

Summer Bridge Program: Helping Underserved Students Develop Social and Cultural Capital

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ABSTRACT

Social and cultural capital are critical components of success among college students. In this paper, we examine the creation, accumulation, and distribution of social and cultural capital by and among underserved college students who participated in a summer bridge program at one regional public state university. Using qualitative data from interviews with participants, the analysis highlights the importance of trust, sense of belonging and use of non-cognitive strategies. We argue that in addition to traditional achievement measures such as GPA and test scores, social and cultural capital need to be considered. While quantitative measures often label these students as below benchmarks, this study highlights how social and cultural capital are assets to be nurtured and facilitated.

Keywords: Cultural Capital, First-Generation College Students, Habitus, Low-Income Students, Social Capital, Summer Bridge Programs, and Underserved Students

From 1970 through 2015, American colleges and universities experienced an exponential growth from more than 8.5 to 20.2 million enrolled students (NCES, 2016). As a key part of the nationwide effort to increase access to higher education, this explosive increase simultaneously afforded opportunities for socio-economic mobility and created conditions that

highlighted the under-preparedness of many students who are the first in their families to attend college (Strayhorn, 2011, 2019).

Throughout this unprecedented expansion of higher education across the United States, a wide array of schools developed summer bridge programs to recruit, enroll, and retain underserved students (Attewell et al., 2006; Hodara, 2013; Knox, 2005). The overwhelming majority of these summer bridge programs "are intended to (address) important preparation and achievement gaps" (Colyar, 2011, p. 123). The primary purpose of these programs is to guide and support underserved students as they embark on a journey to graduation.

As underserved students from low-income families leave their homes and enroll in a summer bridge program, they step into a set of overlapping terrains that are foreign and, at times, socially hostile and economically adversarial (Hutchins, 1995; Strayhorn, 2019). In these new landscapes, there is a segment of incoming students who find themselves lost in these new and likely confusing environments. The college landscape often seems to operate on baffling and confounding sets of norms, rules and values. These new college students are often the first in their families to face concurrent competing demands and pressures (Goldrick-Rab, 2016; Strayhorn, 2019); and, in this new complex environment, the support networks that helped them through high school are now distant and dwindling. On campus, they are prone to simultaneously feel disconnected from family, intimidated by an academic workload that is beyond their preparation and overburdened by financial aid requirements, regulations and procedures that may place them in debt for years to come (Goldrick-Rab, 2016).

This paper focuses on the Summer Transition at Eastern Program/Contract Admission Program (STEP/CAP) at Eastern Connecticut State University. Created to identify underserved high school seniors and guide them to college graduation, STEP/CAP has operated for nearly four decades and concentrated on non-white, low-income students from Connecticut's re-segregated urban areas or low income, white students from the state's rural areas. Drawing on Conley's (2008, p. 24) definition of college readiness as "the level of preparations a student needs in order to enroll and succeed without remediation," this paper uses qualitative data taken from interviews with students to highlight how the development and accumulation of social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1977; Coleman, 1988) are essential elements of success.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Shift from Cognitive to Non-Cognitive Strategies

Historically, the scholarship of summer bridge programs has been largely descriptive, but lacking in empirical evidence (McCurrie, 2009; Sablan, 2014;

Strayhorn, 2011). As the 21st century began and colleges relied on summer bridge programs to help fuel the explosion in enrollments, test scores, grade point averages and other quantitative forms of evaluation all too often fused into the prime components of this literature.

McCurrie (2009) and Strayhorn (2011) identified students' motivation and academic self-efficacy as important variables in assessing success. While most researchers relied on conventional quantitative measures because they could be easily manipulated by the tools of statistics, McCurrie (2009) noted that the definition of success differed for different actors -- and underserved students and their families from low-income groups as well as racial and ethnic minorities may have criteria for success that are outside of -- or beyond -- grade point averages and test scores. Strayhorn (2011, 2019) furthered this possibility by emphasizing a student's sense of belonging. This variable cannot be quantified and emerges from the student's dynamic and multi-faceted interactions with many peers, family members and institutional actors -- roommates, classmates, intramural or intercollegiate sports team or club members, financial aid staff, instructors, mentors, advisors, residence hall staff, dining hall staff, bursar's and registrar's offices, as well as employment supervisors.

Though grade point averages, test scores and credits earned -- the conventional measures of retention and graduation -- are very important and necessary, McCoy and Winkle-Wagner (2015) point out that they fail to capture the summer bridge program's concentration of affective processes needed to prepare students for specific skills, knowledge, abilities and sets of dispositions that are required for academic success and degree completion. As Farrington et al. (2012) and Dweck et al. (2014) emphasized, increasing student preparedness is often best served by focusing on non-cognitive strategies -- meeting deadlines, asking for help, note-taking, collaboration, public speaking, or digital presentation, outlining, planning and time management.

These activities, which require underserved students to reach out to others and forge associations with people who are simultaneously seen as strangers and colleagues, remote institutional actors and neighbors, roommates or desk mates, are the backbone of STEP/CAP. The following section introduces the Social Capital Theory (SCT), which is the theoretical lens through which the researchers examined the summer bridge program in this study.

Social Capital Theory

Bourdieu (1977) and Coleman (1988) describe the intricate, overlapping and extensive reach of social capital as emerging from relationships. Social capital offers support, relays information, provides security, grants access to credentials, creates formal and informal partnerships, socializes individuals

into the norms of a group and thereby, controls their behavior. Putnam (1995, p. 67) succinctly adds to these formulations by defining social capital as "networks, norms and social trust that facilitates cooperation and coordination for mutual benefit." To Coleman (1988) and Putnam (2000), trust is the foundation of social capital. As Putnam (2000, p. 135) wrote about individuals, "I will do this for you now, without expecting anything immediately in return and perhaps without even knowing you, confident that down the road you or someone else will return the favor."

Fukuyama (1995) and Putnam (2000) contend trust is measured and achieved when a person believes he or she will continue to receive help from someone who already provided support in the past. Similarly, these authors note, trust, at a group level, is achieved when members of one group believe they will receive the help and support from another specified group. In the context of underserved students making the transition to and beginning as undergraduates on a college campus, trust emerges from the interactions between peers, roommates, family members and institutional actors (Colyar 2011; Douglas & Attewell, 2014).

One way a student begins this process is when he or she stays after class or sends an e-mail and asks an instructor for extra help, an extension or a way to slightly deviate from the assignment. The instructor's response conveys important clues, messages and information that affords the student opportunities to experience and participate in a dialogue and activities that concurrently furthers instructional goals and strengthen the foundation for cooperation and collaboration, reliability and regularity (Dweck et al., 2014; Farrington et al. 2012).

Social capital and trust are built upon reciprocity and exchange, receiving and giving back in return. As Fukuyama (1995) and Putnam (2000) explain, trust is created by helping someone who will turn around and provide support at some time in the future. In this manner, "social trust is a valuable community asset if -- but only if -- it is warranted" (Putnam, 2000, p. 135). Fukuyama (1995, p. 26) explains that "trust ... involves the exchange of information, trust is not reducible to information...Trust is the exception that arises within a community of regular, honest, cooperative behavior, based on commonly shared norms, on the part of other members of the community."

Social capital creates a network of support, shared labor and other forms of collaboration that can be used to offset obstacles to success that arise because of deficits in other capitals or unequal opportunities (Bourdieu, 1986). On a college campus, social capital can take one from being isolated to serving as an active member of a group, from being confused and bewildered by new norms to comprehension of formal and informal policies and procedures, from feeling helpless to establishing informal and formal associations or collaborations, from being overwhelmed by financial aid

requirements to working with staff and administrators to navigate and qualify for scholarships and loans, payment plans and deferments.

Addressing many overlapping obstacles experienced by underserved students, the creation and accumulation of social capital requires students to develop collaborative and cooperative networks amongst their peers, family members, the faculty and administrators. Emerging from these networks is the promise of the individual's willingness and increased ability to trust and build trust as he or she engages in a series of flexible relationships and associations that may involve roommates, classmates, hall directors, instructors, administrators, advisors, family members, off-campus friends, supervisors at part-time jobs. As Putnam (2000) noted, the creation, accumulation and distribution of social capital occurs when any individual—or combination of individuals – offer and receive support or help in an effort to overcome obstacles or hardships.

In the case of a summer bridge program, students develop their social capital by interacting with their peers, family members and with institutional actors. With their peers, students will develop a bonding social capital which “is good for undergirding specific reciprocity and mobilizing solidarity [which provides] crucial social and psychological support” and “reinforce exclusive identities and homogeneous groups” (Putnam, 2000, p. 22). With institutional actors, students forge social capital as a way to encounter “people across [a] diverse social cleavage” (Putnam, 2000, p. 22). This is seen as crucial for ‘getting ahead’ (Putnam 2000, p. 22-23).

The Journey of the Successful Underserved Student: From Shunned to Academic Tenacity

Campus environments reflect the stratification of American life. In many intended and unintended ways, being an undergraduate contributes to a segregation that prompts students from high and above average socio-economic status or level of educational attainment to congregate with each other. Frequently, this contributes to the shunning of students “whose parents are less educated” or less than average in terms of income, wealth and other variables. This stratified environment prompts underserved students, especially those who identify as members of racial or ethnic minority groups, to feel alienated, isolated, judged and stereotyped” (Strayhorn, 2011, 2019).

Despite these challenges, successful underserved students at all levels of schooling who have developed a practice of working together in groups have gained valued knowledge about navigating higher education (Crosnoe, Cavanagh, & Elder, 2003; Luthar, Crossman, & Small, 2015). An undergraduate's relationship to and participation in these groups -- whether formal or informal -- provide “social support and modeling of pro-social behavior, emotional support for the meeting of challenges, friends' knowledge of skills related to schooling and academic subjects, exposure to larger

academically oriented social network, and access to various forms of capital the friend may have" (Crosnoe et al., 2003, p. 333).

Expanding the self-efficacy and role-model research pioneered by Bandura (1977), Farrington et al. (2012), and Dweck et al. (2014) have focused on how underserved students rely on non- cognitive strategies to engage peers, institutional actors and family members to create networks for transmitting, exchanging and decoding information needed to succeed. Dweck et al. (2014) labeled these efforts "academic tenacity." Extending the nautical metaphor put forth by Hutchins (1995), Farrington et al. (2012) and Dweck et al. (2014) describe how a student navigates challenges and obstacles that are present at every turn -- by calling upon a guide. Whether it is an instructor, financial aid staff, parent, sibling, peer, tutor, residence hall supervisor, mentor, advisor, employer, or a combination of these individuals, they serve in roles that range from counselor to friend, money manager to study partner, cheerleader to enforcer of rules and norms.

For the duration of this journey, from enrollment through graduation, the underserved student is repeatedly forming and re-forming associations that are intended to create social capital that make "possible the achievement of certain ends that in its absence would not be possible" (Coleman, 1988, p. S98). In their study of peer networks and education, Calvo-Aremngol, Patacchini & Zenou, (2009, p. 1240) provide statistical evidence that "peer influence acts as a multiplier on the outcome of the isolated individual...(and) peer effects aggregate at the group level."

As the underserved student progresses towards graduation, he or she may still feel alienated and shunned by many, but he or she is less isolated because his or her success requires a series of interactions that often intertwine academic achievement, family finances, cooperation and collaboration with peers and others. Institutional actors, classmates and others who were once seen as remote and adversarial have become part of the student's multi-faceted efforts to develop, establish, articulate and attain goals; the freshman who was intimidated and unsure becomes the goal-directed senior who worked with, earned, received and gave back trust from men and women he or she once viewed as strangers, competitors and adversaries.

Creating A Sense of Belonging: The Interactions Between Students and Institutional Actors

Strayhorn (2019) synthesizes and builds upon this research by stressing a student's "sense of belonging" to a campus as a key indicator of success. Similar to Walton and Cohen (2007), he describes the sense of belonging as "an experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by and important to the campus community or others on campus such as faculty, staff and peers" (Strayhorn, 2019, p.4). Throughout this aspect of his research, he focuses on reciprocity. A student has a sense of belonging

because he or she can identify and benefit from contributions made by others; and he or she can identify how others benefit from his or her contributions.

Besides the exchanges and interactions between individuals, Strayhorn (2011, 2019) extends Stanton-Salazar's (2001; 2010) research into the importance of student encounters with institutional actors and agents. In assessing the school's outreach to and assistance offered to underserved students from racial and ethnic groups that are under-represented on campus, Stanton-Salazar (2001) identifies these efforts as attempts to provide "empowerment social capital" – which are methods used by institutional actors to help students receive needed financial aid and an array of support services.

Institutional actors "directly transmit, or negotiate the transmission of, highly valued institutional" (Stanton-Salazar, 2010, p. 1075) knowledge, norms, values, and postures. By offering support to students, institutional actors participate in a "counterstratification as the counterpart to hierarchical and reproductive social structures" (Stanton-Salazar, 2010, p. 1087). In making connections and offering assistance through the award of scholarships, the explanation of and completion of student loans, the settlement of an outstanding balance, the selection of a roommate, scheduling of study or tutorial sessions, advice on choosing a major and selecting courses, adjusting to meal plans and dining hall regulations, administrative staff and faculty welcome those students who come to campus wondering how they are going to enter and become part of a community operating in ways that are foreign and often perceived as adversarial.

Social Capital, Cultural Capital and The Re-orientation Into Habitus Valued in Higher Education

Bourdieu (1984; 1986) examines how an individual's accumulation and use of social capital leads to cultural capital – which he defines as having the currency needed to attain goals. For an underserved student living on a college campus, this process often follows the three forms of cultural capital identified by Bourdieu (1984, 1986): First is the embodied cultural capital composed of tastes, postures, skills, knowledge, disposition; second is objectified cultural capital is the way to talk about material capital (such as talking about a Pablo Picasso or Georgia O'Keefe painting) or the ability to use particular machines, equipment and technologies; third is the institutionalized cultural capital, a credential, such as a degree, recognized throughout society as a significant accomplishment and gateway to increased status.

For an underserved student, the path to graduation requires an integration of all three forms of cultural capital – a set of individualized and communal processes that transform the once foreign, or sometimes adversarial campus, into a place of familiarity. To Bourdieu (1990a, p. 53), social and cultural capital are successfully accumulated and distributed when

an individual can experience and adapt strange, uncomfortable “practices and representations... (into) an express mastery of operations.”

When engaged in this manner, Bourdieu (1990b) points out, an individual’s environment becomes a friendly or familiar “habitus” as opposed to an intimidating and hostile terrain. This re-orientation, from uncertainty to competence and eventual mastery, is fluid and dynamic, evolving throughout the student’s undergraduate career, let alone his or her lifetime. Created and expressed, accumulated and distributed through networks of people, these interactions, exchanges and encounters, these strategies for using social and cultural capital are inherent in the college experience; and, a wide array of social scientists have noted the effects for more than five decades from Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) to Strayhorn (2019).

As the exponential expansion of undergraduates peaked in 2014 and 2015, researchers began to focus on how educators and students work together to forge non-cognitive strategies and activities designed to bring forth the academic tenacity needed to graduate (Dweck et al., 2014; Farrington et al., 2012; Luthar et al., 2015). Investigating the dynamics related to study skills, seeking extra help, time management, breaking down large assignments into smaller segments, this literature highlighted the insufficiency of educational research aimed at merely examining what is taught and how it is taught. Some scholars (Dweck et al., 2014) have argued that so called “psychological factors” or motivational or non-cognitive factors -- can matter even more than cognitive factors for students’ academic performance.

According to Dweck et al. (2014) these factors may include students’ beliefs about themselves, their feelings about school, or their habits of self-control. Educators, psychologists, and even economists recognize the importance of non-cognitive factors in achievement both in school and in the labor market. “These factors also offer promising levers for raising the achievement of underprivileged children and, ultimately, closing achievement gaps based on race and income” (Dweck et al., 2014, p. 2).

These factors reach beyond individual, self-reflective epiphanies and become manifest in tasks that are part of a structured program of interventions (Bandura, 1977; Duckworth & Seligman, 2005; Dweck et al. 2014). In the context of a college campus and summer bridge programs for underserved students, faculty administrators and staff organize collaborative activities around the following goals – establishing the relevancy of the curriculum, identifying social, economic, and academic obstacles to graduation and implementing self-control. The classroom becomes only one of many locations for these interventions and experiences that further an underserved student’s sense of belonging and the development of his or her intrinsic motivation (Damon, Menon, & Brank, 2003; Jang, 2008; Kaplan & Flum, 2012).

In this paper, we explore the case of STEP/CAP and argue that its focus on social capital affords underserved students' key opportunities needed to succeed in college.

RESEARCH METHOD

Introducing the Summer Transition at Eastern Program/Contract Admission Program

STEP/CAP started at Eastern in 1984. Over the past 37 years this summer program has attracted between 50 to 100 students each year. A six-week residential (i.e. pre- covid-19) program, STEP/CAP recruits from the pool of students who applied for regular admission at Eastern but whose SAT scores (now optional), high school grade point average, and/or class rank are below admission standards. A majority of these highly motivated students are from underserved populations including --students of color, those from families with low-or-moderate income families, and whose parents did not graduate from college.

Gaining acceptance into STEP/CAP (pre-COVID) involves a day of screening that brings prospective students and their parents to campus, where students are tested and placed into appropriate levels of mathematics (using the Accuplacer math placement test), English (using the writing prompt), and study skills (using the LASSI Learning and Study Strategies Inventory test). Following these assessments prospective students participate in one-on-one interviews with either a faculty or other appropriate staff member. At the same time, parents are busy attending workshops on the financial realities of higher education, how to identify and secure scholarships, and the ins and outs of student loan options. In addition to meeting faculty and staff, the on-campus visit offers prospective students and their parents the chance to meet former STEP/CAP students and learn about the program and opportunities it provided from the perspective of a peer.

Throughout its years of existence, STEP/CAP has methodically recruited and enrolled students from the lowest percentiles of family income and consistently retained and graduated these students at rates far above the national average but persistently lagged behind the graduation rates for Eastern's regularly admitted students. According to the Institute of Education Policy at Johns Hopkins, the national six-year graduation rate for students from the lowest income quartile is 14% (Bjorkland- Young, 2014). In 2017, the National Center for Education Statistics calculated a 15% graduation rate from the lowest quartile of the income ladder (Gewertz, 2018).

For students entering in 1995 through 2012, the six-year graduation rate for STEP/CAP students rose from 29% to a peak of 44%. Over the same period of time, Eastern reported an overall six-year graduation rate that rose from 43% to 57%. Though Eastern's Integrated Postsecondary Data System,

the data show persistent and stubborn gaps in graduation rates between whites and non-whites, the trends are clear: Still, STEP/CAP continues to graduate at rates that exceed the national average for students from the lowest income quartiles.

Data Collection

The main data come from a larger research project focusing on revealing how First-Generation College Students use their social capital to navigate higher education. Nicolas Simon interviewed fifty-six students for this project at Eastern. Ten of these fifty-six students participated in STEP/CAP. Semi-structured interviews lasted between 45 minutes and an hour and a half and were digitally recorded and transcribed for analysis (see interview guide in the Appendix).

We draw on other sources of data which serve to triangulate the interview data. The first source is our involvement with the program. Rick Hornung served in the STEP/CAP program from 1998 to 2018 and brings a wealth of autoethnographic data to this study. He worked closely with many STEP/CAP students as they moved their way through the program and has kept in touch with many of them; he has a unique position of extended involvement with the students and has been able to reflect on those experiences. He managed to amass a wealth of material from this role to provide greater insight into the successes and challenges faced by STEP/CAP students and the program in general. To minimize the impact, and possibilities of bias, he was not involved in formulating the interview questions, conducting the interviews, reviewing and analyzing the data. Kim Dugan taught *Introductory Sociology* in STEP/CAP over the course of a few summers during the time the interview data were being collected. She also served in an advisory capacity to her students in the program during this time. Her experience in (and out of) the classroom with the students offers additional insight into the value of the program for students. We also use the quantitative data amassed over the past four decades. Finally, we also rely on university documentation about STEP/CAP and its origins.

Data Analysis

Primary data for this study are qualitative and are drawn largely from the transcribed interviews. When reviewing and examining the transcripts, we followed the lead of Kathy Charmaz (2006, p. 51) and concentrated on the six areas she identified:

- 1) What process(es) is at issue here? How can I define it?
- 2) How does this process develop?
- 3) How do the research participant(s) act while involved in this process?
- 4) What does the research participant(s) profess to think and feel while involved in this process?

- 5) What might his or her observed behavior indicate?
- 6) What are the consequences of the process?

From these six concentrations, we developed codes of origin aimed at identifying the individuals involved in creating social capital. Guided by the student responses, we differentiated institutional actors – peer advisors, director of STEP/CAP, professional advisor, career advisor, staff from the Bursar's Office, the Office of Financial Aid, the Registrar, the Provost, the instructors, administrators, etc., peers, other students, roommates, and friends.

Throughout our analysis and coding, we identified who initiated the outreach and contact in an effort to create a chronology of the interaction and thereby explore the possibilities of similarities, contrasts and patterns amongst respondents. In addition, we coded how STEP/CAP students explained what was meaningful for them in the construction of social capital with institutional actors.

At the same time, we identified the practice of students creating and accumulating social capital with and from their peers by working together and living together during the six-week summer bridge program. During this period, students identified – and we coded – practices that internalized the importance of working with others, sharing family stories, personal narratives and asking for help as strategies for developing the skills they need to succeed on campus and in the classroom.

As our analysis intensified, two primary questions emerged: How does STEP/CAP contribute to the development of social capital with both institutional and peer actors? How does social capital contribute to develop cultural capital valued in higher education?

FINDINGS

We present the students' demographic information in table 1 for the reader's consideration of participants' background. Based on the information provided by the ten students, we identify the ways STEP/CAP helped them to develop their social and cultural capital (see Table 2). This section will use students' experiences to describe the important role played by institutional actors in developing the students' social capital, and how these interactions helped students to build relationships with their peers. Then, we will discuss how students employed this social capital to heighten their individual awareness, then create and develop a network of positive relations within an institutional setting, i.e., a form of cultural capital.

Table 1*Demographic information*

Name	Race/Ethnicity	Gender	Classification	Age
Caroline	Black	Female	Sophomore	20
Edward	Latino	Male	Senior	23
John	Black	Male	Freshmen	19
Leila	Latina	Female	Junior	22
Lucy	Black	Female	Junior	21
Malcom	Black	Male	Senior	24
Max	Latino	Male	Sophomore	21
Rebecca	Black	Female	Senior	22
Samantha	Latina	Female	Junior	21
Richard	Black	Male	Senior	22

Table 2*Ways STEP/CAP helped students to develop their social and cultural capital*

TO	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Creating multiple interactions with institutional actors 2. Creating multiple interactions with other students 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Develop trust b) Develop care c) Develop help/support d) Develop information sharing e) Develop collaboration
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The First Step: The Importance of Institutional Actors

From the first day of the summer experience through graduation, each of the ten respondents reported, STEP/CAP staff repeatedly and methodically prompted students to create networks of relationships that facilitate support and help the flow of essential information. They all commented on the importance of STEP/CAP's design revolving around repeated interactions with a wide array of institutional actors. The respondents recognized and understood the importance of fostering a collaborative and cooperative environment that introduced students to institutional actors working from the bottom to the top of university's employment hierarchy. Throughout the summer experience, STEP/CAP students met other students serving as student mentors, part-time and full-time clerical, dining hall and custodial staff, resident assistants, hall directors, part-time tutors, advisors, counsellors, adjunct faculty, full-time tenured faculty, administrators, deans, financial aid

counsellors, employees of the Bursar, deans and associate deans, Vice President for Student Affairs and the Provost.

Students reported that regularly scheduled meetings and interaction with institutional actors display a level of care from the institution. For students who had perceived educators at best as neutral, and at worst as antagonistic, these continuous interactions radically changed their perception of institutional actors. For instance, Caroline stated “They always stopped by to make sure I was okay. They always asked me how I was?” Similarly, Leila said “It is the simple things. They ask if you are ok or if you need anything when they pass the hallway. It is good to know that someone cares.” Max simply said “I felt welcome.” Along these lines, two students shared a story about their experiences with peer tutors and advisors. Malcom said “One night, we (peer tutors and advisors) did my homework together. I appreciated that my struggle became their own. We did not leave until we all understood.” Likewise, Rebecca shared “I had to spend hours and hours with math tutors. I felt dumb, but they never made me feel dumb. Whenever I saw teachers and administrators, they would take a moment or two to pull me aside and tell me how I was making progress.”

Extending a hand in assistance and offering care are ways to develop a trusting relationship and thereby change a student’s trajectory from alienated or isolated to welcomed. In addition to peer advisors and tutors, instructors facilitated the creation of social capital by making themselves available during office hours, tutorial sessions, sharing meals or other encounters in and out of the classroom. Throughout the six-week summer bridge program and stretching across a student’s undergraduate career, instructors were openly encouraged to speak with students in one-on-one and small group settings. As Leila explained, she “felt accepted. They accepted me as I was. They did not judge me.” Malcom illustrated this idea by sharing the following example of this dynamic with faculty:

“Our (summer) class was too hard. We all felt the pressure of this college class. We were not ready for it. Most of us failed the first exam. So, we spoke with our professor. She continued to challenge us, but she gave us study guides to help us to prepare our exams. She spent more time explaining the homework. We spent more time on the reading and she explained how to read the textbook. We had problems. We talked about it.”

By focusing on the development of institutional social capital, STEP/CAP staff changed the habitus of the students who participated in the summer bridge program. The staff helped students to develop and internalize cultural capital and see themselves as people acting with each other, creating and using a network, instead of working as disconnected individuals, to solve

problems. According to the respondents, these lessons proved invaluable and were used throughout their undergraduate years. Rebecca shared: “Now, when I have a problem, I go to my professor and explain the situation. They always gave like positive feedback, explain what to do or how to deal with it.” Institutional actors played a significant role in developing trust.

Social Cohesion, Solidarity and Trust Amongst Peers

Through intensive classroom and residential contact during the six-week summer bridge activities, STEP/CAP students were socialized to bond with each other and view each other as resources. Each of the respondents repeatedly reported multiple instances in which cooperation and collaboration with other STEP/CAP students provided essential help and support in curricular and non-curricular activities. Once students developed the initial trust amongst each other, they recognized that individual goals can be achieved by working together; in fact, they came to realize it was more efficient to collaborate than work apart as separate individuals. Malcom illustrated the feeling expressed by the ten students who shared their experience:

All the STEP/CAP students have grown very close. I have made a lot of awesome friendships that I carried through the fall semester. We built relationships by working together in class, studying together, hanging out after class. [...] I had problem with reading. Enzo helped me with reading and I helped him with math. We helped each other. (Malcolm)

Another interviewee simply put it “we all get together and did what had to be done to make it through” (Rebecca). By overtly and explicitly working together during the six-week summer bridge program and throughout their paths to graduation, STEP/CAP students experienced a social cohesion and integration that simultaneously highlighted their accomplishments -- the benefits of being a successful student – and illuminated their shared efforts to overcome similar hardships. Each of the respondents described how they felt solidarity with other STEP/CAP students. They shared the experiences of simultaneously focusing on the individualized, personal nature of paying for college and the collective, social nature of classroom and campus tasks.

Passing a test, writing a paper, taking notes, completing and comprehending the reading, working with family members to finish financial aid requirements, participating in housing selection, choosing and getting along with a roommate afforded each respondent multiple opportunities to create social networks, move in and out of -- navigate and chart courses through unfamiliar terrains and thereby engage in actions that were collaborative and reciprocal. As Max explained, “During STEP/CAP, we

were extremely tight. We had to share the confusion of what was happening in our families as well as the confusion of what was happening in the classroom.” Another interviewee explained about the importance of their similar backgrounds when she said, “we knew that our support of each other, our shared experiences, gave us the foundation to get through” (Samantha). Further, students articulated the common experience they had in navigating the financial aspects of the college experience. Max said “Especially when it came to loans and holds that prevented registration until balances were paid off, we just asked each other about ways to find help, who to ask for help, where to go, how to talk to our parents, how to talk to the school administrators.”

Because of the experience in STEP/CAP they grew more deeply connected. They were able to share personal problems and together work out possible solutions. Edward summed it up by saying that the members of his cohort helped each other “find the strength and desire, the simple get-up-and-get-off-our asses to keep going.”

The Most Important Forms of Cultural Capital for STEP/CAP Students

The most important lesson that STEP/CAP students learn is to ask for help, or how to use their network, or social capital, to succeed. It was the most valuable cultural capital they learned. As institutional actors deliberately engaged and encountered STEP/CAP students in daily, weekly and monthly activities, they openly and explicitly encouraged students to seek extra help for curricular and non- curricular activities. As one student explained: “*That little change, learning how to ask, was the most important lesson*” (Edward). Learning how to ask for help was a new and very useful strategy for success.

Respondents stated that these encounters were essential to reversing the behaviors that kept them away from informal or formal tutorial, counselling and advising sessions. By pushing and prodding students to ask for help, STEP/CAP’s institutional actors prompted students to transform their old, individualistic habits and develop a new set of collaborative practices that served as the foundation for building networks of associations designed to bolster on-campus success. John, one interviewee, stated clearly “I came from a family and a neighborhood where the code was to never trust a stranger. It was all about doing everything on my own and, of course, I never had enough to do anything. I could barely start.” Caroline similarly stated “If I wanted to be in college, I had to reach out to strangers. I had to do the exact opposite of what I was taught and told, the exact opposite of all the messages given to me in high school.”

This new skill was useful in various contexts. Along these lines, Malcolm shared “On many, many levels, college meant a complete upside-down and inside-out turn of our family finances and my relationship with my parents. I needed to talk to someone about loans, how to deal with mom and

brothers and sisters, and then I had to figure out math that I was not prepared for. I needed all kinds of help and all I had to do was ask.”

Instead of stigmatizing the need and request for help, STEP/CAP placed an extra premium and benefit on behaviors that guided a student to meeting with a tutor, faculty or staff member and discussing his or her difficulties in and out of the classroom. In this way, by rewarding the effort of bridging to an institutional actor, STEP/CAP helped students to understand the importance of social capital and to use it to succeed in an institution of higher education. As Leila stated “And when I saw that my test scores began to rise, slowly at first, but always steady, I began to see what was important. I began to see how smart it was to work with others.”

Discarding old habits, taking tentative steps into an unknown setting and then actively engaging and participating in the norms and practices takes time. This cannot be solely measured by grades. These processes are fundamental to the success of an underserved student on a college campus. This is invaluable. The process helped them develop their own self-confidence.

DISCUSSION

The dynamics of creating, accumulating and expending social capital became a fluid, intertwined and often non-linear set of relations that emerged from the moment-to-moment interactions between and amongst STEP/CAP students, as well as their families and institutional actors. In creating this capital – in creating multiple, overlapping relationships amongst a wide range of individuals and groups, STEP/CAP students began to internalize these practices and employ social capital to overcome obstacles to academic success and graduation.

From the beginning, when STEP/CAP students arrive in the summer before starting the freshman year, they are immediately directed and encouraged to participate in activities designed to help students to develop and use their social capital, or network, inside the college environment. Within the first six weeks of the summer bridge program, underserved students’ progress by increased participation in the classroom, asking for, seeking and scheduling extra help sessions with peers, instructors and tutors, scheduling regular meetings with support staff and administrators ranging from mentors and advisors to financial aid staff, representatives of the Bursar’s Office, the Office of Residential Life, the Provost, the Vice President of Student Affairs and other institutional actors.

Coupled with intensive, credit-bearing academic instruction, these activities lay the foundation upon which STEP/CAP students build trust and create networks that afford opportunities for the accumulation and distribution of social and cultural capital. The non-cognitive strategies of asking for help,

meeting deadlines and time management, note taking, collaboration and cooperation transform the underserved student from an individual prone to be isolated and alienated into a goal-directed participant of a socially cohesive group focused on improving academic achievement. The use of social and cultural capital repeatedly allows for students to step in and out of a series of multi-layered and flexible associations that address a wide array of challenges -- from passing classes to paying tuition bills, from making friends on campus and learning the rules, regulation and norms of undergraduate life to holding down a part-time job or meeting familial responsibilities at home.

During the economic hardship caused by the Great Recession that started in 2008, STEP/CAP students relied on social and cultural capital to help them face deficits in financial capital that threatened their retention and graduation. Emerging from the associations and networks that included institutional actors, this social and cultural capital afforded STEP/CAP students from low-income families the opportunities to work with instructors, advisors, mentors as well as staff from the Bursar's Office, the Office of Financial Aid, the Office of Residential Life and others to access scholarship and loan opportunities as well as payment plans and deferments.

As STEP/CAP students and their families faced the pressures and burdens of borrowing tens of thousands of dollars to pay for the rising costs of higher education, they made and executed many of these decisions in consultation and collaboration with institutional actors who had been working with them from the beginning of their undergraduate experiences. This continuity -- the regularity of repeated and multiple encounters with institutional actors, peers and family members -- prompted and encouraged students and their families to change their perceptions and interactions with institutional actors; this continuity forged, fostered and maintained a student's sense of belonging to the campus community. This sense of belonging became one of the cornerstones for students to discard old, individualistic habits and develop new sets of collaborative behaviors that created, accumulated and distributed social and cultural capital as the once intimidated underserved high school senior undertook and completed the journey to self-confident, college graduate.

Though the associations and networks of peers, family members and institutional actors cannot and does not overcome the deficits in financial capital that form so many obstacles to retention and graduation for low income students, STEP/CAP's emphasis on social and cultural capital affords students to experience the sense of belonging on campus and thereby make the choices needed to persist and finish with a degree.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study of STEP/CAP provides solid evidence that a summer bridge program's focus on social and cultural capital plays an integral role in student success. Though a wide array of colleges and universities rely on summer bridge programs to enroll, retain and graduate underserved students, researchers' focus on test scores, grade point averages, credits earned and other quantitative measures have regularly missed or overlooked the important affective, non-cognitive processes involved in the creation of trust, associations, networks and relationships that are essential to improving the academic performance of an underserved student -- especially those men and women who come from low income families.

Bourdieu (1977), Coleman (1988), Putnam (1995, 2000) developed the concepts of social and cultural capital which helped researchers of this study investigate how and why underserved students succeed or fail on college campuses. As Calvo-Armagoel, et. al. (2009), McCurrie (2009), and Strayhorn (2011, 2019) point out, a college campus is a multi-faceted, complex environment producing overlapping informal and formal networks of students, their peers, family members and institutional actors.

By examining these dynamic and flexible associations and relationships, researchers can begin to highlight the qualitative measures and variables that emerge from the experiences of the underserved student. While quantitative measures all too often label these students as below one benchmark or another, this study highlights how social and cultural capital are assets to be nurtured and nourished, encouraged and enhanced by the regular, repeated interactions between students, their families, and institutional actors.

With the utilization of social and cultural capital, the underserved student can transform a family member constrained by economic hardship into a partner, a peer who was once seen as a rival into a friend, an instructor or staff member who was once seen as a stranger or adversary into a colleague. Researchers often overlook these transformations and how they guide the underserved student to graduation.

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Appendix

1/ First Generation Student

Did your parents go to college? Did your parents graduate?

Did your brothers or sisters go to college? Are your brothers and sisters currently in college? Did your brothers and sisters graduate?

Did you have friends who go to college? Are your friends currently in college? Did your friends graduate?

Did you develop friendships or relationships with your classmates or students since you arrived in college?

2/ Problems and Solutions

What are the problems you faced in college? What are the most stressful situations that you faced?

What was your last concern, problem, situation at school? Who helped you with this situation, concern, and problem?

When you have a problem, a concern, a difficulty at school or in a class, who do you talk to?

3/ Solutions – Social Capital

What kind of solutions did you use to respond to these problems or these stressful situations?

Who help you with these problems?

Do you often ask some help to this/these person(s)?

4/ Solutions - Motivations

Could you tell me what motivated you when you had these problems or stressful situations?

5/ Identity

Do you or did you observe any differences between what you observe in your family/neighborhood/high school/friends in high school/ associations/church and what you observe in college?

Are you able to behave the same way in your family and in college?

Did you change in any way coming to Eastern?

What is your unique experience as a first-generation college student?

6/ Conclusion

When you have problems, in general who help you?

How is it helpful?

Were you able to express everything which is important for you? Do you want to say anything else? Do you want to answer a question that I did not ask?

7/ General Information

What is your GPA?

How many courses do you take per semester?

When will you graduate?

Will you graduate on time?

How old are you?

Are you a freshman, sophomore, junior, senior?

What is your gender?

What is your race and ethnicity?

What is your social class?

Do you live on campus? If you do not live on campus, how far do you live? Are you on campus 5 days a week?

Do you work? If yes, where do you work?

How many hours do you work per week?

How many days do you work per week?

What is your major/minor?