously coded transcripts and memos and re-coded them in accordance with nascent themes—with self-advocacy emerging as the key form of cultural capital among pre-orientation participants. Survey data collected at the end of 2020, 2021, and 2022 academic years provided useful supplemental information on students' academic enrollment status, engagement with pre-orientation, and relationships (i.e., counts of withdrawals and leaves of absence, participation in pre-orientation as a student leader in their second or third year of school, etc.). We also shared our preliminary findings with professors, support staff, and FGLI students at

Midwest Elite. Engaging in these structured dialogues with multiple stakeholders also suggested that our study findings reflected the experiences of students who participated in the study, as well as those who did not.

FINDINGS

Pre-Orientation Participation and Enacting Self-Advocacy

At the start of the interviews, most students talked about the fears and expectations they had prior to beginning college. For many, gaining admission to an elite university sparked moments of elation, both for themselves and for their families. For instance, Jeremy, an Asian student, remarked, "I couldn't imagine life changing this way for better. I couldn't have expected getting into such a good college with all the good perks." Such sentiments proved common, with students citing how attending Midwest Elite offered them opportunities like long-term financial stability, job prospects, and the opportunity to explore their academic interests. Still, students also discussed anxieties surrounding their identities in relation to the school's overall population. Josie, an Asian student, offers a clear example of these anxieties, saying, "The amount of rich kids at this school is crazy. Some of them are secretly rich and I didn't realize that they're rich and then I found out. I'm like, 'Oh, well. . .' I actually knew I was going to be bottom [of family income levels] when I came here. My dad said it." This anxiety about the "rich kids" at Midwest Elite cropped up across all interviewees, underscoring mixed feelings regarding the transition.

As interviews progressed, however, it became evident that participants who had taken part in a pre-orientation program demonstrated more comfort and confidence in advocating for themselves—especially in ways that explicitly addressed their underrepresented identities—than their peers who did not do a pre-orientation program. Pre-o participants not only acknowledged an initial shock in adjusting to college but also expressed notably more positive sentiments about the start of college than their peers who did not do a pre-o program. In this section, we show two primary mechanisms that undergirded the enaction of self-advocacy for pre-o participants in the transition to college: (1) peer relationships with both incoming and later-year students and (2) relationships with faculty and staff. We consider these two mechanisms at the start of the transition to college (our first wave of interviews) and amid the transition to remote school during the COVID-19 campus shutdown (our second wave of interviews). Here, interviewees noted that the activities put on during pre-orientation (i.e., team-building exercises, mini-lectures with faculty, etc.) not only surpassed those of orientation but were also central to the formation of these various relationships.

Participants Enacting Self-Advocacy in the Transition to College

As with other studies of pre-orientation (Douglas and Attewell 2014; Hallett et al. 2020), learning how to navigate the school and forming new, meaningful relationships marked the first few weeks of school for pre-orientation participants. After discussing her initial apprehensions in coming to Midwest Elite, Katie, a White student noted,

> Oh my god. I'm obsessed with pre-o. For me, it was huge because I got to go in with other classmates and even with upperclassmen and break the ice that I was so terrified of breaking. We actually got really close. Coming in at orientation week, I already had a group of students, which really helped since some kids come from these feeder high school and already know like 100 people. Plus, I applied to be one of the captains next year and got picked for that. So, this coming fall I get to give back to the program.

Like Katie, supplemental survey data showed that eight of the 20 participants had served as a pre-orientation leader by their third year of college. Surveys also confirmed that pre-orientation participants developed lasting relationships with those they met in the program. For instance, even 3 years after they participated in the program, all 20 pre-orientation participants were still in touch with at least one person from their program.

Pre-orientation participants talked at length about the various friendships and mentorships they formed during the program and how these relationships aided their transition into college. Olivia, a Latinx student, told us:

> My core crew is from pre-orientation. We've stayed together. We have sleepovers all the time and we do face masks. This group, we're so close. It's really what I dreamt college was going to be. We go into the city every week. We go shopping and we have a lot of fun. And it's nice to have people to go to when I need to talk.

In addition to the sense of friendship that Olivia experienced, her peers proved critical to her ability to advocate for herself when she encountered an issue in her class schedule:

> I had an issue with switching my math courses. I wanted to jump down [to a less advanced] sequence, but my advisor kept pushing me not to. So, I went to my girlfriends at my house [dorm]. We sat down and we talked about it, they just said, 'Why and why not.' I would definitely say they are my support system . . . I trust them a lot, and I wouldn't have confronted my advisor without them.

Ultimately, Olivia talked over her concerns again with her adviser and they were able to find a course that was a better fit for her.

Alex, a White student, emphasized the material benefits of connecting with other FGLI students during pre-orientation: "It's nice to hang out with them because they're also on a budget, so you're not kind of forced to buy stuff. If we go downtown. I can go window shopping and not feel ashamed. If I go with my dorm and they keep on buying stuff, and I'm the only one who's not buying anything from the really fancy store, I just feel so out of place." Daquan, a Black student, highlighted similar benefits, stating:

> You may have a group of friends who actively want to go out, but if you're low-income, and you make a group of friends who are disregarding of your financial circumstances, then when they say, "Go out," they mean spend $50 apiece. I found that being in a more affluent group of friends and having to explain my particular circumstances, especially so that outings are actually inclusive and available for everybody to partake in, was not my thing. So, I've stayed tight with the pre-o crowd.

Such friendships also supported students in advocating for their financial needs. For instance, Daquan added, "We have a GroupMe chat from pre-o, and I know that many of us are like, 'So financial aid came in, how is everything going for everyone?'" He further discussed how students in the chat would try to answer each

other's questions and, when needed, accompany each other to the financial aid office so that they could have a support while having their financial concerns addressed. Here, students had a community that was aware of their needs and also supported them in advocating for those needs throughout their college experience.

In a similar vein, Noah, an Asian student who met Olivia during their pre-orientation program, described the need for affordable dinner options on campus. At Midwest Elite, dining halls offer limited hours in the evening, which assumed students had the money to eat at restaurants during off-hours. Noah recounted how he and Olivia made the university administration aware of this issue and advocated for food access programs for FGLI students. Olivia also reflected on her feelings of homesickness as related to Brazilian food, which she could not find in or around Midwest Elite. Here, she recognized that this was most likely the case for many other students from immigrant backgrounds, stating, "'If I miss food from my culture, I'm sure that other people do. If I have a need then other people would have a need.'" With this knowledge, she decided to coordinate her and Noah's food access efforts with suggesting that students submit recipes to the dining halls, which ultimately resulted in the addition of multiple dishes to the dining hall menu.

Frederick, an Asian student, felt that he experienced racial microaggressions in his first quarter on campus. Wanting to address his experiences—and to stop future mistreatment of students of color—he worked with his peer mentors from his pre-orientation program on a campaign to push the university to invest in cultural centers. He said, "Our main goal is to have a place where students from different groups could be able to talk with each other. Right now, people do not really know about [the campaign], and they do not know where to ask for help. But this could be a place for us to talk and organize together." Here, and in departing with oft-cited accounts of FGLI students struggling to self-advocate, Frederick reiterated the importance of the university supporting students like himself. Efforts such as advocating for cultural centers, expanding food access, and diversifying food options indicate how pre-orientation participants often felt that they had access to the necessary support to affect change at Midwest Elite.

While previous studies of FGLI students highlight how students can struggle to find institutional support during the transition process (see, for example, Reay 2018), we found that pre-orientation participants were able to describe ways they were advocating for various resources through their connections with faculty and staff—connections they had made during their program. For instance, when Titi, a Black student was asked what she would do if she started to struggle in her classes, she pre-empted the question by stating, "It would be no problem . . . I'm in professors' offices constantly." When Gabrielle, a Latinx student was asked what she would do if she started to struggle in her classes, she said, "I'd get help by going to the center for student success, which I visited during pre-o." Lastly, when asked how he planned to learn more about his major of interest, Pierce, a Middle Eastern student, said, "I'd get help by sending an email to the department head and then asking them to get their advice."

Samia, a Middle Eastern student, also discussed the significance of staff supports in advocating for herself during her start of school. Unfortunately, Samia experienced acute discrimination in her dorm in her first few weeks, where two students ridiculed her

hijab, engaged in Islamophobic slurs, and mocked the fact that she was a "scholarship kid." After talking with her pre-orientation staff leader, Samia reported the students to university administration and also ensured that rules were put in place that prevented future behavior from occurring without consequence. In reflecting on the incident, Samia remarked on what the staff member had told her:

> She said, 'In order to get something done, you have to work your way up the ladder until you find someone that can actually fix things for you.' I think a lot of people do that and get totally let down because they don't realize they have to continuously go up and up, which really frustrating. But with the right supports, some things can actually change.

Samia's experience demonstrates how forming relationships with faculty and staff early in the college transition can give students a sense of community and confidence during their vital first few weeks. In turn, participants began self-advocating in ways that transformed their initial experiences of the university, and, in some cases, the functioning of the university itself. As we show in the next section, these early connections withstood the test of an unexpected disaster during participants' first year in college: the shut-down of Midwest Elite during COVID-19.

Participants Enacting Self-Advocacy in the Transition to COVID-19

The first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic marked an immense period of destabilization among college students across the U.S., upending the typical process of adjusting to school. In March 2020, Midwest Elite moved to remote learning and shut down the vast majority of campus activity—a policy that impacted all of our participants who were, as first years, required to live on campus. Interviewees reflected on this moment as an "immensely hectic" and "shocking" time. Such a change for students meant figuring out where to go—like home or a friend's house—how to get there, with whom to talk to about all of these changes, and more. All interviewees pointed to this moment as "life-changing" and lingered on their "new normal" following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the context of transitioning to remote learning, interviewees commonly shared experiences of not having access to stable WIFI, not having a dedicated space to complete their schoolwork, interacting with inflexible professors, and being tasked with family responsibilities. Furthermore, given the many unexpected needs that arose during the pandemic, students' ability to ask for and access necessary resources became paramount to their experiences in online school (i.e., financial assistance, academic support, etc.).

During the initial move to remote learning in the spring quarter of our participants' first year in college, the pre-orientation participants' enactment of self-advocacy persisted. In particular, peer support proved central to their ability to advocate for change. Hailey, an Asian student, describes her feelings of exclusion from virtual dorm meetings which Resident Assistants started in April 2020 in an effort to give students a continued sense of community with their floormates. She noted, "I feel that the [online] dorm meetings are exclusive because there are a lot of . . . I guess for me, it's sort of like a rich boys' club. I can't really engage in the conversation that people are having. So, I'm not feeling completely comfortable."

However, after talking with—and feeling supported by—a few FGLI friends she had met in both pre-orientation and in her classes, Hailey confronted her RA and, as a result, became more involved in her dorm's online culture. She added, "I got involved in other house programming. For example, in order to encourage house spirit, we are making house themes, like a T-shirt that people can buy online . . . and we have this first-gen girls' group chat where people can sorta plan specific things that we can talk about."

Students' self-advocacy skills became especially apparent in their reflections on managing their academic requirements, particularly in relation to negotiating professors' and advisors' expectations and norms for engaging in remote learning. While all of our interviewees emphasized the difficulties of managing overwhelming online course loads, pre-orientation participants typically sought assistance from multiple supports and advocated for themselves when those supports could not or did not respond to their needs. Here, relationships with faculty and staff proved especially pivotal to enacting self-advocacy. Jeremy, an Asian student, struggled with a bad internet connection at home that disrupted his courses. After the first few days of online classes, he filed for support with his academic advisor whom he had met during pre-orientation and regarded as a staff person with whom he could "easily reach out to with questions, especially since we've known each other since before I even started at Midwest Elite." This advocacy ultimately led to greater support from Midwest Elite for students with home internet issues.

Noah, an Asian student, discussed how he had asked for a reduced course load from one of his professors due to the strains of COVID-19 on his home life. Instead of working with Noah to navigate the situation (which Midwest Elite encouraged faculty to do during this unprecedent upheaval), the professor responded by stating, "If you don't like the course, drop it." Recognizing his professor's unwillingness to adjust the course, Noah advocated for himself through his academic advisor. "I went up to my college advisor and I was like, 'Look, this ain't it. This course is so unaccommodating, please help.' So, I had to take the entire situation up the chain, and then I did get them [the professor] to change the course requirements." Incidents like Jeremy and Noah faced highlight the many challenges associated with COVID-19 for all students. In our study, pre-orientation participants remained in contact with people whom they thought would take their needs seriously, such as peers, faculty, and staff, who provided them with beneficial support while they were adjusting to remote school. As we show in the next section, students who did not participate in pre-orientation programs faced more challenges and had experiences that more closely reflect previous studies of FLGI students and the transition to college.

Mirroring the Typical Narrative: Students Without Pre-Orientation Experience

Unlike pre-orientation participants, nonparticipants rarely discussed engaging self-advocacy on campus in our interviews when talking about their transition to college or their experiences during COVID-19. In contrast, nonparticipants more regularly indicated a sense of isolation at school and feeling of class- and race-based exclusion that did not lessen over time. Rather than advocating for change on

campus to address their sense of isolation, nonparticipants highlighted their intentions to focus on course completion and maintain contact with networks established before entering college (e.g., family members and high school friends). And, as we show with experiences during the move to remote learning, nonparticipants had not developed supportive relationships with peers, faculty, or staff that could alleviate some of their crises.

Nonparticipants Attempting to Manage the Transition to College

Nonparticipants' recollections mirrored typical narratives of FGLI students at elite schools, particularly in struggling to develop peer support. To start, unlike those who participated in pre-orientation, nonparticipants moved into their dorms with all of the other incoming students at the start of the orientation week—which many described as "exhausting" and "shocking." Evan, a White student, recalled how she told her parents, "I'm not going to have any friends" during her move-in day, after seeing "so many rich students with mini-fridges and TVs" in her dorm. Other students echoed her sentiments, discussing feelings of being overwhelmed with mandatory orientation activities, struggling to interact with other students, and missing their families and high school friends.

Like Evan, students typically noted that they felt more alienated from their peers than expected, commenting on the difficulties of being a minoritized student at the institution. Melissa, a Hispanic student, highlighted this form of experience upon first meeting her roommate:

> My roommate, she starts off with like, 'Oh, yeah, my parents give me a weekly allowance of 400 bucks.' And I'm just like, what does that even feel like? The little group that I hang out with, it's just three of us—we're the only Hispanics in my dorm, and the rest are a lot of just really wealthy or White students, so the transitioning part has been a bit hard.

She went to a few meetings for the campus organization for Latinx students in an effort to meet students who shared her cultural background. However, she felt intimidated by the "sheer number of people in the group", as well as not knowing how to form connections beyond "basic small talk." This sense of being an outsider in the dorm and in cultural spaces on campus diverged from the stories of the pre-orientation participants, who discussed pre-existing connections with students from both different and similar backgrounds—and how those connections provided them with a dependable and beneficial support network to explore their newfound community.

In discussing their transition into the classroom during their first academic quarter, nonparticipants recounted being "freaked out" or "stressed out." Becka, a White student noted,

> I feel illiterate in my classes, and I don't know what's going on in any of my lectures. I've never, ever studied in my life more than 2 hours a day. In high school, I could study for 2 hours, get everything done, and be at the top of my class. It was so easy for me back then. So, I was the valedictorian of my high school, but now, I just hope I'll make it.

In describing her transition to Midwest Elite, Becka echoed a similar narrative to other nonparticipants we interviewed: she was lonely, missed home, and felt

unsteady in her academic coursework. Yet, when we asked nonparticipants about their help-seeking habits related to academic work, they typically described an individualistic approach, such as studying on their own. Similarly, Evan remarked, "I've just done my mandatory meeting with my academic advisor, and I don't really plan on going back. Like when I asked her if I should switch out of my math class or something, she was just like 'read the college catalog.' Given that vibe, I don't think I'll meet with her regularly." Upon asking who she thought she might go to instead, she replied, "I just don't know really." Students like Becka and Evan also often struggled to articulate their academic and career goals. These limited connections that students felt regarding possible supports (like academic advisors) are commonly reported among FGLI students, even though these supports are considered essential to first-year academic performance.

Like pre-orientation participants, nonparticipants often referenced discrimination related to their personal identities. Such reports ranged from hurtful social experiences in the dorms, apathy from administrators, and the lack of sustained conversations on class and race on campus. For instance, Melissa recounted how White students in her dorm regularly leave trash in common areas with the expectation that she and two other low-income women of color would clean up after them—and started referring to them as the "housekeepers of the dorm." Unlike pre-orientation participants' enactment of self-advocacy in discriminatory situations, Melissa noted, "I felt like although it made me uncomfortable ... I kind of swallowed it and I was like, 'OK, I can deal with it.'" Even more, despite having two other friends of similar backgrounds, she did not feel that they would be able to take on the larger group of wealthier White students that dominated her dorm. She further indicated that while she could potentially bring this up with her Resident Advisor, she did not feel comfortable doing so, especially when considering potential backlash from her peers.

Similar to Melissa, nonparticipants often remarked on their fears in challenging the normative expectations of their new college environment. Margo, a Multiracial student referencing her financial difficulties, highlighted:

> I don't think there's anyone I can go to. I know there's the financial aid office, and they have walk-in hours. I haven't had the chance to go. I'm scared to go. Anytime I've spoken to them over the phone, it hasn't been pleasant. I remember the first couple times my mom called, they didn't want to help, they were brash, 'I don't know what to tell you' kind of vibe so it wasn't the most welcoming kind of thing.

When asked about faculty or staff she could go to for support, Margo more specifically highlighted: "I have this feeling of being alone. There might be people who care about you, but you have to be responsible for keeping your head above water, and how do you do that?" Through these reflections, nonparticipants reported much greater feelings of being overwhelmed by the wealth and Whiteness of the university, even within the first few days of school. Nonparticipants further experienced a sense of isolation and alienation from their peers, as well as faculty and staff, which undermined their ability to advocate for needed support.

Nonparticipants Attempting to Manage the Transition to COVID-19

This lack of supportive relationships among those who did not participate in pre-orientation came much clearer to us when we interviewed them during the campus shutdown. This group of students faced similar challenges with remote learning as our pre-o participants did but expressed greater struggles accessing needed resources from the university. Tianna, an Asian student, described her experience of seeking help:

> All the messaging I'm getting here is, the university says, 'Oh, we're taking care of you,' and it's like, 'but you're not.' They get a lot of feedback, and they just don't act on it. That is frustrating. I am talking to a literal brick wall. It is like no one is listening to me. Flexibility is really important, and the student body has been really flexible. We want the same. I feel anxious all the time, and it's really difficult to just sit and pay attention.

Students like Jia, another Asian student, recounted similar issues during this time:

> Our WIFI system is super unstable, and I don't have unlimited data. I have to watch out for how I use it. Just like two weeks ago, we had two WIFI outages. The day before, our power was out for the entire day. My laptop was dead by noon. I wasn't able to do anything. Then I had to cram to write a paper last night.

Unlike Jeremy, the pre-orientation participant who asked for and received technical support from his academic advisor, Jia was unaware that such services existed.

Students' academic struggles also often persisted into COVID-19, where Becka, a White student, thought she may have to withdraw from a class. Still, when asked who she could reach out to, she responded, "I didn't even realize that Midwest Elite had a whole virtual community." Tamitha, a Black student, who was also struggling in one of her classes noted, "My issue is that I'm someone who will exhaust myself until I truly feel that there is nothing more I can do in terms of understanding a subject or completing an assignment. I'm just very hesitant, in terms of asking for help. And I usually figure things out by myself anyways." This reflected the same differences in advocating for needed assistance and resources that arose during the initial transition to college, where nonparticipants mirrored typical narratives of attempting to do it on their own (Jack 2016; Schwartz et al. 2018). Additionally, our survey findings showed that two nonparticipants ultimately did elect to take a leave of absence following COVID-19, which was not the case for any of our pre-orientation participants.

DISCUSSION

Many studies highlight how FGLI students struggle during the transition to college, where previous studies and these interviews alike account for experiences of culture shock, class- and race-based discrimination, and difficulties in navigating essential resources at school (Jack 2016). Related work highlights the opportunity to support FGLI students in acquiring forms of dominant cultural capital—which they can use to navigate these spaces—while also underscoring that universities also need to change in response to students' needs (Lee 2016). In response, this study probed:

How can participation in a pre-orientation program support the procurement of cultural capital among FGLI students during the transition to college? It did this both in the context of the start of students' first year and during their COVID-19-induced transition to online school, offering insights into the significance of cultural capital in in-person and remote school, as well as in crisis. Our conceptualization of self-advocacy as a form of cultural capital builds on similar forms like help-seeking behaviors, while also attending to students' ability to transform that university in ways that respond to their personal identities and experiences (Lareau 2015; Richards 2022).

Accordingly, this study demonstrates how students who participated in pre-orientation enacted self-advocacy across several aspects of their university lives—as buttressed by relationships with peers, faculty, and staff that they had formed in the context of pre-orientation. Notably, FGLI students were able to form these connections prior to the onslaught of general student orientation, classes, and more, further supporting their ability to self-advocate even in the first few weeks of school (Kezar 2000). Participants' enactment of self-advocacy as a form of beneficial cultural capital also persisted even into COVID-19, an unprecedented event that hugely disrupted campus life for all students—and especially for FGLI students who often to not have access to or have the same level of experience in requesting the kinds of beneficial material resources that their continuing-generation and higher-income peers may have.

Where previous work associates self-advocacy skills with higher-income and continuing-generation students, this study explicates how interventions like pre-orientation can support FGLI students in becoming equipped to advocate for themselves (Lee 2016:164). This study shows how pre-orientation programs should continue to emphasize forming relationships with peers, faculty, and staff—a finding that can be translated to other types of interventions as well. In developing these relationships, FGLI students' can practice self-advocacy in ways that can improve their social, academic, or financial experiences—as well as create new forms of resources, such as food access programs and cultural centers, that transform the institutional space in ways that respond to their marginalized identities (Kornbluh et al. 2021; Lee and Harris 2020).

Even in the months away from school, pre-orientation participants more often recounted the ways that they continued to advocate for their various and often unexpected needs even while adjusting to remote learning, such as negotiating course expectations with advisors and obtaining needed internet access. These accounts diverged from FGLI students who had not participated in pre-orientation, as they often attempted to manage their unexpected needs on their own, reflecting most studies of FGLI students' difficulties in gaining and leveraging cultural capital (Jack 2016; Schwartz et al. 2018). Pre-orientation participants' continued enactment of self-advocacy during such strenuous conditions further underscores how building students' cultural capital can support them in learning how to navigate institutional spaces—especially in ways that reflect their changing life conditions and are key to potential upward mobility. This is especially informative as remote college options are increasingly common, where 59% of students were enrolled in distance education courses in postsecondary institutions in 2021 (NCES 2021). Online school is

especially advantageous for those like FGLI students who may need the flexibility of an online program to acquire needed income, care for family members, or have access to more affordable educational options. While the long-term ramifications of this study's participants divergent experiences remain unknown, future work can build on these insights to understand how self-advocacy skills can support FGLI students' experiences navigating institutional spaces in-person, online, and in the midst of changing sociopolitical conditions.

A singular program like pre-orientation will not be able to completely upend the fact that institutions like universities privilege dominant forms of cultural capital that have not often been made readily available to FGLI students prior to school (e.g., high-status cultural experiences, parental coaching) (Checkoway 2018; Tinto 2012). However, this study makes clear that foregrounding FGLI students' abilities to acquire forms of cultural capital like self-advocacy—particularly as buttressed through dedicated resources like pre-orientation—has the potential to beneficially transform FGLI students' experiences during the transition to college (Kezar 2000; Lee 2016:164). Beyond that, focusing specifically on self-advocacy also allows for the recognition of students' desires and abilities to reconfigure the institution in ways that are responsive to their marginalized backgrounds (Lee 2016; Lee and Harris 2020). Taken together, continuing to conduct FGLI student-centered research may offer meaningful insights into upending the ways that these institutions perpetuate historical inequities by advantaging dominant forms of cultural capital. It can also support FGLI students in effectively transitioning into school and navigating related institutional spaces, while recognizing how FGLI students can self-advocate in ways that are often not accounted for in studies of their academic careers (Schwartz et al. 2018; Tinto 2017).

LIMITATIONS

Our findings show that students who were prepared to self-advocate from the start of college through a pre-orientation program continued to benefit from this form of cultural capital during a time of immense upheaval, whereas those who did not struggled more with managing their academic coursework, navigating financial changes, and feeling connected to their college. While this study offers novel insights into self-advocacy among FGLI students, a few limitations remain. First, despite ensuring that none of our interviewees did not participate in a pre-orientation program due to significant barriers on their end, we might still be seeing selection effects. For instance, students who elected to participate in a pre-orientation program might belong to a group that is already more likely to advocate for themselves. In addition, the study team was aware of whether or not a student had participated in pre-orientation, which may have influenced their expectations for students' procurement of cultural capital. Still, this is partially mitigated in that the central finding, self-advocacy, emerged in the process of analysis, rather than prior to the interviewing process. This study also does not engage in comparative analyses around gender and race due to (1) space limitations and (2) the relatively small number of interviewees in any sub-group.

IMPLICATIONS

This study conceptualizes self-advocacy as a form of cultural capital that can benefit FGLI students' transition to college, as buttressed through participation in pre-orientation. Future research can continue to probe how self-advocacy, as an understudied form of cultural capital, can improve the educational experiences of various student populations (Daly-Cano et al. 2015; Khalifa 2013). Empirical studies could also build on this research to examine the implications of pre-orientation participation in other university systems—or identify the longer-term ramifications of pre-orientation participation in the final years of college or postcollege. This would be especially illuminating as related work highlights how acquiring cultural capital can buttress students' longer-term upward mobility (i.e., through understanding how to make sense of the informal rules of other institutional spaces like the workplace) (Lareau 2015). The mechanisms undergirding the enactment of skills like self-advocacy may translate to other interventions that could occur in-person or online as well—as the cultivation of relationships with peers, faculty, and staff among FGLI students has also been demonstrated through student affinity organizations, peer mentoring programs, and more (Aries 2008; Lee and Harris 2020).

In addition to FGLI students acquiring cultural capital themselves, our findings offer insights for those working to develop better programs, practices, and policies to support FGLI students. Administrators and staff members are key to creating resources and programs like pre-orientation that facilitate students' procurement of cultural capital. Previous work also highlights how institutional agents (e.g., academic advisors) can shift the educational trajectories of FGLI students by acting as "cultural guides" who advise students on how to seek help in advantageous ways (Richards 2022). Faculty and later-year students can also act as mentors and additional cultural guides who can assist FGLI students in becoming connected to beneficial academic and social opportunities at college, as FGLI students often struggle to cultivate supportive relationships in these spaces (Reay 2018). Notably, these types of relationships could be facilitated across both in-person and remote spaces, as our findings show that pre-orientation participants continued to reach out to trusted faculty, staff, and other students during COVID-19. Lastly, our work also shows that FGLI students can recognize how to change their university in ways that respond to their personal backgrounds, which highlights the benefits of including FGLI students' voices in institutional decision making and may further promote their long-term success (Tinto 2017).

APPENDIX

Table A1. Interviewee Sample

Pseudonym	Pre-orientation participation	Sex	Race/ethnicity	Number of interviews
Alex	1	Male	White	2
Alexander	1	Male	White	2

Table A1. (Continued)

Pseudonym	Pre-orientation participation	Sex	Race/ethnicity	Number of interviews
Ally	0	Female	Asian/Asian American	2
Amina	1	Female	Multiracial	2
Antoine	0	Male	White	2
Becka	0	Female	White	2
Brian	0	Male	White	2
Catherine	0	Female	White	2
Daquan	1	Male	African American/Black	2
Dara	0	Male	Asian/Asian American	2
David	0	Male	White	1
Evan	0	Female	White	1
Frederick	1	Male	Asian/Asian American	2
Gabrielle	1	Female	Hispanic/Latinx	2
Hailey	1	Female	Asian/Asian American	2
Jeremy	1	Male	Asian/Asian American	2
Jia	0	Female	Asian/Asian American	2
Josie	0	Female	Asian/Asian American	2
Joy	1	Female	White	2
Kaitlyn	0	Female	Asian/Asian American	2
Katie	1	Female	White	1
Margaret	0	Female	Hispanic/Latinx	2
Margo	0	Female	Multiracial	1
Mehmet	0	Male	Middle Eastern/North African	1
Mei	1	Female	Asian/Asian American	2
Melissa	1	Female	Hispanic/Latinx	2
Mia	1	Female	White	2
Michelle	0	Female	Multiracial	2
Nicholas	1	Male	White	2
Noah	1	Male	Asian/Asian American	2
Olivia	1	Female	Hispanic/Latinx	2
Peter	1	Male	White	2
Pierce	1	Male	Middle Eastern/North African	2
Samia	1	Female	Middle Eastern/North African	2
Sammy	0	Male	Hispanic/Latinx	2
Sarah	0	Female	African American/Black	2
Sasha	0	Female	Asian/Asian American	2
Tamitha	0	Female	African American/Black	2
Tianna	0	Female	Asian/Asian American	2
Titi	1	Female	African American/Black	2

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