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BC BOUND: A PATHWAY DESIGNED TO SUPPORT
NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENTS

by

FIONA CHAN

A master's thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New York

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Fiona Chan

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in satisfaction of the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

BC Bound: A Pathway Designed to Support Non-traditional Students

by

Fiona Chan

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This paper reviews the creation and practices of the Brooklyn College BC Bound Program, focusing on its mission and structure. The BC Bound Program is a one-semester service at Brooklyn College that admits and supports individuals with their high school equivalency diploma. Through an interview with a coordinator of the program and students who completed the BC Bound Program in their first semester, we can understand its positive impact on college students in their first semester and beyond. Program structure is key in analyzing the process by which the BC Bound program is and can be implemented effectively. Under the direction of Dr. Sharona A. Levy, the BC Bound Program continues to recruit, educate, and support accomplished college students. This thesis depicts a well-structured, effective program that can be used as a model for supporting students with high school equivalency diplomas in higher education.

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INTRODUCTION

The pandemic of 2020 brought with it sweeping changes to the nature of America's public schools and brought us face to face with the harsh reality that the United States' education system was not prepared for those changes. School districts across the country were forced to close, re-open, close again while shifting to platforms of online learning, hybrid learning, and parent-teacher instruction. To say that students have had a challenging time since the onset of the pandemic is an understatement. Not only have students been forced to quickly adapt to completely new methods of learning but families have lost their businesses, jobs, homes and their loved ones. School shutdowns and virtual schooling have compounded what was already a sizeable achievement gap for underserved students and has resulted in students stagnating at their present grade level (Dorn, 2020). For high school students who were struggling academically before the pandemic, the lack of technological resources like laptops and WIFI access has made it that much easier for them to consider dropping out. We have yet to see how significant the long-term effects of the pandemic will be which is why we as educators should act swiftly and effectively on behalf of those students may have dropped out. Before the pandemic, nearly 40 million adults in America did not possess a high school diploma or a General Educational Development Test (GED) credential (Martin, 2013). For students who have dropped out of high school, the GED certificate provides a pathway for post-secondary learning and college graduation. It is a collection of four sub-tests which measure a student's proficiency and applied knowledge of subjects for anyone sixteen years of age or older who is not currently enrolled in high school. Unfortunately, many adult learners who enroll in GED programs do not pass the exam and therefore, do not continue on to college studies. This has created a social dilemma in a country where education is directly tied to increases in lifetime earnings, quality of life and longevity (Carnevale, 2013).

From a macro-perspective, we have seen the impact that technology has on our global and national economies. For educators, technology served as the foundation for maintaining a deliverable service to students learning at home during the pandemic. It stands to reason that in a world driven by the knowledge and application of technology, higher paying jobs will require a degree beyond high school. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, nearly 70% of jobs required post-secondary education in 2020 (Carnevale, 2013). Considering the COVID19 virus has affected every student in the country, what does this mean for the scores of students we may lose to dropout during and after the pandemic? According to Dr. Dorn “Black students may fall behind 10.3 months Hispanic students by 9.2 months, and low-income students by more than a year. In addition to learning loss, COVID19 closures will probably increase high school dropout rates (currently 6.5 percent for Hispanic, 5.5 percent for black and 3.9 percent for white students, respectively.” (Dorn, 2020). For these students, the only other option for entering college is the attainment of their GED certificate. This data exposes the need to create, implement and continually support GED to college programs that create pathways for the over 40 million people in this country who do not possess a high school diploma or GED. Programs that develop and teach curriculums which emphasize decision making values, provide holistic support such as counseling and mentorship and administer group and individual tutoring before and after a student has passed their GED and entered college (Nix, 2012). Furthermore, these programs must be allotted adequate resources to provide student engagement that is grounded in theory, practiced daily, and assessed often. Doing so will bolster the college retention rates of GED to college programs while increasing the number of Americans who will be eligible for higher paying careers and a progress in their social mobility.

As a member of the BC Bound Program, I have witnessed the positive impact that the program has had on the lives of students, and it is because of these practices that students have

been able to succeed academically. The BC Bound students are dedicated and resilient individuals, and they are the inspirations behind this thesis for my master's degree. The students who I meet in the program have incredibly unique life stories and the program structure has supported these unique individuals towards their academic goals. To better understand how these programs create pathways towards college graduation, this thesis focuses on the structure and practices of the BC Bound Program at Brooklyn College in Flatbush, Brooklyn. BC Bound represents a unique approach to adult learner retention by creating pathways for its students to enroll directly into a four-year college (Brooklyn College) after passing their GED exam. This is the only program in the City University of New York system that allows its GED recipients to be admitted directly into a four-year college as opposed to a community college. Through the incorporation of a learning community, a freshman seminar workshop, academic advising, peer mentors, and required meetings with social workers, BC Bound takes a holistic approach to college readiness for adult learners who did not complete their high school studies. And while the BC Bound Program is young, having been founded in 2013, its students have found consistent success in transitioning into college studies. Unfortunately, due to looming budget cuts expected to take place due to the effects of the pandemic, BC Bound is at risk of losing its funding. However, through the use of theoretical framework, detailing the program's structure and practices and the incorporation of student and staff interviews, this thesis argues that the BC Bound Program has met its objectives as a college readiness bridge program and should be continually funded by the City University of New York. But before we measure the impact of the BC Bound Program, it is important to begin with its conception as a college readiness program.

In the fall of 2004, CUNY Chancellor Goldstein created a University Task Force on the Black Male Initiative (BMI). The Executive Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Selma Botman was tasked with identifying individuals with relevant expertise to help develop methods of

overcoming the inequalities that black men face in the K-12 education system, higher education, and beyond. In the final report conducted by the Task force on the BMI in 2004, the theories explaining the staggering employment, graduation, and arrest rates were addressed. Based on the census data for 2000, the employment rate for black males was 55.5% in New York City among those aged 16-64. The graduation rate among black high school males in NYC in 2000 was 31%, and the graduation rate for nationwide black high males in colleges in 2003 was 34%. The report briefly mentions possible explanations of the alarming data on Black men. Popular culture has created a stereotypical image of the black man. “Slavery; pervasive racism; white male privilege; the absence of role models; absentee fathers; the temptation of criminal life; and the glorification of the gangster/bad-boy image” are factors that have been pervasive in the stereotype of the image of a black man. In order to combat these stereotypes of black men, a crucial method is the altering of self-perception in black men. Self-perception begins in the early, formative years of a child’s life, thus the Task Force on the Black Male Initiative was created to help implement positive changes in education for Black Males.

Based on the findings of historically low employment rate among black male teens (19.9%) and young adults (70%), the Task Force made recommendations to CUNY and all educational institutions to change into sources of success for black males. The following points were made in recommendation:

1. Establish strong university leadership
2. Improve access to higher education
3. Increase admission and graduation rates at CUNY Colleges
4. Educate a new generation of K-12 teachers
5. Use the university’s resources to improve employment prospects of black males
6. Develop ways to contribute to the reduction of the incarceration rate for black males

7. Involve experts in the implementation of these recommendations
8. Establish benchmarks

Based on these recommendations, the Higher Education Committee, under the Chairperson of Charles Barron of the New York City Council awarded funding to CUNY to work on improving and obtaining these recommendations to diminish the inequalities of black males in the K-12 education system, enrollment and retention in the education system, employment, and incarceration. The original task force resulted in a working group focused primarily on the long-term effects of support on 5th graders and their college retention.

As of 2014, there are 30 projects that are funded by CUNY BMI across the pre-college level, community colleges, senior colleges, and graduate and professional school programs including BC Bound. The common goals for all programs are the following: increase enrollment and retention of underrepresented students, increase the overall grade point average of underrepresented students, and increase the graduation rates of underrepresented students. Collectively, these goals serve as the foundation for BC Bound's student programming. As a bridge program for students without high school diplomas, BC Bound is able to recruit and assist students of all socio-economic statuses and ethnicities. However, according to the National Center of Education Statistics (2006), an overwhelming majority of high school dropout and GED students fall into both the first-generation and low-income categories. First-generation students (FGS) are students whose parents do not possess a four-year degree from a college or university in the United States and low-income students are those whose household income levels fall below the poverty line according to the United States Department of Education (insert table). These distinctions are of critical importance for both the theoretical framework of this thesis and the structure and practices of the BC Bound program.

Theoretical Framework

Retention

The majority of students in the BC Bound program fall into low-income and first-generation student categories. First-generation students (FGS) are students whose parents did not graduate from a four-year college in the United States, therefore, these are the first in their family to be graduating and often even attending college. When researching FGS, scholars often build a foundation from the work of Professors Vincent Tinto and Ernest Pascarella. Their work in the early 1970s and 1980s is considered the first to focus on the characteristics of FGS retention and attrition rates.

For Tinto, his theoretical model did much to observe and explain the importance of interactions between students and their institutions, or lack thereof, which lead many FGS to leave school. Tinto was careful to distinguish between social and academic systems on college campuses. He utilized individual characteristics he deemed relevant to college persistence into his theoretical model. This included student expectations, past education experiences, goal commitments, college-type (two-year, four-year) as well as their pre-college characteristics (gender, family background, ethnicity, high school academics, etc.) as to better explain the processes of student interactions on campus and their impact on student retention. In doing so, the researcher created a theoretical model of dropout behavior which included students' longitudinal interactions with academic and social systems on campus that eventually led to either the retention or attrition of those students. The author was careful to distinguish between a student's voluntary withdrawal and that of academic dismissal from college. In doing so, he found academic performance to be the deciding factor in dismissal from school, but this was not the case for student withdrawal. Tinto states that student withdrawal "appears to relate to the lack of congruency

between the individual and both the intellectual climate of the institution and the social system composed of his peers” (Tinto 1975).

Tinto’s theoretical framework exposed the need to not only study the processes that led to attrition but also the need to research further into why different students are either choosing to withdraw or failing in their academics. His work gave rise to research of attrition and persistence based on race as well as the study of subcultures which exist within student/faculty peer-to-peer interactions. By clarifying the types of dropout which occur and studying the backgrounds of students and their processes of attrition, Tinto laid the groundwork for retention studies as well as the types of student programming higher education systems should provide to increase retention for first-generation and minority students. Furthermore, Tinto’s model has contributed widely to the creation of hybrid models of predictive student attrition which work to predict dropout events for students of differing academic and social backgrounds. Finally, Tinto’s research was the first to categorize the different types of dropout behavior first-generation students display i.e. stop out, dropout, academic probation, academic dismissal. By categorizing and explaining the nature of these dynamic behaviors, Tinto’s work helped institutions and state legislatures create measures of assistance to bolster the impact of institutions’ retention efforts for college students.

In 1980, Dr. Ernest Pascarella tested the applicability of Tinto’s model as it related to predictors of first-generation student retention. Pascarella worked to build a longitudinal model at Syracuse University that could measure the rates of student college attrition and retention in order to test and predict the validity of Tinto’s conceptual framework regarding academic and social interactions (Tinto, 1975). Furthermore, because Tinto’s conceptual model warns that first-year students are most at risk of attrition, Pascarella incorporated only incoming college freshmen students. The study took place at Syracuse University in 1976 collected surveys from 1,457 randomly selected incoming freshmen who were then categorized according to the same pre-

college characteristics as the Tinto model with the addition of informal student-faculty contact and “fit”.

Pascarella noted that student-faculty relationships contributed strongly to the rates of persistence for those students who returned for their sophomore year. These relationships bore more weight than did student to peer relationships on campus. The study also verified the predictive validity of the Tinto conceptual model as it relates to both retention and attrition. The results of this study gave rise to the importance of first-year support programs on college campuses and did much to highlight the potential risk first-generation students have on dropping out during their first year of college. The year-long longitudinal study helped the Tinto model transition from a conceptual framework to a measurement of predictive validity. By incorporating Tinto’s conceptual model and including informal student-faculty interactions, Pascarella’s model properly predicted up to 81.4% of students who would persist after year 1 and 75.8% of those students who would drop out before their sophomore year (Tinto, 1975). Furthermore, the study concluded that FGS students are most at-risk for attrition compared to their peers and that FGS retention was closely associated with increased rates of informal student-faculty interactions. The study exposed the need for consistent engagement of FGS students on campus especially during their first year.

It is clear that first-generation students differ from their peers by facing challenges unique to students whose parents did not graduate from college. Drawing on the works of Tinto and Pascarella, Dr. Terry Ishitani produced a longitudinal study that continues to highlight the variables which inhibit the overall college retention and graduation rates of first-generation students. Ishitani’s work focused on the pre-college characteristics of students’ grade point average, academic support in high school, guidance counselor to student ratios, and parental involvement and its role on FGS retention. This model also researched the effects of departure types (stop out, dropout, transfer, dismissal, graduation) on FGS. By incorporating this quantitative study into FGS

retention studies, Ishitani provides new insight on how to identify which FGS students are most at-risk of attrition in real time.

Ishitani used a longitudinal study to decipher which long term effects led to consistent rates of attrition for FGS populations. Through event history modeling, he collected enrollment status information at different times in students' college careers. This methodology allowed the author to examine different independent variables which could lead to FGS attrition and create probability scenarios to predict when and why a student would leave college.

The study was conducted at a four-year public university in the Midwestern part of the United States. 1,747 of first-time freshman students and their fall/spring enrollment statuses were measured every semester for five academic years. Students were categorized according to their FGS status, gender, hometown size, high school grade point average and household income. At the conclusion of the five-year study, Ishitani incorporated the measurements of his time-varying effects model to present his findings. In doing so, he concluded that the survival rate for an FGS student was at a significantly higher risk of attrition right after the first year of college. The FGS survival rate was 9% less than their non-FGS counterparts after one semester. However, after six semesters, the survival rate for FGS students was 22% less than their non-FGS counterparts. Furthermore, students within household income categories less than \$25,000 were 49% more likely to dropout in year one than students within the >\$45,000 category (Ishitani, 2003).

In conclusion, Ishitani proved the previous findings from Tinto and Pascarella to be correct through the utilization of event history modeling. Yes, FGS students are at a significantly greater risk of college attrition than even students with one college educated parent. However, the research highlights specific timeframes of attrition based specifically on pre-college characteristics paired to household income. This would allow retention programs to apply event history modeling to their own student data and further establish attrition "at-risk" categories for their students. Doing so not

only establishes categories of attrition risk based on student characteristics but after time, programs can assess the impact of the retention efforts used on certain students who were at specific levels of potential attrition. The research also points to the necessity of incorporating campus initiatives dedicated to impactful student engagement directed specifically towards low-income AND first-generation college students. Creating pathways for college access allows for FGS to enroll in college but it is not enough to bolster their survival rates. For FGS included in the low-income categories, this level of student engagement must begin even before students set foot in a college classroom. Ishitani stated, “Targeting students during the risk periods makes the institutional retention efforts more efficient and effective.” By incorporating the research of Tinto, Pascarella, and Ishitani, retention programs like BC Bound are able to implement their unique student data systems that can spotlight potential student attrition and allow faculty and staff to intervene. One of BC Bound’s support services aimed at creating a smooth transition into college life are the peer mentors.

Mentorship

For the first-semester students in the program, BC Bound upperclassmen are called upon to provide mentorship. In 2012, Roxanne Moschetti studied the value of these same mentorship initiative from the FGS student perspective by comparing data between two specific cohorts at a 4-year public university. One cohort was comprised of first-generation LatinX students with designated mentors while the other cohort was comprised of LatinX students without assigned mentors. Overall, students with mentors reported higher rates of campus involvement, peer connectedness, social integration and academic success. Drawing on Tinto and Pascarella, the author writes that for first-generation college students (FGS), their level of involvement on campus, connectedness and academic integration were important predictors for their persistence and

graduation. The author goes on to explain how the incorporation of peer-to-peer mentoring engages students while improving academic success thereby retention for FGS.

For this study, Moschetti examined the impacts of the peer mentoring cohort for 458 LatinX freshman compared to 86 non-mentee FGS over the course of three years using four different samples of LatinX freshman mentees. Mentees attended UNIV 100 classes together with other freshmen LatinX mentees. Different mentors were incorporated on different class days to assist the professor in their respective lesson plans. Doing so exposed all of the mentees to all of the mentors while encouraging academic discourse to take place throughout the semester. Mentees conducted weekly surveys concerning satisfaction with their mentee/mentor, benefits of the program, improvements for the program, perceptions of connectedness from the beginning to the end of the semester and whether or not the mentees saw their mentors as a form of social capital. The results for the FGS mentee students were overwhelmingly positive for each of the three years. 91% of students saw their mentors as social capital and typical responses to the improvements question included “making the peer mentors their tutors as well” and “Making the mentors exactly as they were for next year” (Moschetti, 2017). Finally, students with mentors reported higher test averages than students without mentors for UNIV 100 post-test.

Overall, the FGS mentees reported to have experienced higher rates of connectedness, academic success and social experiences than their FGS non-mentees. The findings support the previous findings concerning social capital and retention effects (Stanton-Salazar, 2001) while confirming Pascarella’s model regarding informal student/faculty interactions (Pascarella, 1980). LatinX students involved in peer mentorship program experience higher rates of campus connectedness and are more likely to persist through to graduation. For FGS from low-income families, mentors provide a level of social support that cannot be replicated from their friends on campus or even their families. Mentor support provides academic support, role-modeling and goal-

setting that revolve specifically around academic success. Most importantly, the study provides a blueprint for creating retention pathways through mentorship for first-generation students, a practice well-established within the BC Bound program through the culturally relevant teachings displayed in the freshman seminar.

Freshman Seminar: Culturally Relevant Teaching

At its core, BC Bound is a program that exists to support non-traditional, first-generation, low-income students. In Brooklyn, as in America, these students are often minority students as well. Pedagogy is as much a focus for BC Bound as its MSW, mentoring, and academic advisement. For an educational program to be successful, its students must feel supported inside and outside of the classroom. One way to increase the effectiveness of curriculum and instruction for BC Bound students is to incorporate culturally relevant teaching into its freshman seminar course.

In her often-cited article, Gloria Ladson-Billings wrote that, “a culturally relevant approach to teaching helps students understand that there can be and should be learning connected to everyday problems of living in a society that is deeply divided by economic and cultural lines” (Ladson-Billings, 1990). In Ladson-Billings’s study, teachers worked to maintain a balance between cultural competence and the necessary nuisance of standardized testing. What eventually formed was a group of teachers who were individually and collectively focused on implementing cultural relevancy as an underlying theme within their school district’s respective curriculums. In short, Ladson-Billings asserted that teachers must be passionate about knowledge and learning while also incorporating multi-faceted approaches to instruction and assessment.

Culturally relevant teaching does not treat its student achievement in literacy or numeracy as its end all-be all and according to Ladson-Billings, “Culturally relevant teaching must meet three criteria: an ability to develop students academically, a willingness to nurture and support cultural

competence, and the development of a sociopolitical or critical consciousness” (Ladson-Billings, 1990). Culturally relevant teaching is sympathetic to identity, students’ first language and even meritocracy. The culture appropriateness compass in the classroom today can often become confounded by the noise of an administration’s interruption, lack of culturally relevant pedagogy, culturally compatible curriculum and resources, and appropriate familial communication. Because of these potential pitfalls, cultural synchronization in the classroom must be a deliberate mindset. Ladson-Billings argued there should be intentionality in every idea and decision we make in the classroom and our pedagogies must be able to demonstrate cultural competence and protect it and defend like a moral compass. She argued that teachers should be critical of curriculum and resources so that they warrant cultural competence, empower educators, grow their conceptions of knowledge while working towards the consistent attainment of academic success. Dr. Ladson-Billings’s work pushes educators to consider cultural relevance in school administration, teaching and learning. She posits educators to be certain that we are doing enough to give our students a fair opportunity to learn within a pedagogy that can be inclusive and protect against hegemony. Dr. Ladson-Billings stated that “culturally relevant pedagogy must provide a way for students to maintain their cultural integrity while succeeding academically” and that “each action taken by teachers who place students on a path to their destiny belongs to those who would be dreamkeepers” (Ladson-Billings, 2009). BC Bound has incorporated cultural relevance, not only to the program, but has influenced the cultural relevance of the Brooklyn College community. Its origin is rooted within CUNY’s Black and Latino Male Initiative. This relationship allows for guest lectures, workshops, and presentations focused on cultural integration to take place within the BC Bound freshman seminar course.

History of BC Bound

As BC Bound is funded by CUNYBMI, it is important that the program serves the underrepresented population within New York City, especially Black and Latino males in their undergraduate education. However, students are not admitted based on race, gender, nationality, or age, as the program is nondiscriminatory. General Education Test (GED) recipients are also diverse in their race, gender, nationality, and age; thus, the demographics of the program are representative of New York City.

This program was initially created by the Director of Undergraduate Admissions of Brooklyn College, Ms. Penelope Terry, and the former Acting Associate Provost at Brooklyn College, Dr. Sharona Levy, in the fall of 2013. For the purpose of this thesis, individual interviews were conducted with Ms. Terry and Dr. Levy in hopes of accurately portraying the program's onset. The following historical information was shared.

Through a long relationship of working together in different capacities at Brooklyn College, they found a number of individuals with High School Equivalency Diplomas were applying to Brooklyn College. Dr. Sharona Levy was familiar with opportunity programs such as the Search Elevation Education Knowledge (SEEK) Program, which aims to provide financial and academic support to students from low-income backgrounds. With her knowledge and experience, alongside Ms. Penelope Terry's knowledge of the admissions process at Brooklyn College, they decided to create a program designed to give a special group of students the chance to prove that they were capable of course work at a higher level. The first cohort of students was accepted on a conditional basis. Brooklyn College agreed to accept the students with the understanding that they would pass all their classes with a minimum grade of C-.

In the spring of 2013, the Acting Associative Provost, Dr. Sharona Levy met with the Senior Director of Institutional Planning, Research, and Assessment at Brooklyn College to speak about "the numbers" within the programs that she was overseeing. Dr. Levy inquired about the

number of students enrolled at Brooklyn College with a high school equivalency diploma. The original understanding was that there were not enough of them on campus, and if there were, they historically did not do well at Brooklyn College. Dr. Levy was an administrator and professor at Medgar Evers and BMCC. In her time at the community colleges, she became familiar with the non-traditional students. She believed in the capabilities of non-traditional and older students. Brooklyn College has also had a rich history in evening classes for night students and had previously admitted students with GED tests. However, through a meeting with the Director of Undergraduate Admissions, Penelope Terry, there was confirmation that students with high school equivalency diplomas are generally not qualified. They are often denied entrance as regular admission students because they do not meet the criteria. Admission to Brooklyn College for regular admission students is based on a minimum total TASC score of 3100 or GED score of 3000 and proficiency in reading, writing, and mathematics, which is determined by Standardized Assessment Test (SAT) scores, American College Testing (ACT) scores, or Regents scores. Because many GED recipients generally do not have SAT scores, ACT scores, or Regents scores, they do not qualify for admission into Brooklyn College. Simultaneously, the regular admission students at Brooklyn College were low in number. For that reason, Penelope Terry looked into different sources for enrollment of appropriate students (i.e. transfer students and international students). An important figure in the creation of BC Bound is Dr. Elliot Dawes, who was the former director of the CUNY BMI Project. It was his interest in the program that led to the funding of the program.

In Dr. Levy's goal of setting up the BC Bound program, she found that many administrators at Brooklyn College had personal connections to GED programs. The former Vice President for Enrollment Services, Dr. Stephen Joyner, taught classes to students who were studying to get their GED thus he was in support of the BC Bound program's induction at Brooklyn College.

Additionally, the Director of the Learning Center at Brooklyn College, Richard Vento, taught GED courses for over 10 years. Sharona Levy, Penelope Terry, and Richard Vento were the initial driving forces behind the program. It is through their willingness to adapt the program based on the needs of the students that the program has continued to produce positive results. With the student-centric approach to pedagogy and institutional support, the program structure has been a key component to student retention.

Structure of the Program

BC Bound is a program that admits qualified individuals with their High School Equivalency Diploma to enter Brooklyn College as full-time undergraduate students. Students who are admitted into this program are required to be full-time students (enrolled in at least 12 credits) in their first semester with a set of classes that are limited to BC Bound students. In their first semester, students are required to take the following courses: College mathematics, English composition 1, a General Education course, and an Elective. After the first semester of the program, students are not mandated to be full-time students. However, in their second semester, they are required to complete English Composition 2. Students have access to two coordinators, a BC Bound academic advisor, coordinators, math tutors, and professors that are hired to teach BC Bound sections. After the first two semesters at Brooklyn College, BC Bound students are not required to attend any BC Bound classes nor meet with any advisors. However, they are always eligible to receive advisement and guidance from the staff. The academic advisor continues to meet with students for class recommendations and guidance on the path for academic and professional success. The coordinators provide administrative guidance to streamline students' non-academic challenges (i.e. financial aid, Personal Counseling, Tutoring, Student Affairs). BC Bound students require special academic and emotional attention, as they are non-traditional college students, thus BC Bound has created support services for the students.

Students who enroll, and are accepted, into the program have interesting educational backgrounds and life-stories. The population of students range in age from 18 to 58. As of the fall 2016 semester, there are a total number of 45 students enrolled in the program. The reason for many students' desire to return to receive a baccalaureate degree after 10 to 30 years varies greatly. In the third cohort of students is an individual who came to Brooklyn College despite already having a full-time job as a home-attendant for over ten years. She worked 45-50 hours a week at night, knew the strict requirements of the program, and still wanted to attend classes during the day in order to further advance her career. There are a number of BC Bound students who are young parents who want to focus on themselves after years of only taking care of their family. Two students are from a program called Footsteps that offers support services to people from ultra-orthodox Jewish communities. Each new cohort of BC Bound student tends to have a high percentage of individuals who live in Brooklyn. However, the program is comprised of students from Manhattan, Queens, and the Bronx.

The program uses a model of scaffolding to help ease students into college life. For those who have not received formal educations in many years, the program believes that the structure of block classes, academic advisement, and counseling will help students transition smoothly into academic life. In their first semester at Brooklyn College, the block classes are 4 out of 5 classes taken with fellow BC Bound peers for four days a week. The professors of the English Composition 1 class, the math class, and music class are hired and assigned by each department in collaboration with BC Bound to teach the students. The advisement is led by the academic advisor for the program. The academic advisor conducts a series of group and individual sessions with students to ensure students are meeting their academic semester goals, program goals, and requirements for graduation. There are regular in-person meetings and communication via email relating to students' individual academic needs. The program's academic advisor engages the

students in hopes of creating self-sufficient upperclassmen. An important variable that needs to be factored into the long-term success of BC Bound students is their socioemotional state. In the pilot program of fall 2013, Dr. Levy and Mr. Vento found that students were able to succeed academically. However, the missing component was the counseling aspect. Because of Dr. Levy's background with SEEK, she knew of the relationship between the Master of Social Work (MSW) program at Hunter College and the SEEK program in which the program requires an internship at off-site locations. As of the spring 2014 semester to current day, the MSW interns are an integral part of the BC Bound program in supporting the students' emotional needs. During weekly group sessions in a for-credit class, the students openly discuss shared experiences such as financial troubles, family difficulties, past and present struggles accepting school authority, romantic relationships, work-school balance, and cultural acclimation.

The program structure in the first and second semester are strict for most of the BC Bound students. These support services are created with the students' needs in mind; however, the full-time coursework can be demanding for those working full-time jobs while in school and taking care of their families. At Brooklyn College, the General Education Pathways courses are a set of liberal arts courses that all students must take in order to graduate. These classes are in an array of subjects: English, history, mathematics, social sciences, physical sciences, etc. The BC Bound Program's block classes contain seats closed off to just the BC Bound cohort, but the tests, essays, and assignments are not simplified nor assessed differently than the Brooklyn College equivalent courses. The BC Bound mathematics class, English, and general education pathways course fulfill the requirement for the Brooklyn College pathways liberal arts degree. BC Bound students may initially be challenged by the full-time coursework, but the benefits of the block classes far outweigh the challenges.

BC Bound students are often low-income, first-generation students with varying levels of support outside of the Program. Tinto set the stage for educational theorists, but more importantly, it allowed for programs like BC Bound to implement these theories into practice. Tinto's notions of student expectations, past education experiences, goal commitments, and pre-college characteristics are evaluated in the BC Bound admission application and throughout their college career with the BC Bound Program. Because many students are first-generation students, it is imperative to the Program that students use a holistic approach to not only determine whether the Program is a good fit for them, but also to create a realistic plan for academic and social success. Students are exposed to relevant academic information and institutional support, which supports the idea that student withdrawal from school is correlated with students' understanding of larger systems within the university.

One question that the program asks applicants when they fill out an initial application is, "How many hours will you be working in the semester that you attend college?" This question is not intended to penalize the applicant. The purpose, as stated by one of the coordinators of the program, is to bring awareness to the applicant and the Program staff about the factors that affect academic success. Although the student body is made up of a racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse group of individuals, an unintentionally shared feature is the financial challenge. By asking the questions on anticipated workhours, it forces applicants who may eventually become students to self-evaluate while allowing for the BC Bound administrators to create conversations about financial preparation for school. This conversation would be held in the individual academic advisement sessions, freshman seminar workshop, and in conversations between the coordinators and the individual students. The program has been able to approach the admission process and the students' first year holistically because of the number of students who apply to the program.

The BC Bound student cohort has never exceeded 20 students in each new freshman group. In the Spring 2020, Fall 2019, Spring 2019, and Fall 2018 semester, the number of students in each cohort was 8, 18, 11, and 14, respectively. Although unintentional, the small student body allows for students to have more face time with professors and their peers. With smaller class sizes, professors are able to provide more time to students' questions, which inevitably arise. If students feel comfortable asking questions during class, it reinforces the acceptability of dialogue between professor and student even after the first semester. Another positive effect of the small class size was the relationships formed between peers. Because of proximity and the repetition of seeing familiar faces, BC Bound students form professional and personal relationships with each other. Students form voluntary study groups and complete their assignments together. After the first semester of the blocked classes are over, some students even intentionally register for a number of the same general education classes.

There is not a common reason that people drop out of high school, but the decision to attend university, and, more specifically, the BC Bound Program is because of the opportunity and service that education can provide. The learning community addresses this desire for opportunity and service, but also acknowledges that new students simply do not have the tools necessary yet. The two BC Bound workshops in the learning community are led by the academic advisor and Master of Social Work intern. The students receive a "Pass" or "Fail" grade in this course based on participation and assignments.

The Freshman Seminar Workshop is an introduction to Brooklyn College resources while (re)introducing students to the tools necessary for academic success. It is introduced colloquially by one of the coordinators as "a user's manual" to the college that integrates students into campus life. This workshop is led by the academic advisor who invites campus officials to speak about their respective offices. These campus resources include: Personal Counseling, Health Clinic,

Student Disability & Accommodation, Student Affairs, Women's Center, Black Latino Male Initiative, Learning Center, Financial Aid, Residency, LGBTQ Resource Center, Center for Academic Advisement and Student Success, and the Library. The Freshman Seminar Workshop also addresses topics that are academically relevant: Note-taking skills, presentations, communicating with a professor (through different media), selecting a major, etc. The topics for the academic Freshman Seminar Workshop are adjusted to suit the needs of the students in the class and is in the block of classes reserved for the BC Bound students.

The Master of Social Work intern (MSW) leads the workshop related to the socioemotional programming. This workshop has no obvious academic purpose to the students and is usually initially unappreciated for its required nature. This workshop is purely dialogical and can be compared to "group" sessions in psychotherapy. The Master of Social Work intern directs the large group discussion around a topic that is either selected by the MSW or raised by a student. Topics have included: stress-management, being a non-traditional student, time-management, professionalism, procrastination, and mindfulness. The MSW workshop differs every semester in specific topics, however, the fundamental purpose is the same: allow for students to have a common, safe space to discuss potentially taboo or uncomfortable topics. Through dialogue and self-reflection, students are able to learn about topics that affect their academic potential.

The BC Bound Program enables otherwise non-admissible students into Brooklyn College. BC Bound supports Ishitani's models not only by giving access to FGS, but by bolstering students' opportunities for success through the support services which involve student engagement. Many of the students in BC Bound do not fit the profile of an ideal student; they had poor or even non-existent pre-college characteristics. BC Bound students are predominately first-generation students with non-existent or extremely low GPAs prior to dropping out. Their families are also of lower socioeconomic status.

The BC Bound Program is essential for high school equivalency student retention. Before placing the students in the general population of Brooklyn College students, the Program assimilates students. The first-year learning community contains courses that are solely designated for BC Bound students, but it also allows for students to be enrolled in two general education courses that contain Brooklyn College students admitted through General Admission. Additionally, the academic and socioemotional workshops provide guidance, discussion, and lessons to prepare students to be self-sufficient college students. After the first-semester, BC Bound students are able to navigate through the college landscape on their own.

There is a more modern best practice that neither Ishitani, Tinto, nor Pascarella incorporated into their research on retention and attrition, which is mentoring. Their research set the stage for discussions on the importance of mentoring.

BC Bound students are connected with a BC Bound peer mentor. The program hires two peer mentors every academic year to serve as the older sibling who is also a GED/TASC recipient, was admitted into the BC Bound Program, and successfully completed their first year at Brooklyn College. Similar to Moschetti's study, BC Bound peer mentors attend the First-year Seminar Workshop that all BC Bound students are required to attend. BC Bound Program staff also incorporated the mentors into the workshop to expose mentees to an approachable and knowledgeable face. For many students, in the end of semester surveys, peer mentors are recognized as one of the top three services offered by the program.

The BC Bound student does not often fit the image of a traditional student. They are not always aged eighteen to twenty-two. There have been students in their thirties, forties, and fifties. For students who trend older, it is not uncommon for them to be foreign to certain technological abilities that an eighteen-year-old or even twenty-nine-year-old would find instinctual. The BC Bound peer mentors have been younger than their mentees, which has not deterred either individual

from connecting with each other. Because the mentors are open to discuss any topic, they have established a level of comfort for the mentees to approach them. The mentors have also taken initiative by using their own strengths and experiences to support their mentees. One mentor is a computer science major who is well-versed in the latest technology. He establishes text groups each semester to create dialogue between students. In the Spring 2020 semester when all CUNY students transitioned to remote learning, the text group was integral in maintaining a connection and ensuring mentees knew how each of their classes would be operating (e.g. synchronous vs asynchronous, Blackboard vs Zoom, establishing assignment due dates, etc.) The mentors are also active members of the Brooklyn College community. They have joined clubs, studied abroad, formed connections with campus officials, and even worked as paid campus officials. They pursue scholarships and internships. It is important for BC Bound students to see students who were once in their shoes do well after their first year, so that they can envision themselves pursuing clubs, internships, paid campus jobs, and study abroad opportunities.

It is easy for high school dropouts to associate their dropping out of high school as a failure, but the perspective should be adjusted to one of accomplishment; their decision to pursue their high school equivalency diploma should be recognized as fulfilling a goal. There are times when mentors also face academic difficulties in classes, but they are honest with their mentees about their approach to the difficulty. These discussions with the peer mentor present in the freshman seminar workshop allow for the new students to gain perspective. Mentees can learn from mistakes and challenges that mentors face as it happens.

Cultural relevant pedagogy has been a major factor in the success of the BC Bound Program. The workshops are constantly adjusted to suit the needs of the BC Bound cohort. There are commonalities between all students, regardless of whether they received their high school equivalency or high school diploma, such as procrastination, note-taking, and an introduction to

campus resources. However, these topics are brought up during the workshops in a context that is appropriate for the BC Bound students. The tone and context of stress and procrastination differs for individuals who work full-time jobs while going to school, which describes many BC Bound students. It is necessary to value each students' backgrounds and identity and view each student as someone who brings experiences to the table. Stress manifests differently for each individual, but for many BC Bound students, there is a self-attached stigma of "high-school dropout" that resurfaces when new academic challenges occur in their first semester in college. The BC Bound Program addresses the challenges that the students encounter by being sensitive to the needs of the diverse group.

This student-centric pedagogy was essential in the spring 2020 and fall 2020 semester. The COVID19 pandemic brought lasting changes to the lives of college students. BC Bound students are an exceptionally vulnerable population and online learning led to increased financial, emotional, and life balance challenges. The BC Bound Program adjusted the workshops, academic advisement, and social work component to better assist the students during their challenges. The peer mentors actively contacted their mentees over their preferred teleconferencing method. The academic advisor held longer office hours. The tutoring workshop contained more lessons on online learning. Overall, the program accommodated the students based on their socioemotional needs to ensure academic success.

In order to provide the reader with a greater understanding of the program and its positive impact on students, I interviewed members of the BC Bound Program community. These four interviews were conducted for the purpose of the graduate thesis in the winter of 2020. Three interviews depict the importance of the BC Bound Program in the academic lives of students. One of the coordinators of the program was interviewed to provide a different administrative perspective. The BC Bound program provides opportunity to attend Brooklyn College. It provides

support through the learning community, tutoring, academic advisement, social work interns, and peer mentoring. These services have been crucial in the success of the BC Bound cohorts throughout the years. Students, especially in the BC Bound population, are diverse individuals with more than just a quantitative profile from SAT scores, GED scores, and other numbers. Yes, there needs to be some form of assessment, but these interviews will reinforce the value of providing an opportunity for the non-traditional student in conjunction with support services. This first interview is conducted with one of the coordinators of the program. In addition to the role of coordinator, this person has a strong and influential presence on the Brooklyn College campus in academic affairs.

Interview: What is your role in the BC Bound Program?

Coordinator: My role in the BC Bound Program is that of a coordinator, floating around meeting students' needs on a variety of level but it's also revolving around academic support services, providing tutoring, as well as working on the intake process, meeting evaluating potential students as they reach out to BC Bound.

Interviewer: How long have you been working with the BC Bound Program?

Coordinator: I've been with BC Bound since its inception, which I think was 2013, at least that's when the initial conversation started about it. It was proposed to me in conversation. Actually, not even just to me. It was to a group by the then associate provost who mentioned a side project that she was considering. Since it was near and dear to my heart in terms of creative experience and overall interest, I approached her and openly gave my support. "If you need anything from me, whether it's sweeping the floors or answering the phones, I'd like some part in what's going on with this."

Interview: You mentioned that it's near and dear to your heart. Why were you so adamant about joining this initiative?

Coordinator: Previous work experience and just by fluke, I was a tenured member of the English department in CUNY and my class didn't run. This was going back 2005 or even earlier. A friend of mine said that they were looking for someone to teach an evening reading-writing workshop for testing GED students. So, I learned about the exam and I started teaching and that led to a run of about several years if not more of just teaching the reading-writing portion. I just did math-specific courses and then teaching for all the subjects simultaneously. And, that was not through CUNY, but through various non-profits, through the JCC, through a lot of different independent sources, not just CUNY. So, I just had a great affection for the non-traditional student, especially those that are working all day. I think I relate to them fairly well and I understand what they're juggling at the same time, and it was just nice. There's one thing about giving a student an "A" in a college class that is rewarding. But there's something so much more rewarding on a selfish, personal level about helping someone earn a high school equivalency diploma when this is something that they probably have been thinking about working towards for 20 years, if not more. Having no GED to having a GED opens up job opportunities. And many of them are working off-the-book jobs just because they couldn't legally get hired without a diploma, so it really was a game changer. And thankfully, a lot of those students went on to college. It even helped out those who just got their GED and were able to get more legitimate on-the-books position, that in theory, they were probably already doing anyway. Now they are entitled to a lot more and have more options.

Interviewer: How has each BC Bound service played a role in the student' success?

Coordinator: Each student walks through the door with a different set of skills and we would have to insulate the learning community with supports that meet any of those potential needs. So there may be students with academic deficiencies. Maybe they came from another country. Maybe they dropped out of school in the 9th grade 20 years ago. So we need an academic component. We have first generation students that have no idea how to get by in a school environment. They don't know

what a bursar is. They don't know what a registrar is. They don't know about anything. They just think it's the thirteenth grade and everything just rolls up. That's why we have a peer mentor and an academic advisor that spell out all those different things. We have a socioemotional component. We have social workers who help them offset those factors that potentially led them to dropping out of high school in the first place and they're still dragging that negative baggage with them. So it really depends on the needs of the student and where they're at and literally BC Bound turning our pockets inside out offering as many different areas just to give these students a more even playing field to set them up for success. I think overall in a more global importance sense, the most important thing that we give them is overall support and guidance. A lot of them are attending college without getting approval from many other parts of their lives. I think we're this great gung-ho, motivating, positive forces and I think this overarching great sense of support is the thing that fuels them on a daily level. A lot of them question whether they're making the right decision. Because again, a lot of them are making sacrifices without the support from other areas in their lives. We want them to know that they are deserving of this opportunity and this is their time, and they should do this. At the end of the day when they graduate, the benefits will far out-weight any of the negative adversities that they are dealing with on a day-to-day basis to reach that goal.

Interview: What kind of students are generally admitted into the program?

Coordinator: The thing about BC Bound, which I love about the program is that I don't know if there's a general prototype because there are so many different types of students walking through the door. From the students that are 18 years old that just dropped out two months before they graduate to the students who are in their mid 50s that have kids in college on their own and now are thinking they should do this. The opportunity is right for me. It's the diversity which is really the aspect that I enjoy the most because you really just don't know. We have students who are coming to us who are changing more than just their academic direction. They are changing their faith. They

dropped out of religious schools and they're completely changing their lives. Like I said, there are parents who are making themselves the focal point. So this is not just a minor tweak in their identities. A lot of them are really changing their own self-identities in all-encompassing ways. To watch that evolution happen and sometimes it's more gradual than others but it's just a fun process to watch people develop and change and come into their own.

Interviewer: So, there's no cookie cutter student?

Coordinator: No, I would really say there really isn't. I'm sure if you look at data there are some parallels, but the data can also be deceiving. You have to get to know the personalities and that tells the bigger story than just maybe how many high school units when they graduated and maybe their age. I don't think those are really symbolic of who they are. It just happens to be a chronological number put on something. Their motivations, personalities, wants, and tracks. That's the differential that makes them so unique.

Interviewer: Without analyzing the data, how are you able to understand who these students are?

Coordinator: We do rely on data because there are consistent measures of academic proficiency we have to abide by because that indicates how the student would potentially do with the academic rigors of college. I rely on data for the most part around that area but there are students who you think would thrive and adapt quickly to a college environment that are maybe younger in age but sometimes that's not the case. Sometimes it's the older ones that have a different perspective who are a bit more weathered and can handle more in terms of adversities. They don't have the social anxieties that a younger person would have and would be more equipped personality-wise to deal with the flow. You could argue the opposite case as well. It really depends on the hard wiring in the person and their experiences and getting to know them is a better indicator on how they would do academically. The x factor isn't really about them even but it's more about what else is going on in their lives. That to me is a predictor. Are they working 40 hours a week on a night shift while

taking care of kids? Maybe they're not physically well. Mentally. Emotionally. Maybe they're in toxic relationships. Maybe there are food insecurities. Those are predictors and that's not something necessarily measured in some algorithm according to data. But again, data does come into play when in the early assessments and academic predictors.

Interviewer: How would you compare the BC Bound/GED population to the Brooklyn College general admission students?

Coordinator: I think if you pose that question in a different university that is not CUNY, I would say that there is a very big difference in terms of student profile. If we were at a dorm school, the demographics would be a night and day. With CUNY though, I don't feel that there is a big difference. In a lot of ways, there's a very high percentage of students in CUNY that are dealing with other issues that are non-academic that may get in the way of them reaching their full academic potential. I think that is a common bond shared with our GED students. From a demographics' perspective, our GED students tend to average a bit older. But again, the average age of CUNY freshman is about 24/25 if you look at the data. I think that there could be anxieties that build up from students coming out of equivalency programs feeling as if they're the "other," that they're entering college on some kind of plane that's not quite even. I think sometimes they look at things like fairness issues and "I didn't go to a regular high school' and more than anything it's their own securities and their own anxieties. But I think that's also temporary. That doesn't usually last because once they're in a room, I'm one of 50 students in this psychology class. We're all here learning the same information on day one and honestly, the student on the left and the student on the right don't give an ounce about who I am. This is about me. I think they shed the insecurities about their insecurities about their identities quickly. They don't think about the fact that they didn't come from Midwood High School or FDR.

Interviewer: In your experience, what are the typical challenges that BC Bound students encounter in their first semester?

Coordinator: The lay of the land and time-management. They're all smart in different ways but I think a lot of them don't have a sense of the academic discipline it takes to do well in their classes. Just how long do I need to study? What are some of the best practices as far as being a good student? When it comes to note-taking. When it comes to studying for exams. I think that there's a very, very big transition revolving around those things. This even happens on a different level when they're in their GED classes. Most GED classes are not structured like college classes. Most are replicated by high school. It's a lot of chalk and talk. It's a lot of lecture. It's different formatted lessons. In college, there's a lot more freedom academically. And students have to figure things out on your own. I think for our GED students, this is an environment they're completely unfamiliar with. The expectation is that they're walking into a classroom and they're going to be a certain set of notes on the board. They know they have to copy this and do that. I think in the dynamic of a classroom where there's a lecturer who's talking 70% of the time and throw words on the board and there are class discussions, I think students find it difficult to know what to process. How do I sift through this information? How do I study for it? How do I do recall? Just getting a sense of processing and retaining the information I think is a challenge. It's not as if these students have access to other college students to tell them how things are going to run. Many of our GED students are first generation college students, so they're walking into this blind thinking that college is just going to be a more intense environment than they've dealt with in the 12th grade or 9th grade or whenever they were there. It's just getting acclimated into the rhythm of learning in a college classroom that is the biggest thing they have to adjust to.

Interviewer: How does BC Bound combat that challenge?

Coordinator: I think the individual workshops help a lot in terms of talking to students about the expectations and here's what we need to do. Here are some best practices. Here are several forms of note-taking that you can try. We pass on information that we think is valuable and it's not rooted in specific content area. Everything that we do is meant to prepare students to meet the rigors and demands of the courses across the curriculum. They are universal best practices and we also promote that through group work and team building so they're communicating with their peers and they're working with an embedded tutor and getting accustomed to the college supports available to them and how to use them to their fullest potential. Our job is to bring the best practices to them as a first-semester freshman, present them, and even if they don't use them right away, there will at least be a recall and familiarity so when next semester they're in a course where maybe those teachings are a lot more called for and relevant, the students will utilize them.

Interviewer: What is the overall experience like for BC Bound students in their first semester?

Coordinator: Before I answer your question, I want to give a bit of background. In all fairness, some students are a bit of a blank slate when it comes to college navigation. We have to fill in a lot of those gaps because they've never been exposed to it. It's not that we're looking down on them or being condescending. We just want to make sure that they walk with an overall sense of confidence. This is my campus. I know where to find things. I know what these places are. I know who these people are and what they do. From a learning standpoint, I think BC Bound students bring so much to the table because they tend to have past experiences in a lot of different ways and I think in order to make a firm connection with students, it's important to assess where they're at and build on pre-existing experiences with new and deeper information in hopes of engaging them on a deeper level. We're not just presenting a random theory. We're having a warm-up conversation first and even though the content may be something new, they may have experienced something similar in different ways and taking that experience, theory, or knowledge and using that

as a propulsion system in fully understanding the new things coming at them. It really makes them a part of the fabric of the lesson because you're building off of things that they were aware of when they came through the doors. So, I think it's about making them active learners and incorporating them into the conversations and having them learn from one another. I think it's important in college to make college students realize that their perspective is not universal. There are a lot of people with conflicting opinions and that's okay. Luckily in BC Bound, we have folks coming into the program with different ages, religions, origins, cultures, everything. At the end of the day, no one is going to say this one is right. This one is wrong. It's just about building an overall acceptance that this is my perspective. I understand where those other folks are coming from and I think that's one of the huge benefits of attending classes in a diverse university. I think that kind of understanding leads to higher learning on different levels.

Interviewer: The GED students otherwise would not have had the opportunity to attend Brooklyn College.

Interviewer: How would you argue BC Bound has supported the GED population?

Coordinator: Firstly, I think providing the students an opportunity, in itself supports the students in getting one step closer to their goals. The admission process assists students in determining whether this is a good fit for them. If it isn't, then they're advised by the program staff to other universities that may be more conducive to their lifestyle. That is also another way of supporting GED students, even if it means that they would not attend BC Bound. For the students who are admitted, there's so much that goes into it before they even attend orientation in the week prior to the first day of classes that helps to support them. The system is key to ensuring that we provide the opportunity to those who we think need it most. We are targeting the areas where we think these students would benefit. We also maintain good communication with the feeders at the college and beyond who we have contact with. One of the things I like most about the BC Bound structure is

that there is a Learning Community. We have a contained group that we can insulate with all of these support resources and the students tend to act as their best social motivators in many ways. They take classes together and chat and form bonds. I think it's also important that they're able to have that one class outside of the Learning Community as well to expose them to college in a broad sense that is outside of BC Bound. I actually think it's a really good combination of a lot of things. It's a community where they have a closed learning block of courses that they take together and our influence throughout their learning community helps integrate the students together. I think it's the support of the social workers is a team-building exercise that brings closeness. Yes, it's important for students to study amongst themselves, share experiences, and share notes, but I also like that there is the counterbalance of peers outside of the BC Bound Learning Community to help the BC Bound students slowly sprout their wings and getting acclimated to college life outside of the community. Without them taking that class or two outside of the Learning Community, I think it would be too drastic of a change in the second semester. By wading into one class that is not a BC Bound class, they are transitioning which is what we aim for as a one-semester transitional program getting acclimated into fully embedded college students. I think that balance works really well for what we're trying to achieve. It's also about the compassion that the students are shown from the moment they express interest in admission into the program. We know about the challenges that comes with getting a GED and they're coming to us with insecurities, anxieties, a lot of doubt and not a lot of positive support. So we understand and realize that everyone comes with a backstory and experiences, negative baggage. We don't condescend. But we are accessible, patient, and we start from square one with informing them on how things work without looking at them as "the other" and I think that's something that they drag with them. I think that the way that the staff has fun with them and seeing them as unique individuals makes a difference. Busting their chops a little bit can alleviate some of the anxieties. We have an interactive, friendly dynamic. And

that's also a variable in how we support them and ensure that the students also realize we are humans and care for them. We are here to help and we are approachable. We make sure students know that they should not feel bad for asking us for help and approaching us with questions. We are not uptight with our students. Once they let their guards down with us, that's when the good conversations happen and they get acclimated. Everything slowly begins to snowball in a positive direction for the students. We also are very careful with who we invite to speak to our students throughout the semester in the workshops. We don't want to bring anyone in with a negative energy that is going to destruct what we're trying to achieve, and also the instructors for students as well. We've actually identified instructors who we didn't think would be a good choice for our students, not because they're not good at what they do but because we think our students may not relate as well to this particular person as they would with someone else. There's a lot of thought and care that goes into the consistent kind of demeanor that complements what we're trying to achieve.

Interviewer: Do you think BC Bound has been successful?

Coordinator: I'm happy that a lot of folks are starting to realize what I knew, which is that these students would thrive in college with the right supports. And that comes from me working with them. That's a personal "I told you so." I knew that this person had the chops to hang in college as long as they had the right navigation, supports, tools. There's no reason why this person should be excluded because of the life circumstances that they may have been forced into. I think the program works giving the students an opportunity to show that they are worthy in some respects to attend a four-year college. That they have the academic prowess and academic skill set. That they can adapt. Their whole lives they've had to adapt and that's a skill that we can't teach. They've adapted to not having a great education. They've had to adapt to having horrible jobs. They've had to adapt to having several jobs in one year and struggling with maintaining a life with not the best

situations or wages. So there is a certain wherewithal and overall grit that a lot of these students have. That's not all but some of them do. And it's very rewarding to see these students that I knew reach the potential that we knew they had. There are transferrable things that are non-academic that would lead to academic success and determination and grit in the right environment harnessed in the right way definitely pays off.

Interviewer: What is the best thing about BC Bound for the students?

Coordinator: How welcoming and non-judgmental it is. I think that offsets a majority of their fears right away. I'm a fan of priming students for success. I don't want students to walk in through the front doors, sign the application, register the next day and start classes the next day. When I say priming, I mean that there has to be a long lead up preparing them for what they're going to face. I think that priming and accessibility and the program setting the table for them and giving them the helpful nudge is the biggest difference maker in them transitioning and mainstreaming into a college environment. Yes, there are tweaks along the way and even after their first semester, there is always a certain degree of maintenance, but to me, the biggest difference maker is the weeks leading up to the actual first week of classes that gets their minds ready for what they're going to face.

Interviewer: Do you have any memorable moments in your tenure with BC Bound?

Coordinator: It sounds cheesy but every moment has been meaningful. There are so many instances in which students walk in on their first day of classes and have a sense of insecurity to the point of them walking out of class to take a breather. But then there's this gradual change that I see in them where they show up every single day with just a bit more confidence. Then a year later, I'm just peripherally viewing them on campus owning the place. Just in their element without an ounce of anxiety. They're in clubs. They're the spokesperson for certain organizations and just thriving in that environment. To see that happen has been extremely rewarding and gratifying.

Interviewer: Is there anything you would like to say to the former, current, and future BC Bound students?

Coordinator: Regardless of where you're at, there are still chapters left in the book of your life that you can still write. Whether you're at the point where you're graduating, great. There's another chapter. For the folks that are trying and stumbling, but are still going at it, it's a big book. So, just keep grinding away at it. If there's a goal that you want to achieve, there's always time. Don't be held back by a chronological age and thinking that it's a deal breaker because it's not. Think about the euphoric feeling you'll get when you get the degree. So, just know that there are still chapters that you can write to achieve this happy storybook ending that you want to achieve.

The coordinator provides a personal insight into the success of the program. There is a candidness and pride in their explanation of not only the program's efficacy, but the students they encounter in BC Bound. They recognized that applicants who interview and eventually become students in the program are more than just the scores on their GED or number of high school credits. The students have life experiences that make them resilient in the academic setting. When the BC Bound students are first admitted into the college, they may require more support, but these soft-skills are addressed in the freshman seminar workshop. The coordinator is one of the instructors for the workshop and adjusts the topics to suit the needs of the cohort. The coordinator also spoke emphatically about the Learning Community that both insulates the students but also assimilates them into the general college population.

Both the Learning Community and freshman seminar workshop are examples of applying Ishitani's research in practice. Ishitani identified variables that were important for college retention: GPA, academic support in high school, and parental support. BC Bound students both defy and support these claims, as the coordinator's interview would state. FGS are at a significantly higher risk of attrition from university because they did not graduate from high school. The coordinator

spoke often about the lack of outside support for the students. However, the program uses many of these same measures to ensure that students are supported and have the opportunity to succeed. The BC Bound students receive the academic priming from the freshman seminar workshop and feel like part of the campus because of the learning community. The first year of college is a precarious period, but the GED students who come through Brooklyn College through the BC Bound Program are able to complete their freshman year.

The coordinator made an important point about the demographics of CUNY students. Both BC Bound and all CUNY students are not the traditional student who are 18 to 22 years old. The ethnicity, race, gender, and age are extremely diverse. Yes, Ishitani's framework for retention in first-generation students was groundbreaking, however, CUNY and BC Bound students require additional support. In the case of BC Bound, the social work interns and peer mentoring are reported by the coordinator and the students to be effective. I would challenge educational theorists to incorporate socioemotional programming in the variables for retention and attrition in first-generation students, especially the non-traditional student.

The following interview is conducted with a student who was admitted into the BC Bound Program and is now an upperclassman preparing for graduation. This student was denied by Brooklyn College when they applied through general admission but was referred to the program by the former Director of Admissions, Ms. Penelope Terry. This student struggled in their academics and school-work balance in their first year in college. The initial resistance from the student in the first year became nonexistent. The interview provides a unique perspective from a student who showed growth throughout their undergraduate career.

Interviewer: What is your academic standing at Brooklyn College?

Student M: I am a senior.

Interviewer: How long have you been in or a part of the BC Bound program and to what capacity?

Student M: I am a student and I work, I mean, not necessarily for the program, but I work on campus for the Brooklyn College Learning Center. I've been there, two almost three years now. And I am not particularly a tutor, but I do general, I guess administration stuff. I'm greeting everybody who comes in. I sign them into their tutors. I schedule them for a future tutoring session with certain tutors and kind of keep the traffic moving. I've also helped with things like payroll.

Interviewer: How did you get introduced to BC Bound?

Student M: I applied for just as a regular college student to a few different schools, and someone actually reached out to me about the BC Bound program. I don't remember who exactly reached out, but I remember they told me to come in and I met with Director of Admissions, Penelope Terry. Okay, so, I was, I was signed up and ready to go by the fall 2016. Then, I got really scared and nervous. I was having doubts. I was wondering whether this was what I should be doing or whether it was the right thing or not. And by this, I mean like going to school. It had just been so many years and I didn't know how I felt about it. I was more nervous than excited, but I still was trying to get back on track and I guess I didn't have enough of a push. So, I ended up just not going, I didn't reach out to anybody. I just didn't show up. And it was not long after that. I realized while I was working my terrible retail job that that was not where I wanted to be for the rest of my life and that I should have gone, and it was a terrible mistake to not show up. So, I decided, let me see if I can reach back out to the people in the program and see if I can get another chance. So I came into the school, I went to the admitted admissions office and I talked with someone about it and he directed me to the Coordinator. She asked me why I wanted to come back what was different this time. I told her I was really nervous the first time, I regretted my decision to not go, and I really just wanted to try to make a change. Getting back into it was a process for me. It wasn't like I could just get up and go back. At least didn't feel like it. And I was as honest as I could be because that's

really just the best way to go. I mean, what am I going to just lie about some emergency and then no I was just telling the truth.

Interviewer: So, what led you to get your GED as opposed to getting a high school diploma?

Student M: I was not a good high school student. I actually cut most of them, so I failed most of them. So I was very behind, I was a freshman, for three years before I finally had enough credits to become a sophomore. And by the time I left school, I was a junior, but I was already 18. And I took all my Regents and I passed all of them. So all I was really short of were the credits, but if I stayed, it would have probably taken me another year or two. And I would have been a 20-year-old graduating from high school. So I made the decision to drop out. And since I was old enough, I did it myself. I didn't need my mom. I don't know if it was that I wanted to be rebellious or if it was just because I was an asshole. But, eventually I was not doing okay. I said I can't live like this because I'll probably be dead in a few years.

Interviewer: Is it safe to say that it was an unhealthy lifestyle that you were living both emotionally and physically?

Student M: Yes, it's just when you're not living healthy, in any way, you're not going to care about school. Why would you care about school? I was also hanging out with the wrong crowd, and they were not very good influences. They eventually left to different schools or different programs that would help them make it. So even once they were gone, I was going to some classes. And to me it didn't matter because you're not graded for the day, based on going to all of your classes. You just have to show up to the one specific one, and then you're marked present for the whole day. And, we had free periods. So, if you were free during that attendance period, you go to the auditorium you get marked off that you came in on a piece of paper, and that's our day. Yeah, I used to go home after that, not home but I used to go to a friend's house, and we would just bullshit around at our house. Needless to say, it was not a great education. No, it was not a good school at all. They

had a very high dropout rate I don't remember the number, but a lot of students didn't make it out of there, and they didn't really do much to kind of push us or encourage us to do better and stuff like that. They kind of just gave us detention or suspended us for a little bit. So, yeah, I dropped out of high school. I was doing a lot of things I was not supposed to be doing, most of them illegal. And I was just hanging out with some people and, you know, sometimes I wasn't coming home for like three days at a time. Then eventually, I don't know what hit me. Oh my god yes, I remember it now. Okay, I don't know if you're familiar with Elvis Duran on Z100.

Interviewer: Yes, I am.

Student M: So, there used to be this guy on there in 2011, TJ, and he left the show because he was going to have his own radio show somewhere else. And he in his last parting words said, "You're not guaranteed anything except for this moment." That kind of just stuck with me and I just kept thinking about that, quote, day after day and then soon enough I realized he's really right. And I actually did reach out to the show after that. I sent them an email and I told them because of those words, I stopped doing this and I stopped doing that and now I want to I want to do this and I'm going to try to do that. They read it on the air. That kind of nudged me into the right direction. I slowly began to think about things differently and my mom, of course, always was like you know get your GED. I never really intended to but then I signed up for the GED program at TCI College in midtown Manhattan and eventually signed up to take the exam in the Bronx. I went in, took everything all at once. That was it. I got actually not only my results, but it came attached with my diploma. I was so happy and everything. I actually felt really proud of myself. And from there, it kind of progressed. Like I got a job in retail. No, I had a different really crappy job, in which I was doing things that was kind of fucking people over in a sense. You know we were, we were helping them but it was kind of like we had an ulterior motive. So it was in sketchy place, but I left there, and I got into a fight with my boss. I quit on the spot and I left from there and I found myself a job

in retail, and from there I kind of just started doing a little better. I was hanging out with different people and I was just working and making money. I was finally feeling okay.

Interviewer: Why did you ultimately decide to join BC Bound after you didn't show up the first semester?

Student M: I had a terrible manager in my retail job and I realized I didn't want to work with people like him. So there was no turning back with my second contact with BC Bound.

Interviewer: What is a challenge that you faced as a first-semester freshman?

Student M: Well, there were a few. Yeah, maybe like three. So, one challenge for me in particular was balancing school and work. Yes, I only had a full-time thing to do, and it affected different parts of me. I was really exhausted. I was afraid that because I had to work the closing shift I wouldn't be able to come home and do my homework and stuff like that. It was cutting into my sleep. I just didn't know how to balance it at the time. And of course there was the whole I'm suddenly back in school and I have to sit at a desk thing around surrounded by all these people who were just in high school last semester. It was just a whole different atmosphere and I wasn't used to it yet. It took a little bit to feel like I was normal or like I belong there. So like the whole belonging and being physically in a classroom with young peppy 18 year olds, but, BC Bound had those classes that were just for BC Bound students, and we knew that you were with people who were like you, in some ways, in terms of the GED way. I felt that actually was a lot more comfortable. Maybe we weren't all exactly in the same boat but you know we ended up in the same place because of different circumstances. And it did help and we got to know each other which helped even more. So it wasn't treated as like a regular class in college, we were treated a little bit differently. In a good way of course, especially thinking about the English class. The professor was more accommodating in some ways, yes, yes. And she was um, she was taking it slow you know she always slow down if we needed to slow down or something like that, you know, and that was

those good and then we had like mixed classes where, You know, all over BC Bounders were mixed in with a bunch of other kids and that wasn't so bad because the class itself wasn't so difficult. Yeah. And it kind of helped us feel a little more incorporated into the regular college life. But then we also had classes that we chose individually to take outside of BC Bound, and I think that was the hardest thing because then we were kind of on our own. I mean we were there to support each other but while we were in the classroom we were doing it ourselves.

Interviewer: Did it get easier at any point?

Student M: I don't want to say it got easier or harder. I was just able to figure it out. I kind of just made it work, because it's not easy to adjust to an eight-hour closing shift followed by waking up at 7am to go to school the next day and then there's papers in between. And that was something that I don't think anyone could have truly prepared for until being in the moment.

Interviewer: So, how did you go about working at the Learning Center?

Student M: I came in to say hello to Rich one day. and I was complaining about how I hated my job so much. I was actually starting to bring my flask to work. I was getting drunk while I was there. I just hated it so much. It was a miserable place. The one boss was miserable. I really hated every part of him. Rich just said to me casually, do you get work study? So then I spoke with someone from work study, and he kind of told me what I had to do to get the process moving and I was out of my job in retail less than two weeks later, and that was kind of it. I started this new thing that was already on campus. That was probably the biggest benefit. And I was learning something else. I was meeting different people. We were all there in school. We were all students. And it was good, you know changes. The work life balance was easier, way easier. Majority of it was due to the commute. That was no longer there. You know I was doing it in between classes or before my classes or after they were over. I stayed on campus if I had to work and then in between that time, I was able to work on my assignments.

Interviewer: The BC Bound program has the services in place. Are there any particular ones that really stand out to you as impactful and meaningful for you?

Student M: The required tutoring. I couldn't meet with tutors outside of the ones that were provided for us because of my work schedule. But it did definitely help to have the time every week to help us. It was also good because he was working with us like the same person every time and he kind of knew where we were. It was just continuing like a class. Yeah, that was good, that was helpful. I guess the interns were also useful but at the same time, we were kind of required to see them. It was just nice for some days. I wasn't looking for advice and she wasn't really offering too much advice. I guess they gave us the opportunity to be personal. It gave me the opportunity to feel normal given my history. You know I was given some special treatment, but they kind of did it in like a subtle way where I was still allowed to join the rest of the school. Yeah. And like I said it was difficult to do that one class on my own, but that kind of helped me also, you know, feel more normal, like I wasn't isolated within my BC Bound group for the entire year. Also the freshman seminar was the other helpful part of the program because it wasn't just a class. He was giving us all these tips on how to get through school and he was giving us these assignments that we would be expected to do like note taking skills, finding out about certain campus resources, Magner Center, and student clubs.

Interviewer: You spoke about that last class that you took with general Brooklyn College students and not just BC Bound students. Did you notice any differences between BC Bound students and Brooklyn College students?

Student M: I don't think there was anything particular, you know they kind of helped me realize actually that they were all just regular people like I was and I just so happened to be there a few years after them. But I also did realize that some of them were a lot more confident. Some of them knew the content already before they got there which kind of helped them participate a little bit

more. Maybe they just showed that they were regular and confident but maybe deep down they were also a little bit nervous like it was a freshman class, and most of the people in there were freshmen. So they were also new to the school. I think I started to feel a little bit more normal in the second semester. But at the same time I feel like even if I felt some type of way about being there as a BC Bounder, the professor didn't know that at least right away so she treated me just like she treated everybody else.

Interviewer: What could BC Bound have provided in the beginning or provide even now in the middle of your academic career to help you?

Student M: I don't know. I think for the most part everything was done in a way that was still helpful, even if it wasn't for me. BC Bound was still making efforts in different ways to help someone who could use that. I feel like I did benefit a lot from all the offers that you guys were giving us and everything.

Interviewer: Do you have any impactful moments that you remember in your first semester or beyond with the program that you would like to share?

Student M: I don't want to say there's like a particular thing that stands out. I made a couple of friends I still keep somewhat regular contact. I got a job that helped me focus a lot more on school. I don't think there's anything particular that stands out that much really.

Interviewer: Last question. What's the one thing you would say to all former, current, and future BC Bound students?

Student M: I actually did say this in particular to someone before. It was something along the lines of, you're here because you want to be, because you made the choice to be here and not because society pressures you to be. You already left and did what you had to do when you had your realizations and here you are making this life changing decision, this life changing road. You are a

little bit different than your regular college student because of your efforts to be here. You went above and beyond to be here.

This student is a prime example of the growth that a person can have if they are provided the opportunity to have a college education. They are a high school dropout that would have aged out of the New York City public school system. They attended the school in their district that neither enforced strict attendance nor academics. The public school system failed this individual. This student was fortunate because they had familial support and the ability to reflect and realize an education could bring them out of poverty. In this student's situation, poverty can be interpreted as a financial, professional, and intellectual poverty.

Throughout the interview, the student consistently, but unconsciously, redirected the conversation back to employment. The student was able to acquire an on-campus job because of the support from Richard Vento, who is involved with the BC Bound Program. For this student, a college education is a gateway to occupational improvement, and the interpersonal relationships they built while in the BC Bound Program directly affected it.

The student identified the tutoring, the social work interns, and the freshman seminar workshop as most significant services offered by BC Bound. They do not identify any mathematical concepts or specific moments with the social work interns that stand out. Instead, the student appreciated the tutoring and social work interns because of how they made her feel. The math tutoring was scheduled at a time that was conducive to their schedule, which was important to them. Although it was not mentioned in the interview, this student almost failed the connected mathematics course, yet there was no ill feeling towards the class. Instead, the student chose to perceive the near failure in an optimistic way by remembering the benefits of the associated tutoring. As for the social work interns, the student appreciated how they felt "normal." An

important variable for this student's academic success is their emotional well-being. Because they felt appreciated and humanized by the program staff, they were able to persist in their academics.

In the following interview, this next student presents a different perspective from someone who dropped out of school at a young age but is now determined to create positive changes in their life.

Interviewer: What is your academic standing at Brooklyn College?

Student R: I am an upper sophomore.

Interviewer: Why did you decide to apply to and join the program?

Student R: A counselor at the GED program I was in suggested it to me. She told me about it.

Initially, I didn't have any plans to go to college. I was just like let me get the high school equivalency diploma. But I really cared what other people thought about me, and in the smallest sense, I didn't want them to be like, Oh, he's a dropout. So I wanted to add something to my intellect. When I finally got the GED, it was like what from here? We can find you a job or you can continue to college and then you can go from there. I was told about BC Bound and how Brooklyn College offers this and like they were telling me how before they wouldn't allow people who had a GED but then they did through the BC Bound Program.

Interviewer: So, why did you ultimately decide to join the program after being accepted if you were uncertain?

Student R: Prior to me getting the GED, I was at home doing nothing but contemplation about existence. It wasn't like depression, but it was just me. Just contemplating everything. Yeah. So at that point, I had no idea what was what. I didn't even know that we like, honestly, even the base, I didn't know what a credit was. I didn't know what a GPA was. I didn't know anything. I didn't know a lot of things. I didn't know what a syllabus was. I didn't say a lot though. It was the

guidance. I was letting an authority figure guide me. So, I just went for it. Why? Because I had no idea where I stood though. It was presented in front of me at the time in my life in that moment.

Interviewer: Why did you decide to get your GED?

Student R: Well, I dropped out of school in the sixth grade. I was around 12 years old. Why I didn't want to go, I don't know. It was an accumulation of a lot of things in my life. I wasn't neglected like most people. I want to say, I initially stopped going to middle school And I didn't even know what a lot of these themes were. I didn't know what algebra was. I didn't know that there was a constitution. But why did I leave school? That's actually a tough question. It didn't seem right for me at the time. That's not a decision a 12-year-old should make. But it wasn't even that my grades were lacking. It wasn't. I was paying attention to it. I would come home, and I would read books of things I preferred to learn about. I mean, at the end of the day, it is what it is. But the reason why I left it, it just didn't seem right for me at that time.

Interviewer: Then you eventually got to the point of attending a program for getting your GED or TASC, and that's where you met the GED counselor and you had said that you didn't even really care about going to college.

Student R: Right, it wasn't in my mind. I let these figures in my life sort of influence the way I thought about the world and make the decisions for me. But I kept hearing college is a waste of time. It is a waste of time if you're going because someone told you to go. But the reason why I didn't want to go was because I was just, you know, I keep hearing people talking about how they couldn't find a job even after getting a degree. But I don't think my career in life is contingent on what I'm doing in college. I'm not relying on college to teach me all the things that I need to know. But if college can teach you the things that you need to become a CEO, then the world will be filled with CEOs. College is not necessarily the thing you need to succeed in life. I feel like I've

learned bubkis. It can help. Like right now, I am exposed to new things like a new environment, a new set of people, a new set of minds, like the way that other people view things.

Interviewer: How does the GED/BC Bound student differ from the Brooklyn College traditional General Admission student?

Student R: I have noticed a lot of difference. I can sort of tell who went to Brooklyn College with a diploma from high school or a GED simply from the way they respond to the world. The typical high school student have just been told what to do and what to think. Their whole life is a multiple choice. And it's like, I had no choice but to figure it out. Yeah, non-traditional students, we figured out how to think. We had no choice. We have to figure it out. I learned how to do math, like just simple math and stuff like that. Because I was in a job and I was counting money. It's real world stuff. I was introduced to negatives and positives. And I didn't have a bank account, but I knew how banks worked. So, I was like, I can grasp concepts a lot easier. So, when I was trying to take the GED, and I realized they were showing me all these things, I would just immediately relate it to other things. What I think traditional students do is they just compare it to things they've already learned in life. In class, that's the foundation. My foundation is the actual world. Textbooks have a structure. And it's like they assume things that are a particular way, and this is how it goes. But you know, humans are not always predictable like that, and life is not always predictable.

Interviewer: What are the typical challenges that the BC Bound students encounter in their first semester?

Student R: Yeah, in the beginning, actually trying to care was a big challenge for me. I didn't feel as if I fit in. But it was at a point I didn't want to fit in. It's just like this academic environment that I had to sort of merge with. I felt that was the only challenge like I didn't care, which is like, whatever it was, I'm learning to care. My challenges I know aren't really academic. It is more staying focused. Because I truly don't care about this, whatever college is right now. It's just I want

to do it for me. I want to start something and finish it. I want to tell myself I can finish it no matter what it is. I don't care what it is, I don't care if it was me trying to finish a video game, I want to finish. I tend to just take something up and then try something else. I want to finish. That's the only challenge right now. It is getting to the finish line, the top of the first mountain.

Interviewer: How has BC Bound addressed some of the challenges for you?

Student R: I started viewing it in a different way. I think that's something I learned in psychology, cognitive dissonance. That's how I overcame challenge. It just that's what it is right now. I just changed my mindset.

Interviewer: The BC Bound program has support services. There's tutoring, academic advisement, the learning community, and the social work intern. It has all these support services in place. Are there any particular ones that really stand out to you as impactful and meaningful for first semester freshman?

Student R: Tutoring. I appreciate what tutoring did because even though I didn't do great in the class, I would have done worse without the tutoring. I got a C plus. That's fine, but it would have been an F. It helped me latch on to things a lot better. You pick up the material better with tutoring. Because for the rest of it, I was physically there but my mind was not. So with tutoring, it was the fact that the tutor pointed out things to you. It helped me understand the things that I didn't care about understanding. It's like I didn't want to do it because I didn't know it. But just the confidence of the tutor had is what did it for me. I saw myself there for like a millisecond. Whenever I see someone confident, I become them in my mind for a second and try to figure out what it's like to be them to just know shit. So it makes me want to know shit.

Interviewer: Have you gone to tutoring since your first semester?

Student R: I was going to do it for philosophy but then Corona happened. I've gone to the academic advisor often though. Even before the pandemic, I would go to her office every time I passed by the door and it was open.

Interviewer: Why did you visit so often?

Student R: It was something about talking to somebody who's close to my age that kind of gets it. I can just tell when someone just like understands. It was the academic advisor. I don't like people who follow their scripts, who are like the role that people place. So I tend to stray away completely from anybody who's too scripted. It doesn't seem real. It seems like I'm talking to a robot.

Interviewer: Where do you think the program makes significant contribution to students?

Student R: I appreciate the fact that all these things were presented to me. What I had to do. How to do it. Where I can go if I don't know what to do. So I did appreciate that over time. Not the first semester. I thought I was going to be told that I made a mistake. I don't think you were supposed to be accepted. That was that was going on in my mind. And then when the semester started, I was like, Oh, shit, I'm really here. I'm like, oh, they're not kicking me out. Yeah, I belong somewhere. So, the opportunity to attend along with the support was great.

Interviewer: What could BC Bound have provided in the beginning or provide even now in the middle of your academic career to help you?

Student R: I feel like it was good enough. It's not that it was perfect, but they put everything out there for me.

Interviewer: Do you have any impactful moments that you remember in your first semester or beyond with the program that you would like to share?

Student R: Yes, the music teacher in the first semester in the BC Bound classes corrected my grammar. It meant everything. It put me on my toes, and I appreciated that. I didn't like him, but I appreciated that he challenged me. He would not let it slide. He didn't let me get away with

mediocre bullshit. This is your grade based off of this, this, and this. I didn't appreciate that in the first semester, but I appreciated that later. In my second semester, I wasn't gonna let professors catch me again.

Interviewer: What is one thing you would say to all former, current, and future BC Bound students?

Student R: I don't know who I would have to hear it from to actually be receptive to it, but just trust the process. Just be patient.

This student's interview was comparable to their first semester at Brooklyn College. They were withdrawn, doubtful, and introspective. Much to the chagrin of the academic advisor, the student constantly told the advisor that they did not put effort into their work and intentionally completed assignments on the day they were due. Student R's first semester and second semester resulted in mediocre grades. Unfortunately, the staff did not have high expectations for the student. This could have resulted in negative effects for the student if the staff did not support the student, but that was not the case.

As Student R spoke about in their interview, they appreciated that these services were presented to them. They used the required services in the first semester and the act of including him in the BC Bound cohort was enough to make him feel "accepted." This leads to the following question for GED recipients: does the fear of being kicked out or feeling unwanted linger through their college career? If so, is socioemotional programming truly enough to alleviate those thoughts and fears? Student R did not address the BC Bound socioemotional programming throughout the interview, but they did talk about two unintended sources of socioemotional support. The tutor and the academic advisor made a lasting positive impact on the student. The tutor's confidence and ability to articulate difficult math terms to the student served as a model for the student, and the academic advisor was a nonjudgmental individual who sympathized.

Based on the three interviews conducted with Coordinator, Student M, and Student R, the non-traditional, GED student brings life experiences to the classroom. The experiences that older, experienced students attained are written about in the textbook. Because they already have the first-hand experience, it may be easier for them to understand and retain concepts. Currently, the freshman seminar workshop serves as a “user’s manual” to college. It contains lessons on the best practices for academic success, such as note-taking skills, learning styles, introduction to campus resources, and other topics relevant to each cohort. It would be beneficial to both the program and the students to incorporate the students’ strengths into the workshop topics. When concepts are relatable to students, it becomes valuable and comprehensible. For the BC Bound students who already feel insecure and are tired from working full-time jobs in conjunction with full-time school, they need to know that they are valued; incorporating their strengths and experiences would make them feel valued.

The final interview is conducted with a current peer mentor for the BC Bound Program. Student A was an academically strong student who did not struggle in the first semester. They are active members of the Brooklyn College and CUNY campus through their cabinet positions in two clubs and student government. They are the prescriptive, straight ‘A’ student. Student A is a former member of the ultra-Orthodox Jewish community. This interview also stresses the benefits of the support services for GED students and general admission students at Brooklyn College.

Interviewer: What is your academic standing at Brooklyn College?

Student A: I am now considered a lower junior.

Interviewer: How long have you been in or a part of the BC Bound program and to what capacity?

Student A: Well, the same amount of time. I’ve been in BC Bound from the spring of 2019 until now. In the following semesters, I was involved with BC Bound as a peer mentor. I was helping out students in their first time joining Brooklyn College, joining a college to find out exactly where

they can find resources and find a path where they can continue their education without worrying too much about the small details that is very hard to get information and whatnot.

Interviewer: How did you get introduced to BC Bound?

Student A: I was introduced to BC Bound from an organization called Footsteps. Footsteps is an organization in New York that helps people who are ex-Jewish. I can just put it like that. Or in other words what they like to use is “off the *Derech*.” *Derech* means a road so it's off the path. So it's people who were raised inside ultra-Orthodox communities and they decided to leave and this organization helps them out with resources and kind of like advice so they can pursue an education or get a job or whatever.

Interviewer: So did Footsteps help you to get your GED?

Student A: Yes, they did tell me to go to the Brooklyn Public Library, and to be honest, I even started before I even met them.

Interviewer: What brought you to the path of getting a GED as opposed to getting the traditional high school diploma?

Student A: As mentioned before, I was raised inside an ultra-orthodox community. Inside the ultra-orthodox community, I was in high school but the thing is in some parts of the ultra-orthodox community, they don't give you a high school diploma because you don't qualify for that. That means in most of these schools they don't teach math, social sciences, or English and it's mainly focused on Judaic studies, Bible, *Talmud*, and stuff like that, which is why I couldn't have gone through the path of a standard high school diploma and had to go for a GED.

Interviewer: Why did you ultimately decide to apply to and join BC Bound?

Student A: I was debating between two options that I had. I had an option in Kingsborough and an option in Brooklyn College. I was debating which one I should go for but decided to go for Brooklyn College. I went to BC Bound for a small interview. Once I got accepted, I just started

studying in Brooklyn College. BC Bound seemed like a better option overall. It was a little bit because of title but there was also other stuff, like the resources provided by BC Bound. First of all, it seemed like a small group which was intimate and I was in a way a little bit afraid that I might get lost inside a big campus without anyone who's over viewing my education. I did need that kind of guidance at the beginning. It's not necessarily needed it. I wanted it because I believe that guidance makes it easier to succeed. So, yeah, seeing the academic advisor, seeing the social workers. It felt like it was the right choice.

Interviewer: So, you wanted to utilize these resources as opposed to needing it but would you suggest the GED students entering Brooklyn College to utilize the BC Bound resources?

Student A: I would agree with that statement. I believe that other students would benefit from it. Having a small kind of pillow landing is a lot better than just you know landing on your ass. You can quote me on that. I'll make the point that not everybody needs that pillow actually. Some people prefer getting kicked very hard and being shocked.

Interviewer: As a peer mentor, what are the typical challenges that the students bring to your attention or don't bring to your attention that you notice in their first semester?

Student A: First of all, with general non-BC Bound students, they are extremely lost. Most of the freshmen that talk with me are extremely worried and they don't know who to go to in order to help them out. They don't have the guidance. They are not aware of several of the buildings on Brooklyn College. Most of the resources are just non-existent for them. A lot of them don't know even that there's a digital ID. They didn't know that there's a Student Center. They didn't know that there's a Magner Career Center. They knew that there's a library, but they didn't know that they had printing stuff over there. I mean it's a shame that they're going around on campus for a while and not knowing what's going on and I believe that for the campus itself, it's really bad because what you hope for at least as a member of the student body, you want to have a mixture of people who

know what's going on at the campus so they can address concerns. Because if the only time that I know how to reach out to the administrators is when I'm a senior, only senior problems will be what will have solutions. You want freshmen to be involved on campus because then you'll have more clubs that are addressed specifically for freshmen, more tools that will be addressed specifically for freshmen, and you would get a lot more feedback from freshmen. At the moment you're only getting the feedback from seniors mostly.

Interviewer: So then how has BC Bound combated some of these challenges?

Student A: They eliminated a lot of those challenges for the average student. It was eliminated for me and for other students from BC Bound. I was able to get into positions. I'm in student government and I'm a sophomore and everybody doesn't believe me. This is my fourth semester and they're like but there's no one in student government that is a sophomore and I'm like yeah, but now there is. BC Bound gave me the knowledge that I needed in order to drop classes and stuff like that. It gave me a position where I can give that information to other students, which automatically made me a candidate to get involved into stuff because a lot of students were looking towards me with questions. How do we do this and this? How do we get involved in this club? It didn't push me into USG or USS but what it definitely did was it eliminated a lot of the stuff that a lot of the challenges that I would have if I was just the average freshman student.

Interviewer: It almost sounds like it gave you the confidence to be comfortable enough to talk about the things that a general admission freshman would not have known and understood. Therefore, you could focus on pursuing new and exciting things.

Student A: Yeah, exactly.

Interviewer: The BC Bound program has support services. There's tutoring, academic advisement, the learning community, and the social work intern. It has all these support services in place. Are

there any particular ones that really stand out to you as impactful and meaningful for first semester freshman?

Student A: I would say the learning cohort was one of the best aspects or one of the most important aspects. You had all those classes together where we could communicate and compare stuff that other professors did. It felt more like a community and not just like a processing plant where we just walked through and was nice to have that. Later on in the future when I wanted that in other classes, it's funny but I created the discord servers for almost each of my class, What'sApp groups and we communicate and talk. It's by far helped to spread information like really fast and create a more of a community. The only reason why I felt like I could do that is because I was used to in BC Bound.

Interviewer: Why was it so important to you that there's a community aspect to education?

Student A: That is a good question. I believe in everything that we do, we can do a lot more when we work together. It also helps you to understanding a lot of aspects. If you believe that other people are not giving in the homework. "I'm not gonna give in the homework." But if you see that everybody's investing time and everybody's talking in the group and they're more connected to the class which makes you put in a little bit more work, that community aspect I would say helps you. When you're in the same boat with other people, it's obviously less stressful than just feeling like you're the only one that is drowning under all the pressure and stress. Also, almost every social worker that was brought to BC Bound were amazing and were helping out in so many ways. They were caring and filling the aspect you never see being addressed in academic environments. It doesn't seem like people care about your well-being. I can be in a math class and nobody's gonna ever ask me how I feel. And suddenly there's that new aspect and I believe that that is something new to the table and it is a nice and important thing to have.

Interviewer: As someone who interacts with the diverse population at Brooklyn College, do you see any differences between the Brooklyn College general admission students and the BC Bound students?

Student A: I don't believe that every student who comes in is like the rest of the students. Everybody comes from their own place and from their own background. They apply the knowledge that they're given in different ways so I would probably say that the BC Bound cohort is so representative of this idea.

Interviewer: How have the BC Bound services supported the students in the first semester?

Student A: I feel like explaining to them the structure of a lot of how college life is and how to get to resources allows them to be more self-sufficient. When you're being bossed around by your teacher or anyone telling you what you can and can't do, that information and knowledge from BC Bound is very powerful. I would say that the peer mentor, the social workers, and the learning cohort helps them.

Interviewer: Where do you think the program makes significant contribution to students?

Student A: I think maybe in the kind of like removing barriers that other students would have. I would say that that would be the key thing that BC Bound contributes.

Interviewer: Do you have any impactful moments that you remember in your first semester or beyond with the program that you would like to share?

Student A: I would say the big moments were mainly going through the resources, buildings, walking around the campus. The hands-on experience was a great moment, specifically going into the library and talking over there with the librarian about how to research books and stuff like that. It later on helped me with researching and stuff like that so I would say that was a good moment.

Interviewer: Do you think BC Bound prepared you for online learning?

Student A: They haven't prepared me for that. How possibly could they have known to prepare me for it? I mean the emails that are sent out are great. It's good because it's like, hey, today you don't have this or I believe like a lot of students miss that. Oh, there's a credit policy. Oh, there's that. Oh, there's this. It's very good to have that but I don't believe that there's a way for BC Bound to fix that problem of online learning. I think it's a problem in general. It's a mindset that we have to just get into for online learning.

Interviewer: What's the one thing you would say to all former, current, and future BC Bound students?

Student A: Stay tough. Be New Yorkers. What is Cuomo's stuff? Whatever Cuomo says. Just that it will be stressful the path that you're taking in academia but there's a satisfaction at the end of each semester and there is an end to it all. And I want everybody to see the light at the end and not just be buried under all the stress and they can't handle it.

This final interview with Student A illustrates the value of belonging to a community for first-year students. Student A is the “textbook” student. They receive good grades each semester and is recognized by BC Bound and many Brooklyn College offices as a model individual. Then why was the student unable to receive a high school diploma? Student A grew up in the ultra-Orthodox Jewish community, and the schools in the private school system did not give him the proper credentials for admission into college. Additionally, education for the boys focus on religious studies. The BC Bound students who left the religious community find college mathematics to be the most challenging, yet Student A never expressed difficulties in math. As evident in all of the student interviews, the students identified socioemotional programming as an important BC Bound service. In particular, Student A found the social work interns to be very helpful. All students recognized at least one individual who made a lasting impression on them. For

many BC Bound students, the transition to college could be witnessed in the need to find like-minded, relatable individuals.

Without the BC Bound Program, Student A would have been denied admission to the college. As a rising junior, they have made an impact on the school's different clubs and organizations: University Student Senate, University Student Government, Student Advocate, Hillel, and BC Bound are only a few groups that have benefited from the student's short time at the college. If the program had not given a chance to Student A, the college would have missed out on an exceptional individual.

Conclusion

The BC Bound students are unique at Brooklyn College because of their ability to thrive in spite of their challenges. They often lack the numeric credentials to gain admission into a four-year CUNY college. The measures for success dictate that they ought to fail or do poorly in college because they did not have strong high school GPAs, academic support in high school, and familial support. But because of the BC Bound Program's structure of support, the students have the opportunity to succeed. The student-centric pedagogy and the culturally relevant teaching in the learning community, freshman seminar workshop, peer mentoring, MSW interns, and academic advisement are the factors that positively influence college retention for the BC Bound students. A crucial component for retention that requires more research is the socioemotional programming. Anecdotally, students express the importance of a peer, tutor, social worker, academic advisor, or coordinator who impacted their lives. The influence goes beyond the first year and resonates with them throughout their academic career.

This influence is also evident during the past year in which the COVID19 pandemic challenged all students physically, emotionally, and financially. The program may not have had the foresight to prepare students for online learning, however, the structure was transferrable, thus

allowing for continued services for the students. As educators, we want to see all students succeed. For a program that has consistently positive results, BC Bound should be used as a model to ensure the college retention and success for students who did not graduate from high school but want to earn their college degree.

For decades, the General Educational Development exam has been seen as a last resort for students who did not complete high school. In actuality, the GED has created educational and economic opportunities for millions of Americans. Annually, over 650,000 people take the GED (Garvey 2011). Therefore, it is essential for academic communities to support GED to college programs, such as BC Bound which focus on preparing high school dropouts to pass their GED exam and begin postsecondary study. High school dropouts who want to get back on track with their education must be able to rely on college-readiness programming that meets their needs and supports their aspirations. By establishing effective pathway programs for GED to postsecondary education, the country can positively affect college-ready outcomes for GED test takers. The BC Bound Program is one such program. Although it is unique to the City University of New York, the model is replicable at all levels. BC Bound remains a successful college program because it focuses on tracking the college readiness of its students while incorporating the vital support services. This allows program staff to monitor a substantial range of its students' academic performance and the ability to make programming adjustments when necessary. These support services allow for BC Bound students to become versatile and proficient in the myriad of academic and professional activities they will engage in while attending college.

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