

Sociology 1104: Higher Education: Institutions, Inequalities and Controversies
Final Paper

Applying to Apply


How College Access Programs Impact College Admissions and Adjustment Experiences for First-Generation College Students

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Abstract

According to the Pell Institute, only 11% of low-income, first-gen students complete their college degree within six years of enrolling in school vs. 55% of their non-low-income, non-first-gen peers. Increased attention to the disadvantages first-gen and low-income students face in the college admissions process has inspired the rise of college access programs, both federal and privately owned and operated, to address these challenges and help send first-gen and low-income students to college. This study builds upon previous scholarship on educational and economic mobility, as well as social and cultural capital, to analyze the impact of college access programs on the admissions and adjustment processes of first-generation college students. To understand this specifically within the context of elite institutions of higher education, this study is comprised of five personal interviews with first-generation, second-year students at Harvard College as well as a survey of 47 students, 22 of which participated in a college access program and 25 of which did not. The researcher found measurable differences between program participants and non-participants in self-assessing familial and school support, receiving essay writing assistance, and forming a social network outside of students' own communities when applying to college. Interviews revealed that while some programs are intensive and provide exam preparation, mentorship, college essay editing, academic enrichment, leadership classes, and more, other programs simply provide a mentor or an essay editor. The level of the program's involvement determined how students associated it. The overrepresentation in the survey data of a specific, less-involved program appeared to account for neutral survey results in categories it was initially expected to impact. The study found that gender, and gender as it intersects with income and first-gen status, may be a larger variable in understanding how first-gen, low-income students adjust to college. Interviews with students confirmed that their adjustment experiences depended on the style of program: how early it started, the resources it provided, and more. Overall this study provides insight into an area largely unresearched by academia and shows that college access programs have measurable impact, albeit dependent on their services, in the admissions and adjustment processes of first-gen and low-income students.

I affirm my awareness of the standards of the Harvard College Honor Code.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'AScharmann', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Allison Scharmann

Introduction

I attend Harvard University because one day, when I was a bored high school junior, I decided to scroll through the social media app, Twitter. While surveying the accounts of different colleges in Massachusetts, I stumbled across a Tweet on the Williams College page congratulating the school's Questbridge Scholars. Intrigued, I decided to google the program. I soon learned that Questbridge was a non-profit organization that connected first-generation and low-income students to free applications and full scholarships to elite colleges and universities, and that the deadline for their College Prep Scholars program for high school juniors was fast approaching. I filled out the application, hit submit, and kept my fingers crossed. At this point my plan was to apply to journalism schools in Boston, the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, and maybe NYU and Columbia—as reach schools, of course—just because I dreamed of living in New York City. A few months later, on my way back from my first ever college tours in New York, I received a phone call notifying me that not only was I accepted to Questbridge, but the organization had forwarded my application to the Princeton University Summer Journalism Program.

While Questbridge may have been the first stop on my admissions journey, PUSJP was the game-changer. I was accepted and, in addition to undergoing a ten day “journalism boot-camp” on Princeton's campus that August, the program matched me with a college mentor—the current Sunday Business Editor at The New York Times—to help me navigate the admissions process. He and his wife, also a journalist, tossed my college list out the window and told me, verbatim, “Which of the big three are you going to apply to Early Action: Harvard, Princeton, or Yale?” I chose Harvard and, as for the rest of my list, I selected a mix of Ivy League schools and elite liberal arts colleges, leaving the University of Massachusetts as my only safety school. I was accepted to Harvard that December, committed immediately, and never looked back.

I credit these programs and—to the extent such things can be created in such a short amount of time—the cultural and social capital they endowed me with changing the trajectory of my life, but I am far from the only one. Community Based Organizations, non-profits, fly-in programs, and other, similar programs that promote elite college access for first-generation and

low-income students around the country. These programs can be as simple as mine, a 10 day program with a more implicit emphasis on college access, and as complex as the Leadership Enterprise for a Diverse America, an expansive non-profit that hosts 100 FGLI rising high school seniors on Princeton University's campus for 7 weeks each summer in order to prepare them for, and guide them through, the college admissions process and foster early career awareness. They connect students of color, low-income students, and first-generation college students to colleges and universities they often wouldn't have otherwise applied to.

For me, these programs not only changed the trajectory of where I would attend, but also helped me find community on, and beyond, campus. I was the first person from my high school to ever attend Harvard. It was exciting, but also terrifying. I didn't know anyone on campus, I didn't know how to navigate such elite spaces, I was completely in the dark. What really calmed these fears was the network of friends I had made through PUSJP and through Questbridge. We supported each other as we prepared and submitted applications, heard back from colleges, and embarked on our respective first years on campuses including Harvard, Princeton University, Tufts University, UCLA, Williams College, Dartmouth College, and more. Beyond their own networks, these programs helped me understand the significance of my being in the first generation in my family to apply to and attend college, as well as my being a low-income student on a historically elite campus, and instead of shame or discomfort they fostered a sense pride around that identity that caused me to speak out about my experiences and seek out the first-gen community on campus as a first-year student.

These experiences motivated me to research how participation in college access programs affects the admissions processes and first-year adjustment experiences of first-generation and low-income Harvard College students. I hypothesized that these programs would, like they were for me, be instrumental in other students' successes both applying to and adjusting to college. In surveying and interviewing the first-generation student population of the Harvard College Class of 2021 I not only encountered students crediting their presence on Harvard's campus to these organizations, but also crediting them for the community they build and for giving them skills that helped them succeed as they adjusted to campus. While some of my own experiences and expectations were reflected in the data, I was surprised by just how much information challenged the preconceived notions I had about what these programs are and what they do. The sheer variety of programs that survey and interview participants were involved with

provided a deeper understanding of what college access programs are, the varying degrees of application assistance they provide, and how the type of program itself is instrumental to the experiences that individual participants have both applying to and adjusting to college.

Literature Review

The expansion of higher education access from “elite to mass to universal” (Boliver and Wakeling 2018) has made inequality in institutions of higher education the emphasis of much research and intrigue within the field of sociology of higher education. My research is rooted in previous study of inequality of access to higher education and in experiences of low-income and first-generation college students within elite institutions of higher education. While the public, and particularly the working class, may view higher education as a means of social mobility, the Maximally Maintained Inequality and Effectively Maintained Inequality Hypotheses state that the academic programs best situated to provide less socioeconomically privileged students this mobility tend to be dominated by their more socioeconomically privileged peers (Boliver and Wakeling 2018). As a result, less privileged students are presented with barriers to accessing the (often elite) academic opportunities best situated to increase their social class and status.

Differences in cultural capital in particular impact the experiences of first-generation college students both in seeking higher education and in their experiences within institutions of higher education themselves. Differences in cultural capital between lower income students and students with little to no “familial experience of higher education” and their peers have been shown to result in feelings of alienation towards institutions of higher education, choices of local and less-prestigious institutions, and negative self-comparisons to, and social isolation from, more advantaged peers (Brooks 2018). Sociologists Aries and Seider (2005) studied how class identity impacted the higher education experience for 30 low-income and/or first-generation college students, half at an elite, private college and half at a state college, focusing their findings on the experiences of the students at the elite institution. The researchers found that these educationally and socioeconomically disadvantaged students felt isolated because they lacked signifiers of material wealth, inadequate in terms of their intelligence and linguistic skills, and inferior due to their less elite backgrounds and tastes relative to more privileged peers (Aries and Seider 2005). These experiences were noticeably more salient for the first-generation college

students surveyed, who were disadvantaged not only by their socioeconomic status, but also by a greater lack of cultural capital, resulting in amplified feelings of “intimidation, discomfort, inadequacy, and deficiency” and who were observed to have lesser gains in self-confidence and self-respect than their solely low-income peers (Aries and Seider 2005).

Sociologist Anthony Jack has conducted extensive research on how access to elite secondary education, through connecting programs and scholarships, has created disparities in cultural and social capital that impact elite college adjustment experiences of low-income, often first-generation, Black and Latinx college students. In “Culture Shock Revisited: The Social and Cultural Contingencies to Class Marginality,” Jack (2004) identified and surveyed students from two groups dubbed the “Doubly Disadvantaged” and the “Privileged Poor,” the former referring to disadvantaged black students who come to elite universities from localized backgrounds and public school educations and the latter to identical students who, before entering elite universities, received subsidized education in elite day, preparatory, and boarding schools. He found that the “Doubly Disadvantaged” struggled in connecting with faculty and administration and engaging in the broader school community, while the “Privileged Poor,” as a result of their prior social and educational experiences in elite spaces, entered with cultural and social capital that allowed them to easily forge relationships with authority figures and navigate the elite social environment (Jack 2014). Jack researched further the phenomena of “acquired cultural capital” as it relates to faculty and administrative engagement, finding that the “Privileged Poor” express feelings of entitlement to attention from collegiate authority figures, while the “Doubly Disadvantaged” struggle to navigate systems in which student-faculty interaction is the key to success and opportunity, “drawing moral boundaries against those who do” (Jack 2016).

I seek to study the ways that college access programs, similarly to the elite secondary institutions Jack addresses, endow first-generation and low-income students with cultural and social capital as they apply to and navigate elite institutions of higher education. Existing research on college access programs is limited and does not directly engage with individual student impact. To address the impact of capital disparity on first-generation and low-income college students in accessing higher education, a number of what Gullatt and Jan (2003) refer to as “pre-collegiate academic outreach programs” have arisen to assist students in the college preparatory and admissions process. While these programs are considered as having generally positive impact, a lack of internal evaluation has made it very difficult to research and compare

their larger impact and effectiveness (Gullatt and Jan 2003). The authors analyzed four different organizations that provide academic enrichment and instill students with positive “attitudes and beliefs about college,” concluding that while such programs are positive, their impact has not been measurable in such a way that would allow for the adoption of their methods in the form of school reforms (Gullat and Jan 2003).

Questbridge, a program in which I personally participated, is a popular example of a college access program. Initial, and continuous, press around the program has been largely positive. A 2007 article interviewed the non-profit’s founders as well as three student participants, describing the program as “an intermediary between some of the nation’s brightest, underserved students and leading institutions of higher education” and quotes founder Michael McCulough characterizing the organization’s continuing support as “getting them good internships and building public service opportunities that will help them after school” (Gilroy 2007). Later research by Furquim and Glasener (2017) found no evidence that partnering with Questbridge significantly increases low-income student populations at elite schools and that the application waivers and no-loan, full ride scholarship promised by Questbridge are available to applicants external to the “Questbridge” process for most partner schools. They conclude that elite institutions of higher education must take further action, beyond partnerships with such organizations, to recruit and support low-income students (Furquim and Glasener 2017). A Research to Practice Brief (2012) on community-based college access organizations indicates that CBOs, as analyzed by a 2009 study, increased college enrollment at large and at elite and four-year institutions and resulted in better grades and credit accumulation in college for participants.

Taking into consideration Jack’s research on acquired cultural capital and existing research on college access organizations, I set out to study the impact of college access programs on first-generation, low-income students’ admissions processes and first-year adjustment at Harvard University. Existing research, reviewed above, is focused on the impact of individual programs across all institutions of higher education, but I am more interested in the potential for, and impact of, cultural and social capital gain for individual participants. College adjustment of first-generation and low-income status has been shown to be particularly difficult in elite universities (Aries & Seider 2005) and so, by studying the adjustment experiences of first-

generation, low-income students at Harvard University, I sought to find how, if at all, participation in college access programs might ease this process.

Research Methods

In order to assess the impact of college access programs on first-generation, low-income college students at Harvard College, I employed a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. I conducted an anonymous survey of first-generation college students in the Harvard College class of 2021 (see Appendix I). The choice to survey only first-generation students was one driven by available data, student contact resources, and previous research. Surveying first-generation students within a specific class year provided measurable population metrics. Approximately 15%, or 260 students, of the class of 2021 are in the first-generation of their family to attend college. In a [survey of the entire class of 2021](#) by *The Harvard Crimson* — which had a participation rate of over 50% — 16% of students surveyed self-identified as first-generation students, a slight overrepresentation, and within this group 94.9% of students self-reported receiving financial aid and 78.4% self-reported family incomes of \$80,000 a year or lower. The first-generation population of the class of 2021 has been shown, both in official and unofficial data, to self-report both family income lower than \$80,000/year and eligibility for financial aid at higher rates than the university's student population at large. This data was affirmed in my survey results, in which 89.4% of students who completed the survey questions self-identified their family income as \$80,000 or less. Further, as was pointed out by Aries and Seider (2005), first-generation students have a more exaggerated gap in cultural and social capital than fellow low-income students with parents who attended college. These factors combined made Harvard's first-generation population ideal for surveying to study the impact of college access programs on admissions and first-year experiences.

While the class of 2022 would have been the ideal group to survey considering their proximity to the college admissions process and continuous first-year experiences, these experiences have been shaped by the introduction of a pre-orientation program specifically designed to support students from under-resourced backgrounds in adjusting to Harvard College. For this reason, I chose to center my study on students in the class of 2021, who did not have this information or support system and who are still early in their college careers. Limiting the survey to first-generation students of a specific class year made the process of soliciting survey

participation more regulated in that it could be advertised within online and in-person spaces specific to the class of 2021 and first-generation students on campus. I advertised my survey over the course of three weeks on an email list for first-gen students and in the Harvard College Class of 2021 Facebook Group, garnering 47 complete responses and four partial responses from first-gen sophomores. I distinguish the 47 complete responses from the rest because they comprised responses to all of the question matrixes in my survey, while the partial responses did not continue past the demographics stage of the survey. By comparing the completed question matrixes with the demographic information I was able to calculate and interpret the demographic breakdown of the survey sample. I used the data from this survey to search for distinctions between responses from college access program participants and non-participants.

To supplement my collected quantitative data, I solicited interviews from five first-generation, low-income students who participated in college access programs. These students' narratives contextualize the data collected from the survey, allowing for in-depth, qualitative discussion of the impact of college access programs as they relate to specific student experiences. Four of the interviewees were recruited through a separate Google form linked at the end of the survey in order to keep survey results separate from the information (name, email, and college access org. participation) needed to solicit interviewees. One of the five interviewees reached out directly in response to an inquiry for interview participants over the first-gen email list. Each interviewee was asked base questions from a pre-determined list (Appendix II) to gauge their experiences applying and adjusting to college independently of, and as they relate to, the college access programs in which they participated. Follow-up questions that deviate from this list were asked as needed to understand how different programs and services impacted each student's experiences.

There are limitations to my research and details of my positionality that must be addressed before I interpret my research. The first are in the limitation of my quantitative survey. While I am choosing to control and limit results using metrics of family educational experience, income, and secondary school type, I did not limit the study to a specific racial or ethnic group or gender. This means that, while my results focus on income and education-related cultural capital and cast a wider net in terms of participation, they may be impacted by disparities in student experiences within institutions of higher education caused by race and gender. I have provided in my appendix a breakdown of survey answers organized by participants' self-identified race and

gender identity (Appendix V). While significant patterns did not appear when analyzing responses divided by participants' self-identified race, very distinct patterns did appear when analyzing responses divided by participants' self-identified gender. Students who identified as female (64% of the complete responses) were less likely than male students (34%) to positively respond to questions measuring college adjustment experience, however it is unclear how much this was impacted by the lower representation of male students in the data. For this reason I avoided making broad conclusions about social experiences based on my survey data.

Additionally there were not enough responses from non-binary/genderqueer students to assess potential differences in how their gender identity may impact their adjustment experiences as well. I also included a cross-tab of the data measuring the effects of secondary school type in Appendix V to gauge the potential impact of what Jack (2014) calls the "privileged poor" on my results, however because only 5 out of 47 complete responses were from students who attended private school and there's not context as to the quality of these schools, it is difficult to draw full conclusions on the subject from this data. While race and gender identity were not the chosen focus of this research project, their impact on college admissions and adjustment experiences are certainly areas that warrant more research going forward.

In focusing my research on students at Harvard College, where financial aid and resources for low-income and first-generation students are often greater in terms of funding and age than those of many peer institutions, I risk producing less representative results for the broader population of first-generation and low-income students at elite universities. By surveying and interviewing strictly first-generation college students, my research will unfortunately exclude the similar experiences and narratives of low-income students who are not first-generation college students. This sacrifice was made in the interest of sampling a measurable population with a minimal amount of cultural capital.

It must also be acknowledged that my presence as a first-generation and low-income member of the class of 2021 and perceived involvement in institutional and student-driven advocacy surrounding these communities may have impacted the likelihood of participation in my research survey, the willingness of certain students to volunteer for interviews, and has increased the likelihood that I know, in varying capacities, the students that I interviewed. Of the five students I interviewed, I work with one on the board of Harvard Primus, a campus organization for first-gen and low-income students and have taken a class with another. The

other three students I either did not know or knew only in passing or in limited capacity through a shared extracurricular.

Lastly, I would like to acknowledge the assistance of my professor, Dr. Manja Klemenčič, whose guidance and support was instrumental in the design and implementation of this project, as well as the Harvard Department of Sociology's Quantitative Research Advisor Roland Neil for his support in designing and interpreting my survey.

Findings

1. "We were bad enough to be amazing."

This is what one student, Michael¹, remarks to me about the large public school he attended in Los Angeles, California. In this case "bad" means underprivileged, overcrowded, not rigorous, and lacking in individual attention. For Michael however, "bad" quickly became "amazing," because the low status of his high school invited intervention from a significant number of nonprofit organizations. Michael said:

"I would walk into my college center—where normally we would have one counselor for the entire senior class—we had easily four or five different counselors because each one of them was representing a different organization... We had 826LA, Upward Bound: TRIO, Upward Bound: Math and Science... We had College Match, we had LA Promise Fund, we had Minds Matter..."

For Michael this meant participating in more than just one program, the first being an Upward Bound affiliate program that, his freshman year of high school, enrolled him in community college classes and provided weekend classes that familiarized students from disadvantaged backgrounds with SAT exams, AP classes, and the college admissions process. For Michael, one

¹ Student names have been changed to protect students' anonymity, while geographic locations and program names have been left the same or generalized when necessary/when a small enough area or program to be distinguishing.

program led to another and soon he actively began seeking out different programs, bringing the organization College Match to his high school. College Match provided him with college and SAT prep classes as well as flew him out to visit colleges across the country. Unlike the more community-based, California public university centered programs he had previously done, College Match had a stated purpose beyond just getting first-gen, low-income students to college: its website boasts that 96% of participants are admitted to a “Top 50 school.” Having participated in Upward Bound starting his freshman year and College Match his junior year, Michael was unable to separate his college admissions experience from these programs.

For sophomore Isabelle, who went to a large public high school in the Southern Florida for its International Baccalaureate program, the college access program CollegePoint provided a starkly different experience. The program’s website states a mission to provide “individualized support” for high-achieving, low-income students as they navigate the college admissions process, however the methods by which this was done were less intensive than the community and school-based programs that Michael participated in. Isabelle recalled:

“It wasn’t super intense—like LEDA [the Leadership Enterprise for a Diverse America] or all these other programs—and it wasn’t like a college counselor. I would give her all my essays, she would help me create a list, and I would send her some of my drafts and she looked over them. I think the big thing that she helped me more with was I applied to a lot of local scholarships...I think I didn’t get paired with her until the beginning of senior year and by then that’s kind of late for certain things.”

While the program gave her assistance with essay editing and making a college list, she sought out most of the assistance she received applying from two relatives who had attended selective schools and from her high school guidance counselor who, while difficult to contact because they served all Junior and Seniors in Isabelle’s IB Program, was helpful in signing waivers, sending documents, and writing a recommendation letter.

These two experiences — Michael’s and Isabelle’s — set up what are, to an extent, the highs and lows of college access program participation as observed through my qualitative and quantitative research. All five of the first-generation, sophomore students I interviewed for this research project went to public high schools before attending Harvard College, and all five of these students participated in a college access program. Three total, including Michael, participated in earlier-intervention programs that began between freshman year of high school and junior summer, with intensive preparatory services including essay editing, test preparation, academic enrichment, leadership classes, community building, college visits and more. Their

reflections are akin to, on a smaller scale, Anthony Jack's (2014) "privileged poor." They identified their respective programs with completely changing their college application processes and, though to a lesser degree than a private school education, entering college with more confidence and a better understanding of what they were going to face. Two, including Isabelle, participated in programs which began junior summer or senior fall and provided resources along the lines of general counseling, essay assistance, and connection to other first-gen and low-income peers. Isabelle and the other participant, Jessie, had more traditional application experiences, with Jessie specifically participating in a separate program—post-admissions process—that they credit with somewhat aiding in their adjustment. The exact services provided by different college access programs determined not only how these students applied to college but, for more intense programs relative to less intense ones, how they adjusted as first-year, first-gen students on an elite college campus.

II. "My parents were a support system in terms of being supportive and encouraging me. However, they have no clue how the college application process goes."

Over the course of a little over two weeks, I publicized and ultimately received 47 responses to a survey of first-generation, second-year students at Harvard College. It was this survey that the majority of interviewees both responded to and indicated their desire to be interviewed on. I approached the survey believing that the assumptions I had made going into the project — that there would be noticeable, positive differences in answers from students who participated in college access programs versus those who did not — would be unequivocally confirmed, and was surprised upon reviewing the data at just how similar many of their responses were. I used survey questions (Appendix I) to gauge students' experiences in the admissions process and then, taking into consideration Anthony Jack (2014) and Aries and Seider's (2005) assessments of student discomfort in social spaces and in classroom and faculty interactions, asked a series of questions about student social, administrative, and faculty interactions in their first year of college to measure adjustment. 22 of the survey's respondents participated in a college access program compared to 25 students who did not, making the two groups close enough in general size/proportion of the sample to compare. In contrast to what I hypothesized, minus a few notable exceptions, students who participated in college access programs marked largely similar responses in the survive relative to those who did not. When

asked about when they knew they would apply to Harvard, whether or not they had a support system, their familiarity with financial aid policies, and several of their social and academic experiences in terms of making friends, reaching out for help from faculty, comfort speaking in class, and sense of belonging, students who completed these programs largely answered “strongly agree”/ “somewhat agree,” “neither agree nor disagree,” and “strongly disagree”/“somewhat disagree” (which I collapsed into “agree,” “disagree,” and “neither” to more easily identify patterns) at similar rates to students who did not. My interview with Jessie provided more context as to why this may have happened.

Jessie, who attended a medium to large sized high school in the American South and for who I am using they/them pronouns, participated in the college access program Questbridge. Of the 22 students who participated in a college access program and completed the survey, 11 indicated Questbridge as their only college access program. The other 11 students indicated a mix of programs like Upward Bound, CollegePoint, and more area and community specific organizations. While Questbridge may have been the most represented program in my data, it

		Please consider the following statements and mark your response to each statement as best fits yo... - I knew early in my high school career that I would apply to Harvard College.				Please consider the following statements and mark your response to each statement as best fits yo... - I received useful advice/assistance from high school teachers and guidance counselors throughout the college admissions process.				Please consider the following statements and mark your response to each statement as best fits yo... - I received useful advice/assistance from my family throughout the college admissions process.				Please consider the following statements and mark your response to each statement as best fits yo... - I had a support system I could go to for help with the college admissions process.				Please consider the following statements and mark your response to each statement as best fits yo... - I received assistance writing and editing my college essays.				Please consider the following statements and mark your response to each statement as best fits yo... - I had friends within my high school and my community applying to elite colleges and universities at the same time as me.			
		Strongly disagree, Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree, Strongly agree	Total	Strongly disagree, Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree, Strongly agree	Total	Strongly disagree, Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree, Strongly agree	Total	Strongly disagree, Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree, Strongly agree	Total	Strongly disagree, Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree, Strongly agree	Total	Strongly disagree, Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree, Strongly agree	Total
A college access program is defined as a student-centered program providing supplemental academic...	Yes	14 63.64% 43.75%	1 4.55% 50.00%	7 31.82% 53.85%	22 100.00% 46.81%	4 18.18% 30.77%	2 9.09% 40.00%	16 72.73% 55.17%	22 100.00% 46.81%	11 50.00% 35.48%	4 18.18% 66.67%	7 31.82% 70.00%	22 100.00% 46.81%	7 31.82% 53.85%	2 9.09% 33.33%	13 59.09% 46.43%	22 100.00% 46.81%	4 18.18% 30.77%	0 0.00% 0.00%	18 81.82% 52.94%	22 100.00% 46.81%	8 36.36% 42.11%	1 4.55% 25.00%	13 59.09% 54.17%	22 100.00% 46.81%
	No	18 72.00% 56.25%	1 4.00% 50.00%	6 24.00% 46.15%	25 100.00% 53.19%	36 96.00% 69.23%	0 0.00% 60.00%	13 52.00% 44.83%	25 100.00% 53.19%	20 80.00% 64.52%	9 20.00% 33.33%	3 12.00% 30.00%	25 100.00% 53.19%	6 24.00% 46.15%	4 16.00% 66.67%	15 60.00% 53.57%	25 100.00% 53.19%	9 36.00% 69.23%	0 0.00% 0.00%	16 64.00% 47.06%	25 100.00% 53.19%	11 44.00% 57.89%	3 12.00% 75.00%	11 44.00% 45.83%	25 100.00% 53.19%
	Total	32 68.00% 100.00%	2 4.26% 100.00%	13 27.66% 100.00%	47 100.00% 100.00%	47 100.00% 100.00%	5 10.64% 100.00%	29 61.70% 100.00%	47 100.00% 100.00%	31 65.96% 100.00%	12 27.7% 100.00%	10 21.28% 100.00%	47 100.00% 100.00%	13 27.66% 100.00%	6 12.77% 100.00%	28 59.57% 100.00%	47 100.00% 100.00%	13 27.66% 100.00%	0 0.00% 100.00%	34 72.34% 100.00%	47 100.00% 100.00%	19 40.43% 100.00%	4 8.51% 100.00%	24 51.06% 100.00%	47 100.00% 100.00%

[illegible]

The following questions ask you to reflect on your first year as a student at Harvard College. P... - I felt comfortable interacting with administrators.					The following questions ask you to reflect on your first year as a student at Harvard College. P... - I felt comfortable raising my hand and speaking in class.					The following questions ask you to reflect on your first year as a student at Harvard College. P... - I felt comfortable reaching out to Professors/Teaching Fellows for help.					The following questions ask you to reflect on your first year as a student at Harvard College. P... - I formed a close relationship with at least one Professor/Teaching fellow.					The following questions ask you to reflect on your first year as a student at Harvard College. P... - I felt like I belonged at Harvard.				
Strongly disagree, Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree, Strongly agree	Total		Strongly disagree, Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree, Strongly agree	Total		Strongly disagree, Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree, Strongly agree	Total		Strongly disagree, Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree, Strongly agree	Total		Strongly disagree, Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree, Strongly agree	Total	
11 50.00% 47.83%	7 31.82% 70.00%	4 18.18% 28.57%	22 100.00% 46.81%		11 50.00% 42.31%	3 13.64% 50.00%	8 36.36% 53.33%	22 100.00% 46.81%		9 42.86% 45.00%	2 9.52% 40.00%	10 47.62% 47.62%	21 100.00% 45.65%		8 36.36% 33.33%	13 59.09% 33.33%	22 100.00% 65.00%	46.81%		5 22.73% 33.33%	8 36.36% 72.73%	9 40.91% 42.86%	22 100.00% 46.81%	
12 48.00% 52.17%	3 12.00% 30.00%	10 40.00% 71.43%	25 100.00% 53.19%		15 60.00% 57.69%	3 12.00% 50.00%	7 28.00% 46.67%	25 100.00% 53.19%		11 44.00% 55.00%	3 12.00% 60.00%	11 44.00% 52.38%	25 100.00% 54.35%		16 64.00% 66.67%	8 32.00% 66.67%	7 28.00% 35.00%	25 100.00% 53.19%		10 40.00% 66.67%	3 12.00% 27.27%	12 48.00% 57.14%	25 100.00% 53.19%	
23 48.94% 100.00%	10 21.28% 100.00%	14 28.79% 100.00%	47 100.00% 100.00%		26 55.32% 100.00%	6 12.77% 100.00%	15 31.91% 100.00%	47 100.00% 100.00%		40 84.48% 100.00%	5 10.87% 100.00%	21 45.65% 100.00%	46 100.00% 100.00%		24 51.06% 100.00%	3 6.38% 100.00%	20 42.55% 100.00%	47 100.00% 100.00%		15 31.91% 100.00%	11 23.40% 100.00%	21 44.68% 100.00%	47 100.00% 100.00%	

Figure 1: Survey Questions and Answers Organized by College Access Program Participation

was far from the most intensive. Jessie participated in the Questbridge College Prep Scholars Program, the stated purpose of which is to provide support for low-income rising seniors in high school as they enter the admissions process, and then applied to the Questbridge College Match Program, which allows students to apply early through Questbridge to a ranked group of schools

in the hopes of “matching” or being accepted to one with a full scholarship. Jessie opted out of the College Match and said of the Questbridge organization at large:

“The institution gave me some help, a little bit of feedback on the essays, kind of connecting you to other colleges and giving you something to put on your resume, but especially in hindsight it wasn’t particularly helpful. So a lot of it was through the peers and the comfort of having people in the same situation as me and using them as a resource.”

For Jessie the program was most helpful in connecting them with other first-gen and low-income prospective college students, whom they could reach out to for assistance editing college essays and for support throughout the process. Like Isabelle, despite their participation in a college access program, Jessie embarked on a largely traditional application process, reaching out proactively to high school counselors and teachers for the assistance they needed to apply. “None of the counselors knew how to apply to an ivy so I had to learn how to apply to an Ivy, teach them how to apply to an Ivy, and then apply,” they said.

The questions that did agree with my hypothesis—and that point further to the importance of the specific program for each individual student—were those that measured college admissions assistance from family, college admissions assistance from counselors, assistance writing essays, and the existence of friends outside of students’ respective communities applying to elite colleges alongside them. Regardless of the degree of the program, general services that were provided across the programs participated in by my interview participants, and that are indicated by the survey results, are essay editing and the formation of a peer community of fellow first-gen/low-income students applying to elite schools.

		Please consider the following statements and mark your response to each statement as best fits yo... - I received useful advice/assistance from high school teachers and guidance counselors throughout the college admissions process.				Please consider the following statements and mark your response to each statement as best fits yo... - I received useful advice/assistance from my family throughout the college admissions process.				Please consider the following statements and mark your response to each statement as best fits yo... - I received assistance writing and editing my college essays.				Please consider the following statements and mark your response to each statement as best fits yo... - I had friends outside of my high school and community applying to elite colleges and universities at the same time as me.			
		Strongly disagree, Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree, Strongly agree	Total	Strongly disagree, Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree, Strongly agree	Total	Strongly disagree, Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree, Strongly agree	Total	Strongly disagree, Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree, Strongly agree	Total
A college access program is defined as a student-centered program providing supplemental academic...	Yes	4 18.18%	2 9.09%	16 72.73%	22 100.00%	11 50.00%	4 18.18%	7 31.82%	22 100.00%	4 18.18%	0 0.00%	18 81.82%	22 100.00%	10 45.45%	2 9.09%	10 45.45%	22 100.00%
	No	9 36.00%	3 12.00%	13 52.00%	25 100.00%	20 80.00%	2 8.00%	3 12.00%	25 100.00%	9 36.00%	0 0.00%	16 64.00%	25 100.00%	17 68.00%	2 8.00%	6 24.00%	25 100.00%
	Total	13 27.66%	5 10.64%	29 61.70%	47 100.00%	31 65.96%	6 12.77%	10 21.28%	47 100.00%	13 27.66%	0 0.00%	34 72.34%	47 100.00%	27 57.45%	4 8.51%	16 34.04%	47 100.00%

Figure 2: Cross-Tabs for teacher/counselor, family, essay assistance and social network.

The survey data revealed that 45.45% of college access program participants had friends outside of their high school and community applying to elite schools at the same time as them,

relative to only 24% of non-participants. Jessie pointed to this in their description of Questbridge, citing the peer resource of the organization's Facebook group as being more helpful than the actual institutional resources. James, a student who went to high school in Fort Worth, Texas and participated in a small, northeastern summer program for minority students interested in science, cited the support of his peers from the program as important throughout the process of applying to elite schools. The program he participated in took place each summer beginning the summer after freshman year through the summer before senior year of high school. Akin to Michael's program, James's provided students with advanced STEM classes as well as opportunities to visit schools like MIT, WPI, and Dartmouth, SAT/ACT prep classes, and college essay and application assistance. The same students came back to the program each summer, forming a close bond that James described further:

“It was a very tight-knit group. I remember nights [we] just spent together revising our essays or like ‘hey can you read this? I don’t know if this makes sense’ or anything like that so it was kind of nice to have that little support group. As senior year rolled around and we all started applying and you’d see all the Facebook posts...it was just a nice thing to have.”

While the relationships began to taper off as college went on, James still keeps in touch with several of his fellow program participants, who reached out more frequently during freshman year to check in. Michael, too, had a similar experience having participated in so many different intensive programs. While he met many students applying and visiting schools, he attributed much of the community building to his adjustment process rather than his application process. He said the transition was eased by the fact that he had met near-70 people who now attend Harvard in the months leading up to freshman year. The final student I interviewed was Anna, who attended a large public school in central Florida and participated in the Leadership Institute for a Diverse America (LEDA) program. The intensive program was centered around a seven week summer institute before senior year in which participants took SAT/ACT prep courses, essay writing classes leadership classes, were assigned mentors, visited colleges, and more. Like the programs Michael and James participated in, LEDA's support continued offsite. LEDA paid for Anna to send applications and score reports and supported her in completing her applications. She also cited community as a major aspect of the program, saying “My senior year in high school we talked every day, we’d FaceTime sometimes. Even freshman year I went to visit LEDA friends at Penn.” This contextual information from interviews may explain why there is such a significant difference between the inclusion of friends outside of their community in the

social networks prior to being admitted to elite schools between first-gen program participants and non-participants. Even when these programs are less intensive, like Jessie’s description of the most popular program in the survey. Questbridge, they often emphasize community and peer support that has at least a strong situational, if not always long-lasting, impact on participants.

Other significant differences in data between first-gen program participants and non-participants were in how they described their assistance from family and counselors in applying to college—as well as their assistance in crafting essays. 32% of students who participated in a college access program agreed to having received useful advice from family throughout the admissions process and 50% disagreed, relative to 12% of non-participants who agreed and 80% who disagreed. 20% more program participants positively considered their family’s assistance than non-participants did. Similar splits occurred for the prompts: “I received useful advice/assistance from high school teachers and guidance counselors throughout the college admissions process” and “I received assistance writing my college essays.” 73% of college access program participants agreed that their teachers and guidance counselors were useful compared to 52% of non-participants, and 82% of college access program participants agreed that they received assistance writing their college essays compared to 64% of non-participants. The difference may be explained, in part, by the external support that program participants credit their families with, their need not to rely solely on familial and school resources — or the lack thereof, and the at-least basic essay writing and editing support that most college access programs appear to provide. Michael specifically recalled the sacrifices his parents made to get him to the Saturday programs, after-school classes, and preparatory workshops that his programs provided him:

“...my parents would get up with me and travel down there at 7:00 AM so they could drop me off before they went back to work...After school I’d do all these programs, take the bus down to the local college, classes from 5:00 to like 9:00-11:00 PM and at 11:30 PM when I’m dead and, like, leaving the college, my dad is waiting for me in the parking lot and we drive an hour back to get back [home] to get to bed at 12:30 to do the same thing the next day.”

For Michael, Anna, and James, many of their college admissions needs were met by their respective programs and so while often in the same situation as survey participants like the one whose anonymous quote—“My parents were a support system in terms of being supportive and encouraging me. However, they have no clue how the college application process goes”—heads this section, they were not at as much of a loss in the process as students without the resources

they had. For Jessie and Isabelle, who both participated in programs with little admissions support outside of essay-editing and community building, their reliance upon teachers, school guidance counselors, and more traditional resources was amplified. For Isabelle the lack of intensive counselor support meant seeking more support from her relatives, while for Jessie it meant teaching their counselors how to assist them in applying to more selective and out of state schools. A different anonymous comment in the survey pointed to minor edits from teachers as being their only assistance while another pointed to an older sibling as their primary resource. In terms of essay editing, all five students interviewed indicated receiving assistance — primarily organizational, but in Jessie’s case peer assistance — from their college access programs in writing their college essays.

III. “Do I feel like I deserve to be here, certainly... ‘Was this space made for me/is it being re-made for me?’ I certainly feel like that’s a no.”

While the survey results and interview data provided really extensive quantitative and qualitative data assessing the effects of college access programs on the admissions process, the data on college adjustment was much less clear-cut. The question I was most interested in having answered was “Do you feel like you belong at Harvard?” to which Jessie responded with the above quote, citing their hard work in getting to Harvard but also adding that “obviously this place was not made for really poor, non-binary people.” There was a common theme across the interview participants in that they said their respective programs instilled them with confidence, regardless of how intensive the programs were, but that they still had a very difficult time adjusting. The words “difficult,” “tough,” and “challenging” came up in nearly every interview when participants were asked to describe their adjustment processes, and students self-identified their college access programs as helping them to varying, but at large not substantially significant, degrees in adjusting to college.

While the interview data provides much context into patterns between how these students adjusted to college, it is first necessary to go back to the survey data which, on this topic, provided some very interesting and puzzling results. Many of the questions on adjustment, much like the application questions, were split fairly evenly with the exception of the questions “I felt comfortable in social spaces and at social events,” “I felt comfortable interacting with

administrators,” and “I formed a close relationship with at least one Professor/Teaching Fellow.” 27.27% of participants in college access programs indicated agreement with feeling comfortable in social spaces and at social events relative to 48% of non-participants, a difference of over 20%. Additionally 18.18% of program participants indicated agreement to feeling comfortable interacting with administrators relative to 40% of non-participants. The final category, on close relationships with Professors/Teaching Fellows, split in favor of my research hypothesis in that 59% of college access program participants indicated they had formed at least one close relationship with a faculty member relative to 28% of non-participants. The first two data points here gave me immediate pause, as nothing else in the quantitative data or in the qualitative interviews indicated that these programs would, beyond just a neutral effect, possibly have a negative effect on college adjustment.

In response I went searching for a lurking variable. For all five their socioeconomic and educational backgrounds played a role in the adjustment process, however several noted that their racial/ethnic background impacted their adjustment as well. James specifically pointed out that coming from a majority Hispanic high school and area to the Northeast for college was a “huge culture shock,” making him wonder “Where are all the people who look like me?” Isabelle, on the other hand, found friendship and support in Harvard’s Latinx student community from the start, highlighting how she bonded first-gen, low-income Latinx students through cultural groups and was able to reach out for help and support to these friends as needed. Assuming that the lurking variable would thus be race, I checked responses against students’ self-identified racial/ethnic identities only to discover few distinct patterns. After race I considered the possibility that Anthony Jack’s (2014) “doubly disadvantaged”/“privileged poor” effect could be at work in my data and organized responses by secondary school background. However, only five respondents had gone to private school relative to 42 who hadn’t, making their numbers too small to effectively compare.

Lastly I organized the responses by gender only to discover a huge difference between responses to the adjustment questions based on the gender of the survey respondents. 16 students identified as male, 30 as female, and 1 as non-binary, and there were clear differences between how self-identified male and female first-gen sophomores answered the same questions about college adjustment. The questions gauging admissions process experiences showed little to no difference based on gender, however a major split occurred once questions moved into the

adjustment process. In response to the question on social spaces, 62.5% of male respondents indicated comfort in social spaces and at social events compared to only 26.67% of female respondents. The same pattern carries over to the question measuring comfort with administrators, to which 56.25% of male students answered affirmatively compared to only 16.67% of female students. On agreeing to forming a close relationship with at least one Professor/Teaching fellow the male/female split was 62.5% to 30%, indicating that gender was a much stronger predictor of specifically adjustment experiences amongst first-gen sophomores than other demographic dividers. The gender gap carried into the belonging question: with 81.25% of men agreeing to the statement “I felt like I belonged at Harvard” compared with 23.33% of female respondents. The responses as divided by gender are included in Appendix 5. Because of the strength of this variable, I avoided making large conclusions about the adjustment process based on my survey and instead turned to patterns in the qualitative data.

		The following questions ask you to reflect on your first year as a student at Harvard College. P... - I felt comfortable in social spaces and at social events.				The following questions ask you to reflect on your first year as a student at Harvard College. P... - I felt comfortable interacting with administrators.				The following questions ask you to reflect on your first year as a student at Harvard College. P... - I formed a close relationship with at least one Professor/Teaching fellow.			
		Strongly disagree, Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree, Strongly agree	Total	Strongly disagree, Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree, Strongly agree	Total	Strongly disagree, Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree, Strongly agree	Total
I self-identify as... (Choose all that apply)	Male	5 31.25%	1 6.25%	10 62.50%	16 100.00%	5 31.25%	2 12.50%	9 56.25%	16 100.00%	5 31.25%	1 6.25%	10 62.50%	16 100.00%
	Female	15 50.00%	7 23.33%	8 26.67%	30 100.00%	17 56.67%	8 26.67%	5 16.67%	30 100.00%	19 63.33%	2 6.67%	9 30.00%	30 100.00%
	Non-Binary/Genderqueer	1 100.00%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	1 100.00%	1 100.00%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	1 100.00%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	1 100.00%	1 100.00%
	Other	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	0 100.00%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	0 100.00%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	0 100.00%
	Total	21 44.68%	8 17.02%	18 38.30%	47 100.00%	23 48.94%	10 21.28%	14 29.79%	47 100.00%	24 51.06%	3 6.38%	20 42.55%	47 100.00%
A college access program is defined as a student-centered program providing supplemental academic...	Yes	11 50.00%	5 22.73%	6 27.27%	22 100.00%	11 50.00%	7 31.82%	4 18.18%	22 100.00%	16 36.36%	1 4.55%	13 59.09%	22 100.00%
	No	10 40.00%	3 12.00%	12 48.00%	25 100.00%	12 48.00%	3 12.00%	10 40.00%	25 100.00%	16 64.00%	2 8.00%	7 28.00%	25 100.00%
	Total	21 44.68%	8 17.02%	18 38.30%	47 100.00%	23 48.94%	10 21.28%	14 29.79%	47 100.00%	24 51.06%	3 6.38%	20 42.55%	47 100.00%

Figure 3: Cross-Tabs for student adjustment metrics organized by gender and college access program participation.

The most consistent impact of college access programs in college adjustment, shared by four of the interviewees, was a confidence boost. Michael who, as stated earlier, credited the conferences and scholarship programs that his college access programs had connected him to with much of his comfort in adjusting to campus, recognized his personal growth:

“I count my blessings every day because, believe it or not, I was a shy high school student but, at some point through these programs and through these experiences...when I came here I was, like, convinced that I was gonna be the loudest guy in the room. I was convinced that I was gonna have absolutely no shame to ask for anything that I needed. I was convinced that I was gonna do terribly, that I would face challenges that I wouldn’t be able to handle on my own so I had all these contingency plans with counselors back home who I was gonna talk to, all these different resources that I knew I was gonna tap

into, but it turns out I came out here—and I was actually laughing and I sent a letter back home because, a couple of the programs I did totally helped so, so much. I got to do the Academic Decathlon Program that was backed by 826LA, a nonprofit organization, that was helping us prepare to do interviews and prepare to do speeches. I got pretty good at talking and, you know, that’s something I’ve stuck with all this time...the summer between the year I graduated high school and started here I easily met a thousand people, because I was flying across the country—conference after conference after conference. The first one I went to was the Coca Cola conference in Atlanta, like in April. I felt so [expletive], I felt so terrible, I was like ‘I don’t belong here, what the [expletive] am I doing.’ By the seventh one I went to I was like ‘Hold my coat, let me introduce myself to everybody.’ It was a pretty big change and it was because all of these different programs. I was backed by enough organizations that I felt like I was privileged, it felt like I was prepared in a way the people around me weren’t and I was like ‘I know what It feels like to be uncomfortable, let’s see how I can try to make this better for everybody else.’”

For Michael, the early intervention of the programs and the confidence and hard speaking and networking skills they instilled him with played a fundamental role in his college adjustment process. He maintained old connections as well as new ones. James and Jessie too identified a confidence factor in having done the programs they did that carried them both in the admissions and adjustment processes. James identified his program as making him more confident as an individual in applying and also more independent:

“I would definitely say it made me a lot more confident in my abilities, if I got into this program and they think I can go to these top tier schools than I should definitely try. In general it kind of helped me open up a bit more and be more independent and try to do things on my own which was really helpful.”

Being away from home for three summers helped him bond with other students as well as get used to the smaller nuances of college adjustment like doing laundry, waking yourself up, and living away from home. For Jessie, a different program than Questbridge provided much of their adjustment support. They participated in a small program based at Stanford University that targets low-income Women in STEM. The program didn’t notify participants of their acceptance until after the admissions process was over, however it provided Jessie with a \$10,000/year scholarship and invited them to participate in a summer leadership program before their first year of college. Jessie summarized the impact of both Questbridge and this STEM program:

“I think they both definitely gave me increased confidence, one, Questbridge, in applying to schools and [the STEM Program] in coming here. And I think that particularly with [the STEM Program], I came here and there were all these students who had done fancy summer camps and college prep programs and things like that and if it wasn’t for [the STEM Program]...I would’ve been like “Wow I’ve literally done nothing at all,” so it gave me a lot of confidence in that regard. Particularly because — I don’t remember what the math worked out to — because they only accepted like 20 people...so it was a huge

confidence boost in coming here, much more so than Questbridge. Impact on my life: it did give me some hard skills I would say, but not much. I would say that for both of them, they both gave me some hard skills and some good advice but it wasn't, I think either would've been a lot more helpful for someone who's going to a university that wasn't as insane and just abnormal as Harvard is."

Jessie found that while both of their programs were less intensive, the Women in STEM program connected them with other low-income students of similar interests headed to college in the fall, provided a really helpful mentor, and gave them a sense of what college would be like going forward. Anna, similarly to Jessie, James, and Michael, reflected this sentiment of knowing what was coming because of her college access program, saying that, while her process was still difficult:

"LEDA helped me prepare. I learned the vocab basically, I learned what imposter syndrome was, right? I learned what it means to be a first-generation student in a really prestigious Ivy League school. So I came in knowing things are going to be tough and things might be tougher for me than perhaps other students who had parents go to the school or were better off. I was more aware of the time I would have, so that helped."

For Isabelle, who did not participate in a program tailored to the adjustment process like the other four, support in adjusting to college was largely sought out through cultural groups and the first-gen, low-income friends that she made in joining them. While the survey data for the college adjustment process wasn't conclusive, the qualitative data indicates that the majority of the college access program participants interviewed at minimum took from their programs a sense of confidence and increased preparedness moving forward into their respective first years of college. What changed the magnitude of the college access programs' impact on each student was the intensiveness of the individual program. For Michael and James, who had participated in their programs for years, there was a lasting impact. For Anna and Jessie, their later-intervention but more involved programs helped guide them through their first-year, but provided fewer hard skills for adjustment. For Isabelle, whose program was not adjustment focused and intervened late, the program had little impact on her adjustment process.

Conclusion

In surveying 47 first-gen, second-year students and interviewing 5 it is clear that college access programs do have a measurable impact on first-gen students at elite schools, however the extent of this impact has been shown to vary depending on the nature of the program. This

research was entered into with the expectation that students who participated in college access programs, when surveyed and interviewed, would demonstrate measurably more positive experiences applying and adjusting to college than their peers who did not participate. While this held true as to having a network of first-gen, low-income friends applying to schools at the same time, receiving essay assistance, and positively reviewing assistance from teachers, counselors, and family members there was little to no measurable differences in most other areas of these processes. The assistance and networks were contextualized by the interviewees who had bonded with fellow program participants online and in person and who had received, to varying degrees, assistance with their essays and different forms of support from their counselors, teachers, and families. Most surprisingly, my research shows that the college adjustment process did not appear to be seriously impacted by college access program participation, but instead by gender. Despite this lurking variable, the interviewees provided useful context as to the confidence their programs instilled in them, the information they gave them, and subsequent, varied effects the different programs had on their adjustment processes. Participants in early-intervention, intensive programs are instilled with social capital (networks, mentors) and cultural capital (understanding of college, imposter syndrome, etc.) that help them navigate the application and adjustment process, while participants in later-intervention, less extensive programs at the very least received social capital in the forms of peer networks and assistance with essays and applying.

From my research it is clear that more work needs to be done by sociologists of higher education in studying this field. I set out to, at a general level, understand the impact of college access programs on students — discovering that these programs do indeed have measurable impacts, but that the impact varies greatly depending on the program. Future research should be done on extensive versus less extensive programs in order to fully measure the impact that different college access programs are having on students' admissions and adjustment experiences. Additionally, my survey's findings on gender are more than just a lurking variable — they're a call to action to understand why first-gen women are reporting substantially more difficult times socially and institutionally adjusting to college than men.

I am not the first college student to credit college access programs with getting me into college and I will not be the last. So long as there are first-gen, low-income students seeking for assistance in applying to college, college access programs will have a market. These programs are revolutionizing the way that students apply to not just elite colleges and universities, but

higher education in general, and the results for different students are not always equal. In order to reconcile the stated missions of these programs that are attracting students and the actual benefits that they're providing, more research must be done from a sociological perspective on how college access programs impact the admissions processes of first-gen and low-income students.

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Appendix

I. Survey Questions

1. Please answer the following demographic information:

Class Year: 2022, 2021, 2020, 2019 (answer should be 2021)

I self-identify as...(Choose all that apply): male, female, queer/nonbinary, other (text option)

I self-identify as...(Choose all that Apply): Asian or Pacific Islander, Black or African American, Native American or Alaskan Native, White, Hispanic or Latinx, Middle Eastern of Arab, Mixed-Race, Other (text option)

Annual Family Income: less than \$40,000/yr, \$40,000-\$80,000/yr, \$80,000-\$125,000/yr, \$125,000-\$150,000/yr, \$250,000-\$500,000/yr, over \$500,000/yr

Secondary School Type: Private, Public charter, Public non-charter

2. A college access program is defined as a student-centered program providing supplemental academic and/or enrichment programs for primarily high school students. These services include, but are not limited to: providing information and assistance in college admissions, mentoring, counseling, college tours, advocacy, standardized test preparation, and assistance in writing college essays, filling out applications, and applying to college.

A few examples: Questbridge, the Leadership Enterprise for a Diverse America (LEDA), and CollegeBound.

As a high schooler did you participate in a College Access Program? If so, which one?

3. Applying to College:

Please consider the following statements and mark your response to each statement as best fits your experiences applying to college:

(Strongly disagree, Somewhat disagree, Neither agree nor disagree, Somewhat agree, or Strongly Agree)

I knew early in my high school career that I would apply to Harvard College.

I received significant advice/assistance from high school teachers and guidance counselors throughout the college admissions process.

I received useful advice/assistance from my family throughout the college admissions process.

I had a support system I could go to for help with the college admissions process.

I received assistance in writing and editing my college essays.

I had friends within my high school and my community applying to elite colleges and universities at the same time as me.

I had friends outside of my high school and community applying to elite colleges and universities at the same time as me.

I was familiar with Harvard's financial aid policies when I applied.

Feel free to explain or add context to any of your choices here:

4. First-Year Adjustment

The following questions ask you to reflect on your first year as a student at Harvard College. Please mark your response to each statement as best applies to your experiences as a first-year student:

(Strongly disagree, Somewhat disagree, Neither agree nor disagree, Somewhat agree, or Strongly Agree)

I had many friends on campus.

Many of my friends on campus identified as low-income and/or first-generation college students.

I regularly spoke with first-generation/low-income college students who attended other elite colleges and universities.

I felt comfortable in social spaces and at social events.

I felt comfortable interacting with administrators.

I felt comfortable raising my hand and speaking in class.

I felt comfortable reaching out to Professors/Teaching Fellows for help.

I formed a close relationship with at least one Professor/Teaching Fellow.

I felt like I belonged at Harvard.

II. Interview Questions

Tell me about your high school. What was your experience like? Did many students consider/go on to college? How about elite colleges? What was the overall atmosphere like?

Did you participate in a college access program (explain definition), what program did you participate in, and how did that program impact your admissions process?

- What were your college plans before the program? After the program?
- What assistance did the program provide you?
- Did the program introduce you to any new/important people?

What was the process of adjusting to College like for you?

- Did participating in the program impact how you adjusted to life, academics, etc. as a student at Harvard?
- Did you maintain connections with people from the program?
- Did it help in a classroom setting?

What was the overall impact of the program on your life? Does it still impact your life?

III. Consent Form for Interview

Dear [student],

I am taking a class on the sociology of higher education (SOCIOL 1104) and, for the final project, I am writing a paper on the impact of college access programs on the experiences of first-generation, low-income students in applying and adjusting to college.

I am reaching out to you because you recently indicated that you are interested in being interviewed about your experiences applying and adjusting to college. I would like to conduct one short, max. 30 minutes, interview at a time and place convenient for you. Your answers will be kept confidential and your name will not appear in any data records (transcripts), any information that could possibly identify you will be removed and no names will be used in the final paper. If you agree to be recorded, you will not be asked to identify yourself in the recordings. Immediately after the interview is conducted, a code will be generated to make your recording and any notes taken identifiable only to myself. This project is exempt from CUHS approval.

Please let me know if you would be willing to be interviewed and when you would be available.

Thank you,

Allison Scharmann

IV. Consent Form for Survey

My name is Allison Scharmann, and I am asking you to take part in my class research project for the course SOCIOL 1104 Higher Education: Institutions, Inequalities, and Controversies, in which I am an enrolled student this Fall 2018.

If you choose to participate, I ask that you complete this survey. This survey will help me learn more about the way college access programs impact admissions processes and first-year college adjustment for first-generation, low-income students.

You can skip questions that you do not want to answer or stop the survey at any time. Being in this study is voluntary. The survey is anonymous, and no one will be able to link your answers back to you. Please do not include your name or other information that could be used to identify you in the survey responses.

If you consent to this anonymous survey please click the Accept button to begin.

Please close the webpage if you do not want to participate.

Questions? Please contact the SOCIOL 1104 course instructor Dr. Maja Klemencic at manjaklemencic@g.harvard.edu.

V. Cross-Tabs of survey responses divided between CAP participation, Race, Gender, and Secondary School Type:

A Google Drive Folder containing these documents can be accessed using the following link, please email allisonscharmann@college.harvard.edu for inquiries.

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1x4_p1SrBqWXTx1ARSSSts12QmmaUtLHs4?usp=sharing

Survey responses are available organized by college access program participation (with responses expanded or responses collapsed), race, gender, and secondary school.