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GRADUATE SCHOOL DECISIONS:
THE IMPACT OF OUT-OF-CLASS COMMUNICATION ON FIRST-GENERATION
COLLEGE STUDENTS

BY
KAITLYN VOGES

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

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Specialization in Communication Studies

South Dakota State University

2017

GRADUATE SCHOOL DECISIONS:
THE IMPACT OF OUT-OF-CLASS COMMUNICATION ON FIRST-GENERATION
COLLEGE STUDENTS

This thesis is approved as a creditable and independent investigation by a candidate for the Master of Science in Communication Studies & Journalism degree and is acceptable for meeting the thesis requirements for this degree. Acceptance of this does not imply that the conclusions reached by the candidate are necessarily the conclusions of the major department.

~~Karla Hunter~~, Ph. D.
Thesis Advisor

Date

~~Joshua~~ Westwick, Ed.D.
Interim Head, Department of Communication Studies

Date

~~Dean~~, Graduate School

Date

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ABSTRACT

GRADUATE SCHOOL DECISIONS:
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COLLEGE STUDENTS

KAITLYN VOGES

2017

First-generation college students possess barriers within academics that may be unique to the population. This thesis seeks to understand how instructors and advisors can use the memorable messages framework to encourage first-generation college students to attend graduate school despite barriers the students may possess. Thirteen first-generation college/graduate students were interviewed regarding their decisions to attend graduate school. Specifically, interviewees were asked if they received memorable messages from an outside source which encouraged them to pursue a master's degree. A majority of participants stated they had received a particular message from either an instructor or academic advisor. These messages tended to be one of two types: action-oriented or encouraging messages. Implications based on findings are discussed, as well as directions for future research.

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

“Ingrained in American society is a belief that higher education is an investment in human capital, which benefits the individuals who earn college degrees” (Hossler, Schmidt, & Vesper, 1999, p. 3). Many high school graduates choose to pursue bachelor’s degrees due to the belief that it will benefit them throughout their futures. The U.S. Department of Education (2016) supports this statement, reporting that from 2003-2013, enrollment in post-secondary institutions increased from 16.9 million to 20.4 million--a 20 percent increase. Approximately 32 percent of these students are first-generation college students (U. S. Department of Education, 2012).

A first-generation college student (FGC) is one who comes from a family “where neither parent completed a baccalaureate degree” (Wang, 2014, p. 65). Because FGC students have changed the pattern in their family by attending college, they are a unique population. FGC students face challenges that are different from continuing-generation college (CGC) students--those who have had at least one parent attain a four-year degree (Wang, 2012).

As more FGC and CGC students seek and achieve undergraduate degrees, the value of those degrees decreases, causing a stronger need or impetus for college graduates to pursue graduate degrees (McCall, 2007). According to Zhang, (2005) “as college education became quite a universal phenomenon, many individuals sought to distinguish themselves from others through graduate education” (p. 2). The U. S. Department of Education (2016) reflected this statement by stating a 20 percent increase in the enrollment of graduate students from 2002-2014. While a master’s degree can separate one candidate from another, two more years of school after achieving a

bachelor's degree may seem daunting to an individual, especially an FGC student, due to undergraduate debt and a lower likelihood of undergraduate success (Coffman, 2011; Strayhorn, 2006). Investigating effective means for encouraging an FGC student to attend graduate school may help college instructors and administrators break down the barriers that may be holding them back.

One barrier that may affect FGC student attendance in graduate school is the cost of college tuition. College tuition has grown year by year, forcing students to take out more loans to cover the cost. Since 2001, college tuition for the average public university has increased by an average of \$11,613 per academic year to about \$16,288 today, nearly a \$4,000 difference in costs of tuition (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Furthermore, Dynarski and Scott-Clayton (2013) stated that from the 2001-02 school year to the 2010-11 school year, the average loan amount per undergraduate student increased by \$4,000. This increase in tuition and student debt has negatively impacted graduate school enrollments. Clendaniel (2016) found that students who had more undergraduate debt reported higher debt aversion, leading students to make decisions against attending graduate school. Thus, undergraduate debt has a negative effect on graduate school attendance.

Along with high amounts of undergraduate debt, one's undergraduate grade point average (GPA) can also affect their decision about applying to graduate school. Strayhorn (2006) stated that FGC students with higher GPAs had higher aspirations for further education than those with lower GPAs. While students with low GPAs were less likely to apply to graduate programs, a one-unit increase in GPA increased the likelihood of students applying to graduate school by 22 percent (Zhang, 2005). Being an FGC student

can contribute to these challenges of high undergraduate debt and being at a disadvantage in academic preparedness (McCall, 2007).

Along with undergraduate debt and a potentially low GPA, FGC students face additional challenges throughout their undergraduate careers as compared to those of CGC students (Pascarella, Pierson, Walniak, & Terenzini, 2004). These extra challenges continue for students who are considering applying to graduate school. For instance, by 2003, only 21 percent of FGC students from the class of 1993 had completed master's degrees, as compared to 36 percent of CGC students (Engle & Tinto, 2008). One additional challenge that FGC students face is low-socioeconomic status (Stephens, Hamedani, & Destin, 2014), which can be a significant influence on school decisions, due to undergraduate debt (Coffman, 2011). Students must decide whether to take out more loans and further their degrees or to look for jobs right out of undergraduate school. Because an increased amount of debt may not be appealing, some students may find that making money immediately after receiving bachelor's degrees is the better option.

Another barrier toward applying to graduate school that can stem from a lack of parental higher education occurs within academics. FGC students tend to be less academically prepared than CGC students when entering college (Garcia, 2010) due to a tendency toward lower grade point averages in high school (Stephens et al., 2014) and a lack of student-teacher involvement (Carter & Robinson, 2002). High undergraduate debt and a lack of academic preparedness can hinder success if these factors continue from high school into their college careers (Martinez et al., 2009). These barriers can impact graduate school attendance due to more rigorous academics and an increased amount of debt (Millett, 2003; Stephens, Fryberg, Markus, Johnson, & Covarrubias, 2012).

In this thesis, I examine how instructors and academic advisors are able to encourage FGC students to look past potential barriers and make the decision to attend graduate school. In this chapter, I examined the background of FGC students within academics. In the second chapter, I review previous research regarding FGC students and the barriers they may face within academics, as well as possible solutions to these barriers. I also investigate the memorable messages framework which guides this study. In chapter three I describe the sampling and interviewing processes. In chapter four I present the findings from the data, while chapter five discusses the findings, draws implications, and suggests directions for future research.

Statement of the Problem

Many students make the decision to attend undergraduate universities, as bachelor's degrees are seen to be influential in reaching one's financial goals (Choy, 2011). Those with master's degrees earn roughly 20 percent more annually, as compared to those with bachelor's degrees (National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2012). However, FGC students may have a difficult time making the decision to attend graduate school. Challenges in FGC students' undergraduate careers and the notion that they may not harness opportunities to form professional relationships with instructors, may deter FGC students from attending graduate school (Gardner, 2013; Gardner & Holley, 2011; Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996). Due to these factors, FGC students may not know their opportunities regarding graduate school or have the desire to apply (Walpole, 2003).

These factors and challenges that FGC students face in their undergraduate careers accompany them in graduate school (Choy, 2001). FGC students are less likely to

even apply to graduate school for many reasons. First, they do not have the knowledge about graduate school and/or are less academically prepared than CGC students (Choy, 2001; Gardner & Holley, 2011; Stephens et al., 2014). Second, FGC students face considerable financial burdens (Gardner, 2013; Gardner & Holley, 2011). Third, when FGC students do enroll in graduate school, they are less likely to finish the degree due to these barriers, as well as not knowing the “rules of graduate education” (Gardner, 2013, p. 47). The lack of knowledge about navigating graduate school can lead FGC students to feel left out from CGC peers and faculty, which can decrease confidence in students’ academics (Gardner & Holley, 2011).

Finally, FGC students tend to experience a lack of familial support (Gardner, 2013; Gardner & Holley, 2011). Although these students want to “break the chain” within their families of not attending college (Gardner & Holley, 2011, p. 82), many families do not see the need for, nor support a decision to pursue higher education (Engle, Bermeo, & O’ Brien, 2006). This lack of support can be especially draining on students’ mental health and academics, as well as an extra burden in navigating the processes of graduate school (Choy, 2001; Gardner, 2013; Gardner & Holley, 2011).

One area that is found to help with these barriers is out-of-class communication. Nadler and Nadler (2001) define out-of-class communication as “interactions outside of the formal classroom...it includes advising, seeking out faculty to ask questions about class content...and/or student/faculty discussions about non-class related issues” (p. 242). This type of student-teacher interaction has been known to build trust within that relationship (Jaasma & Koper, 1999). Trust leads to increased retention rates, higher educational aspirations, increased motivation, and increased confidence in academics

(Jaasma & Koper, 1999; Jones, 2008; Kuh, 1995; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Because many of these factors can hinder applications of FGC students for graduate school (Choy, 2001; Gardner, 2013; Gardner & Holley, 2011; Terenzini et al., 1996), out-of-class communication could be beneficial in encouraging FGC students to enroll in and complete master's degrees. However, many FGC students do not seek out-of-class communication with their instructors because they are scared or do not know that they possess that opportunity (Engle et al., 2006; Gardner & Holley, 2011). Without seeking out-of-class communication with an instructor, applying to graduate school may not be considered by first-generation college students (Hayden, 2008).

Despite the knowledge that out-of-class communication is so beneficial to students, and that FGC students face particular challenges that such communication might remedy, a gap in the literature exists regarding studies of FGC students, specifically focusing on out-of-class communication. The researcher examined databases such as Communication Source, ProQuest, and Ebscohost for publications pairing the term "first generation college" with terms such as "out-of-class communication," and "extra-class communication," "instructor-student interaction outside of the class," and "instructor-student relationship outside of the classroom." The search turned up no recent information.

Although attaining a bachelor's degree is more common today, a master's degree is still intimidating (Choy, 2001). Because FGC students are such a unique population with a different set of challenges, the decision to apply to/attend graduate school can be more challenging for them, as compared to CGC students. These problems, along with a lack of communication with instructors, makes this decision more difficult or even an

unknown possibility to FGC students (Gardner & Holley, 2011). Until scholars address these issues, graduate school may continue to be an option that is unattainable to FGC students.

Background and Need

Thus far, much of the research regarding FGC students has looked at FGC students' transition into college (Stephens et al., 2012; Wang, 2012), along with how teachers can effectively communicate with students during class time in order to enhance learning outcomes (Paolini, 2015). In addition, a phenomenon known as “memorable messages” has also been studied and found to be a major factor in students' higher education success (Kranstuber, Carr, & Hosek, 2012). Memorable messages are “verbal messages which may be remembered for extremely long periods of time and which people perceive as a major influence on the course of their lives” (Knapp, Stohl, & Reardon, 1981, p. 27). The impact that memorable messages from instructors and advisors have had on the decision of FGC students to attend graduate school have not been fully examined. As a result, this study focuses on how college instructors can encourage FGC students to attend graduate school.

Because FGC students tend to be less prepared for college (Engle et al., 2006), research has investigated ways to improve their college experiences. Since FGC students tend to have lower college entry test scores (Ishitani, 2003), many of them are placed into remedial classes in college to ease them into higher-level courses (Chen & Carroll, 2005). According to Ray and Rogers (2014), 55 percent of FGC students are placed into at least one remedial class to ease them into the rigor of collegiate academics. Along with remedial coursework, developing a teacher-student relationship via out-of-class

communication has been found to increase academic success (Jaasma & Koper, 1999; Wang, 2012; Wang, 2014). However, there is a dearth of studies regarding out-of-class communication and its impacts on preparation for graduate school. Because graduate school is becoming increasingly necessary to attain a job (Zhang, 2005), it is important to understand how out-of-class instructor communication might help to prepare FGC students for the potential of acquiring master's degrees.

Within previous research, studies have shown that out-of-class communication with instructors provides benefits for students. Specifically, benefits of out-of-class communication include increased learning in the classroom and higher academic success, as well as increased student motivation (Jaasma & Koper, 1999; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1979). For example, one FGC student said that “talking one-on-one with someone helped me more than anything else” (Bok, 2014, p. 1). The teacher-student relationship is also more likely to develop when out-of-class communication is pursued (Dobransky & Bainbridge Frymier, 2004). These relationships are known to help guide FGC students' graduate school careers throughout the process of attaining master's degrees (Gardner, 2013). Due to this information, Gardner (2013) thought that developing the teacher-student relationship and increasing out-of-class communication could influence FGC students' decisions to attend graduate school. However, researchers have not specifically examined this idea. With this knowledge, along with the low rates of FGC students applying to graduate school (Choy, 2001; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Walpole, 2003), it is important to examine whether out-of-class communication with instructors influences FGC students' decisions to attend graduate school.

Once enrolled in an undergraduate program, FGC students can succeed academically, largely through the influence of instructors and peers (Kranstuber et al., 2012). As mentioned previously, one way that instructors are able to influence FGC students' academics and college satisfaction are through memorable messages—high-impact messages that may be recalled for extended periods of time (Knapp, 1981). These messages from parents and on-campus mentors, as well as effective communication and teaching strategies, are known to be influential in FGC student success (Wang, 2012). Memorable messages have led to self-assessment by students, through learning about their values about college and what they want to achieve throughout their time there, as well as positive behavior changes to meet and maintain their goals (Nazione, Laplante, Smith, Cornacchione, Russell, & Stohl, 2011).

Much of the previous research regarding FGC students focuses on their transitions and successes within their undergraduate careers. Because of the research at hand, instructors can understand how to help FGC students succeed academically in order to attain bachelor's degrees. However, scant research has examined how to prepare these students for graduate school, and how to encourage them to apply. With knowledge about ways to help FGC students succeed academically, instructor-student out-of-class communication, and the positive influence of memorable messages in FGC students' undergraduate careers, it is important to understand whether these factors also influence their decisions to apply for graduate school.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand how college instructors and academic advisors are able to encourage first-generation college students to make the decision to

attend graduate school. Because FGC students face additional and unique challenges throughout their undergraduate careers, graduate school may seem a daunting task. To make progress in this area and help FGC students make the decision to take the next step in their collegiate careers, this study investigates positive influences on this unique population that have encouraged the idea of graduate school, using the memorable messages framework. Previous research regarding FGC students and the memorable messages framework have examined transitions into college and their undergraduate careers. However, researchers have not studied the decision to attend graduate school in this context. By understanding how instructors can encourage FGC students to attend graduate school, it will be possible to reduce barriers that FGC students possess regarding graduate school.

To understand strategies that encourage FGC students to attend graduate school, I conducted interviews with FGC graduate students at a Midwestern university. Interview questions were framed using the memorable messages framework from the Knapp et al. guide (1997), along with Wang's (2014) memorable messages interview guide. I accounted for basic demographics including gender, current age, race, and year in their program. Owen's thematic analysis interpretation, using recurrence, repetition, and forcefulness as guidelines, was used to analyze data (1984). The goal of this study was to understand how college instructors can work to lessen the barriers that FGC students have, and to provide resources for instructors who wish to encourage this unique population to apply to and make the decision to attend graduate school. In the next chapter, I review previous research on FGC students, the instructor-student relationship, academic advising, and the memorable messages framework. At the end, I pose research

questions which may provide insight into how instructors and academic advisors are able to encourage FGC students to attend graduate school.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

The causes and potential solutions for the disparity between graduate school attendance of FGC students and CGC students, especially given the financial benefits of graduate education, merit analysis. Scant research exists to examine FGC students who matriculate and become graduate students (hereafter referred to as first-generation college/graduate students or FGC/G students). Through the lens of a communication theory framework, an examination of FGC/G students and their decision-making process of attending graduate school will strengthen the understanding of the impact that instructors and/or advisors may have on this unique population of students. Therefore, in the following review of literature, extant research and theory relating to FGC students will be discussed in terms of its relevance to the FGC/G population.

FGC Barriers to Graduate School Attendance

Throughout the following section, this analysis will discuss research that has established the unique set of barriers that FGC students face to provide groundwork for the analysis of likely trials faced by FGC/Gs. The likelihood of a given student attending college is strongly related to the amount of education that his or her parent/s have (Choy, 2001). FGC students have lower rates of enrollment (Choy, 2011), to the extent that 47 percent of FGC students attend college directly after high school, as compared to 85 percent of CGC students (Ray & Rogers, 2014), and as previously mentioned, 32 percent of undergraduates are FGC students (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). There are many reasons for this disparity, including the many unique challenges faced by the FGC population.

One reason for the small numbers of FGC students attending college is due to these students feeling as though they are a marginalized group (Tate, Caperton, Kaiser, Pruitt, White, & Hall, 2015). FGC students have stated that they must work harder to attain a bachelor's degree than CGC students do (Tate et al., 2015). One FGC student mentioned:

My dad always told me that, naturally, compared to other students that have parents that both went to college...I naturally won't be able to be at the same level, but because of that I have to work harder, to try to surpass that. (Tate et al., 2015, p. 301)

Feeling as though one must work harder to be at the same level as other students may discourage undergraduate enrollment. This feeling may also continue into thoughts about graduate school. An FGC student may have hesitations regarding graduate school due to the amount of work they feel as though is necessary of them.

Along with feeling as though they need to work harder, FGC students will most likely score much lower in Arnold, Lu, & Armstrong's (2012) five key elements of academic preparation. These five fundamental aspects include knowledge about college itself, self-efficacy, motivation, academic skills and discipline, and aspirations (Arnold, Lu, & Armstrong, 2012). These researchers examined literature reviews of previous studies and put together an ecological model of outside factors which determine the extent to which a student possesses the five elements of academic preparation.

The first level of the model includes individual factors such as race, sex, academic habits, and more. The second level of the model is the microsystem of the student. The microsystem includes factors such as the school that the individual attended, teachers,

and the student's family. The third level of the ecological model is the mesosystem, including whether the student participated in preparation programs during high school, mentoring, and more. The fourth level of the model is the exosystem, which includes the economy, financial aid, and community. The final level of the ecological model is the macrosystem, including social stratification and more. Because FGC students typically do not possess the characteristics of each level to the extent that CGC students may, FGC students' levels of academic preparation are lower (Arnold, Lu, & Armstrong, 2012). FGC students scoring lower in all five aspects of preparation supports the claim that FGC students need to work harder to achieve a bachelor's degree. Thus, for an FGC student to consider graduate school, it may take more encouragement from outside sources.

Although more discipline may be involved in achieving a degree, many FGC students want to attend college, and aspire to receive a bachelor's degree to reach their financial goals, and to change the course of their families in regards to education (Gardner & Holley, 2011; Tate et al., 2015). For example, Kelly, an FGC student stated:

...it was more or less looking at how hard my parents had struggled for such a long time. We're talking basic, entry-level, labor-intensive-type positions that both held during their lives. I didn't want to do that. (Gardner & Holley, 2011, p. 83)

Wanting a better life for themselves provides some FGC students the motivation to further their education beyond high school.

However, some FGC parents are not supportive of their student receiving a bachelor's degree, due to lack of knowledge and support (Tate et al., 2015). Due to parents not understanding the importance or logistics of a bachelor's degree, many FGC

students do not make it through the enrollment process. Berkner and Chavez (1997) outline the steps to enrolling in college. This process includes first, deciding to attend college, and second, academically preparing for college throughout high-school. Next, taking entrance exams for four-year schools, such as the ACT/SAT, and finally, choosing institutions to apply to and filling out applications; and finally, making the arrangements to attend (Berkner & Chavez, 1997). Just 32 percent of potential future FGC students (U. S. Department of Education, 2012) complete each step that Berkner and Chavez (1997) laid out. Thus, these students may miss out on the opportunity to enhance their academic and professional careers.

Of the 32 percent of potential future FGC students who complete each step, it is even more difficult for an FGC student to persist through their collegiate career and achieve their degree. They are at a disadvantage regarding staying enrolled, partly because FGC students are typically a part of lower-income populations (Choy, 2011). Being from low-income families makes it difficult to afford college (Gardner, 2013; Gardner & Holley, 2011). Along with financial burdens, FGC students tend to have lower educational expectations for themselves, be less academically prepared than CGC students, face a lack of parental involvement in academics, have reduced time management skills, and struggle with understanding college life (Collier & Morgan, 2008; Horn & Nunez, 2000). Due to these trials, graduate school may seem an impossible feat to an FGC student.

Mitigating Barriers

Because FGC students face many trials throughout their education, researchers have examined ways to help these students in their success. Throughout the following

section ideas to mitigate these barriers are presented. These solutions include remedial programs and support from instructors and academic advisors.

Remedial Programs. Due to the challenges that FGC students face, many colleges have put into place programs designed specifically for FGC students. For example, California State University-Dominquez Hills in Los Angeles maintains a high rate of FGC students at about sixty percent of total enrollment (Mangan, 2015). The university maintains a high quota of FGC students and to help them succeed provides scholarships, academic coaching, tutoring, peer mentorships, financial literacy training, and graduate school preparation (Mangan, 2015). Other schools are also implementing similar programs before school begins and during the school year, such as career development programs (Tate et al., 2015). Schademan & Thompson (2016), stated, “In order to mitigate...long-term individual and societal consequences, U.S. colleges and universities have a responsibility to increase the success rates of FGLI (First-generation/low income) students and better position them for career opportunities” (p. 195). FGC students may face long-term difficulties without the assistance of their university and academic personnel.

Instructor-Student Relationship. Along with beneficial programs for FGC students, support from professors has also been known to increase the undergraduate success of FGC students. FGC student, Tae-Hyun Sakong, stated that he would have dropped out had he not received support from his professors (Mangan, 2015). Having support from instructors may be the deciding factor in whether FGC students can succeed. While there is research on the characteristics of FGC students, the challenges that they face during their undergraduate careers, and ways to help them succeed, there

has been little research on FGC/G students' decisions to attend graduate school. Research has found that instructor-student relationships and academic advisor relationships, specifically through out-of-class communication, are influential in assisting students in their undergraduate success (Jaasma & Koper, 1999; Kuh, 1995; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Wang, 2014). This relationship may be beneficial for FGC students with graduate school potential. However, the impact that these instructors and advisors may have on an FGC student's decision to attend graduate school is currently unknown.

Instructor-student relationships are a major factor in undergraduate student success. An instructor-student relationship is an interpersonal relationship in which both the instructor and student may have relational goals within the class (Dobranskey & Frymier, 2004; Frymier & Houser, 2000; Frymier, 2007). For FGC students, an instructor can become a primary source of support, formed by the interpersonal interactions between the two parties (Wang, 2014). These interactions can assist with course-related problems, increase confidence in academic learning, and help students with their personal problems (Kuh, 1995; Wang, 2014). For example, one participant stated that "It really made me...know that I was in the right place in my life and that...this is for me...because [my teacher]...let me know that I can be strong enough to beat everything..." (Wang, 2014, p. 74). Based on this participant's statement, gaining confidence in academic abilities and decisions from interactions with instructors may be a factor in FGC students persisting through college as well as attending graduate school. Instructor-student relationships may develop within the classroom setting or outside of class.

In-class communication. The first context in which an instructor-student relationship may develop is in-class. This development may occur via building rapport,

which can assist in undergraduate student success. Catt, Miller, and Schellenkamp (2007) defined rapport as “the ability to build relationships based on mutual trust and harmony” (p. 369). Building rapport between an instructor and students can occur in a variety of ways. An instructor is able to build rapport by using verbal and nonverbal immediacy, genuinely caring about students, and being respectful, supportive, and encouraging (Frisby, Berger, Burchett, Herovic, & Strawser, 2014; Frisby, Beck, Bachman, Byars, Lamberth, & Thompson, 2016; Holley & Steiner, 2005). Rapport building can also occur by requiring participation from students, such as allowing them to speak about their opinions and views or even modeling participation skills (Holley & Steiner, 2005; Myers, 2009). After establishing rapport, a positive effect may occur within the classroom and the enrolled students.

Students and instructors may benefit from establishing rapport with each other. Rapport can increase student motivation (Myers, 2009), satisfaction, comfortability in asking questions and for clarification, positive learning outcomes (Frymier & Houser, 2000), and the feeling of having a connected classroom with both classmates and the instructor (Frisby & Martin, 2010). Along with these outcomes, positive communication may increase, as well as grades and student participation (Menzel & Carrell, 1999; Rocca, 2008; Smith, 2015; Weaver & Qi, 2005). As student participation increases, communication skills with both classmates and the instructor increase, as well (Dallimore, Herenstein, & Platt, 2004). Critical thinking skills can also improve (Al-Kandari, 2012). Possibly due to an increase in critical thinking skills, students are able to perform better academically (Burchfield & Sappington, 1999), tend to have a greater appreciation for academics (Messman & Jones-Corely, 2001), and are more likely to stay

in school and receive a degree (Astin, 1999). Because these values and skills are often ones that FGC students lack as compared to CGC students, rapport building and participation may be especially beneficial to them throughout their undergraduate career, and in deciding to pursue a master's degree.

When there is an established relationship between an instructor and a student, the student may also begin to form values and opinions about education similar to those of the instructor (Myers, 2009). This idea is especially apparent in undergraduate students and professors who are mentoring them (Ferrari, 2004). Frisby and Myers (2008), stated that “not only do these relational skills impact the way in which students can improve their academic experience, but these relational skills exert and influence outside of the classroom as students seek mentoring, personal, and career advice from their instructors,” (p. 31). Because professors likely value the educational experience and the furthering of education as they furthered theirs, these same values may be transmitted to the students that they are mentoring, many of which may be FGC students. Possessing these values along with an increased motivation, may lead to graduate school consideration by an FGC student.

Out-of-class communication. The second context in which instructor-student relationships may develop is through interactions that occur outside of the classroom. These interactions are found to be particularly useful in forming student-teacher relationships (Dobransky & Bainbridge Frymier, 2004). This kind of interaction is known as out-of-class communication or extra-class communication. Researchers have studied this area extensively, and have determined many factors that can increase a student's perceived value of out-of-class communication, increasing the likelihood that the student

will seek this type of interaction. These factors include humor, social accessibility, credibility, teaching effectiveness, communication skills, and affinity seeking strategies.

Wilson, Wood, and Gaff (1974) found that a teacher's behavior in class is often a predictor of out-of-class communication. Humor is an aspect of a teacher's classroom behavior that has been known to increase the perceived value of out-of-class communication for students (Goodboy, Booth-Butterfield, Bolkan, & Griffin, 2015). Social accessibility, or "the degree to which students view instructors as being socially available, or seem interested in informal interaction" can also influence the perceived value of out-of-class communication (Bippus, Kearney, Plax, & Brooks, 2003, p. 14). Social accessibility can include being willing to talk and being open, patient, and approachable (Bippus et al., 2003).

Along with humor and social accessibility, a teacher's perceived credibility can strongly impact the extent to which a student sees value in out-of-class communication (Myers, 2004). McCroskey (1998) stated that credibility is a mixture of competence or perceived knowledge, good character, and caring toward students. Myers (2004), found that when students reported that their teacher demonstrated these three components in their classroom, the perceived value of out-of-class communication increased, as compared to students who reported less teacher credibility. Myers (2004), also found that teaching effectiveness was strongly related to out-of-class communication. Thus, the more effective in teaching a student perceives an instructor to be, the more likely that student is to partake in out-of-class communication. Teaching effectiveness can include verbal and nonverbal immediacy, being assertive in the classroom, and possessing low verbal aggressiveness (Johnson & Miller, 2002; Martin, Chesebro, & Mottet, 1997;

Martin, Weber, Burant, 1997). Specific functional communication skills are also able to increase the frequency of out-of-class communication (Myers, Martin, & Knapp, 2005). These abilities can include ego support skill or being able to help a student feel good about themselves, and persuasive skill, or being able to modify a student's thoughts or behaviors (Myers, Martin, & Knapp, 2005).

Affinity-seeking strategies are also able to increase the frequency of out-of-class communication (Myers, Martin, & Knapp, 2005). The first strategy is the sensitive strategy or being caring and able to understand how a student feels about a situation. Second is the self-inclusion strategy, which includes interacting with others so that more people will interact with them. The third strategy is the comfortable with self strategy or being able to appear comfortable with other people. Finally, the supportiveness strategy is being encouraging, agreeable, or uncritical (Gorham, Kelley, McCroskey, 1989; McCroskey & McCroskey, 1986; Myers, Martin, & Knapp, 2005). Advisors may use these strategies to assist an FGC student in a successful undergraduate career and in encouraging them to attend graduate school. While the frequency of out-of-class communication is an important factor to measure, Myers, Martin, & Knapp (2005), did not examine the content of the communication. Content is important to examine, as it may include information that may be helpful to students and decisions that they make, namely FGC students and graduate school decisions.

While an instructor's behavior in the classroom may affect value and frequency of out-of-class communication, students also seek out-of-class communication for many reasons. These reasons can include course-related issues, career mentoring/advice, psychosocial mentoring, self-disclosure, sharing intellectual thoughts, asking the

instructor for a favor, and campus issues/problems (Bippus et al., 2003; Jaasma & Koper, 2001; Theophilides & Terenzini, 1981). Fusani (1994), assessed out-of-class communication in regards to three contexts: course-related information, personal issues, and socialization, or getting to know the instructor, studying only full-time faculty, due to more physical availability. Fusani (1994), found that course-related information was most common. While there are many reasons for seeking out-of-class communication, Bippus et al. (2003), found that students most often initiated the conversations 86 percent of the time. This information poses an issue for FGC students as they are less likely to initiate communication with an instructor (Engle et al., 2006; Gardner & Holley, 2011), and therefore may not be receiving information or advice about graduate school.

When students engage in out-of-class communication with an instructor, regardless of intent, potential benefits arise. The confidence of a student's decisions regarding their career may increase, along with their overall satisfaction of college (Kuh, 1995; Wilson, Gaff, Dienst, Wood, & Bavry, 1975). Further, feelings of affirmation and self-worth may also increase (Kuh, 1995). Out-of-class communication can also lead to greater trust by the student toward the instructor (Jaasma & Koper, 1999). Furthermore, trust leads to higher retention rates and higher educational aspirations of students (Jaasma & Koper, 1999; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Because out-of-class communication influences confidence, satisfaction, and higher educational aspirations, it may impact FGC students' decisions to apply to graduate school. However, information regarding this idea was unable to be found. Due to the importance of student-teacher interactions that occur outside of the classroom, and the increasing importance of graduate school, it

is vital that scholars delve into whether out-of-class communication has an impact on graduate school, to encourage FGC students to enroll.

Academic advisor-student relationship. Along with instructor-student relationships, academic advising has been found to assist with undergraduate success, as well as decision-making regarding potential future academic and career paths. A junior FGC student stated:

It was not until I met an advisor who understood my background and my challenges that I started getting out of the hole I thought I was in...now that I am a junior, I am able to look back and see how much progress I made thanks to that advisor. I now have the opportunity to interact at a professional level with other mentors...[and] while I had not considered pursuing a master's degree before, I am planning to pursue not only a master's but a doctoral degree in my area of interest. (Esping, Melton, & Hernandez-Gomez, 2014, p. 68)

Meeting with an advisor may help FGC students overcome the obstacles they possess, potentially leading to a decision for graduate school. Hunter & White (2004) stated that academic advising assists students in building life experiences and supporting their educational, career, and life goals. Academic advising can take the form of various styles, and provide benefits for FGC and potential FGC/G students who possess the motivation to meet with the advisors. The following section discusses styles, motivations, and benefits of academic advising.

Advising styles. The first advising style is developmental advising, in which the focus is on developing an interpersonal relationship between the advisor and the advisee (McArthur, 2005) as well as working to develop the advisee's academic and future career

goals (Fowler & Boylan, 2010). This advising style may be especially beneficial in developing an FGC students graduate school decision-making process. The second type is prescriptive advising, where there is no development of a relationship, rather the sole focus is on taking care of business to assist in the success of a student in achieving their bachelor's degree (Crookston, 1972). Taking care of business may include placing students into the appropriate courses and helping with registration (Crookston, 1972; Fowler & Boylan, 2010). Fowler and Boylan (2010), also lay out the third advising style, provocative/intrusive advising, in which the advisor contacts the advisee even when the advisee does not initiate. This style may include the advisor contacting the advisee when the student has missing homework, or is not attending class. Also, an advisor may initiate communication to discuss the potential of graduate school. The final advising style is appreciative advising, which is most beneficial for "at-risk students," or those who are less prepared for college (Truschel, 2008). FGC students fall into this category (Arnold, Lu, & Armstrong, 2012). The advisor with an appreciative advising style focuses on the positive characteristics of the at-risk student, helping them to realize that they can succeed in college (Truschel, 2008). This advising style may be especially beneficial in eliminating barriers that FGC students possess.

Student motivation to seek advising appointments. Just as there are many methods of advising, there are also many reasons that a student may seek an advising appointment. Leach and Wang (2015) conducted a study in which they lay out six motives that students possess for initiating communication with an academic advisor. The most prominent motivation found in the study is a relational motive. The person with the relational motive strives to develop an interpersonal relationship between the advisor and

advisee (Martin et al., 1999). The second motive that Leach and Wang (2015) lay out is a functional motive. Six students mentioned that their motivation for seeking out communication with an academic advisor was for functional purposes of getting information about classes and registration (Martin et al., 1999). Students may possess this motive when seeking information regarding a master's program. The third motive is encouragement, in which the student seeks out contact with an advisor in hopes of hearing encouraging words or phrases (Leach & Wang, 2015; Martin et al., 1999). The fourth motive for students to seek out communication with their academic advisor is a participatory motive, in which the student wants to show their advisor, who in this case must also be their instructor, that they understand course material (Martin et al., 1999). The final two and less prominent, motives for seeking out-of-class communication with an advisor is sycophanting, or wanting to communicate with their advisor in a "way that they know the instructor will approve" (Martin et al., 1999, p. 159), and excuse-making motives, to "explain why work is late or missing, or to challenge grading criteria or a grade" (Martin et al., 1999, p. 159). Each of these last two motives exists when the advisor is also an instructor (Leach & Wang, 2015).

Benefits of academic advising. Students may receive benefits due to meeting with an advisor. Per Young-Jones, Burt, Dixon, and Hawthorne (2013), meeting with an academic advisor and having accountability can lead to increased student responsibility and self-efficacy, improved study skills, and perceived support. Many of these factors are linked to higher GPA among students, especially those who meet with their advisor more than once per semester (Young-Jones et al., 2013). Contact with an advisor is also linked to overall student success (Shelton, 2003), and may increase retention rates (Young-Jones

et al., 2013). Swecker, Fifolt, and Searby (2013) found that the more that students feel engaged in the institution, the more likely they are to stay at that institution and in college. One way students are able to feel engaged is via advising appointments, which Swecker, Fifolt, and Searby (2013) found to increase retention by 13 percent each time a student went to an advising appointment. As retention increases, so might considerations of staying longer to pursue a graduate education.

Young-Jones et al. (2013) also found that FGC students have lower levels of self-efficacy when compared to the levels of CGC students, thus putting them at risk for a decreased GPA. Meeting with an advisor may assist with this issue and increase GPA (Young-Jones et al., 2013), which, as previously mentioned, can be a determinant of attending graduate school (Zhang, 2005). However, as juniors and seniors tend to meet with their academic advisors less than freshman and sophomores, the advisors may have to seek out communication with the students in order to provide them with support, encouragement, and possibly even a discussion regarding the option of graduate school (Leach & Wang, 2015; Young-Jones et al., 2013).

Memorable Messages

Just as a comprehensive background in research related to a topic is important when analyzing the interactions that occur between an instructor and a student, a theoretical framework is also necessary. Memorable messages, the framework for this study, are “verbal messages which may be remembered for extremely long periods of time and which people perceive as a major influence on the course of their lives” (Knapp et al., 1981, p. 27). The following sections will discuss the framework along with the sources and receivers of the messages. The memorable messages seminal article by

Knapp et al., (1981) states that nearly everyone is able to recall at least one positive or negative message that has shaped some aspect of their lives. The following review of literature will delve into the impact that memorable messages and their sources have on the receivers.

Sources of memorable messages tend to communicate these messages orally. Barge and Schluter (2004) found that 63.2 percent of participants received such a message via face to face communication. Along with face to face communication, in a study in which researchers interviewed 42 employees of an organization regarding memorable messages about work life, Stohl (1986) found that 100 percent of the memorable messages were a part of private conversations between the two parties. The following sections explore memorable messages and their sources and receivers.

Holladay (2002) stated that memorable messages have valence, more often than not positive, to positively impact the recipient. In the study mentioned above, Stohl (1986) found that all respondents were able to recall at least one memorable message that affected them in some way. These messages provide a different perspective for receivers, allowing them to potentially think outside of their comfort zones (Nazione et al., 2011). Barge and Schluter (2004), found that memorable messages had a lasting impact on employees, even from their first few days working at a new company. One participant mentioned that the message she received from a coworker about doing her best in her job “helped me to press on, determined to succeed” (p. 245). Another participant mentioned that a message from a colleague “allowed me to always analyze what impacts certain decisions would have” (Barge & Schluter, 2004, p. 245). Ford and Ellis (1998) also found that 86% of interviewed nurses who received a message of support claimed that the

message they received had a lasting impact on the way they practiced their medical profession. The impact of memorable messages may be due to the fact that many of them are action-oriented. Smith and Ellis (2001) found that many of the participants received messages that called for them to do something, such as living a healthy life and being responsible. Memorable messages received by FGC students may call for them to attend graduate school.

While much of the time the messages were action-oriented, Stohl (1986) also found that most of the messages did not come in a period of crisis or stress for the recipient. Because many times FGC students do not recognize that graduate school is an option, the stress of graduate school is non-existent. Thus, the notion that the message does not come during a stressful time may ring true for this population, as well. This study will focus on FGC/G students' decisions to apply to graduate school, due to receiving verbal messages that impacted their decisions. By examining memorable messages through characteristics of the sender and receiver, along with the content and context of the message, researchers can understand the verbal messages that were used to encourage current graduate students, and gain knowledge about how to encourage FGC students about future decisions.

Relevance of the source. The source of a memorable message is important in the impact that a message has on the receiver (Stohl, 1986). The source of a memorable message is generally someone of a higher status, or someone who has previously been in the receiver's position (Barge & Schluter, 2004; Ford & Ellis, 1998; Holladay, 2002; Smith & Ellis, 2001; Stohl, 1986). In their study of religious messages, Smith & Ellis (2001) stated that the messages that participants received came from someone who was

already religious and had religious experience. Sources who have experience in attending graduate school and may provide memorable messages to FGC students regarding graduate school may include instructors and academic advisors.

Along with religious messages, Barge & Schluter (2004) stated that 79.2 percent of the sources of memorable messages within a study of organizational communication of a company were sources who were of higher status and had been there longer than the recipients. The sources were usually managers or trainers. Further, Stohl (1986) interviewed 42 employees in a single company. Three participants were in upper management, 11 were supervisors, and 28 were hourly employees. Ninety percent of these participants stated that they had received a memorable message regarding their job in the company from someone who had been there longer than they had. Eighty-eight percent of these messages came from someone who was of a higher status within the company. Ford and Ellis state the same type of results, with 77 percent of nonsupport messages or messages which are not supportive to the receiver, being from someone of a superior status (1998). Sources of a superior status who may provide a message about graduate school to an FGC student may include instructors and academic advisors.

While researchers have studied the sources of memorable messages in the contexts of organizational communication (Ford & Ellis, 1998; Stohl, 1986), and religion (Smith & Ellis, 2004), sources within the instructional setting have been examined less. Within this limited amount research, researchers have found that students' elders such as instructors, advisors, parents, grandparents, and other authority figures tend to be the most influential sources of memorable messages concerning college (Knapp et al., 1981; Nazione et al., 2011). Holladay (2002) found that of 104 participants, those who reported

a memorable message stated the sender of the message was older 100% of the time. Because of this information and the fact that students tend to look to elders for advice (Nazione et al., 2011; Knapp et al., 1981), there is reason to believe that students will turn to elders for direction and advice regarding applying to graduate school, as well. Elders may include many different people for FGC students. They may be on-campus mentors such as faculty, instructors (Wang, 2012), advisors (Nazione et al., 2011), and experienced students (Kranstuber et al., 2012).

Parents also tend to be an influential source in regards to college students' ways of living (Kranstuber et al., 2012; Ellis & Smith, 2004) which may transfer into academic or career plans after their student receives a bachelor's degree. Parents may be influential because the way students perceive and evaluate a message is dependent more on the relationship between the student and the source than on the specific content of the message (Ellis & Smith, 2004; Kranstuber et al., 2012). Because impact of the message can be dependent on the relationship between the source and receiver of the message, and the relationship that students generally have with parents, there is reason to believe that a parent may be influential in an FGC student's decision regarding graduate school. However, Stohl (1986), found that the source of memorable messages within a company came from a coworker that the receiver saw nearly every day. While a parent may not be seen multiple days per week while the student is attending college, an instructor may be. Due to the importance of superiority of the source, the frequency of interactions between the source and receiver, and the importance of instructor-student relationships in collegiate success particularly for FGC students, (Wang, 2012), it is important to delve

into research with instructors as a source of memorable messages concerning attending graduate school.

First-generation students as the sample. Along with the source, the receiver is an important factor in a memorable message. Throughout previous research, the studied receivers have consisted of undergraduate students (Ellis & Smith, 2004; Knapp et al., 1981; Kranstuber et al., 2012; Nazione et al., 2011; Wang, 2012). However, Wang (2012; 2014) is the only author to use first-generation undergraduate students as receivers of these messages. In a 2014 study, Wang set out to examine what memorable messages FGC students received from their parents about the role that family should play throughout their collegiate experience. Wang interviewed 30 FGC undergraduate students and pulled out five themes from the data collection.

First, Wang (2014) found that parents told their undergraduates to remember them and where they came from. One participant mentioned that her parents told her “family’s the world, family first,” even above academics (p. 277). Even amidst the struggles that her family endured, remembering their upbringing may encourage them to push through to receiving a bachelor’s degree. This encouragement pushed many participants to work harder than they may have thought they needed to in order to achieve a bachelor’s degree. Second, Wang found that family should be a part of FGC students’ college life by keeping family a major component to their lives and making time for them. One participant mentioned that her family was angry with her for not spending as much time with them once entering the collegiate world. However, this student was trying to balance school, homework, and work. FGC students may have difficulty maintaining a focus on family when adjusting to and going through the collegiate life.

Third, FGC students can set a good example for their siblings or younger family members. By attending college, FGC students are able to show their younger family members that it is possible to achieve a bachelor's degree. Attending college will show younger family members that they will be able to attend college, too. Finally, FGC students should not worry about family. Within messages regarding not worrying about the family, parents were supportive of their FGC student earning a bachelor's degree and wanted them to focus on school and be confident in their decision to attend college. Parents reassured their students that the family would be fine while the student was at college. The final theme Wang pulled from the data was being able to count on family for support. One student reported her family members saying: "No matter what happens if you fail, or whatever happens, whatever life throws at you, your family will always be there..." Due to this memorable message, this FGC student understood that she could rely on her family's support throughout college.

While supportive messages from parents and family can be helpful as mentioned previously, one challenge that FGC students face is that their parents may not be suited to give advice about college due to inexperience (Stephens et al., 2012; Wang, 2012). Thus, FGC students must rely on others to help them with college living and the decisions that they must make regarding graduate school. Tate, Fouad, Marks, Young, Guzman, & Williams (2015), found that in FGC undergraduate students, intentions to go to graduate school largely depended on familial support since the desire to attend graduate school in the future decreased when the family did not want them to attend. While this is pertinent information, this study along with previous research have strictly used undergraduate FGC students as their samples of research (Ellis & Smith, 2004; Knapp et al., 1981;

Kranstuber et al., 2012; Nazione et al., 2011; Wang, 2012). However, graduate students are a population that has not been studied extensively in the context of the memorable messages framework. The limited amount of studies that examine FGC/G students does not provide enough reliable data. Thus, FGC/G students warrant a separate study regarding their decision to attend graduate school.

While FGC students are important to study, FGC/G students are also a necessary population to study because of the barriers that they faced in making the decision to apply to graduate school. Due to financial and academic barriers, these students have a difficult time reaching their decisions to apply, or they choose not to apply at all (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Millet, 2003). It is imperative that instructors understand how they can communicate with FGC students to look past these barriers, and encourage them in the next level of their collegiate careers. By studying memorable messages that FGC/G students found helpful in their decisions to apply to graduate school, instructors will be better suited to encourage FGC students to look past their barriers against attending graduate school.

Research Questions

Graduate school is becoming an important factor in attaining a job (Gallagher, 2014). However, many FGC students do not enroll in graduate school, as compared to rates of CGC students (Choy, 2001; Gardner & Holley, 2011). The lack of enrollment by FGC/G students is due to the fact that they face multiple unique challenges within their undergraduate careers, such as a lower likelihood of undergraduate success, lessened familial support, and a lack of professional relationships with instructors that could help

them with graduate careers (Choy, 2001; Gardner, 2013; Gardner & Holley, 2011). However, there are ways to combat these challenges.

One way to assist with challenges that FGC students face is to place them in remedial classes to help with their academic success and preparation for higher level courses (Chen & Carroll, 2005; Ray & Rogers, 2014). Along with remedial classes, support from on-campus mentors (Wang, 2012) and memorable messages from parents and instructors (Kranstuber et al., 2012; Wang, 2012) can also aid in FGC students' undergraduate successes. Although scholars are aware of ways to assist with the undergraduate challenges of FGC students, the challenges that FGC students face may carry over into graduate school (Choy, 2001; Gardner, 2013; Gardner & Holley, 2011). While there is research on FGC students' decisions to attain bachelors degrees and the process of receiving them, no research was found regarding their decision to apply for graduate school. Due to this lack of research, along with the knowledge of how to help FGC students persist through their undergraduate career, it is important to ask the following research questions:

RQ1a: Do first-generation college students receive memorable messages that encourage them to apply for graduate school?

RQ1b: What memorable messages do first-generation college students receive that encourage them to apply for graduate school?

RQ2: Do instructor memorable messages influence a first-generation college student's decision to apply for graduate school?

RQ3: Do academic advisor memorable messages influence a first-generation college student's decision to apply for graduate school?

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Design

This study used a constructivist approach which involved in-depth, semi-structured interviews. These interviews contained specific questions about memorable messages of first-generation master's degree students and their decisions to attend graduate school. Each interview was conducted in person in a neutral setting and lasted roughly 15-20 minutes. An interview was the best method for researching this topic because it allowed for specific questions, as well as probing questions if the researchers needs more information from the participant (Cresswell, 2014). Interviews are also useful for providing historical information from the participant, and for allowing the researcher to elicit the information that is desired (Cresswell, 2014).

Sample/Participants

FGC/G students who were currently in the process of earning their master's served as the study sample. I drew these students from one midsized Midwestern university. I asked for participant demographics at the beginning of the interview. These demographics included measured gender, age, race, and the student's year in the master's program. The sample was a non-random, purposive sample because participants were selected due to sharing the characteristic of being FGC/G students (Tongco, 2007). Thirteen students participated in this study. This sample provided information regarding how sources of the memorable messages are able to influence a Midwestern, FGC student's decision to attend graduate school.

Instrumentation

The interview protocol was developed using the Knapp et al. (1981) guidelines, along with Wang's (2014) memorable messages interview guide. The protocol focused on specifics of the memorable messages that were shared by participants. Specifics included the age of the recipient when the message was received, the status between the sender and receiver, the setting, the content of the message, and the effects that the message had on the recipient. Due to previous research, an instructor would be the expected source of the memorable message to an FGC student and the expected setting would be outside of class. However, it is important to ask, as students may state different answers. As previously mentioned, the interviews were semi-structured, with specific questions such as the above, while still allowing for probing questions to elicit more information.

Analysis

Owen's thematic analysis interpretation (1984) was used for the analysis of the data from the conducted interviews. Owen uses recurrence, repetition, and forcefulness to determine themes throughout data. Recurrence is noted when "at least two parts of a report have the same thread of meaning, even though different wording indicated such a meaning" (Owen, 1984, p. 275). Repetition is defined as the "explicit, repeated use of the same wording" (Owen, 1984, p. 275). Forcefulness is defined as "vocal inflection, volume, or dramatic pauses which serve to stress and subordinate some utterances from other locations in the oral reports (Owen, 1984, p. 275). By using Owen's interpretation, I recognized the occurrence of themes from the data. The unit of analysis in the study was each turn of talk by the participant. I knew when I had reached saturation when the same

themes were occurring, and no new ones were being generated. Saturation is the point where no new categories need to be created to account for new data (Holton, 2008).

Previous studies using the memorable messages framework have established the validity of this coding scheme (Wang, 2012; Wang, 2014). Another professional also reviewed the data and themes to ensure validity.

Next, a member check was conducted to establish the validity of the analysis (Frey et al., 2000). According to Creswell and Miller (2000), a member check “consists of taking data and interpretations back to the participants in the study so that they can confirm the credibility of the information and narrative account” (p. 127). I emailed each participant to ensure that the data reflected an accurate understanding of the answers that they provided.

A qualitative, thematic analysis is the best method for this topic because it allows for an understanding of the meaning behind participants’ answers (Boyatzis, 1998), and allows a look into the context of the memorable message interaction. The type of results this analysis produced included themes and meaning behind the themes (Boyatzis, 1998). One benefit of this analysis is that it assisted in the understanding of the participants’ decisions to attend graduate school and an understanding of the context behind that decision.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

After completing member checks with each participant (Cresswell & Miller, 2000) from completed semi-structured interviews, I conducted a thematic analysis. This analysis focused on recurrence, repetition, and forcefulness (Owen, 1984) of the transcribed data. After the analysis, another professional checked over the data to ensure the accuracy of themes. Table 1 outlines each participant by name, age, gender, race, and year in graduate school. Names have been changed by the researcher to maintain confidentiality. Any given names from the interviews were omitted. The results of the study are organized by research question, with other themes presented after.

Table 1

Research Participants

<u>Participant</u>	<u>Gender</u>	<u>Current Age</u>	<u>Race</u>	<u>Year in Program</u>
Bree	Female	24	Caucasian	Third
Amber	Female	22	Caucasian	First
Jordan	Male	22	Caucasian	First
Kirsten	Female	24	Caucasian	Third
Scarlet	Female	24	Caucasian	Third
Alexis	Female	22	Black	First
Kayla	Female	22	Caucasian	First
Rachel	Female	23	Caucasian	First
Mikayla	Female	31	Caucasian	First
Jared	Male	24	N/A	First
Justin	Male	23	Caucasian	Second
Jenna	Female	31	Caucasian	First
Stephanie	Female	44	Caucasian & Native American	First

Memorable Messages About Graduate School

Research questions 1a asked if FGC students received memorable messages that encouraged them to apply for graduate school. Memorable messages are messages that can be recalled for a long period of time and which have an influence on the receiver's life (Knapp et al., 1981). Eight out of 13 interviewees stated that they had received a message from someone and that message had encouraged them to apply for graduate school.

Kayla reported that she received a message saying "you can do this...you'll be fine...you'll really enjoy [graduate school]," while Jordan received one stating "you are fully capable of pursuing graduate work...honestly I think you can do this...you're good enough, to do this..." Another student who received a memorable message encouraging them to attend graduate school was Amber, who cited a message that stated "you're going to grad school...You're good enough and it would be a waste for you not to do it." Stephanie also cited a memorable message that she received encouraging her to attend graduate school. This message was a simple "you should go to grad school."

While some FGC/G students were able to mention a specific memorable message that they received encouraging them to attend graduate school, other students did not cite a specific message. However, almost all students mentioned a time when someone assisted them or encouraged them to apply. For example, Justin stated that while he debated staying in school to receive a minor, his professor told him "if I was going to do that and maybe stay an extra semester it'd be kind of pointless, like why not stay three extra semesters rather than just one?" Although Justin did not cite this as a specific memorable message, it appears to be one since the student was able to recall the message

and it influenced him to attend graduate school. Rachel also mentioned her advisor encouraging her to go to graduate school, though could not remember any specific message. Along with Justin and Rachel, Scarlet stated that her professor highlighted her strengths and told her why a graduate program would be right for her. Although this was not a specific message, Scarlet mentioned that this not only influenced her decision to attend graduate school but more specifically the program that she chose.

Over half of the interviewees were able to cite a specific memorable message that encouraged them to attend graduate school. A few interviewees did not mention a specific message but could recall a time when someone encouraged them to attend. Thus, much of the time FGC students do not make the decision to go to graduate school based on their own thinking. Someone is there to push these students toward the next step in their education.

Types of Memorable Messages About Graduate School

Research Question 1b asks what memorable messages FGC students receive that encourage them to apply for graduate school. Two types of messages were cited that encouraged FGC students to apply to graduate school. The first type of message is action-oriented, in which the message calls for the receiver (FGC student) to take a certain action (Smith & Ellis, 2001). The second type of message that participants reported were messages of encouragement. Receiving these messages assisted these FGC students in the decision-making process of attending graduate school.

Action-oriented memorable messages. Action-oriented messages in these results called for FGC students to attend graduate school. Jared stated that his professor told him: “you know I don’t want to push you, but I think you should go into [the

sustainability program].” This message not only concerned graduate school in general, but the source pushed for a specific program. Along with Jared’s action-oriented message, Amber stated that her professor told her: “...you should really think about [graduate school]...you’re going to go.” Amber mentioned that she would have never thought about graduate school had this person not told her to consider it. Jordan also received action-oriented messages. These messages included: “When you’re in grad school, you’ll understand what this is like,” “keep [graduate school] in mind,” and “you should consider going to grad school.” These messages were not just encouraging, but also called for Jordan to act.

Messages of encouragement. Along with action-oriented messages, encouraging messages toward the student were also given to FGC students. Amber stated that the source of her messages told her that “it would be a waste for you not to go, ‘cause I think you could honestly be one of the best scholars.” This encouragement helped Amber to believe that she could do it. Along with Amber, when Jared asked his professors whether or not he could make it in graduate school, his professors said: “of course,” which Jared stated as “huge” toward his decision to attend graduate school. Along with Amber, in a member check due to not receiving enough information in her interview, Kirsten stated via a member check that she received the message: “with your good grades...anyone would be lucky to have you.” Kirsten stated that this message was encouraging to her.

Memorable Messages from Instructors

Research Question 2 asked whether FGC students received memorable messages regarding graduate school with an instructor as the source. Six out of 13 interviewees mentioned an instructor as a source of help in their decision-making process. Some

interviewees said their advisor/instructor was the source of a message. However, since these students mentioned these people as their advisors first, those results will be provided in the results of Research Question 3. Two respondents mentioned specific memorable messages from an instructor, and three did not recall specific messages but were able to recall conversations. Multiple interviewees stated that they had a professor assist with the process of questions and applications, and multiple interviewees mentioned the credibility of the instructor in reference to the influence of their opinion.

Specific memorable messages. Three students recalled specific memorable messages from an instructor. As previously mentioned, Amber's professor told her "you're going to grad school," and "you're good enough and it would be a waste for you not to do it." Receiving these messages from an instructor that Amber knew well was important in her decision to attend graduate school, as she stated that she would have otherwise not considered it. Along with Amber, Jordan stated a couple of messages that he received from an instructor encouraging him to attend graduate school. As previously stated, his instructor said to him "when you're in grad school you'll understand what this is like." Along with this, another instructor told him consistently that he was capable of doing graduate work and that he should consider attending graduate school. These messages were influential in Jordan's consideration and ultimate decision to attend graduate school.

Jared also stated that his professors encouraged him to attend graduate school. He had three professors tell him "of course" when asked if they thought that he would be a good fit for a graduate program. As mentioned previously, one of these professors went so far as to say "Jared, we would accept you in a second...you know, I don't want to push

you but like I think you should go into [the sustainability program].” These memorable messages gave Jared the push that he needed to apply for graduate school.

Providing encouragement. While two students did not have specific messages that they recalled, they remember talking to an instructor about graduate school. Scarlet stated that her instructor “highlighted a lot of [her] strengths,” and told her why a graduate “program would be good for [her] versus specifically why I would have to go to a program for [her] career.” Along with Scarlet, Justin stated that his instructor encouraged him in his abilities and passion for education multiple times. Jenna also recalled a conversation that she had with a professor from a prospective graduate program. Jenna said that this professor “was really open to...being a support...She was really...supportive, and you know, willing to take the time to help me.” While this was not a professor that Jenna previously had, she said that this conversation influenced her decision to attend this college.

Helping with the process. While many instructors were a source of encouragement for FGC students, six interviewees (the same five who discussed encouragement and one additional interviewee), stated that an instructor assisted in answering the student’s questions and the process of applying to graduate school. For example, Scarlet stated that her instructor “helped [her] with the process,” and told her “...steps to what, what this degree looks like in undergrad and what you need if you want to continue on.” Scarlet also stated that talking to this instructor was “kind of a reality check.” If she had not discussed graduate school with her instructor, she would not have understood that she needed a master’s degree to do her dream job. Jenna also mentioned that during her talk with a professor, the professor told her what the program was about,

what she needed for the application process, and “just gave [her] an idea of what the program was like.”

Amber also mentioned her instructor assisting with the graduate school process. Amber said she asked her professor what graduate school was like, if she was good enough to be in a program, and more. Her professor also “would send [her] Facebook links to like, different schools. And he’d be like ‘I know you’d like this school, here’s a journal here...’” She stated that he pushed her into applying. Jordan also sat down with his professor multiple times to discuss graduate school. It was during these meetings that she told him what the program was, how many credits he needed to complete his master’s degree, classes that he would take, and “kind of the logistics of the degree.” Jared stated that he did most of the application process himself. However, when he hit a road block he had people to go to. Because of the answers and assistance these FGC students received from their instructors, the decision-making and application processes were easier.

Instructor credibility. The encouraging messages and replies to questions reported above were well taken by the interviewees, largely due to the professor’s credibility. Three of the six students who stated that an instructor encouraged or helped them with the decision-making process mentioned the instructor’s qualifications for giving this advice and encouragement. For example, Jared stated that he thinks that his instructors “embody what [he] considers to be the ideal human being...in their pedigree...” Jared also stated that because his instructors “are constructed to be kind of in the hierarchy,” when it comes to academics and the student-teacher relationship, if they had told him that he was not smart enough to attend graduate school, he would not have attended.

Along with Jared, Justin also mentioned his instructor's credibility when giving advice. He stated that he "obviously believed her and [he] thought...she's just incredibly intelligent and...she has her doctorate, she knows what she's doing..." Because of this instructor's perceived intelligence and professional degree, Justin took her advice seriously and attended graduate school. Jordan also mentioned his instructor's credibility, stating "having someone outside my family have confidence in me and believe in me... and express...encouragement and confidence is really impactful because it's people that are within...the sphere of education..." Because Jordan's parents do not have college degrees, his instructor's encouragement impacted him more than his parents'. The credibility and qualifications of instructors, especially when compared to parents of FGC students, are an important aspect of the advice and encouragement that FGC students receive.

Out-of-class-communication. The previously mentioned memorable messages and conversations that the interviewees had with their instructors took place outside of class, via out-of-class communication. Out-of-class communication is "interactions outside of the formal classroom...it includes advising, seeking out faculty to ask questions about class content...and/or student/faculty discussions about non-class related issues" (Nadler & Nadler, 2001, p. 242). When asked if the conversations that Justin had with his professor took place outside or inside of class, he replied:

...it was probably more outside of class. Just because, when I started, like when I started getting the idea of like this is what I want to do, um, it was...the summer before my senior year. And so like, we would meet up like, maybe once a month and so it was a lot of...interaction outside of class just because I didn't have class

with her then. And then my senior, like I went through my senior year and we would still meet up, um, I would say monthly probably.

Because Justin did not have class with his instructor at the time, they partook in out-of-class communication, which continued throughout the rest of his undergraduate career. Through out-of-class communication, Justin was able to understand the master's program and made the decision to attend.

Along with Justin, Rachel also stated that she used out-of-class communication to talk with her instructor. When asked if her conversations with her instructor were outside of class, Rachel responded:

It was usually during her office hours because most of the time she taught the 100, 100 level classes which were really big. So um, it was just easier to catch her with her office hours or schedule a time.

Regardless of motivation for out-of-class communication, conversations regarding graduate school often took place outside of the classroom. Most often, these conversations were initiated by the student.

Student seeking out-of-class communication. Seven interviewees reported seeking out their instructor to ask questions about graduate school. For example, Jenna stated that she was curious about a graduate program. Thus she contacted an instructor within the department that she was considering. She mentioned that she contacted her via phone and email to ask questions. Along with Jenna, Alexis also sought out an instructor to ask about graduate school. Although Alexis' parents were the ones who suggested graduate school as an option, she still went to her instructor for questions about the process and the program.

Scarlet also stated that she went to her instructor for questions and answers. While her instructor did provide some details regarding the graduate program to Scarlet's class, Scarlet then "sought her out to have that conversation, more on 'what's the next step?'" It was within these meetings initiated by Scarlet that she ultimately realized that she needed a graduate degree to have the career that she wanted. Along with Jenna, Alexis, and Scarlet, when asked if her instructor/advisor sought her out to have a conversation about graduate school, Rachel stated "I sought her out, actually. Because, um, I changed from an English major to a psychology major, and as I got closer to graduation, I um, decided I wanted to continue on." Similar to Jenna, Alexis, and Scarlet, Rachel had already been considering graduate school, but sought out an instructor/advisor for information and answers. These FGC/G students are not unique in this aspect, as most of those who reported out-of-class communication with an instructor said that they sought that instructor out.

Professor seeking out-of-class communication. While most interviewees that reported out-of-class communication with their instructor stated that they sought out the conversation, two students stated that their professor initially sought them out to discuss graduate school. When asked if her instructor sought out communication with her, Amber replied:

Yeah, definitely. Um like, I wasn't thinking about it at all, but the reason he did it at Central States was there was so many people there that he was like 'you're going to go meet these people.' So yeah, he definitely sought me out.

Had Amber's professor not initiated this conversation, Amber would not have considered graduate school. However, Amber stated that she then initiated further conversations in order to ask questions about a graduate program.

Along with Amber, Jordan stated that his professor also sought out communication with him. He stated:

...she sought to give me information and wanted to present information to kind of recruit me uh, at some capacity. To really seek out my attention for considering graduate school. I don't know if I was on uh, a short list, or in a black book about people to recruit, but I, at times I kind of felt like that's how I was being treated, which is fine because I obviously have graciously accepted the...messages...

Although Jordan had received hints from a previous instructor and a previous advisor, he mentioned that the conversations that were started by this instructor were ultimately the factor that influenced his decision to attend graduate school. While only a couple of interviewees had conversations that were initiated by their instructor, the two that did would not have sought out communication and would not have considered graduate school.

Memorable Messages from Academic Advisors

While many FGC students may receive memorable messages regarding graduate school from instructors, some may receive them from an academic advisor. Research question three asked "do academic advisor memorable messages influence a first-generation college student's decision to apply for graduate school?" Interviewees reported receiving encouraging messages from advisors; others stated that their advisor answered questions and assisted in the application process, and some interviewees

mentioned their advisor's credibility when allowing an advisor to influence their graduate school decisions. Some participants said their advisor had also been an instructor of theirs. However, because the interviewee referred to them first as an academic advisor, those results will be discussed in the advisor section.

Specific memorable messages. Kayla was one interviewee who mentioned that her advisor was also an instructor of hers. However, she said that she knew this person as well as she did through advising appointments. Kayla stated that when she had doubts about whether she would make it through graduate school, her undergraduate advisor told her "you can do this...you'll be fine, you'll really enjoy it." Along with this message, Kayla recalls believing that once she changed her major, her plans to teach for a career would not be a possibility. The turning point for Kayla was when this same advisor told her "oh you can still teach, you can still do grad school." When Kayla felt as though she could not pursue graduate school and her career aspirations, her advisor reassured her that she could do it both logistically and with her strengths as a student.

Along with Kayla, Jordan also reported an academic advisor telling him about graduate school. He stated that although it was early in his undergraduate career, and it was not necessarily a big push to apply for graduate school in the future, his academic advisor "planted the seed.." Jordan stated that his advisor told him to "keep [graduate school] in mind." Although this was not Jordan's major push to attend graduate school, it forced him to consider it from the early stages of his academic career. Kirsten was another participant that mentioned her academic advisor when asked how she decided to attend graduate school. Via a member check, Kirsten stated that her advisor told her "with your good grades...anyone would be lucky to have you." Kirsten stated that

although she had already been considering graduate school, hearing this message from her advisor encouraged her to push on and apply.

Helping with the process. While a few students reported receiving memorable messages regarding graduate school from an academic advisor, more reported that their advisor answered questions and assisted with the process. For example, Jared stated that his advisor went so far as to buy him books about being a graduate student. Also, the advisor assisted in choosing the school that he ultimately decided to attend. Because of her assistance and influence, Jared said “I don’t think you can do it without somebody like that. I mean maybe you can, I don’t, I’m not that, I don’t know, strong, that I would have done it all myself without any guidance.” Without his advisor’s help throughout the process of applying to graduate school, Jared may not have made it. Similar to Jared, Rachel also mentioned her academic advisor assisting her through questions and the process. Rachel stated that:

She wrote, it was a letter of recommendation I think? And um, just kind of helped me get to all the links to, to the graduate programs and how to apply to them.

Because I had no idea what I was doing.

Along with Jared, Rachel knew she wanted to attend graduate school. However, getting through the process would have been more difficult without her advisor.

While instructors are instrumental in assisting and encouraging FGC students through the graduate school decision-making and application process, academic advisors are influential as well. Many participants reported an advisor helping them in some way, whether it be through a memorable message or throughout the process of applying and

answering questions. Without receiving help from an academic advisor, FGC students may not pursue a master's degree.

FGC Students Questioning Themselves

Before many of the interviewees made the decision to attend graduate school, they found themselves questioning their abilities. Five participants wondered whether they would be able to attend and finish a graduate degree successfully. Because of these issues, the decision-making process was difficult. Jordan was one participant who questioned himself. He stated:

I felt like I, I don't know if I can do the work, if I'm capable of, I know I'm intelligent enough to be able to comprehend this higher level of thinking...but the actual work of...'butt in chair time' as [advisor] says, I'm not as confident in that. And I would also express that I don't know if I'm capable to do that, to push myself to that level.

Alexis also questioned this ability when considering graduate school. She stated that she asked herself whether she could do another two years of school after completing a bachelor's degree. Amber stated that she questions herself while in the program, too. "Even like, when I'm like trying to do my homework, and I'm like 'I'm too dumb for grad school, I can't do this.'" Self-doubt did not leave Amber's mind even after beginning the work.

Questioning oneself can affect FGC students as shown through the results of this study. Whether FGC students question themselves during the decision-making process of attending graduate school, while in the program, or both, many interviewees faced self-doubt in either their intelligence, maturity, or ability to complete the work that a master's

degree requires. The questioning may affect an FGC student's decision to attend graduate school.

Instructor and Academic Advisor Influences on an FGC Student

Because many participants reported that they questioned their abilities to perform well in graduate school, their instructor or academic advisor encouraged them and reassured them of their abilities. This encouragement and assistance affected multiple participants beyond the decision-making process. Participants stated that this encouragement and assistance influenced them in two ways: First, it allowed some to believe in themselves, and second, it impacts their communication with this instructor and/or advisor today.

Confidence in abilities. First, some interviewees mentioned that the encouragement they received allowed them to start believing in their abilities to be successful in graduate school. For example, Amber stated:

...this professor made me believe in myself. So far like, my high school career like, I was the kid that failed pre-calc., like I was the kid who was on her phone, I didn't care about school. And I got to college and I started to like, decide I'm going to care now...And I did and he was the first one to be like 'you're good at this. Like you should really think about really doing [graduate school].' Instead of just like trying to pass me through, like all the other teachers did, he like really...pushed me as an individual, to like believe in myself.

Amber's belief in her abilities impacted her decisions and work in graduate school. She also stated that when she feels as though graduate school is too difficult, she remembers

that she has someone out there who is believing in her and in her abilities to be successful. This confidence allows Amber to persist.

In addition to Amber, Jordan also mentioned the confidence that he has now. About the messages that he received from his professor and academic advisor, Jordan stated:

...having someone be that confidence that I'm lacking has really stuck with me because they, they can say that to other people as well, but they're not saying it to everybody. Right, there's only 12 of us in our program...and of those 13 I'm one of them...and there's 60 undergrads, potentially who could do this. And there's thousands of students on campus who could do this. But they sought to tell me about it. And that's what really resonated.

Via messages that Jordan received from his instructor and advisor, he was able to realize his potential in the realm of graduate school. Jared was also one who mentioned the confidence that his professors gave me through the messages they shared with him. When asked if these messages have an influence on him today, Jared replied:

Oh, ten-fold. Yeah. Absolutely. Yeah...I heard a quote the other day...something like I think, I want to say it's less than 13 percent of people go to graduate school...So the fact that I'm in, I don't know technically the top 13 percent...Um, so to know that somebody has the confidence in you to go through and pass it...and definitely go further, is just huge...Having confidence from other people, because we all doubt ourselves, it's just completely natural. Um, but appraisal from others is like huge, especially when it comes from those characters.

Along with Jordan, Jared mentioned his professors having confidence in him to be a part of the small percentage that achieve a master's degree. Receiving encouragement from professors and academic advisors can influence an FGC student's decision to attend graduate school, along with their confidence and belief in their abilities to finish a master's degree.

Continued communication with the source. Another way that memorable messages from instructors and academic advisors are able to influence an FGC student is in continued communication with the source. Multiple participants mentioned that they still talk to the source of the message or assistance, even after needing to for school purposes. For example, Bree said "I'm so thankful for [the assistance]. And I still communicate with [advisor] now, uh, but she, without her I would have made it to grad school I don't think. She really helped me through understanding it all." Not only did this assistance from her advisor help Bree to attend graduate school, but they are still in communication with each other.

Along with Bree, Justin also mentioned that he is still in contact with the professor who encouraged him to attend graduate school. This professor is now his boss, who observes the lecture that he teaches while finishing his master's degree. Justin stated:

I would say, she just like, she's been first-hand probably the most, the person who has seen the most growth in me. Like professional growth. Um, and she like, comments on just like how I communicate with people and how I...I lecture in a class of like 300 students...But just her comments in that influence me a lot...So, the two classes that I TA for, um like she's the head teacher. Um, and then we meet weekly just based on things for classes of like stuff for me personally, so.

While Justin must continue communication with his professor due to her being his boss, this communication continues to influence his confidence in teaching and personal aspects. Amber is another participant that mentioned having continued communication with her instructor because of the messages that she received from him during her undergraduate career. Memorable messages from instructors and academic advisors are not only able to influence an FGC student's decision to attend graduate school, but also confidence in their abilities, and communication in the future.

Non-traditional Graduate Students

Three participants had taken time off after completing their undergraduate degree. Mikayla is currently 26 years old, Jenna is 31, and Stephanie is 44. These FGC students reported making the decision to attend on their own, with no real memorable messages encouraging them to do so.

Mikayla was one of these participants who had originally planned to work toward a master's degree. However, she took a few years off after her undergraduate career. She stated:

I wasn't really sure why I [going to get a master's degree], it's just everyone was doing it and so I guess that's something I have to do, too. Um, and then once I got [an undergraduate] degree, I was like 'well I can't really do much with this.' And so then the longer I went on just doing other things, I was like okay I should probably do something with this, so I ended up going back...It was really on my own accord...

Although Mikayla did not originally have a certain reason to work toward a master's degree, after taking time off she realized that she needed one to do the career that she

wanted. Jenna also had already made the decision to attend graduate school before talking with a professor from the school she chose. She said:

...right before grad school I was teaching. Uh, I was an elementary teacher and I had just recently had my first child. and I've always thought, you know maybe grad school was something I wanted to pursue. but I didn't quite know what area...I was kind of exploring different programs...

While Jenna did talk to a professor in the department, she sought this person out to ask for information because she had already made the decision to work toward a master's degree. Stephanie also took time off after her undergraduate career before pursuing a master's degree. She stated:

...I decided I wanted to be a high school guidance counselor. Which I needed my master's degree in counseling. And so I actually...was in the process of applying, you know like filling out the paperwork and getting my references and things like that when I was finishing up my undergrad. But um, I was engaged, and then I got pregnant...

Stephanie had original plans to attend, but due to life events did not start for a while after receiving her bachelor's degree. However, she stated that because she had always wanted to receive a master's degree, she eventually decided to return to school.

After being on the job market with a bachelor's degree, all three of these participants realized that they needed a master's degree to have the career they wanted. Because they needed a master's degree, each interviewee made the decision to attend graduate school. These decisions were made solely by themselves.

Conclusion

Overall, multiple participants stated that they recalled a particular memorable message that they received regarding their attendance in graduate school. These messages consisted of both action-oriented and encouraging messages. However, some participants also stated that they did not recall any specific message, but remembered having conversations with an instructor or advisor about graduate school. Both instructor and academic advisors were able to encourage these FGC students to attend graduate school, along with helping them through the process of asking questions and applying. Out-of-class communication was particularly notable within these conversations, and the students generally sought out communication with an instructor or advisor to discuss graduate school. Because many participants questioned their abilities of successfully achieving a master's degree, the encouragement and advice that they received influenced them in multiple ways. The upcoming chapter discusses the results, as well as provides implications, limitations, and directions for possible future research.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Summary

This study disclosed themes within and about memorable messages that FGC students received from instructors and academic advisors regarding students' potential attendance in graduate school. Memorable messages are "verbal messages which may be remembered for extremely long periods of time and which people perceive as a major influence on the course of their lives" (Knapp et al., 1981, p. 27). To analyze these messages and understand FGC/G students' decisions to attend graduate school, I conducted face-to-face semi-structured interviews with 13 FGC/G students about their decision to attend graduate school. By interviewing these participants, answers were provided to the previously posed research questions:

RQ1a: Do first-generation college students receive memorable messages that encourage them to apply for graduate school?

RQ1b: If so, what memorable messages do first-generation college students receive that encourage them to apply for graduate school?

RQ2: Do instructor memorable messages influence a first-generation college student's decision to apply for graduate school?

RQ3: Do academic advisor memorable messages influence a first-generation college student's decision to apply for graduate school?

With the growing necessity for a master's degree (McCall, 2007), many students are striving to reach this accomplishment (U. S. Department of Education, 2016). However, there is a substantial disparity in the graduate school attendance of FGC students (Engle & Tinto, 2008). Many FGC students face challenges that may prevent

them from going to graduate school (Carter & Robinson, 2002; Coffman, 2011; Garcia, 2010; Millett, 2003; Pascarella et al., 2004; Stephens et al., 2012; Stephens et al., 2014)

Through the memorable messages framework (Knapp et al., 1981), I analyzed the transcriptions of the semi-structured interviews for common themes regarding the FGC student's decision to attend graduate school. Since I was seeking to understand how instructors and advisors were able to specifically influence an FGC student's decision to attend graduate school, the memorable messages framework was appropriate for the study (Knapp et al., 1981).

The first question of the research study asked whether FGC students receive memorable messages that encourage them to apply for graduate school. According to the results of this study, many FGC students do receive memorable messages that encourage them to apply for graduate school. Eight of the thirteen students interviewed stated that they remembered receiving a verbal message that influenced their decision to attend graduate school. Some of these participants recalled specific words that the source said to them, including a message to Jordan who's advisor told him: "you are fully capable of pursuing graduate work...honestly I think you can do this...you're good enough to do this..." Being able to recite specific messages supports Knapp et al.'s (1981) claim that memorable messages "are able to be remembered for extremely long periods of time" (p. 27).

While Stohl (1986) found that 100 percent of 42 respondents in a study were able to recall a memorable message, this study shows otherwise. Participants mentioned in the above paragraph stated that they recalled receiving memorable messages which encouraged the idea of graduate school while other participants stated that they did not.

However, based on the definition of a memorable message as previously cited (Knapp et al., 1981), it appears some of these participants who said they did not recall receiving a specific message were later able to recite a message regarding graduate school from an outside source. Thus, these participants may not have realized they had received a memorable message. For example, Justin said that he did not remember receiving a message regarding graduate school. However, he later stated that when he considered staying an extra semester to get a minor, “[my] professor said if I was going to do that and maybe stay an extra semester it’d be kind of pointless, like why not stay three extra semesters rather than just one?” While Justin said that he did not remember a particular message, he remembered this statement from his professor which impacted his decision to attend graduate school. Along with Justin, Kirsten also said that she did not recall receiving a message from someone regarding graduate school. However, she later mentioned that her advisor told her “with your good grades anyone would be lucky to have you,” which encouraged her in her decision to work toward her master’s degree.

Both messages presented in the above paragraph, along with all other memorable messages participants reported, impacted FGC students’ decisions to attend graduate school. Knapp et al. (1981) stated that a memorable message affects a person’s life in some way. Whether the participant realized the message they received was memorable, without receiving memorable messages from an outside source, these participants may not have made the decision on their own to attend graduate school.

The second Research Question asks what memorable messages FGC students receive that encourage them to apply for graduate school. Two types of messages were seen in the data from the interviews. The first type of message that showed through the

data is action-oriented messages. Action-oriented messages call for the receiver to act on something (Smith & Ellis, 2001) as compared to “weak scripts” in which a general statement of expectations is given to the receiver without specific instructions (Abelson, 1976). Many participants reported a source telling them to attend graduate school. For example, Amber said that her professor told her “...you should really think about [graduate school]...you’re going to go.” Amber’s professor told her to act on this idea of graduate school, which impacted her decision to attend. Along with Amber, Stephanie reported receiving an action-oriented message from a former professor in her department. This professor told Stephanie: “You should go to grad school.” This message contained a direct action for Stephanie.

The second type of message that participants reported was encouraging messages. Encouraging messages included praising of the students’ character and abilities. For example, Jordan reported:

[Professor] would constantly praise the work that I’ve done in her courses and say that ‘You’re really cut out for this...you’re fully capable of pursuing graduate work, you have um, great inquisitiveness...regarding communication studies...’ and just being capable to physically do the work. To actually commit hours and hours and essentially two years of time to one topic. And she was very confident that I would be able to handle that and be able to push myself.

Along with Jordan, Amber stated that her professor told her: “you’re not an imposter, you’re for real.” This encouraging message from a professor allowed Amber to seriously consider attending graduate school.

The action-oriented and encouraging messages discussed above were all of a positive valence. Holladay (2002) stated that positive valence will positively impact the receiver. Participants were positively influenced to attend graduate school based on the messages that they received. Not a single participant mentioned receiving a message of a negative valence stating that they should not attend graduate school. Thus, the messages that FGC students in this sample generally received were of a positive valence, impacting them in a positive way toward graduate school. Positive valence is important for FGC students because it appears to assist with some of the questions they may face, as mentioned in the above paragraph.

Research Question 2 centered around the memorable messages that instructors provided to FGC students regarding applying to graduate school. Multiple themes were drawn from the data when focusing specifically on instructors as a source. Some of these themes regarded particular memorable messages, while others were seen outside of the memorable messages framework.

Many participants reported receiving memorable messages from an instructor. This finding is not shocking because of the results from previous research discussed in the literature review. Just as Tae-Hyun Sakong stated that he would not have made it through his undergraduate career without the support of his professors (Mangan, 2015), many participants reported similar accolades about their decision to go to graduate school. As Wang (2014) found, instructors can be a source of support for FGC students while working toward a bachelor's degree. This support carried over into many participants graduate school plans as well.

A specific type of memorable message many FGC/G students reported having received from their undergraduate instructors was encouraging messages. Scarlet stated that her professor highlighted her strengths and told her why she would be a good candidate for graduate school. Thus, the message centered around Scarlet and her abilities rather than solely the benefits of graduate school. Some participants said that the messages they received from their instructors gave them confidence in themselves and their academic abilities, just as reported in previous research (Kuh, 1995; Wang, 2014). For example, Jordan stated that his professor told him: “Honestly I think you can do this. Ya know, you’re good enough to do this, you can do this.” Jordan stated that receiving this message from his professor was “the kind of conversation I needed” in order to make the decision to attend graduate school.

Encouraging messages were prominent perhaps due to the established rapport between the participant and instructor. Many participants reported that they knew their instructor well. For example, Amber mentioned that the professor who gave her the message about graduate school was also her academic advisor and an advisor for clubs on campus in which she participated. The rapport between Amber and her instructor likely influenced her decision about graduate school, as establishing rapport can lead to increased student motivation (Myers, 2009), communication (Menzel & Carrell, 1999; Rocca, 2008; Smith, 2015; Weaver & Qi, 2005), comfortability (Frymier & Houser, 2000), academic performance (Burchfield & Sappington, 1999), and retention (Astin, 1999). Enhancing these outcomes through rapport building may reduce barriers to graduate school attendance. Thus, having a positive rapport with an instructor likely influenced FGC students’ decision-making process of attending graduate school.

Along with the above outcomes, Myers (2009) stated that when there is an established relationship between an instructor and a student, the student may begin to form values and beliefs about education that are similar to the instructor's. Because many instructors have graduate degrees, they likely value education and the furthering of it. Participants may have accepted this value of advanced education, which may have also had a significant influence on the participants' decisions to attend graduate school. Because positive rapport may have impacted participants' decisions in attending graduate school, it is essential that there is rapport between the source and receiver of the memorable message.

Participants who reported having established positive rapport with their instructors also reported receiving memorable messages and having other conversations regarding graduate school outside of the classroom. These interactions are known as out-of-class communication. Participants such as Justin, Jordan, Rachel, and Amber reported speaking with their instructors outside of the classroom. Most of the time the participant was the one to seek out communication with their instructor. There are many factors which may influence a student's comfortability in seeking out-of-class communication with an instructor, one of them being the consideration of graduate school and the other being the instructor's perceived credibility (Myers, 2004).

As the literature review suggested, there are many reasons for a student to initiate out-of-class communication with their instructors. In this study, FGC students who initiated communication with their instructors had already been thinking about the possibility of graduate school. These participants sought more information and sometimes encouragement from their instructors in order to make the decision to attend.

While an FGC student seeking out-of-class communication with an instructor is positive, FGC students are less likely to initiate communication with an instructor (Engle et al., 2006; Gardner & Holley, 2011). Thus, many FGC students may be missing out on the opportunity to learn about graduate school. FGC students that do not start conversations because they are unaware of their options or are uncomfortable with initiating the conversation may not possess knowledge of future educational opportunities as well as the benefits that a master's degree provides. Thus, it is essential that if instructors wish to encourage highly talented and motivated FGC students to attend graduate school, they should initiate these conversations to inform FGC students about opportunities surrounding graduate school.

Three participants mentioned that during their out-of-class communication, they decided to take their instructors' messages and advice due to the credibility that they perceived their instructor to have. For example, Jared stated that he believed his instructors to "embody what I consider to be the ideal human being...in their pedigree..." Further, he stated that had his instructors told him not to attend graduate school or that he could not be successful in graduate school, he would not have attended. Jared held his instructors' opinions in such high regard that he would have changed his plans had they told him to. A couple of participants also mentioned their instructor's credibility but in comparison to that of their parents'. Jordan mentioned that:

Having someone in uh, the outside my family have confidence in me and believe in me and want to share their accolades, and express, ya know, um, encouragement and confidence is really impactful because it's with people that are within...the sphere of education, where as my parents are encouraging me

that's one thing, but these people are doing it full time. These are people that are in academia, telling me, someone who isn't very confident in myself with this, that [I] can do it...

Jordan held his professors' messages in high regards, especially when compared to his parents' messages, when considering attending graduate school. Based on these results, the perceived credibility of an instructor appears to be important in not only out-of-class communication but also the decision-making process of attending graduate school.

The final research question centered around an academic advisor being the source of memorable messages received by FGC students. Advisors are able to mitigate some of the challenges faced by an FGC student and, as shown by this study, are also able to assist in an FGC student's attendance in graduate school. Multiple participants stated that their academic advisor encouraged and helped them through the process of applying to graduate school. For example, Bree mentioned her advisor helping her with the process and answered her questions about graduate school. Bree stated that her advisor "reached out to one of her connections" at a graduate program, and also:

helped me fill out applications and told me kind of what graduate school was like, because I didn't really know for sure...without her I wouldn't have made it to graduate school I don't think. She really helped me through understanding it all.

Perhaps this finding is due to the advising styles that took place. The development advising style focuses on developing a relationship with the student along with developing their educational and career goals (Fowler & Boylan, 2010; McArthur, 2005). This style of advising showed through participants' recollections of memorable messages

and conversations with their advisors. Many interviewees said they knew their advisors well and were able to ask questions regarding a master's degree.

Along with the developmental advising style, the appreciative advising style also showed through the data. The appreciative style focuses on at-risk students, such as FGC students, and helping them to realize their potential for success (Truschel, 2008). Many participants reported that their advisors encouraged them in their academic abilities and characteristics. For example, Kayla recalled her advisor telling her “you can do this...you'll be fine. You'll really enjoy it.” Kirsten's advisor also told her “with your good grades, anyone would be lucky to have you.” These messages were encouraging to these participants and supported their desires to attend graduate school. Developmental and appreciate advising styles are helpful in being resourceful for FGC students who may consider attending graduate school.

While advising style is an important consideration, an FGC student's motivation for conversing with an academic advisor is also important. Participants who named an advisor as the source of a memorable message had functional purposes for communication. Functional motivation includes seeking information about classes and registration (Martin et al., 1999) or in this case, graduate school. Kayla reported asking her advisor questions regarding graduate school. She stated that “It was more me asking questions about it...and so [ADVISOR] gave me all of the information...” By asking questions about graduate school, Kayla received the information that she needed in order to pursue a graduate degree. However, similar to instructors, advisors should seek communication with FGC students to discuss the possibilities of graduate school.

Without advisors initiating conversations, FGC students such as Kayla may not know their options.

Another important finding from the data is the low self-efficacy reported by participants. Self-efficacy is defined by Bandura (1986; 1989) as perceived confidence in completing a particular task. For example, Jared mentioned having self-doubt regarding graduate school. He said that “the self-doubt didn’t go away until I got accepted....well realistically the self-doubt didn’t go away until I passed my first semester.” Even when going through graduate school Jared questioned whether he could be successful in achieving a master’s degree. Along with Jared, Kayla also reported low self-efficacy when considering graduate work. She stated:

... am I smart enough to go to grad school? Will I be able to make it through?...And I was kind of nervous about it because I was graduating a year early so I knew I’d be younger than everyone else so I was like ‘oh, well I’m going to be younger than them, like I already don’t know if I’m like good enough.’ I don’t want to be too immature to like, go be a serious grad student.

As previous research has demonstrated, many FGC students have lower self-efficacy in academics (Young-Jones et al., 2013). Therefore, their confidence in their abilities to be successful in graduate school may be lower than that of CGC students, as well. Further, Pajares (1995) stated that those with low self-efficacy tended to avoid perceived challenging tasks; therefore, the challenges of graduate school may deter FGC students from attending. Low self-efficacy showed through the data as participants such as Jared and Kayla shared the questions that they posed to themselves regarding their academic abilities.

Perhaps these FGC students' questioning of their potential to be successful in graduate school stems from the unique barriers research shows FGC students often face. These challenges include having a lower GPA, less parental involvement in their education, decreased time management skills, struggling to understand the collegiate experience, and being of a lower socioeconomic status (Choy, 2011; Collier & Morgan, 2008; Gardner, 2013; Gardner & Holley, 2011; Horn & Nunez, 2000). However, Kayla stated that when she questioned whether she could be successful in graduate school, her advisor told her: "Oh yeah, you can do this, like you'll be fine, like you'll really enjoy it." Participants such as Kayla help to highlight the fact that the benefits instructors and advisors can provide to FGC students may also carry over to potential FGC/G students. The encouraging messages that interviewees reported were helpful in mitigating these doubts.

Implications

The findings of this study provide support for the memorable messages framework in the context of instructors and/or advisors as the source and FGC students as the receivers regarding the attendance of graduate school. The results provide two implications for those in the academic sphere and for communication studies research. Communicating with an FGC student about his/her options in a graduate program may directly influence the student's decision to pursue further education and future career goals.

First, if academic personnel wish to encourage FGC students to attend graduate school, they must initiate conversations. The findings of the study that most participants initiated conversation with their instructor or advisor raise the concern that those who do

not initiate may never hear their options. Out-of-class communication may be especially important in initiating these conversations. This setting may allow for depth in discourse between an instructor and/or advisor and an FGC student due to the increased accessibility as compared to discourse within the classroom setting.

Along with initiating conversations regarding graduate school, personnel are also encouraged to speak to students' abilities and characters. As stated previously, results of this study show low self-efficacy among participants' perceived abilities in academics and his/her motivation to complete a master's degree. However, when instructors and advisors encouraged students' abilities the doubts and questions that students had were able to be mitigated. Thus, if instructors wish to encourage FGC students to attend graduate school, they should discuss the students' abilities to be successful in a graduate program.

The findings of this study expand on the Knapp et al. (1981) memorable messages framework. Stohl (1986) reported 100 percent of 42 participants in a study recalled a memorable message that impacted their work life in some way. However, three participants in this thesis reported receiving no memorable messages which impacted their decision to attend graduate school. These three participants were older than the other ten participants and had taken time off between receiving a bachelor's degree and attending graduate school. Stephanie stated that although she remembered a former professor telling her "you should go to grad school," this message did not impact her decision. Because of her prior life and workplace experiences, Stephanie previously decided to attend graduate school. Thus, a message may be recalled by a person.

However, the message may not be impactful. The impact of memorable messages deserves further attention.

Limitations and Future Directions

Although this study provides answers to many questions, there are still areas to be explored. This study's main limitation stems from its homogenous sample. Because students from only one university were studied, diversity in demographics was difficult to find. All but three participants were female, which provides some research for males but not enough for strong generalizations of the population. Along with gender, age range was also limited in this sample. Most participants were under the age of 24 and had finished their bachelor's degrees just prior to attending graduate school. Only three participants took time off from after receiving their bachelor's degrees before deciding to go into graduate programs. Next, nearly all participants were Caucasian. Thus, in order to further understand the impact that memorable messages from academic personnel can have on FGC students in their decision to attend graduate school, researchers should conduct further research with increased diversity of gender, age, race, and other universities.

Next, due to a lack of recent statistics regarding the attendance of FGC/G students, this study was based on prevailing information that a strong disparity exists. The most recent statistic found is of a graduate cohort of 1993. By 2003, only 21 percent of these FGC/G students had finished their master's degrees (Engle & Tinto, 2008). Along with this outdated statistic, in an attempt to collect recent statistics from the studied university, no current information was available. The university collects data as to whether incoming undergraduate students are of FGC status. However it is unknown as to

whether incoming FGC/G status is measured. These findings may present an opportunity for stronger implications and generalizations if such information is measured. Thus, researchers should conduct studies with stronger baseline measures and should encourage graduate school personnel at the institutions to collect such data.

Third, some participants reported not receiving a memorable message regarding graduate school. However, throughout the interview mentioned specific conversations that encouraged them to attend. These conversations fit the definition of a memorable message. Therefore, because some participants did not directly say yes, perhaps the question that I posed was worded in a way in which they did not understand, or they did not realize the impact that the message had on them until further questioning. Thus, rewording the question may prove beneficial in eliciting a “yes” response from participants who did not recognize the memorable message initially but later discussed.

Third, while many participants reported questioning their abilities to be successful in a graduate program, previous research has pointed out other barriers that FGC students face in considering graduate school. These barriers include a lower GPA (Strayhorn, 2006), lower socio-economic status (Stephen et al., 2014), and costs of attending graduate school (Clendaniel, 2016). This study focused on ways to encourage FGC students to attend graduate school. However it did not ask what specific obstacles that FGC/G students faced in their decision-making process. While low-self efficacy was a common theme throughout the data, participants did not mention other barriers. Future researchers should consider asking participants what other barriers might have kept them from attending graduate school, so as to identify possible solutions.

Fourth, satisfaction in FGC students' decisions to attend graduate is worth examination. Jordan stated that due to his professor's encouragement toward graduate school he feels pressure to stay with the program. While he did not state that he was unhappy, this pressure may impact the overall satisfaction he feels in his decision. Thus, future research should examine the happiness FGC students feel after participating in a graduate program.

Further, because this study did not examine CGC students, it cannot be known if these results are unique to FGC students. Although FGC students face different barriers than CGC students, the decision-making process of attending graduate school for CGC students may or may not be similar to the results of FGC students in this study. Thus, it is important to investigate CGC students' decisions to attend graduate school, even if just to compare to the decision-making process of FGC students.

Next, while this study did not have a research question regarding out-of-class communication, communication in this context was prominent throughout the findings. All participants who reported discussing graduate school with an instructor reported these conversations occurring outside of the classroom, whether in the instructor/advisor's office or while getting coffee. Because previous research has identified potential benefits of and reasons for initiating out-of-class communication, future research should further examine the reasons, likelihood, and benefits of FGC students beginning out-of-class communication with an instructor in regards to graduate school.

Finally, an interesting group to study may be the parent/s of FGC/G students. Because FGC students' parents face a lack of experience in the collegiate atmosphere, they may not understand the benefits of their student working toward a bachelor's degree,

let alone a master's degree (Tate et al., 2015). Via researching a parent's perspective, this idea may be better understood. Along with the better understanding researchers may gain, they may also find ways to assist in developing stronger parental understanding of graduate school.

Conclusion

This study sought to understand how academic personnel can use the memorable messages framework to encourage FGC students to look past barriers they may have faced in order to attend graduate school. Participants revealed their decision-making process of attending graduate school, specifically in the assistance of college instructors and/or academic advisors. Instructors and academic advisor were influential in the encouragement of FGC/G students' abilities to successfully complete a master's degree, and in the process of making the decision to attend. Future research can focus on a more diverse sample, and understand further barriers and solutions that may be impactful for potential FGC/G students. Through this research, instructors can be better equipped to provide important opportunities to the FGC population as well as providing their institutions with intelligent and capable students.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

CONSENT FORM

Participant Consent Form
 Participation in a Research Project
 South Dakota State University
 Brookings, SD 57007

Department of _Communication Studies_____

Project Director __Kaitlyn Voges_____ Phone No.

605.592.1170_____

E-mail _Kaitlyn.voges@sdstate.edu_____ Date

_11/17/16_____

Please read (listen to) the following information:

1. This is an invitation for you as a student, to participate in a research project under the direction of __Kaitlyn Voges_____.
2. The project is entitled Graduate School Decisions: The Impact of Out-of-Class Communication on First-Generation College Students
3. The purpose of the project is to assess if/how instructors are able to encourage first-generation college students to attend graduate school.
4. If you consent to participate, you will be involved in the following process which will take about _30___ minutes of your time: You will be interviewed and audio-recorded by the project director about your decision to attend graduate school, in a neutral setting on the SDSU campus. After this, you will be sent an email to make sure that I have understood the answers that you gave me, accurately.
5. Participation in this project is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at any time without penalty. If you have any questions, you may contact the project director at the number listed above.
6. There are no known risks to your participation in the study.
7. A direct benefit to participants may be understanding of how to better encourage first-generation students to attend graduate school.
8. There will be no compensation for participation.
9. Your responses are strictly confidential. When the data and analysis are presented, you will not be linked to the data by your name, title or any other identifying item.

As a research participant, I have read the above, have had any questions answered, and agree to participate in the research project. I will receive a copy of this form for my information.

Participant's Signature _____ Date _____

Project Director's Signature _____ Date _____

If you have any questions regarding this study you may contact the Project Director. If you have questions regarding your rights as a participant, you can contact the SDSU Research Compliance Coordinator at (605) 688-6975 or SDSU.IRB@sdstate.edu.

This project has been approved by the SDSU Institutional Review Board, Approval No.:

Appendix B

INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. What is your preferred gender?
 2. How old are you currently?
 3. What is your race?
 4. What year are you currently in your graduate program?
 5. Do you remember a verbal or written message that you received to encourage you to attend/not attend graduate school?
 6. Who communicated the message?
 7. Did this person seek you out to communicate this message to you?
 8. Describe in as much detail as you can what this person did and said.
 9. Describe the situation/context in which you heard the message.
 10. How was the message communicated to you? (e. g. said, written, etc.)?
 11. How old were you at the time you received the message?
 12. Why is this message memorable to you?
 13. How, if at all, does this message influence you today?
 14. What would you change, if anything, about this memorable message you told me about?
- If the source of the memorable message is not an instructor:**
- 15a. Do you recall receiving a memorable message such as the one from [previous source], from an instructor?
 - 15b. If so, repeat questions 2-10.

Appendix C

TRANSCRIBED INTERVIEW

Interview #2 I=Interviewee**December 8, 2016, 10:00am**

K: Do you remember a verbal or written message that you received from someone to encourage you to attend or not attend graduate school?

I: Yeah, definitely. I think the first time I thought about it was um, one of my professors at central states like pulled me aside and was like “you’re going to grad school.” (laughs) So it wasn’t like “you should”, it was like, you’re gonna go. And so he like, was just like encouraging me like, “you’re good enough and it would be a waste for you not to do it.”

So: definitely, he was the one that pushed me for it.

K: So, like, it was one of your professors, had you had this professor for a couple classes? or: like, did you know him well?

I: yeah, I probably had him more than anybody else at that point (1), um, he was my advisor, he was the advisor of the club that I was in, um, so yeah, so him quite a bit throughout my undergrad.

K: Okay, cool. Did this person, uh, seek you out to communicate this message to you, or were you, like [

I: [Yeah, definitely. Um like, I wasn’t thinking about it at all, but the reason he did it at [conference] was there was so many people there that he was like “you’re going to go meet these people.” So, yeah, he definitely sought me out.

K: Okay, great. So: describe in as much detail as you can, as much as you remember, what this person said in that message.

I: Um (.), I think he first started off by being like “um, so, are you thinking about grad school?” and I was a sophomore at the time so I was like “no. (laughs) not at all”. But, I would have graduated in three years so I was like, it was like time for me to make that decision, (.3), and so (.3), I was like “no, I don’t think so”, he’s like “well, you’re good enough. You should, you should really think about it.” He’s like “It would be a waste for you to not go, cause I think you could honestly be one of the best scholars” and I was like (laughs) “no, I don’t think that at all.” Um, and so he just like, from that conversation then, just kept pushing me about it, and would send me like, facebook links to like, different schools (laughs). And he’d be like “I know you’d like this school, here’s a journal here, here’s like this”, so he was trying to like push me into the, um, grad school. Then I just asked him a bunch of questions about like, what it’s like. Like, “well is my writing good enough? Do I have to give a lot of speeches?” And then he just kind of told me, what grad school is like.

K: Okay, cool. Um, so (.3), you kind of already described the, the context of the message, you were at [conference], um (1), what was, what do you think was the reason he did it at [conference]? Was it just like, he was just thinking about it ‘cause there was all these people, or:?

I: Yeah, I think it was just because, um, (.5) like there was so many different schools there and that he really wanted me to talk to. And it was right before, um, that like (1), um undergrad was called the presidential luncheon or something like that, where they have like a bunch of shows, um, with like colleges. And it’s ironic because the three colleges I talked to were the three that I applied to.

K: okay.

I: Um, so yeah, [list of schools]. Um, so I talked to all those people, um, and (.5), so I think that was the reasoning. And I was also at that time like, by myself, 'cause [conference], it's so, it's a lot, so I just kind of like sat in the hallway for like, I need to not be by people. He was like "Hey, you're by yourself I'm going to pull you aside!"
(laughs)

K: That's, that's really cool. Um:, how old were you, you said you were a sophomore at the time[

I: [I was (1) um I was probably 19. (2) 'Cause I started in the [program of study] when I was 18, like right away. So I think I was either 19 or 20.

K: Okay, okay. Um, why is this message memorable to you?

I: I think because this is the professor that made me like, believe in myself. Um (.5) like, (1), so far like, my high school career like, I was the kid that failed pre-calc (laughs), like I was the kid who was on her phone, I didn't care about school. And I got to college and I started to like, decide like, I'm going to care now. I pay for this. (laughs) so I'm going to really try. And I did and he was the first one to be like "you're good at this. Like you should really think about really doing this." Instead of just like trying to pass me through, like all the other teachers did, he like really like, (.5) pushed me as an individual, to like believe in myself so.

K: Okay, cool. That's awesome. Um, how if at all does this message influence you today?

I: It influences me definitely cause we're still like really close. Um, like we talked just like over my birthday. We have like a group message with all of the people we went to school with. Um, and so (.5), I remember like (.3), like even like when I'm like trying to

like do my homework and I'm like "I'm too dumb for grad school, I can't do this" (laughs), and so I'll just remember like there's, there's someone out there believing in me and someone that thinks that I can do this. And in a weird way like, he's like this father figure that I don't want to disappoint. Like I feel like I could tell my parents that I'm dropping out of grad school, but I don't know that I could tell him. (1) Like, and so um yeah, cause he was just so influential in my life that I would be, (.5) like he sent me this picture right when I went to grad school, um, that was like (1), "you're not an imposter, you're for real", and so I like tell myself all the time like "okay, you're not an imposter", so like he still has that influence on me, even though (.2), I'm not (.3), like I haven't seen him in a while.

K: Why do you think that you said you know, "I could tell my parents that I'm dropping out of grad school, but I don't think I could tell him." Why do you, why do you say that?

I: I think it's because I'm a first-generation college student. Like, because they don't really get college anyway, and so when I'm like, "grad school is hard," they're like "yeah, I never even got an associates, it must be hard." And so, they've always like, really believed in me, but they've never been like, "you have to succeed". Where I feel like, it's the expectation that I succeed, like I set myself so high, um, as an undergrad that they're like "okay you have to meet this like top tier expectation", where my parents are like "get a C and that's good enough."

K: Yeah, okay! Yeah, that's really interesting. Um, what would you change, if anything, about this memorable message that you've told me about?

I: (2) Hm: that's interesting. (7)

K: If anything.

I: I don't think I would. Um, honestly like, it had just such a big (1) influence into my decision. (1) Like, I wish that I didn't care what he thought about me as much (laughs), but I do, and so it keeps me going.

K: Awesome. Um, that is actually what I have.