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AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF FIRST-YEAR STUDENT SELF-AUTHORSHIP AND MAINTENANCE OF A MERIT-BASED SCHOLARSHIP

Michelle Antonia

Kennesaw State University, mantonia@students.kennesaw.edu

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AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF FIRST-YEAR STUDENT SELF-AUTHORSHIP AND
MAINTENANCE OF A MERIT-BASED SCHOLARSHIP

By

MICHELLE ANTONIA EATON

A Thesis

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Accepted by:

James Davis, Ph.D., Chair

Stephanie M. Foote, Ph.D., Committee Member

Michael Sanseviro, Ph.D., Committee Member

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to research the meaning behind first-year students' self-authorship development and how that development correlates to their ability to retain a merit-based scholarship and likelihood of persisting to the second year of college. This study sought to examine the ways students make meaning of their identities and development during the transition and throughout the first year of college. The study was conducted at a mid-sized, 4-year public liberal arts institution in the Southeast United States and the research used the theoretical framework of Baxter Magolda's Self-Authorship development (Kegan, 1994; Baxter Magolda, 2005). One-on-one interviews with six HOPE Scholar participants in the study concluded that: 1) first-year students are moving between the beginning phases of self-authorship; 2) a merit-based scholarship was a motivating and influencing factor to maintain a 3.0 GPA in the first college year; 3) there is no evident connection between retaining a merit-based scholarship and persistence to the second year; and 4) merit-based scholarships play a role in increasing engagement in course work and co-curricular activities, while providing the option for students to work less in college. Implications for research involve replicating the same research on a larger scale, and further research on the connection of merit-based scholarships and persistence. Implications for higher education and practitioners includes promoting self-authorship development in first-year students through programming and intervention efforts while connecting the developed programs to assist students in maintaining a "B" average or higher grade point average (GPA) to retain a merit-based scholarship.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Summary

Retention and persistence in the first college year are salient topics in higher education, which is reasonable as, “attrition is the flip side of retention, and it has consequences for the student as well as the image and finances of an institution” (Levitz and Richter, 1999, p. 32). According to University System of Georgia (USG) reports and recent data, out of first-time freshmen who entered the system in fall 2009, 21,436 students received the HOPE Scholarship (Helping Outstanding Pupils Educationally) and after the first check at 30 credit hours, 6,844 students lost HOPE. One study conducted in 2006 found that, “HOPE increased freshmen enrollment by 5.9%...four-year colleges account for most of the gain; a reduction in students leaving the state explains two-thirds of the 4-year school effect attributable to freshmen who have recently graduated from high school” (Cornwell, Mustard & Sridhar, 2006, p. 761).

Student retention and progression after loss of merit-based scholarships has been an issue in higher education. Alexander Astin (1977, 1985) concluded that the more students are involved in their collegiate career, the more likely they are to be retained. Further research on student development and the transitional period of entering college has been conducted by Nancy Schlossberg. According to Hamrick, Evans and Schuh (2002), “Schlossberg (1989) argued that a sense of belonging is an influential factor in whether a student succeeds and develops in college” (p. 86). Early theories of retention were an outgrowth of research on and involving the retention mystery of why some students persist while others do not. The earliest retention research suggests student retention was seen as a reflection of the student’s attributes, skills and motivation; however, perspectives on retention began to broaden in the 1970’s with Vincent Tinto’s 1975 research that demonstrated the relationship between the environment the student

was surrounded by (particularly the institution) to a student's decision to stay or leave the institution (Tinto, 1975). According to Tinto (1999), first-year students are more likely to persist when they are surrounded by an environment that promotes success, provides academic and social support, motivates students to learn, and holds high expectations. Poor adjustment to college includes problems students face with their environment, especially for first-year students, when they expect more from their college environment than they do of themselves (Swartz & Martin, 1997).

According to Henry, Rubenstein, and Bugler's (2004) study on "borderline HOPE Scholars" (those close to 3.0 GPA), the HOPE scholarship affected student behaviors, persistence, and graduation. In addition, their findings show students with the HOPE Scholarship were more likely to graduate after four years than non-HOPE recipients, and "scholarship loss tends to be associated with lower credit accumulation and a decreased likelihood of degree receipt," (Henry, Rubenstein and Bulger, 2004, p. 686). Additionally, Diamond (2011) explained, "for every 10 students who start college with the HOPE Scholarship, only three will keep it the entire time they're in college" ("Few Hold onto HOPE," para. 1). Understanding the factors that contribute to maintaining or losing a merit-based scholarship, (such as HOPE) could help faculty and staff better assist students in sustaining the necessary grade point average (GPA) to keep the scholarship, potentially leading to persistence after the first year of college.

The HOPE Scholarship assists in retaining students, as it alleviates some of the financial burden from students and their families. In a 10-year period, ending in 2003, \$1,183,468,377 in merit-based aid was awarded to 324,921 USG students through the HOPE Scholarship ("HOPE Overview," 2003). There are several factors that could be researched to determine what occurs

during the transition between high school and first year in college that influences students' GPA to decrease, resulting in students leaving an institution. For example, studies suggest success in college is related to grit and self-efficacy, in addition to SAT and High School GPA (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews & Kelly, 2007). Grit refers to the ability of a person to be able to challenge their inborn talent to have perseverance and passion for long-term goals (Duckworth, 2016). Similarly, when students enter higher education the belief that they can succeed based on past experiences of success, they have a positive sense of self-efficacy, which is also integral to student success (Bandura, 1997). Furthermore, non-academic variables include social (parental attachment/separation, social adjustment, and external factors), emotional and personal factors, and institutional environment factors play a large role in persistence of college students (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Brooks & DuBois, 1995). Grit and self-efficacy support the notion of self-authorship as individuals define their inner passion and purpose, and in turn, work hard to become the authors of their own lives.

For the purposes of this study, research focused on self-authorship development and variables that impacted transition beyond student characteristics and past academic performance. In relation to retention and self-authorship, research indicates that integrating cognitive, intrapersonal, and relational development portrayed how students interpret their experiences, characteristics, and social relations. Attrition often occurs when students fail to reflect on their goals or make internal decisions based on personal reflections and perspectives (Kegan, 1994; Baxter Magolda, 2001). Once students develop self-authorship skills, their coping skills increase, and they rely on strong, internally defined goals (Baxter Magolda (2001); Pizzolato, 2004).

In addition, research conducted by Martin, Swartz-Kulstad and Madson (1999) suggests that the importance of obtaining an undergraduate degree is constantly growing, and problems with student retention are increasingly costly to individuals, families and universities, “Nearly one-third of all undergraduates leave postsecondary education in their first year, a greater proportion than in all later years,” (Horn, 1998, p. 1). As research points to the loss of scholarships aligning with attrition, it is important to look at the requirements of merit-based scholarships. The HOPE Scholarship is a merit-based scholarship that requires Georgia residents to have a minimum GPA of 3.0 and then retain a minimum 3.0 in their cumulative higher education GPA to remain eligible (“Georgia Student Finance Commission,” n.d.).

Self-authorship involves the integration of cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal dimensions of development (Baxter Magolda, 1998, p. 144). According to Baxter Magolda (2001), the development of self-authorship occurs in four phases, Following External Formulas, the Crossroads, Becoming the Author of One’s Own Life, and Internal Foundations. The current study, described in this thesis, focused on first-year students, who are generally in the first two phases, Following External Formulas and the Crossroads.

Baxter Magolda et al. (2012) found that first-year students begin to move away from relying on authority (Following External Formulas) to defining themselves and their lives (the Crossroads). In the early phases of self-authorship, students are transitioning from the idea of viewing their superiors as figures of authority and navigating the increased options and opportunities to be successful in their own beliefs. “Baxter Magolda et al. (2012) revealed that first-year students moved away from reliance on authority and toward self-definition as they entered a period of crisis and uncertainty in one’s ways of knowing and came out on the other side unscathed” (Redmond, 2014, p. 92). As Baxter Magolda & King mention in their 2007

study, entering college students “often see knowledge as certain and accept authority’s knowledge claims uncritically” (p. 493). While existing research shows that students who are more self-authored are more successful in college and life, it is unknown how students make meaning of self-authorship and its connection to maintaining a merit-based scholarship. Furthermore, there is no existing research that determines whether self-authorship development plays a role in students retaining the HOPE Scholarship and persisting at a higher rate because of the scholarship.

Statement of the Problem

Research indicates that the first year of college is critical to whether or not a student will persist at an institution. Early experiences can potentially affect whether students persist not just in the first year but persistence to graduation (Astin, 1993; Tinto, 1975; Tinto, 1993). Because not all experiences are positive, it is important that students develop the capacity to navigate all types of experiences, and through that process, become self-authored. When students are self-authored, they make decisions based on their internally defined goals and perspectives (Baxter Magolda, 2001). Not having the ability to make their own decisions can be a setback when students encounter challenging situations such as making an academic decision which will assist them in whether or not they retain the HOPE Scholarship. There is a lack of research describing students’ self-authorship development and the relationship, if any, development in this area has to college persistence. Furthermore, there is no research exploring self-authorship and the maintenance of a merit-based scholarship such as HOPE. “Because of financial pressures and competing obligations, today’s students are less likely to finish higher education. Thirty-eight percent of students with additional financial, work and family obligations leave school in their first year” (“Today’s Reality,” Lumina Foundation, n.d., n. p.). Illuminating stories of self-

authorship development of students may provide a comprehensive understanding of relationships between this form of psychosocial development and ability to progress and retain the HOPE Scholarship.

Through existing studies and research, it is possible to examine a student's current phase of self-authorship as well as the phase toward which they are moving. Students in their first year of college are likely not able to identify and discuss their self-authorship development, however their stories could provide more of an understanding of the relationship between the HOPE Scholarship and self-authorship. There is an existing gap between how students describe themselves and their growth in the first year of college as it relates to their ability to retain and feel the need to sustain the HOPE Scholarship, for a variety of reasons.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to observe the ways students, specifically HOPE Scholars, make meaning of their self-authorship development in the first college year. To differentiate this study from existing research, the study examined participants who entered the University of North Georgia (UNG) in fall 2016 with a 3.0 or higher GPA. UNG is a mid-sized, public, comprehensive university in the Southeast United States. The participants included those who were able to retain the HOPE Scholarship following their first year in college, as well as a participant who failed to retain the scholarship following her first year. During the interview process, students' narratives defined their level of self-authorship development. This exploratory study was intended to introduce practices or policy to assist students in maintaining a GPA of at least a 3.0 so they could retain the HOPE Scholarship.

Maintaining or raising a GPA has implications for not only the students, but also their family contribution and increases their likelihood to persist at the institution and graduate.

According to Henry et al. (2004), “complementary programs that address the factors that put students at risk of losing their scholarship could prevent students from falling below the eligibility threshold” (p. 706). This study provides a foundation for higher education professionals to consider as they develop programming and interventions to assist first-year students, particularly those who are not the highest achieving students, to maintain or raise their GPA.

Research Questions

1. What phase of self-authorship is reflected in students’ discussion of their first year of college?
2. How do students describe their self-authorship development during the first year of college?
3. How are students’ perceptions of themselves during their first year of college influenced by their goals, personal characteristics, and a merit-based scholarship?

Significance to the Field

This study has several benefits that could be significant to higher education research and practice. First, the research fills an existing gap in research on self-authorship development. The participants interviewed for the study had the opportunity to share their experiences with the researcher to shape the development of new programs for HOPE Scholars, and in that process, they might further self-author. Furthermore, the study may increase participants’ awareness of self-authorship allowing them to become more aware of themselves and their identities. The study provided the researcher with information about first-year student’s attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors during self-authorship development in the first-year of college and how it connects

to retaining the HOPE Scholarship. This research could potentially be useful to faculty, staff, and other researchers, as it can be used to inform professional practice and future research.

Overview

This thesis begins with an examination of the research and literature that provide a foundational understanding of the self-authorship development theory, the impact of self-authorship on students, first-year students point in the developmental process, retention and persistence of first-year students, and HOPE Scholarship literature on student success and impact of losing merit-based scholarships. Next, Chapter 3 describes the methodology used in this exploratory, qualitative study to explore self-authorship development in HOPE Scholarship recipients. Chapter 4 describes the findings, including the common themes that emerged from the analyses of the qualitative data collected from one-on-one interviews with participants in the study. Finally, Chapter 5 presents a discussion of the findings, as well as implications on professional practice and future research.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Overview

This chapter examines three areas of research related to the current study. The first section explores who first-year students are from a developmental standpoint. The second section describes research highlighting the relationship between the HOPE Scholarship and retention and persistence of first-year students. Finally, the last section examines the self-authorship theory, especially the first two phases of Following External Formulas and the Crossroads, with a focus on environmental and personal characteristics that assist in the development of self-authorship in first-year students.

First-Year Students: Who Are They?

The Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) Freshman Survey data in 2016 mentioned the topics which emerged as a common theme for incoming first-year college students at four-year colleges and universities were college costs and affordability (“The American Freshmen,” 2016). This is important to note as this thesis studies ways self-authorship ties into merit-based scholarships. Today’s first-year students are becoming increasingly more diverse and higher education institutions are serving a multitude of students of different ages, races, ethnicities, gender identities, disabilities, sexual orientations, nationalities, and first-generation students. The demographic profile is constantly changing, including the backgrounds and environments students are arriving from, their physical and mental health status, and academic preparation (Crissman Ishler, 2005). Students today are also becoming one of the most diverse groups in history, with different race and ethnicities enrolling at a higher rate (Turner, 2015).

The authors of *Knocking at the College Door: Projections of High School Graduates* predict that

45% of the nation's public high school graduates will be non-White by 2019-2020 (Prescott, 2012).

Traditionally-aged college students are moving from the Millennial student group to Generation Z, and while the exact time frame for "Generation Z" or "Gen Z" varies among those who study the group, this generational category generally encompasses those born between 1995 and 2010 (Seemiller & Grace, 2016). Students in Generation Z are defined as technology reliant, with a strong ability to multi-task, feel the need to be rewarded, desiring high intensity relationships with others, and thriving on opportunities presented to them ("Engaging Generation Z Students," 2015). Additionally, Generation Z students are a mature and focused group of students who feel responsibility toward their environment and to each other (Semiller & Grace, 2016).

The characteristics of the current generation of first-year students indicate aspects of development as suggested by research. Most first-year students are in dualism and multiplicity stages of development, which is consistent with theories regarding intellectual development (Baxter Magolda, 2002). Dualism is a phenomenon defined as, "entering students define knowledge as information and facts" (Erickson & Strommer, 2005, p. 246). In this phase, students view instructors as authorities and when students are faced with challenges to their views, they gradually transform their assumptions toward the facts from sources of authority (e.g., textbooks or their instructors) (Erickson & Strommer, 2005). An example of dualism as Erickson and Strommer (2005) explain, "Learning means taking notes on what the authorities say, committing them to memory, and feeding them back as answers on tests" (p. 48).

Multiplicity is when students begin to see that in some areas, there seems to be no "right

answers” which goes against reasoned arguments, evidence and documentation. Students in this phase realize that it is important to emphasize support of their opinions.

It is important to not only understand the characteristics and aspects of first-year student development, but equally important is information that provides insight into other influences on student persistence, including finances. Today’s first-year students are increasingly concerned about college cost and affordability, which makes it is important to understand the financial implications of a student in higher education. According to the Educational Advisory Board (EAB), a third of today’s first-year students expect their families to contribute \$10,000 or more to their first year. In addition, more than half of students are concerned about their ability to pay for college and have to use their own income to contribute (“Facts About Today’s College Students,” 2017). Crissman Isler (2005) explained that the cost of college tuition continues to increase and only about 30 percent of students are pursuing an exclusively parent- or student-financed education.

Retention in the First Year

Retention and persistence continue to impact first-year students throughout institutions of higher education. Tinto’s (1975) model of student retention supported the notion that students persist when they are successfully integrated into the institution. There are types of integration that Tinto (1975) suggest as measurement tools for student retention, including aspects of academic and social integration. Additional national research identifies the same type of factors that play a role in retention which include GPA and financial aid (Makuakane-Drechsel and Hagedorn, 2000). According to Tinto (2004), when students have an unmet need they tend to register for fewer courses, they tend to work, or live off campus which could have a negative

influence on retention. Additionally, student attitudes and satisfaction are prevalent themes in retention literature, which are discussed later in this section.

Data retrieved from the University System of Georgia show that in 2010, 33,966 first-time, full-time freshmen in bachelor's degree seeking programs initially started in a USG system school. The system-wide retention rate in Georgia after six years was 65.1%. Additionally, in the fall 2015 first-time freshmen cohort, there were 37,482 total students who began their first year at a USG institution, and 85% of those students continued into their second year (USG Data Warehouse). Research suggests the first-year persistence of students plays a vital role in the overall success and graduation rates of individuals at the institution in which they initially enroll, "Freshmen-to-sophomore persistence measurement is important both because of student vulnerability at the beginning of college and because institutions can react quickly with interventions" (Mortenson, 2012, p. 41). It is important to note institutional persistence rates vary with the academic selectivity of the institution; institutions with more selective admissions standards tend to have higher first-year to second-year persistence rates than colleges and universities with an access mission (Mortenson, 2012).

At the same time, research on student persistence reveals that a large portion of students who leave institutions do so between the first and second year (Ishler and Upcraft, 2005). Bean (2005) found in his research, there are nine themes of college student retention: Intentions, institutional fit and commitment, psychological processes and key attitudes, academics, social factors, bureaucratic factors, the external environment, the student's background, and money and finance.

In regard to this thesis specifically, financial considerations played a role in whether or not students persisted if they lost the HOPE Scholarship. As the cost of college rises, many

students fail to enter or complete because of financial considerations. Moreover, Caberra, Stampen, and Hansen (1990) found students who are dissatisfied with the cost of attendance are more likely to withdraw. This potentially indicates the student's likelihood to persist after losing HOPE their first year in college could be lowered significantly. Furthermore, financial aid is a positive factor related to attainment of baccalaureate degree seeking students, and the percentage of students who are receiving financial aid continues to increase, currently eighty-five percent for full-time undergraduate students at four-year degree-granting postsecondary institutions (National Center for Education Statistics, "The Condition of Education," 2016).

There is vast research on college student retention. Berger and Lyon's 2005 study included data from retention studies from the 1930s, identified student mortality and related factors through Panos and Astin's 1968 article on attrition of college students (Berger & Lyon, 2004). The foundational research on student retention started with the publication of Tinto's 1975 theory on dropout in higher education which concludes that dropout from college can be, "viewed as a longitudinal process of interactions between the individual and the academic and social systems of the college during which a person's experiences in those systems continually modify his goal and institutional commitments in ways which lead to persistence and/or to varying forms of dropout" (Tinto, 1975, p. 94). According to Tinto (1975), this means a student who does not achieve some level of academic or social integration is likely to leave. "The importance of academic integration (especially grade performance) in persistence in college, social interaction with one's peers (through friendship associations) can both assist and detract from continuation in college" (Tinto, 1975, p. 109). Tinto's later model of student departure from 1993 offers additional explanations of why students leave, including being separated from

their family and high school friends and becoming engaged in the process of college with other students and faculty, and pursuing new values and behaviors (Tinto, 1993).

John Braxton's work in *Reworking the Student Departure Puzzle* suggests that tangible factors such as students' finances, savings and financial aid, as well as intangible factors including student perceptions play a role in persistence (Braxton, 2000). Kuh, Cruce, Shoup and Kinzie (2008) found that many studies focused on baccalaureate degree attainment as a primary measure of student success. Kuh et al. (2008) states, "Braxton (2006) concluded that eight domains warrant attention: academic attainment, acquisition of general education, development of academic competence, development of cognitive skills and intellectual dispositions, occupational attainment, preparation for adulthood and citizenship, personal accomplishments, and personal development" (p. 541).

HOPE Scholarship

The HOPE Scholarship Program was initiated in 1992 under the supervision of Governor Zell Miller and was launched in 1993 to, "provide assistance towards the cost of tuition at eligible Georgia postsecondary institution to incent and reward Georgia's high achieving students" ("HOPE," n.d., para 2). "The Georgia HOPE Scholarship Program has two components—the merit-based HOPE Scholarship and the HOPE Grant," (Cornwell et al., 2006, p. 762). For the purposes of this research, the focus is on the HOPE Scholarship, a Scholarship funded by the Georgia Lottery for Education. Eligibility for the HOPE Scholarship includes at least a 3.0 GPA in core curriculum courses earned in a Georgia high school. In order to retain the HOPE Scholarship, students must earn and maintain at least a 3.0 GPA in postsecondary higher education. First-year students with an incoming GPA between a 3.0 and 3.70 receive 80% payment towards their tuition for their "B" average attainment in high school. If a student

has above a 3.70 GPA from a Georgia high school and minimum scores on the SAT and ACT, it allows eligibility for the Zell Miller Scholarship. The Zell Miller Scholarship pays 100% of an eligible student's tuition ("HOPE & Zell Miller Scholarship Eligibility," n.d.). According to Bruce and Carruthers (2014), one of the principal objectives of state-financed merit scholarships is an incentive to stay in the state for college.

The HOPE Scholarship Program plays a role in college enrollment in the state of Georgia. According to Cornwell, Mustard & Sridhar (2008), "we estimate that total college enrollment was 5.9% higher in Georgia than for the Southern Regional Educational Board (SREB) as a whole because of the HOPE Program...the program added 2,889 freshmen per year to Georgia colleges, which amounts to 15% of freshmen scholarship recipients between 1993 and 1997" (p. 763). According to Cornwell, Lee and Mustard (2005), merit-based scholarships help to "increase college enrollment; another is to keep the best and brightest from going to school out-of-state; and to promote and reward academic achievement" (p. 896).

HOPE Scholarship and Persistence

There is a variety of literature examining the effects of merit-based scholarships and college persistence, however the findings from these studies are mixed. Some research suggests that the loss of a merit-based scholarship leads to lower persistence, while other research suggests that students who lose a merit-based scholarship ultimately stay enrolled. Existing research described in this section demonstrates the relationship between financial aid programs and student persistence rates in higher education institutions. For example, a study conducted by Cornwell, Mustard, and Sridhar (2006) discussed the importance of merit-based aid and its impact on enrollment increases in college. The study found that the total number of first-time freshmen enrollment in Georgia colleges increased due to the HOPE Scholarship. "Further,

since 1993, Georgia's rate of retaining students with SAT scores greater than 1,500 climbed threefold" (Cornwell et al., 2006, p. 783). In fall 2009, USG accounted for 76,888 (39.6%) of total students who were receiving the HOPE Scholarship ("USG HOPE Report 2009," n.d.).

A study conducted by Henry et al. (2004) suggests that HOPE allowed students more time to devote to school and possibly quickened the time to degree. To the extent that students are responsible for paying part of the cost of college, merit aid could reduce the potential need to work while in school, which would allow students with more time to study, therefore increasing the likelihood to persist. St. John (1999) suggested that each dollar of student financial aid of all types increases persistence more than each dollar reduction in tuition. This was followed by Bean's model of student attrition (1983) which argues that student finances are a potential reason for attrition.

Dynarski (2008) found that the introduction of the HOPE Scholarship in Georgia led to increases in enrollment, and Scott-Clayton (2011) found that the West Virginia PROMISE (Providing Real Opportunities to Maximize In-state Student Excellence) Scholarship, much like the HOPE Scholarship in Georgia, had significant impacts on college outcomes, specifically, on time-to-degree completion. This point is argued by Cornwell, Lee and Mustard (2005), who suggest the requirements to maintain HOPE encourage students to adjust their course schedules to balance course loads and difficulty to achieve a 3.0 or higher GPA, or students may be motivated to defer course work to the summer to make up for not taking enough credit hours in the fall and spring to graduate on-time. For example, if students are below the 3.0 GPA threshold, they may have incentive to enroll in fewer courses, to buy more time before the first checkpoint for HOPE eligibility (Cornwell, Lee & Mustard, 2005). Entering first-year students receive payment for the HOPE Scholarship until the initial GPA checkpoint, which occurs when

the student attempts 30 semester or 45 credit hours. In order to continue their eligibility, all HOPE Scholarship recipients must have at least a 3.0 GPA at the end of each spring term. If lost, students have the ability to reapply for the scholarship at 60 or 90 credit hours attempted (“Maintaining Eligibility for the HOPE Scholarship,” n.d.). These criteria to maintain the HOPE Scholarship, “encourage a variety of grade-enhancing behavioral responses” (Cornwell, Lee & Mustard, 2005, p. 900). According to Henry et al. (2004), “the predicted odds of persistence are 13% higher for borderline HOPE recipients than for nonrecipients at 4-year schools” (p. 699).

Roughly half of HOPE Scholars lose their funding after only one academic year (Thomas & Jackson, 1999). “The percentage of students receiving and maintaining the scholarship increased for freshmen from 1997 to 2004, but has been on a downward drop since then, according to USG data” (Simon, 2016, para. 11). The Georgia Board of Regents (2001) reported 70% of HOPE recipients lost their scholarships after attempting 30 credit hours in 1994. There is literature examining how merit-based scholarships affects student persistence, behavior, and graduation. For example, West Virginia’s PROMISE merit-based scholarship enables, “financially constrained students to enroll full-time rather than part-time, or to attend more semesters than they would have otherwise. Lowering the cost of college also might reduce student employment, thus enabling students to spend more time on their coursework, raise their GPAs and accelerate their progress towards a degree” (Scott-Clayton, 2010, p. 615). Furthermore, research conducted by Castleman and Long (2012) found the Florida Student Assistant Grants increased degree receipt. David Deming and Susan Dynarski (2009) were transparent that reducing college costs increase persistence, in particular when the program design focuses on intervention practices. Arguments by Cornwell, Lee & Mustard (2005) show

some of the requirements for Georgia's HOPE Scholarship result in strategic course withdrawals and credit reductions among marginal students. Scholarship loss tends to be associated with a decreased likelihood of graduating and that students are more likely to leave college if they fail to meet the requirements of merit-based aid (Henry et al., 2004).

Self-Authorship

History

Self-authorship was originally defined by Robert Kegan (1982; 1994) as self-evolution through a process called meaning-making, which is an activity of making sense of one's experiences through challenges and their own development. According to Kegan (1982), the activity of meaning making is, "the fundamental motion in personality" which one evolves through experiences (p. 15). Kegan (1982) presents a constructive-developmental theory which describes the way individuals make sense of their environment, including relationships and responsibilities. In his subsequent work, Kegan (1994) expands on his original theory to design a theory called order of consciousness. This theory further addresses cognitive, social and emotional development as variables for meaning-making. "This kind of 'knowing,' this work of the mind, is not about 'cognition' alone, if what we mean by cognition is thinking divorced from feeling and social relating. It is about the organizing principle we bring to our thinking and our feelings as our relating to others and our relating to parts of ourselves" (Kegan, 1994, p. 29). There are five orders of consciousness individuals move through based on their own experiences (Kegan, 1994). The orders of consciousness are, "principles of mental organization that affect thinking, feeling, and relating to self and others" (Love & Guthrie, 1999, p. 67). Although all of the orders of consciousness enfold one another, it is likely the third order defines adolescence and the fourth and fifth order likely only occur in adults. According to Kegan (1994), "it is rare

to see people moving beyond the fourth order, but when they do, it is never before their forties” (p. 352). For this study, first-year college students would likely fall into the third level of consciousness, or somewhere in-between the third and fourth level. Kegan (1994) states “school can be a most fertile context for the transformation of consciousness in adulthood...the principal transformation we are talking about is the move from the third to the fourth order” (p. 300-301).

In the third order of consciousness, students began to gain their own interests, points of view and relationships (Kegan, 1994). Individuals in this order saw themselves in society but did not quite realize the gaps in societies that cross their own paths. This is called traditionalism (Kegan, 1994). According to Kegan (1994), “the accomplishment of the third order of mind is a spectacular transformation...nearly twenty years of living may go into the gradual evolution of a mental capacity that enables one to think abstractly, identify a complex psychological life, orient to the welfare of a human relationship, construct values and ideals self-consciously known as such” (p. 75). For example, the ability to think abstractly and orient human relationships would be a sign one was in the third order of consciousness.

In the fourth order of consciousness, individuals enter the modernism stage where they began to regulate their own relationships, their own formations, systems and values (Kegan, 1994). In the fourth order, Kegan identifies meaning-making through bridging the epistemological (i.e., cognitive) and intrapersonal and interpersonal domains of development called the “order of mind” (Kegan, 1994). According to Kegan (1994), the fourth order is, “the ability to subordinate, regulate, and indeed create (rather than be created by) our values and ideals—the ability to take values and ideals as the object rather than the subject of our knowing” (p. 91).

The intersection between the third order and the fourth order is an ideology: “An internal identity, a self-authorship that can coordinate, integrate, act upon, or invent values, beliefs, convictions, generalizations, ideals, abstractions, interpersonal loyalties, and intrapersonal states. It is no longer authored by them, it authors them and thereby achieves a personal authority” (Kegan, 1994, p. 185). The ability to take values and ideals rather than the subject of knowing is self-authorship which was developed from Kegan’s earliest work (Kegan, 1994). According to Love and Guthrie (1999),

“self-authorship is an outcome reflected in many universities’ mission statements and a goal for many divisions of student affairs: to foster student’s development as a self-directed learner, an individual who acts on the world for the betterment of society (rather than acted on), and an engaged citizen with a strong sense of values and a clear identity that is internally defined” (p. 73).

Baxter Magolda built her research on self-authorship through Kegan’s theories and theorizing that third order meaning-making could lead to a better understanding of common campus issues (Love & Guthrie, 1999).

Baxter Magolda’s Theory of Self-Authorship Development

Building on Kegan’s (1994) work, Marcia Baxter Magolda developed a study which attempted to understand student’s meaning-making in college. According to Evans et al. (2010), “self-authorship is the internal capacity to define one’s own beliefs, identity, and social relations” (p. 183). Additionally, Baxter Magolda (1999) defined self-authorship, as described by her participants, as a way of making meaning of one’s experiences from inside oneself. Moreover, the term self-authorship refers to a phase of development within the lifelong process of self-evolution (Baxter Magolda, Meszaros, & Creamer, 2010). Baxter Magolda’s theory of

self-authorship development emerged through when she continued to study 39 of her initial 101 participants following their graduation in a 20-year longitudinal study. In order to identify an individual's journey towards self-authorship, Baxter Magolda (1999, 2001) formulated an interview protocol that included the following questions: "Who am I?" "How do I know?" and "What relationships do I want to have with others?" In order to promote these questions, Baxter Magolda (2001) introduced the Learning Partnership Model (LPM), which focuses on the epistemological, intrapersonal and the interpersonal dimensions of human development that create environments between individuals and authorities to promote self-authorship. At the epistemological level, "beliefs tend to be adopted from authorities rather than being internally constructed, so challenges to beliefs are often ignored or quickly determined to be wrong" (King & Baxter Magolda, 2005, p. 575). The intrapersonal dimension, "focuses on how people view themselves; this is variously referred to as identity development, ego development, developing a sense of self identity, or self-development" (King & Baxter Magolda, 2005, p. 577). Finally, in the interpersonal dimension, students are able to, "construct and engaged in relationships with others in a way that show respect for an understanding of the other's perspectives and experiences, but that are also true to one's own beliefs and values" King & Baxter Magolda, 2005, p. 579). According to Pizzolato (2005), the LPM principles include: Validate students as knowers; situate learning in the students' experiences; and define learning as mutually constructing meaning.

Baxter Magolda (2001) includes four phases of self-authorship within her model: Following External Formulas, the Crossroads, Becoming the Author of One's Own Life, and Internal Foundations. Similar to the three-authorship dimensions (epistemological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal), these phases were developed from Baxter Magolda's (2001) longitudinal

research. According to Baxter Magolda & King (2007), “multiple theories of college student development suggest that many students have been socialized to depend on external others such as authorities and peers for their beliefs, identity, and relationship constructions” (p. 493). Research found students are likely in the beginning phases of self-authorship development during their first-year in college (Baxter Magolda, 2001; 1999; Baxter Magolda & King, 2007; Baxter Magolda, 2012; Barber, Baxter Magolda, King, Taylor, & Wakefield, 2012). The studies suggest that many undergraduate students enter their first year with reliance on authority for their decisions, with little to no internal voice. According to Baxter Magolda and King (2007), “they often see knowledge as certain and accept authority’s knowledge claims uncritically” (p. 493). The study conducted by Baxter Magolda et al. (2012) concluded that 86% of first-year students in the study relied solely on external authorities to define their beliefs, identity, and relationships; and the second year reports the percentage of students relying on external authorities decreased to 57%. The following sections will describe the phases of “Following External Formulas” and “the Crossroads” in detail.

Following External Formulas

According to Baxter Magolda (2001), the initial phase of self-authorship, Following External Formulas, results in an inability to know oneself and one’s values in a genuine, confident way. In this phase, individuals “follow ‘formulas’ they obtain from external sources to make their way in the world” (Baxter Magolda, 2001, p. 71). External formula followers have an internal perception of themselves based on the way others think are appropriate (Baxter Magolda, 2001). Without developing the capacity to understand and learn from one’s own experiences, students do not know how to internally make their own decisions, therefore they turn to others to find answers. In interviews of participants, this would include the “who I am”

responses, and from Kegan's (1994) study in the order of consciousness, where individuals subordinate their own interests for greater loyalty or friendships with others. For instance, one of the participants in Baxter Magolda's 2001 study was frightened to do something herself but felt as though she had no choice because it is what others expected of her (Baxter Magolda, 2001). Another student discussed a difficult project and lack of guidance from the instructor. As these examples demonstrate, individuals in this phase trust others more than they trust themselves (Baxter Magolda, 2001). This phase could limit the interaction students have with others, especially those who are different than them (Torres & Hernandez, 2007). As individuals transition into the next phase of self-authorship, "A beginning awareness of how the person constructs her or his world, identity, or relationships in comparison to how external others construct them emerges as the first sign of internal voice. The external voice is clearly still in charge and although some tension exists there is not yet any substantive struggle or conflict between the two voices" (Baxter Magolda, King, Perez & Taylor, 2012, p. 68).

The Crossroads

In the next phase of self-authorship, the Crossroads, individuals recognize that they gain awareness of the things they believe may differ from the authority figures in their lives (Baxter Magolda, 2001). In Baxter Magolda's (2001) study, "The Crossroads was a turning point that called for letting go of external control and beginning to replace it with one's internal voice" (p. 94). This phase is characterized by the discontent and dissonance arising from unhappiness from following formulas (Baxter Magolda, 2001). In this phase, individuals may see the need to set goals for their own lives, giving them the efficacy to drive them in the direction they hope to go. During this transition, individuals were at a place of discontent and felt the need to develop their own goals, beliefs, values, and self-definition (Baxter Magolda, 2001; Pizzolato, 2005).

Typically, movement into the Crossroads phase is defined by a provocative or challenging moment in an individual's life. In Pizzolato's (2005) study, a participant described the thought process of his decision making about attending college or carrying out his family's business. The participant was about to make his own decision allowing him to be confident in his ability to be independent, which is a factor of the Crossroads phase. According to Pizzolato (2005), "he was dissatisfied with following formulas for his life prescribed by his family, and he felt a need for self-definition" (p. 629). This leads to the intrapersonal dimension, where individuals were in the process of discovering what they value (Baxter Magolda, King, Perez & Taylor, 2012). the Crossroads phase is characterized by the struggle one has regarding other's expectations as they begin to process and develop their own sources of making-meaning, which complicates an individual's ability to make decisions. This often causes conflict between the individual's internal voice and their reflection to others, not wanting to disappoint anyone, also known as a transitional point in one's life, which complicates an individual's ability to make decisions (Baxter Magolda, 2001).

Influencing Factors of Self-Authorship

College presents a variety of situations that challenge students' sense of self (Pizzolato, 2004). The ability to manage, grow, and balance factors in one's life is indicative of self-authorship. According to Baxter Magolda, King, Perez & Taylor (2012):

A meaning-making perspective can also be thought of as a way of making sense of the world, such as figuring out what to believe, who to be, and how to act: it provides a guide for determining what to pay attention to, whose advice to listen to, what can be gleaned from a positive or negative experience, and in general how to navigate complex environments, including college campuses. (p. 4)

An individual's ability to meet their goals is influenced by myriad factors including social, civic, and institutional environments. People tend to be shaped by the expectations of their environments as well as personal authority taking precedence in their lives. These environmental and personal factors influenced meaning-making. The two variables are discussed in more detail below, and according to Baxter Magolda, King, Perez & Taylor (2012), these two variables are intertwined and complicate assessing meaning-making structures as well as the evolution of self-authorship in college students.

Environmental

Environment impacts the way individuals make meaning of their lives. Baxter Magolda (2004) argued that self-authorship is a perilous component of an individual's ability to navigate compound environments, such as college campuses. A college environment impacts the experiences some individuals face in relation to movement through the phases of self-authorship, particularly in the Crossroads. According to Kuh (1995),

Many different out-of-class experiences have the potential to contribute to valued outcomes in college. Although knowledge is acquired primarily through the formal academic program...more powerful experiences were those that demanded sustained effort to complete various tasks (for example, decision making) as students interacted with people from different groups and peers from different background. Out-of-class experiences presented students with personal and social challenges... (p. 145).

Such experiences can assist in the movement away from relying on external formulas to entering into the Crossroads phase where they experience intrapersonal experiences.

Learning environments in higher education encourage students to construct their own lives. Moving away from an instructional paradigm (Barr and Tagg, 1995) towards a learning

paradigm could assist in the development of self-authorship. The learning paradigm emphasizes the design of active learning environments that encourage students to construct their own ideas or enter into the Crossroads phase of self-authorship (Hodge, Baxter Magolda, Haynes, 2009). According to Hodge, Baxter Magolda and Haynes (2009), intellectual and relational maturity is possible through supportive and challenging learning environments.

Personal

Today's students are often struggling to balance family, work and school. Although this is not a new challenge, the current generation of students continue to balance the finances of a higher education while maintaining their enrollment in college. According to a 2017 study by the Center for Generational Kinetics one in five Generation Z students said debt should be avoided at all cost ("The State of Gen Z 2017," p. 16). Data from research conducted by Riggert, Boyle, Petrosko, Ash & Rude-Parkins (2006) suggests that nearly 80% of U.S. college students are employed during their undergraduate years and over 50% of traditional-aged college students are working an average of 25 hours per week. Personal characteristics are the context for meaning making (Kegan, 1982) including variables such as gender socialization, faith, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and their backgrounds; students use these variables to make meaning of the experiences they encounter. Students' success is in part dependent upon their ability to connect socially with peers, speaking on behalf of themselves and their experiences. The way in which students identify internally allows them to rely on internal meaning-making. According to Meszaros, Creamer, and Baxter Magolda (2010), "the relationship between the internal process (identity negotiation) and the external (managing perceptions)...continue to exert significant authority on the individual" (p. 232).

For example, a participant in Meszaros, Creamer and Baxter Magolda's (2010) study started her self-authorship development through a personal encounter with a professor. The encounter allowed her to analyze past relationships and make a conscious choice not to let others' interests interfere with her own viewpoints. It was difficult for her to implement, however, because of the interpersonal desire for others' approval. By listening to her intrapersonal dimension, she was cultivating her own voice, therefore trusting her internal voice.

Achieving Self-Authorship as a First-Year Student

Self-authorship is a pivotal piece of the undergraduate experience. As suggested previously, many students enter their first year of college with reliance on authority and little growth toward their own inner reflections (Baxter Magolda, 1994). "They often see knowledge as certain and accept authority's knowledge claims uncritically" (Baxter Magolda & King, 2007, p. 493). Research suggests there is little movement in self-authorship development in the first-year of college due to college environments not being a place where students are pushed to figure out who they are, how they know, or how to be in mutual relationships with others (Baxter Magolda, 2001). According to Pizzolato & Olson (2016), "overly instructive environments inhibited students' self-authorship development; it was not that they could not, but rather they need not self-author" (p. 413). However, Pizzolato & Olson's (2016) study found students demonstrated making progress toward self-authorship development. Redmond (2015) argues, "undergraduate students have the potential to significantly develop their identities over the course of their first year" (p. 91).

With respect to the current study, students entering college with a high school GPA between 3.0-3.25, may have been likely to have collegiate experiences which compelled them to question whether or not they belong in higher education. Persisting students in this group may

have needed to develop a sense of internally-driven self so that they can create goals. Creating goals leading to graduation could assist students with being more properly equipped to balance the challenges associated with their first college year, including the ability to find support available to them and developing strategies to cope with the environment around them (Pizzolato, 2004).

Summary

Much of the existing research on self-authorship development extends far beyond the first year of college. Although limited, previous research touches on the possibility of first-year students moving through the beginning phases of self-authorship. Students could be moving in the direction of self-definition in their first year by being inclined to move away from reliance on authority towards the Crossroads (Baxter Magolda, King, Taylor, and Wakefield, 2012). Additionally, less attention has been allocated to measure student development associated with retention and persistence (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005) and has not been narrowed to grade point average and merit-based scholarships and self-authorship development effects on persistence. Earlier research studies reviewed in this chapter examined some of these variables, but this study brings these concepts together and explores them with students' perspectives in their own words.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This study explores the ways the HOPE Scholarship recipients in the first year made meaning of their self-authorship development. The outcomes of the study help to develop an understanding of the connection between self-authorship development and the maintenance of the HOPE Scholarship in first-year college students. The current study may potentially fill a gap in existing research on self-authorship, as there is no research examining the correlation between scholarships and self-authorship, and there is little research development on self-authorship development in first-year college students.

The qualitative study was guided by three research questions:

1. What phase of self-authorship is reflected in students' discussion of their first year of college?
2. How do students describe their self-authorship development during the first-year of college?
3. How are students' perceptions of themselves during their first year of college influenced by their goals, personal characteristics, and a merit-based scholarship?

Qualitative Research Approach

A qualitative research project starts with situations, finds patterns or themes in data, establishes a hypothesis, and then develops theories or conclusions based on the research conducted (Bui, 2014). In this study, qualitative methods allowed the researcher to explore narratives of first-year students, their transition from high school to college, and how emerging into adulthood affects their GPA and HOPE status.

According to Creswell (2014), “Qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (p. 4). This research utilized an exploratory study in order to gain insight on students’ experiences and allowed them to tell their stories regarding their transition to college. Using students’ stories allows researchers to interconnect themes into a story line (Creswell, 2014). While interviewing participants, the researcher developed a collection of open-ended questions which allowed for exploration to further analyze the topic (Creswell, 2014). This study employed an holistic examination of epistemological perspectives which allowed for a learning experience for the researcher as well as personal satisfaction and growth (Hesse-Biber, 2017). Data collected from individual student stories helped to fill in a gap in first-year studies research which has been missing: self-authorship and its relationship with merit-based scholarship maintenance.

Theoretical Framework

This study used Marcia Baxter-Magolda’s theory of Self-Authorship as a theoretical framework. Self-authorship is the ability to take values, relationships and ideas to develop their own identity rather than rely on other opinions (Kegan, 1994; Baxter Magolda, 2005). To differentiate this study from existing research, the study involved five participants who maintained the HOPE Scholarship and one participant who failed to retain the HOPE Scholarship after their first year. In this research, the ability to analyze whether a student had emerged through the phases of self-authorship offered insight on how students perceived themselves, listened to others, demonstrated the ability to make their own decisions, and connection to their ability to retain a good GPA and persist following their first year.

The interview protocol was based on Pizzalato’s Self-Authorship Survey (Pizzalato, 2005) and Baxter-Magolda and King’s Reflective Conversation Guide (Baxter Magolda & King,

2008). The interview protocol included questions about the participants' perceptions or opinions related to their transition from high school to college in their first year as well as their goals, motivation, environment, personal characteristics and beliefs. Participants were also asked if the HOPE Scholarship eased their transition to college to better understand how finances play a role in their decision to attend college. Interview questions were written to gather information from participants about whether retaining the HOPE Scholarship was a priority, with the hope of better understanding the meaning behind the scholarship and whether or not it assisted in the development as an adult.

Study Design

This study investigated the way students, specifically HOPE Scholars, made meaning of their self-authorship development in the first college year at University of North Georgia (UNG). Students were interviewed on the Dahlonega and Gainesville campuses at UNG. Conducting interviews on these sites allowed the researcher to explore students on traditional residential and commuter college campuses. The intention was also to interview students who were declaring a baccalaureate degree. To gain a better understanding of this study, it is important to also understand UNG and its environment on the separate campuses.

The University of North Georgia is a comprehensive, liberal arts, public 4-year university with a first-year class of 3,800 and an overall undergraduate population of 18,000 and is located in the fastest-growing region in the state (“About UNG,” n.d.). UNG is part of the University System of Georgia (USG) and is designated as a State Leadership Institution. UNG was formed through the consolidation of North Georgia College & State University (NGCSU) and Gainesville State College (GSC) in January 2013. “This was the first consolidation that combined a two-year institution with an access mission with a four-year institution with a

competitive admissions process. This presented unique challenges and opportunities for our students” (Derek Sutton, personal communication, March 12, 2018). This study was focused on two of the five campuses at UNG, including Dahlonega and Gainesville. The two sites are variable in student types and have diverse settings, with different student backgrounds and characteristics, however the mission of each campus remains aligned. The Dahlonega campus, previously known as NGCSU, offers baccalaureate degree programs and is a residential campus. The Gainesville campus, previously known as GSC, offers both associate and baccalaureate degree programs and is non-residential.

Based on institutional data, there are common characteristics found in entering first-year students at UNG with an incoming high school grade point average (GPA) between a 3.0 and 3.25, which include: students are less likely to persist, and their GPA generally drops significantly during their first year which initiated loss of HOPE Scholarship fund. For the purposes of this study, data were provided by UNG Institutional Research regarding student average GPAs who had entering GPA between a 3.0 and 3.25. Data were presented from UNG Institutional Research on the average percentage of first-year students in this range who retain the HOPE Scholarship and those losing the HOPE Scholarship and whether they persist at the institution.

According to UNG Institutional Research, the average GPA of these specific baccalaureate student’s fall semester was 2.73 and their spring semester was a 2.69. Due to the GPA drop students incurred within their first year at the institution, the percentage of students retained after losing HOPE Scholarship after their first year is 64.4% (University of North Georgia Office of Institutional Effectiveness, 2017).

The participants were selected purposefully to make meaningful sampling for the study (Patton, 1990). The participants included the following criteria: first-year students in fall semester of 2016, baccalaureate degree seeking, and entering GPAs between 3.0 and 3.25. The Office of Institutional Research was contacted via email and asked to provide names and email addresses of students who met these criteria. After the sample was identified, students were contacted via campus email, informed of the study, and they were invited to participate. A total of 175 students were contacted, and seven responded to the email invitation to participate in the research study. While six participants is an acceptable number for a qualitative study, this number may not be enough based on the response received from the participants in order to gain a difference in quality of dialog, analysis, and diversity (Malterud, Dirk Siersma, and Dorrit Guassor, 2015). This study cannot be generalized across all first-year students as the findings due to delimitations of the sample size. Limitations can be described as inadequate measures of variables, lack of participants, small sample sizes and other factors (Creswell, 2005).

After the initial contact with each participant, a follow-up message was sent to students regarding times, days, and locations to meet for one-on-one interviews. After each participant provided a time at their convenience, the researcher emailed them a confirmation of the interview appointment as well as a consent form to view prior to the meeting.

The researcher received the participants email addresses and names from UNG's Institutional Research department in the Office of Institutional Effectiveness. Additionally, UNG's and Kennesaw State University's Internal Review Boards (IRB) reviewed and approved the proposed study. In this qualitative approach research, ethical principles were considered to protect and respect the participants by the "do no harm" guiding foundation (Creswell, 2013). Individual participation in the study was voluntary based on a student's response to the email

invitation. Participants in the study signed consent forms, and pseudonyms were used to protect their identities. In order to learn more about the students in their growth cycle within self-authorship, questions were developed specifically in hopes to receive answers to get to the heart of the research.

Data Collection Instruments & Procedures

The interview data in this study was collected through one-on-one interviews with six students. Of the six students, five were female, one was male. Three of the females were located at UNG's Dahlonega campus and two were on the Gainesville campus. The male student's home campus was Dahlonega. The Dahlonega campus is located in a rural town in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains. It has a competitive baccalaureate mission and is the only residential campus at UNG. The Gainesville campus is also located in rural north Georgia and has an access mission, allowing students to complete associate and baccalaureate degrees. Both campuses enroll approximately 8,000 students during the fall semesters ("UNG Campuses," n.d.).

The interview protocol for this study was developed from Baxter Magolda's self-authorship study in order to get student's stories based on personal experiences related to their development in the first year of college. The protocol allowed the researcher to understand which phase of self-authorship a student experienced during their first year and how this had the potential to predict their ability to retain the HOPE Scholarship. More specifically, questions addressed students' expectations of first year in college, their best and worse experiences, details on how they make decisions, what and who influences them, and how they perceive themselves. Follow-up questions were posed to the participants as the researcher engaged in the conversation through active listening, "to construct meaning" of the answers participants provided (Baxter

Magolda, 2004a). “Active listening is essential because the interviewer must attend to the responses to figure out how to guide the conversation” (Baxter Magolda & King, 2007, p. 504).

Interviews were conducted between November 13, 2017 and February 9, 2018. Taking into consideration and being respectful of students’ transition from fall to spring semester as well as finals and holiday breaks, the gap between the interviews was larger than anticipated. Despite the gap in time, there was no significant impact on the responses the participants provided, as they continued to remain in their second year. The interviews were conducted on the student’s home campus in a setting mutually agreed upon by the participant and the researcher. In all instances, the researcher met the student in a common meeting location in an academic building or at the on-campus coffee shop. Prior to the interview, each student signed an Informed Consent Form (Appendix D) explaining the purpose of the study, limitations or considerations for the participant, as well as an explanation of how each participant will remain anonymous (Sarantakos, 2005). Each interview was conducted one-on-one, recorded on a digital device, and then fully transcribed by a transcriber that was hired by the researcher. In order for the participants to remain confidential, the transcriber signed a statement of confidentiality (Appendix E).

Data Analysis

Data analysis began with verbatim transcription of the interviews. This study drew from a narrative inquiry data analysis which allowed the researcher to hear stories from the participants themselves. According to Polkinghorne (1995), a narrative inquiry helps to, “retain the complexity of the situation in which an action was undertaken and the emotional and motivation meaning connected with it” (p. 11). Sandelowskin (1991) suggested, “narrative analyses reveal the discontinuities between story and experience and focus on discourse: on the

telling themselves and the devices individuals use to make meaning in stories” (p. 162).

Creswell (2006) states narrative research, “is a design of inquiry from the humanities in which the researcher studies the lives of individuals and asks one or more individuals to provide stories about their lives (Riessman, 2008)” (p. 42). In order to use a narrative technique, the researcher analyzed data with a coding system (Appendix F) derived from existing research on students’ self-authorship development derived from Baxter Magolda’s Self-Authorship Development theory. As data were analyzed, a second list of codes were identified as recurring themes became clear. This coding allowed the researcher to look for participants who established a sense of self-authorship by developing a sense of internal voice to guide their actions. According to Strauss (1987), coding is to, “rearrange the data into categories and that aid in the development of theoretical concepts” (p. 29). Furthermore, Baxter Magolda and King (2007) define coding in self-authorship interviews as “identifying meaningful units of conversation, labeling those units to convey their essence in terms of meaning making, and sorting the labeled units into categories that portray the key themes of the interviews (Charmaz, 2003, 2006; Patton, 2001)” (p. 504).

The data analysis process involved “Interpretation of linguistic material to make statements about implicit and explicit dimensions are structures of meaning-making in the material and what is represented in it” (Flick, 2014, p. 5). Analysis in this phase relied on Baxter Magolda’s Self-Authorship Interview (2001b) which is conducted as an informal conversation allowing the participant to reflect on previous experiences as well as how they made sense of their experiences. Benefits of interviews in self-authorship studies,

Clearly hold benefits for students participating in these conversations. The nature of these interviews offers respondents an opportunity to reflect on their experiences in ways

that are atypical in everyday life. Processing their experience and consciously reenacting on it can bring insights to light that students might not otherwise have discovered.

(Baxter Magolda & King, 2007, p. 505)

Furthermore, participants could feel a commitment to help future generations of college students with the research provided (Baxter Magolda & King, 2007). The interview helped to address all three of the research questions in this study.

Role of the Researcher

In qualitative studies, the role of the researcher is considered an instrument of data collection (Dezin & Lincoln, 2003). Data in this thesis consisted of, “direct quotations from people about their experiences, opinions, feelings, and knowledge” (Patton, 2015, p. 14). Steps were taken in order to obtain permission from the institutional review board (IRB) to protect the participants involved in the study. The researcher responded to the participants’ own voices by asking probing questions, listening, and asking additional questions to get to deeper levels of the conversation. It was important for the researcher to focus on potential influences for subjectivity, which included personal biases such as being a graduate of UNG, a HOPE Scholar, and employee of the University. These biases helped identify the researcher’s own interests to be clear of allowing those interests to shape the collection and interpretation of data. This interview style was chosen in attempt for the researcher to gain awareness on the phase of self-authorship the first-year participant was potentially enduring.

Ethical Considerations

According to Creswell (2013), “Ethical behavior is defined as ‘a set of moral principles, rules or standards governing a person or profession” (p. 66). In qualitative research, “a researcher is expected to analyze data in a manner that avoids misstatements, misinterpretations,

or fraudulent analysis” (Creswell, 2013, p. 57). Although qualitative research potentially involves harmful feelings from sharing personal information (Creswell, 2013), the interviewer utilized several strategies to limit the participants’ risk of exposure to uncomfortable or damaging scenarios. Participants in this study explicitly agreed to the terms of the research project and proceeded with the interviews by signing a consent form, as detailed above.

Questions were not designed to elicit sensitive information, but students might decide to divulge information on sensitive subjects voluntarily. There was not any intention for deception to be involved in the study, nor did it occur during the interviews. Even if the student decided to participate, they could withdraw from the study without penalty at any time during or after the study. The participants could have the results from their interview, to the extent that they can be identified, returned, and removed from the research records or destroyed. Students were made aware that they could stop the interview at any time and they did not have to answer any question that might make them uncomfortable. Participants signed a waiver of informed consent so that they had full knowledge of the interview process as well as potential benefits and risks of the study. The data were collected through an audio method that was stored on a password-protected file that will be destroyed three years after the project is completed. The digital files of the interview were destroyed once the data were transcribed.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

This chapter presents the findings of the current study that examined how students, specifically HOPE Scholars, made meaning of their self-authorship development during their first year of college. A description of the participants will be presented, followed by the findings as related to the following research questions:

1. What stage of self-authorship is reflected in students' discussion of their first year of college?
2. How do students describe their development during the first year of college?
3. How are students' perceptions of themselves during their first year of college influenced by their goals, personal characteristics, and a merit-based scholarship?

Participant Data

The participants in the study included six first-year students who began at either the Dahlonega or Gainesville campuses of the University of North Georgia in fall 2016 and were retained at the end of the first year. Participants represented a variety of academic majors, diverse living arrangements, backgrounds and different high school associations (private and public). At the time of the interviews, the participants were in their second year of college and were between the ages of 19-20, the majority of the participants were female, and almost all of the participants were living off-campus. Compared to the first-year student cohort at UNG, there were more commuters and female students; Table 1 provides demographic data for the first-year students on the Dahlonega and Gainesville campuses.

Table 1		
<i>Demographics for First-Year Students</i>		
Characteristic	Dahlongega	Gainesville
Baccalaureate	99.4%	20.0%
Associate	0.6%	80.0%
HOPE Scholars	85.3%	65.3%
Non-HOPE Scholars	14.7%	34.7%
Pell-Eligible	24.5%	36.7%
Not Pell-Eligible	75.5%	63.3%
On-Campus	74.1%	0.0%
Commuter	25.9%	100.0%
Male	44.0%	45.1%
Female	56.0%	54.9%

Participant Descriptions

The following section provides more detailed information about the participants, including their major at the time the interviews were conducted, home campus, reasons for choosing UNG, whether they entered their first year with the HOPE Scholarship and if it was maintained after their first year. The participants' ages and housing status are also included in the descriptions along with details about the expectations and reality of their initial college transition. Also included are descriptions of how the participants felt about earning the HOPE Scholarship and the relationship of the scholarship to their enrollment in college. Table 2 includes informative data on the participants, and pseudonyms were assigned to each participant to maintain confidentiality.

Name*	Gender	Age	Campus	Residence	HOPE Scholar?	Maintained HOPE?	Declared Academic Major
Sarah	Female	20	Dahlonoga	On-campus	Yes	Yes	History
Davis	Male	20	Dahlonoga	On-campus	Yes	Yes	Business Marketing
Reagan	Female	19	Dahlonoga	Commuter	Yes	Yes	General Studies
Kennedy	Female	19	Gainesville	Commuter	Yes	Yes	Psychology
Blake	Female	20	Gainesville	Commuter	Yes	Yes	Business Marketing
Gina	Female	19	Dahlonoga	On-campus	Yes	No	Art Education
*pseudonyms were used to protect the participants identity							

Sarah

Sarah attended private schools her entire life and believed that the culture and learning environments of private institutions allowed her to be better equipped for college. She decided to go to college because her entire family attended some institution of higher education and also made mention that, “in this day-and-age you kind of need a bachelor’s degree to get a job anywhere decent, and I like the pursuit of a higher education.” During the interview, Sarah, a HOPE recipient and History major on the Dahlonoga campus, shared she had made the decision to transfer to Georgia State University to complete a degree in Anthropology. Although she loved UNG, the degree program she wished to study is not offered. Sarah reflected on her expectations about college saying she expected it to be more challenging than high school, but in reality, discovered college was much like her private high school experience. She noted the major difference between the two, “professors treat me like an adult rather than a student...while every professor is different, you can still expect to be treated with respect rather than talked down at.” During the time the interviews were conducted, Sarah lived in a residence hall amongst peers and talked about enjoying the freedom to make her own everyday decisions. Sarah said she believed the HOPE Scholarship helped her transition to college because it enabled her to focus on her education without the pressure of having to maintain a job.

Davis

Davis, a residential student majoring in Business with a concentration in Marketing, expected college in the first year to be a lot more work than it was for him. Davis attended public high school prior to higher education, and he entered college with the HOPE Scholarship and maintained it after the first year. Davis said he decided to attend college because he wanted to “further his education and get a degree and it is the standard norm and that my parents went.” Davis mentioned he was successful in maintaining the HOPE Scholarship because he planned his college schedule based on experiences which taught him what works and what does not work for him. For example, Davis talked about choosing his classes based on balancing out his grade point average (GPA) to maintain a 3.0 average with a mix of classes he saw as more challenging and others that would help him maintain his GPA. For example, if he knew he is going to get a C in one course, he chose other courses allowing him to earn an A to maintain a 3.0 average. Davis described the transition to college as a bit challenging as he “never had to study for tests and now has grown up and taken things a bit more seriously and studies beforehand and the morning of a test.”

The freedom to choose his own class schedule, specifically the ability to choose the days and times he takes classes, is also important to Davis. This is the beginning of an important trait of self-authorship as one begins to be able to make their own decisions for their life, such as their course schedule.

First semester I had 8AMs and I actually dropped my Monday, Wednesday, Friday 8AMs because it was hard to go towards the end of the semester when it was cold in the morning. It’s kinda hard to force yourself to get up at 8AM. Which is kinda weird cause in high school I got up at 5:40AM to be there by 7:20AM and I can barely do it for

college. When I was living at home, my parents had breakfast made when I got up. If I overslept, my parents would wake me up. And now, there is no one to wake me up if I oversleep except my roommate.

Davis has strived to maintain the HOPE Scholarship to help his parents out financially. He also said he found college easier to balance without a job and knows if he were to lose the HOPE Scholarship, he would need to work to help his parents pay his tuition and fees.

Reagan

Reagan is a sophomore who attended a public high school. During the interview, she talked about being very involved on the Dahlenega campus. She was seeking a degree in General Studies with a focus on the areas of Leadership, Business, and Social Sciences. She came into her first-year undecided on what to major in, and while going through orientation she felt determined to “stay undecided until I figured out what I wanted to do. Because I didn’t want to be that person who changed majors a bunch of times” even though most of the incoming students around her “sounded like they have their life figured out.” Her best experience in her first year of college was a ski trip that she led as a member of one of the on-campus organizations she was involved in.

I got to lead that trip which is very logistically challenging but like I was pretty much the point person. So, I was able to like, make all the decisions and I made sure everyone got what they needed, and it worked out well. So, I would say that was because I was in charge and it was a successful trip, it made me feel like I was succeeding.

Reagan talked about the freedom she had to make her own decisions, yet she sought out advice from trusted mentors. She also tended to weigh her pros and cons when deciding. She placed much trust in her mentors from who she seeks advice and did not deviate from their suggestions.

Reagan entered UNG with the HOPE Scholarship and said, “My mother would kill me if I lost it.” She places a lot of regard in the opinion of others and wanted to keep the scholarship to please her mother by retaining it. Although Reagan talked about the freedom she had to make her own decisions, she sought out advice from trusted mentors.

Kennedy

As a Psychology major, Kennedy said she was shocked to come to college to do hours of homework every night. In order to create her class schedule each semester, she talked about reaching out and scheduling meetings with her academic advisors. Kennedy said her motivation to go to college was to, “get further educated and get a good career.” Her goals in life were to be happy and successful, which she said she considers as she makes decisions. Kennedy talked about her desire to be a clinical psychologist or work in criminal psychology. At the time of the interview, Kennedy was a HOPE Scholar who talked about making every effort to maintain the scholarship because without it, she said she would be financially burdened. She mentioned in the interview having the HOPE Scholarship helped her to, “feel ready” for college, and her decision to attend UNG was influenced by her mother, who also attended the university.

Blake

At the time of the interview, Blake was a sophomore and HOPE Scholar who worked two jobs as a nanny and marketing assistant for a fundraising company. She was majoring in Business with a concentration in Marketing and had a dream to work in marketing. She said she had no desire to be involved or to interact with others on campus, “I just go to my classes and go home.” I don’t really want to be involved. I have other things to do.” Instead, Blake spent most of her time with her older sister who attended and graduated from UNG and she talked about choosing to spend most of her time with her sister. She expressed her best experience in

her first year of college was, “receiving all A’s.” Blake talked about leaning on her advisor to help make decisions on what courses to take.

I learned from my sister’s mistakes. She literally took so many classes that did not count because she never met with an advisor. I even asked her who her advisor was and she said, “I don’t know.” I go to my advisor and am literally like, tell me what classes to take. At the same time, I deviate from what they tell me because I want to graduate.

Like this semester, I am taking all of the ones they told me I shouldn’t take at the same time, because I can do it, it’s fine.

Although she stated she visits her advisor because she witnessed her sister not staying on track, she strayed from what her advisor told her to register for; therefore, she contradicted herself.

Blake also said she watched her sister lose the HOPE Scholarship, which is why it became important for her to maintain it, “I had to take out student loans so she could help my dad, and I’m kind of like I have HOPE, it would be so dumb to lose it.” Blake said she had her life plans mapped out and wants “a job that provides a 401K and to have \$100,000 in savings by the time I am thirty.”

Gina

A sophomore Art Education major, Gina, said she had a goal of teaching art history at the collegiate level and earning her doctoral degree. Gina entered UNG as an English major and quickly found her passion in art while taking Art Appreciation and promptly changed her major to reflect her passion. She attended a private high school and said she found her first year of college was less challenging, although she entered UNG with the HOPE Scholarship and lost it following her first year by .1 GPA points. Gina said she is striving to gain the scholarship back at the next GPA check for HOPE.

Education was important to Gina because it was a goal of hers to finish as the first to attend college in her family, in the same token, she believed a college degree is not the end-all, be-all. She stated, “My thing is, if I get a degree, that’s awesome, if I don’t get a degree my life will be ok. Sometimes people with degrees don’t always have better lives, it’s all about what you make it.” Gina talked about finding her residential experience on campus beneficial because, “you get out of your comfort zone with people you don’t necessarily know, while terrifying, is something everyone needs to experience just because you have to learn how to interact with others.”

Findings

The findings of the study are presented in relationship to each of the research questions. Overall, each of the six participants demonstrated being in the beginning stages of self-authorship, including Following External Formulas and the Crossroads (Baxter Magolda, 2001). There is evidence, from the participant’s responses, they were beginning to move through the Crossroads phase and becoming more confident in their own decisions, however, most of the participants moved back and forth between the two phases. The evidence of the stages is presented below.

Self-Authorship During the First-Year of College

The participants demonstrated moving between the first two phases of self-authorship, Following External Formulas and the Crossroads. This affirmed the Baxter Magolda et. al. (2012) study finding first-year students began to move away from relying on authority to defining themselves and their lives as discussed previously. In Baxter Magolda’s 2001 study, the Learning Partnership Model indicated students in the first phases of self-authorship are at the epistemological level which is confirmed by the findings of this study. Specifically, at the

epistemological level, one's beliefs tend to be, "adopted from authorities rather than being internally constructed" (Baxter Magolda, 2005, p. 575). The findings presented answer research question one: What phase of self-authorship is reflected in students' discussion of their first year of college? Evidence from the participants' narratives is detailed below and affirms their self-authorship development.

Following External Formulas

Each participant in this study demonstrated, during their first year of college, they were moving through the first phase of self-authorship, Following External Formulas. Participants in this study were asked questions which were influenced by the Learning Partnership Model designed by Baxter Magolda in 2001 to determine whether they were turning to others to find answers. Participants discussed how they "follow 'formulas' they obtain from external sources to make their way in the world" (Baxter Magolda, 2001, p. 71). Specifically, Davis was motivated to go to college because, "it's the standard norm and that my parents went. It's almost expected for kids to go these days." Kennedy chose to attend college, and ultimately UNG, because "her mom went here." The choice to go to college was driven by family members and not one Davis or Kennedy felt the need in which to place trust. Sarah, received guidance from her parents, also had a "group of people outside of my family who I can come to for help," indicating that she still valued other's opinions when making decisions. Like Sarah, Gina also values her friends' opinions in college. She mentioned, "I feel like my friends get disappointed if I don't do good." Gina's reliance on peers' approval yields an identity that is susceptible to external pressure rather than her own internal values (Baxter Magolda & King, 2007). Sarah also witnessed her brother, "mess up a lot in college," and developed an understanding of what is expected of her from her parents based on the experiences of her sibling. Blake relied on her

sister's perception of what college was like and thus did not have the capacity to understand and learn from her own personal experiences. Reagan is influenced heavily by those around her. She changed her major based on conversations with her mentor as well as her mother and follows their lead on various ideas. For example, while navigating challenges in college, "they're very influential in my life which I like, but sometimes I wish they weren't so much so that I could think for myself sometimes. But it is nice having them there to talk to. Whenever I have problems I go to my mentor's office or call my mom."

Movement Toward the Crossroads

The majority of the participants in this study were in the process of moving between the Following External Formulas and the Crossroads phase. They demonstrated the ability to move toward making their own decisions, however, they still relied on others to help in their decision making. According to Baxter Magolda, King, Perez & Taylor (2012), the transition between Following External Formulas and the Crossroads was a challenge because the external voices from others continue to be something they rely on, but there is a beginning awareness of how the person identified themselves based on their experiences and environment around them. This transitional point in one's life can be complex because one may not have wanted to disappoint authorities, which complicated an individual's decision-making capabilities (Baxter Magolda, 2001). The following provides examples of the participants' movement toward the second phase of self-authorship.

Reagan talked about making decisions based on, "opinions [of fellow peer employees] in my department [on-campus position in recreational sports] that have similar goals to me kind of thing and have been through things in that realm" which shows that she still relied on other's opinions of the goals set for herself. However, her values show that she identifies herself strong

in her faith because she, “always make sure my decisions are in line with my faith because that’s really important to me.” Reagan’s intrapersonal (who am I?) dimension of herself could be defined by entrusting her life through her faith orientation. According to Magolda & Ebben (2006), Christian students could resist behaviors that are counter to their moral conviction.

Gina valued her independence and finances, so she chose to live at home her first year in her parent’s basement apartment, saving money. She enjoyed spending time with her family which informed her decision making during her first-year of college. Currently living on campus, she, “has freedom and a sense of independence” which showed that she is moving towards the Crossroads.

Kennedy made appointments with her advisor every semester while planning her schedule because she finds it is important to make sure she was taking what she needed, even if she knew the exact courses she wanted to take. This intersection shows that Kennedy is confident in creating her schedule; however, still wanted to further confirm from an authority figure.

Davis chose to attend UNG because he “heard it was a great school” but also knew he personally needed to attend an in-state institution to receive HOPE Scholarship, and as a result, make college more affordable. He made no indication that the decision to attend a USG school was encouraged or pushed by his parents simply because he had the HOPE Scholarship. In fact, he made the decision to use his scholarship based on his own internal resolutions to make college more affordable for himself.

Sarah was able to make the decision to attend college partly on her own, and partly because of family who have “all gone to college.” Her decision to attend on her own was based off of her own philosophy gaining a higher education degree is needed to get a job and she likes,

“the pursuit of a higher education.” Additionally, Sarah showed signs of the transitional phase by expressing that her “parents let me make my own decisions” however, she had help from her brother in making college-based decisions because he attended before she did.

The Crossroads

All of the participants in this study demonstrated being in the second phase of self-authorship, the Crossroads. In the Crossroads phase, participants in this study recognized that the things they believe may differ from the authority figures in their lives (Baxter Magolda, 2001). During the interviews, questions were posed to the participants to get to better understand their decision-making process to maintain their personal and academic goals. This allowed the researcher to discover what the participants valued and if they are developing their own voice.

As a first-year student, Sarah realized she was becoming an adult and expected to be treated in such a way from her professors. She placed strong value in the respect of others and found through her first year, “I’m a bit of a hard ass when I get talked down at. I bring it to the head of the department.” The situation that drove her decision to meet with the department head was a disagreement with her professor. Her internal voice influenced her through this challenging moment and allowed her to be proactive in speaking with authority over the professor.

Gina, who valued her interest in being a “free spirit” stated that one of the best experiences during her first-year of college was realizing that “I can make decisions for myself and it’s changed me ultimately.” Gina was a first-generation student who was never pressured into attending college but made the decision to attend because she sought a good education. Kennedy’s journey of entering the Crossroads was based on peer opinions surrounding her and how she was to, “become more accepting of actually listening and discussing” differences in

opinions. She stated college “has made me question things that I never have before and its changed my opinions about a lot of things especially things like politics because you grow up hearing one thing all the time. Hearing different views in college is very changing.” This showed Kennedy was entering the intrapersonal dimension which is discovering what she valued (Baxter Magolda, King, Perez & Taylor, 2012) and understood that multiple perspectives exist as she desired to learn and explore diverse viewpoints (Baxter Magolda & King, 2007). Having a part-time job in college has assisted in Reagan’s development of the second phase, and she developed personal goals influenced by her position that have pushed her to prioritize her time.

I spend extra time at work doing things that I need to do to get prepared for the next week and I get ahead with my school work. Yesterday I had two classes and then I had a two-hour break and then I had to work. So, I went home and was really proud of myself, ‘cause I went home and did my accounting homework before work. I try to stay ahead as much as I can.”

Since Reagan decided to stay ahead by making the decision to manage her work and study time separately, this showed she was moving towards the Crossroads phase and making her own decisions about her daily schedule and time commitments.

Blake attempted to receive advice from those around her in the classroom but chose to not get involved based on her own decisions. She stated, “I don’t really want to spend my time doing that. I mean I know I *should* get involved on campus, but I don’t want to.”

Additionally, Blake went through some challenging experiences related to underage drinking during her transition from high school to college that caused her to be distressed constantly.

Through these experiences Blake realized that the decisions she made in high school go against her morals and therefore formulated goals for herself. One of those goals was not to take out any

student loans. She said she remained focused on the goal and takes school very seriously, unlike high school where she engaged in partying. This indicated that her goals align with being in the phase of the Crossroads because she was able to stop being surrounded by the crowd she was troubled with during high school and stay motivated in her college work.

Motivation to Attend College

Participants in this study were asked about what motivated them to attend college and what they expected college to be like in the first year. Through the participants' responses, the researcher was able to determine where each participant was in their self-authorship development. Four of the six participants decided to pursue higher education because it was the norm, as their parents attended college, and moreover, these students felt as though it was never a question of whether or not they would attend college, but more of an expectation. According to Sarah, her decision to attend college was, "a little bit of my family because we've all gone to college, and I know that in this day-and-age you kind of need a bachelor's degree to get a job anywhere decent." Davis knew he was going to attend college to further his education and "be able to enter at a higher level than someone who didn't go or only went for maybe their bachelor's degree. It's just the standard norm and my parents went. It's almost expected for kids to go these days." Reagan never considered not attending college. She mentioned she wanted to get a "higher education degree because it has always been in the cards. My parents both went to college. That was just something that was going to happen." Kennedy was most interested in earning a degree to get a good career and mentioned she "wanted to get further educated and definitely wasn't ready to start just working and I'd need a degree."

Perception of the First Year of College

Two out of six of the participants attended a private high school and felt adequately prepared for their first year in higher education. In actuality, these two students in particular, found the college-level work to be easier than their high school academics. Gina quickly realized college was, “a little easier than high school” and Sarah compared her experience in high school to college.

My first year I did expect it to be a bit harder, but I have found that from my private school education it felt a lot like high school. Not so much in how the professors treated me. But, I had a whole lot of writing that I had to do in high school, so um, I was very, very prepared for reading comprehension and writing and all kinds of higher level work. So, it felt familiar to me.

The other four participants who went to public high schools had a mixed perception of what they would face in their first year. Davis expected college to be a lot more work and anticipated that he would be busy all of the time, but stated this thought, “isn’t really the case.” Blake’s perceptions about higher education were shaped by her older sister who had recently graduated from college, so Blake came into college with expectations from what she witnessed her sister go through in college, and in reality, felt like “it was a lot like high school except less fun.” Blake indicated college was “less fun” because she has more responsibility now and also indicated that she has lacked in developing relationships inside and outside of the classroom and is not involved, potentially causing her to have a false reality of the enjoyable aspects of college.

On the other hand, Kennedy felt as though she was not as prepared for college as she would have liked to be, and specifically, she had expectations that it would be difficult, and she felt very nervous going into her first year, but the work load ended up being more than she

predicted. Kennedy mentioned, “it was kind of a huge shock to do hours of homework every night.” Reagan said she felt prepared for college, however, multitasking a job and living away from home was quite challenging during the first year. Although the majority of perceptions of the participants’ first year in college was to be more difficult than it was, the anticipation of rigorous courses allowed them to be mindful of their course load, extracurricular activities, and GPA.

Seeking Others Approval

The participants in this study were faced with decisions which forced them to either rely on their own internal voice or to seek approval from others during their first year. The narratives provided by participants indicated their parents had played a role in their decision to attend college, and it was evident the participants tended to seek others guidance and approval when faced with making a decision such as choosing their courses. Gina said she tended to contact her mother when she was confused, for example while she chose her course schedule.

My mother probably gets so annoyed with me, but anytime I schedule classes I call her like five times. Do you think this class is good? Do you think this one is good? She’s like Gina, these are your classes not mine, pick them for yourself. I am like, I’m sorry. My advisor has been great, so it makes it so much easier planning.

Gina talked about feeling more comfortable knowing her mother approved her schedule before registering. Reagan chose to go to her advisor prior to registering, as well as seeking advice from her mother.

I literally go to my advisor every semester and I’m like what do I take? I don’t know what to take and I just kind of go and he helps me with that. You can take this, that, and this, and he gives me the options. From there, I pick the courses he told me to choose.

My mom taught me how to choose electives during harder semesters to weigh out the hard classes.

Kennedy relied on rating websites to follow other student's lead on the choice of her professors. She also said she chose to visit her advisor to be sure they approved of the courses she was registering for. Blake said she chose her courses based on her own internal opinion, which solely relied on the timing of the class and mentioned that she visited an advisor because it is mandatory, but she "deviates from what they suggest because I know I can do it." Visiting an advisor is a level of support that showed development through the stages of self-authorship. As they navigate interactions with their advisors and question their abilities to make their own decisions about course scheduling, it is helpful for students to be engaged in conversations with their advisors about their challenges, expectations, and strategies for success. According to Pizzolato (2004), "it is important for both advising and teaching situations to build on students' recognition of the gaps in their knowledge and their resilience in the face of this recognition" (p. 440).

Relationship Between Self-Authorship Development and the HOPE Scholarship

Motivation to Maintain a 3.0 GPA

Five of the six participants in this study maintained the HOPE Scholarship following their first year of college. Based on existing research described in Chapter 2, 70% of HOPE recipients lost their scholarship after the first year, however 83.3% of the participants in this study maintained the HOPE Scholarship; therefore, the sample in this study may not be large enough to gain significant information of how the scholarship affects persistence (Georgia Board of Regents, 2001). However, it was prevailing that the participants were driven to maintain a 3.0

in college in order to keep the HOPE Scholarship. From the participant narratives, it is clear the HOPE Scholarship is a source of pride and an external motivator.

Sarah's narrative revealed that her personal goals were influenced by the HOPE Scholarship, and specifically, the desire to maintain a 3.0 GPA throughout her undergraduate career. She said, "it would be a huge accomplishment on my part." Sarah talked about her academic and personal goal of excelling at a "B" average or above so she could avoid student loans. The decision to not take out loans was formulated personally, without external influence. Her driving factor behind that decision was to not be in a lot of debt following graduation, therefore indicating her goals align with the decisions she made of maintaining a high GPA. She stated, "I can handle some debt, but I don't want to be in utter piles of it." Davis talked about planning his academic schedule around keeping a 3.0 GPA as discussed earlier in this chapter, and it is an academic goal he had set for himself to maintain the HOPE Scholarship. Kennedy and Reagan also described their academic goals, which included earning a 3.0 GPA, and Reagan discussed what keeping a 3.0 GPA and retaining HOPE meant to her.

With all of the things that I make decisions about I have to make sure that I'm not overloading myself otherwise so that I have time for school and to keep my grades up. It's also nice taking courses over the summer because I'll only take one at a time. So, I only have to focus on one, so I have a better chance of getting A's. And I try to get as many A's as I can so in case I have a hard semester where I might get a C, it kind of cancels out to a B is the way I see it.

Additionally, Reagan did not want her GPA to be a barrier when applying to graduate schools. She stated, "I want to try to get my GPA as high as possible so that I do have options of places to go because I don't want my GPA to be a factor in why I can't go to the places." Blake was

motivated by GPA because she, “definitely wants a high GPA ‘cause I feel like that is important, that’s something that I can put on my resume and Dean’s list...I never want to get to the point where its worrisome like a 3.2 or a 3.1.”

Gina, who did not maintain the HOPE Scholarship after her first year, talked about her personal goal to be eligible for the scholarship again. Since regaining the scholarship is a top priority for her, she said she strives to persist in higher education and increase her GPA. Unfortunately, she lost the scholarship by 0.1 points and it emotionally affected her so much that she “cried like a baby” when she got the letter. Gina stated, “I have worked my butt off to get it back not because of the financial aid but because I lost HOPE.”

All six of the participants identified a sense of pride in having a merit-based scholarship which allowed them to enter higher education with less financial burdens and each mentioned retaining the scholarship was a priority for them; however, the scholarship did not seem to be the reason they all entered college nor was it a reason for attrition for the one participant who lost the scholarship following her first year. Gina, felt a burden from losing HOPE because she felt like, “her friends get disappointed if I don’t do good...I would rather them be angry than disappointed.” When asked, Gina said she was certain she would still attend college if she did not have the HOPE Scholarship, but it was a goal for her to work to get it back because she, “worked hard to receive it graduating from high school and I wanted it back not because of the financial burden but because I lost HOPE.”

Sarah said she strived to maintain the HOPE Scholarship because, “it helps with the tuition and I would like to graduate with a three-point-something GPA. If I lose HOPE, it would put an unnecessary strain on myself and my family...It is very important to me to keep HOPE.” Davis stated, “the scholarship covers a lot of tuition and my family isn’t the richest family. So,

we definitely needed as much help as we could. So, I was striving to help my parents out as best as possible.” This would have caused him unneeded stress to have to maintain a job to help his parents and their financial strain on college funding. Reagan and Kennedy also found it was important to assist in removing the financial burden from their family by applying the scholarship to her tuition. Blake kept HOPE a priority, but more so in order to achieve a high GPA.

Financially, it is not a huge issue. I feel like it’s definitely important and I never want it to get to the point where it’s like worrisome like a 3.2 or 3.1. I never want to get to the point where I’m worrying that I’m going to lose it because like I said, my GPA has gotten lower every semester, but I set the bar pretty high.

Transition to College

The majority of the participants believed that the HOPE Scholarship helped them transition into college because it allowed them to make the decision on where to attend college and to take the strain off of some of them having to work and worry about finances. Davis stated, “it helped make my decision on where to go to college because HOPE is in-state, so I chose to go to an in-state college. And I wanted to go to a smaller one, so that is why I applied to this one.” Reagan mentioned it was a, “big factor in where I went with prices and stuff like that.” Additionally, it is a priority for Reagan to not overload herself so she could maintain the scholarship, which assisted in her decision to take summer courses so that she can “focus on one class at a time to have a better chance of getting A’s.” Kennedy agreed the HOPE Scholarship made her, “feel ready,” to attend college since she worked to keep her GPA up in high school.

The Goal of Retaining the HOPE Scholarship

For most of the participants, earning and maintaining the HOPE Scholarship was a personal goal, and a recurring theme present in the narratives was the relief they felt knowing they were not incurring financial burdens because they had the scholarship. One participant, Sarah, said:

It keeps me away from the "C's get degrees" mentality since C's aren't very impressive in the United States. It's a goal personally because the scholarship takes a load off of college expenses. It's less money to pay back from loans and since my parents help me pay for college, I don't feel like getting an education is a burden on them since the HOPE (for me) pays about \$2500 on average. Also, I keep HOPE because with it, I don't have to take out any personal loans and pay those off too.

Similarly, Davis and Kennedy mentioned they used HOPE as a threshold to keep good grades because if they were to lose it, their parents would be unable to pay their tuition. Kennedy said that her father would not continue to help pay her tuition without HOPE, and she would be forced to “get a job and take out student loans.”

Interpretation of the Participant’s Self-Authorship Development and Connection to Retaining the HOPE Scholarship

As stated previously, existing research indicated HOPE Scholarship plays a role in college enrollment in the state of Georgia. As the participants in the current study indicated, their search for in-state institutions during the college search process was their only option, so they may use HOPE Scholarship, which they worked diligently for in high school. Contrary to what research shows on the impact of merit-based scholarships and persistence in college, the participants in this study indicated they would have continued in college if they lost the HOPE

scholarship. The interview protocol included questions on why the scholarship motivated their decisions and ability to remain in college, and a follow-up question was given to students specifically asked: Would you have continued your education at UNG if you lost HOPE after your first year of college?

Reagan said she would have continued her education because “I was well integrated into the university by the end of my freshman year. I had a leadership position, was a part of Greek life, and was hired on to be an orientation leader. Not to mention, I love the community as well as the mountains at UNG...even if I had lost HOPE, I would still value my education and finish my undergraduate.” Davis concluded that he would have continued his education and “just taken out loans if needed I needed the financial help.” Blake mentioned she absolutely would have continued her education “with or without HOPE because I want a bachelor’s degree, having the HOPE Scholarship is just a bonus.” The only student who indicated they may leave the institution was Kennedy who stated “I would have likely continued unless I could find somewhere that was more affordable. Location likely still would have kept me at UNG.”

Finances as a Factor: Balance Between Work and School

Chapter 2 of this thesis discussed lowering the cost of college also might reduce student employment, enabling them to spend more time on their coursework (Scott-Clayton, 2010). Three out of six of the participants indicated they would be in a financial burden, or placing their parents in a financial burden, by losing the scholarship. Knowledge of losing HOPE would cause a financial burden shows the participants were moving through the phases of self-authorship as they recognize the difficulty of paying for tuition could put an undue burden on their families or having to get a job themselves. On the other hand, the current student that did lose HOPE, Gina, described working a substantial amount help pay for her college tuition. Gina

could have shifted the financial burden on her parents, but instead was able to take responsibility herself by maintaining a job to help pay for her tuition and fees. This responsibility proved that Gina was moving through the phases of self-authorship development by committing to work to assist in the financial obligations of college.

Davis said he strived to maintain the HOPE Scholarship because, “the scholarship covers a lot of tuition and my family isn’t the richest family. So, we definitely needed as much help as we could. So, I was striving to help my parents out as best as possible.” If he were to lose the HOPE Scholarship, he would likely have to get a job and take out a personal loan. Kennedy stated there, “definitely would have been a financial burden if I lost HOPE,” Reagan’s parents paid her college tuition; she personally did not want to put any additional pressure on them to have to increase their financial obligation to her education.

Although Sarah suggested she would not have to work if she lost the scholarship, it would “put an unnecessary strain on myself and my family. I would not have to work, but I would because I would feel as though it would be an obligation to repay what I lost, even though my parents have never told me you need to work if you lost HOPE, that’s how I feel.”

Blake talked about her awareness of finances and how they would not be an issue if she did not retain the scholarship. She developed a goal to keep her GPA up early on so that she “never gets to the point where I’m worrying that I’m going to lose it because my GPA has gotten lower every semester, but I set the bar pretty high.”

Since Gina lost the HOPE Scholarship and was having to fund her education out of pocket, she indicated she had barely any free time, “Most days I get out of class and then I go straight to work.” Gina specified, “work doesn’t really take away from my academic involvement.” Her perspective on work and academic balance was a smooth transition for her

because she worked full-time throughout high school; however, Gina stated, “I do wish I had more free time to join different types of clubs and organizations on campus.” This indication of her ability to not be able to be as involved in co-curricular activities could potentially be affecting her significant connections to the University, as Astin (1977, 1985) concludes in his research which indicate that the more students are involved in their education, both in and beyond the classroom, the more likely they are to be retained.

Summary

The themes present in the participants’ narratives indicate an overall awareness of academic goals, which are largely motivated by maintenance of the HOPE Scholarship. The narratives described similarities and differences in the student’s perception of college, merit-based scholarships, transition into the first year, and the desire to seek approval from others. Furthermore, these narratives serve as a basis to gain perspective on the three research questions and allow the researcher to assess evidence of maintenance of HOPE in the critical first year of college and how students identify their experiences and how they contribute to college persistence.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the self-authorship development of six HOPE Scholars, who began their first-year at UNG in fall 2016. Specifically, the study focused on self-authorship development during the transition from high school to college, as well as throughout their first college year. The following research questions were used to guide this study:

1. What phase of self-authorship is reflected in students' discussion of their first year of college?
2. How do students describe their self-authorship development during the first year of college?
3. How are students' perceptions of themselves during their first year of college influenced by their goals, personal characteristics, and a merit-based scholarship?

In order to develop a sense of what phase of self-authorship the participants were in, a qualitative approach was used, and participants' narratives were analyzed to identify consistent themes (Strauss, 1987) which revealed self-authorship development and to what extent the development was influenced by the HOPE Scholarship.

The themes from the participant narratives responded to the research questions in the study and revealed the following in relationship to those questions:

1. First-year students are moving between the phases of Following External Formulas and the Crossroads;
2. The HOPE Scholarship was a motivating and influencing factor to maintain a 3.0 GPA in the first year of college;

3. There is no evident connection between retaining the HOPE Scholarship and persistence to the second year in college in the participants;
4. Merit-based scholarships play a role in increased engagement in course work and co-curricular activities, while providing the option for students to work less during college.

Discussion of Results

The findings of the study affirm first-year students are moving through phases of self-authorship and a merit-based scholarship, an external source of motivation, influenced the participants desire to maintain for a 3.0 GPA. Although this study cannot be generalized across all first-year students at UNG, the findings from this exploratory study provide evidence that the participants were moving through the beginning stages of self-authorship, HOPE Scholarship was an internal factor in setting goals for themselves, and the college experiences the participants went through during their first-year created heightened awareness of their epistemology, intrapersonal, and interpersonal dimensions.

The participants had experiences during their transition from high school through their first year of college which compelled them to move through the beginning phases of self-authorship development. The findings were assessed through questions asked in regard to the participants' experiences transitioning to college, how they approached making decisions, and how they felt they have changed as a person from high school to college. Grade point average (GPA) was discussed as a variable that drove them to not only make decisions about what courses to take, but their GPA was a positive factor in positive experiences they have in their first year. A sense of independence students developed since entering college assists in development of their internal voice (Pizzolato, 2006). Realization of the need to work harder, in some instances, in college seemed to compel the participants to make their own decisions to

attend class and develop different study and time management skills than they had in high school.

The study shows the participants developing and acting on their goals to balance the challenges associated with the first college year (Pizzolato, 2004). The participants made a connection to their goals by discussing them with their academic advisors while seeking guidance on course registration. As the participants reflected on conversations with their advisors, they seemed to respect engagement with what authority figures suggested, which allowed them to reflect on their academic goals of retaining a 3.0 GPA. As Pizzolato's 2006 study found, meeting with advisement allowed these students to be more likely to develop perspectives associated with self-authorship development.

In contrast, the findings in this study present additional questions for continued research. The findings were inconclusive in persistence as it relates to the HOPE Scholarship. These inconclusive findings suggest the participants would have continued to remain enrolled at UNG if they did not retain the merit-based scholarship. The following section acknowledges several implications for research.

Implications

Implications for Research

This study introduced an unexplored area of research merits potential investigation: What is the relationship between self-authorship development and an individual's ability to persist after the loss of a merit-based scholarship? To explore this question, the study should be replicated on a larger scale and include students who have lost HOPE Scholarship and were not retained after their first year in college. The current study had a limited number of participants

which could be less representative of the overall first-year student population at UNG, lacking significant results.

The result of this study concluded with no direct connection between merit-based scholarships and persisting after the first year in the participants who were interviewed. The participants in this study indicated that they would continue to enroll, with or without the HOPE Scholarship and they would receive help from family members to pay for the tuition the scholarship previously funded.

This study affirmed that retaining a merit-based scholarship not only has implications for students, but for their families as they play a role in contributing financially during the participant's time in college. Although this research involved students who persisted, and the majority retained a 3.0 GPA at the end of their first year at UNG, if participants lost their merit-based scholarship and recognized the financial strain on family and themselves, their ability to persist might be impacted.

Implications for Higher Education and Practitioners

Designing Programs to Promote Self-Authorship Development

Existing research indicates self-authorship could be portal to the way students make meaning [how a person makes sense of his or her experience] and navigate their own experiences in undergraduate education (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). As revealed by the participants in this study, many undergraduate students enter college with a strong reliance on others and with little to no inner voice and limited internal motivation. According to Baxter Magolda & King (2007), "college experiences usually change this authority dependence by inviting learners to develop their own purposes and meaning" (p. 493). As the participants in this study went through higher education experiences, they began viewing themselves more as successful adults

both socially and academically. However, due to the participants' tendency to rely on others, they viewed others as a source of authority. This complicated the participant's self-authorship development as they continued to rely on other's opinions of their identities. This lack of internal voice may result in an individual being unfamiliar with the cultural context of their peers. One may have developed relationships based on what they have learned from those in positions of authority. Providing students, particularly those in the first year, with opportunities to engage in meaningful ways with others who have different and diverse perspectives and to reflect on experiences can be foundational in self-authorship development (Torres & Baxter Magolda, 2004).

Existing research demonstrated the connection between self-authorship and student success (Magolda & King, 2008; Pizzolato, 2003; Pizzolato, 2004; Baxter Magolda, 2001; Baxter Magolda, 2007; Baxter Magolda, 2008; Strayhorn, 2014), but the focus of future research could explore ways to help students recognize what stage they are in and how they and faculty and staff can support and foster student self-authorship development. Furthermore, and specifically related to the current study, there is an opportunity to consider the influence, if any, a merit-based scholarship might have in this development. For example, can the loss of a scholarship prompt self-authorship development? Are those who are at higher levels of self-authorship development more likely to maintain their scholarship? This thesis research suggested that a more self-authored student would be likely to retain the HOPE Scholarship because they could recognize the importance of keeping the scholarship and the impact of not retaining the financial assistance. As a student moves through the phases of self-authorship development, they potentially recognize the need for financial assistance the scholarship provides.

To achieve self-authorship, Hodge, Baxter Magolda, and Haynes (2009) suggest putting students in situations that prepare them for personal and intellectual experiences to promote lifelong learning; actively engage students in discovering new knowledge, thinking critically, and make informed decisions; and creation of a vibrant campus learning community that blends curricular and co-curricular learning opportunities. To foster this development, student experiences, like those described in the participant narratives in this study, allow students to make decisions contributing to the development of their internal voices.

Recommendations for Future Research

The results of this study provide insight to the possibility of future research. This study employed an exploratory research method as the researcher conducted a single interview with the six participants at a mid-sized liberal arts public institution in the southeast. While the number of students in this study provided revealing information on the heart of the current research study, a wider variety of diverse students and more students who lost the HOPE Scholarship following their first-year in college could provide further research in the direction of self-authorship development in HOPE Scholars and how it correlates to persistence or attrition of students in college. Research conducted on participant's that failed to retain their merit-based scholarship could illuminate some of the reasons why students persist or fail to persist when they lose a merit-based scholarship and any relationship to their self-authorship development.

Further research on self-authorship development could include a mixed methodology approach including both quantitative and qualitative measures. According to Creswell (2005), "the key idea with this design is to collect both forms of data using the same or parallel variables, constructs, or concepts. In other words, if the concept of self-esteem is being measured quantitatively, the same concept is asked during the qualitative data collection process" (p. 269).

Mixed methodology in further research could include additional interviews and surveys to measure the phase of self-authorship a student is in as well as further information regarding the connection of retention and merit-based scholarships. The variables could be measured through questionnaires or surveys including development of a Self-Authorship Survey (SAS), much like Pizzolato's (2007a) survey which invites respondents to indicate their level of agreement (on a scale) and reflect on their typical ways of thinking and acting (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). Another survey example would be the Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education (WNS) survey designed to measure complex reasoning why students have yet to develop meaning-making capacities that support "complex reasoning and independent judgements" (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012, p. 3). Survey results using these measures could provide a detailed picture of the connection between a student's self-authorship development, retaining a merit-based scholarship, and persistence at a respected institution.

The timing and duration of the research is another area which could present areas for future research. The interviews were conducted between the end of the fall semester and beginning of second semester of their sophomore year. More significant results may have come across in the participant's self-authorship development in the first year if the timing of the interviews was immediately following their first year. Additionally, a second interview conducted immediately after the check for HOPE Scholarship status may be beneficial, to hear the participant's raw feelings about retaining or losing the scholarship. Further investigation involving the participants in this study, following their second year at UNG, could identify a supplementary connection between HOPE Scholarship and self-authorship development. The prospective study could describe student's thought processes and reactions as they develop more of their internal beliefs and their desire to become the Author of One's Life, the third phase of

self-authorship, based on situation and experiences in their second year. Since students may have not further developed through the later phases of self-authorship like existing research suggests, it could be beneficial for research to continue following these participants, including any who may have stopped out of school or transferred to another institution, through their undergraduate journey and beyond college. A specific question that may be answered would be: If they were to lose HOPE Scholarship, how would their decision-making processes look different than when they maintained the scholarship?

Finally, another area for potential research could be analyzing what role the participant's environments play into self-authorship development and "B" average GPA maintenance. According to Baxter Magolda (2011), "providing a supportive environment conducive of change" is an important balance in the epistemological notion of an individual (p. 47). Additionally, "change in environment (place or friends) brings about new diversity that is incorporated into social circle" (Baxter Magolda, 2011, p. 74). Research could be conducted further and questions posed to participants about their particular college environments, inside and outside of the classroom. It could be acknowledged that a student would have different self-authorship development if they are living in residence halls or commuting to campus. The campus type and culture could also play a role in development of self-authorship. Classroom pedagogy could be researched as a method to assist students in knowledge as a promotion of self-authorship. Baxter Magolda (2001) states:

Helping students establish their own belief systems, determine how to implement them in their professional practice, and refine them as knowledge and they as professional evolve again calls for a layer of education beyond knowledge acquisition. It requires conveying information in a way that links existing knowledge to students' experiences and

development, engaging the messiness of working through knowledge claims, and engaging in genuine mutual construction with learners. (p. 215)

Future interview questions to participants could acquisition the different structures of classrooms, pedagogy approaches, and how they view their professors (authority) and further gain knowledge on one's phase within self-authorship development.

Recommendations for Practitioners

Self-authorship development can impact the ways in which students perceive themselves and their ability to successfully navigate to and through the first year of college. Implications for practice in Baxter Magolda's (2008) study were identified as "a challenge to educators to help students cultivate their internal voices by reducing the student's external voice, which can take such forms as peer, family, or society" (p. 282). In the current study, the HOPE Scholarship provided a source of motivation for the participants, which is consistent with existing research on the Crossroads phase of self-authorship development: "The Crossroads may be externally induced through programming, interventions, and reforms related to common collegiate experiences" (Pizzolato, 2005, p. 624). This study explored ways self-authorship influenced maintenance of a merit-based scholarship in the first year of college, and ultimately, participants in the study were motivated by the scholarship, and associated the financial benefits with maintaining a 3.0 GPA. Based on the experiences of the participants and considering self-authorship development, it is important for institutions of higher education to implement programs that are intentionally designed to promote self-authorship development in first-year students when they are striving to maintain a healthy "B" average GPA and a merit-based scholarship to assist in the funding of their tuition and fees.

Based on this study, there are opportunities to design and implement programs to assist students and to foster movement through the phases of self-authorship while helping students maintain HOPE Scholarship. Several University System of Georgia (USG) institutions have developed programs with this goal, and while self-authorship development may not have been the primary intent behind the programs described in the following section, the strategies used to assist students clearly contribute to students' self-authorship.

Kennesaw State University

Kennesaw State University (KSU) created a program called Thrive which assists students in developing academic skills supporting the goal to maintain the HOPE scholarship as well as develop beneficial social skills students can use in college and beyond. The main goals of the program are to support students in academic skills, offer resources to develop leadership skills, assure the student is integrating academically and socially to KSU, and to help students to progress to graduation (“Thrive Welcome,” n.d.). In order to be eligible for the program, students must have been accepted into KSU, be a first-year full-time student, have between a 3.0-3.49 High School GPA, meet standardized test score requirements, and have the HOPE scholarship (“Thrive Eligibility,” 2017). The program specifically benefits first year students by creation of learning communities, having graduation coaches, and earlier orientation experiences to integrate a healthy transition to college. Data shows retention rates from first year to second year of students is an average of seven percentage points higher than students not entering KSU in the program (Shae Smith, personal communication, February 6, 2017).

Georgia State University

Georgia State University (GSU) developed a program called “Keep HOPE Alive” which assists students after losing the scholarship. The program integrates a series of interventions

“designed to get them back on track academically and to make wise financial choices in the aftermath of losing the scholarship” (“Keep HOPE Alive,” n.d.). Students who participate in the program are awarded \$1,000 scholarship upon completion of the program requirements, including: pursue a minimum of 30 credit hours; attend Student Success workshops, meet regularly with an academic coach; and required to attend mandatory advisement (“Keep HOPE Alive,” n.d.).

Additional Theory to Promote Self-Authorship Development

Integrating programs like the ones discussed above while implementing strategies to help students become more self-authored could allow a student to become more independent, therefore internalize the need for a merit-based scholarship and are more likely to seek out intervention programs. In addition to specific programs designed to help students persist and retain or regain a merit-based scholarship, there are models developed to assist practitioners with promoting more self-authored students. Two specific models of designation are Piper’s (1996) Community Standard’s Model (CSM) and academic advising approaches that promote self-authorship.

Community Standard’s Model (CSM)

Piper’s CSM would be focused on students living on-campus in residence halls. The model shifted the role of residence life staff from authority to facilitators in order to have students monitor and reflect on their own behavior (Piper & Buckley, 2004). The phases of the CSM model include Establishing a Foundation for Community, Community Problem Solving, and Accountability to the Community (Piper, 1997b). The intention and goals of this program is to have a desired outcome of self-authorship development as it drives students to make meaning of their experiences and challenges in the residence halls of college campuses.

Academic Advising Approaches

“Teaching students to identify and work toward realistic goals begins with helping them develop a strong identity, examine their reasons for choosing an academic or career path, and identify the best approach for making their aspirations a reality” (Pizzolato, 2008, p.

19). Academic advisers can play a role in self-authorship development as the process and partnership a student has with their advisor could promote discussion on beliefs, identity, challenges, healthy relationships, and more. These conversations can allow for the articulation of epistemological, intrapersonal and interpersonal development through conversations (Baxter Magolda & King, 2008). Many academic advising programs are based on appreciative, developmental or holistic models. One of the goals of all advising models is the development of the student as they progress through their education. Advisors want students to take ownership of their education. Overtime the role of the advisor decreases as the student takes on a more direct role in advising matters, such as registration, course selection and awareness of holds or other barriers to registration. As a result, advisors assist students in this progression and this goal of having students take ownership of their education corresponds directly to self-authorship theory.

Conclusion

This exploratory study provides themes which could assist faculty and staff as they support students, particularly first-year students, as they move through the phases of self-authorship. While the study did not reveal a clear connection between self-authorship and maintenance of the HOPE Scholarship, it is likely students who are actively experiencing this type of development will continue to be motivated to maintain the GPA necessary to be eligible for this merit-based scholarship. The students in this study appear to be moving through the first two phases of self-authorship, Following External Formulas and the Crossroads, and from the

narratives collected and analyzed, the participants clearly take pride in how they are perceived by family and peers in their studies and remaining enrolled as a student in college. There are a variety of findings that warrant further examination , including replication of this study on a larger scale and including participants who lost the HOPE Scholarship and did not persist into their second year; exploration of how to develop self-authorship in students on the cusp of movement from a “B” average at risk of moving toward a “C” average; and how students’ environments, especially living on campus or being a commuter, assist in the transitional phases of self-authorship and retaining merit-based scholarships.

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Appendix A
IRB Approval

UNG UNIVERSITY of
NORTH GEORGIA
Institutional Review Board (IRB)

IRB Approval of Protocol Change
IRB Protocol Code: 2017-132
Decision Date: 12/05/2017

Michelle Eaton
Department of Management & Marketing

Project Title: An Exploratory Study of First-Year Student Self-Authorship and Maintenance of the HOPE Scholarship

Dear Dr. Eaton

Your proposed changes to the IRB application 2017-132 entitled “An Exploratory Study of First-Year Student Self-Authorship and Maintenance of the HOPE Scholarship” has been evaluated in light of federal, state and institutional guidelines that govern the protection of human subjects. Based on these policies, the **proposed modification** of the research project has been approved. Please make sure the changes are implemented “as approved”. If you encounter unanticipated problems and/or adverse events, please submit *IRB Form 4.1*. to the IRB immediately.

For further questions about research continuation, termination and closure, please consult the IRB website and/or consult the IRB Chair.

Good luck with the project!

Best,

Lisa Jones-Moore, PhD
UNG IRB Chair
irbchair@ung.edu

Appendix B
Email Solicitation

Dear UNG Student,

I would like to invite you to participate in a research study related to student development in your first year of college and how it correlates with maintenance of the HOPE Scholarship. My name is Michelle Eaton, Master of Science student at Kennesaw State University as well as Associate Director for Enrollment Management at University of North Georgia. You are being asked because you were a first-year student in fall 2016 with an incoming grade point average between a 3.0 and 3.25.

This study will require one or two one-on-one interviews, scheduled on a day and time at your convenience. The interview should last no longer than one hour. The interview will be audio recorded as part of my data collection, however your name will remain confidential. My hopes are that you will benefit from reflecting on your first-year experiences and knowing that you will potentially be helping others.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. Prior to the interviews, you will be provided an informed consent form. Your decision whether or not to participate in this study will in no way affect your current or future relationship with UNG. Should you choose to participate in this study, you have the ability to refuse to answer any of the questions.

If you are willing to participate, please indicate by replying to this message.

I appreciate your consideration to assist in this important research project!

Sincerely,

Michelle Antonia Eaton
Associate Director for Enrollment Management
University of North Georgia
110 South Chestatee Street
Dahlonega, Georgia 30597
(706) 867-2893

Appendix C
Interview Protocol

1. Please tell me about yourself.
2. What is your major? How did you select your major?
3. What did you expect college to be like in your first year?
4. Did you receive the HOPE Scholarship during your first year? Was it maintained after your first year?
5. Describe your best and worse experience about your first year in college.
6. What do you consider when you're selecting courses?
7. When registering for your classes, keeping your GPA in mind, do you seek advice from others or do you plan your academic schedule individually?
8. What do you do with your free time and what led you to pursue those things?
9. How would you describe yourself to friends or family?
10. Why are you in college? How did you decide to go to college? What motivated you to go to college? What motivated you to pick UNG?
11. What are your goals?
12. How do these goals influence your day-to-day decisions?
13. How would you have described yourself in high school & how would you describe yourself now?
14. What is it that you hope to accomplish when you graduate from UNG? How do those goals influence your day-to-day decisions?
15. What steps do you take when making a decision?
16. In what ways have you changed personally and academically from your first year in college?

17. To what extent do you spend time when making decisions? For instance, how does this decision fit your goals and values?

If student says “yes” to whether they received the HOPE Scholarship, ask the following:

18. Getting back to the HOPE Scholarship, why do you strive to maintain the 3.0 GPA and the scholarship?

19. Has the HOPE Scholarship helped in your transition to college? How so?

20. When setting academic goals for yourself, was maintaining the HOPE Scholarship a priority for you?

*Will have follow-up questions based on their responses to better understand their decision and meaning making. Follow-up questions will try to figure out the “why” and what else will help determine getting to the heart of self-authorship.

Appendix D
Informed Consent



IRB Form 3.1
Informed Consent Form

Title of the Study: *First-Year Self-Authorship Study*

Researcher: *Michelle Antonia Eaton, Kennesaw State University, Master of Science in First-Year Studies and Associate Director for Enrollment Management, University of North Georgia*

You are being asked to participate in a research project conducted by Michelle Antonia Eaton, a staff member in the department of Enrollment Management at the University of North Georgia. I am also a graduate student in the Master of Science in First-Year Studies program at Kennesaw State University. You are being asked because you attended the University of North Georgia as a first-year student in the fall of 2016. The research conducted through your interview will be used in my thesis study. The title of my thesis study is *An Exploratory Study of First-Year Student Self-Authorship and Maintenance of the HOPE Scholarship*.

The goal of this interview is to explore student development in the first-year of college, specifically self-authorship, involving participants who entered the University of North Georgia in fall 2016 between a 3.0 and 3.25 with the HOPE Scholarship.

The interview will take approximately between 45 and 60 minutes. During the interview you will be asked to discuss some of your experiences prior and during your first year of college, and to describe ways in which you managed challenges, discuss relationships with those around you, and how perceptions of yourself during your first year of college was influenced by your environment, personal characteristics, and beliefs.

The interview will be audio-taped and transcribed. The results of your interview will be *will be used in a thesis paper for a master degree program. You will have the opportunity to review a summary of your responses in order to ensure accuracy.*

The potential risks associated with this study are minimal but may include discomfort related to discussing relationships and first-year experiences. I expect the project to benefit you by assisting you in reflecting on your first-year experiences in college and your development. There are no other direct benefits to you from participation, but your willingness to share your knowledge and experiences will contribute to *first-year student success and potentially using your research to implement programming to assist students in maintaining a 3.0 GPA and keeping the HOPE Scholarship.*

Your study data will be handled as confidentially as possible. If results of this study are published or presented, individual names and other personally identifiable information will not be used. In order to preserve the confidentiality of your responses, only the researcher will have access to the participants' identities and interview responses.

To minimize the risks to confidentiality, the researcher will have access to the participants' identities and interview responses in a password protected file.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. Even if you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study without penalty at any time during or after the study. You may have the results of your participation, to the extent that they can be identified, returned to you, removed from the research records or destroyed.

Contacts and Questions:

If you have any questions about this research project or interview, feel free to contact *Michelle Antonia Eaton* at (706) 429-3199 or by emailing at michelle.eaton@ung.edu.

Statement of Consent:

I agree to participate in this interview, and to the use of this interview as described above. The signature below indicates that you have read the information in this document and have had a chance to ask any questions you have about the study.

Participant's Signature

Date

Researcher's Signature

Date

Questions or problems regarding your rights as a participant should be addressed to Dr. Lisa Jones-Moore, Chair of the Institutional Review Board, University of North Georgia, Middle Grade Education, 82 College Circle, Dahlonega, GA, (706) 867-2969, IRBchair@ung.edu

Appendix E

Confidentiality Agreement for use with Transcription Services

Research Study Title: An Exploratory Study of First-Year Student Self-Authorship and
Maintenance of the HOPE Scholarship

1. I, _____ transcriptionist, agree to maintain full confidentiality of all research data received from the research team related to this research study.
2. I will hold in strictest confidence the identity of any individual that may be revealed during the transcription of interviews or in any associated documents.
3. I will not make copies of any audio-recordings, video-recordings, or other research data, unless specifically requested to do so by the researcher.
4. I will not provide the research data to any third parties without the client's consent.
5. I will store all study-related data in a safe, secure location as long as they are in my possession. All video and audio recordings will be stored in an encrypted format.
6. All data provided or created for purposes of this agreement, including any back-up records, will be returned to the research team or permanently deleted. When I have received confirmation that the transcription work I performed has been satisfactorily completed, any of the research data that remains with me will be returned to the research team or destroyed, pursuant to the instructions of the research team.
7. I understand that University of North Georgia has the right to take legal action against any breach of confidentiality that occurs in my handling of the research data.

Transcriber's name (printed) _____

Transcriber's signature _____

Date _____

Appendix F
Codes and Themes

Table 1: Initial codes	
<i>Codes</i>	<i>Description</i>
Parents	Related to parental roles and relationships
Relationships	related to social relationships
Values	illustrative of participants' choices, goals, decisions, etc.
Decisions	Related to decision-making process
Family	Related to family roles or relationships
Support	illustrative of participants' feelings of support
Experiences	Describing experiences
Education	related to participants' view on education
GPA	related to participants' grade point average
First-year	related to participants' time in college
High School	related to participants' prior time in high school
Purpose	related to participants' sense of purpose
HOPE	related to HOPE Scholarship
Emotions (e.g. anxious, excited, happy, etc.)	related to participant's feelings

Table 2: Emergent Codes	
<i>Codes</i>	<i>Description</i>
Adult	related to post-high school life
Friends	related to experiences with friendships
How I feel	description word associated with one's feeling or instinct
Major	participants' program of study
Advisor	related to participants' relationship with advisors
Challenging	describing one's feelings toward challenges they've faced or are facing
Debt	related to student loans and/or monetary in college
Involvement	whether or not a participant was involved in first-year
Motivation	related to participants' inner motivation vs. being motivated by other
Independent	the way the participant views independence
Mistakes	situations where the participant felt they made a mistake
Honest	way participant viewed others or self
Goals	related to the participants' goals in and out of the classroom
Obligation	related to participants' feelings to others or self or situational