The Effects of the COVID-19 Global Pandemic on First-Generation College Students' Perceptions of Support and Retention

Brittany Wilson

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

Northwest University

Author Note

I have no known conflicts of interest to disclose

Nikki Liu Johnson, PsyD, Chair. Jennifer S. Harris, PhD, Committee Member. Cherri K. Seese, PhD, Committee Member

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Brittany Wilson at Northwest University, College of Social and Behavioral Sciences, 5520 108th Ave NE, Kirkland, WA, 98033. Email: brittany.wilson18@northwestu.edu

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Abstract

First generation college students (FGCS) experience systemic differences and disparities during their academic careers compared to their non-first-generation peers. These differences not only impact their collegiate experience but their perceptions of support, retention, and well-being. This study attempted to better understand, from a college student perspective, the impact the COVID-19 global pandemic has had on factors of support (i.e., family, financial, social, and significant other) and overall degree commitment, specifically within the FGCS population. A longitudinal study design was used for data collection. The participants were recruited from various universities across the United States and consented to a follow-up survey within a 2-year time frame from the initial archival data at Time 1 for the purpose of readministration of measure at Time 2. The research included quantitative methodology using two models to understand self-reported perceptions of FGCS and the differences in retention rates between FGCS and their peers mediated by support. Although results did not yield significant results, the current study did pave a pathway for future research to focus on individualistic experiences of FGCS and the impact of the COVID-19 global pandemic and subsequent lockdown on students' overall well-being and degree completion.

Keywords: first-generation college student, perceptions of support, retention, COVID-19 global pandemic

Chapter 1

First generation college students (FGCS) face unique barriers associated with their student status including student involvement, faculty expectations, and degree completion (Peralta & Klonowski, 2017). For the purpose of this study, a first-generation college student was defined through Peralta and Klonowski's (2017) definition of a first-generation student, as "An individual pursuing a higher education degree whose parents and/or legal guardian does not have a postsecondary degree" (p. 635). Although enrolled, many FGCS also encounter socioeconomic and housing concerns, job demands, and issues regarding financial aid. Ethnically diverse students on predominately White campuses may also experience a lack of cultural sensitivity, racism, and overall feelings of isolation (Peralta & Klonowski, 2017). In addition, FGCSs can differ from traditional students in their reasons for pursuing higher education and their overall first-year experiences (Bui, 2002). FGCSs have reported feeling less prepared, more worried about financial aid, and having higher fears of failure (Bui, 2002) than their traditional student counterparts. Interestingly, students did not feel significantly different than traditional students on access to university programs, making friends, and enjoying student life.

During the COVID-19 global pandemic and stay-at-home order many college campuses closed their doors for on-campus classes, activities, and housing and became virtual. This shift severely changed student access to activities, programming and student life traditionally associated with the college experiences. Unfortunately, what is known about factors of support for college students, especially FGCS's retention, is within the traditional college setting rather than through an ongoing global pandemic.

For this study, types of institutional support were reviewed as one of the four suggested areas that contribute toward the success of FGCS: (a) support (e.g., family, social, significant other, financial), (b) expectations, (c) feedback, and (d) involvement (Peralta & Klonowski, 2017). The types of support FGCS receive may help break down some of the barriers they encounter. Lohfink and Paulsen (2005) suggested personal support factors for first-generation students to include: family, mentorship, social, financial, and emotional. This study focused on perceptions of family, social, significant other (i.e., emotional, sexual support), and financial support.

Retention Theories

Thayer (2000) identified multiple models that have sought to explain students' persistence and attrition in higher education, all of which suggested various characteristics, experiences, and commitments students bring to their college entry. Most notably, Thayer (2000) highlighted characteristics including "academic preparedness, parent educational attainment and aspirations for their children, socioeconomic levels, and aspirations for learning and degree attainment" (p. 3). Following these theories, retention policies have focused on the admission process of students that demonstrate characteristics predictive of retention. Then, these policies have focused on the student–environment interaction through the creation of quality learning and support systems that impact an institution's overall prestige and, therefore, the expectation of student performance and academic rigor. Rather, Thayer proposed a model that combined previous models and suggested developing a retention theory not only focused on the selection of students through desired characteristics but also worked toward attending to and modifying institutional changes that enhance the educational environment.

Ultimately, this model suggested the dual approach would not only increase student retention rates but also diversify the student population and learning outcomes.

Institutional Barriers: Summer Melt

A phenomenon known as summer melt has drastically impacted high school graduates and admission offices across the country (Tacket et al., 2018). Summer melt occurs when students fail to enroll in college the fall after graduation despite being admitted (Tacket et al., 2018). Efforts to address the institutional barriers and promote support for students from various backgrounds to continue their education could be significantly impacted if they never actually make it to their first day and become part of the melt. Tacket et al.'s (2018) research on summer melt demonstrated 10–40% of college-intending (i.e., applied and accepted to universities) graduates failed to enroll in college or make it to their 1st day, most of whom came from low-income backgrounds. Universities have started to implement programs to support these students as they transition onto a college campus.

Summer melt has been linked to students' difficulties navigating summer obstacles prior to spring graduation. Many of the barriers that students experiencing summer melt have faced are the same barriers FGCS experience once they are enrolled and in the collegiate environment, specifically related to lack of financial and informational support (Castleman et al., 2012). Of the many shared experiences among FGCS, access to financial aid and knowledge of how to navigate aid services has seemed to be the most notable (Castleman et al., 2012). Essentially, those students that receive substantial aid or need additional aid often lack family members or support figures who can provide guidance or perspective on the college experience, including filling out

forms, enrolling for classes, and seeking out mentorships or additional informational support (Castleman et al., 2012; Martinez et al., 2009; Sweker et al., 2013; Xue & Chao, 2015).

Retention theories frequently begin with a student's intent to go to college and initial enrollment and often suggest those who are academically and socially integrated on campus have a higher predicted persistence and degree completion (Castleman et al., 2012). Understanding why individuals, predominantly low-income students, do not make it to enrollment is fundamental in identifying barriers and building strategies that support students postenrollment and toward degree completion. Retention strategies have often taken a one size fits all approach in the integration and support of students, beginning with classes on their 1st day; however, due to the continuation of summer melt concerns, retention and enrollment strategies have begun to incorporate aspects of support (i.e., financially and socially) to counteract institutional barriers for retention prior to students stepping on campus. Evaluating the types of support most notably impacted during this summer melt time and continuing throughout college would continue to enhance retention strategies and support students from low-income environments and with first-generation student status.

Retention and Factors of Support

For the purpose of this study, factors of support were identified as perceptions of family, social, significant other, and financial support.

Family Support

Perceptions of family support were suggested to be comprised with themes of communication, family motives and values, differences in upbringing, and emotional support felt within the family system.

Communication. Adjustment to college can be significantly impacted by overall perceptions of support. Dorrance Hall et al. (2020) examined how first-year undergraduates' adjustment to college may have been impacted by family support and resilience through family communication patterns. The way families communicate can be extremely impactful in perceptions of family support and overall resiliency of students. Dorrance Hall et al.'s results suggested students with family communication styles encouraging individual beliefs, open communication, and exploration of their own beliefs, values, and attitudes had lower levels of overall academic concerns. Family communication styles encouraged an environment of open communication also indicated higher perceptions of support (Dorrance Hall et al., 2020). The results highlighted the importance of parental perception and communication throughout childhood and into emerging adulthood, which could ultimately help or hinder a student's transition into college and their development of resiliency (Dorrance Hall et al., 2020). These findings were consistent with previous research (Roksa & Kinsley, 2019) suggesting resiliency was associated with better psychological well-being and student engagement outcomes, both of which could be significantly impacted and promoted by parental emotional support.

Family Motives and Values. Students that come from backgrounds and cultures with more collectivistic values, often indicative of FGCSs, rather than individualistic

values that may be disproportionally impacted by their perceptions of family support while beginning their collegiate career (London, 1989). Various factors of support can affect aspects of student engagement in and continuation of postsecondary education. Some factors might include motives toward pursuing higher education (London, 1989), development of self-concept, and familial attitudes toward pursuing a higher education degree (Gofen, 2009). Themes of support and perceptions from family were reviewed as motives for seeking higher education (Gofen, 2009; London, 1989; Martinez et al., 2009). London (1989) suggested motives for education included career preparation, intellectual fulfillment, and social standing. Similarly, Bui's (2002) research suggested motives toward education for FGCS such as "bringing honor to their family, helping family financially after college, and gaining response and status" (p. 3). London proposed the values and motives FGCS hold may stem from their overall connectedness and understanding of their family values and support.

Familial influence on motives for seeking education could impact a student's overall perceptions of higher education. This was demonstrated by past research (Gofen, 2009) perceptions that FGCS attended college to break the family cycle of not obtaining higher education degrees but had little family support because attending college was not aligned with the set of norms or values within the family system. Covarrubias et al. (2019) found changes to familial support, roles, and development of independence were enacted during one's transition to higher education for many FGCS. Through qualitative analysis of low-income students who identified as FGCS, Covarrubias et al. (2019) reported providing parents with emotional support and advocacy, language brokering, financial support, physical care, and significant sibling caretaking as they transitioned

into their higher education career, inconsistent with experiences of most non-FGCSs. Moreover, FGCS identified features of soft independence they developed as they transitioned into higher education including experiencing freedom, pursuing their own interests, becoming mature, and experiencing aspects of self-expression.

Covarrubias et al. (2019) also identified themes of hard independence FGCS developed through their family upbringing and into their collegiate studies including resilience, self-reliance, toughness for family, responsibility, and breaking of family tradition. Soft independence was suggested to be informed by an FGCS working-class background whereas non-FGCSs' development for both forms of independence were suggested to be informed by privilege. This distinction may be attributed to the alignment of self-oriented behaviors of soft-independence or individualistic values, typical of the college experience. Whereas factors of hard independence were more aligned with family-oriented behaviors more often consistent with collectivist values and the values consisted within FGCS. FGCS may begin to learn and develop their soft independence due to working-class behaviors like holding part- and full-time jobs (Martinez et al., 2009) contrary to non-FGCS who may be more likely to develop soft independence throughout their development, socioeconomic status, or privilege.

Upbringing. Gofen (2009) conducted 50 structured interviews of FGCS in Israel and results suggested family upbringing helped FGCS break the cycle seeking and completing higher education studies in their family and one or more family members helped the breakthrough. Family plays an integral part in FGCS status; FGCS status is dependent on the educational background of the student's family and lack of parental/guardian pursuit for postsecondary education. During Gofen's interviews,

students reported not feeling supported academically or emotionally because teachers and other students would question their ability based on their student status. Students experiencing academic and emotional support from home may better their chances of continuing education and developing a stronger self-concept (Gofen, 2009). The ideas and values parental figures or strong family figures may hold can influence the overall development and fundamental values children are instilled with and continue to hold throughout their lifetime. Gofen also suggested family support (e.g., attitudes toward education, interpersonal relationships, and family values) aided FGCS in continuing their education.

Emotional. Although significant research has been involved in identifying factors of social support and loneliness in young adults and college students, little research has addressed the impact on student retention rates. Roksa and Kinsley (2019) specifically focused on family, financial, and emotional support in relation to low-income students' academic success. Roksa and Kinsley indicated low-income FGCS were nearly 4 times more likely than their peers to drop out of college after their 1st year and often accumulate lower grades and fewer credits during their time at a college or university. Roksa and Kinsley sought to understand the disparities of family support and academic outcomes across different student backgrounds specifically addressing GPA and obtainment of 24 credits throughout the 1st year of college. Results revealed students who reported higher family emotional support were more likely to have a GPA of 3.0 or higher, were more likely to accumulate at least 24 credits, and were more likely to persist through the 2nd year of college. Contrary to previous research by Xue and Chao (2015), Roksa and Kinsley's findings suggested FGCS benefited equally from family emotional

support regardless of parental education or financial means. Family financial support was not related to outcomes of retention, credit accumulation or grades; however, non-FGCS benefitted more from financial support from families than their FGCS peers. Overall, family emotional support was shown to be impactful on both FGCS and non-first-generation students' retention primarily within low-income families in their 1st year of college/university.

Social Support

Factors that may help promote or hinder a student's positive perceptions of social support were identified as help-seeking behaviors related to overall well-being and mentorship support and the impact social support could have on adjustment and retention.

Help-Seeking and Well-Being. An individual's perceptions of social support have been suggested to provide a multitude of benefits including improved overall psychological well-being and reduced mental health symptoms like depression (Martinez et al., 2009). Academically, having social support helps students feel more connected and emotionally supported, impacting their overall academic adjustment (Martinez et al., 2009). Additionally, help-seeking behaviors among college students may be impacted by their overall social support and associated with depressive symptoms or lower mental health wellness (Kim, 2020). In Kim's (2020) study of South Korean university students, they evaluated the influence of social support on depressive symptoms and self-stigma of help-seeking. Results demonstrated friend support may have been more influential to help-seeking behaviors of university students over family support, especially when help-seeking behaviors were related to mental health well-being. Social support through friendship was also shown to reduce depressive symptoms often exacerbated by academic

stressors. Moreover, results indicated those with social supports who supported mental health fitness might feel better about seeking out services and be more able to mediate the effects of depressive symptoms often experienced through the high demands in the collegiate setting. These findings were consistent with previous research and cross-cultural studies with Jordanian and Turkish college students (Khallad & Jabr, 2016) that proposed social support through friendship could mediate the effects of family demand impacting overall mental-health well-being.

Social support has been linked to better mental and physical health; unsurprisingly, students who received support from both family and friends were less likely to be depressed or stressed. Conversely, students who felt higher family demands were more likely to report higher levels of depression and stress. Having friends and feeling supported socially was demonstrated to be impactful on college student's overall well-being (Khallad & Jabr, 2016; Kim, 2020; Martinez et al., 2009). A student's perception of social and familial support may also affect their experience of others depending on them, being interested in them, and being connected to their future or their sense of mattering to others (Rayle & Chung, 2007).

When students believed other people care about their personal goals and their future, they reported more perceptions of mattering to others, this is especially representative in collegiate settings. Rayle and Chung (2007) emphasized the importance of the student's experience when facing additional challenges in the adjustment to a collegiate environment. This adjustment could be more challenging for students who either did not have parental figures who experienced the transition previously or had little social support from friends who could empathize with them regarding culture, value

conflicts, and overall life challenges. Ideally, students without a strong sense of familial support could find similar feelings of support through friends and within their social environments. FGCS have had a unique upbringing and experience that could create barriers to building support systems that challenge family values and expectations (Soria & Stebleton, 2012). FGCS may not have the same familial aspirations, values, or expectations as their non-FGCS counterparts and therefore their experiences and perceptions of entering and continuing higher are fundamentally unique.

Mentorship Support. Underlying motives for attending higher education were also represented through mentor support. Wang (2012) collected 30 FGCS' memorable messages from mentors through qualitative interviews. Themes such as pursuing academic success, valuing school, increasing future potential, making decisions, general support, and encouragement arose. Furthermore, familial themes of comparing and contrasting, counting on family, and recognizing the importance of family were also demonstrated as memorable takeaways from academic social support through established mentors. Many students reported experiencing competing messages from mentors and family. Students participating in the study reported feeling they could talk to their mentors about academic challenges but not as often about things going on outside of the classroom. Previous research (Bui, 2002; Longwell-Grice & Longwell-Grice, 2008) supported these views through themes like lack of preparedness and feelings of the capability to seek out educational help, which has been a notable challenge for FGCS.

Seeking out mentorships is not outwardly taught but rather an expectation of higher education settings through attending academic office hours, joining extracurriculars, and pursuing additional collegiate opportunities. This expectation may

be more likely to be passed down to non-FGCS by their parents. FGCS could be at a disadvantage in seeking out mentorship opportunities that tend to lead to more positive academic outcomes due to the potential lack of parental guidance or knowledge of university expectations.

Adjustment and Retention. Social support has often taken the form of friends and family; although, for some students, it could take the form of opportunity programs, academic support, and faculty or student mentoring (Grant-Vallone et al., 2004). Research regarding the college student population, social support, and retention has typically addressed concerns of academic readiness and college experiences regarding FGCS (Martinez et al., 2009; Sweker et al., 2013). Researchers (Martinez et al., 2009; Sweker et al., 2013) have suggested FGCS may be considerably more impacted by academic readiness and perceptions of their college experiences than non-FGCS. Grant-Vallone et al. (2004) explored the overall effects of social support through opportunity programs, academic support, mentoring, and general supportive relationship. Grant-Vallone et al. found the relationship between self-esteem, family support, peer support, and use of programs significantly impacted overall academic and social adjustment in addition to college degree commitment. Those that reported higher self-esteem and higher peer support, specifically, resulted in a better adjustment to campus life and were more likely to commit to continuing their degree. Grant-Vallone et al. suggested helping students transition to higher education by increasing opportunities for similar services and connections may help the overall adjustment to college and therefore increase retention rates.

Significant Other Support

Nearly 70% of emerging adults have reported being involved in a romantic relationship and often became involved in a primary relationship during emerging adulthood (Ratelle et al., 2013). Evaluating the impact of romantic relationships was beneficial to understanding the overall relationship between significant other support and college students' well-being. Ratelle et al.'s (2013) research highlighted the importance of parental, friend, and romantic partner support for students' subjective well-being. Results indicated that although each area of support was helpful, perceptions of support from parents, friends, and a romantic partner were all needed for high levels of subject well-being. Moreover, parental or friend support cannot replace or compensate for a lack of romantic partner support. Rather, the three work together to contribute to overall well-being. Having a significant other or romantic partner may provide a protective factor for students' overall well-being.

Additional research (Van Rhijin et al., 2015) studied factors that were suggested to aid in academic success through stress reduction from romantic partners for mature students (i.e., undergraduates ages 25 and older, nontraditional students). Through a mixed-methods approach (i.e., qualitative and quantitative analysis), participants reported sexual activity with their partner provided a way to distract from and reduce stress and impacted overall perceptions of academic success. Furthermore, sexual satisfaction (i.e., a factor of perceived academic success) was significantly predicted by family and parental support of the relationship. Factors that contributed to lower sexual satisfaction and perceived support included not having enough time, feeling too tired, or being stressed. Those in a romantic partner relationship may also experience role conflict as a

parent, student, and/or worker, suggesting a combination of partner and sexual satisfaction contributes to significant other support and is predictive of overall school satisfaction and well-being.

There has been limited research to suggest FGCS have sought to attend higher education with aspirations of finding a significant other (Martinez et al., 2009). This may be due to holding one of the many different motivations for pursuing higher education as discussed in previous research (Bui, 2002), like bringing honor to one's family, helping their family financially, and gaining response or status. Without significant research addressing FGCS experiences with significant other support while in college, it is difficult to determine if significant other support could provide overall emotional support for FGCS as it does for non-FGCS. Furthermore, it is unclear if significant other support could provide overall emotional support for FGCS with the premise that they are able to develop deeper and more committed relationships with their college peers.

To understand the many factors that may contribute to lower grades or GPA and class attendance (i.e., factors of retention), Schmidt and Lockwood (2017) sought to understand the impact of romantic relationships on academic performance in college students. Results from the study suggested although romantic relationships had no significant effect on academic GPA, no significant findings were established for the overall retention of students in romantic relationships. However, correlation analysis suggested those in a romantic relationship were more likely to skip or fail to attend classes, which over time has been linked to lower levels of academic achievement, continued attendance, and degree commitment of college students. This finding was consistent with ongoing research that (Roksa & Kinsley, 2019) demonstrated the impacts

of overall academic achievement (i.e., grades overtime and class attendance) were significant predictors of college persistence and retention. Moreover, those with lower grades or a lack of academic self-efficacy were more likely to discontinue their collegiate career and drop out, especially those with a lower-income status (Roksa & Kinsley, 2019). Therefore, romantic relationships may play an important role in mediating attendance like skipping and failing classes which in turn influences academic self-efficacy a predictor of retention.

Research to better recognize romantic relationship support has also grown to understand queer/LBGTQ+ romantic relationships from a nonbinary perspective and the overall implications of support for the retention of queer students specifically. Denton (2020) provided a literature review of socionormative retention values from a queer perspective, including retention as an economic and labor problem, campus climate, focus on programs, policies, and services, psychological traits, and positivistic approaches. Queer and LGBTQ+ identifying students may be at risk of discontinuing their education due to heteronormative cultures on campuses and feeling as though their desires, relationships, or sex and gender practices are not valued or supported.

Literature suggested although there are ethical implications to academically supporting queer students, institutional structures for support such as campus housing options have been lacking, which can be significantly impactful in first-year student retention rates (Britt et al., 2017). There has been limited research to understand the overall impact of social support through romantic relationships among college students, current research presented (Denton, 2020; Schmidt & Lockwood, 2017) factors impacting

retention like academic success and the type of romantic relationship could affect overall retention rates of students, especially within their 1st year of college.

Financial Support

Student perceptions of financial support were suggested to be significantly influenced by feelings of stress and anxiety and barriers regarding financial literacy before and during collegiate studies.

Stress and Anxiety. College students have shown high levels of anxiety symptoms including reports of feeling overwhelming anxiety or feeling generally overwhelmed, exhausted, and hopeless while in school (Samuolis et al., 2015). Perceptions of financial support could impact college students' anxiety measured by academic distress, financial stress, and peer and family support (Jones et al., 2018). Financial stress, in particular, was significantly related to general anxiety and academic stress. Consistent with previous research (Britt et al., 2017; Singell, 2004), financial stress was related to academic stress and student concerns regarding finishing their degree due to financial reasons (Jones et al., 2018). In Xue and Chao's (2015) qualitative study, lower- or lower-middle-class nonborrowing students were suggested to avoid borrowing loans due to parental influence, fear of economic burden, an underestimated the value of a college education, and lack of information about the loan system resulted in impacting the student's choice in major and overall college experience. Participants reported some sensitivity around the major students may choose, especially with the perception that a college degree had become the equivalent to what a high school degree was previously (Xue & Chao, 2015). Students overall, may be more reluctant to pursue degrees in general studies or may base their degree decisions on the practicality of how

they will be able to pay back their loans, rather than student interest or passion. The investment of college and loans has potentially shifted to depend more on the student's major and potential job market rather than specific interest or desire to pursue a particular field of study.

The factors leading to lack of borrowing have often resulted in students seeking ways to pay for college, whether it be employment (i.e., part time and full time), scholarships and grants, family support, or prepaid college tuition programs. Consequently, students' abilities to commit time to the college experiences, including building social connections, romantic relationships, and mentorships have been notably impactful in students' well-being and retention (Grant-Vallone et al., 2004). College experiences were previously noted to be impactful on a student's transition to college, overall well-being, and commitment to graduation, particularly within FGCS (Martinez et al., 2009; Sweker et al., 2013). These activities may be impacted by their perception of financial support and an impending need to seek other avenues for financial security. Financial aid or loan programs like FASFA were developed with the purpose of providing students with more opportunities for academic success and choice (Xue & Chao, 2015). However, those that decide not to participate or borrow may be at a disadvantage regarding the college experience, degree choices, and degree completion.

Financial Literacy. First-year college students, especially first-year FGCS, may not be financially literate (Eitel & Martin, 2009). Eitel and Martin (2009) conducted research on financial literacy and barriers for college students and revealed financial aid was perceived as a mysterious and unknown process to many college students, including FGCS. Long-term access to aid also impacted the type of occupational goals students

pursued. Continuing education was perceived as unrealistic for some FGCS because of a student's lack of access to continual aid. Access to financial literacy may be deeply rooted in family values and the development of independence (Covarrubias et al., 2019). FGCSs have reported being a financial resource to their parent's ongoing financial struggles, often acting as a financial broker for their family as they enter higher education, and expressed feeling connected to family through financial means. FGCSs demonstrated aspirations to find work opportunities to self-fund their education and decrease the potential financial burden to their family, often resulting in working part- or full-time jobs throughout their collegiate career (Martinez et al., 2009).

More students have become reliant on access to financial aid as tuition prices continue to rise (Furquim et al., 2017). Not only have FGCS had an increased likelihood to apply for financial aid, but they have also been more likely to borrow more frequently and take on multiple types of loans (Furquim et al., 2017). Consequently, they have been less likely to rely on parent PLUS loans that are reliant on parent/guardian obligation rather than the student (Furquim et al., 2017), resulting in sole student responsibility for the repayment of loans and the cost of attendance. This reality combined with the potential for financial illiteracy (Eitel & Martin, 2009), instability of income (Martinez et al., 2009), and lack of parental support could set FGCS up to enter and exit college with financial barriers drastically different than their non-FGCS peers.

A student's decision to drop out could be significantly impacted by financial need or financial aid concerns (Britt et al., 2017; Singell, 2004). Need versus merit-based aid significantly increases retention; however, selection for such aid often is biased due to need and ability. According to Singell (2004), students who completed the Free Aid for

Federal Student Aid (FASFA) application during their 1st year were more likely to reenroll than those who did not. FGCS are more likely to use aid (Martinez et al., 2009) than their non-FGCS peers; however, they were also more likely to struggle with asking for and seeking help regarding financial aid services, suggesting they may struggle to fill out the FASFA or gain access to grants and other forms of financial support (Xue & Chao, 2015). This could result in lower retention rates after their 1st year.

Income inequality in the United States may be impacted by altered graduation rates for various income groups (Singell, 2004) due to an increase in high degree obtainment and ongoing changes to financial aid policies. More recent research (Britt et al., 2017) has continued to support these trends of retention rates and suggested 60% of students who decided to leave college were responsible for paying their own tuition and struggled to balance multiple life demands (i.e., family, jobs, daily life stressors) along with academic demands. Britt et al. (2017) explored the effects of financial stress, debt loads, and the use of financial counseling on retention rates. Financial stress was suggested to contribute to less campus and social engagement, which as previously discussed, is an important factor in engagement and retention (Martinez et al., 2009; Pratt et al., 2019).

Those with the highest amount of university-reported student loan balances were less likely to drop out compared to those with no debt; however, students with the perception they held a higher student loan balance were more likely to drop out of college (Britt et al., 2017). These results suggested the perception of loan debt may contribute to an individual's higher levels of stress and decision to abandon their education and believed getting a job is a better, more effective alternative than the accumulation of debt

for degree completion. Early intervention strategies like financial aid counseling for those funding their own education, those under high financial stress, or those who perceive their student loan debt to be at a high level could be beneficial in mediating the dropout rates amongst college students as tuition costs for higher education continue to rise.

Effects of the COVID-19 Global Pandemic on Colleges and Students

Higher education and college students alike were deeply impacted by the COVID-19 global pandemic and subsequent stay-at-home orders. In this study, three main areas were explored in conjunction with the pandemic: (a) the impact on college retention, (b) student well-being, and (c) the various unique challenges placed on higher education learning environments. Colleges not only had to shift their way of teaching but also their means of student engagement.

Colleges and Retention

Prior to the COVID-19 global pandemic, retention rates for university online student learning were significantly lower than traditional learning environments (Muljana & Lua, 2019). Themes suggested impactful retention for online learning platforms included institutional support, level of program difficulty, promotion of a sense of belonging, facilitation of learning, course design, student behavior characteristics, and demographic or personal variables. Muljana and Lua's (2019) research prior to the stay-at-home order and the national shift to online learning showed online students reported feeling more isolated and unsupported by peers, resulting in a low sense of community, less class participation, and a higher risk for dropping out. All of these are already notable experiences for FGCS in traditional on-campus settings (Kim, 2020; Roksa & Kinsley, 2019; Soria & Stebleton, 2012). Additional areas that may affect retention rates

of online student learning programs, similar to features of the stay-at-home order shift, include behavioral characteristics of students like self-regulation, satisfaction, self-efficacy, flow experiences, clear goals, college readiness, and technological skills.

Personal variables that were similar to ongoing pandemic challenges included home environment, family support, and time management. Consistent with previous research, students with additional family responsibilities (Covarrubias et al., 2019), students working full or part time (Martinez et al., 2009), students with financial stress (Britt et al., 2017), and students with lower grades or GPA experienced an increased likelihood of dropping out or discontinuing their education, even more so for FGCS (Roksa & Kinsley, 2019; Thayer, 2000). Considering the factors that have historically impacted online learning environments compared to the traditional on-campus environment, college and university retention rates, along with student satisfaction, may have been greatly impacted by the significant shift to online learning due to the COVID-19 global pandemic and stay-at-home order. However, there has been no current research to support this claim.

College Student Well-Being

The COVID-19 global pandemic and changes to daily living as it related to students' learning environments have been significantly impactful on students' mental health, well-being, and emotional functioning (Seidel et al., 2020). Support through counseling centers and student support services has been essential to combat the mental health challenges that often derail student academic success (Seidel et al., 2020). Since the onset of the pandemic, there has been an increased use of college counseling centers; nearly two thirds of students reported feeling overwhelming anxiety, and nearly half

reported being so depressed that daily living activities and functioning (e.g., showering, brushing teeth, getting out of bed) were impacted and difficult (Seidel et al., 2020). Furthermore, data collected predominantly from New York City Metropolitan University in April 2020 (Siedel et al., 2020), at the beginning of the pandemic, revealed the pandemic negatively impacted 80% of students, and 50% of students had little knowledge of how to access mental health services if they were experiencing a crisis. Not only has the mental health of college students been impacted by the pandemic including elevated levels of stress and depression, but they also have difficulty locating and accessing mental health services to mediate those symptoms while still attending classes.

Copeland et al. (2021) collected surveys from first-year college students who participated in a full assessment of behavior and emotional functioning at the beginning and end of the spring semester in 2020 (i.e., prior to the pandemic and right after the onset of the pandemic). They also completed a nightly survey of mood and wellness behaviors. Results suggested students' externalizing problems and attention problems increased after the onset of the COVID-19 global pandemic, mood and daily wellness behaviors were negatively impacted by the pandemic, but stress was not significantly impacted. The stabilization or lack of change in stress was suggested to be attributed to students moving back home and the reduction of social stress often experienced by first-year students (e.g., building new social supports, making new friends, joining new groups). Unfortunately, the closest comparison event to the COVID-19 global pandemic has been the effects of natural disasters like hurricanes, or earthquakes, often resulting in students experiencing increased rates of depression, anxiety, stress, and low academic

motivation, consistent with current and emerging COVID-19-related research (Copeland et al., 2021; Seidel et al., 2020).

Unique Challenges

Factors unique to college student experiences that have been, and have continued to be, impacted by the COVID-19 global pandemic along with shifts in higher education included students' family support with online learning, sense of belongingness, access to basic needs, job security, and potential increased discrimination. Gao et al. (2021) surveyed 1,317 college students' perceptions of family support (i.e., environmental, emotional, and capability) after 60 days of online learning in April 2020. Results revealed family support led to high levels of learning engagement and suggested family support may also influence and improve students' sense of self-efficacy, ultimately impacting student motivation and learning behaviors like focus, dedication, vigor, aspirations, and expectations. Consequently, emotional depression and low family support were negatively related to students' abilities to learn and experience educational success (i.e., build academic self-efficacy).

The stay-at-home order, along with changes caused by COVID-19 global pandemic procedures and policies, resulted in the cancelation of student events, study abroad trips, internships, and graduation ceremonies, potentially leaving students feeling like personal and professional milestones had been left unfulfilled (Lederer et al., 2021). Of the many challenges to daily living the COVID-19 global pandemic brought, students may have been the most impacted by their sense of belongingness, access to basic needs, job security, and increased discrimination (Lederer et al., 2021). According to Lederer et al. (2021), students' sense of belonging has been suggested to influence social,

psychological, and academic outcomes; moreover, a weak sense of belonging has been previously associated with poor mental health, physical health, and suicide. Mental health challenges similar to those presented in previous research have been continuously endorsed by over two thirds of college students (Siedel et al., 2020); feeling connected to peers and faculty was found to be fundamental to students' well-being and success (Grant-Vallone et al., 2004; Martinez et al., 2009). Nearly 45% of students reported having food insecurity and feeling the need to rely on campus meal plans and resources like community gardens and food pantries (Lederer et al., 2021). Attending college often provides students with food and housing security through on-campus housing and may mediate stressors for the obtainment of basic needs, thereby contributing to better grades and greater retention rates (Britt et al., 2017). Prior to the onset of the COVID-19 global pandemic, 58% of students worked (many through on-campus jobs or work studies), 55% reported being financially independent, and 42% lived below the poverty line (Lederer et al., 2021). Finally, students of color, specifically Asian and Pacific Islanders reported encountering discrimination and xenophobia throughout the COVID-19 global pandemic (Lederer et al., 2021). The pandemic may have also exacerbated inequalities for students of color and lower income, many of whom were more likely to also identify as FGCS (Soria & Stebleton, 2012).

Rationale, Purpose, and Significance of the Study

The COVID-19 global pandemic globally interrupted daily living, lifestyles, and overall well-being of individuals. Research has just begun to scratch the surface and explore the impact of the pandemic and stay-at-home order (Lederer et al., 2021). Universities and college campuses had to adapt and change structurally and

institutionally to meet the needs of students and provide alternative learning opportunities while students moved home, quarantined, and shifted to predominantly online learning platforms. Historically, researchers (Dorrance Hall et al., 2020; Martinez et al., 2009; Soria & Stebleton, 2012) have demonstrated various factors of support (i.e., family, social, significant other, and financial) impacting a student's ability to adjust to college and their decision to stay in school to complete their degree; all of these factors have notability been impacted by the COVID-19 global pandemic. There has been no research to date on the changes and effects of perceived support (i.e., family, social, financial, and significant other) in part due to the pandemic's unique challenges. This study attempted to better understand, from a college student perspective, the impact of the COVID-19 global pandemic on factors of support and overall degree commitment, specifically within the FGCS population.

Chapter 2

Study Design and Methodology

The design of this study was a cross-sectional survey with data collection from participants via the internet. The research included quantitative methodology using two models. Model 1 used an analysis of variance repeated measures to test for within interactions to measure associations of self-reported, changes to support factors after a year of lockdown during the COVID-19 global pandemic for Hypotheses 1–4. Model 2 used a logistical regression to explore the differences in retention rates between first generation college students (FGCS) and their peers, mediated by support. The current study used both archival and additional demographic data and a single questionnaire: The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS). Archival data included two additional measures not included in the current study.

Time 1 (Archival Data)

Participants from Time 1 included 294 current and recently graduated college students recruited from various universities in the United States via email and social media. Of those 294 students, 155 fully completed the survey. However, of the 155 students who completed the survey, only 106 consented to follow-up. Participants self-identified their sex (i.e., 30% male, 70% female). On average students were 23.89 years old. They identified themselves as Black (African American; 5%), White (57%), Hispanic or Latino (27%), Asian (1%), American Indian or Alaska Native (1%), biracial/multiracial (6%), and other (3%). Most students classified themselves as never married (86%, $n = 91$). Of the participants, 19% were first-year students, 15% were 2nd-year, 10% were 3rd-year, 16% were 4th-year, 9% were 5th-year, 8% were 6th-year, and

23% either recently graduated or were no longer enrolled. Of the full sample, 69% of students were enrolled full time, 7% were part time, and 24% were unsure. In terms of student status, 40% (n = 42) identified as first-generation students, 56% (n = 60) as non-first-generation students, and 4% (n = 4) were unsure of first-generation student status.

Participants completed an online consent form (see Appendix A) followed by an online questionnaire (see Appendix B) began with basic demographic information: educational background, year in college, gender, race, religious affiliation, and financial status. The questionnaire then continued to inquire about family support, social support, and emotional support measures, including the MSPSS. Completion of the survey took approximately 20–30 minutes. All responses were de-identified and no incentives, monetary or otherwise, were offered for participation.

Research Questions/Hypotheses

- *Hypothesis 1:* First-generation college student perceptions of family support will increase after a year of lockdown due to the COVID-19 stay-at-home order.
- *Hypothesis 2:* First-generation college student perceptions of financial support will decrease after a year of lockdown due to the COVID-19 stay-at-home order.
- *Hypothesis 3:* First-generation college student perceptions of social support will decrease after a year of lockdown due to the COVID-19 stay-at-home order.

- *Hypothesis 4:* First-generation college student perceptions of significant other support will remain the same after a year of lockdown due to the COVID-19 stay-at-home order.
- *Hypothesis 5:* First-generation college students will be more likely to drop out than their non-first-generation peers and therefore have decreased retention rates after a year of lockdown due to the COVID-19 stay-at-home order.
- *Hypothesis 6:* Student's perceptions of social support will mediate the relationship between student status (FGCS versus non-first-generation student) and retention rates.

Participants

The participants for this study were accumulated via a convenience sample of undergraduate and graduate college students (age 18+) from universities across the United States during the spring of 2020 (March 2020–July 2020). Participants gave consent to be contacted a second time (see Appendix C) for participation in a follow-up survey (see Appendices D and E) regarding their perceptions of support and current enrollment status within a 2-year period of the initial survey response. Participants were initially recruited though university professors in the Pacific Northwest and Midwest regions. Professors were then encouraged to share the Qualtrics survey link with other colleagues, students, and members of higher education. To be included in data collection, participants had to be at least 18 years of age and be current students at a college or university. Snowball sampling was used to invite college students to visit the online survey site. This type of sampling occurs when someone shares information regarding the study with their friends and acquaintances, in this case, via email or online messaging

databases. Readministration of the survey at Time 2 consisted of participants who had initially agreed to receive a follow-up survey at Time 1. After completion of the survey from Time 2 administration participants were no longer contacted.

A posthoc power analysis for sensitivity in a repeated measure within factors was run to establish what effect size would be needed to reach power with a sample size of 42 participants, in one group, four measure analysis using alpha of .05, power of .95, and correlation between measures of .25. According to the analysis, an effect size of .28 and a critical *F* of 2.68 would need to be reached to achieve power.

A posthoc power analysis for sensitivity in a multiple regression was conducted to establish what effect size would be needed to reach power with a sample size of 106 participants, with five predictors (i.e., status + 4 levels of support), alpha of .05, and power of .95. According to the analysis, an effect size of .19 and a critical *F* of 2.30 would need to be reached to achieve power.

Measures

The initial study (i.e., archival data from Time 1) used a web-based survey platform, and participants were administered three measures: A two-part measure of Perceived Social Support from Friends (PSS-Fr) and From Family (PSS-Fa), MSPSS, and the Two-Way Social Support Scale (2-Way SSS). At Time 2, participants used the same web-based survey and were administered the MSPSS a second time. Although data for all measures were collected initially at Time 1, only the MSPSS was collected at both Time 1 and Time 2 to be used for data analysis. Data for the remaining measures have remained archived for future research.

Demographic Questionnaire

A demographic questionnaire was administered at the beginning of the survey. The demographic questionnaire consisted of 10 questions regarding current enrollment status, graduation or expected graduation date, and financial status.

The MSPSS

The MSPSS (Zimet et al., 1988) is a 12-item self-rated questionnaire used to examine different sources of support including family, friends, and significant others (e.g., *I can count on my friends when things go wrong*). Participants rated items on a 7-point Likert scale (i.e., 1 = *Very strongly disagree*, 2 = *Strongly disagree,* 3 = *Mildly disagree*, 4 = *Neutral*, 5 = *Mildly agree*, 6 = *Strongly agree*, 7 = *Very strongly agree*). The instrument yielded a high degree of internal consistency total (α = .88), as well as good internal consistency for each of the three subscales with family (α = .87), friends (α = .85), and significant other (α = .91). Participants were tested over a 2–3-month period and the instrument yielded good internal reliability and adequate stability over time (r = .85). To assess construct validity the instrument was correlated with the depression and anxiety subscales of the Hopkins Symptoms Checklist (HSCL; Derogatis et al., 1974). The instrument as a whole correlated significantly negatively with depression (r = .-25, p < .01). Of the subscales, family was significantly inversely related to both depression (r = -.24, p < .01) and anxiety (r = -.18, p < .01); friends were related to depression (r = -.24, p < .01); significant other was also related to depression (r = -.13, p < .05).

Procedures

Data collection and survey administration were conducted through the use of Qualtrics, an online data collection platform. As an authorized user of the College of

Social and Behavioral Science's Qualtrics account, the author, Brittany Wilson and faculty sponsor had sole access to, and full control of, the data collected through the Qualtrics platform. Qualtrics is Fed Ramp Authorized and thereby certified by the Federal Risk and Authorization Management Program. This certification signifies Qualtrics' compliance with the highest industry standards in security, including rules for health information security, specified in the Health Information Technology for Economic and Clinical Health Act (HITECH). Qualtrics employees did not have access to data unless given consent by the author, Brittany Wilson. Data were downloaded from Qualtrics and encrypted through password protection on a password-encrypted OneDrive cloud.

At Time 1 of administration (i.e., archival data), following the informed consent, participants were provided the option to consent to follow-up questions after survey completion. This consent form asked participants for two email addresses: (a) their university/college email and (b) a personal email the researcher could use to extend a follow-up survey to for continued data collection and research for Time 2 administration of the follow-up survey. After declination or consenting to follow-up in the initial survey at Time 1, participants continued with the survey and were required to enter their age and their birth year. Participants under the age of 18 were automatically directed to the end of the survey thanking them for their participation. Participants 18 years of age and over continued with the survey. Only students who consented to a follow-up survey were contacted at their specified email(s). Those who agreed to follow up (n = 106) received a survey link to the email(s) they provided. This survey link site contained a description of the survey, informed consent, and the survey itself.

Upon entering the website, participants were informed of the study description and they were free to discontinue the survey at any time. Additionally, the instructions included resources available to help any participant concerned by the content of, or their reaction to, the study. By clicking the "I agree" tab at the bottom of the consent form participants indicated their consent and were automatically directed to the survey. The online questionnaire began with basic self-reported demographic information including current enrollment status, graduation or expected graduation date, and financial status followed by the MSPSS questionnaire. Completion of the survey required 5–10 minutes. All responses were deidentified. An incentive was used in this current study (at Time 2) that allowed participants to receive $5 through Venmo or Starbucks gift cards. No incentive was offered initially at Time 1.

Summary

The present study attempted to explore the effects of the COVID-19 global pandemic on FGCS' perceptions of support and overall retention. To investigate these effects, the present study used the MSPSS to measure perceptions of family, social, and significant other support along with demographic questions to measure self-reported perceptions of financial support and enrollment status (i.e., retention) over the course of 1 year during a global pandemic. The participants were recruited from various universities across the United States and consented to a follow-up survey within a 2-year time frame from the initial archival data at Time 1 for the purpose of re-administration of measure at Time 2. This study will be used to increase awareness of the effects of the COVID-19 global pandemic on FGCS' perceptions of support and retention.

Chapter 3

This chapter presents the data used to examine the six hypotheses initially proposed in this study. Specifically, data collected aimed to examine the relationship between first generation college students (FGCS), factors of support, and retention.

Results

Results consisted of descriptive statistics and correlation analysis for the full sample and FGCS sample. Findings were divided into two analyses models: (a) Model 1 included Hypotheses 1–4 and (b) Model 2 was used to analyze Hypotheses 5 and 6.

Descriptive Statistics

Participants from the Time 1 original data collection included 294 current and recently graduated collegiate students recruited from various universities in the United States via email and social media. Of those 294 students, 155 fully completed the survey. However, of the 155 completed surveys, only 106 participants consented to the follow-up (see Appendix A). Of the 106 students that consented to follow-up, 44 completed the survey (see Appendices D and E). Of the 44 completed surveys, 41 met the criteria for the current study. Participants self-identified their sex (32% male, 68% female). On average, students were 23.63 years old. Of the full sample (n = 41), participants identified themselves as Black (African American; 7%), White (61%), Hispanic or Latino (29%), and biracial/multiracial (3%). Regarding current enrollment status, 37% of participants were enrolled full time, 5% were enrolled part time, 5% transferred out to another institution/university, 2% were unenrolled or had dropped out, 2% differed (i.e., planned to or have returned to school), 7% graduated and enrolled in a new education program, 10% graduated in 2019, 15% graduated in 2020, 15% graduated in 2021, and 2%

identified in some other way. Additionally, 78% (n = 32) identified as traditional students and 22% (n = 9) identified as nontraditional. In terms of student status, 37% (n = 15) identified as first-generation students and 63% (n = 26) as non-first-generation students.

Correlations

A Pearson correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between the family, financial, social, and significant other support at Time 1 and Time 2 of data collection for both FGCS specifically and the full sample. At Time 1, there was a modest positive correlation between perceived significant other support and family support within the FGCS population (see Table 1). Moreover, there was a significant positive correlation between family and social support and family and significant other support within the full sample at Time 1 (see Table 2). There was also a positive correlation between social support and significant other support within the full sample at Time 1 (see Table 3). There were no significant correlations between any variables at Time 2 for FGCS specifically (see Table 3), but there was a modest correlation between social support and significant other support within the full sample at Time 2 (see Table 4). There was no significant correlation between other variables. The descriptive statistics for the predictor and criterion variables are presented in Tables 5–9.

Table 1

Pearson Correlations of Variables Time 1 of FGCS

Variable	Family support	Social support	Significant other support	Ability to attend
Family support (FaS)	--	--	--	--
Social support (SS)	.082	--	--	
Significant other support (SoS)	.544*	.349	--	--
Financial support (FS)	-.045	.156	.238	--
Ability to attend	--	--	--	--
Adequate aid	.124	-.147	.505	.012

Note. $n = 15$, $*p < 0.05$.

Table 2

Pearson Correlations of Variables Time 1 of Full Sample

Variable	Family support	Social support	Significant other support	Ability to attend
Family support (FaS)	--	--	--	--
Social support (SS)	.510**	--	--	
Significant other support (SoS)	.594**	.553**	--	--
Financial support (FS)	.001	.129	.066	--
Ability to attend	--	--	--	--
Adequate aid	.113	.053	.251	-.035

Note. $n = 41$. $**p < 0.01$.

Table 3

Pearson Correlations of Variable Time 2 of FGCS

Variable	Family support	Social support	Significant other support	Ability to attend
Family support (FaS)	--	--	--	--
Social support (SS)	.252	--	--	
Significant other support (SoS)	.039	.391	--	--
Financial support (FS)	-.328	.014	-.032	--
Ability to attend	--	--	--	--
Adequate aid	-.006	.243	-.200	.481

Note. $n = 15$, $^{**}p < 0.05$.

Table 4

Pearson Correlations of Variables Time 2 of Full Sample

Variable	Family support	Social support	Significant other support	Ability to attend
Family support (FaS)	--	--	--	--
Social support (SS)	.075	--	--	
Significant other support (SoS)	.092	.541*	--	--
Financial support (FS)	-.299	.090	.072	--
Ability to attend	--	--	--	--
Adequate Aid	-.131	-143	.037	.098

Note. $n = 41$, $^{*}p < 0.01$.

Findings

This study was divided into two separate models. For Model 1, a repeated measure ANOVA within subjects was conducted for Hypotheses 1–4 to better understand the changes of FGCS perceptions of support (i.e., family, friends, significant other, and financial) before and after 2 years of the pandemic lockdown. Model 2 proposed a regression analysis to determine a mediation effect from social support with the FGCS

population and retention; however, due to an insufficient number of participants a chi square analysis was conducted. No mediation analysis was ran due to an unmet power.

Model 1

Hypothesis 1. A repeated measure ANOVA was performed to compare the changes to FGCS' perceptions of family support before the initial lockdown of the COVID-19 global pandemic and the 2 years after the lockdown. There was no statistically significant difference in perceptions of family support between the two data collection points, $F(1,14) = .025$, $p = .876$, $n_p^2 = .002$. Although the perceptions of support are not indicative of a significant change from Time 1 to Time 2, there was a slight decrease in general perceptions of family support after the 2 years following the pandemic (Time 2; see Table 5 compared to beforehand).

Table 5

Means and Standard Deviations of Scores for Perceived Family Support (PSS-Fa)

Variable	*M*	*SD*
Perceived Family Support PSS-Fa Time 1	19.60	5.29
Perceived Family Support PSS-Fa Time 2	19.33	5.55

Note. $n = 15$.

Hypothesis 2. A repeated measure ANOVA was performed to compare the changes to FGCS' perceptions of financial support before the initial lockdown of the COVID-19 global pandemic and after the lockdown. There was no statistically significant difference in perceptions of financial support in relation to one's ability to attend with/without aid between the two data collection points, $F(1,14) = .085$, $p = .774$, $n_p^2 =$

.006. Furthermore, there was no statistically significant difference in perceptions of financial support in relation to perceptions of adequacy with individuals' financial aid package between the two data collection points, $F(1,14) = .538$, $p = .475$, $n_p^2 = .037$. There was a minimal decrease in general perceptions of support (ability to attend without financial aid) from Time 1 ($M = 3.93$, $SD = 1.62$) to Time 2 ($M = 3.87$, $SD = 1.51$; see Table 6), and a minimal decrease in perceptions of financial support in relation to feeling like their aid package was adequate from Time 1 ($M = 2.40$, $SD = 1.45$) to Time 2 ($M = 2.07$, $SD = .70$; see Table 7).

Table 6

Means and Standard Deviations: Perceived Financial Support – Ability to Attend

Variable	*M*	*SD*
Could you have attended your university/college without financial aid/scholarship(s)? (Time 1)	3.93	1.62
Could you have attended your university/college without financial aid/scholarship(s)? (Time 2)	3.87	1.51

Note. $n = 15$.

Table 7

Means and Standard Deviations: Perceived Financial Support – Aid Package

Variable	*M*	*SD*
The financial aid package I received is adequate to meet my basic financial needs for the coming academic year (Time 1)	2.40	1.45
The financial aid package I received is adequate to meet my basic financial needs for the coming academic year (Time 2)	2.07	0.70

Note. $n = 15$.

Hypothesis 3. A repeated measure ANOVA was performed to compare the changes in first-generation students' perceptions of social support before the initial lockdown of the COVID-19 global pandemic and 2 years after the lockdown. There was no statistically significant difference in perceptions of social support between the two data collection points, $F(1,14) = .483$, $p = .499$, $n_p^2 = .033$. Although the perceptions of social support did not demonstrate a significant change from Time 1 to Time 2, there was a slight decrease in general perceptions of social support before the COVID-19 global pandemic (Time 1, $M = 20.80$, $SD = 3.61$) and the 2 years following the pandemic (Time 2, $M = 20.53$, $SD = 3.54$; see Table 8).

Table 8

Means and Standard Deviations of Scores for Perceived Social Support (PSS-So)

Variable	*M*	*SD*
Perceived Social Support PSS-So Time 1	20.80	3.61
Perceived Social Support PSS-So Time 2	20.53	3.54

Note. $n = 15$.

Hypothesis 4. A repeated measure ANOVA was performed to compare the changes in first-generation students' perceptions of significant other support before the initial lockdown of the COVID-19 global pandemic and the 2 years after the lockdown. There was no statistically significant difference in perceptions of significant other support between the two data collection points, $F(1,14) = .176$, $p = .681$, $n_p^2 = .012$. Although the perceptions of significant other support did not demonstrate a significant change from Time 1 to Time 2, there was a slight decrease in general perceptions of social support

before the COVID-19 global pandemic (Time 1, $M = 22.53$, $SD = 5.81$) and the 2 years following the pandemic (Time 2, $M = 22.27$, $SD = 5.20$; see Table 9). Interestingly, of the three factors of support measured in the MSPSS, significant other support was had the highest overall score at both Time 1 and Time 2.

Table 9

Means and Standard Deviations: Perceived Significant Other Support (PSS-SoS)

Variable	*M*	*SD*
Perceived Significant Other Support PSS-SoS Time 1	22.53	5.81
Perceived Significant Other Support PSS-SoS Time 2	22.27	5.20

Note. $n = 15$.

Model 2

Hypothesis 5. Due to the lack of power met, a Chi-Square analysis was conducted in contrast to a logistical regression. The Chi-Square analysis yielded insignificant results for the association between student status (i.e., FGCS vs. non-FGCS) and retention, $x^2(1, n = 41) = .0163$, $p = .686$. These results may be unstable because the minimum expected count is 5 or more; however, the current minimum expected count was .73.

Hypothesis 6. Due to the lack of significant findings and unmet power for Hypotheses 1–5, there were no significant results to suggest a mediating relationship between factors of support and student status, and therefore, the mediation analysis was not conducted.

Summary

Overall, analyses yielded insignificant results for all the current study's presented hypotheses. There were no significant changes in perceptions of support (i.e., family, financial, social, or significant other) from Time 1 (i.e., prior to the COVID-19 lockdown) to Time 2 (i.e., 2 years after the COVID-19 lockdown began). Moreover, there were no significant effects on student status in relation to retention rates and, therefore, no mediating effect to explain the lack of significant effects. Further interpretation and implications of the results are discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter 4

Interpretation

The initial correlation analysis provided support for positive relationships between the support variables at Time 1 and Time 2 within the first-generation college student (FGCS) population and the full sample. At Time 1, prior to the COVID-19 global pandemic, correlation analyses suggested as perceived significant other support increased, so did perceptions of family support for FGCS (n = 15), specifically. Furthermore, at Time 1, results suggested as perceptions of family support increased, social support and significant other support also increased for the full sample (n = 41). There were no significant correlations at Time 2 (i.e., 2 years after the onset of the COVID-19 global pandemic and lockdown protocols) for FGCS. This could be due to the small sample size during the second point of data collection. Regarding the full sample at Time 2, results suggested as perceptions of social support increased so did perceptions of significant other support. Overall, it appeared perceptions of significant other support shared positive relationships with other perceptions of support (i.e., family and social) for the full sample. Perceptions of financial support did not demonstrate significant correlations to any other factors of support.

In the present study, none of the hypotheses were supported by the results. Regarding Hypotheses 1–4, ANOVAs were assumed to provide a cause-and-effect relationship between independent variables and dependent variables (i.e., changes to factors of support throughout the COVID-19 global pandemic lockdown).

Hypothesis 1

The first hypothesis predicted FGCS perceptions of family support would increase after 1 year of the lockdown due to the COVID-19 global pandemic. During the COVID-19 global pandemic, many students were forced to return home and began attending classes virtually. Ideally, moving home due to the pandemic would provide FGCS, who come from more collectivistic values (Dorrance Hall et al., 2020) and may have more responsibilities (Covarrubias et al., 2019) than non-FGCS, with opportunities to balance family and student roles. Although findings were not significant, the importance of support by family continued to be beneficial toward retention efforts. As many students moved back home due to the stay-at-home order, the effects of the COVID-19 global pandemic could have given FGCS specifically more ability to manage familial expectations and educational responsibilities.

Hypothesis 2

Hypothesis 2 investigated the changes to financial support and aimed to demonstrate FGCS perceptions of financial support would decrease after 1 year of lockdown. Financial stress has historically impacted students' overall degree commitment and finishing their degree due to financial reasons (Britt et al., 2017; Singell, 2004). Before the pandemic, college students used campus work studies and on-campus housing to meet basic needs (Martinez et al., 2009). Results from this study were not significant; however, current research (Copeland et al., 2021; Seidel et al., 2020) has continued to demonstrate access to financial support and financial literacy as a barrier toward enrollment for FGCS and degree completion. Not only did students lose their homes (i.e.,

on-campus housing), but many lost their jobs (i.e., work study positions) and their financial stability (Copeland et al., 2021; Martinez et al., 2009; Seidel et al., 2020).

Hypothesis 3

The third hypothesis suggested perceptions of social support would decrease due to the COVID-19 global pandemic. Part of the stay-at-home order included students returning home and potentially missing out on traditional college student experiences encourage building connections and social skills (Martinez et al., 2009). Results did not demonstrate significant results; however, when students were forced to move home due to the pandemic, they were not only leaving their classes and campus but also their friends. Past research has demonstrated the benefits of social support toward help-seeking, well-being (Khallad & Jabr, 2016; Kim, 2020; Martinez et al., 2009), and adjustment in early adulthood (Grant-Vallone et al., 2004). All areas may have been impacted when students were asked to leave their friends, mentors, and peers.

Hypothesis 4

The final hypothesis in Model 1 suggested FGCS perceptions of significant other support would remain the same. Research on significant other support for college students and FGCS has been scarce. Although the importance of significant other support toward well-being and other factors of support like social support has been demonstrated (Ratelle et al., 2013), FGCS were also less likely to seek out romantic relationships than their non-FGCS peers (Martinez et al., 2009). Like the other results in Model 1, Hypothesis 4 did not yield significant results. However, correlational analyses suggested the most significant correlations were with perceptions of significant other support. Thus,

results suggested significant other support for FGCS may be an important variable and consideration for future research areas.

Although analyses yielded insignificant results, the overall slight decrease in general perceptions of each support factor were indicative of a slight decrease in perceptions of support within the four identified factors; however, due to a lack of strong sample size, the results were not reliable and indicative of the general population. Although this decrease may have been due to stressors from the COVID-19 global pandemic, it may be more attributed to the smaller sample size and unmet power.

Hypotheses 5 and 6

In part due to the small sample size, only two students (n = 1 FGCS, n = 1 non-FGCS) in the full sample (n = 41) identified as individuals who dropped out of school or academic programming; therefore, there was no relationship between student status and retention. There were no conclusive findings that one type of student was more likely to drop out than another (i.e., Hypothesis 5). Due to the lack of findings on the relationship between student status and retention, it was unclear if factors of support would mediate this relationship and further explain retention rates among both FGCS and non-FGCS (Hypothesis 6).

Strengths and Limitations

A strength of this study included participant interest. Archival data demonstrated nearly 300 individuals, prior to data cleaning, were willing to participate in initial data collection efforts with at least 100 participants initially willing to complete follow-up survey questions within a 2-year time frame. This suggested the contexts of this study have heightened interest among higher education students and professionals. The study

also used a psychometrically reliable measure, the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS), to investigate FGCS perceptions of family, social, and significant other support.

Limitations to the research included the sample size and time between data collection points. The sample size (n = 41), after data cleaning, did not meet the desired power for Model 1 (n = 42) or Model 2 (n = 106) and, therefore, was not a valid estimate of the general population. Moreover, the sample size of FGCS' data used for Hypotheses 1–4 was inadequate (FGCS sample n = 15, full sample n = 41). The length between data collection being 2 years may also be suggested as a limitation rather than administering 1 year later, as more students had the opportunity to graduate and pursue additional degree paths (i.e., graduate studies, trade schools, professional tracks), thus impacting the results for retention and degree completion when specifically looking at undergraduate students. The time between data collection points could have most notably impacted the perception of retention (i.e., degree completion) that was assessed in Model 2, as well as Hypotheses 5 and 6. Considerations for future research with special attention to the long-lasting effects of the COVID-19 global pandemic stay-at-home order or lockdown are provided.

Clinical Implications and Future Research

Initially, research was limited at the start of the COVID-19 global pandemic and was widely compared with natural disaster events to provide predictions of what psychological and academic effects may ensue due to an ongoing, global pandemic (Copeland et al., 2021; Seidel et al., 2020). However, as society has approached 3 years after the initial lockdown and as restrictions have begun to lessen, more research has begun to emerge specifically regarding the FGCS experience throughout the pandemic.

Globally, people have not truly returned to “normal” or to what life was like prior to the onset of the pandemic.

Although people have not fully recovered from the effects of the COVID-19 global pandemic and stay-at-home orders, the pandemic did promote potential positive change in some areas for students and FGCS. When students were asked to return home, those that acted as language brokers and caregivers for family members, especially FGCS (Eitel & Martin, 2009), may have experienced more flexibility with their time. This impact could be seen through changes to commuting times, working from home, and more accessible virtual options. The increased access and acceptance of virtual learning could also demonstrate the positive impacts of the pandemic. Students’ access to virtual learning, classes, and academic programming may have increased some students’ ability to take certain courses, attend events, and meet with professors and mentors. However, little research has currently supported the impact of the potential positive effects of the COVID-19 global pandemic on the general population. The possible positive effects of the COVID-19 global pandemic could shed some light on the lack of significant change in the current studies’ support variables from Time 1 to Time 2 and should continue to be investigated.

Although many academic programs have shifted to allow for virtual accommodations and an increase in online, distant, and hybrid learning models, students have more access to learning opportunities (Fauzi, 2022). The National Center for Education Statistics reported in 2021, due to the pandemic, “87% of undergraduate students experienced enrollment disruption or change, 28% of students experienced housing disruption or change, and 40% of students experienced financial disruption or

change" (p. 5). Moreover, as a result of the pandemic, 29% of students lost a job or source of income (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). Consistent with the National Center for Education Statistics (2021), the admission and enrollment process (Castleman et al., 2012), stability of housing and food (Britt et al., 2017; Lederer et al., 2021), and financial strain and job stability (Martinez et al., 2009; Pratt et al., 2019) were all suggested to have been impacted prior to the pandemic for FGCS, and impacted overall by the pandemic across student status (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). All the aforementioned areas have previously been identified as factors that contributed to FGCS' perceptions of support that promoted retention, academic motivation, and overall student wellness. These findings suggest the previously identified areas of concern were not only felt by the general student population but of heightened concern for FGCS throughout the COVID-19 global pandemic. Current and future research should continue to focus on the ways in which these factors increase and/or decrease perceptions of support for FGCS.

Soria et al.'s (2020) research, which was conducted during the process of the current study, focused primarily on the impact of financial support and perceptions of financial support in relation to the FGCS experience during the COVID-19 global pandemic. Their findings suggested FGCS were more likely to experience financial hardships, be twice as concerned about paying for their education, and experience food and housing insecurities than their counterparts (Soria et al., 2020). The same study also proposed the value of a college education may have also been impacted by the COVID-19 global pandemic and although students reported dedication to finishing their

education, there was a decrease in identifying the value of their education and educational experience.

So, one may wonder what the current study and research says. Essentially, FGCS have continued to be at a disproportional disadvantage compared to their continuing-generation peers (non-FGCS; Soria et al., 2020). It appears, regardless of a global pandemic, the higher education system has not been fundamentally structured to support students from these backgrounds despite retention theories geared toward maintaining and retaining FGCS (Thayer, 2000). This fact can be demonstrated through previous literature (Castleman et al., 2012; Martinez et al., 2009; Sweker et al., 2013; Xue & Chao, 2015), which suggested FGCS enter in or fail to enroll in collegiate studies due to a lack of information and financial support in contrast to their non-FGCS peers. These types of informational supports could potentially influence FGCS willingness and motivations to enroll in college, stay enrolled, and feel more supported. Historically, this financial and informational support has been suggested to come from family members who have navigated the system previously and supportive figures like mentors who can provide perspectives and guidance on navigating the nuances of the collegiate setting. Experiences like filling out forms, enrolling for classes, seeking out mentorship and extracurriculars, and navigating degree paths have all been associated with higher rates of degree completion (Castleman et al., 2012; Martinez et al., 2009).

Systemically, supporting the FGCS demographic has been directed as such—supporting a demographic rather than the human, student experience (Thayer, 2000). Supporting FGCS experiences could include initiatives earlier on in a student's experience, before enrollment, to help them navigate symptoms of summer melt that

often carry over into the collegiate experiences (Tacket et al., 2018). Because of the uniqueness of their experiences, research about FGCS may be more effective by using qualitative versus quantitative methods to initially understand FGCS experiences emerging from a global pandemic. Ongoing research should continue to identify barriers, stressors, and areas of vulnerability that not only affect the retention of FGCS, but also their well-being and resiliency toward the higher education system. Future areas of research may be more influential in understanding the unique and individualistic experiences of FGCS throughout the COVID-19 global pandemic to better provide recommendations that suit the individual student rather than the higher education system.

Conclusions

Regarding the FGCS population, it may be important to shift the discussion regarding support and retention to focus on the ways in which the higher education system can promote early access to support factors that could mediate the risk of dropping out and decrease barriers to support as previously suggested in retention theories related to the summer melt (Castleman et al., 2012; Thayer, 2000). Rather than promoting resources to the student population as a whole, research and programming efforts should aim to identify and establish resources for FGCS specifically (Soria et al., 2020). Many retention theories have focused on maintaining enrollment and enrollment strategies (Thayer, 2000); however, they may be more useful in targeting the factors of support that have been historically known to decrease student motivation toward degree completion for FGCS. Although the current study's results were not statistically significant, in part due to the limitations of the study, the present study does provide further literary support for the need to acknowledge systemic differences and disparities

between FGCS and non-FGCS' collegiate experience, factors of support, and degree completion. Furthermore, the present student continues to stress the importance of understanding the impact of the COVID-19 global pandemic on changes to support for FGCS that promote degree completion and overall student well-being.

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Appendix A

Consent Form

IMPACTS OF FIRST-GENERATION STUDENT PROXIMITY FROM HOME ON PERCEIVED FAMILY SUPPORT

Consent Form

Northwest University

Brittany Wilson

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Brittany Wilson a doctoral student in counseling psychology at Northwest University. The study is being conducted as a class requirement for PSYC 7273, Research Methods and doctoral dissertation research. The purpose of this study is understand barriers and identify areas of support that may impact college undergraduate students. Before taking part in this study, please read the consent form below and click on the "I Agree" button at the bottom of the page if you understand the statements and freely consent to participate in the study. You may exit the survey at any time.

The study has been approved by the Northwest University Institutional Review Board. No deception is involved. The study involves no more than minimal risk to participants (i.e., the level of risk encountered in daily life). Risks may be emotional distress due to answering questions of a personal nature for example, financial aid, educational background, and social support. Some individuals may be uncomfortable answering personal questions. In the event that you experience a negative reaction to participating in this research, consider engaging in self-care activities that allow you to regain your balance. Should you need to connect with someone, consider the following confidential resources.

Crisis Hotline: https://www.crisisconnections.org/24-hour-crisis-line/
Crisis Chat: http://www.crisischat.org/ Free chat line available 2PM to 2AM, 7 days/week.
Crisis Text Line: Text “START” to 741-741 Service is free through most major phone service carriers and available 24/7.
Contact your local and/or university counseling center
Contact a mental health professional of your choice, at your own expense.

Participation in the study is voluntary and typically takes 20-30 minutes and is strictly confidential. You begin by answering a series of demographic questions, followed by questions regarding family, social, and emotional support. In addition to the brief survey, you will be given an opportunity to participate in future research about college students by agreeing to be contacted one time at a later date, through email, within the next three years. After follow up questions are administered and received all data forms will be de-identified and archived. All data collection and submitted survey’s information will be password encrypted and stored on a password encrypted OneDrive. You will be free to decline to participate at any time. Your responses will be treated confidentially and will not be directly linked to any identifying information about you. You may discontinue the

questionnaire at any time if you wish. Using only anonymous summaries of the data, this research may be presented at professional conferences and/or published.

If participants have further questions about this study or their rights, or if they wish to lodge a complaint or concern, they may contact the principal investigator, Brittany Wilson, [redacted]; Dr. Leihua Edstrom, Northwest University College of Social and Behavioral Sciences, at [redacted], Email: [redacted]; or the Northwest University Institutional Review Board, at [redacted]. Thank you for considering participation in this study.

Brittany Wilson
Doctoral Student in Counseling Psychology
College of Social and Behavioral Sciences
[redacted]

Leihua Edstrom, PhD, ABSNP
Professor of Psychology
College of Social and Behavioral Sciences
[redacted]

Please print a copy of this consent form for future reference

If you are 18 years of age or older, understand the statements above, and freely consent to participate in the study, click on the "I Agree" button to begin the survey.

I Agree I Do Not Agree

Appendix B

Questionnaire Part 1: Demographic Information

IMPACTS OF FIRST-GENERATION STUDENT PROXIMITY FROM HOME ON PERCEIVED FAMILY SUPPORT

Questionnaire Part 1: Demographic Information

Northwest University
Brittany Wilson

Demographic Information:

1. Age? *(Text Box)*
2. Do you consent to be contacted for follow up questions for future research? This outreach for follow up would only occur once after your initial survey submission. *(yes, no)*
3. What is your school email? *(Text Box)*
4. What is your personal email? *(Text Box)*
5. What is your primary language? *(Rather not say, Japanese, English, German, Italian, Portuguese, Korean, Chinese, Russian, French, Spanish, Dutch, Greek, Hebrew, Swedish, Arabic, Other)*
6. How many other languages (other than your primary) do you speak fluently?
7. Have you been diagnosed with any of the following disabilities or impairments? (Check all that apply) (Sensory impairment *(vision/hearing), mobility impairment, learning disability, mental health disorder, disability or impairment not listed, prefer not to say, none)*
8. What is your sex *(Male, Female, Prefer not to say)*
9. What is your racial/ethnic identity? *(Black (African America), White, Hispanic or Latino, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, American Indian or Alaska Native, Bi-Racial/Multi-racial)*
10. Marital Status? *(Married, Widowed, Divorced, Separated, Never Married)*
11. Are you currently… (check all that apply) *(self employed, employed full time, employed part time, unemployed looking for work, unemployed not looking for work, a homemaker, student, military, retired, disabled, other)*
12. What is the highest degree you have obtained? *(some high school, high school graduate, some college credit (no degree) trad/technical/vocational training, associated degree, bachelor's degree, master's degree, professional degree, doctorate degree)*
13. Are you living at home while attending school? *(yes, no, prefer not to say)*
14. How far away from your home is your current college/university in miles? *(text box)*
15. What year are you in school? *(First, Second, Third, Fourth, Firth, Six+)*
16. Are you currently enrolled at a college or a university? *(Yes, No)*
17. What is your current cumulative GPA (*four point scale)*
18. What degree, if any, are you pursuing currently? *(some high school, high school graduate, some college credit (no degree) trad/technical/vocational training, associated degree, bachelor's degree, master's degree, professional degree, doctorate degree)*
19. Are you participating in any extracurricular activities? (Check all that apply) (*Student Government, New Student Orientation, Students Activities Board, Resident Assistant/Housing Department, Athletics, Honor Society, Club/Campus Group, Volunteering, Off Campus Job, Work Study/On Campus Job, Teaching Assistant, Tutor, Other – Text Box, Prefer not to say)*
20. What is your current university or college enrollment status? *(full-time, part-time, unsure, not applicable)*
21. Are you the first person in your family to attend college (first generation)? *(yes, maybe, no, unsure, prefer not to say, not applicable)*
22. Would you consider yourself a traditional (earned a high school degree and enrolled in higher education immediately after graduating high school) or non-traditional student? *(Traditional, non-traditional, unsure)*
23. How are you paying for tuition at your college/university? (Check all that apply) *(out of pocket, financial aid, scholarships, loan repayment, third party, other, prefer not to say)*
24. How much do you accept in financial aid/loans per year? *(answer options range from Under $500 to $50,000+)*
25. How much do you receive in scholarships per year? *(answer options range from Under $500 to $50,000+)*

26. Could you have attended your university/college without financial aid/scholarship(s)? *(Definitely yes, probably yes, maybe, probably not, definitely not)*
27. Do you feel that the financial aid package you received is adequate to meet your basic financial needs for the coming academic year. *(extremely adequate, somewhat adequate, neither adequate nor inadequate, somewhat inadequate, extremely inadequate)*

Appendix C

Second Consent Form

THE EFFECTS OF COVID-19 GLOBAL PANDEMIC ON FIRST GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENT'S PERCEPTIONS OF SUPPORT AND RETENTION

Consent Form

Northwest University

Brittany Wilson

Previously you completed a survey, prior to the COVID-19 global pandemic and consented to follow up. You are invited to participate in this follow up research study conducted by Brittany Wilson a doctoral student in counseling psychology at Northwest University. The study is being conducted as a program requirement for doctoral dissertation research. The purpose of this study is to understand the impacts of the COVID-19 stay at home order on areas of support and retention for college students. Before taking part in this study, please read the consent form below and click on the "I Agree" button at the bottom of the page if you understand the statements and freely consent to participate in the study. You may exit the survey at any time.

Participation in the study is voluntary and **typically takes 10-15 minutes** and is strictly confidential. You begin by answering a series of demographic questions, followed by questions regarding family, social, and emotional support. After follow up questions are administered and received all data forms will be de-identified and archived. All data collection and submitted survey's information will be password encrypted and stored on a password encrypted OneDrive. You will be free to decline to participate at any time. Your responses will be treated confidentially and will not be directly linked to any identifying information about you. You may discontinue the questionnaire at any time if you wish. Using only anonymous summaries of the data, this research may be presented at professional conferences and/or published.

Incentive for the full completion this survey is provided; however, to receive the incentive you must waive your right to confidentiality at the end of the survey by providing the designated e-mail or Venmo account in which you choose to have the incentive sent to. **The incentive consists of the choice of a $5 gift card through Venmo or a $5 Starbuck gift card. Incentive will be provided within 24 hours of survey completion.**

The study has been approved by the Northwest University Institutional Review Board. No deception is involved. The study involves no more than minimal risk to participants (i.e., the level of risk encountered in daily life). Risks may be emotional distress due to answering questions of a personal nature for example, financial aid, educational background, and social support. Some individuals may be uncomfortable answering personal questions. In the event that you experience a negative reaction to participating in this research, consider engaging in self-care activities that allow you to regain your balance. Should you need to connect with someone, consider the following confidential resources.

- Crisis Hotline: https://www.crisisconnections.org/24-hour-crisis-line/
- Crisis Chat: http://www.crisischat.org/ Free chat line available 2PM to 2AM, 7 days/week.
- Crisis Text Line: Text "START" to 741-741 Service is free through most major phone service carriers and available 24/7.
- Contact your local and/or university counseling center
- Contact a mental health professional of your choice, at your own expense.

If participants have further questions about this study or their rights, or if they wish to lodge a complaint or concern, they may contact the principal investigator, Brittany Wilson[redacted]; Dr. Nikki Johnson, Northwest University College of Social and Behavioral Sciences, at [redacted] ; or the Northwest University Institutional Review Board, at [redacted]. Email: [redacted]. Thank you for considering participation in this study.

Brittany Wilson
Doctoral Student in Counseling Psychology
College of Social and Behavioral Sciences
[redacted]

Nikki Johnson PsyD
Associate Professor
College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

Please print a copy of this consent form for future reference

If you are 18 years of age or older, understand the statements above, and freely consent to participate in the study, click on the "I Agree" button to begin the survey.

I Agree | I Do Not Agree

Appendix D

Time 2 Questionnaire Part 1: Demographic Information

THE EFFECTS OF COVID-19 GLOBAL PANDEMIC ON FIRST GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENT'S PERCEPTIONS OF SUPPORT AND RETENTION

Questionnaire Part 1: Demographic Information

Northwest University

Brittany Wilson

Demographic Information:

1. Are you currently… (check all that apply) *(self-employed, employed full-time, employed part-time, unemployed looking for work, unemployed not looking for work, a home maker, student, military, retired, disabled, other)*
2. What is your current cumulative GPA
3. What is your current enrollment status? *(enrolled full-time, enrolled part-time, transferred out (to another institution/university), unerolled: dropped out, differed, graduated and enrolled in a new education program, graduated (year), other)*
4. How are/were you paying for tuition at your college/university? (Check all that apply)
5. How much do/did you accept in financial aid/loans per year?
6. How much do you receive in scholarships per year?
7. Could you have attended your university/college without financial aid/scholarship(s)?
8. Do you feel that the financial aid package you received is adequate to meet your basic financial needs for the coming academic year.
9. Are finances a barrier to meeting your educational goals? (yes, no, unsure)
10. How much time a week do you spend thinking about your financial situation? *(not at all, several days, more than half the days, nearly every day)*

Appendix E

Questionnaire Part 3: Social Support

THE EFFECTS OF COVID-19 GLOBAL PANDEMIC ON FIRST GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENT'S PERCEPTIONS OF SUPPORT AND RETENTION

Questionnaire Part 3: Social Support

Northwest University

Brittany Wilson

Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support

Instructions: We are interested in how you feel about the following statements. Read each statement carefully. Indicate how you feel about each statement.

1 Very Strongly Disagree	2 Strongly Disagree	3 Disagree	4 Neutral	5 Mildly Agree	6 Strongly Agree	7 Very Strongly Agree

1. There is a special person who is around when I am in need.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. There is a special person with whom I can share my joys and sorrows.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. My family really tries to help me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. I get the emotional help and support I need from my family.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. I have a special person who is a real source of comfort to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. My friends really try to help me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. I can count on my friends when things go wrong.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8. I can talk about my problems with my family.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9. I have friends with whom I can share my joys and sorrows.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10. There is a special person in my life who cares about my feelings.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11. My family is willing to help me make decisions.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
12. I can talk about my problems with my friends.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7