

**Beyond Access:  
Exploring the Experiences of  
First-Generation College  
Students of Color Participating  
in a Comprehensive College  
Completion Program**

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Capstone Project

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in Leadership and Learning in Organizations at the Peabody College of Education and Human Development of Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee, USA

August 2021

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### ***Dedications, Acknowledgements, & Gratitude***

*“Bringing people together is what I call ‘ubuntu’, which means ‘I am because we are.’ Far too often people think of themselves as just individuals, separated from one another, whereas you are connected and what you do affects the whole world. **When you do well, it spreads out; it is for the whole humanity.**” – Desmond Tutu*

This capstone is dedicated first to my Ancestors, whose blood, sweat, and tears paved the way to make this moment possible. Your strength, courage, and perseverance that has been passed down through generations, allowed me to be the first in our lineage to reach this milestone. To my father, Charles Little, father-in-love Arthur McKinney, mother-in-love Rutha L. Carnegie, grandmother, Mary E. Jones, and great-grandmother Ruby Smith – I honor your legacies with this work.

To my husband Broderick and two children Braeden and Leia, thank you for being on this journey with me! I would not have been able to do this without your love, patience, understanding, and affirmation. I love you beyond verbal and written articulation.

To my mom, Elaine Little you have always pushed me beyond what I have ever thought was possible and have always been there to encourage me every step of the way and keep me grounded! God knew exactly what He was doing when he made you!

To my siblings, Deon, Taiya, and Tynish – thank you for putting up with my middle child antics from the 600 block of 19<sup>th</sup> in Maywood until now! You have always had my back, supported me, loved me, and let me be ME! We are and will always be The Littles!

To my godchildren, nieces, and nephews, just because I am the first, does not mean I should be the last! I hope that by example I have demonstrated to you that ANYTHING is possible, and YOU CAN DO ANYTHING! I love each of you to the moon!

To my Granny T, cousins, aunts, uncles, in-laws, godparents, and mentors thank you for being my hype squad and constant source of support! To my tribe, the AMAZING group of women that push me to be the best version of myself – I thank you and value our bonds!

To the LLO Cohort 4, especially my group text crew, it has been an honor to be on this journey with you! To every professor at Peabody that has contributed to my knowledge expansion, thank you!

To Dr. Eve Rifkin, I started and ended with you! You are NEVER getting rid of me! Thank you for pushing me, supporting me, and believing in me! You are what and who I needed!

To the program staff at All-In Milwaukee, thank you for agreeing to partner with me and supporting me every step of the way! To the program scholars, thank you for trusting me with your experiences and allowing me to amplify your voices!

**THANK YOU GOD!**

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## Executive Summary

This capstone explored the experiences of first-generation college students of color who participate in All-In Milwaukee's comprehensive college completion and career placement program. All-In Milwaukee is entering into its third year of existence and will accept its third cohort of students in preparation for a Fall 2021 entrance into college. As the number of All-In Milwaukee program scholars increases, organization leadership seeks to understand the experiences of students at their partner colleges and universities. This insight and understanding can inform future program design and codify the expectations of university partners as the organization expands and scales impact.

Given that the students that All-In Milwaukee serves are 100% students of color and 95% first-generation college students, it was important to critically explore their experiences considering race and belonging as foundational to this study. With a focus on understanding the experiences of All-In Milwaukee program scholars and the factors that might impact their persistence, critical race theory was used as the central framework. It would be impossible to fully understand and deconstruct the experiences of these students without exploring the implications of race. The sense of belonging theory was used as a complimentary framework to understand how the experiences of program scholars at university partners either support or undermine the sense of belonging for program scholars. The community cultural wealth model was also used as a complimentary framework to explore how the cultural assets, cultural wealth, and multiple strengths that students of color intrinsically possess are leveraged as a part of All-In Milwaukee's comprehensive college completion and career placement program.

Based upon the problem of practice, organizational context, literature review, and conceptual framework, the following research questions were generated to guide this study:

1. How do first-generation students of color experience college at All-In Milwaukee's partner colleges and universities?
2. How does a comprehensive college completion program support first-generation students of color to be successful at partner colleges and universities?
3. How might All-In Milwaukee leverage the findings of this research to inform program design and expectations of university partners to ensure persistence and successful matriculation for program participants?

This study utilized an exploratory sequential mixed methods approach that combined quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection to answer the study questions. First a survey was administered to program scholars to get a general sense of their feelings of belonging. This was followed by individual interviews with program scholars to probe more deeply into aspects of belonging and understand the college experience from their perspective. The final phase of data collection included individual interviews with four members of the All-In Milwaukee program staff to understand how the organization's program, practices, and policies supported first-generation students of color to be successful at partner colleges and universities.

Findings from this research study established that persisting as a first-generation student of color at All-In Milwaukee's partner colleges and universities is a triumph but is also filled with challenges for program scholars. Furthermore, persistence at All-In Milwaukee's partner colleges and universities requires strategic systems of support to overcome the challenges that program scholars face. Another finding aligned with Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth theory that highlights the invaluable wealth of life experiences and knowledge that students of color bring from their homes and communities into college. Family, faith, culture, and community are

critical aspects that keep program scholars persisting at partner colleges and universities; however, family can also be a barrier. Finally, there is a greater need for All-In Milwaukee to focus on equity, diversity, and inclusion with partner colleges and universities.

Informed by the findings, five recommendations were proposed to All-In Milwaukee. First, All-In Milwaukee should enhance the scope and sequence for program scholar workshops to address the social, emotional, and cultural needs of program scholars. Second, All-In Milwaukee should require each program scholar to select a college journey partner – another program scholar attending the same school who will support, encourage, and hold them accountable for persisting. Third, a parent engagement component or Parent University should be developed as a part of All-In Milwaukee’s comprehensive program to intentionally engage parents in their student’s college experience. Fourth, All-In Milwaukee should have program scholars collaboratively engage in a social action or advocacy project at their college or university. This would help to create meaningful intergroup interactions with a focus on coalition building among program scholars on each campus. An intentional focus on improving the campus environment could lead to greater sense of agency, belonging, and connectedness on campus. Finally, All-In Milwaukee should incorporate annual accountability reports as a part of the step back meetings with college and university partner liaisons. The predetermined metrics would hold university partners accountable for student experience and outcomes beyond admittance and enrollment.

## Introduction

**“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.” – Marianne Williamson**

First-generation college students are students whose parents did not earn a two- or four-year college degree. Students who are entering college as the first in their families represent approximately 56% of students who are currently attending college in the United States (Whitley et al., 2018). Notably, first-generation students tend to come from families that are categorized as limited or low-income and often attended high schools with insufficient resources (Cataldi et al., 2018). Insufficient resources lead to insufficient academic preparation and puts first-generation students at a disadvantage when faced with the rigor of college (Cataldi et al., 2018). While college access is increasing, significant gaps still exist in college persistence and degree attainment for first-generation college students. Because they are not able to glean from the college experiences of their parents, first-generation students must contend with structural and institutional barriers in their pursuit for higher education (Engle & Tinto, 2008).

Black and Latinx first-generation college students in particular experience structural and institutional barriers when attending Predominately White Institutions (PWIs) - challenges that they may not anticipate and are not prepared to navigate. Although not an official classification, PWI is a term used to refer to a college or university where 50% or more of the students enrolled identify as being White (Lomotey, 2010). The pressure to fit into the mold of the dominant culture narrative can be overwhelming and taxing, creating undue stress for a student trying to navigate new surroundings (Bui, 2002). As a result, the institutional environment is an important factor in supporting first-generation students. The way that students perceive the college or university and its acceptance and reception of non-White students determines if the environment can be trusted and serves as an indicator of persistence (Littleton, 2001).

College access and completion programs have emerged across the country in response to the lack of college access and significantly lower persistence rates for Black and Latinx students specifically. There are various models of college access and completion programs aimed at increasing college enrollment for traditionally underserved student populations. One such program is All-In Milwaukee, which launched in 2018 to have a direct positive impact on college graduation rates and increase the pipeline of diverse talent in the Milwaukee area. The need for college completion programs such as All-In Milwaukee is not just about getting low-income, first-generation students of color into highly regarded institutions of higher education or simply addressing their financial needs. These programs are also designed to provide support for minority students and other vulnerable populations when navigating the college environment. As evidenced in existing literature, Black and Latinx students of color attending PWIs have to contend with challenges that White students who attend the same schools do not have to face. These challenges lead to a significant gap in college persistence and degree attainment (Bui, 2002).

Since the primary goal of college access and completion programs is to increase access, persistence, and completion rates, it is important to understand the college experiences of the students that they support. This project seeks to understand the experiences of first-generation students of color who participate in All-In Milwaukee's comprehensive college completion program. Gaining a deep understanding of these students' experiences at partner institutions which all happen to be PWIs, will inform ongoing program design and expectations for university partnerships to ensure successful matriculation for All-In Milwaukee's program scholars. This project also seeks to understand the perspectives of the staff regarding programmatic decision making.



## Organizational Context

All-In Milwaukee is a comprehensive college completion and career placement program located in Milwaukee, WI. The program model includes intensive advising and career development coupled with financial aid and affordable university costs. The aim of the program is to ensure that the participants successfully complete college and matriculate into the Milwaukee workforce. At the time of this capstone project, All-In Milwaukee was in its second year of program implementation, supporting 105 students enrolled in 1 of 7 official college partners. Two additional non-partner universities were also included where exceptions were made for two program scholars.

Students who are accepted into the All-In Milwaukee program are required to have a 3.0 or higher cumulative GPA through the first semester of their senior year. They must demonstrate leadership and services as evidenced by involvement in their school, church, community, employment, and/or family. Students who are part of the All-In Milwaukee program come from families with limited income, identify as a student of color, and are from Milwaukee. Of the students who are currently affiliated with the program, 95% of them have broken the college access barrier by being the first in their family to attend. All-In Milwaukee refers to the students that they support as “scholars”; in keeping with the organization, I will refer to the students who participate in the All-In Milwaukee program as program scholars and students interchangeably throughout this capstone report. The demographic breakdown of All-In Milwaukee program scholars across its two years is depicted in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*All-In Milwaukee Program Demographics*

	<b>Total Program Scholars</b>	<b>Cohort 1 Incoming Freshman Class of 2019</b>	<b>Cohort 2 Incoming Freshman Class of 2020</b>
<b>Asian American</b>	12	5	7
<b>Black or African American</b>	26	9	17
<b>Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish Origin</b>	61	22	39
<b>Middle Eastern/North African</b>	5	1	4
<b>Native American/Alaskan Native</b>	1	0	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>68</b>

*(Source: All-In Milwaukee)*

At the time of this capstone project, there were four members of the program staff: the Executive Director, the Program Director, and two Scholar Advisors. All-In Milwaukee scholar advisors provide support beginning with orientation in the spring of the students’ senior year in high school, through college graduation, and on to career placement. Program scholars meet in-person with their advisor at least once per month and come together as a cohort monthly. Scholar advisors support academic and career development as well as provide support for a wide range of social and emotional needs. In addition to receiving wrap-around support from scholar advisors, program scholars receive support from a career mentor who guides their career development. Scholars also receive support from the donor partner who is making a financial investment into their college success.

One of the eligibility requirements for All-In Milwaukee is that a potential program scholar must enroll full-time in one of the seven partner universities. These universities are predominately white institutions located throughout the state of Wisconsin. Table 2 shows the

distribution of program scholars across the partner universities; although nine are shown, only seven (A-H) are considered ongoing partners that will continue to enroll students from future All-In Milwaukee cohorts.

**Table 2**

*All-In Milwaukee University Partner Enrollment Demographics*

	# of All-In Milwaukee Program Participants	Total Undergrad Enrollment	% White non-Hispanic	% Black non-Hispanic	% Hispanic/Latinx	% Asian or Pacific Islander	% American Indian or Alaskan Native
University A	42	8,515	68.4%	3.9%	14.1%	6.8%	0.2%
University B	38	32,399	68.1%	1.9%	5.4%	7.1%	0.2%
University C	9	21,107	66.7%	6.7%	12.1%	6.7%	0.3%
University D	6	1,105	42.4%	13.4%	32.2%	4.5%	0.7%
University E	6	2,960	79.5%	1.5%	7.3%	3.6%	0.3%
University F	1	11,024	81.7%	3.9%	8.0%	1.6%	0.1%
University G	1	2,566	68.9%	2.1%	7.6%	5.1%	0.2%
University H	1	2530	1.7%	81.0%	4.5%	3.8%	0.0%
University I	1	23,482	73.7%	2.9%	7.9%	4.2%	0.2%

(Source: Scholarships.com, 2021; All-In Milwaukee)

University H is designated as a Historically Black College and University (HBCU), and University I is another PWI. Both universities are located outside of the state of Wisconsin. Exceptions were made for two Black female scholars from All-In Milwaukee’s first cohort who currently attend college outside of the state because of their significant academic achievement in high school and potential for success as an All-In Milwaukee program scholar. Although these exceptions were made during the inaugural year, All-In Milwaukee made a strategic decision to only build cohorts at universities in Wisconsin to allow for regularly scheduled in-person visits from All-In Milwaukee program staff and to ensure effective support for program scholars. There was also a focus on deepening the partnerships with select universities and building

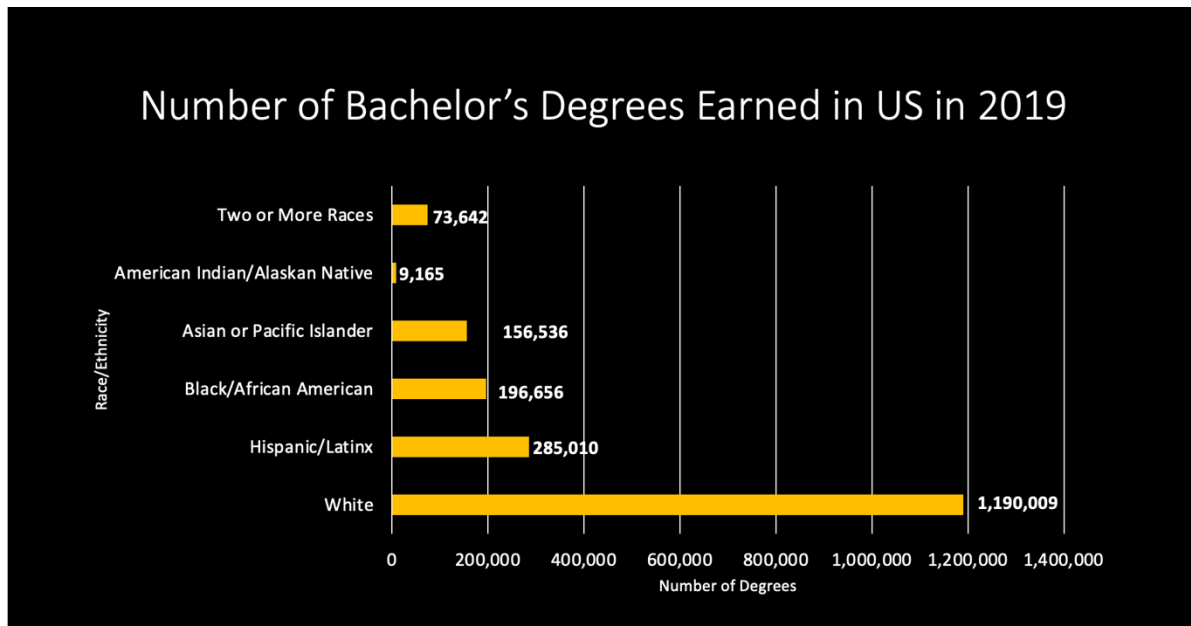
cohorts at universities where a partnership could be established. All-In Milwaukee has a collaborative partnership with their university partners but acknowledges the challenging reality that far too few students of color are enrolling in college and that there is a graduation attainment gap between White students and students of color at every partner university. All-In Milwaukee seeks to reverse this trend and ensure that their program scholars persist and successfully complete college at its partner universities.

### Area of Inquiry/Problem of Practice

In 2019, the number of bachelor's degrees earned by Whites compared to all other ethnic and racial groups was significant as shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**

*Bachelor's Degree Attainment by Race*



*(Source: Statista.com, 2021)*

This gap in degree attainment is a clarion call to action to address the state of emergency as it relates to equity and access in K-12 and higher education. Although this is a national problem, the city of Milwaukee specifically is grappling with the ripple effect of education inequity.

There is a growing wealth gap, and a lack of diverse leadership that has plagued this midwestern city for decades. Blacks, Asians, and Latinx people make up 65% of the population in Milwaukee but are grossly underrepresented in Milwaukee's college graduate workforce, positions in management, and business ownership. According to All-In Milwaukee, the city has one of the highest racial achievement gaps in the nation, graduating only 62% of its high school students. Among those who graduate, only 40% will enroll in college, and only 12% percent will earn a two- or four-year degree (All-In Milwaukee, n.d.). The lack of degree attainment perpetuates the wealth gap in the city considering 35% of jobs in Milwaukee require a college degree and over 60% require some post-secondary education (All-In Milwaukee, n.d.). Essentially, All-In Milwaukee exists *because* of disparities in college access and completion.

The Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce (MMAC) is focused on ensuring that Milwaukee becomes a more equitable city but acknowledges the lack of diversity within management positions in the private sector as a barrier that contributes to the wealth gap in this metro area (MMAC.org, 2021). The Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce has set ambitious goals in collaboration with businesses within the city to address the lack of Black and Latinx representation in the workplace. By 2025, their goal is to increase overall diversity by 15% and increase diversity in management positions by 25% (MMAC.org, 2021). To meet these ambitious goals, a diverse pipeline of qualified candidates will be necessary. The dire need for diversity in the Milwaukee professional sector emphasizes the mission for All-In Milwaukee to ensure that students of color can successfully matriculate through their partner universities and be prepared to enter the Milwaukee workforce.

All-In Milwaukee could be a key contributor to the diverse talent pipeline in the Milwaukee area by ensuring that program scholars successfully matriculate and attain degrees.

As All-In Milwaukee enters its third year of existence and prepares to welcome its third cohort of program scholars, the organization seeks to critically examine the impact of their program design and execution, university partnership collaboration, and its ability to effectively grow and scale impact in the city of Milwaukee. But the concern that is paramount is ensuring persistence and degree attainment for program scholars.

According to 2020 data compiled by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), workers over the age of 25 with a high school diploma had median weekly earnings of \$781 compared to those with a bachelor's degree with median weekly earnings of \$1305 (BLS.org, 2021). As All-In Milwaukee supports their program scholars to and through college, they are simultaneously positioning these first-generation college students to be the first in their families to eradicate the wealth gap in their communities.

### **Literature Review**

Historically, cognitive variables have been used as predictors of academic outcomes for college students. Some prevailing research contends that this is a flawed approach when it comes to predicting academic outcomes for first-generation students of color (Tinto, 1987). Non-cognitive variables like personal characteristics and environmental factors are becoming increasingly more accurate in predicting how first-generation students achieve academic success in higher education (Buie, 2002; Ting, 1998). Tinto (1987) challenged the assumption that cognitive variables were an accurate predictor of college persistence and retention. He instead asserted that students were more likely to remain in college if they were fully integrated academically and invested socially in the institution. Noticeably absent from early research regarding retention was the focus on first-generation and Black students leaving a void regarding

the unique experiences of students of color in higher education (Ryland et al., 1994). There is a growing body of research as it relates specifically to the experiences of Black and Latinx first-generation college students attending PWIs, and specifically how those experiences influence retention and persistence. This literature review seeks to highlight some of the non-cognitive and non-academic factors that inform the experiences of, and influence college success for students of color who are first-generation college students. This literature review further examines the role of college access and completion programs as it relates to persistence and degree attainment for first-generation students of color.

### **First Generation College Students**

“First-generation college student” is a term used to refer to a college student who is first in their immediate family to attend college. Current research data has shown that access to college is not equitable for students of color, students who come from families with limited income, and students who are first in their family to attend college. Students who meet all these criteria tend to face unique challenges and significant hurdles as they break through the cycle of poverty and create better opportunities afforded to them by receiving a college education (Ting, 1998). According to the National Poverty Center, only 12% of students who come from the lowest wealth group graduate from college (Pfeffer & Schoeni, 2016).

College degrees are regarded as the gateway to reducing poverty and closing the wealth gap for people of color (Bui, 2002), but significant gaps in college access, persistence, and degree attainment continue to exist. According to 2019 U.S. Census data, adults with a bachelor’s degree or higher had the lowest levels of poverty compared to those who did not have a college degree. Of the adults who reported earnings at or below the poverty line, 26% had less than a high school diploma, 35% had a high school diploma or equivalent, 26% had some college

or an associate degree, and 14% had a bachelor's degree or higher (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). In 2019, The Institute for Policy Studies analyzed the data from the Federal Reserve and determined that approximately 28% of Black households and 26% of Latinx households had negative wealth in 2019 (Inequality.org, 2021). Black and Latinx families are, essentially, one economic setback away from financial tragedy as they live paycheck to paycheck with no cash reserve or savings. The lack of a cash reserve or savings can cripple a Black or Latinx family if any unexpected expenses arise. As a result, first-generation college students often carry the weight of lifting their families out of poverty and pursue college to get a better job and be in a better position to financially support their families (Saenz et al., 2007). First-generation college students of color tend to place greater importance on giving back to their family financially and bringing honor to their family through attainment of a college degree (Bui, 2002).

For first-generation college students, gaining access to higher education is just the beginning. Once the student arrives on campus, they often must contend with classism, racism, and other forms of oppression because of their marginalized identities (Vaccaro & Newman, 2016). The academic setting becomes a place to prove their value and worth to counter false assumptions and deficit thinking regarding their ability and potential (Macias, 2013). Often, first-generation college students find themselves in unfamiliar and privileged spaces that are not affirming, nurturing, or supportive (Pyne & Means, 2013). Terenzini et al. (1996) contend that collectively, first-generation college students have a more difficult transition from high school to college than their peers. In addition to confronting the anxieties and challenges that any college student usually feels, first-generation college students also struggle with the cultural and social transitions that are associated with entering higher education (Terenzini et al., 1996).



## **Family - Letting Go While Staying Connected**

Families play a significant role in influencing the success of first-generation college students. First-generation college students often feel the tension to negotiate between their families and home communities and college (Gloria & Castellanos, 2012). Azmitia et al. (2018) found that first-generation college students felt disconnected from their home and communities. The inability to discuss their college experiences with family and friends left these students less likely to receive the social support that they needed from family and friends. Research suggests that feelings of guilt or stress can surface for first-generation students due to their pursuit of a college education although their motivation is to be successful for their families (Tate et al., 2013).

London's (1989) findings demonstrate how first-generation students struggled to balance college and home. Students either experienced feeling bound and delegated, delegated, or expelled and delegated. First-generation students who experienced feelings of being bound and delegated struggled with how to care for and remain connected to family while receiving messages from their family that going to college was important. There were expectations from the family to participate in activities at home, but also wanted the college student to study and be successful academically (London, 1989). The mixed messages although unintentional, contributed to feelings of guilt and the unnecessary pressure to choose between family and college.

Students who experienced feelings of being delegated took on the pressure of breaking through academic and financial barriers for their families by being the first in the family to attend college. While the desire to attend college was present, the amount of pressure placed upon delegated first-generation students by their parents and families created doubts about their

independence and personal identity (London, 1989). Expelled and delegated students essentially felt pushed away from their families and excluded because they were attending college.

Feelings of guilt and isolation occurred when students could not travel home from college for holidays or special family events. As a result, students felt isolated both at home and at college (London, 1989).

In addition to navigating the balance of college and home life, first-generation college students often struggled with how their family viewed them given their developing college identities (Covarrubias et al., 2019). Often times, first-generation college students provide support for their families and play a role in maintaining the household. In some cases, first-generation college students take on multiple roles in their family, providing emotional and financial support, being a caretaker for family members, and sometimes serving as the family advocate and translator. The inability to fulfill these additional duties tends to be a primary source of guilt for first-generation college students and has an impact on their decision to attend and persist in college (Covarrubias et al., 2019).

### **Community Assets of First-Generation College Students**

First-generation college students are often framed from a deficit perspective, highlighting the many challenges that these students face as they navigate through college. While the challenges faced by first-generation college students are indeed barriers to college success, students of color are able to persist in higher education spaces despite institutional and structural racism because of the cultural and community assets that they bring to education (Yosso, 2005). The assets that first-generation students of color bring to higher education may not be valued by those who are a part of the dominant society, but these assets highlight the priceless commodity of the cultures that exist within people of color.

Yosso (2005) identified six forms of capital that contribute to “cultural wealth” which, if utilized, could have a positive impact on education for students of color. The ability to maintain hope for the future despite barriers refers to **aspirational capital**. **Linguistic capital** includes the multiple forms of language and communication skills that students possess. **Familial capital** refers to kinship ties and connections and the sense of community history, memory, and cultural intuition and traditions that people of color can leverage. **Social capital** reflects the networks within the community that include people and community resources that assist in navigating through institutions. The ability to successfully maneuver through institutions that were intentionally not designed for the advancement of people of color is an example of **navigational capital**. The final form of capital is **resistance capital** which is essentially the knowledge and skills that are developed because of the need to challenge inequities. Leveraging these various forms of cultural capital can have a positive impact for students of color.

### **College Experience for Students of Color at PWIs**

Attending college as a first-generation student can present barriers to college success. When race is also a factor, additional challenges to persist and successfully matriculate emerge. Unfortunately, more in-depth research that specifically provide an exploration into the experiences of students of color at PWIs is still needed. There is still a significant gap in understanding for universities to meet the complex and diverse needs of this student population. Based upon the existing research, scholars contend that at PWIs, the experiences of racial minority students on campus are noticeably different that those of White students on the same campuses (Fries-Britt, 1997; Jagers & Iverson, 2012). Black students often struggle with reconciling their racial and academic identities on campus and in their communities (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002). Latinx students face similar pressure to submit to gender and family roles that

are customary in Latino culture (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009). The unique issues that students of color face tend to shape their experiences at PWIs and influence their decision to persist.

In a Fischer (2007) study, the experiences of students of color at PWIs were explored to better understand the perceptions of a negative racial climate on campus. While the study concluded that students of color had higher incidents of reported discrimination, prejudice faculty and staff, and negative in-class experiences, the difference in perception among racial/ethnic lines was notable. The data collection for the study used a six-point Likert scale where six was the highest, to measure the perception of Students of Color at PWIs. An analysis of the data revealed that Black/African American students had an average perception of 5.02 related to negative campus racial environment, followed by Asian American students with a 3.00 average perception, and Latinx students who had a 2.96, average perception of a negative campus racial environment. Their perceptions scores were compared to White students who had a 1.57 negative perception, indicating the least negative perception of campus climate (Fischer, 2007).

The college experience for Black students at PWIs can be particularly disconcerting. Students in the Harvey et al. (2004) study described feelings of disregard related to decisions that were made on campus. They felt that their perspectives were not validated or reflected on campus. They expressed frustrations of being the only Black person in class and as a result, the spokesperson for the Black race. Students felt the fatigue of having to justify their presence to White students and sometimes faculty. Similarly, students in a study conducted by Fries-Britt and Turner (2002) described feeling isolated because there were a limited number of Black faculty, staff, and administrators on campus which led to negative perceptions of cultural validation. Negative perceptions of the racial climate on campus decreases the level of

satisfaction that students of color have with PWIs and can increase the likelihood of them leaving college prior to graduating (Fischer, 2007).

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) connected critical race theory (CRT) with education and challenged racial inequities in the K-12 education space. They critiqued the educational system contending that racism and White supremacy in education were co-conspirators in educational inequities (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Other scholars have extended Ladson-Billings and Tate's work to explore critical race theory in higher education, using it as a framework and deconstructive tool to address college access, curriculum, policy, faculty experience, and students experience (Bernal, 2002; Solórzano, 1998). Education spaces provide a key setting in which issues of race inequity and the presence of institutionalized racism should be examined and challenged (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Tate, 1997). Given the seminal work of Ladson-Billings and Tate, exploring the experiences of students of color in higher education requires deconstructing those experiences using a framework that centers on critical race theory.

### **A Sense of Belonging**

A sense of belonging in college has been researched extensively to understand how belonging is associated with student outcomes and college success (Hausman et al., 2007). A sense of belonging is often used to express how connected a student feels to their college campus community or to other students and faculty at their college (Tinto, 1993). While feeling a sense of belonging is important for all students, exploring the concept of belonging is critical to understand the nuanced experiences of students of color as it relates to retention (Strayhorn, 2012). The importance of exploring belonging for students of color in environments where there is a tendency for them to feel marginalized or unsupported is paramount (Freeman et al., 2007). Focusing on belonging gives credence to the influence that race, ethnicity, and culture have on

the overall college experience, and thereby impacts academic outcomes, persistence, and retention (Strayhorn, 2012). However, a siloed focus on addressing academic ability and preparation will not contribute to solving the gap in persistence rates for students of color (Cabrera et al., 1999). Instead, a keen and intentional focus on understanding the cultural, social, and even psychological factors that influence retention and persistence rates is necessary to begin to unpack and address the inequities and disparities that exist (Hurtado & Carter, 1997).

When students feel a sense of belonging, they feel affirmed, valued, and respected by their college campus community at large (Strayhorn, 2012). This sense of belonging must not only include but extend beyond “counter-spaces” – places where people of shared identities can come together and find refuge from social and institutional oppression, like Black Student Unions or Latinx Students Unions (Keels, 2019). This sense of belonging should be evident in the quality, sincerity, and authenticity of the relationships and connections that are established with administrators, faculty, staff, peers (Maestas et al., 2007). When students do not feel a connection or a sense of belonging, there are negative consequences – decreased motivation, lower academic achievement, and potential departure from college (Maestas et al., 2007). Strayhorn (2012) asserted that the sense of belonging was one of the main reasons that students decided to leave college; this has serious implications for students of color.

Given the increase in diversity at PWIs, there is a pressing need to understand and explore the sense of belonging and experiences of students of color (Hausmann et al., 2009). This struggle for belonging is often rooted in the inability to find opportunities that are culturally relevant or authentically inclusive in majority White spaces (Harper & Quaye, 2009). Studies conducted by Fleming (1984) and Fries-Britt and Turner (2002) specifically explored the experiences of Black students attending both HBCUs and PWIs and compared the impact of

those experiences. The findings from both studies highlight the social and academic difficulties that Black students face at PWIs – particularly the feelings of isolation, lack of support, and tokenism. In contrast, students felt validated, supported, and connected at HBCUs (Fries-Brit and Turner, 2002).

### **College Access and Support Programs**

President Lyndon Johnson’s War on Poverty and the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 established federal TRIO programs to improve opportunities and increase access for marginalized groups. TRIO programs, focused on federal outreach and student services, and currently operates eight programs that are aimed at assisting limited-income, first-generation college students and individuals with disabilities to successfully matriculate from middle-school to postbaccalaureate programs (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). High-quality college access programs are essential to helping students navigate the admissions process, but they also prepare students academically, socially, and emotionally for college. This support often impacts the likelihood of students successfully completing their degree.

The development of national and local external college access programs has increased to meet the growing demand for college access for marginalized groups. External college access program models are developed in response to the needs of their targeted student population and further informed by who the program collaborates and partners with. Some external college access programs are funded at the federal level while others depend on the philanthropic community and non-profit organizations to provide the resources needed to fund the program. External college access programs are usually delivered in three models as described by Lieber (2009) and shown in Table 3.

**Table 3:**

*External College Access Program Delivery Models*

Program Delivery Model	Characteristics	Examples
<b>Out-of-School-Time Programs</b>	Programs that tend to be more “student-centered and follow and support individual students who may or may not attend the same school.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Posse Foundation</li> <li>• The Harlem Center for Education</li> <li>• Sponsor-a-Scholar</li> <li>• UCLA Outreach</li> </ul>
<b>In-School and Out-of-School Time Programs</b>	Year-round programs where organizations partner with a school to provide services to a group of students during the school day with additional time spent after school, on weekends, and during the summer.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• GEAR UP</li> <li>• The I Have a Dream Foundation</li> </ul>
<b>In-School Collaborative Programs</b>	Programs that are embedded in the school and external partners train school staff to facilitate some key components of the program during the school.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• AVID</li> <li>• Puente Project</li> <li>• College</li> </ul>

*(Source: Lieber, 2009)*

Students of color often rely on these programs to provide essential college information, assistance navigating the application process, and guidance for completing financial-aid applications (Lieber, 2009). College access programs also provide students with the skills and supports necessary to increase the likelihood of college completion (Lieber, 2009).

College access programs serve as gateways to higher education for students of color; particularly those who will be the first in their family to attend college. Although there are benefits to college access programs that particularly target underrepresented and marginalized groups, these programs often face scrutiny due to a lack of external evaluations that validate their effectiveness and impact (Harvey, 2008). Researchers agree that the absence of such programs would greatly impact college access and degree attainment for marginalized groups of students.



Harvey (2008) asserts,

“the potential elimination of programs like Upward Bound, Talent Search, and GEAR-UP is disturbing, for such an action could have potentially far-reaching and long-lasting negative effects on African American boys and girls, but the impact on boys could be especially problematic. Already facing a myriad of social factors that discourage academic attainment, such as peer pressure, uncertain employment opportunities, and substandard instructional preparation, many of these young men would see their chances of attending college substantially diminished without these kinds of talent development programs.” (p. 979)

As predominately White institutions seek to increase diversity of their student population, they are also starting to rely heavily on college access programs to bring in students that their traditional methods of recruitment might not be able to reach.

### **Conceptual Framework**

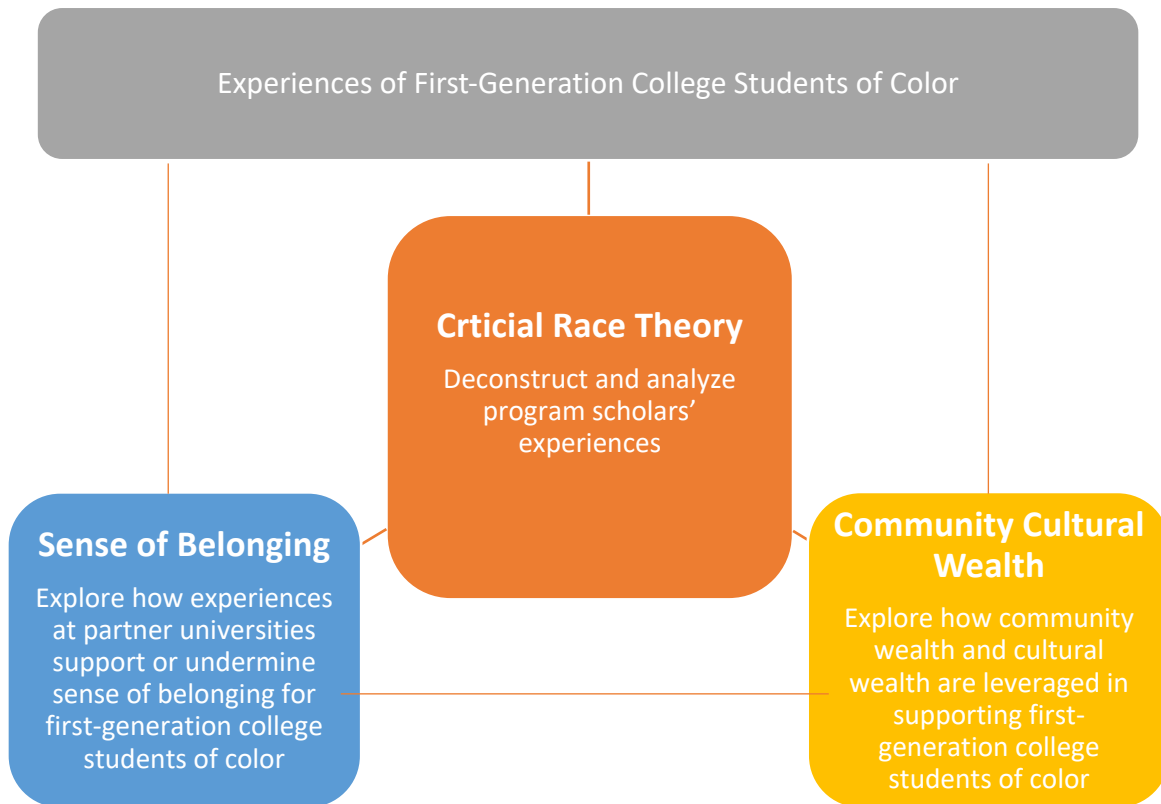
With a focus on understanding the experiences of All-In Milwaukee program scholars and the factors that might impact their college persistence, critical race theory is used as the central framework. It would be impossible and to some degree, irresponsible, to fully understand and deconstruct the experiences of these students without exploring the implications of race. With regard to race, the sense of belonging theory is used as a complimentary framework to understand how the experiences of program scholars at university partners either support or undermine the sense of belonging for program scholars. The community cultural wealth model is also used as a complimentary framework to explore how the cultural assets, cultural wealth, and

multiple strengths that students of color intrinsically possess are leveraged as a part of All-In Milwaukee’s comprehensive college completion and career placement program.

Figure 2: *Conceptual Framework* offers a visual depiction of how these three frameworks operate in tandem to fully deconstruct and understand the stories and experiences of first-generation college students of color, as well as those of the program leadership and staff who are committed to supporting them.

**Figure 2**

*Conceptual Framework*



This conceptual framework positions critical race theory as the central theoretical framework for this study used in conjunction with the sense of belonging and community cultural wealth

models to consider issues of race and culture in higher education and better understand the experiences of All-In Milwaukee Scholars at partner universities.

### **Critical Race Theory Applied to Education**

Critical race theory (CRT) emerged in the 1970s from the field of Critical Legal Studies as a movement aimed at studying and interrogating the relationship between race, racism, and power (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). The primary goal of CRT was to call for justice against inequity and the conditions that inequity created for marginalized people by giving voice to their experiences. It further aimed to establish the commonality of racism and emphasized the idea that institutional racism is at the center of inequities in academic achievement, income, and socioeconomic status (Briscoe & Khalifa, 2015).

Besides its usage as a social deconstructive tool, CRT is frequently used as a framework to critically analyze racial discrimination in the field of education. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) contends that CRT can be used by educational scholars to explain educational inequity and its impact on students of color. The central tenets of critical race theory applied to the field of education include five themes that can be applied when exploring experiences of students of color. The five themes are: (1) the centrality and intersectionality of race and racism; (2) challenging the dominant ideology; (3) commitment to social justice; (4) experiential knowledge and voice; and (5) interdisciplinary perspectives (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001).

The **centrality and intersectionality of race and racism** highlights understanding individual experiences through the lens of race and racism and how those experiences are impacted by individual and environmental characteristics. **Challenging the dominant ideology** views the neutrality of race, color blindness, and equal opportunity as false narratives.

**Commitment to social justice** highlights the importance of eradicating various forms of

oppression and empowering marginalized communities in educational contexts and spaces.

**Experiential knowledge and voice** give credence the lived experiences of people of color and the power in narratives and storytelling to understand and analyze those experiences.

**Interdisciplinary perspectives** place an emphasis on analyzing race and racism from a historical and contemporary perspective through different perspectives and epistemologies.

Critical race theory is a central framework for this study, providing a deconstructive tool to process, understand, and analyze the lived experiences of program scholars at partner institutions. It further provides a means to address the social construct of race and explore the ideology of racism in higher education even when disguised in narratives of shared normative values and neutral social principles, policies, and practices (Matsuda et al., 1993).

### **Belongingness Theory**

Baumeister and Leary (1995) described the need to belong as a fundamental human motivation. The belongingness hypothesis, established by Baumeister and Leary (1995), stated that human beings have an inescapable need to maintain significant, lasting, interpersonal relationships. Their research established multiple links between belongingness and cognitive processes, emotions, behaviors, health, and well-being. The need to belong or the sense of belongingness is a core personality trait in humans. Belongingness helps us to survive and thrive while exclusion tends to hinder progress and impact resiliency. The need to belong is a fundamental need that transcends all cultures and situations.

Strayhorn (2012) based his research on the foundational theories of belonging but contended that belonging has greater impact on marginalized populations and becomes more of a necessity in certain context, at certain times, and among certain populations. Strayhorn (2012) further asserted that a sense of belonging is particularly important in contexts where individuals

are prone to feelings of isolation, alienation, or loneliness. Strayhorn's research concluded that sense of belonging was important for historically marginalized and disenfranchised student populations and students of color who were pursuing majors in the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields (Strayhorn, 2012). Often, students shoulder the responsibility for achieving positive outcomes and success in college; however, Strayhorn (2012) places some of the responsibility on institutions to foster a sense of belonging by intentionally creating a welcoming and inclusive campus environment. This places an obligation on institutions of higher education to require administrators and faculty to commit to an active role in creating and fostering a sense of belonging for all students.

The prevailing literature and research establish a connection between sense of belonging and college success for first-generation students of color. It further highlights the need to understand how these students experience belonging in higher education and how institutional practices and policies impact sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2012). As a result, it is imperative to understand how All-In Milwaukee's university partners support or undermine the sense of belonging for its program scholars.

### **Community Cultural Wealth Model**

Black and Latinx students have historically been viewed with a deficit lens and forced to contend with dominant ideologies that position being White and affluent as more valued and revered. This mode of thinking has historically permeated education from pre-school to post-secondary education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Although Black and Latinx students may not inherit traditional cultural and social capital that are valued for success when transitioning and matriculating through college, they bring an invaluable wealth of life experiences and knowledge from their homes and communities into college (Yosso, 2005). As noted earlier, the

six forms of cultural wealth capital as identified by Yosso (2005) are aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistance.

Community cultural wealth challenges the discourse of the dominant Eurocentric social and cultural capital ideology and extends to a framework that is rooted in the rich culture of Black and Latinx people but can also extend to other groups that exist in communal structures (Yosso, 2005). This framework was used to understand and explore the fullness of the capacity that students of color bring to partner universities and the opportunity for All-In Milwaukee as an organization to leverage this capacity.

The literature review highlighted several non-cognitive factors that impact the experiences of first-generation college students of color and specifically discussed how race and generational status impact those experiences. It also emphasized the importance of a sense of belonging when students are navigating spaces that are predominately White and informed by values established by the dominant class. Further highlighted in the literature review is the wealth of experiences that Black and Latinx students bring into educational spaces. These experiences are a reflection of rich community culture and the families that these students represent.

### **Research Questions**

Building upon the literature and informed by the areas of inquiry articulated by the partner organization, this quality improvement study focuses on three questions to better understand the experiences of All-In Milwaukee program scholars, who are first-generation students of color, at its partner institutions. The findings from this research will inform continuous improvement of program design and implementation and structure expectations of

university partners to ensure that program scholars are able to persist and successfully matriculate through college. The three research questions are:

**Question 1:** How do first-generation students of color experience college at All-In Milwaukee’s partner colleges and universities?

**Question 2:** How does a comprehensive college completion program support first-generation students of color to be successful at partner colleges and universities?

**Question 3:** How might All-In Milwaukee leverage the findings of this research to inform program design and expectations of university partners to ensure persistence and successful matriculation for program participants?

For this study, the following terms are applicable: first-generation refers to students whose parents did not complete or attend college. The term “predominately white institution” (PWI) for the purpose of this study refers to a college and/or university where the majority of the student population identify as White, non-Hispanic. “Persistence” in this study refers to the experiences, beliefs, and behaviors that motivate a student to stay in college until degree completion.

The first research question focuses on the experiences of the program scholars of All-In Milwaukee. Giving voice to the students who are often unheard and/or marginalized validates their experiences and provides insights into the factors that encourage or hinder college persistence. The second research question focuses on the ways in which a comprehensive college completion program like All-In Milwaukee is structured to support first-generation college students of color to be successful at partner colleges and universities. The third question focuses on the quality improvement aspect of the study and how All-In Milwaukee can leverage the findings from this study to inform their program design and implementation as they continue to grow as an organization to impact more first-generation college students of color in Milwaukee. Table 4 presents the research questions and their alignment to the conceptual framework and data collection methods to inform the design of this study.

**Table 4:**  
*Research Questions with Conceptual Framework and Data Collection Methods*

<b>Research Question</b>	<b>Conceptual Framework</b>	<b>Method of Data Collection</b>
1. How do first-generation students of color experience college at All-In Milwaukee’s partner colleges and universities?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Critical Race Theory</li> <li>• Belongingness Theory</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quantitative Survey</li> <li>• Qualitative Interviews</li> </ul>
2. How does a comprehensive college completion program support first-generation students of color to be successful at partner colleges and universities?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community Cultural Wealth Theory</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Qualitative Interviews</li> </ul>
3. How might All-In Milwaukee leverage the findings of this research to inform program design and expectations of university partners to ensure persistence and successful matriculation for program participants?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Critical Race Theory</li> <li>• Belongingness Theory</li> <li>• Community Cultural Wealth Theory</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Qualitative Interviews</li> </ul>

### Study Design and Methodology

This study utilized a mixed methods approach that combined quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection and analysis to answer the three research study questions. First the quantitative research was conducted, and the results analyzed to leverage those findings for further exploration during the qualitative portion of the study. This exploratory sequential mixed methods approach was a means to gather quantitative data from a significant sample size as an initial basis and determine, based upon those findings, where to focus my qualitative data gathering to answer the research study questions (Creswell et al., 2018). The following sections describe the data collection and analysis methods used in this study.



## Quantitative Survey

Levett-Jones and Lathlean (2008) found belongingness crucial for student learning and success and that an enhanced sense of belonging made students more likely to succeed.

Belongingness is a personal and context-specific experience that occurs when humans feel (1) secure, accepted, included, valued, and respected by a defined group, (2) connected with or an integral part of the group and (3) that their professional and/or personal values are in alignment with those of the group (Levett-Jones & Lathlean, 2008). I utilized an adapted version of the Belongingness Scale-Clinical Placement Experience (BES-CPE) (Levett-Jones et al., 2009) and revised the language to fit the general context of higher education versus the original specific context of nursing student placement. This instrument was selected because it measured the dimensions of belonging: self-esteem, self-efficacy, and connectedness that were reflected in the literature review. This instrument would further provide the detailed quantitative data that I was seeking to inform the qualitative aspects of my research.

The survey was administered through [Survey Monkey](#) with a link provided in an email that was sent to all program scholars of All-In Milwaukee (N=105). The survey administration window was January 9<sup>th</sup> – 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2021. The survey response rate was 75% (n=79). Of the respondents, 62% (n=49) identified as female, 37% (n=29) identified as male, and 1% (n=1) identified as a gender not listed. Of the respondents, 62% (n=49) were classified as freshman and 38% (n=30) were classified as sophomores. The language used to introduce the survey can be found in Appendix A: Survey Participation Recruitment Letter. The distribution of survey respondents by race/ethnicity is presented in Table 5.

**Table 5**

*Distribution of All-In Milwaukee Survey Responses by Race/Ethnicity*

Race/Ethnicity	# Of Responses Received	# Of Program Scholars	Responses as % of Program Scholars
Asian/Pacific Islander	11	12	91%
Black/African American	16	26	62%
Latinx/Hispanic	46	61	75%
Middle Eastern/North African	5	5	100%
Two or More Races	1	1	100%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>75%</b>

### Quantitative Data Analysis

As stated previously, the survey instrument was selected because it measured the multi-faceted dimensions of belonging: self-esteem, self-efficacy, and connectedness and would offer the initial quantitative data I was seeking to inform the qualitative aspects of my research.

Although all the aspects of the data collected were important and informed the continuation of research, the focus of in-depth analysis were the responses to three statements that aligned to the conceptual framework of this study. The three focal statements and corresponding dimensions were:

- I feel like I fit in with others at my college/university – **self-esteem**
- I view my college/university as a place to experience a sense of belonging – **connectedness**
- I have thought about leaving my college/university because I did not feel like I fit in – **self-efficacy**

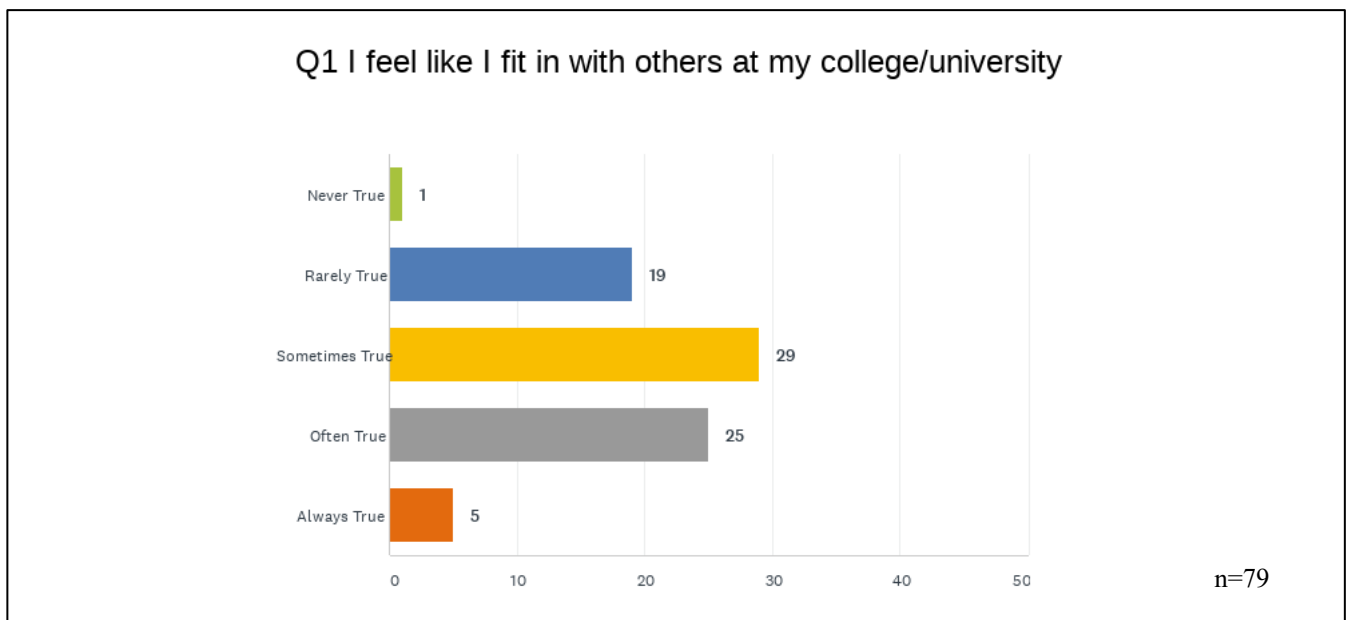
The intentional focus on these three statements could offer insight on the program scholars' sense of belonging and clearly indicate if the presence or absence of the feeling of belonging caused them to contemplate leaving college. In addition to the data analysis available in the

online survey platform, the survey results were exported into Excel for further in-depth analysis. The full analysis can be found in Appendix B: All-In Milwaukee Program Participant Survey Analysis.

The responses from the first statement of focus are presented in Figure 3. This statement is aimed at measuring the program scholar's level of confidence in their own worth or value at their college/university.

### Figure 3

#### *Survey Question #1- Self Esteem*



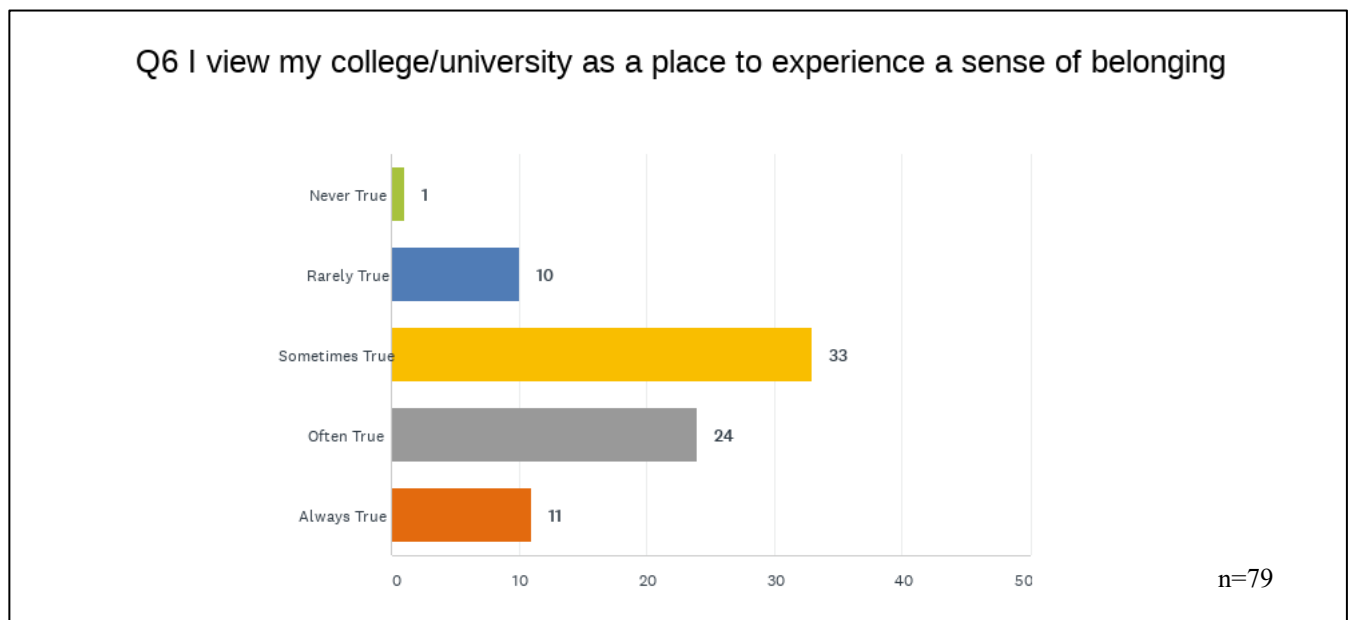
The first observation from the response to this statement that measured the student's perception of fitting in was that 25% (n= 20) of student respondents had negative responses and 37% (n=29) had a neutral response, indicating that students felt like they fit in sometimes or not at all. In contrast, only 38% (n=30) of the students who responded to this statement perceived that they often or always fit in at their college or university. Further disaggregation of the data for this statement revealed that 80% (n=16) of students who responded that they rarely or never fit in

identified as female and 44% (n=9) of respondents who answered that they rarely fit in were Black/African American women.

The responses from the second statement of focus are presented in Figure 4. This statement is aimed at measuring the level of connectedness that program scholars feel at their college/university and the degree to which they feel that they belong.

**Figure 4**

*Survey Question #6: Connectedness*



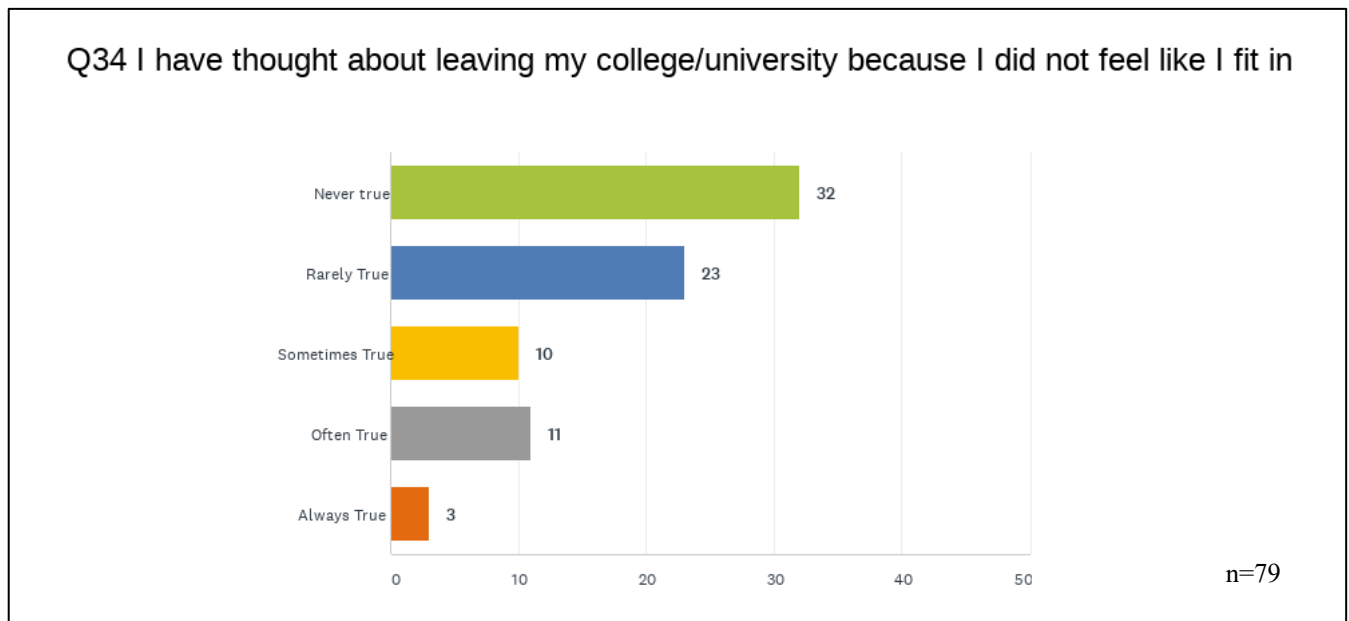
The responses from this statement revealed that 14% (n=9) of the program scholars rarely or never feel that their college/university is a place to experience a sense of belonging. While 42% (n=33) feel that that they feel connectedness some of the time, and 44% (n=35) often or always feel that their college/university is a place to experience a sense of belonging. Further disaggregation of the data for this statement showed that 80% (n=9) of students who responded that they rarely or never felt like their college/university was a place to feel a sense of belonging

identified as female and 70% (n=7) of respondents who answered that they rarely felt that their campus was a place to sense belonging identified as Latinx.

The responses from the third statement of focus are presented in Figure 5. This statement is aimed at measuring the level of self-efficacy and level of confidence that program scholars feel in their ability to persist even when they don't feel like they fit in at their college/university.

**Figure 5**

*Survey Question #34: Self-efficacy*



The response to this statement indicated that 70% (n=55) of program scholars are confident in their ability to persist and are unwilling to allow the absence or limited sense of belonging cause them to contemplate leaving college. Further disaggregation of the data for this statement revealed that of that of the students who frequently contemplated leaving college because they did not feel like they belonged, 50% (n=7) identified as male and 50% (n=7) identified as female with identical distribution between program scholars who were first year and second year college

students. Of note regarding the responses to this statement, 71% (n=10) of the program scholars who have frequently contemplated leaving college identified as Latinx.

The analysis of the data from the three focal survey statements provided a general sense of how the All-In Milwaukee program scholars measure their sense of belonging based upon self-esteem, connectedness, and self-efficacy at the partner universities. It was necessary to disaggregate the data by race/ethnicity and gender to determine if those factors influenced belonging. For statements that measured self-esteem, female students tended to respond more frequently about rarely or never feeling valued at their college/university. For statements that measured connectedness, Latinx students tended to respond more frequently about rarely or never feeling connected or like they belong at their college/university. Notably, responses to statements from these two categories had a lot of neutral responses or feeling valued or connected sometimes. For statements that measured the level of self-efficacy or confidence in their ability to persist, there was a significantly higher rate of positive and affirmative responses from program scholars across gender, ethnicity, and school year classification. This data analysis proved to be insightful for providing some preliminary answers to the research question regarding how students are experiencing college. It prompts further exploration during the next phase of the data collection using one-on-one interviews to gather qualitative data.

The results from this quantitative portion of the study are supported by the literature. In analyzing the data from the third focal statement and the responses of program scholars reflecting their unwillingness to allow the absence or limited sense of belonging cause them to contemplate leaving college. The responses aligned to one of the forms of capital that Yosso (2005) referred to as navigational capital or the ability of program scholars to successfully maneuver through higher education institutions that were not always intentional about supporting

students of color. Conversely, program scholars who identified as Latinx who made up 70% of the respondents who often contemplated leaving college due to the absence or limited sense of belonging, could be attributed to London's (1989) findings of how first-generation students struggled to balance college and home which could be especially difficult for tight-knit Latinx families. The noticeable amount of negative and neutral responses to statements that measured belonging, confirmed the emphasis that Strayhorn (2012) placed on belonging and its impact on marginalized populations. The general sense of an absent or inconsistent sense of belonging by these first-generation students of color demonstrates how educational spaces provide a key setting in which issues of race, inequity, and institutionalized racism should be examined and challenged (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Tate, 1997).

### **Qualitative Interviews – Program Scholars**

A list of 28 prospective program scholars who would most likely respond to the request for participation in the study was provided by the Program Director for All-In Milwaukee. This convenience sampling was based upon the Program Director's knowledge of program scholars' capacity to engage in the process while balancing other responsibilities and priorities. An email was sent to the prospective participants to give further details of the study and to invite their voluntary participation to be interviewed as a part of the study. The email contained a link to my Calendly account where prospective participants could schedule a time to engage in a one-on-one interview via Zoom. The language of the participation solicitation email can be found in Appendix C: Email Invitation to Participate in Study Interview. The emails to solicit participation in the study yielded 14 interview participants who completed interviews during the months of February and March 2021. Each interview lasted approximately one hour over Zoom. The participants for the interviews attended University A and University B whose demographics

were shared previously in Table 2. Program scholars from these two universities were the target group for the interviews given that 81% of program scholars attend one of these two schools.

The demographic information for the interviewees is found in Table 6 below.

**Table 6**

*Interviewee Demographics*

Race/Ethnicity	Demographic Information
Asian/Pacific Islander	<b><u>2 – 1<sup>st</sup> Generation College Students</u></b> 2 - Female 1 – Freshman 1 - Sophomore
Black/African American	<b><u>4 - 1<sup>st</sup> Generation College Students</u></b> 2 – Female 2 – Male 1 – Freshman 3 – Sophomore
Latinx/Hispanic	<b><u>8 – 1<sup>st</sup> Generation College Students</u></b> 3- Female 5 – Male 3 – Freshman 5 - Sophomore

The protocols for the program scholar interviews can be found in Appendix D: All-In Milwaukee Program Scholar Interview Protocol.

The interview questions were informed by the literature and the five tenets of critical race theory applied to the field of education. Since one of the main foci of the research study was to understand the experiences of first-generation college students of color, it was imperative to acknowledge race as a central theme and using this conceptual framework provided a means to give voice to their experience through the lens of critical race theory in the context of education. The interview was further informed by a strategy matrix created in a previous study by Cain and Smith (2020) that used critical race theory to explore the experiences of rural area college



students. The strategy matrix was adapted to include verbiage related to first-generation college students, PWIs, and university partners by permission of the authors of the study. A copy of the email granting this permission is found in Appendix E: Permission for Use Cain and Smith (2020). The adapted version of the strategy matrix that informed the development of the interview questions is found in Table 7.

**Table 7**

*Exploring the Experiences of First-Generation College Students of Color at PWIs*

Understanding of Individual Experiences	Challenging the Dominant Ideologies	Commitment to Social Justice	Experiential Knowledge and Voice	Interdisciplinary Perspectives
<p>What are the individual characteristics of students (e.g., race, gender, etc.)?</p> <p>What are the family, school, and/or community backgrounds of students?</p> <p>What are the unique needs of first-generation college students?</p>	<p>What are the possible barriers to educational success of these students (success being defined by the students)?</p> <p>What are the barriers or contributors to success at the partner universities for students?</p> <p>How are students' opportunities for success influenced by their multiple identities?</p>	<p>In what ways do these students have privilege and in what ways are these students oppressed?</p> <p>How are these students influenced or affected by the current racial climate?</p> <p>In what ways do students feel empowered at partner universities?</p>	<p>How do students understand and make meaning of their identities and experiences?</p> <p>How do students express their identities (e.g., language, actions, dress)?</p> <p>How are the stories of students being told? Who are they being told to?</p>	<p>What are the perspectives that students draw from?</p> <p>How might the identities, experiences, and stories of these students be understood using different perspectives?</p> <p>What are the similarities and differences between these understandings?</p>

(Cain & Smith, 2020)

## Qualitative Data Analysis

The qualitative interviews sought to explore the research questions in greater depth and help identify themes that fit within the conceptual frameworks that informed this study. This approach considered the disaggregated quantitative survey response data to inform additional data that was needed to answer the research study questions. The analysis was further used to make evidence-based recommendations to All-In Milwaukee to enhance the experience of its program scholars and ensure college persistence and degree attainment from partner universities.

The process for analyzing the data from the interviews required creating a transcript from the Zoom interview using the Otter app. The transcripts were then transferred from Otter to Word for the purpose of cleaning the transcripts to ensure accuracy in the transcription. The transcript cleaning process required viewing the live video and comparing the transcript to the live video for accuracy. Once the transcripts were prepared for coding, Excel was used for the next phase of the process.

I created a codebook in Excel that began with the topic codes which were the five tenets of critical race theory applied to education. I color coded the transcripts based upon topic codes. I used the descriptive codes to track who (by gender, ethnicity, and college classification) spoke the quotes that I wanted to highlight as themes emerged. While the themes that emerged did not immediately answer the research questions, they provided a foundation on which to understand the experiences of the program scholars. Table 8 shows the themes that emerged from the analysis of the 14 interview transcripts of the All-In Milwaukee program scholars.

**Table 8**

*Qualitative Analysis Themes – Program Scholar Interview*

Topics (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001)	Themes
<b>Understanding of Individual Experiences</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The cost vs. the price of college</li> <li>• Culture shock</li> <li>• Family and community connections</li> </ul>
<b>Challenging the Dominant Ideologies</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seeking representation and validation</li> <li>• Remake or reposition myself</li> <li>• Support systems matter</li> </ul>
<b>Commitment to Social Justice</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• College is not colorblind</li> <li>• Access does not equal inclusion and belonging</li> <li>• Power in my voice</li> </ul>
<b>Experiential Knowledge &amp; Voice</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• My identity is not a threat</li> <li>• Creating my own narrative</li> <li>• Being my authentic self</li> </ul>
<b>Interdisciplinary Perspectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I am not alone</li> <li>• The struggle is real but worth it</li> <li>• I am not a single story</li> </ul>
<b>Sense of Belonging</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I matter</li> <li>• I am enough</li> <li>• I am here for a purpose</li> </ul>

While the themes that emerged did not immediately answer the research questions, they provided a foundation on which to understand the experiences of the program scholars.

**Qualitative Interviews – All-In Milwaukee Program Staff**

After interviewing the program scholars, it was important to gain greater insight from the program staff at All-In Milwaukee. Of particular interest was understanding how the organization’s program, practices, and policies supported first-generation students of color to be successful at partner colleges and universities. The Executive Director, Program Director, and two Scholar Advisors of the All-In Milwaukee staff were each interviewed over Zoom for approximately one hour during the months of March and April 2021. The protocol for the program staff interviews can be found in Appendix F: All-In Milwaukee Program Staff Interview Protocol. At the time of this capstone there were four individuals who were a part of the All-In

Milwaukee staff. The Executive Director identifies as a White female, the Program Director identifies as a Black female, one Scholar Advisor identifies as a Latinx male, and the other Scholar Advisor identifies as a Black female.

The interview questions were informed by the literature and specifically Yosso’s (2005) six forms of capital that contribute to cultural wealth. The community cultural wealth framework was used to understand and explore the fullness of the capacity that students of color bring to partner universities and the opportunity for All-In Milwaukee as an organization to leverage this capacity. The interview questions were further informed by the matrix shown in Table 9.

**Table 9**

*Community Cultural Wealth Framework Matrix*

Aspirational Capital	Linguistic Capital	Familial Capital	Social Capital	Navigational Capital	Resistant Capital
<p>What assumptions does All-In Milwaukee staff have about student aspirations?</p> <p>How does the staff support and nurture student aspirations?</p>	<p>To what degree does the program content reflect culturally relevant and inclusive practices?</p> <p>How does All-In Milwaukee support the language and communication strengths of program scholars?</p>	<p>How does All-In Milwaukee engage families?</p> <p>How does the program create space for students to recognize, honor, and leverage the wisdom, values, and stories from their home communities?</p>	<p>How does All-In Milwaukee connect program scholars to mentors and leaders of color within the community?</p> <p>How does All-In Milwaukee support students in staying connected to their home communities?</p>	<p>How does All-In Milwaukee help program scholars to navigate partner institutions?</p> <p>Does All-In Milwaukee acknowledge that partner institutions have a structural and cultural history of being unwelcoming, unsupportive, and in some cases hostile to students of color?</p>	<p>What opportunities does All-In Milwaukee provide for program scholars to prepare them for social justice advocacy?</p> <p>How does All-In Milwaukee support students in engaging and giving back to their home communities?</p>

The aim of the matrix was to align the six aspects of the community cultural wealth framework to the organizational practices of All-In Milwaukee to gather evidence of intentional practices that support an asset-based approach to their comprehensive college completion program.

I used an identical process for analyzing the interviews with the program staff as I used for the interviews with the program scholars. I created the transcripts from the Zoom recordings using the Otter app and transferred the transcripts from Otter to Word. Once the transcripts were checked for accuracy, the coding process began - again using Excel. I created a separate codebook in Excel for the program staff interviews that began with the topic codes which were based upon the six forms of community cultural capital. I color coded the transcripts based upon topic codes and analyzed for themes. Table 10 shows the themes that emerged from the transcript analysis of the program staff.

**Table 10**

*Qualitative Analysis Themes – Program Staff Interviews*

Topics (Yosso, 2005)	Themes
<b>Aspirational Capital</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We believe</li> <li>• Validation and affirmation</li> <li>• Fit matters</li> </ul>
<b>Linguistic Capital</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be you</li> <li>• Embracing personal and cultural identity</li> </ul>
<b>Familial Capital</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The ties that bind</li> <li>• Families matter</li> </ul>
<b>Social Capital</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Windows of opportunity</li> <li>• Mirrors for reflection</li> <li>• Relationships and connections</li> </ul>
<b>Navigational Capital</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A community within communities</li> <li>• Reversing the narrative</li> <li>• We should not have to exist</li> </ul>
<b>Resistant Capital</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creating a movement</li> <li>• Advocacy and empowerment</li> <li>• Reaching back as they climb</li> </ul>

## Findings

***"For me, for example, I'm six foot- two pretty well built, African American male. I'm a dark skinned African American male too. So, like I can literally see people staring at me from blocks away; I think to myself, I don't want to get into the whole like what is that, you know, again, but like, seriously, it's just, I don't know. It just diminishes your whole mental state, you know, and it's just so exhausting. It's like you don't even need to do anything you know; we just have to overthink like that, and it is exhausting." – Black Male (sophomore)***

The data that was collected from the surveys served as an entry point to gain a broad understanding about the program scholars' perceptions about their sense of belonging at partner colleges and universities. This understanding was leveraged to inform the approach and further areas of inquiry to be addressed during the qualitative data collection portion of the study. The findings from this research study emerged from the themes that were established during the analysis of the qualitative interview data. The four findings were the start of the path towards answering the research questions for this study and provided the basis for the recommendations. The findings are supported with quotes from program scholars as giving space to their experiences and highlighting their stories were central to this study.

The findings also echoed what has been found in available literature about first-generation students of color matriculating through higher education at predominately white institutions. The first two research findings addressed the first research question that sought to understand the experiences of All-In Milwaukee's program scholars at its partner colleges and universities. The third research finding addressed the second research question aimed at how a comprehensive college completion program like All-In Milwaukee could best support first-generation college students of color. The final research finding addressed the third research question that focused on how All-In Milwaukee could leverage the findings from this study to inform program design and university partner expectations.

**Finding #1 – Persisting as a student of color at one of All-In Milwaukee’s college /university partners is a triumph but is also filled with challenges.**

The experiences of the program scholars that participated in the interviews varied slightly based upon gender and race/ethnicity. What was central, however, to the experiences was that most program scholars struggled and had to face obstacles and challenges as they navigated the transition to college. For each program scholar, getting acclimated to college was a personal adjustment that required an unwavering focus on their purpose for being there which was degree attainment.

*“This is definitely one of the hardest things I have done in my life. I remember my first big lecture was 500 people and I could count the number of brown people on my hand. Yeah. I was just like, oh my God like there's no way that this is my life. It was just like hard. I would think and feel like I don't belong here and like what's going on?”*

– Latinx Female (sophomore)

*“All my life I've been surrounded by, you know, people that look like me, until college. I did not know how hard that would be.”* – Latinx Male (sophomore)

*“I'm glad to be a student there, but I'm mainly glad to be there because of what they can do for me.”* – Black Male (sophomore)

The program staff at All-In Milwaukee acknowledges that adjusting to college is a transition for their students but they unequivocally believe in the ability of the program scholars to successfully matriculate. They further acknowledge the importance of program scholars selecting the school that is the best fit for each of them among the partner universities.

*“And so, I want our students to be able to be authentic in who they are. And be able to carry their journeys, their experiences, and their challenges as assets, as opposed to how they have been seen in so many other spaces which is why even the term scholar is so important for me.”* – (All-In Milwaukee Program Staff)

*“So, from my seat, first and foremost, fit matters. Sometimes students are picking the school because it was their dream school, or their parents dream school or it's the big name, the flagship but maybe the aid package wasn't right, or maybe the size wasn't right. And so, you know, we see students, not always picking the best fit for themselves.”*  
- (All-In Milwaukee Program Staff)

Program scholars expressed having to contend with the challenges associated with forming their identity in college. They also had to grapple with the deficit thinking that others projected upon them because of their identity. Program scholars also felt challenged at times to defend their legitimacy and “right” to be a student at partner universities. The challenges to their belonging manifested in subtle and overt ways, but nevertheless, noticed by program scholars. The reactions to feeling a sense of belonging or lack thereof had a range of effects on program scholars. For some, it made attending college less of an experience and more of a transaction for future life advancement, and for others it became a motivating factor.

*"Sometimes it feels very awkward because it's like you feel like they (White students) don't know what you're going through because you know for a fact that the experiences that you've gone through are probably nothing similar to what they've gone through."* – Black Female (sophomore)

*"I'm just here to study and try to get out of here as fast as possible and not, you know, I just want to do what I have to do and get out of there."* – Latinx Male (sophomore)

*"I think I've earned my place here, and all the suffering that I've gone through in my life, and all the suffering that I've gone through that transition is totally worth me coming out of there successful and doing something with my life. So, in a way, \_\_\_\_\_ university is mine; I like to think of it as my place."* – Latinx Male (sophomore)

Program scholars shared the feelings of being invisible and devalued while their individual and cultural needs were ignored around campus. They also shared similar experiences of confrontations fueled by racial discrimination, stereotyping and prejudice. In some cases, students used those experiences to find their voice, advocate for themselves, and create counternarratives. In other cases, the absence of a sense of belonging and appreciation for their presence created space for disconnecting and disengaging from campus.

*"I think for sure being here has shaped me to be more comfortable in my skin, even though like ironically, a lot of people would feel different. I feel like I'm a lot more confident now than I was when I came in. I think that's because of the people around me and like hearing different personal experiences from other people."*  
– Black Female (sophomore)



*“Personally, I feel like I don't belong anywhere on the campus. I think that's okay too. Because, as long as I'm always social networking, it doesn't affect me. And as long as I'm working towards my education...that is what matters.”* – Asian Female (sophomore)

Program scholars shared experiences in which they had to become a part of social action and advocacy on campus using their collective voices to amplify issues that were related to race and racism. The racial injustice that was made mainstream sparked by the events of the summer of 2020 with the George Floyd murder caused students to become more aware of their responsibility towards addressing racial and social justice issues on their campuses.

*“I think if it weren't for BSU (Black Student Union) and all the movements that they they've been doing, diversity probably wouldn't have been addressed.”*  
– Black Female (sophomore)

*“Our upperclassmen are the ones that encouraged us to speak up about the comments from the racist professor. We were kind of scared to do it, but they were like no. Things like this need to be spoken up about. I'm like really glad that they told us that because otherwise I don't think I would have been able to do anything especially like coming in as a freshman when that happened.”* - Black Female (sophomore)

There was a tension that was expressed by program scholars between their expectations about college and their lived reality. There was hope, anticipation, and expectations for the college life that they had seen depicted on television and on social media that included connections, bonds, and life-long friendships; but that has not been the case so far for some of the program scholars who were interviewed. There is an acknowledgment of the impact of COVID-19 on campus social life, but there is still a noticeable absence of connectedness and friendship that are often part of recruitment marketing and media.

*“...integration is not just on the part of the minority student; it is also on the part of other people. Like give them the opportunity to get to know you, not the other way around all the time.”* – Black Male (freshman)

*“I feel like I can show up as myself, because at the end of the day, my story and who I am does contribute to the community that I put myself into. And it just is sort of a mental thing that I have to keep reminding yourself of.”* – Black Male (freshman)

*"...it was really just connection with All-In Milwaukee and all their students, those are the other friends that I made outside of my friends from high school."* Black Male (sophomore)

One of the resounding sentiments among all the program scholars was the pride that their families and communities shared because they were attending college. The communal pride makes the struggles that program scholars must endure worth the journey. Although they expressed a myriad of challenging experiences, central to this finding is the determination and resolve from students to succeed even in the face of adversity. This determination is undoubtedly fueled by community and family support.

*"I've always tried to be that person that doesn't give up, you know, even if it gets hard, I can do this. I'll be able to get through it with God. But last year, and you know this year, especially with a pandemic, I saw that kind of determination really being put to the test. I've thought about dropping out so many times. But really what kept me going is just thinking about you know the purpose." - Latinx Male (sophomore)*

*"From the moment, like when I was a little kid, like in elementary school I knew that I had to go to college. I knew this was something that not many people get to do in my family, and I knew that I will be one of those people who would break those barriers and I knew I could do it." – Black Male (freshman)*

**Finding #2 – Persisting as a student of color at All-In Milwaukee partner institutions requires community and strategic systems of support.**

The program scholars who were interviewed expressed feeling accepted and validated in spaces where there were other students who looked like them. This led to students joining various organizations that were oriented to their culture. They expressed feeling free to be themselves fully in those spaces and did not have the pressure of trying to fit in and assimilate which they determined could be exhausting. Overall, program scholars felt that there were limited spaces and places which they deemed as intentionally inclusive and determined those spaces to be those that made them feel a sense of belonging. Among the students interviewed,

there was a consensus on the perception of a lack of belonging in the larger context of the colleges and universities.

*"...because, you know, living here (multi-cultural floor) is better than possibly being on an all-White floor where you know I think that I would be uncomfortable. Coming from a predominantly Black high school, and just a predominantly Black city, I'm used to seeing people who look like me people who I know are on the same, you know, wavelength as me kind of."* – Black Male (freshman)

*"Last semester there were two places where I felt the most comfortable and could be myself. The first one is the EOP office, lounge, and just that whole third floor of ---- Hall. The second place is any of the rooms downstairs in ---- Library where I would usually sit with a lot of my friends."* – Black Female (sophomore)

*"I did join a sorority and I participate in the Latinx Student Union. I feel connections there."* – Latinx Female (sophomore)

*"You know, it's kind of hard, because you want to try to be authentic as possible and feel like your voice matters, like your identity matters."* – Black Male (freshman).

The students overwhelmingly expressed the need for support in navigating college as a first-generation student of color at predominately White institutions and acknowledge that a significant amount of that support comes from family, friends, faith, and the staff at All-In Milwaukee. While these sources of support are consistently available, students expressed the desire to have more social and emotional support on campus to help them process issues, situations, or concerns that arise in their daily experience that do not necessarily warrant a call to their Scholar Advisor.

*"My family and friends are my support system. I would not be able to navigate college without them."* – Latinx Male (sophomore)

*"I would say my family, family and friends contribute to my success; I think being a part of All-In Milwaukee has helped a lot. I feel like they have our backs and actually helped me."* – Black Female (freshman)

There is consensus among the program staff at All-In Milwaukee that establishing community among program scholars, program staff, and partner institutions is critical for scholar

success. The comprehensive support model is aimed at ensuring that program scholars can establish relationships and connections with other program scholars, university personnel, community leaders, donors, and career mentors. The content of the sessions led by the All-In Milwaukee staff that program scholars participate in throughout the year are designed to support the personal, academic, and professional growth of scholars.

*“Connecting them and making sure they're integrated at those different levels is important to navigate, particularly if you're a first-generation student. You really don't have someone who's already been through this within your family who can tell you this is what you need to do. These are the people that you need to talk to, these are the connections that you need to make. So really supporting students in getting acclimated into that higher ed environment is critically important for me.”* – (All-In Milwaukee Program Staff)

*“...but also encouraging them to attend clubs that will affirm their identity and give them a safe space in the community space on their campuses through student involvement.”* – (All-In Milwaukee Program Staff)

**Finding #3 – Family, faith, culture, and community are critical aspects that keep program scholars persisting at partner colleges and universities; however, family can also be a barrier.**

Program scholars entered college with an idea about their own identity as informed by the perceptions of family, friends, and their communities. Their experiences in college challenged their identities in many ways and strengthened their resolve in who they were and gave greater clarity of their purpose for being on these campuses and for pursuing higher education. The persistence that they possessed was attributed to watching family members overcome difficulties and challenges.

*"I'm an immigrant, and my community is proud of me. Some people also have been, I guess I would say inspired because it gave them a chance to see of what the future can be like for people, you know, like us.”* – Latinx Male (sophomore)

*"I like being at home. Hispanic culture is all about you know family and friends. And so, if my family's in, like, in the same city I'm going to college, I rather stay with my family.”* – Latinx Female (sophomore)

*In our culture they really push for higher education, and I could understand why. Because as African Americans, people have like the stereotype about who you are. So, my parents really try to do the best for themselves and push us as their children to go past them.” – Black Female (sophomore)*

*So, coming into Milwaukee being a first-generation student learning English, having to navigate the education system as an undocumented immigrant too just added a lot of barriers that I had to overcome. And I realized early on that it was not out of sheer will that I overcame them, but rather because of the community resources that were offered.” – (All-In Milwaukee Program Staff)*

Program scholars viewed degree attainment as a passport to a better future for them and their families. Students expressed knowing that coming to a predominately White institution would be challenging and they were willing to endure the challenges because they were breaking barriers for themselves and their families. Given the critical role that family connection and culture play in the lives of program scholars, engaging families and leveraging community cultural capital is an area for the All-In Milwaukee program staff to explore.

*“I knew this would be hard. I did not know how hard. But I know that I have to be here to secure my future and I keep thinking about that. There are things that I want in life and getting a degree will help me to reach my goals.” – Black Male (freshman)*

*“Being here can be exhausting, but I know that my family is looking up to me. I am doing this for me and for them.” – Black Female (sophomore)*

*“And in some cases, we probably could use the parent to help light a fire or to bring students back in focus, so it's almost like we wish we had that tool in the toolkit.” – (All-In Milwaukee Program Staff)*

*“...trying to get students to understand their identity as a college student now versus their identity with their family, and much of the concern with our students is recognizing that like to be a full-time student, you can't be a full time everything to your family.” – (All-In Milwaukee Program Staff)*

**Finding #4 – There is a greater need for All-In Milwaukee to focus on equity, diversity, and inclusion with partner universities.**

The program staff at All-In Milwaukee is keenly aware that the organization exists because of disparities in college access and degree attainment for students of color. They

acknowledge the issues of race, equity, and diversity among partner institutions. But they also believe that their existence is a part of a movement towards social justice and equity in education, opportunities, and advancement. They further acknowledge the work that must be done to reach the level of influence that drives systemic change at partner institutions.

*“But we have these universities who are taking our students on in larger numbers, which is great, but they have not at all changed how they're going to serve our students.” - (All-In Milwaukee Program Staff)*

*“And I think that our students, even when you look at the Milwaukee teaching ratios in terms of just like the lack of even just teachers of color, and then they get to these universities and it's, you know, dismal in terms of faculty of color. I think it's really awesome that through our program, they see advisors of color, they see mentors of color, they see corporate leaders of color, and that is very intentional.” – (All-In Milwaukee Program Staff)*

*“Part of our Institute's included, you know, service and giving back and recognizing that this is bigger than any of us, right; this is a movement that you're a part of, and this is bigger than all of us and it's really our job to get you through. But then, it's your job to give back and better the City of Milwaukee and do this for others.” – (All-In Milwaukee Program Staff)*

Although program scholars expressed a strong sense of support from All-In Milwaukee, they did not feel that the partner colleges and universities put enough action into efforts around equity, diversity, and inclusion.

*I wouldn't really say that the campus is really doing everything they can to kind of raise exposure or awareness to Latinx issues or just exposure in general.” – Latinx Male (freshman)*

*“I feel like diversity is something that my school takes at face value. They don't actually do the inside work once the students get here. Like they do a lot to get the students here, but they don't do enough to keep them here.” – Black Male (freshman)*

*“I don't see my culture represented in any way. It seems like basically the only good thing that African American students are good for on campus are like showing diversity pictures. So, yeah, that's how they express their diversity, through pictures of Black and Latino students.” -Black Male (sophomore)*

The consensus among the program scholars interviewed was that the universities go out of their way to get students of color to enroll (access), but they are not as intentional in creating a campus culture and environment that encourages inclusion and belonging.

*"I don't think our institutions are prepared to understand the different challenges that students of color have compared to people, you know that are White. That is a big thing that I think that impacted, even more my transition to college."*

– Latinx Male (sophomore)

*"I feel like they just want to fill up the ratio and meet the quota that they have written out and then after that they don't really care if it's a diverse enough room. I feel like they should do more to protect their minority students, because there's like, not that many of us to begin with."* – Black Female (sophomore)

*"They say we need more Black and Brown students and we want you to feel at home, but they don't make it a priority. They say it is, but their actions show us that it is really not."*

– Latinx Female (sophomore)

Program scholars expressed concern about the lack of diversity among the faculty and staff at their universities. Concerns about the lack of cultural representation contributed to a diminished sense of belonging. Program scholars expressed that even if there is not cultural diversity among the faculty and staff, the universities can enact policies and practices that ensure that the faculty and staff receive training and support to address issues of diversity and equity and to meet the needs of the students of color on campus. The program scholars acknowledged and appreciated the faculty members who were intentional about efforts to get to know them, cared about issues that concerned them, and advocated for them even if they did not share the same ethnic and cultural background. Program scholars overwhelmingly agreed that university leadership should be held responsible and accountable to the written commitments that they make about equity, diversity, and inclusion.

*"It was just so nice, just an acknowledgement he just acknowledged us, and he wasn't trying to be like fake woke. It wasn't like he (the professor) was just trying to force it and that's how I knew it was authentic and genuine."* – Black Female (sophomore)

*"Well, I don't know if I'm just paranoid, but I honestly believe that they (professors), they just seem to have better relationships with White students than students of color. There is a 50% chance for us to have a good relationship with our professors, and, you know, a 50% chance that a professor will be borderline offensive." – Latinx Male (sophomore)*

## **Limitations**

Although the findings of this study aligned to the reviewed literature and conceptual framework, there were limitations to this study. Given the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, I was not able to travel to the partner universities to directly observe campus the climate and student interactions which could have further informed this study. I was not able to see students engage in their environment and capture low-inference notes that may have provided additional data that was not captured in the survey or during the interviews. The second limitation was the general impact of the pandemic on the normal course of college activity which influences how students experience college and how they view belonging. A third limitation was the inability to capture all the experiences of the first-generation students of color who are in the All-In Milwaukee program. The qualitative data heavily reflected the experience of Latinx students because they volunteered in greater numbers to participate in the interview process. While I worked diligently to give voice to the students' experiences, it is challenging to encapsulate their collective experience because while there are similarities, each student has their own story and different factors that influence whether they persist or leave college.

## **Recommendations**

Informed by the findings of this research study and the conceptual framework, the following recommendations are proposed for All-In Milwaukee. Table 11 shows the alignment of the recommendations to the findings and conceptual framework followed by a detailed description of each.



**Table 11**

*Research Study Recommendations*

Recommendation	Alignment to Findings	Alignment to Conceptual Frameworks
<p><b>#1</b> - Enhance the scope and sequence for program scholar workshops and sessions to further address the social, emotional, and cultural needs of program scholars.</p>	<p><b>Finding 1</b> Equipping program scholars with tools and resources to overcome challenges faced at partner universities can help them successfully navigate as first-generation students of color at predominately White institutions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CRT Applied to Education</li> <li>• Community Cultural Wealth Theory</li> </ul>
<p><b>#2</b> - Require each program scholar to select a college journey partner – another program scholar attending the same school who will support, encourage, and hold them accountable for persisting.</p>	<p><b>Finding 2</b> Creating intentional opportunities for relationship building, community, and systems of support will help students feel connected to other program scholars at each partner institution.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Belongingness Theory</li> </ul>
<p><b># 3</b> - Develop a parent engagement component or Parent University as a part of All-In Milwaukee’s comprehensive program to intentionally engage parents in their student’s college experience.</p>	<p><b>Finding 3</b> -Engaging and equipping parents to support program scholars leveraging could aide in persistence and address some of the family barriers.  -Honoring community cultural assets places value on the funds of knowledge that families can bring to the All-In Milwaukee program.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community Cultural Wealth Theory</li> </ul>
<p><b>#4</b> - Have program scholars collaboratively engage in a social action or advocacy project at their college or university.</p>	<p><b>Finding 4</b> Creating meaningful intergroup interactions with a focus on coalition building among program scholars could lead to a greater sense of agency, belonging, and connectedness on campus.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CRT Applied to Education</li> <li>• Community Cultural Wealth Theory</li> <li>• Belongingness Theory</li> </ul>
<p><b>#5</b> - Incorporate annual accountability reports as a part of the step back meetings with college and university partner liaisons.</p>	<p><b>Finding 4</b> Holding university partners accountable for student experience and their commitments to equity, diversity, and inclusion demonstrates to program scholars that All-In Milwaukee is an ally and values program scholars and their experience.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CRT Applied to Education</li> <li>• Community Cultural Wealth Theory</li> <li>• Belongingness Theory</li> </ul>

**Recommendation #1 - All-In Milwaukee should enhance the scope and sequence for program scholar workshops and sessions to further address the social, emotional, and cultural needs of program scholars.**

The program cadence currently includes workshops around several topics, but further rigor and session development are needed to address the specific needs of first-generation college students of color as they navigate higher education. For example, giving students insights into funds of knowledge (Gonzales et al., 2005; Luedke, 2020) and cultural capital (Yosso, 2005) that they already intrinsically possess, better positions them to persist in an environment that challenges their identity. Certain environments can cause them to doubt their self-worth and the assets that they bring into the higher education space. Empowering students in this way helps to counter the deficit minded narrative that typically exists. Another example would be teaching program scholars about the intersectionality of their identities and how to make sense of their college experience. Additional insights that they typically do not learn as part of the college onboarding or content level curriculum; but can give them the soft skill tools necessary to aide in persistence.

**Recommendation #2 – All-In Milwaukee should require each program scholar to select a college journey partner – another program scholar attending the same school who will support, encourage, and hold them accountable for persisting.**

The college journey partner or pod if a group of three is necessary, will be the success partner for each All-In Milwaukee scholar as they continue to matriculate through college. The purpose is to have someone on campus that is the go-to person for scholars. The college journey partner offers support, advice, a listening ear, encouragement, and accountability. Ideally, the goal is to keep the same college journey partner through to graduation. This approach can potentially alleviate some of the pressure for Scholar Advisors as the number of program

scholars increases. It is necessary for the college journey partner connections to organically develop so strict program guidance is not necessary. Program scholars will need support initially to understand the general expectations of the process. Ongoing support will later only be necessary for incoming cohorts of students. This intentional focus on connection will provide the social and emotional support that students need as they navigate through college daily.

**Recommendation #3 – All-In Milwaukee should create a parent engagement component - Parent University to intentionally engage parents in their student’s college experience.**

Although the focus for All-In Milwaukee is on the students, engaging parents can prove to be a worthwhile investment of resources – particularly for students who are in their first and second year. Outside of inviting parents to student orientations, create intentional programming that is geared toward the parents. Just as first-generation students are trying to navigate their new college experience, parents are also adapting to their student’s new normal and making sense of their new college identity. Engaging parents makes them feel valued in this process. Although they may not have attended college themselves, their contributions to their student’s college experience can be invaluable. The components of Parent University do not have to include regular in-person sessions. A parent portal can be created within the All-In Milwaukee website where parents can access resources and tools that aide them in supporting their students.

**Recommendation #4 – All-In Milwaukee should require students to collaboratively engage in a social justice/advocacy project at their college or university each year.**

Participating in a collaborative social justice project each year can have multiple benefits. First, it requires students at each campus to work collaboratively together towards a shared goal which reinforces the skills of teamwork and leadership. Participating in a social justice project encourages advocacy and gives student agency to work to make a difference on their college campus. Having a collective responsibility for change can enhance commitment to the university,

create a greater sense of belonging, and allow students to leave a legacy each year. This will demonstrate among other ways, the value that All-In Milwaukee scholars can bring to prospective campuses and center All-In Milwaukee program scholars as agents of change who can collectively impact their surroundings. This kind of collaborative and intentional engagement across diverse groups of students will encourage more interaction across race and ethnicity. Students can use this opportunity to be the change they want to see at their universities.

**Recommendation #5 – All-In Milwaukee should incorporate annual accountability reports as a part of the step back meetings with college and university partner liaisons.**

All-In Milwaukee plays an integral role in helping its college and university partners increase diversity enrollment numbers. As a result, All-In Milwaukee has leverage to not only hold university partners accountable for adhering to the expectations of the partner agreement, but also to ensuring that college and university partners are intentional about diversity, equity, and inclusion. The proposed accountability report would be presented to partners as a part of the end of the year step back meeting. Each university partner will be rated based upon the following areas: alignment, leadership, DEI, financial aid, student success outcomes, student experience, and commitment to continuous improvement. Annual ratings will be used to hold university partners accountable for collaboration and results and to determine if partnerships colleges and universities need to cease to receive program scholars, maintain the number of current program scholars, or expand/increase the number of incoming program scholars.

### Conclusion

Engaging in this research study was personal for me. I intentionally sought out All-In Milwaukee as a partner organization to contribute to the existing body of research that examines the experiences of first-generation college student of color. As the first in my family to go away

to college, I am familiar with the feelings of anxiety, uncertainty, and self-doubt. Being a part of a campus community where I was embraced, affirmed, supported, and challenged made persisting through to degree attainment possible. Because of my own personal experience, I wanted to leverage this opportunity to contribute to the work of All-In Milwaukee as they provide comprehensive support to first-generation college students of color. As the organization is poised to scale their impact, it is imperative that all program components positively contribute to student persistence, degree attainment, and entry into the Milwaukee professional workforce.

As the number of first-generation college students of color continue to increase, it is incumbent upon leaders of higher education and college completion programs to find innovative ways to provide the holistic support that these students need. Often when first-generation students of color attend predominately White institutions they face a myriad of barriers that exist beyond the academic setting. Leaders in higher education and those who operate programs aimed at supporting students of color must be willing to recognize and challenge deficit-minded perspectives that individuals have about first-generation college students of color. This shift in mindset and beliefs requires acknowledging and embracing the racial and cultural experiences of these students and a willingness to give space to amplify their experiences. Cultural relevance must be at the forefront of support programs, services, strategies, policies, and practice that are intended to support these students. The higher education space must be welcoming, supportive, and inclusive for all students who desire to enter the halls of academia, not just a privilege afforded to some.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Survey Participation Recruitment Letter

#### Request for Survey Participation



McKinney, Lakita D  
Tue 1/12/2021 2:42 PM

To: Tiffany Tardy <tiffany.tardy@allinmilwaukee.org>



Dear All-In Milwaukee Scholar/Prospective Survey Participant,

My name is Lakita McKinney, and I am a doctoral candidate from Vanderbilt University. I am conducting a quality improvement study in partnership with All-In Milwaukee as part of my degree completion requirements. This study explores the experiences of All-In Milwaukee Scholars at partner universities to inform recommendations for continuous program and process improvements to ensure your successful matriculation through college. This is a letter of invitation to participate in an online survey as a part of this quality improvement study.

By agreeing to participate in the study, you will be giving your consent for me as the principal researcher/investigator, to include your responses in my data analysis. The survey should not take more than 10 minutes to complete. Your participation in this study, while appreciated, is completely voluntary, and all your responses will be kept confidential. The Vanderbilt University Institutional Review Board has granted approval of this study. An informed consent agreement will appear on the first screen page of the survey. There will be no individually identifiable information, remarks, comments, or other identification of you as an individual participant. All results will be presented as aggregate, summary data.

Your participation in this study will contribute to the work of All-In Milwaukee to help limited-income, high-potential students graduate from college. No compensation will be offered for your participation.

If you would like to know more information about this study, or have any question, please feel free to contact me at [lakita.d.mckinney@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:lakita.d.mckinney@vanderbilt.edu). Thank you in advance for your time and participation. If you decide to participate after reading this letter, you can access the survey from the link found below. You can click the link to go to the survey or copy and paste the link into your Internet browser.

Thank you in advance for your participation.

Survey link: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/MM687V9>

Regards,

Lakita D. McKinney, M.Ed.  
Doctoral Candidate, Ed.D Leadership and Organizational Learning  
c. 773.454.3763  
e. [lakita.d.mckinney@vanderbilt.edu]lakita.d.mckinney@vanderbilt.edu



**Appendix B: All-In Milwaukee Program Participant Survey Analysis**

<b>Belonging – (Self-Esteem)</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>	<b>Responses Per Rating n=79</b>
1. I feel like I fit in with others at my college/university	3.18	0.92	Never True (1) - 1 Rarely True (2) - 19 Sometimes True (3) - 29 Often True (4) - 25 Always True (5) - 5
2. It is important to feel accepted by other students	3.54	0.92	Never True (1) - 0 Rarely True (2) - 9 Sometimes True (3) - 32 Often True (4) - 24 Always True (5) - 14
3. Students at my college/university see me as a competent person	3.73	0.69	Never True (1) - 0 Rarely True (2) - 2 Sometimes True (3) - 26 Often True (4) - 42 Always True (5) - 9
13. I feel like an outsider at my college/university	2.87	1.10	Never True (1) - 7 Rarely True (2) - 25 Sometimes True (3) - 25 Often True (4) - 15 Always True (5) - 7
20. My professors accept me when I'm just being me	3.9	0.79	Never True (1) - 0 Rarely True (2) - 4 Sometimes True (3) - 17 Often True (4) - 41 Always True (5) - 17
21. I am uncomfortable attending social functions at my college/university because I feel like I don't belong	2.81	1.03	Never True (1) - 7 Rarely True (2) - 24 Sometimes True (3) - 30 Often True (4) - 13 Always True (5) - 5
22. When I interact on campus, I feel comfortable	3.30	0.82	Never True (1) - 2 Rarely True (2) - 10 Sometimes True (3) - 31 Often True (4) - 34 Always True (5) - 2
23. Feeling "a part of things" is one of the things I like about going to my college/university	3.20	0.91	Never True (1) - 2 Rarely True (2) - 13 Sometimes True (3) - 38 Often True (4) - 19 Always True (5) - 7
26. It seems that I am liked on campus	3.28	0.77	Never True (1) - 0 Rarely True (2) - 10 Sometimes True (3) - 42 Often True (4) - 22 Always True (5) - 5
33. My professors make me feel valued as a student	3.47	0.78	Never True (1) - 0 Rarely True (2) - 5 Sometimes True (3) - 41 Often True (4) - 24 Always True (5) - 9
<b>Belonging – (Efficacy)</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>	<b>Responses Per Rating n=79</b>
4. Students offer to help me when they see I need it	3.19	0.95	Never True (1) - 2 Rarely True (2) - 17 Sometimes True (3) - 30

			Often True (4) - <b>24</b> Always True (5) - <b>6</b>
5. I make an effort to help other students feel welcome	4.00	0.77	Never True (1) - <b>0</b> Rarely True (2) - <b>3</b> Sometimes True (3) - <b>14</b> Often True (4) - <b>42</b> Always True (5) - <b>20</b>
7. I get support from professors when I need it	3.81	0.93	Never True (1) - <b>0</b> Rarely True (2) - <b>6</b> Sometimes True (3) - <b>25</b> Often True (4) - <b>26</b> Always True (5) - <b>22</b>
10. I feel discriminated against at my college/university	2.16	0.90	Never True (1) - <b>20</b> Rarely True (2) - <b>31</b> Sometimes True (3) - <b>24</b> Often True (4) - <b>3</b> Always True (5) - <b>1</b>
11. I offer to help other students, even if they don't ask for it	3.13	0.92	Never True (1) - <b>4</b> Rarely True (2) - <b>11</b> Sometimes True (3) - <b>41</b> Often True (4) - <b>17</b> Always True (5) - <b>6</b>
16. I feel understood by other students who attend my college/university	3.13	0.90	Never True (1) - <b>1</b> Rarely True (2) - <b>19</b> Sometimes True (3) - <b>33</b> Often True (4) - <b>21</b> Always True (5) - <b>5</b>
17. I make an effort when in class to interact and engage with other students	3.28	0.77	Never True (1) - <b>0</b> Rarely True (2) - <b>12</b> Sometimes True (3) - <b>36</b> Often True (4) - <b>28</b> Always True (5) - <b>3</b>
18. I am supportive of other students	4.00	.68	Never True (1) - <b>0</b> Rarely True (2) - <b>1</b> Sometimes True (3) - <b>15</b> Often True (4) - <b>46</b> Always True (5) - <b>17</b>
19. I am comfortable asking other students on campus for advice	3.33	1.03	Never True (1) - <b>4</b> Rarely True (2) - <b>12</b> Sometimes True (3) - <b>26</b> Often True (4) - <b>28</b> Always True (5) - <b>9</b>
27. I let other students know that I appreciate them	3.59	0.97	Never True (1) - <b>2</b> Rarely True (2) - <b>6</b> Sometimes True (3) - <b>29</b> Often True (4) - <b>27</b> Always True (5) - <b>15</b>
31. I ask other students for help when I need it	3.47	0.93	Never True (1) - <b>2</b> Rarely True (2) - <b>11</b> Sometimes True (3) - <b>21</b> Often True (4) - <b>38</b> Always True (5) - <b>7</b>
34. I have thought about leaving my college/university because I did not feel like I fit in	2.11	1.20	Never True (1) - <b>32</b> Rarely True (2) - <b>23</b> Sometimes True (3) - <b>10</b> Often True (4) - <b>11</b> Always True (5) - <b>3</b>
<b>Belonging – (Connectedness)</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>	<b>Responses Per Rating</b>



6. I view my college/university as a place to experience a sense of belonging	3.43	0.93	Never True (1) – <b>1</b> Rarely True (2) - <b>10</b> Sometimes True (3) - <b>33</b> Often True (4) - <b>24</b> Always True (5) – <b>11</b>
8. I am invited to social events by students outside of my immediate circle of friends	2.49	1.06	Never True (1) – <b>14</b> Rarely True (2) - <b>29</b> Sometimes True (3) - <b>22</b> Often True (4) - <b>11</b> Always True (5) – <b>3</b>
9. I like the people that I learn with in class	3.38	0.76	Never True (1) – <b>1</b> Rarely True (2) - <b>6</b> Sometimes True (3) - <b>38</b> Often True (4) - <b>30</b> Always True (5) – <b>4</b>
12. It is important to me that someone at my college/university acknowledges my personal milestones and achievements	3.16	1.07	Never True (1) – <b>5</b> Rarely True (2) - <b>15</b> Sometimes True (3) - <b>30</b> Often True (4) - <b>20</b> Always True (5) – <b>9</b>
14. I spend most of my time outside of class with other students who share my values	3.18	1.01	Never True (1) – <b>3</b> Rarely True (2) - <b>20</b> Sometimes True (3) - <b>21</b> Often True (4) - <b>30</b> Always True (5) – <b>5</b>
15. Students ask for my ideas or opinion about different matters	3.13	0.92	Never True (1) – <b>3</b> Rarely True (2) - <b>14</b> Sometimes True (3) - <b>38</b> Often True (4) - <b>18</b> Always True (5) – <b>6</b>
24. There are students who attend my college/university with whom I have a strong bond	3.63	1.11	Never True (1) – <b>5</b> Rarely True (2) - <b>7</b> Sometimes True (3) - <b>17</b> Often True (4) - <b>33</b> Always True (5) – <b>17</b>
25. I keep my personal life to myself while attending school	3.61	0.93	Never True (1) – <b>1</b> Rarely True (2) - <b>7</b> Sometimes True (3) - <b>28</b> Often True (4) - <b>29</b> Always True (5) – <b>14</b>
28. I let other students know that I care about them by asking how things are going for them and their family	3.44	0.97	Never True (1) – <b>2</b> Rarely True (2) - <b>12</b> Sometimes True (3) - <b>23</b> Often True (4) - <b>33</b> Always True (5) – <b>9</b>
29. Students notice when I am absent from class or social gatherings because they ask about me	2.66	1.04	Never True (1) – <b>12</b> Rarely True (2) - <b>21</b> Sometimes True (3) - <b>31</b> Often True (4) - <b>12</b> Always True (5) – <b>3</b>
30. One or more of my classmates confides in me	3.14	1.09	Never True (1) – <b>7</b> Rarely True (2) - <b>16</b> Sometimes True (3) - <b>20</b> Often True (4) - <b>31</b> Always True (5) – <b>5</b>
32. I feel free to share my disappointments/struggles with at least one other student on campus	3.34	1.18	Never True (1) – <b>5</b> Rarely True (2) - <b>17</b> Sometimes True (3) - <b>16</b> Often True (4) - <b>28</b> Always True (5) – <b>13</b>

## Appendix C: Email Invitation to Participate in Study Interview

**From:** McKinney, Lakita D  
**Sent:** Thursday, February 4, 2021 4:05 PM  
**Cc:** Tiffany Tardy <tiffany.tardy@allinmilwaukee.org>  
**Subject:** Request for One-On-One Interview Participation

Good Afternoon All-In Milwaukee Scholar,

I hope that this email finds you well. It was a pleasure to virtually meet you during the Winter Convening.

As a Doctor of Education student in the Leadership, Learning, and Organizations program at Vanderbilt University, I am inviting you to participate in an interview about your experiences as a racial and ethnic minority at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) and how those experiences impact college success and persistence. You have been identified as a potential interviewee for this study because of your participation in All-In Milwaukee's comprehensive college completion program. Your participation in this study is extremely important to me and to All-In Milwaukee as an organization as it will provide the data and insights necessary to ensure success and persistence at partner universities.

Should you agree to participate in the interview, please select an interview date/time using the scheduling assistant linked below. Once your interview appointment is confirmed, I will send you a calendar invitation for a Zoom meeting. The interview video call will take approximately 60 minutes. Participation is voluntary and your responses will be kept anonymous. You will have the option to not respond to any question that you choose. Agreement to participate will be interpreted as your informed consent to participate and that you are at least 18 years of age.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact me as the Principal Investigator via email at lakita.d.mckinney@vanderbilt.edu or my faculty advisor, Dr. Eve Rifkin at eve.r.rifkin@vanderbilt.edu. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a participant, contact the Vanderbilt Institutional Review Board (IRB) at (615) 322-2918. Please print or save a copy of this page for your records.

Thank you in advance for your participation. The scheduling assistant can be found below:

[https://calendly.com/lakita-d-mckinney\\_vanderbilt/60min\\_scholar\\_interview](https://calendly.com/lakita-d-mckinney_vanderbilt/60min_scholar_interview)



### All-In Milwaukee Scholar Interviews - Lakita D. McKinney

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the interview process. Please select an interview date/time based upon availability. After you have selected your interview date/time, a calendar invite with details for Zoom will follow. If none of the available times/dates work for you, please reach out to

calendly.com

Lakita D. McKinney

## Appendix D: All-In Milwaukee Program Scholar Interview Protocol

### All-In Milwaukee Program Scholar Interview Protocol

Good morning, afternoon, or evening

Thank you so much for taking the time to participate in this one-on-one interview with me. I know it is called an interview, but I am really hoping to just facilitate a conversation where I can hear about your experiences attending college at \_\_\_\_\_. As I shared during the All-In Milwaukee Winter Convening, I am a doctoral student at Vanderbilt University, and I have partnered with All-In Milwaukee to engage in a quality improvement study as a part of my degree completion.

So that I can be engaged and fully present during our conversation I will ask your permission to record our conversation. I can provide a written copy of the transcript if you desire but keep in mind that the turnaround time would be approximately 3 weeks. Participation in this interview is voluntary and you have the right to discontinue participation at any time.

When I start the recording, I will ask you to give your first name and repeat the. Statement, “I give my permission to be recorded” I will then begin to ask a series of questions starting with some basic demographic information. Do you have any questions before we begin?

We are now recording, please state your first name and whether you give me your permission to be recorded.

Great! Thank you \_\_\_\_\_  
Can you confirm your student classification?  
What is your major?  
Please tell me what race/ethnicity you identify with.  
Have either of your parents earned a four-year degree?

### **Background and Transition to College**

#### *Understanding of Individual Experiences/Interdisciplinary Perspectives*

1. Can you tell me about where you grew up and what it was like to grow up there?
2. I am interested to know the reasons why you chose to attend \_\_\_\_\_?  
Specifically, what factors contributed to your decision?
3. What is your relationship like with your family and friends from your home community now that you are in college?
4. Describe your transition from high school to college. What has/was that transition been like for you?

### **College Experience**

#### *Understanding of Individual Experiences/Experiential Knowledge & Voice*

5. Tell me about the activities or organizations that you are involved with at this college.
6. Where have you made friends at college (in classes, residence hall, student organization)?

7. How would you describe your experience in your classes at \_\_\_\_\_?
8. Describe your interactions with your faculty.
9. Do you feel like valued by your professors? In what ways do they demonstrate that they value your presence as a student or actively support you?

### **Racial Climate**

#### ***Challenging the Dominant Ideology/Commitment to Social Justice***

10. Do you feel that diversity is a priority at \_\_\_\_\_? Why or why not?
11. How would you describe the racial climate at \_\_\_\_\_?
12. How do students of different cultural or racial backgrounds interact with one another?
13. Have you ever had to advocate for yourself or others who share your identity? What was the situation? What was the outcome?
14. How do you see your racial identity or culture represented at the college?
15. How do you think you are perceived based on your racial identity or culture?
16. Can you think of a time when you felt like your culture was celebrated at \_\_\_\_\_? Describe that experience. How did that make you feel?
17. Can you think of a time when your culture was misrepresented or disrespected at \_\_\_\_\_? Describe that experience. How did that make you feel?
18. Is there one experience that best characterizes the racial climate at this college? Describe that experience.
19. Has your view of the racial climate or diversity changed while you have been in college? Please share how it has changed.

### **Belonging**

#### ***Experiential Knowledge & Voice***

20. Are there spaces where you feel you belong at \_\_\_\_\_? a. What are some of the activities there? b. Who are the people with you in those spaces?
21. Can you think of time when you felt out of place at the college? a. What was happening there? b. Who were some of the people that you were with?
22. Do you feel like you've found your "niche" or place at \_\_\_\_\_? Describe this. a. How do you know that this is your place? b. What feelings or experiences help you to know this?
23. Do you feel like you can show up as your authentic self? Why or why not?

### **Success/Persistence**

#### ***Challenging the dominant ideology***

24. How do you define college success?
25. What has contributed to your success in college?
26. Is there anything that has interfered with you achieving what you hoped to in college up to this point? a. What helped you move forward despite that challenge?
27. Is there anything that you believe would improve your experience at this college that you would like to share with me?
28. Is there anything that All-In Milwaukee could do that it is not currently being done to support you in being successful in college?
29. Is there anything else that you would like to share?

## Appendix E: Permission for Use Cain and Smith, 2020 Strategy Table

Re: [External] Permission to Use and Adapt Table 1. Strategy for Critically Exploring the Experiences of College Students from Rural Areas

**From:** Elise Cain <ecain@georgiasouthern.edu>  
**Sent:** Thursday, April 29, 2021 8:12 AM  
**To:** McKinney, Lakita D <lakita.d.mckinney@Vanderbilt.Edu>  
**Subject:** Re: [External] Permission to Use and Adapt Table 1. Strategy for Critically Exploring the Experiences of College Students from Rural Areas

Dear Lakita,

Thank you for your email. I connected with Dr. Smith and we both give you permission to use and adapt our table from our article *Using Critical Race Theory to Explore the Experiences of College Students from Rural Areas*. We are so happy you found our article and our framework helpful. Your research sounds very interesting. We wish you the best of luck as you complete your requirements for your EdD. Please let me know if you have any questions or if there are any additional ways I might assist you.

Sincerely,

Dr. Cain

On Wed, Apr 28, 2021 at 2:08 PM McKinney, Lakita D <[lakita.d.mckinney@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:lakita.d.mckinney@vanderbilt.edu)> wrote:

Good Afternoon Dr. Cain and Dr. Smith,

I hope that this communication finds you well.

My name is Lakita McKinney, and I am a doctoral candidate at Vanderbilt University. I am in the process of completing the requirements for the Doctor of Education degree and would like your permission to use and adapt Table 1. Strategy for Critically Exploring the Experiences of College Students from Rural Areas from your article *Using Critical Race Theory to Explore the Experiences of College Students from Rural Areas*. I am exploring the experiences of first-generation Black and Latinx students at predominately white universities in the Midwest and leveraging Critical Race Theory as a framework. The table that you created would be useful in my work if adapted to fit this context. As expected, I would credit your original work.

Please let me know if there is additional information that I can provide to aide you in making this decision.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of my request.

Respectfully,

## Appendix F: All-In Milwaukee Program Staff Interview Protocol

1. Tell me about your role at All-In Milwaukee.
2. What are the traits, attitudes, and dispositions that All-In Milwaukee tries to instill in program scholars?
3. What aspects of the All-In Milwaukee program do you think contribute most to the success of program scholars?
4. From your vantage point, what are the barriers to success for program scholars academically? Personally? Socially?
5. How does All-In Milwaukee emphasize the importance of identity and self-concept through its program components and/or supports?
6. How does All-In Milwaukee incorporate the various backgrounds/cultures of program scholars and leverage that to inform program design and implementation?
7. How does All-In Milwaukee engage families to ensure the success of program scholars?
8. How does All-In Milwaukee prepare program scholars to thrive socially at its partner universities?
9. How are partner universities held accountable for student success academically and socially?
10. How does your personal college experience inform how you think about program design and implementation?
11. What keeps you up at night when you think of All-In Milwaukee program scholars?