

Bridging the Gap: Building Meaningful Connections after the Groups Scholars Program

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This study explores the experience of 12 undergraduate students who have recently participated in the Groups Scholars Program at Indiana University Bloomington. The aim of the Group Scholars Program is to support underrepresented students transition to college through a rigorous academic prep program, social activities and financial assistance—if eligible. Through the use of qualitative methods and analysis, six emergent themes were identified about their experiences after completing the summer bridge program. For example, it was found that resident assistants played a significant role in how connected these students felt to campus once the fall semester began. Recommendations were given to further assess and improve the Groups Scholars Program to encourage not only academic success, but a positive social acclimation to campus.

Every year, new students embark on the journey of higher education, and they bring to campus a unique personal identity influenced by individual experiences, cultures, and education (Marcia, 1975). These unique personalities influence the method in which they transition and the success of such transitional efforts (Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006). To assist students during the transition process, institutions often elect to bridge cultural, socioeconomic, or racial gaps through diversity and inclusivity initiatives. According to Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, and Terenzini (2004), “compared to their peers, first-generation students completed fewer first-year credit hours, took fewer humanities and fine arts courses, studied fewer hours and worked more hours per week, were less likely to participate in an honors program, were less likely to perceive that faculty were concerned about students and teaching, and made smaller first-year gains on a standardized measure of reading comprehension” (p. 251).

It has been well documented that first-generation and low-income students face challenges when adjusting to the environment of a college campus due to the amount of social capital they possess relative to a majority of their more

privileged peers (Oldfield, 2007). This shortage of social capital, or exchange of information and resources from friends, relatives and community members, can be hard on these students' transition because they lack familiarity with their new surroundings and expectations (Hill, Bregman, & Andrade, 2014). To counter this, summer bridge programs were designed to assist these students with the transition from high school to the constructed demands of the collegiate environment (Cabrera, Miner, & Milem, 2013). Indiana University Bloomington (IUB) recognized the need for a summer bridge program on campus and created the Groups Scholars Program (Groups). Groups has served more than 10,000 students over the past 47 years, supporting in-state students from low-income and/or first-generation backgrounds (students with physical disabilities are also eligible) the summer before their first year at IUB (The Trustees of Indiana University, 2015). The goal of Groups is to be more than an academic preparation program, seeking to strengthen students on a personal level and help connect them to campus resources and services as they enter their fall semester (The Trustees of Indiana University, 2015). Currently, Groups serves approximately 200 students each summer

(The Trustees of Indiana University, 2015). Based on the limited literature about the subsequent influence of summer bridge programs like Groups, we wanted to gain a clearer understanding of what these students at IUB are experiencing. Our two main research questions were:

- Where do Groups students find meaningful connections after transitioning out of the summer bridge component of the program?
- How do those experiences positively or negatively influence their persistence?

Learning more about how their experience evolves after the summer component of the program was useful in understanding retention at IUB and informing stakeholders of the specific needs for support. In the sections to follow, there will be a discussion of the literature regarding the experiences of students who completed summer bridge programs and related theories and models with an overview of our methodology and findings. Research limitations and considerations are given along with recommendations for student affairs practitioners and researchers focusing on the Groups Scholars Program.

Literature Review

Summer Bridge Programs

Summer bridge programs are transitional programs that assist high school seniors with the process of moving into college/university life by providing support through varying means. These programs are most commonly found at nonselective colleges and universities (Douglas & Attewell, 2014). Cabrera, Miner, & Milem (2013) summarized research on these programs by writing that, traditionally, these programs focused on providing academic and social support to minority students. Despite the widespread implementation of summer bridge programs, there is little

literature on their influence and students' experiences after participating in them (Cabrera et al., 2013; Kezar, 2000; Strayhorn, 2011).

The literature that currently exists on summer bridge programs generally has reported positive results related to academic performance and retention. Cabrera et al. (2013) conducted a longitudinal study of the impact of the University of Arizona's New Start Summer Program (NSSP) on participants' first year GPA and retention and found "on the aggregate, that participation in NSSP positively impacts academic performance and persistence above and beyond demographic characteristics and high school preparation" (p. 491). Douglas and Attewell (2014) conducted a study using data from the National Center for Education Statistics' (NCES) Beginning Postsecondary Student Longitudinal Survey (BPS) and uncovered clear evidence that shows a higher rate of student success leading to graduation in those that attended summer bridge programs between high school and the first semester of college than those that have not. Strayhorn (2011) investigated the linkages between participation in a summer bridge program and academic self-efficacy, sense of belonging, and academic and social skills. Academic self-efficacy is defined as "the level of an individual's confidence in his or her ability to compete academically oriented tasks" (Strayhorn, 2011, p. 149). This construct is closely related to academic resilience, which Waxman, Gray, and Padron (2003) defined as perseverance in school despite adverse circumstances. Cabrera et al. (2013) posited that while resilience is often measured in terms of an individual's determination, environmental factors also influence development of resiliency. O'Connor (2002) criticized the scholarship on resiliency for failing to account for the social structures that

conceptualize resilience, and, within this critique, she offered the concepts of constraint and opportunity, which “are interrelated concepts that describe a student’s structure of opportunity or lack thereof” (Cabrera et al., 2013, p. 484). A student is more likely to develop self-efficacy and experience academic success if he or she has opportunity, or the availability of resources (O’Connor, 2002).

Underrepresented Students’ Transition to College

The way in which institutions allocate resources to contribute to student success can help to increase or diminish student engagement (Kuh, 2005). For low-income, first-generation students, this is exceptionally important due to the heightened challenge of integrating into a complex, bureaucratic organization. Typically, students that hold these identities are unacquainted with navigating complex systems that inherently bring new bureaucratic policies, social formalities, and heightened academic expectations (Bess & Dee, 2008). Such unfamiliarity increases the risk of attrition (Tinto, 1999). Tinto’s (1997) Student Departure Theory postulated that an important factor for the success of a student and their persistence is the societal integration into a collegiate community. Students not capable of feeling connected to campus are then more likely to leave an institution. Tinto’s model is not widely accepted across the board, largely due to the model lacking generalizability beyond students who are resident on, or near, campus and who enter a university or college directly after leaving school (McCubbin, 2003), making it inapplicable to some students. Yet, one study of Tinto’s model as it relates to freshmen in a community college setting found that even outside of traditional first year students, academic integration aspect can predict persistence and exit outcomes.

Campus Ecology

The influential relationship between student and campus environment can further be explained through the lens of campus ecology. First presented in 1974 by James Banning and Leland Kaiser, the campus ecology approach recognizes “the transactional relationship between students and their environment” (Banning, 1978, p 4). It suggests that both the student and the campus influence one another in shared manners (Banning & Kaiser, 1974). Of course, both entities bring their own cultural and structural power dynamics (Bess & Dee, 2008), which, in turn, perpetuates the issue of at-risk students lacking economic and political capital. When students come into an institution lacking cultural and political capital, they experience the way in which the institution provides services much more acutely. Consequently, this leads back to the importance of scrutinizing and assessing the ways in which institutions allocate services and construct learning opportunities to promote engagement (Kuh, 2005).

Understanding the integration of low-income, first-generation students into campus communities also entails understanding the transitions that they face. Schlossberg’s (1984) theory can be considered the foundational piece on transition models. Schlossberg (1984) described her framework as a channel for “analyzing human adaptation to transition” (p. 2). While original transition theories were typically meant to classify and categorize specific components of transitions, later collaborative efforts between the Cormier and Hackney (1993) counseling model and Schlossberg’s (1984) transition model helped to identify and facilitate the success of individuals in transitions.

Description of Program

Students admitted into Groups are recommended for admission as seniors in high school, at which point they are accepted based on meeting the eligibility requirements previously outlined (The Trustees of Indiana University, 2015). The cornerstone of Groups is the summer experience. The goal of the summer experience is not only to provide an academic preparation program, but also to strengthen students on a personal level and help connect them to campus resources and services as they enter their fall semester (The Trustees of Indiana University, 2015). Therefore, we sought to understand where Groups students find meaningful connections after transitioning out of the summer bridge component of the program.

According to Groups administrator Cedric Harris, incoming students arrive on campus at the end of spring the semester before the program begins to receive a tour and to take assessments in math and other subjects (C. W. Harris, personal communication, October 13, 2015). Based on their performance on these assessments, students are placed in honors, STEM or general coursework once they arrive for check-in during the summer. There are three core summer classes and an elective, which is optional for all but STEM students. The school day begins at 8 in the morning for all students and can last until around 3 in the afternoon. Each cohort is different and each individual experience is different. Students are required to attend college meetings once a week, during which they learn about the process of transitioning into the regular school year. There is daily optional programming to keep students engaged as they are forbidden from attending parties either on or off campus. Students are forbidden from intermingling between sexes after midnight and from leaving the residence hall premises after 2 a.m. While

students are allowed to leave the city outside of class times, missing class is a likely cause for expulsion from the program (C. W. Harris, personal communication, October 13, 2015).

Methods

Positionality & Methodology of the Researchers

As researchers, we shared varying identities that influenced our lenses while engaging with the Groups students. Three of our researchers identified with being first-generation college students. Two of the researchers also identified with coming from a low-income background. As graduate students at IUB, three of four of the researchers were relatively new to the campus (less than two years) and were not employed directly by the Groups Scholars Program, leaving them with a limited personal experience of the program. However, based on personal undergraduate experiences, different assistantships at IUB, co-curricular activities, and extracurricular interests, the researchers have encountered Groups students outside of academia and in varying settings across campus. With that in mind, we are aware of the biases that we may have based on our privileged identities and acknowledge that our perceptions affected how we conducted our research, analyzed our data, and interpreted it for potential recommendations. Throughout our research process, we did our best to mitigate those biases.

To illuminate the perspectives of Group students themselves, we decided to utilize a qualitative research methodology to explore their socially constructed environment here at IUB. This is in accordance with constructivist theory where students acquire context and meaning of their surroundings through a reflection of personal understanding, allowing us to gather broad and developing data that assisted in the

creation of themes (Creswell, 2013).

Population

Participants included current undergraduate students at IUB. Those students who were admitted into the summer 2013-2015 Groups cohorts were eligible to participate in the study and constituted the population of interest for this study. We gathered referrals from university administrators, non-Groups students and participants as we recruited them into the focus groups, assisting in the comfortability in dialog and exchange (Kitzinger & Barbour, 1999). The first respondents that met participant eligibility requirements received personalized recruitment emails to participate in a focus group specific to their cohort year.

Sampling

Sampling selection was limited to seven students per cohort years 2013, 2014, and 2015, with two additional chosen as alternates. We utilized a purposive sampling method to reach student participants and then recruited participants using the snowball sampling method. This purposive sampling method was used to ensure that students shared key characteristics and homogeneity, thus providing for a more comfortable and open focus group experience (Rea & Parker, 1997). Sample selection was based on students whom the researchers encountered during their matriculation at IUB who identified with being connected with the Groups program.

As a result, we had a total of 12 students from the 2013 through 2015 cohorts of the Groups Scholars Program participate in the four focus groups. Nine students identified as female and three identified as male. Eight students were a part of the Groups 2013 cohort; two other students were in Groups 2014 cohort; and another two students came from the Groups 2015 cohort. All 12 identified as African American/Black with

one student also identifying with multiple races. Participating students' ages ranged from 18 to 21. A majority of students initially contacted were African American and Groups 2013; however, efforts were made to gather referrals and recruit students of other races/ethnicities and cohort years.

Design

A qualitative, semi-structured focus group approach was used for data collection purposes in our IRB-approved study. Based on previous literature, the focus groups were limited to seven to ensure a permissive and supportive environment (Carnaghi, 1992; Gall, Borg, & Gal, 1996). Participation was voluntary and responses were left anonymous, allowing students to self-select out during any point. Questions were developed using a combination of our assessment of the literature and Tinto and Schlossberg models. The participants' responses dictated the subtopics and follow-up questions as we moved forward from the topics that we had created. A standardized note-taking template was also used by the researchers while facilitating the focus groups, which allowed for the collection of direct quotes, nonverbal cues, as well as the tracking of responses from each participant. The focus groups were also audio recorded to be later transcribed by the researchers, and cross-referenced with the notes.

Data Analysis

Through consideration of Tinto's Retention Model (1987), Schlossberg's Theory (1984), and our participants' responses, we attempted to identify emergent themes from their responses that demonstrate patterns that increase or hinder their likeliness to persist based on indicators that link students to transitional success or failure. Key areas of consideration were the current format of the summer program, placement of the students in residence halls during the first fall term, the connection that

the students maintained with their cohort during the regular school year, the connection the student maintained with Groups during the school year, cross connections between cohorts, student involvement on campus, and parent involvement/family support.

We collectively compiled and transcribed recordings and notes from all four focus groups in a shared document. We began to code the data and identify emerging themes (Creswell, 2013). We began to validate these codes and themes with more specific quotes and instances recalled from the data collected. We then collectively reviewed the transcripts and notes for consensus and decided whether to add to, reject or modify our emerging themes. Upon completing this, we arrived at six emergent themes that each have their own effect on likeliness to persist: pipeline towards involvement in racially homogenous organizations, campus is geographically compiled of cultural silos, enhanced racial awareness, strong academic preparation, the impact of resident assistants (RAs), and campus connections' influence on generativity.

Results

Considerations from theory and participant interviews led researchers to six prominent themes. These themes were relevant to every participant and stood out against all other patterns.

Pipeline Towards Involvement in Racially Homogenous Organizations

A particular theme that emerged earlier on from the data was a large overlap in participants' similar co-curricular club and activity involvement. A majority of students articulated an intentional membership in predominantly black student organizations due to the comfort and ease of shared cultural belonging. One participant noted, "I

feel like you have to go the extra mile to meet people, and make connection [when] finding an event or org that doesn't focus on Black students." Other students, who did decide to branch out to other forms of involvement, spoke up about being chastised by their racial peers for going outside their own racially homogenous organizations. One participant was asked, "Where are your white friends at? Where are your Asian friends at?" This involvement in racially homogenous organizations can be seen across all three years of the Groups' cohorts with a systematic persistence.

Campus is Geographically Compiled of Cultural Silos

While students showed an interest in shared common spaces like the student union and residential dining halls, a good amount their time is spent at spaces marked by the likelihood to see familiar faces; examples include: Neal-Marshall Black Culture Center, friends' residence halls, Groups office, and fourth and fifth floors of Herman B. Wells Library (only with friends). One participant stated, "That's where I feel culturally safe." These physical locations where one may find students with shared cultural values operate somewhat distinctly from the campus at large due to physical and social separation. Groups participants seemed to trade inclusive environments for the security of the familiar and communal experience, citing The Neal-Marshall Black Culture Center as the number one place to congregate on campus. The seemingly self-imposed isolations are compounded by feelings of social segregation with regard to residence hall selection and student organization participation, with participants citing that even the residence halls and neighborhoods are segregated by race and/or culture.

Impact of Resident Assistants

Participants across all cohorts consistently emphasized the impact that Groups RAs had in shaping their experience and helping them transition and get connected to campus. “Your Groups RA can make or break your experience, honestly,” one participant noted. Other responses revealed that Groups RAs served as key conduits for involvement opportunities, academic assistance and social support. RAs would hold group meetings that highlighted different organizations and opportunities on campus, provide advice based on prior experiences, and even engage with the participants via social media. Many participants mentioned that the connection they established with the Groups RAs continued after completion of the program. “My RA from the summer keeps in contact, and she helps me with my essays,” one first-year participant mentioned. Even participants who did not build strong connections with their assigned RA were able to find support with another RA staff member. “I’m really close to one of the RAs, so we [participant and friends] go see her and talk to her...my RA didn’t really come off as helpful,” said another participant.

Campus Connections’ Influence on Generativity

While gaining a clearer understanding of our participants’ connections to campus, we discovered that several saw themselves giving back as a result of their experience, involvement, and connections. This concept of generativity, as first introduced by Erikson (1968), refers to an individual’s desire to give or create a lasting, positive effect directed towards benefiting others. Almost one-third of our participants saw themselves creating this lasting, positive effect for others by participating in the program as RAs or event coordinators. One

participant explained their interest in being a Groups RA or an event coordinator to make the experience better: “When I was in the summer program, they [the event coordinators and RAs] had their fun events, but it would always be the same people—I would focus on getting everybody together.” Some currently help incoming students by being ambassadors for the program and speaking to students at their high schools. “I love IU,” one participant commented. This student went on to explain that it was important for her to leave a legacy and help these students get the most out of their experience. Others saw themselves giving back by providing mentorship and guidance to students who had similar backgrounds or major/career aspirations through providing job shadowing and internships.

Enhanced Racial Awareness

Participants overwhelmingly realized a heightened awareness of their racial identity once they arrived on campus. This is not to say that they did have a sense of self prior to arriving, but they were almost forced into recognizing those parts of their identity that separated them from the majority. One participant stated that while she knew that she was Black, she never felt Black until she got to IUB. This occurred for a few reasons. Groups is an academic, college preparatory program for Indiana high school graduates, many of whom come to IUB from areas largely populated by those that share racial or cultural similarities. The Groups participants were surrounded by similar dynamics during the summer enrichment program. However, upon the start of the fall semester, Groups students were separated from the peers and administrators that were a large part of their summer experience in the program. Many participants expressed discord with being one of few students of color in their classrooms during the regular school semester and experienced pressure from feeling like they were made to

represent their entire race or prove their worthiness to be in attendance.

Strong Academic Preparedness

As a scholars program, Groups had a great focus on academics during the summer. However, this was not the reason that participants garnered the understanding that the only option was to be successful. The large sense of community that is created during the summer carries over and we were able to see throughout the other themes the variable that connectedness played in the growth and persistence of each participant. Not only are the students expected to do well, they are made aware of the biases that they will face based on where they are from and how they will be perceived as Groups participants. This factor is used in pushing students to excel as a testament to their true capabilities. The Groups participants are given access to a network of enrichment programs and opportunities well into their matriculation as students at IUB. Many students shared the sentiment that they look forward to receiving information from the Groups office and will often read that information over correspondence from their school of study or the university because they know that it pertains directly to them. Students have received information regarding scholarships and study abroad and as one participant stated, "because it is from Groups, I trust that it will be good for me."

Discussion

Our findings on the campus connection experience of Groups students following their summer bridge program shadow similar findings from previous literature and research reviews. As a theoretical framework, Tinto's retention model provided a comprehensive and fitting schema in understanding Groups students' integration experiences. However, the one challenge with Tinto's retention model came

with understanding the salience of students' racial identity, which emerged as a significant theme in our findings. Tinto's retention model was modeled after an extremely homogenous group of white, male students. The demographics of our focus group participants were composed of African American students, with a majority being women. Therefore, our findings may not apply to all Groups students but specifically to African American Groups students.

Taking our findings and unique demographics into consideration, we propose two explanations for the unique themes that emerged. First, while Groups students' displayed many of the similar norms and behaviors to those of Tinto's (1997) findings on collegiate integration, they also displayed heightened levels of racial awareness among group settings and key administrative influences with RAs involved directly in the Groups Scholars Program. Thus, when accounting for students' unique involvement in a summer bridge program, the transmission of values, information, and social connections are potentially influenced through the distinct relationship to organizational culture. Organizational culture is an active force that both shapes and is shaped by social interactions (Kuh & Whitt, 1988). Therefore, socialization is an ongoing process, both intentionally and unintentionally. Structural mechanisms account for more of the intentional socialization process for academic preparation and social integration. Informal interactions with peers, administrators, and faculty account for the unintentional socialization process of academic preparation and social integration. This helps to explain why participants shared similar pathways of involvement, friend groups, positive resident advisor

experiences, and thoughts on generativity in relation to the Gorups program.

The second explanation we propose is that collections of Groups students bring with them a common set of values, norms, and ways of interpreting the world. These previously constructed values and paradigms then reflect the themes that emerged from our findings. This process counters the assimilative nature of the previously discussed explanation and suggests that students are bound by previously held shared values and lines of thinking that are then introduced into the organization. Self-selection, social capital, cultural capital, and collective action then become the primary force in promoting a collective identity. The Groups Scholars Program, in this explanation, takes on the role of a vehicle that catalyzes dispositions previously held.

Both of these explanations offer some understanding as to why unique themes of homogenous involvement and the importance of RAs emerged, accounting for the organizational and individual influences. It seemed reasonable to consider both as valid influences, just as most would understand the way nature and nurture make mutual contributions to a person's behavioral traits. In other words, Groups students both bring with them a series of values and are influenced by the organizational culture of the summer bridge program. These bifurcated contributors can then influence how they perceive themselves on campus and how and where they go on to make connections.

Recommendations

Based on our findings, we offer several recommendations on how Indiana University student affairs staff and campus administrators can continue to support Groups students. First, we believe that utilizing new approaches for developing community and providing social support

during and following the program will assist students with the transition from high school to the constructed demands of the college environment. Second, because we found Groups RAs to have a significant impact on the Groups students' experiences, we believe that additional assessment on the training and experiences of Groups RAs is necessary to further quantify, describe, and explain the impact that the Groups RAs have on the experiences of Groups students throughout their time at Indiana University. Third, we believe that continued exploration into the experience of students in summer bridge programs based on their racial/ethnic identities both at Indiana University and on other college and university campuses is required. Indiana University staff and administrators can then use the data from other institutions to benchmark with the overall goal to improve the experiences of Groups students.

Limitations

We have an aggregate sample of data from our four focus groups. Of the four focus groups, two groups were fully audio recorded and two were not due to technical difficulties that arose during the focus group sessions. There were no major discrepancies between the two audio recorded and two unrecorded focus groups with regard to participant responses or direction of research data. Written notes were taken by each of the facilitators for every focus group, and we found it would be inappropriate to not include this data for our analysis. The availability of published data was lacking and due to the focus of our research on the student perspective, we were not able to gather a great deal of data from Groups administrators.

Other limitations related specifically to characteristics of our participants. First, all of the participants who responded to the focus group invitations were involved in

organizations and/or work in various offices on campus. Due to the nature of our sampling procedure, these students also referred other Groups students who were involved or work on campus. We are aware that all Groups students may not match our participants' level of involvement, which means there are possibly other narratives regarding connection to campus after the program. A second characteristic to note is that there were very few non-Black/African-American students who showed interest in participating in the focus groups. A third potential characteristic we did not account for was whether or not these students had relatives, siblings or close friends who had participated in Groups or attended IUB before them who could shape their perspective of the environment. As a result, we were unable to get a wide range of perspectives from other races that participated in and likely had other experiences within Groups.

Lastly, we would be remiss if we did not mention that there were events happening during the study related to IUB's racial climate that potentially affected our participants' perspectives. Themes did not emerge encompassing recent campus incidents, including the loss of a Groups student, and for the purpose of this particular study, we as researchers decided not to prompt this during focus group discussions. However, in our varying capacities on campus, we know that the Groups student's passing had been discussed among many Groups students.

Implications & Future Questions

There was a considerable lack of diversity within the sample of participants. The majority of students who inquired about participating in the focus groups identified as Black or African American, so we were unable to test other questions that were raised as we conducted this study. Since

students may be able to identify negative association to participation in the Groups program, future research in this area might consider investigating these questions:

1. Do students who identify as White, IUB's majority race, face greater challenges in associating with Groups, deterring them from participating in such a study?
2. Is the ability for majority students to blend into non-Groups affiliated student populations following the end of the summer program an appeal to dissociation from the program?

Additionally, in the limited timeframe available to conduct this research, we were unable to survey administrators and Groups student staff regarding their roles in planning and implementing the Groups program. Having this knowledge could have changed the perspective of the researchers as to what impact specific administrators have and how they impact the program. We determined that the participants' experiences are directly linked to their relationship with their summer Groups RA. We were unable to provide the link between the role of administrators and how they impact the summer cohorts. In addition, the time limitations of this research did not allow for the surveying of Groups alumni nor Groups participants that elected not to finish the summer program. Alumni and participants who did not finish the program could give the unique perspective of variances between their summer cohort and current students.

Finally, it is important to consider Groups students and the requirements to which their contracts bind them. Each summer, the Groups cohort is different, sometimes subtly and sometimes very drastically. What remains the same is that each participant is bound to the requirements of a contract. To break this contract means either repaying a large debt of incurred

expenses or leaving school altogether. The Groups '15 cohort was the first to be mandated to take a transition course in the fall following their summer program. This was also the one cohort of the three studied that were the least engaged and willing to participate in activities related to the Groups program. It may be necessary to consider whether Groups participants can be over-stimulated with the requirements of the program so much so that they disconnect from the program, their peers, or their university.

Conclusion

This paper makes a significant contribution to higher education and student affairs researchers and professionals interested in the college experiences of underrepresented students of color in higher education. Understanding how to best support these students and foster their persistence and retention is a complex undertaking with many stakeholder groups who, when they work together, have the

potential to significantly and positively impact the experiences of these student populations. To this extent, the data reported in this paper aligns substantially with the existing literature, which indicates that summer bridge programs, like the Groups Scholars program, significantly improve students' academic preparedness, thus increasing social and cultural capital. We argue that this is an important constituency in higher education because of the challenges that underrepresented students face in relation to a majority of their more privileged peers. Thus, it is necessary for higher education and student affairs practitioners and administrators to support these students beyond just academic preparation and connecting them to campus resources and services. We argue that it is necessary to strengthen them on a personal level. Such connections are imperative for their persistence. It is our hope that additional support and interventions are developed to better aide in students' transition following the summer program.

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