Formational Relational Turning Points in the Transition to College: Understanding How Communication Events Shape First-Generation Students' Relationships with Their College Teachers

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The purpose of the present study was to explore teacher-student interaction, teacher-student relationship formation and development, and the ways in which teacher-student interaction and relationships facilitated support and ultimately persistence to graduation for first-generation students in the transition to college. In this study I sought to better understand the nature of interaction in the teacher-student relationship of these first-generation students during their transition to college. I took an interpretive communication-centered approach to identify the teacher messages that first-generation students perceived to be relational turning points with their teachers as well as their perceptions of teacher messages and relational turning points. Thirty participants were interviewed for this study.

Participants identified 86 relational turning points that occurred in their relationships with teachers during the college transition. These relational turning points were organized into four relational turning point supra-categories, three persistence relational turning point outcome categories, six relationship relational turning point outcome categories, and four classroom relational turning point outcome categories.
Transition theory was the framework for this study. The main focus of transition theory concerns how individuals, and those with whom they are connected, deal with change.

Taken together, the results of this study demonstrate that first-generation students perceived relational turning points as positive when they perceived that their teachers supported them and cared about them as individuals. The perceptions of the students increased their likelihood to persist, improved the quality of their relationships with their teachers, and enhanced their overall classroom experience. When first-generation students perceived relational turning points as negative, some first-generation students perceived that their teachers failed to support them and did not care about them as individuals. The negative perceptions decreased the likelihood to persist, detracted from the quality of their relationships with their teachers, and marred the overall classroom experience. Other first-generation students overcame relational turning points they perceived as negative and sought and found other individuals who supported and cared about them.
Dedication

To the teachers, professors, and students who have helped me grow and develop as a student, teacher, and scholar and encouraged me to pursue my dream of becoming an assistant professor.

In memory of my grandfathers (Mr. Stephen C.K. Wang and Mr. Clifford K.L. Wong) who instilled in me a passion for pursuing personal, professional, and educational excellence.
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*Soli Deo Gloria*
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Chapter One: Introduction and Rationale

Over the past half century, instructional communication researchers have demonstrated that communication competence is a critical aspect of effective teaching-learning encounters (McCroskey & McCroskey, 2006). Communication competence is particularly important during transitions that occur when “an event or non-event results in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world and thus requires a corresponding change in one’s behavior and relationships” (Schlossberg, 1981, p. 5). Consequently, a transition, such as students to college, represents a fitting phenomenon for researchers to examine. The transition to college is continually shaped by interactions that occur on college campuses. Some of these interactions provide support to students. Studying the intricacies of interactions and the process of transition enables researchers to better understand how students seek out and receive support. The interpersonal relationship between students and teachers represents one appropriate context to explore supportive communication, particularly the complexity of how students form and develop relationships with teachers that provide the support students need to cope with the transition to college.

To better understand how teacher-student relationships are formed and developed, researchers have focused on both teacher communication behaviors such as nonverbal immediacy, clarity, socio-communicative style, and power (e.g., Chesebro, 2003; Horan & Myers, 2009; King & Witt, 2009; Mottet & Beebe, 2006; Mottet, Parker-Raley, Beebe, & Cunningham, 2007; Myers, Martin, & Mottet, 2002; Schrodt, Turman, & Soliz, 2006) and student traits such as communication apprehension, shyness, willingness to communicate, and communication competence (e.g., Almeida, 2004; Burk, 2001; Canary
While researchers have devoted a considerable amount of effort toward identifying how teachers and students enhance or hinder teaching-learning encounters individually, only recently have researchers begun to consider how teachers and students simultaneously co-construct teaching-learning encounters through interaction (Frisby & Martin, 2010; Johnson, 2009; Sidelinger & Booth-Butterfield, 2009). When teachers and students co-construct effective interaction, students perceive their teachers as supportive.

Research concerning how teachers and students co-construct supportive relationships through interaction is crucial to understanding how relationships and interaction facilitate students’ instructional outcomes. Existing research has highlighted how supportive interactions can positively influence student-student (Johnson, 2009; Terry, 2006) and teacher-student relationships (Frisby & Martin, 2010; Kerssen-Griep, Trees, & Hess, 2008), learning (Frymier, 2007), in class (Auster & MacRone, 1994; Crombie, Pyke, Silverthorn, Jones, & Piccinin, 2003) and out of class communication (Dobransky & Frymier, 2004), and motivation (Kerssen-Griep, 2001; Kerssen-Griep et al., 2008; Pintrich, 2003; Ryan & Deci, 2000). These interactions are primarily student perception-based. As teachers and students co-construct interactions and relationships, students’ perceptions coalesce over time as students make sense of interactions, relationships, and “the context within which actions and relationships are seen to occur” (Kerssen-Griep et al., 2008, p. 316). Students’ perceptions are shaped by external factors such as college and classroom structures and internal factors such as students’ habits, attitudes, and interactions with teachers and other students (Fraser, 1989; Marjoribanks,
When students perceive that they are supported by their teachers, they take control of their learning (Deci, Ryan, & Williams, 1996; Haukoos & Penick, 1987; Levine, Donitsa-Schmidt, & Zellermayer, 1996; Nolen, 1995), focus on improvement and mastery (Kaplan & Maehr, 2007; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Pintrich, 2003), interact more with others (Coupland, 2003; Jorgenson, 1992), and experience less anxiety (Patrick, Ryan, & Kaplan, 2007). The extant research on teacher traits, student traits, and teacher-student interaction underscores the complexity of the teacher-student interpersonal relationship and the interaction between teachers and students.

One challenge embedded in the transition to college involves facilitating academic integration, students’ desire to complete a degree, and social integration, students’ desire to get a degree at a particular institution (Tinto, 1975, 1993) for student populations who are less likely to stay in college and persist to graduation. Researchers have posited that a crucial means for successful academic integration and social integration is seeking out support from family members who have undergone a similar transition (London, 1996; Ramsey & Peale, 2010). Thus, first-generation students, students who come from a family where neither parent completed a baccalaureate degree, face more challenges during the transition from high school to college than continuing generation students, students who come from a family where one or both parents completed a baccalaureate degree (London, 1996; Ramsey & Peale, 2010). This difference in family background creates a performance gap that extends from the first year of college (Chen & Carroll, 2005; Nichols & Lucas, 2010) through the latter years of college (Ishitani, 2006; Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005; Nichols & Lucas, 2010; Pascarella,
Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004; Somers, Woodhouse, & Cofer, 2004) and ultimately the early career years post-graduation (Pascarella et al., 2004).

While extant research depicts a wide performance gap between first-generation and continuing generation students, Benmayor (2002) suggested that strong interpersonal support systems can narrow the gap between first-generation and continuing generation college students. Although parents can serve as an interpersonal support system for first-generation students, these parents lack the college knowledge necessary to help their children cope with the transition to college (York-Anderson & Bowman, 1991). Parents are unable to supply college knowledge, because they themselves lack the positive exposure to a similar transition needed to understand college experiences and expectations (Ceballo, 2004). When parents lack the specific first-hand insights needed to be credible sources for college information, first-generation college students must learn how to succeed in college from people who have first-hand college knowledge (Nichols & Lucas, 2010). Therefore, the central purpose of the present study was to explore teacher-student interaction, teacher-student relationship formation and development, and the ways in which teacher-student interaction and relationships facilitated support and ultimately persistence to graduation for first-generation students in the transition to college. To date, few researchers have investigated the centrality of communication in the first-generation student and teacher relationship and hence in this study I sought to better understand the nature of interaction in the teacher-student relationship during the transition to college by taking a communication-centered approach.

I used transition theory to guide my inquiry in the present study. The main focus of this theory concerns how individuals, and those with whom they are connected, deal
with change (Schlossberg, 1981). Schlossberg (1981) argued that her theory described “the extraordinarily complex reality that accompanies and defines the capacity of human beings to cope with change in their lives” and captured the individual characteristics and external occurrences that are embedded in the transition process (p. 3). Because the focal point of transition theory entails how individuals, and those with whom they are connected, deal with obvious life changes, it was a practical theoretical framework to guide my study as I explored how first-generation students seek out and receive the support they need from teachers to deal with the challenges and changes embedded within the transition to college and ultimately persist to graduation.

Within this chapter, I explain how transition theory is the most practical theoretical framework to guide my study and then discuss aspects of this theory that support the argument for my study. Second, I develop an argument concerning why the teacher-student relationship, specifically the teacher-first-generation student relationship, represents a suitable context to study the communicative process of social support during college transition. Third, I explain how I operationalized the transition to college as pivotal relational turning point events that influence the establishment of the teacher-student relationship. At the end of this chapter, I embed the research questions guiding this dissertation. To begin, I discuss why transition theory was the most practical theoretical framework to guide my study.

**Overview of Schlossberg’s Transition Theory**

Since the central purpose of the present study was to explore teacher-student interaction, teacher-student relationship formation and development, and the ways in which teacher-student interaction and relationships facilitate support and ultimately
persistence to graduation for first-generation students in the transition to college, I decided to use Schlossberg’s transition theory as a sensitizing theory because this theory helps researchers understand how students deal with change and transition. In the following section I will first discuss the development of Schlossberg’s Transition Theory including the 1981 conceptualization and the 1984 and 1989 reconceptualizations.

**1981 Conceptualization**

Schlossberg’s (1981) transition theory originated in an article published in *The Counseling Psychologist*. Schlossberg’s (1981) theory grew out of her desire to understand how people, and those with whom they are connected, deal with change. To better understand this process, Schlossberg (1981) developed a theory that described “the extraordinarily complex reality that accompanies and defines the capacity of human beings to cope with change in their lives” and captured the individual characteristics and external occurrences that are embedded in the transition process (p. 3). Drawing heavily from life-course theorists including Lieberman (1975), Lipman-Blumen (1976), Lowenthal et al. (1975), Parkes (1971), and Zill (1974), Schlossberg’s (1981) primary goal was to analyze human adaptation to transition. Understanding adaptation to transition merits a discussion of Schlossberg’s conceptualization of these two terms.

**Transition and Adaptation**

Transition refers to “an event or non-event [that] results in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world and thus requires a corresponding change in one’s behavior and relationships” (Schlossberg, 1981, p. 5). Schlossberg (1981) defined transition broadly to include both events and nonevents. Events included obvious life changes such as high school graduation or college entry. Events can be anticipated and
predictable or unanticipated and unpredictable (Schlossberg, 1995). Non-events included subtle changes such as loss of career aspirations or the nonoccurrence of anticipated events such as a college acceptance letter to a first choice college that never comes through. Non-events can be classified into four categories: personal, ripple, resultant, or delayed (Schlossberg, 1995). Personal non-events are related to students’ individual aspirations. Ripple non-events are felt due to someone else’s non-event. Resultant non-events are caused by another event. Delayed non-events involve events that are anticipated in that they still may occur in the future. Perception, context, and impact play integral roles in transition. Perception is integral to transition because a transition only exists if students define a particular experience as an event or non-event (Schlossberg, 1995). Context reflects the students’ relationship to the transition. Impact refers to the degree to which a transition alters the student’s daily life.

Perception, context, and impact also influence adaptation. Adaptation refers to “a process during which an individual moves from being totally preoccupied with the transition to integrating the transition into his or her own life” (Schlossberg, 1981, p. 7). Schlossberg (1981) posited that adaptation was affected by the interaction of perceptions, environmental characteristics, and personal characteristics. Schlossberg (1981) organized this interaction into three sets of factors that mediated the movement from transition to adaptation: characteristics of transition, characteristics of pretransition and posttransition environments, and characteristics of the individual. Each set of factors will be discussed in turn in the next section.
Characteristics of Transition

The first set of factors included seven characteristics of transition: (a) role change, (b) affect, (c) source, (d) timing, (e) onset, (f) duration, and (g) degree of stress (Schlossberg, 1981). These characteristics influenced the ease or difficulty of the adaptation to change. Role change involved a role gain or loss that was accompanied by some degree of stress. Affect referred to changes that were positive and generated pleasure or negative and accompanied by pain. Source referred to how the change came about: internally as a result of an individual’s deliberate decision or externally as a result of other people’s decisions or by circumstances outside the individual’s control. Timing involved being on-time where the individual followed a prescribed timetable for major life events or off-time where the individual deviated from a prescribed timetable. Onset referred to changes that were expected, inevitable, deliberate, and gradual or sudden, unexpected, and unprepared for. Duration referred to whether the change was permanent, temporary, or uncertain. Degree of stress was dependent on the other six characteristics: (a) role change, (b) affect, (c) source, (d) timing, (e) onset, and (f) duration. These seven characteristics of transition cannot be understood in isolation. They should be considered within the context of the pretransition and posttransition environment and the characteristics of the individual.

Characteristics of Pretransition and Posttransition Environments

The second set of factors included three characteristics of pretransition and posttransition environments (Schlossberg, 1981). Aspects of the environment included (a) interpersonal support systems, (b) institutional supports, and (c) physical setting. Interpersonal support systems included intimate, family, and friend networks.
Institutional supports involved informal and formal agencies which provide help.

Physical setting referred to climate, location, living arrangements, and workplace.

**Characteristics of the Individual**

Characteristics of the individual included (a) psychosocial competence, (b) sex, (c) age, (d) state of health, (e) race-ethnicity, (f) socioeconomic status, (g) value orientation, and (h) previous experience with a similar transition. Psychosocial competence includes self-attitudes, world attitudes, and behavioral attitudes. Sex involves biological sex as well as sex-role identification. Age refers to chronological age as well as biological, psychological, social, and functional age. State of health includes good health and ill health. Race-ethnicity involves racial/ethnic background. Socioeconomic status refers to income, occupation, and education. Value orientation includes basic values and beliefs. Previous experience with a similar transition includes people who have positive and negative previous experiences.

**1984 and 1989 Reconceptualizations**

After receiving feedback on her initial model, Schlossberg (1984) reconceptualized her model in *Counseling Adults in Transition* so that her theory dealt with responding to transition rather than adaptation. This book placed her theory in the context of adult development theory, provided examples of applications, and linked transition theory to Egan’s (1982) helping model. This book helped connect theory to practice in counseling and programming contexts (Schlossberg, 1984).

In 1989, Schlossberg introduced several modifications in *Overwhelmed* that would be integrated into her theory in the second edition of *Counseling Adults in Transition* (Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995). *Overwhelmed* (Schlossberg, 1989)
introduced three components of the transition process for the first time: approaching change, taking stock, and taking charge. The taking stock component introduced the 4 S’s (situation, self, support, and strategies) while the taking charge section introduced the three phases of transition (moving in, moving through, and moving out).

**Taking Stock: The 4 S’s**

**Situation.** Sargent and Schlossberg (1988) argued that people bring assets and liabilities to each transition. Students’ success in responding to transition depends on the resources they have at their disposal, specifically how adequate these resources are in helping them manage the demands and challenges that are embedded in transition (Marks & Robb Jones, 2004). Schlossberg et al. (1995) grouped these resources into the four S’s that will each be discussed in turn. The first S is situation which includes experiential and perceptual factors that characterize how the individual copes with the transition (Marks & Robb Jones, 2004). Situation can be broken down into seven factors: trigger (what precipitated the transition), timing (occurring on time or off time or at a good or bad time), control (within or outside the student’s control), role change (a new role that results in a gain or loss), duration (permanent, temporary, or uncertain), previous experience with a similar transition (effectiveness of coping with past experiences and implications for current transition), concurrent stress (single or multiple sources), and assessment (who or what is responsible for the transition and how behavior is affected by this perception) (Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006).

**Self.** The second S is self which includes two factor categories: personal and demographic characteristics and psychological resources (Goodman et al., 2006). Personal and demographic characteristics that affect an individual’s perceptions of his or
her life include socioeconomic status, gender, age, health, and ethnicity/culture. In this theory, age refers to functional, social, or psychological age rather than chronological age. Psychological resources that aid coping include ego development, outlook, commitment, values, spirituality, and resiliency.

**Support.** The third S is support which includes three facets: types, functions, and measurement (Goodman et al., 2006). Support refers to social support that is rooted in four types of relationships: intimate relationships, family units, networks of friends, and institutions and communities. People in these relationships, who comprise the social resources available to the student, may help or hinder students during their transition (Marks & Robb Jones, 2004; Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988). The functions of support include affect, affirmation, aid, and honest feedback (Goodman et al., 2006). Support can be measured through stable and changing supports. Stable supports are role dependent while changing support are more likely to shift over time (Schlossberg et al., 1995).

**Strategies.** Once the student has examined the first three S’s, the student is ready to consider the final S (Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988). The fourth and final S is strategies which include coping responses that fall into three categories: responses that change or modify the situation (e.g., negotiation, assertiveness), control the meaning of the problem (e.g., reappraisal, shifting the blame from self), and manage stress in the aftermath of the transition (e.g., jogging, meditating) (Goodman et al., 2006; Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988). Individuals can also employ four coping strategies: information seeking, direct action, inhibition of action, and intrapsychic behavior. Through one or more of the aforementioned coping responses and strategies, students are able to create a plan for action that helps them develop the strengths and skills they need to cope with the
transition (Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988). Goodman et al. (2006) emphasized that individuals who cope effectively demonstrate flexibility by using multiple methods mentioned above.

**Taking Charge: The Three Phases of Transition**

**Moving in.** In addition to the 4 S’s, Schlossberg (1989) and Schlossberg et al. (1995) introduced three phases of the transition process: moving in, moving through, and moving out. The pre aspect of transition refers to moving in (Komives & Brown, n.d., Schlossberg, 1989; Schlossberg et al., 1995). Moving in involves leaving a known context behind and entering a new context. This process can be voluntary or involuntary. As students start the process of transition in the moving in phase, they begin to assume new roles, routines, relationships, and acclimate to the college setting. Students who manage change successfully often take stock with the four S’s.

**Moving through.** The moving in phase is followed by the moving through phase. In this phase, students begin the process of adjustment and day-to-day management (Komives & Brown, n.d., Schlossberg, 1989; Schlossberg et al., 1995). This process can be short (two weeks), longer (four years), or a life time task. Moving through college involves academic tasks such as deciding on a major; maximizing inside and outside the classroom learning; test-taking; and time management as well as psychosocial tasks such as developing relationships; negotiating class, gender, and racial differences; and finding a place in the community. Similar to the moving in phase, students use the four S’s outlined above to identify and assess challenges in this phase.

**Moving out.** The moving through phase is followed by the moving out phase. In this phase, students begin to figure out where they will go from college and exit the
college experience (Komives & Brown, n.d., Schlossberg, 1989; Schlossberg et al., 1995). This phase ends the college cycle and begins a new cycle such as graduate school or a new job (Komives & Brown, n.d., p. 7). Thus, moving out involves moving out and moving in to something new.

As I have outlined above, transition theory’s taking stock and taking charge components provided insight into the time period I focused on: first-generation students’ transition to college. This theory also informed how students respond to perceived changes in the phenomenon of interest I will discuss next: the teacher-student relationship.

**Teacher-Student Communication and Teacher-Student Relationships**

Two major approaches have dominated instructional communication scholarship: the rhetorical approach and the approach taken in this study, the relational approach (McCroskey & McCroskey, 2006). Rhetorical researchers view “teachers’ behaviors as causal influences of student learning,” while relational researchers view “the shared development of teacher-student relationships as causal influences of student learning” (McCroskey & McCroskey, 2006, p. 37). Consequently, rhetorical researchers adopt a more linear approach to communication where the teacher is the source of the instructional messages and students are the receivers of the instructional messages, while relational researchers adopt a more constitutive approach to communication where teachers and students construct shared meaning within the context of the teacher-student relationship (Mottet & Beebe, 2006). To build their argument that meaning is co-constructed within the context of the teacher-student relationship, relational instructional communication researchers argue that teacher-student relationships share characteristics
with other interpersonal relationships (DeVito, 1986; Fink, 2003; Frymier & Houser, 2000; Mottet & Beebe, 2006; Turman & Schrodt, 2006). Therefore, researchers have explored the types of communicative messages that teachers and students use to co-construct meaning and build an interpersonal relationship in the classroom.

In an early attempt to assess which relational constructs were associated with teacher job satisfaction, Graham, West, and Schaller (1992) proposed that a relational teaching approach comprised of behaviors that indicated competence, immediacy, and humor was associated with teacher job satisfaction. Their data supported a slightly modified version of the relational teaching approach they proposed. As the authors expected, interpersonal competence, including perceived effectiveness and appropriateness, was related to teachers’ reported job satisfaction. Thus, competent teachers were more likely to facilitate satisfying interpersonal exchanges that led to satisfying teaching experiences. Immediacy, including verbal and nonverbal behaviors that reduce the psychological distance between teachers and students, was also related to job satisfaction. Thus, immediate teachers were more involved with their students and derived greater satisfaction from teaching. Contrary to the relational teaching approach the authors proposed, only negative or disparaging humor contributed to teacher job satisfaction. Thus, teachers who engaged in disparaging humor succeeded at defining expectations and setting boundaries for students which led to greater satisfaction with teaching. Graham et al.’s (1992) research that advances a relational teaching approach that promotes satisfying interpersonal exchanges, satisfying teaching experiences, and teacher job satisfaction articulates a need to further explore interactions within the
teacher-student relationship, as these interactions may aid the process of relational
development and lead to satisfying outcomes for teachers and first-generation students.

Although Graham et al.’s (1992) research on teaching as a relational activity is
useful, their research focused exclusively on teachers’ perceptions and did not include
students’ perceptions, which help inform what teacher communication behaviors promote
and inhibit instructional outcomes. In response to Graham et al.’s (1992) research
limitations, Frymier and Houser (2000) conducted two studies. The first study
investigated students’ perceptions of the importance of communication skills and
immediacy behaviors while the second study investigated students’ perceptions of
teachers’ use of communication skills. In the first study, students indicated that
referential skill, ego support, and conflict management were most important to good
teaching. In the second study, students indicated that communication skills, particularly
referential skill, a content oriented factor, and ego support, a relationally oriented factor,
influenced their learning and motivation. As a result of these two studies, the authors
concluded that communication skills that are important to friendship are also important to
teacher-student relationships and that teacher-student communication is relationally and
content driven. Therefore, Frymier and Houser’s (2000) research further justified
focusing on both content and relational dimensions in the teacher-student relationship, as
these dimensions provide an explicit link between teacher-student communication and
satisfying outcomes for teachers and students.

Although Frymier and Houser’s (2000) research provides an adequate foundation
for viewing the teacher-student relationship as an interpersonal relationship, several
researchers have taken an additional step by exploring specific teacher and student
communication behaviors that contribute to an interpersonal relationship. One such communication behavior is teacher confirmation, “the process by which teachers communicate to students that they are valuable, significant individuals” (Ellis, 2000, p. 265). Ellis (2000) developed and validated a measure of perceived teacher confirmation that students identified as confirming or disconfirming. This 16-item teacher confirmation scale included three factors: teachers’ response to students’ questions-comments, demonstrated interest in students and in their learning, and teaching style. She also found that teacher confirmation plays a significant role in students’ cognitive and affective learning and that the effect of teacher confirmation on cognitive learning was mediated through affective learning. Ellis (2004) followed up her initial study with two additional studies. The first demonstrated that students perceived the teacher behaviors delineated in her initial scale as confirming. The second demonstrated that there was no hierarchy of confirmation behaviors and that all confirmation behaviors evoke confirmation feelings in students. Both studies supported confirmation as a significant impact on interpersonal relationships.

Subsequent research (Goodboy & Myers, 2008; Schrodt et al., 2006; Turman & Schrodt, 2006) extended Ellis’ (2000, 2004) research by exploring the impact of perceived teacher confirmation on teacher perceptions and student outcomes. Schrodt et al. (2006) established that perceived understanding partially mediated the effects of perceived teacher confirmation on teacher credibility and evaluations. Turman and Schrodt (2006) found that perceived teacher confirmation was positively related to teacher’s use of expert, reward, and referent power, negatively related to teacher’s use of coercive power, and unrelated to teacher’s use of legitimate power. Goodboy and Myers
(2008) examined how teacher confirmation behavior influenced student communication and learning outcomes. They found that teacher confirmation resulted in increased positive communication (e.g., communication for the relational, functional, and participatory motives; student participation) and learning outcomes (e.g., cognitive learning, affective learning, state motivation, and satisfaction) and decreased negative student communication (e.g., communication for the excuse-making motive, challenge behavior). The preceding research highlighted a specific teacher communication behavior “confirmation” that contributes to the interpersonal relationship between students and teachers.

Another teacher communication behavior that contributes to an interpersonal relationship with students is caring. Caring includes three factors: empathy, understanding, and responsiveness (McCroskey, 1992). Empathic teachers identify with their students’ situation or feelings (Teven, 2007). Understanding teachers comprehend students’ ideas, feelings, and needs (Teven, 2007). Responsive teachers are other-oriented and sensitive toward students (Teven, 2007). Teven and McCroskey’s (1997) study supported the theory that perceived caring positively influences teacher evaluations as well as students’ affective and cognitive learning. Thus, students were more likely to attend class, listen attentively to their teacher, and make an effort to learn when they perceived that their teacher had their interests at heart. In this study, the authors called for research that identified specific teacher behaviors which communicate caring to students and research that directs attention toward the relationship between perceived caring and nonverbal immediacy.
In response to the first part of this call, Teven and Gorham (1998) revealed that students perceive teachers as caring when they demonstrate concern for performance and grades, solicit responses to student questions and feedback, and attempt to communicate in a positive manner. In response to the second part of this call, Teven and Hanson (2004) suggested that high verbal caring behaviors soften the negative impact of nonimmediate behaviors. This line of research highlighted a specific teacher communication behavior “caring” that contributes to the interpersonal relationship between teachers and students.

Although teacher communication behaviors contribute to an interpersonal relationship between teachers and students, these communication behaviors do not reveal the entire picture. To fully understand the communication behaviors that contribute to an interpersonal relationship, scholars have also considered student communication behaviors that occur both inside and outside the classroom. Martin et al. (1999) for example identified five underlying reasons for why students communicate with their teachers in class: relational, functional, excuse, participation, and sycophancy. Students who use relational communication according to the researchers are trying to develop a personal relationship with their teachers. Students who use functional communication are trying to learn more about the course or its content. Students who use participatory communication are trying to earn participation points in classes where teachers required participation or assigned grades based on student participation. Students who use excuse communication are trying to rationalize why their work was late or missing. Students who use sycophant communication are trying to make a favorable impression on their teachers. Students who communicated with teachers for all of the interpersonal
communication motives described above had relational and participation motives and to a lesser extent excuse and sycophancy motives. Students who communicated with teachers for the interpersonal communication motive of control had excuse, participation, and sycophancy motives.

Dobransky and Frymier’s (2004) research on communication outside the classroom complements Martin et al.’s (1999) research. Student out-of-class communication (OCC) occurs when students initiate interactions outside the formal classroom (Dobransky & Frymier, 2004). Dobransky and Frymier (2004) found that students who engaged in OCC with a teacher experienced a more interpersonal relationship than students not engaging in OCC. Students engaging in OCC reported high levels of intimacy, shared control, and trust with their teachers than students who did not engage in OCC. The authors concluded that intimacy, control, and trust were positively related to affective learning and learning indicators and that the results of this study supported Frymier and Houser’s (2000) contention that teacher-student relationships can also establish interpersonal relationships.

The results of the literature on teacher-student communication indicate that interpersonal teacher-student relationships develop when teachers and students engage in communication behaviors that promote interaction (Mottet & Beebe, 2006). Unfortunately, most of the research that has been conducted to identify teacher and student communication behaviors has focused on how instructional outcomes occur as a result of an interpersonal relationship. While this research is useful, it is important to conduct an inquiry into how the interpersonal relationship between teachers and students develops and changes over time both positively and negatively. Specifically, this inquiry
must explore the types of communication behaviors that support and fail to support students as they transition from high school to college and decide whether to stay in school and persist to graduation.

Students’ perceptions of communication behaviors that constitute change in the teacher-student relationship lead to perceptions of how supportive or nonsupportive those communication behaviors are. Thus, in the following section, I discuss potential social support outcomes that may arise from the teacher-student relationship.

**Social Support Outcomes**

Burleson, Albrecht, Goldsmith, and Sarason (1994) argued that “the presence of caring relationships and the experience of social support indisputably contribute to the quality of a person’s life” (p. xi). Burleson et al. (1994) outlined two major bodies of social support research: research that examines the role of support on health and well-being and research that examines the role of support on interpersonal relationship formation and development.

To pursue these two lines of research, social support researchers have taken three approaches: sociological, psychological, and communicative approaches. Early research was dominated by the sociological approach which posited that the mere presence of social ties led to improved or protected health (Burleson et al., 1994). Researchers who took the sociological approach correlated social network features with indices of health and well-being with the goal of determining how the existence of social ties influenced health outcomes. This approach had two limitations. First, structural social network characteristics were weakly associated with the availability of support and health outcomes. Second, some social ties were not health promoting and actually resulted in
sources of stress or stress and support. To address these limitations, social support researchers began taking a psychological approach.

The psychological approach highlighted the need to consider social network quality and meaning in addition to social network quantity and structure (Burleson et al., 1994). Researchers also began to predict health outcomes using perceptions of quality and availability of support rather than structural features of social networks. Thus, this approach emphasized perceptions of support availability and satisfaction and focused on how the quality of social relationships influenced perceived support and health and well-being indices. While this approach moved social support research forward from the sociological approach, this approach still had limitations. First, researchers found that relationships themselves are not supportive or unsupportive. Rather, actions that relationship partners carry out provide support. Second, this perspective gauged cognitive representations of social support rather than actual or experienced support. To address these limitations, social support researchers began taking a communicative approach.

The communicative approach focuses on how individuals build supportive ties, seek and obtain social support, and react to social support by examining the communicative and interactional processes individuals use to solicit and convey social support (Burleson et al., 1994). According to Burleson et al. (1994), conceptualizing social support as communication has several advantages. First, this approach directly features communication which builds upon the previous two approaches that positioned communication as the central mechanism by which support is conveyed. Second, this approach helps researchers understand how social ties are created and maintained. Third,
this approach shows how communication contributes to a sense of support formed through stable, secure attachment or messages and interactional behaviors. Put simply, social support should be studied as communication because social support is conveyed through messages that occur in the context of relationships created and sustained through interaction. Using this approach, social support researchers have focused on characteristics of supportive messages, interactions, and relationships.

Researchers who focus on the characteristics of supportive messages are interested in taking a detailed look at the messages people use to provide social support (Burleson et al., 1994). Limited research has examined specific features of these messages. Several studies (Dakof & Taylor, 1990; Wortman & Lehman, 1985) indicated that efforts to provide support are not equally successful and that the intention to provide support does not always result in successful, sophisticated, sensitive messages (Lehman, Ellard, & Wortman, 1986; Lehman & Hemphill, 1990). These findings illustrated the need for research that examined message design and effects, explained message characteristics and impacts, and described verbal and nonverbal behaviors comprising messages (Burleson et al., 1994). Conceptualizing social support as communication provided the tool researchers like Burleson (1994), Goldsmith (1994), Tardy (1994), Zimmerman and Applegate (1994) needed for message description and analysis.

The interactional context is highlighted further in research that focuses on characteristics of supportive interactions. Researchers who focus on the characteristics of supportive interactions examine the social episodes where support messages are produced (Burleson et al., 1994). These episodes shape whether, how, and from whom social support is solicited (Burleson et al., 1994). These episodes also influence the kinds of
support, form and content of supportive messages, and effects of supports on the recipient and recipient-provider relationship (Burleson et al., 1994). To explore this focus, researchers have proposed analyses and models that may inform researchers’ understanding of the characteristics of supportive interactions (Cutrona & Suhr, 1994; Pearlin & McCall, 1990; Sarason et al., 1994).

Researchers who focus on characteristics of supportive relationships look at ways personal relationships communicate support. While many researchers have viewed social support as distinct behaviors solicited and produced in stressful circumstances, Barnes and Duck (1994) argued that social support is a basic, ongoing process that occurs in many different social relationships, that the enactment of relationships can be supportive, and that support functions can be realized through everyday talk.

In the present study, I built on extant research that took a communicative approach to studying characteristics of supportive messages, interactions, and relationships between teachers and students by following Goldsmith’s (2004) call to fully examine social interaction processes to understand how and when supportive communication promotes well-being. Examining interactions allowed me to apply Goldsmith’s (2004) call to instructional communication by studying teacher messages, how these teacher messages were perceived, the nature of the teacher-student relationship, and fill the knowledge gap that exists about the ingredients of teacher-student interactions. Focusing on communication processes also allowed me to determine what types of teacher messages and behaviors first-generation students perceived as most influential to their likelihood of staying in school and persisting to graduation.
To take a communicative approach to teacher-student interactions, I adopted Cutrona’s (1996) definition that characterizes social support as the “responsiveness to another’s needs and more specifically … acts that communicate caring; that validate the other’s worth, feelings or actions; or that facilitate adaptive coping with problems through the provision of information, assistance or tangible resources” (p. 10). To explore how these interactions function in instructional contexts, I worked to address the limitation of an individual-level approach to social support by examining the communication that precipitates perceived social support.

An individual-level approach to studying social support focuses on investigating receiver perceptions (Miller & Berlin Ray, 1994). Researchers have used several different research strategies to investigate receiver perceptions. First, researchers focused on the functions support can play in ameliorating stress (Miller & Berlin Ray, 1994). This research strategy began with the idea that different types of support could help individuals deal with different types of stress (Cobb, 1976). Cutrona and Russell (1990) have continued this line of research through their theory of optimal matching that focuses on matching support to stress. Other researchers (Pierce, Sarason, & Sarason, 1990; Sarason, Pierce, & Sarason, 1990; Sarason, Shearin, Pierce, & Sarason, 1987) argued that individuals develop their own working models of support where people who believe they can contribute to relationships are confident that others will desire a relationship with them. Other researchers have focused on the different sources each individual has available to them (Miller & Berlin Ray, 1994). While the individual-level approach to social support research contributes to our knowledge of the role of communication in the support process, this approach has one main limitation. This approach does not discuss
the behaviors or messages that lead to perceived support (Miller & Berlin Ray, 1994). Thus, this research does not focus on the communication that precipitates perceived social support.

To begin to address the lack of focus on communication, researchers have begun investigating support messages (Cutrona & Suhr, 1992; Cutrona, Suhr, & MacFarlane, 1990). To investigate support messages, researchers examine the social support messages that occur during interactions or exchanges in interpersonal relationships. Taking a communicative approach to studying support helps researchers understand what support looks and sounds like and what categories of messages lead to perceived support (Miller & Berlin Ray, 1994). While understanding support messages is helpful, we still do not understand support in real life stressful situations for real life support recipients, because the situations are partially contrived and the messages are coded by researchers rather than support recipients (Miller & Berlin Ray, 1994).

Researchers have also focused on specific remembered messages that influence perceived social support. For example, Dunkel-Schetter (1984) and Dakof and Taylor (1990) investigated the types of behaviors and messages cancer patients remembered as helpful and unhelpful. They found that support recipients remembered different sources as helpful in support provision. This line of research provided insights into general categories of support that recipients remembered as helpful or unhelpful. Lyles and Miller (1992) moved beyond general categories of support to specifics of message content, context, and provision. They asked college students to recall an influential person who had an important effect on their lives. Their questions focused on the context, source, content, and perceived supportiveness of the message at the time the
message was communicated and in retrospect. In the present study, I built on remembered messages by pursuing two foci: first-generation students’ support needs during the moving in, moving through, and moving out phases of the transition to college and specific teacher messages that students perceived as influential to their likelihood to persist to graduation. I chose to investigate these two foci because they provided insight into the process by which students perceive and interpret supportive communication from their teachers. My investigation of these two foci was informed by extant social support research situated in the instructional context.

While there is a strong body of research in interpersonal and family communication that has focused on how social support functions in interpersonal relationships (Barnes & Duck, 1994; Braithwaite, McBride, & Schrodt, 2003; Braithwaite, Waldron, & Finn, 1999; Burleson, 1994; Burleson, Albrecht, Goldsmith, & Sarason, 1994; Leach & Braithwaite, 1996), researchers suggest that social support is also important in interpersonal relationships in the instructional context (Jones, 2008; Mortenson, 2006; Thompson & Mazer, 2009). In the National Survey of Student Engagement (2000), student/teacher interaction emerged as a benchmark of effective education. Researchers have shown that informal student/teacher interaction can lead to educational benefits including increased learning, personal development, academic persistence, and dedication to educational goals (Astin, 1994; Kuh, 1995; Martin, Mottet, & Myers, 2000; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

One important function of student/teacher interaction is social support. Burleson and Goldsmith (1998) suggested that the most effective way individuals can cope with stressful situations is to receive social support from trusted others. Thus, in stressful
times in a student’s life such as the college transition (DeBerard, Spielmans, & Julka, 2004; Earwaker, 1992; Holmbeck & Wandrei, 1993; Lafreniere & Ledgerwood, 1997), teachers may play a pivotal role in helping students cope with academic stressors such as adjusting to college expectations (DeBerard et al., 2004; Kenny & Rice, 1995; Lafreniere & Ledgerwood, 1997; Tinto, 2005), being separated from familiar sources of support (Lafreniere & Ledgerwood, 1997; MacGeorge, Samter, & Gillihan, 2005; Shaver, Furman, & Buhrmester, 1985), and adjusting to the college community (Barnett & Harris, 1984; Holmbeck & Wandrei, 1993; Lafreniere & Ledgerwood, 1997; Lapsley, Rice, & Shadid, 1989; Shaver et al., 1985). To examine how social support is conveyed through communication and situated in helping relationships such as the teacher-student relationship (Cronkite & Moos, 1995; Egbert, Koch, Coeling, & Ayers, 2007), instructional communication researchers have traditionally focused their research on communication and interaction that occurs between teachers and students inside and outside the classroom. More recently, researchers have begun to examine how social support influences the educational system (Goldsmith, 2004), student achievement (Cutrona et al., 1994; Ma & Kishor, 1997; Okun, Sandler, & Baumann, 1988; Rosenfeld, Richman, & Bowen, 2000), and student academic performance (Cauce, Hannan, & Sargeant, 1992; Goldsmith & Albrecht, 1993).

A growing body of research suggests that social support is a protective factor that promotes resiliency and academic success. The stress-buffering model posits that social support helps people cope with and manage stressful situations (Cohen, Gottlieb, & Underwood, 2000). Individuals who experience a major transition, like college students transitioning from high school to college, are more susceptible to these situations.
During a major transition, individuals who manage their stress effectively are able to readjust to their new situation. Several researchers show that social support can ease the transition by buffering stress (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Lamothe et al., 1995; Solberg & Villarreal, 1997; Vaux, 1988), promoting personal adjustment (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Sarason et al., 1990), and mediating well-being (Lakey & Cassady, 1990; Lakey, Moineau, & Drew, 1992). As a result, students who receive social support are healthier and report less stress than students who receive little or no social support (Delistamati et al., 2006).

To explore how social support can buffer students from stress and ease stressful experiences such as the transition from high school to college, researchers have examined helping relationships that facilitate social support (Cronkite & Moos, 1995) including family (Arellano & Padilla, 1996; Cutrona, Cole, Colangelo, Assouline, & Russell, 1994; Friedlander, Reid, Shupak, & Cribbie, 2007; Gloria, Robinson Kurpius, Hamilton, & Wilson, 1999; Suarez, Fowers, Garwood, & Szapocznik, 1997), peer (Bennett & Okinawa, 1990; Daugherty & Lane, 1999; Montgomery & McDowell, 2009; Rodriguez, Mira, Myers, Morris, & Cardoza, 2003; Thompson, 2008; Thompson & Mazer, 2009), and teacher (Arellano & Padilla, 1996; Coleman, 1987; Dreyfoos, 1990; Jones, 2008; Sanders & Joshua, 2000; Sanders & Herting, 2000; Stanton-Salazar, 2001) relationships.

Since I focused on teacher-student relationships in the present study, I will discuss this helping relationship in more detail. Teachers who function as mentors, role models, and institutional agents are best able to help students through the college transition (Arellano & Padilla, 1996; Stanton-Salazar, 2001). Jones (2008) found that teachers can help students cope with and manage stress through out-of-class support. He suggests that
teachers should view students who come to them for help with a stressful situation as opportunities to help students manage their problems, increase students’ satisfaction and motivation, and improve students’ overall academic performance. Ultimately, teacher support helps students feel more comfortable and connected to their teachers and their academic institutions. Researchers who have linked teacher social support to positive outcomes such as increased student success (Coleman, 1987; Dreyfoos, 1990; Sanders & Joshua, 2000), motivation (Jones, 2008; Sanders & Herting, 2000), satisfaction (Jones, 2008), increased class preparation (Sanders & Joshua, 2000), and reduced maladaptive behaviors (Sanders & Joshua, 2000) reinforce the importance of teacher support.

As the extant research on social support implies, the teacher-relationship may be a pivotal helping relationship for students as they transition to college. Just as students’ perceptions of teachers’ social support may differ from one relationship to another, their generational status may influence their academic preparation, postsecondary transition, and progress toward degree attainment. Thus, in the following section, I discuss first-generation students’ academic preparation, transition from high school to college, and progress toward degree attainment.

**First-Generation Student Preparation, Transition, and Degree Progress**

The existing first-generation student literature falls into three broad categories that follow the chronological process of going to college (Terenzini, Springer, Yeager, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996). The first category of research examines first-generation students’ pre-postsecondary preparation (e.g., Attinasi, 1989; Berkner & Chavez, 1997; Choy, 2001; Conklin & Dailey, 1981; Horn & Nunez, 2000; Stage & Hossler, 1989; Warburton, Bugarin, & Nunez, 2001). One factor that influenced this preparation was
parental educational encouragement. Conklin and Dailey (1981) focused on the relationship between parental educational encouragement and students’ college activity. They found that consistency of parental encouragement was positively associated with college entry and attendance at a four-year college. Thus, the more time parents spent setting expectations for postsecondary educational activity, the more likely those students were to enter college. This additional time gave students opportunities to make realistic plans for college attendance and act upon those plans. Conversely, students who lacked the necessary time to make and act upon realistic plans struggled because of a deficient high school program or failed to meet college application deadlines.

Stage and Hossler (1989) reaffirmed Conklin and Dailey’s (1981) findings. They found that parental education and expectations exerted strong influences on potential first-generation students’ postsecondary plans. Although earlier studies emphasized that education and expectations were important, Stage and Hossler (1989) suggested that parental influences on student aspirations were more complex and varied than previous studies had indicated. They found that the level of the father’s education had the strongest effects upon students’ postsecondary plans. These effects were different for male and female students. The father’s education level had a positive effect on the number of times parents discussed college with male students. However, it did not affect the number of times parents discussed college with female students. Although the father’s educational level positively affected male students rather than female students, only female students’ discussions about college with their parents affected their educational plans.
Choy (2001) expanded Stage and Hossler’s (1989) findings by identifying five critical steps in the path to college enrollment where parental support was especially crucial: (a) educational expectations which included the decision to pursue postsecondary education and the decision about what type of postsecondary education to pursue, (b) academic preparation which included taking appropriate courses in high school to prepare for college-level work, (c) taking tests which included completing SAT or ACT entrance examinations, (d) preparing applications which included choosing institutions and filing applications at those institutions, and (e) deciding to enroll which included gaining acceptance to an institution and making the arrangements necessary to enroll at that institution. Unfortunately, first-generation students were less likely than continuing generation students to complete all five steps.

Berkner and Chavez (1997) suggested that first-generation students experience barriers to college, because they struggle to complete the path to college enrollment and receive the support and preparation they need to enter college. These deficiencies translate to low educational expectations and poor academic preparation. Unfortunately, expectations and preparation are associated with rates of taking college entrance examinations and applying to four-year colleges. Although first-generation students often experience barriers to college entry, there were also more promising findings, for example when first-generation students took the necessary steps to gain college admission they were able to overcome other barriers and successfully matriculate to college. The authors suggested that these findings indicate that access is more than a financial issue. To promote access, families and schools need to help students gain more
academic preparation for college and follow the appropriate steps needed to gain college admission.

Warburton et al. (2001) confirmed Berkner and Chavez’ (1997) findings that suggested that academic preparation and knowledge regarding the college admission process facilitate matriculation. Although previous research demonstrated that first-generation students have different college enrollment practices and are less persistent than their continuing generation counterparts, Warburton et al. (2001) more closely examined the extent to which academic preparation affects persistence and attainment in postsecondary education. They found that students’ high school curriculum was associated with their postsecondary GPA, amount of remedial coursework taken, and rates of persistence and attainment. Consequently, students who took rigorous high school classes had higher college GPAs, took less remedial courses, and were more likely to persist and earn a college degree than students who took less rigorous high school classes. This relationship between academic preparation and persistence has negative implications for first-generation students since first-generation status had a negative association with academic preparation and persistence.

Although Warburton et al. (2001) and Berkner and Chavez (1997) showed that there were gaps between first-generation students’ support and preparation, Attinasi (1989) suggested that colleges can supplement parental educational encouragement and help students become more prepared for college by improving the college-going experience of first-generation students. First, colleges can bring prospective first-generation students and their families to campus to introduce them to the college experience. These early visits to college directly impact early anticipatory socialization
related to attending college. Colleges, for example, can take more active interventions during later anticipatory socialization by inviting prospective first-generation students and their families to campus tours and college day programs. These visits have the potential to further socialize and orient first-generation students to the college experience. Multiple day campus visits can further maximize socialization to college-going. Colleges can also help design curricula for college preparatory classes offered in high school. These classes can help students prepare to matriculate to college.

Horn and Nunez (2000) argued that increasing first-generation students’ college preparation opportunities can also help increase the chances that first-generation students will benefit from a college education. Their results offered negative and positive findings concerning first-generation students’ experiences. First-generation students were less likely than continuing generation students to participate in pre-college enrollment academic programs. Consequently, they were less likely to enroll in college directly after high school graduation. Conversely, first-generation students who received help from parents and their high school in the application process were also more likely to enroll in college than first-generation students who applied for college without any help. These findings suggested that parents, teachers, counselors, relatives, and friends have the potential to encourage students to pursue postsecondary education. Collectively, this body of research indicates that, compared to their peers, first-generation students are at a disadvantage with respect to basic college knowledge, degree aspirations and plans, and high school academic preparation (Pascarella et al., 2004). Although first-generation students are at a disadvantage compared to continuing generation students it is clear that supportive individuals and colleges can help first-generation students succeed in college.
The second category of research moves forward in the college timeline from precollege entry to the transition to postsecondary education (e.g., Bui, 2002; London, 1989; Terenzini et al., 1994; Terenzini et al., 1996). Researchers have demonstrated that this transition is different for first-generation and continuing generation students. Bui (2002) demonstrated that first-generation students differed overall in their first-year experience from continuing generation students in three academic and two non-academic areas. Academically, first-generation students (a) felt less prepared for college, (b) feared failing in college more, and (c) felt they put more time into studying than continuing generation students. Outside of academics, first-generation students (a) worried more about financial aid and (b) reported that they knew less about the college social environment than other students. First-generation students also reported different reasons for pursuing higher education than continuing generation students. First-generation students were less likely to pursue higher education because a family member was currently attending or had attended college or because they wanted to move out of their parents’ home. Conversely, first-generation students were more likely to pursue higher education because they wanted to gain respect and/or status, bring honor to their family, or help their family financially post-college. Bui’s (2002) research also provides insight into how teachers can best help first-generation students by targeting specific areas of difference in the first-year experience and reasons for pursuing higher education. When teachers support first-generation students in ways that target their unique concerns and needs, they can best help these students persist and graduate.

London’s (1989) research corroborated the importance of family in the decision to attend college and the transition from high school to college. He depicted the shift from
high school to college through first-generation students’ stories. These stories outlined a rough transition fraught with confusion, fear, and alienation. The author organized these stories into two themes: distinct family role assignments or designated psychological tasks and separation. Some first-generation students reported that they were bounded or constrained and that their parents gave them conflicting messages: one message to stay at home, the other message to achieve outside the family in the outside world. Other first-generation students stated that they were delegates and that their parents told them that they were responsible for promoting their family’s interests, wishes, or needs rather than their own. Delegated children were different from bound children in that they demonstrated loyalty by leaving the family rather than staying in the family. Other first-generation students wanted to be exemplars to younger siblings. They had to be the ground breaker for others.

Terenzini et al. (1994) expanded London’s (1989) research by examining the transition from high school to college through first-generation and continuing generation students’ stories. Continuing generation students viewed college as continuation: the culmination of uninterrupted study and progressive academic accomplishment. Continuing generation parents assumed that their children would go to college, because that is what students do after they complete high school. College was the logical next step toward personal and occupational achievement. First-generation students viewed college as disjunction: a difficult transition to a new set of academic and social systems. This adaptation to college represented a departure from their family’s tradition or expectations. This meant breaking rather than continuing family traditions. Breaking these traditions and adapting to the transition was often significant and intimidating.
During the transition, people from the students’ past served as assets and liabilities (Terenzini et al., 1994). High school friends who were also new students at the same institution helped bridge the high school academic and interpersonal environment to the college academic and interpersonal environment. Although these friends are helpful during the initial transition, they fade in importance as students build their friendship network beyond their high school acquaintances. High school friends who did not go on to college were more likely to complicate and hinder the transition to college. These friends often encouraged students to remain anchored in their precollege networks, activities, and interests rather than pursuing new college networks, activities, and interests.

Although first-generation students described a difficult transition, Terenzini et al. (1994) suggested several implications for teachers. First, teachers can consider the varying characteristics of their students and the variations in their students’ transition experiences. Second, teachers can reassure new first-generation students that they can learn, are valuable as people, have legitimate experiences and ideas, and that teachers and institutions are there to help them succeed. Third, teachers can actively participate in the new student orientation process and communicate an interest in students and a willingness to help students become more comfortable at their institutions. Finally, teachers can clearly indicate to their students that they care about them and their success in college.

Terenzini et al. (1996) identified additional differences between first-generation and continuing generation students and additional ways colleges can provide active, targeted support throughout their college years. One key difference found between first-
generation and continuing generation students is perceived support from family, peers, and teachers. First-generation students reported less encouragement from family members regarding their decision to attend college, less time socializing with peers during high school, and less time talking with teachers during high school than continuing generation students. Since these variables have been previously linked to academic performance and persistence, this composite picture depicts students who are at academic risk. Terenzini et al. (1996) derived one key implication from these findings. This implication is that first-generation students need active, targeted support throughout their college years as first-generation students negotiate the transition from high school to college. Colleges can provide this support formally through programs that provide systematic and comprehensive academic support and more informally through validating experiences (Rendon, 1992) with teachers who communicate to students that they have the ability to learn and succeed, that they deserve a place in the academic community, and that their background and past experiences should be valued. Terenzini et al.’s (1996) and Rendon’s (1992) research emphasized the importance of supportive communication within the teacher-student relationship. Through supportive communication, teachers are able to actively make contact with first-generation students and facilitate their academic integration, social integration, and success. This body of research indicates that first-generation students have a more difficult transition to college than continuing generation students. In addition to facing the common anxieties, dislocations, and difficulties many college students face, first-generation students may also encounter additional cultural, social, and academic transitions (Pascarella et al.,
Similar to the first category of research, the researchers in category two suggest that active, targeted support can make the transition easier for first-generation students.

The third category of research focuses on the remainder of the college experience for first-generation students and their progress toward degree attainment (e.g., Attinasi, 1989; Barry, Hudley, Kelly, & Cho, 2009; Skinner & Richardson, 1988). Researchers who focused on this part of the college experience looked for ways that colleges can help first-generation students persist despite statistics that stated that they are less likely to persist toward degree attainment than their continuing generation peers. Attinasi (1989) suggested that colleges can help first-generation students move toward degree attainment by introducing these new students to campus through freshmen orientation programs. These programs help orient students to their new environment and increase the potential that they will ultimately succeed and persist toward degree attainment. As first-generation students progressed toward degree attainment, they needed continued support from their college and social network. Barry et al. (2009) found that first-generation students lack opportunities to disclose college experiences, because people in their social network lack the relevant experiences needed to foster these discussions. First-generation students reported less disclosure of college experiences with family at home and friends from home and at school. This finding has potential negative implications for first-generation students in that these students may struggle to cope with the stress that characterizes the transition from high school to college without social network members who have achieved success in their own transitions. Without these social networks, first-generation students are more at risk to drop out than to remain in college.
Skinner and Richardson (1988) captured what happens when first-generation and continuing generation students receive the support they need to persist toward degree attainment through four profiles of success. In profile one “doing what’s expected,” continuing generation students develop career goals early on and connect higher education to future opportunities with the help of professionals in their family and community. High school peers, teachers, and counselors reinforce their college plans and provide detailed and accurate information about college. These students clearly understood what college entailed and needed little help in college. In profile two “fulfilling the dream,” first-generation students came from families who valued education, but lacked the academic preparation needed to be successful in college. While these students had a route to opportunity like the students in profile one, their career paths were less defined. Students in profile two needed academic support. In profile three “finding direction,” students were the opposite of students in category two. Students in this profile were well prepared for college, but struggled with the social adjustment. Over time, these students began to see education as the route to future opportunities. Through help from the college, they became more determined to succeed. In the final profile, “against the odds,” students lacked the preparation for college and the perception that education would lead to future opportunities. These students needed extensive programs and services to help them negotiate the college experience. This body of research suggests that although first-generation students are more likely to leave after one year, less likely to remain enrolled after three years, and less likely to attain a bachelor’s degree after five years, students can progress toward degree attainment with appropriate help (Pascarella et al., 2004).
Although we know that first-generation students come in with less academic preparation, struggle more with the transition to postsecondary education, and make less progress toward degree attainment than their continuing generation peers without appropriate help and support, we know less about the college experiences that contributed toward their cognitive and psychosocial development during college. To date, only two studies (Terenzini et al., 1996; Pascarella et al., 2004) have addressed this issue directly. Terenzini et al. (1996) analyzed first-year data from 23 two- and four-year institutions that participated in the National Study of Student Learning (NSSL). They found that first-generation students differed from their continuing generation peers in the following ways: first-generation students reported completing fewer credit hours, taking fewer humanities and fine arts courses, studying fewer hours per week, working outside the college more hours per week, making smaller first-year gains in reading comprehension and were less likely to participate in honors programs and perceive that faculty were concerned about students and teaching. These differences remained even after the authors controlled for differences in background or precollege characteristics. Although Terenzini et al.’s (1996) investigation provided an initial look at first-generation students’ college experiences their findings were limited to the first year of college.

Pascarella et al.’s (2004) research built upon Terenzini et al.’s (1996) investigation by extending our understanding of first-generation students’ experiences to the second and third years of college. Pascarella et al. (2004) analyzed second and third year data from 18 four-year institutions that participated in the NSSL. They found that first-generation students continued to struggle compared to their continuing generation peers during the second and third year years of college. First-generation students were
enrolled in less selective institutions, completed fewer credit hours, worked significantly more hours per week, were less likely to live on campus, and made smaller increases in the highest degree they planned to obtain. However, the authors also found some encouraging findings. They found that first-generation students reported that they derived significantly greater benefits from extracurricular and peer involvement and academic or classroom activity engagement than their continuing generation peers. These findings suggest that colleges can enrich postsecondary educational experiences and help first-generation students by facilitating supportive in-class and out-of-class experiences. Promoting and maximizing these experiences help first-generation students to succeed in college.

As the current research on first-generation students suggests, first-generation students can overcome struggles with academic preparation, transition to postsecondary education, and progress toward degree attainment when they engage in supportive interpersonal relationships and enriching educational experiences. As it pertains to the study, students may perceive specific communication events with teachers as particularly helpful or supportive. By gaining knowledge of the communication events that first-generation students perceive as most helpful, teachers may be able to approach and engage first-generation students in ways that promote positive instructional outcomes. The awareness that teachers may gain by understanding how to best communicate with first-generation students is particularly important in the teacher-student relationship. This understanding of how social support develops over time can be understood through relational turning points which are discussed in the subsequent section.
Defining and Rationalizing the Study of Turning Points

Teven (2001) argued that “in order to maximize learning, it is essential for teachers to develop a good relationship with their students, because the rapport established between teachers and students, in part, determines the interest and performance level of students” (p. 159). When teachers and students form interpersonal relationships, these relationships are constituted in communication. Communication is a constructive and dynamic process that produces and reproduces shared meaning (Craig, 1999) where teachers and students construct or define their social world (Baxter, 1992, 1994). Thus, persons and relationships are not separate from communication. Communication constitutes these phenomena and individuals in a relationship such as the teacher-student relationship co-construct meaning together. Baxter (1992, 1994) argued that individuals cannot come with a predetermined or monologic self. Instead, they construct who they are through communication. As individuals construct themselves and their relationships through communication, the relationships remain in a state of flux (Baxter, 1988; Rawlins, 1992).

Relational change over time is punctuated by meaningful communication events or turning points that occur over the life course of the teacher-student relationship (Docan-Morgan, 2011; Docan-Morgan & Manusov, 2009; O’Neill & Todd-Mancillas, 1992). Researchers have adopted several different turning point definitions including a unit of analysis for understanding the patterns of change in relationships (Bolton, 1961), the “sites of developmental change in relationships” (Baxter et al., 1999, p. 294), and “any event or occurrence that is associated with change in a relationship” (Baxter & Bullis, 1986, p. 470). In the present study, I operationalize turning points using Baxter’s
and Bullis’s (1986) definition. Turning points afford a richer understanding of relational processes such as the teacher-student relational process, because they capture critical communication moments, events, or incidents that have impact and import for both teachers and students (Graham, 1997). Turning points are also the sites of developmental change, because they have the potential to transform or alter the relationship positively or negatively (Baxter, Braithwaite, & Nicholson, 1999).

Although turning points studies are common in the interpersonal and family communication literature, turning points remain relatively understudied in the instructional context. Several studies have examined relational turning points in the classroom or college context (e.g., Barge & Musambira, 1992; Bullis & Bach, 1989a; Docan-Morgan, 2011; Docan-Morgan & Manusov, 2009, O’Neill & Todd-Mancillas, 1992). Bullis and Bach (1989a) discovered nine turning points in the teacher-graduate student relationship: academic recognition, perceived similarity, mutual confirmation, advising, personal bonding, relational clashes, relational evolution, relational decline, and miscellaneous. Additionally, Barge and Musambira (1992) examined chair-faculty relationship turning points. They located seven turning points: performance evaluation, recognition, support, trustworthiness, job interference, outside interaction, and interpersonal discussion.

Three published studies have analyzed turning points in teacher-undergraduate student relationships. O’Neill and Todd-Mancillas’ (1992) study of 52 college seniors revealed two macrocategories of turning points: perception of instructional competence and character and perception of teacher’s management style. Docan-Morgan and Manusov’s (2009) study of 640 undergraduate students offered a relational turning point
typology comprised of six supra-categories: instrumental, personal, rhetorical, ridicule/discipline, locational, and other person turning point events. Their analysis also yielded 11 categorical outcomes of these relational turning point events: change in respect for teacher, trust or perceptions of credibility/competence of teacher, perceptions of the relationship with teacher, willingness to approach teacher or seek help, willingness to approach other teachers or authority figures, perceptions of other teachers, decisions about school, desire/ability to ask teacher for professional help, confidence, student’s humanization of teacher, and willingness to take another course with teacher.

While two of the three studies focused on the undergraduate student’s perspective, Docan-Morgan’s (2011) study of 306 teachers focused on the teacher’s perspective. This study yielded four supra-categories of turning point events: consultation, transgression, intimation, and realization of student potential or success. Teachers who described intimation and realization of student potential for success turning point events reported increased liking for students, teacher-student interpersonal relationships, self-efficacy, motivation, and job satisfaction, while teachers who described transgression turning point events reported decreased liking for students, teacher-student interpersonal relationships, self-efficacy, motivation, and job satisfaction. Teachers who described consultation turning points indicated either increased or decreased teacher outcomes depending on the nature of the event.

The three studies (Docan-Morgan, 2011; Docan-Morgan & Manusov, 2009; O’Neill & Todd-Mancillas, 1992) provide sufficient evidence of the role that relational turning point events play in interpersonal relationships such as the teacher-student relationship. These studies also support the argument that turning point events lead to
relational change or other changes such as changing a major or field of interest or deciding to attend graduate school and affect instructional outcomes such as cognitive learning, affective learning, and student motivation. Although research has examined the role of relational turning points in teacher-student relationships, research on student transition has been particularly sparse despite the notion that students who “identify with collectives … to the extent that they feel similar to other members, they feel a sense of belonging, and they consider themselves to be members” are more likely to adapt to the transition and persist to graduation (Bullis & Bach, 1989b, p. 275). Studying first-generation students’ transition is especially significant, because these students often struggle the most with transitioning from high school to college, staying in college, and persisting to graduation.

**Relational Turning Points, Student Development, and Transition**

As the teacher-student relationship forms, many developmental issues are brought to the forefront. Some scholarship has addressed the processes of development that characterize student development. For the most part, however, this work is prescriptive rather than descriptive in nature, proposing what students could or should do to successfully develop from the researcher’s point of view. In general, prescriptive stage-based models of development have been subject to substantial criticism (for reviews, see Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Cate & Lloyd, 1992). These criticisms appear relevant to developmental position and vectors models, such as Perry’s (1968) and Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) models. Baxter et al. (1999) highlighted four criticisms of stage models. First, stage models presume that sequential stages capture the experience of all developing teacher-student relationships and miss the potential for multiple
developmental trajectories. Second, stage models presume that all relationships advance sequentially, progressively, and linearly toward greater closeness. Alternatively, relationships may be better described non-linearly. Third, stage models present relationship development as a series of stages punctuated by transitions from one stage to another. These models fail to explain the factors that move a relationship from one stage to another and emphasize stability within a stage, which deemphasizes change. Thus, stage models may not capture the fluctuation and turbulence present in first-generation students’ transition. Fourth, stage models often have overlapping characteristics that result in unclear boundaries between stages. Thus, these overlapping characteristics may muddy the conceptual clarity of each stage. Consequently, stage-based models have not fared well in empirical studies (Cate & Lloyd, 1992).

Turning points offer an alternative to stages that more closely reflect the perspective of life events theorists including Lowenthal, Thurnher, and Chiriboga (1975) and Schlossberg (1984) who focus on the influence of environment and interaction on developmental change rather than specific stages. This alternative addresses the criticisms mounted against stage models and “potentially affords a rich understanding of relationship processes” (Baxter & Bullis, 1986, pp. 470-471). A relational turning point is a valuable unit of analysis for four reasons (Bullis & Bach, 1989a). First, a relational turning point analysis does not assume that the transition process follows a clear linear pattern of growth as stage models do. Second, a relational turning point analysis allows researchers to examine change points identified by participants rather than researchers. Third, a relational turning point analysis collects self-reports from participants that do not rely on their memories of events in the distant past. Finally, a relational turning point
analysis relies entirely on reports from students who are actively involved in the transition process rather than relying on the college’s perspective.

Considerable research attention has been paid to developmental turning points within the context of romantic relationships (e.g., Baxter & Bullis, 1986; Baxter & Erbert, 1999; Baxter & Pittman, 2001; Bullis, Clark, & Sline, 1993; Cate, Huston, & Nesselroade, 1986; Chang & Chen, 2007; Goldberg, Downing, & Richardson, 2009; Huston, Surra, Fitzgerald, & Cate, 1981; Koenig Kellas, Bean, Cunningham, & Cheng, 2008; Lloyd & Cate, 1985; Reherman, 1987; Siegert & Stamp, 1994; Stafford & Merolla, 2007; Stafford, Merolla, & Castle, 2006; Steuber & Solomon, 2008; Surra, 1985, 1987; Surra & Hughes, 1997). Some research attention has been paid to developmental turning points within friendship (e.g., Becker et al., 2009; Johnson et al., 2004; Johnson, Becker, Craig, Gilchrist, & Haigh, 2009) and family relationships (e.g., Baxter et al., 1999; Breshears, 2010; Dun, 2010; Golish, 2000; Mormon & Herrick, 2008; Willer, 2007). Less research attention has been paid to developmental turning points within the instructional context (Barge & Musambira, 1992; Bullis & Bach, 1989a, 1989b; Docan-Morgan, 2011; Docan-Morgan & Manusov, 2009; O’Neill & Todd-Mancillas, 1992) with only two published studies focused on undergraduate students’ relational turning points with their teachers (Docan-Morgan & Manusov, 2009; O’Neill & Todd-Mancillas, 1992). Collectively, this body of research has emphasized a range of turning points topics including relational turning point events, valence of these event types, rates of change in relationship progress, reasons for and causes of relational turning point change, sequenced patterns and trajectories of relational turning points, and correlation of
relational turning points with interpersonal outcome indicators such as commitment and satisfaction.

In general terms, eight broad categories of relational turning points can be identified in teacher-undergraduate student relationships (Docan-Morgan & Manusov, 2009; O’Neill & Todd-Mancillas, 1992): instructional communication competence and character which involved turning points related to perceived competence and character; teacher’s management style which involved turning points related to learning climate, course administration style, rhetorical sensitivity, and feedback; instrumental turning points which involved turning points related to course-oriented concerns; personal turning points which involved turning points related to personal information, personalized interaction, and teacher-student connection; rhetorical turning points which involved turning points related to overall instruction; ridicule/discipline turning points which involved turning points related to mocking or humiliating behavior; locational turning points which involved turning points related to non-class locations or environments; and other person turning points which involved turning points related to third party interactions.

The relational turning point offered a useful alternative to developmental stage models as a lens by which to gain insight into first-generation students’ perceptions of their development. This approach was advantageous because it privileged the perspective of first-generation students rather than the researcher’s perspective and provided insights into how and why first-generation students developed and changed during the postsecondary educational transition. Therefore, the following research questions were proposed to create a profile of the specific and concrete events that first-generation
students perceive to have been turning points in their likelihood to persist to graduation, relationships with their teachers, and overall classroom experience:

*RQ1*: What types of teacher messages and relational turning points occur during first-generation students’ transition to college?

*RQ2*: How, if at all, do first-generation students perceive that teacher messages and relational turning points influence their likelihood to persist to graduation?

*RQ3*: How, if at all, do first-generation students perceive that teacher messages and relational turning points influence their relationships with their teachers?

*RQ4*: How, if at all, do first-generation students perceive that teacher messages and relational turning points influence their overall classroom experience?

As evidenced by the research questions of this study, investigating the relational turning points in the teacher-student relationship that facilitated students’ persistence to graduation, relationships with the teachers, and overall classroom experience had potential benefits for both teachers and first-generation students. Teachers were better equipped to build supportive interpersonal relationships with their first-generation students that promoted the transition to college and student success. This study also allowed first-generation students to reflect upon relational turning points in their relationships with their teachers that had promoted their instructional outcomes and eased their transition from high school to college. In doing so, both first-generation students and teachers improved their ability to engage in interaction that co-constructed interpersonal relationships.
Summary

In this chapter, I (a) advanced the rationale for the present study, (b) advanced transition theory as a practical theoretical framework to guide the present study, (c) argued for the use of the transition to college as the context for the process of enacting social support in the teacher-student relationship, and (d) discussed the outcomes of social support and relational turning points in instructional interpersonal relationships. Now that I have discussed the rationale for this study, the next chapter describes the interpretive research design used to address my research.
Chapter Two: Argument for Method and Procedures

The present study investigated the relational turning points first-generation students perceive as significant to their interactions with teachers and their transition from high school to college, with the specific goal of raising teachers’ and students’ awareness of communication that facilitates transition from high school to college and persistence to graduation. Specifically, this study used an interpretive research design (a) to gain an in-depth understanding of teacher messages and relational turning points in teacher-student relationships and the perceived influence these teacher messages and relational turning points have on first-generation students’ (b) likelihood to persist to graduation, (c) relationships with their teachers, and (d) overall classroom experience. In this study, I generated teacher message and relational turning point themes and students’ reported perceptions of these teacher messages and relational turning point themes. In this chapter, I describe the participants, data collection, semi-structured interviews, data analysis, and data validation I used for this study.

The present study was rooted in the interpretive tradition. Interpretive researchers examine how individuals interpret events, stories, and conversations by spending time listening, observing, and understanding the respondent’s perspective (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Consequently, research within this tradition represents the researcher’s understanding as well as research participants’ various understandings. By examining these understandings, the interpretive researcher is able to build understanding from these specific detailed first-hand accounts and derive shared meaning from what people in this particular group share (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Corbin and Strauss (2008) referred to this desire to figure out what people share as getting in the inner experience of participants.
and determining how their meanings are formed through and in culture. These experiences are part of human action.

Interpretive researchers focus on human action as meaning-making activity. They pursue this focus by seeking understanding rather than prediction, causal explanation, or functional explanation; embracing the subjective world of people they are studying; and trying to see the world through their participants’ eyes (Baxter & Babbie, 2004). Thus, for interpretive researchers, human action is centered in meaning rather than causes or functions. When human action is centered in meaning, interpretive researchers can understand what action means to people, render human action intelligible, and understand the web of meaning that guides human communication (Baxter & Babbie, 2004). Interpretive researchers understand meanings and meaning making through qualitative observation. Through qualitative observation, interpretive researchers are able to explore more complex questions, those which have multiple answers and truths, from another person’s point of view and provide a detailed understanding of how social realities are produced and maintained through every day practices (Baxter & Babbie, 2004). Through their research which focuses on a very specific, local, understanding of a particular phenomenon, interpretive researchers contribute a rich, detailed understanding of a specific phenomenon from the perspectives of those living it.

To achieve this rich, detailed understanding, the goal of this data collection was to describe the teacher messages and relational turning points first-generation students experienced in the teacher-student relationship and the influence of these teacher messages and relational turning points as understood through the experiences of participants (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). To accomplish this goal, I conducted semi-
structured interviews with first-generation students using the Retrospective Interview Technique (RIT; Huston et al., 1981) to target first-generation students’ perceptions of relational turning points in their interactions with teachers and first-generation students’ perceptions of how these communicative events have influenced their likelihood to persist to graduation, relationships with their teachers, and overall classroom experience. Through these interviews, I worked “to paint a verbal picture so rich that readers of the study feel as if they had walked that mile in the shoes of the group members” (Baxter & Babbie, 2004, p. 62). Using open-ended interviews in this data collection allowed my participants to discuss their experiences without the constraints of pre-configured categories or typologies (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

**Participants**

Since interpretive researchers embrace the world of the people they are studying and try to see the world through their eyes, I chose participants who had experienced the phenomenon of interest (Baxter & Babbie, 2004; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Thus, I chose participants who were 19 or older and met the U.S. Department of Education’s (1995) definition of a first-generation student: neither parent completed a bachelor’s degree. After receiving approval from the University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB), I located participants through convenience sampling and snowballing techniques by recruiting participants who were taking communication classes at a large Midwestern university through the departmental website that offered extra credit opportunities to students and emails to other teachers in the department. To present a full representation of typical first-generation students’ relational turning points, participants were not restricted to a specific class-standing, major, or age group. Rather than seeking a specific
number of interviewees, I collected data until I reached theoretical saturation, the point in analysis when all categories were well developed and further data collection and analysis added little new to the existing conceptualization (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Although theoretical saturation was achieved within the first 16 interviews, I continued to interview participants to further develop and test my analysis and to develop a credible data set.

I interviewed a total of 30 participants for this study, 23 females and 7 males. Twenty-nine participants were between the ages of 19 and 23, whereas one participant was 46. Of these participants, there were 22 who identified themselves as White/Caucasian, three Hispanic, two Asian, one Black/African American, one Asian and Caucasian, and one Caucasian, Black/African American, and Native American. Of these participants, there were 9 who identified themselves as freshmen, 10 as sophomores, 8 as juniors, and 3 as seniors. Twenty-seven participants reported that they had declared majors or double majors in the following departments: advertising and public relations; agronomy; communication studies; criminal justice; dietetics; environmental studies; geology; hospitality, restaurant and tourism management; international business; international studies; management; management information systems; nutrition, exercise and health science; pre-dental hygiene; pre-elementary education; pre-nursing; pre-radiation science technology; psychology; sociology; and Spanish education. Three participants reported that they had not yet declared a major. Participants reported that two parents completed some elementary school, 14 parents completed some high school, 24 parents earned a high school diploma or GED, and 20 parents completed some college or an Associate’s Degree.

Data Collection
Each participant’s interview lasted between 15 and 69 minutes and was conducted in a private location that was convenient for the participant. All 30 interviews were conducted in a private research office at a large Midwestern university. To ensure that ethical considerations were followed, I asked participants for permission to record their voices using a digital recording device, informed them of their rights as participants, asked them to complete informed consent forms (see Appendix A) to ensure that they understood their rights as participants, and reminded them that their identity would remain confidential in all stages of the study. To maintain confidentiality throughout the study, I used pseudonyms rather than the real names of the participants or any teachers they named in their interviews. Following each interview, I transcribed each digital audio recording verbatim for analysis purposes, resulting in 480 double spaced pages of transcripts.

**Semi-structured Interviews**

As I mentioned in the previous section, my participants and I took part in semi-structured interviews using the RIT (Huston et al., 1981) which has been used in previous turning point studies (e.g., Baxter & Bullis, 1986; Bullis & Bach, 1989a; Dun, 2010; Golish, 2000; Johnson et al., 2004; Johnson et al., 2009; Willer, 2007). As is customary in previous relational turning points research, I asked first-generation students to focus on their interactions with teachers and rate their likelihood to persist to graduation on a 100-point scale. Since this study focused on students’ perceptions of how communication within multiple teacher-student relationships influenced their likelihood to succeed in college, students rated how likely they were to stay in school and persist to graduation rather than rating closeness which has been used in studies focused on friendships (e.g.,
Johnson et al., 2004) and parent/child relationships (e.g., Golish, 2000; Willer, 2007) or commitment which has been used in many studies focused on romantic relationships. In addition to basic demographic data such as sex, age, and ethnicity I collected content data. This content data included data concerning relational turning points in teacher-student interaction. Each participant used a graph to show the path that teacher-student relationships followed to reach the current level of persistence. These trajectories provided a pictorial representation of their perceived likelihood to persist over time. On this graph, the x-axis represented time in monthly intervals and the y-axis represented their likelihood to persist at the time of the relational turning point on a scale of 0 (not likely to persist) to 100 (completely likely to persist). Since helping relationships such as teacher-student relationships have been shown to facilitate academic integration, students’ desire to complete a degree, and social integration, students’ desire to get a degree at a particular institution (Tinto, 1975, 1993), and ultimately likelihood to stay in college and persist to graduation, I selected persistence for the y-axis.

During the interview, participants recalled the earliest message they received from a teacher. At the beginning of the graph, participants graphed their likelihood to persist on a 100-point scale following this initial message. Next, respondents plotted their current likelihood to persist at the end of the graph’s horizontal or x-axis. These two data points provided each participant with visual anchors. Then, participants plotted any relational turning points that had occurred in their interaction with teachers between the first classroom interaction, “first interaction,” and the present, “today.” Following Baxter and Bullis’ (1986) conceptualization of relational turning points, relational turning points were described as “any event or occurrence that is associated with change in a
relationship” with college teachers (p. 470). For each turning point, each participant recorded the approximate month and year that the relational turning point occurred. After they had reported all of their relational turning points, they connected the relational turning points to depict the degree and shape of their likelihood to persist over time and made any revisions they believed were necessary to accurately reflect this progression.

After participants had reported and revised their relational turning points, I asked the participants questions about each relational turning point utilizing the Critical Incident Technique (CIT; Flanagan, 1954). In relational turning point studies using this technique (e.g., Docan-Morgan, 2011; Docan-Morgan & Manusov, 2009), participants provide firsthand accounts of each relational turning point experience by telling a story about each relational turning point that describes the context surrounding the relational turning point and explaining why that story is significant or important to them by discussing how that relational turning point affected their likelihood to persist (Kain, 2004). This technique captured the contextual and case-specific nature of the relational turning points I am studying (Docan-Morgan & Manusov, 2009). Following a modified version of Docan-Morgan and Manusov’s (2009) CIT questionnaire (see Appendix B), I asked the participants questions about each relational turning point and the perceived influence that relational turning point had on their likelihood to persist, relationship with their teacher, and overall classroom experience. To determine the approximate length of the interview, I tested my interview protocol by conducting a pilot interview that lasted 34 minutes. After that pilot interview was completed, I asked the participant to suggest changes that would help future participants recall their relational turning points. After this pilot interview was completed, I made necessary changes prior to data collection.
**Data analysis.** The interview transcripts served as the raw data for this study, which I analyzed using a qualitative thematic analysis (Smith, 1995). The unit of analysis for this study was each relational turning point the first-generation student identified. Perceived change in persistence due to a relational turning point was determined by comparing the participant’s rating of persistence with the previous relational turning point (e.g., relational turning points raised, lowered, or left persistence unchanged). The primary task in data analysis was developing a typology of teacher messages and relational turning points (RQ1) and describing how students’ perceptions of these teacher messages and relational turning points influenced three outcomes: (a) likelihood to persist to graduation, (b) relationships with teachers, and (c) overall classroom experience (RQ2, RQ3, and RQ4).

I conducted this qualitative analysis from an interpretive approach, seeking to generate themes as described by Owen (1984). The goal of my analysis was to create “an analysis of thematic content, arrived at by inductive reasoning” that provided “a detailed, comprehensive and valid description of the activity studied” (Woolsey, 1986, p. 248). Consistent with the theoretical perspective of transition theory, I focused my analysis on the resources or 4 S’s (situation, self, support, and strategies) students had at their disposal as they managed the demands and challenges that were embedded in transition to reach their goal of staying in school and persisting to graduation, and the three phases (moving in, moving through, and moving out) that occurred during the transition process which represented the time period this study focused on. The goal of the data analysis was to answer my research questions. Thus, I will explain in the next section how I used the four research questions to guide my analysis.
The four research questions guided my data analysis by functioning as “sensitizing concepts,” concepts that give “the user a general sense of reference and guidance” and “suggest directions along which to look” (Blumer, 1969, pp. 147-148). Specifically, the sensitizing concepts I used to guide my analysis were the teacher messages and relational turning points that occurred during first-generation students’ transition to college (RQ1) and the ways in which first-generation students perceived that these teacher messages and relational turning points influenced their likelihood to persist to graduation (RQ2), relationships with their teachers (RQ3), and overall classroom experience (RQ4). Although I approached my data analysis with these sensitizing concepts in mind, I also kept an open mind regarding other possible important findings that emerged in these data.

Using Smith’s (1995) guidelines for a qualitative thematic analysis, I read the data twice: a first time to gain a holistic perspective and a second time to note emerging relational turning point themes. As I read through the data, I noted preliminary emerging themes by typing key words in the transcript margins. As I derived my themes, I used Owen’s (1984) method of interpretation to ensure each theme met these criteria: recurrence, repetition, and forcefulness. Recurrence occurs when participants use different wording to indicate the same thread of meaning. Repetition is an extension of recurrence in that participants use the same wording to indicate the same thread of meaning. Forcefulness refers to vocal inflection, volume, or dramatic pauses which stress or subordinate certain parts of the interview from other parts of the interview.

As I read through the data, I categorized the relational turning points using analytic induction. Analytic induction is an iterative process for conceptualizing data that
considers judgments of similarity and difference (Bulmer, 1979). I began the analytic induction process with the first unit of data. This unit comprised an initial category or theme. After I had created the initial category, I created a tentative label that captured the relational turning point category. Starting with the second relational turning point and continuing with all subsequent relational turning points, I compared the unit to the existing categories. When a unit was similar to an existing category, I grouped it with the existing category. When a unit was different from all existing categories, I created a new category for that relational turning point until I reached theoretical saturation.

After I reached theoretical saturation, I produced an initial list of teacher message and relational turning point themes in response to RQ1 and an initial list of the ways in which first-generation students perceive that these teacher messages and relational turning points influenced their (a) likelihood to persist to graduation in response to RQ2, (b) relationships with their teachers in response to RQ3, and (c) overall classroom experience in response to RQ4. After I had produced these two initial lists, I refined the initial categories, clustered together categories into supra-categories as needed to address my research questions, and saw what subcategories emerged from the supra-categories. After I had completed this analysis, I made sure that the categories reflected the latent content of the participants’ teacher message and relational turning point labels and produced two final lists of themes. This meant that the labels reflect the meanings of these data (Baxter, 1991) and “reflect the essence of what participants are trying to convey, or represent one logical interpretation of data, as seen through the eyes of this particular analyst” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 47). After the categories were finalized, I developed the subcategories further by using examples to add additional depth to each
subcategory and supra-category and paired each theme with actual quotations or exemplar statements (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In the final step of analysis, I integrated and connected categories together to determine the relationship between or among supra-categories (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; LaRossa, 2005) and compared my teacher message and relational turning point categories to existing literature, specifically O’Neill and Todd-Mancillas’ (1992) and Docan-Morgan and Manusov’s (2009) typologies which focused on undergraduate students’ perceptions of relational turning points in the teacher-student relationship and Schlossberg’s (1981) transition theory. When possible, I used supra-category and subcategory labels that reflected existing relational turning points and transition theory literature.

Data Validation

Since this data collection was situated in the interpretive paradigm, a paradigm that seeks to understand the webs of meaning that guide human communication, the validity of this part of the study should be evaluated based on interpretive paradigm conventions (Baxter & Babbie, 2004). To gauge whether my study was valid, I determined whether my study “is accurate, can be trusted, and is credible” (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007, p. 134) and whether my study met Leininger’s (1994) six criteria: credibility (truth, value, or believability of the findings), confirmability (obtaining direct and often repeated affirmations of what the researcher heard), meaning-in-context (data are understandable within holistic contexts), recurrent patterning (repeated instances that are patterned over time), saturation (done an exhaustive exploration of the phenomena), and transferability (can general similarities of findings fit other similar environmental contexts).
To meet interpretive paradigmatic conventions, I employed several strategies qualitative researchers frequently use. First, to accurately capture the relational turning points my participants share during their interviews, I recorded and fully transcribed each interview. Second, I continued interviewing and analyzing data beyond theoretical saturation to further develop and test my analysis, confirm the validity of my findings, and develop a credible data set. Third, to confirm my analysis further, I assessed the validity of my results using an interactive data conference or peer debriefing as is the practice in my research community (Creswell, 2007; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Stake, 1995). At the data conference, I discussed my results with several qualitative research methods experts and invited them to offer critical feedback related to my interpretation of the results. From this process, I reflected on and adjusted the analysis as needed. This process provided an external check of the research process and allowed these experts to serve as devil’s advocates who kept me honest by asking me questions about the methods, meanings, and interpretations I used in this study (Creswell, 2007). Fourth, I took summaries of the findings back to all 30 participants to see whether the findings accurately reflected their experiences (Creswell, 2007). Fifteen participants reviewed and agreed with the themes I constructed from the interviews. This member checking process allowed me to validate my data and ensure that my themes accurately and credibly reflected my participants’ experiences and ensured that my participants played a role directing and acting in my research (Creswell, 2007; Stake, 1995). Finally, I provided evidence for my findings and interpretations through the use of extensive participant quotes and rich, thick description. This ensured that my research was explicit, transparent, traceable, and transferable (Creswell, 2007).
Summary

In this chapter, I have described the participants, procedures, and data analyses that I used in my interpretive study. In doing so, I have described what criteria I used for participation in the study, how I intended to recruit individuals, and the questions I used in my qualitative RIT and CIT guide. In my research design decisions, I have considered ways that I could make this study as reliable and valid as possible and considered and protected against potential shortcomings. Overall, I anticipate that this study will add to our understanding of teacher communication, first-generation students’ transition from high school to college, and the relational turning points that emerge within teacher-student relationships.
Chapter Three: Relational Turning Points in the Transition to College

The data in this chapter reveals the types of teacher messages and relational turning points participants reported experiencing during the transition to college. The results of this data analysis support the premise that relational turning points occur during the transition to college and that students are influenced by teacher messages. In the previous chapters, I outlined four research questions that guide this study. This chapter details the emergent themes that helped to answer the first research question by providing, through exemplar statements, a clearer picture of the ways that students experience teacher messages and relational turning points in the transition to college.

There were a total of 30 participants for this study (23 females and 7 males). In the passages that follow, I use a specific method to organize participants and their comments. As I transcribed each interview, I assigned a unique number from 1 to 30 to the participant, a unique number from 1 to 5 to the participant’s turning points, and numbered each line of double-spaced text. To demonstrate the experiences of my participants with clarity, I utilize these numbers following each exemplar statement used throughout the two results chapters (e.g., 1-2: 114-123). The exemplars for the first research question are reported in detail in the following sections.

Types of Teacher Messages and Relational Turning Points

The first research question was asked to determine the types of teacher messages and relational turning points that students perceived being communicated to them by their college teachers during the transition to college. Four supra-categories emerged revealing the specific types of teacher messages and relational turning points that were reported by students. These supra-categories include: instrumental turning points,
personal turning points, rhetorical turning points, and ridicule/discipline turning points. The first three supra-categories included multiple subcategories. The instrumental turning points supra-category included four subcategories: discussion of grade; discussion of course assignment, course content, course more generally; discussion of college, major, independent study, and/or internships; and discussion of course policy/rule. The personal turning points supra-category included three subcategories: discussion of coursework and personal information, discussion of common interest, and compliment. The rhetorical turning points supra-category included two subcategories: lecture topic or claim and teaching style. In the sections that follow, I discuss each of these supra-categories and subcategories in depth, focusing specifically on using the participants’ own words to accurately capture their experiences.

**Instrumental turning points.** The first supra-category that emerged in regard to the types of teacher messages and relational turning points which college students reported receiving from their teachers was instrumental turning points. The teacher messages that were classified into this supra-category were “reports of the teacher helping or assisting a student with class or college-related issues/concerns” (Docan-Morgan & Manusov, 2009, p. 164) that did not involve discussions about highly personal matters. This supra-category of turning points ($n = 36$) accounted for 41.9% of the turning points participants reported. Four subcategories of instrumental turning points emerged from these data: discussion of grade; discussion of course assignment, course content, course more generally; discussion of college, major, independent study, and/or internships; and discussion of course policy/rule.
**Discussion of grade.** Several students recalled instrumental turning points related to the first subcategory: discussion of grade (n = 3). The subcategory which included student-teacher discussions about exams, assignments, or final course grades accounted for 3.5% of the turning points reported by participants and 8.3% of the turning points reported by participants in the supra-category. One instance of this subcategory was described by Brianna. Brianna, a 19 year old sophomore pre-radiation science technology major, spoke with me about a turning point that occurred during the first semester of her freshman year. During this semester Brianna was enrolled in a computer science class that had a weighted grading policy. In the syllabus, her teacher stated that the final grade would be determined by a weighted point total rather than an unweighted point total. Unfortunately, the teacher posted an unweighted point total throughout the semester on Blackboard until the final week of the semester. When the unweighted point total became a weighted point total, Brianna’s grade dropped a full letter grade from a B to a C. When Brianna noticed that her grade had dropped dramatically, she decided to discuss her final course grade with her teacher following a heated class discussion about the change on Blackboard from an unweighted to a weighted point total.

> Everybody saw it and we’re like what’s going on here. … It was kinda heated. … People got mad and he kinda just shrugged his shoulders and was like I’m really sorry everybody. … This is the syllabus and I’m sticking to it and I’m really sorry. … You can go back and look at it if you want to. … He didn’t accommodate anybody no matter how much they talked about it. … I told him my specific case but … he was like well there’s nothing … I can do for you … and then left it at that unfortunately. (1-2: 284-299)
When I asked Brianna to elaborate on how this turning point changed her relationship with her teacher, she said

You … lose a little bit of respect for ‘em just because … he wasn’t very responsible. … He didn’t put up the weighted grade at first from the get go and that would have … solved everybody’s problems. I mean it was just that one easy fix and he just waited until the very last minute. … It’s so easy and … he’s a computer science teacher. That’s the ironic thing about it. He’s a computer science teacher and he didn’t even run Blackboard right from the get go. … They need to be more professional. … I mean this is their job. … This is what they’re paid to do and … I guess if you really were that worried about sticking to the syllabus then you should have had it up there weighted the whole time instead of waiting till the very last minute … till it was way too late. (1-2: 303-310)

Although Brianna understood that her teacher could not do anything to change her grade since it was the end of the semester, she viewed this conversation as a turning point because she lost respect for this teacher because he did not take the steps necessary to post grades correctly which led to problems and confusion for the entire class when the grades changed after it was too late for the students to drop the class if they were unhappy with their weighted grades or raise their grades by focusing more on the assignments that were weighted more heavily in the class. Brianna’s statements provide evidence that instrumental turning points that deal with a discussion of a grade may change students’ respect for their teachers.

In a different class, Yan described a turning point that resulted in a similar negative perception of his teacher. Yan, a 19 year old freshman nutrition, health, and
exercise science major, described a turning point that occurred during the first semester of his freshman year. After he saw that he had not earned the grade he thought he deserved in the class, Yan chose to approach his teacher about the grade.

I didn’t think the grading was fair so I said something about it and… I felt like I should have gotten a better grade like I was blindsided. … I was off from getting an A like point something percent and I thought I should have got some points here or there but she wouldn’t change it so [I] just let it go. (2-1: 41-46)

After Yan’s teacher told him that the grade was final and she was unwilling to change it, he elected to just let the grade go and accept the grade rather than appealing the grade. Since he did not think there was anything he could say back to his teacher, he decided that it was not worth the effort to discuss the grade further.

When I asked Yan to elaborate on how this turning point changed his relationship with his teacher, he said

Honestly … I still like her but it changed how I looked at her … like how she grades stuff … but she still is a really good teacher. It’s not like she turned completely. It’s just like that one thing. … I think I should have gotten a couple more points. [It] really hurts when you’re just off a couple points from a specific letter grade. (2-1: 62-66)

As Yan thought about his perceptions of his teacher following the turning point, he actively worked to compartmentalize his perceptions of her grading from his global perceptions of her as a teacher. Although he was unhappy with his grade and the way she had graded his assignments, Yan did not let his frustration with being just off a couple points from the grade he thought he deserved detract from his overall perception that his
teacher was a really good teacher. Yan’s statements provide evidence that instrumental turning points that deal with a discussion of a grade may not account for the student’s global perceptions about the quality of the teacher. With this turning point, Yan’s global perception of this teacher formed through other events that occurred throughout the semester was not changed by a single turning point that occurred at the end of the semester.

In a different class, Amanda described a turning point that resulted in a more positive outcome than the first two turning points. Amanda, a 19 year old freshman environmental studies major, described a turning point that occurred during the first semester of her freshman year. During this semester Amanda was enrolled in a political science class. After she saw that she had performed poorly on a test, Amanda decided that she needed to approach her teacher to talk about her test grade:

I only spoke to her … when I saw my grade was in the hole and …when I talked to her she … set up a time for us to talk and look over my grade and everything and she was really helpful. … We went over the test and …she actually had to go and count the number and see which one was the one and check. … She took her time and … she didn’t have to do that but she did it anyways and she explained each question for me and … what I did wrong on the essay. (4-2: 152-161)

Prior to this turning point, Amanda had been unwilling to talk to her teacher because she was enrolled in a big class and was not sure that her teacher would be available or willing to talk with her about her grade. During her conversation with her teacher, Amanda was surprised that her teacher was more helpful than she had expected her to be. Her teacher
took the time to identify which questions were missed and explain each question in detail so Amanda would be able to get a similar question right on a future test.

When I asked Amanda to elaborate on how this turning point affected her as a student, she said

It has encouraged me to … be more prepared for classes and put more effort into them because I went in thinking just do the minimum and pass … so it has showed me to be more studious. (4-2: 248-250)

As Amanda’s relationship with her teacher improved over the course of the semester as she realized that her political science teacher knew her by name and was interested in helping her succeed, she began to take the class more seriously rather than just brushing it off and failing the class. This turning point also changed Amanda’s perspective on past classes. In discussing past classes, she remarked that she regretted not approaching her teachers for help because these teachers may have provided the help she could have used in other classes. Amanda’s statements provide evidence that instrumental turning points that deal with a discussion of a grade may do more than change student’s perspective on one particular teacher. In Amanda’s situation, her turning point influenced the way she approached the class, her perceptions of past teachers’ willingness to help, and her willingness to approach future teachers for help.

All three of the exemplars included in this subcategory reflected movement from the first phase of transition, moving in, to the second phase of transition, moving through. In their first semester of college, Brianna, Yan, and Amanda began to assume new roles, routines, and relationships. In their new role of college student, these three students began to form study routines that impacted their classroom performance, their grades
throughout the course of the class, and ultimately their final course grade. These three students also made decisions on whether or not to pursue relationships with their teachers. As these three students acclimated to the college setting and began to become more comfortable with their classes and teachers, they decided that it was important to approach their teachers and initiate discussions about their grades. This conscious decision to approach rather than avoid their teachers and perform the academic task of seeking help or a grade change represents the second phase, the moving through phase. In this phase, these students began the process of adjustment and day-to-day management of the transition to college.

As Brianna, Yan, and Amanda took charge and moved in and through the transition to college, they also took stock with the four S’s: situation, self, support, and strategies. With regard to situation, these three students all dealt with transitions that were outside their control in that their teachers determined their grades. With regard to self, they all possessed one important psychological resource: resiliency. This resiliency enabled these students to move past the grades they earned and continue to persist despite the initial disappointment of earning a lower grade than they had expected or perceived they deserved. Although their GPAs were negatively impacted, this setback did not deter them from pursuing their goal of completing their degrees. The third S, support, is salient to this particular instrumental turning point subcategory, because the need to discuss a grade represents an attempt to seek out social support from teachers within the institution. The three students differed in their perceptions of whether their social support needs were met. When Brianna and Yan did not receive the grade change they desired, they perceived that they did not receive the aid they were entitled to. Conversely, Amanda
received more aid than she expected from her teacher and perceived her turning point positively. The fourth S, strategies, is also salient, because discussing a grade involves a negotiation response that seeks to change or modify the situation as well as information seeking and direct action coping strategies. All three students approached their teachers to negotiate their grade. Although none of the students succeeded in changing or modifying their grades, they did succeed in seeking out information and taking direct action by approaching their teachers. These students’ success or lack of success using these coping strategies influenced their perceptions of their likelihood to approach the same teacher or approach other teachers in the future.

Discussion of course assignment, course content, course more generally.

Several students recalled instrumental turning points related to the second subcategory: discussion of course assignment, course content, course more generally (n = 13). The subcategory which included student-teacher discussions about assignments, course concepts and/or topics, student progress and/or standing in the course, and the course more generally accounted for 15.1% of the turning points reported by participants and 36.1% of the turning points reported by participants in the supra-category. One instance of this subcategory was described by Christina. Christina, a 20 year old junior pre-dental hygiene major, spoke with me about a turning point that occurred during the first semester of her freshman year. During this semester Christina was enrolled in a biology class. This class was the first science class she took at the university. As the semester progressed, she started having her first real interaction with a teacher at the university. This interaction was reassuring for her. She remarked:
That was [the] first class that I’ve ever really had and it was in a huge room with 250 people so that was intimidating so … right after [class] I went up to him and talked to him … to see what I needed to do … to … stay on track because … that’s where a lot of people go wrong in college. … They don’t get that interaction with the professor and get … what they need to do in order to succeed so I felt like that was something I needed to do in that class to do well. Just because … applying into something you have to obviously have the good grades … so there wasn’t really any room for mistakes at that point because there was three tests and if you do bad on one test then … that compromises … what you’re working for so just trying to stay on track with that … was my goal … so I just went up to him and asked him. I introduced myself and … I told him a little bit about myself and he asked me what my major was and what my ultimate goal was and I told him … pre-dental hygiene and I have to apply so I have to … get a good grade and he said in order for you to do well you need to … obviously come to every class, do the outside work, spend the time on it, ask questions, … read the book stuff, … just stuff you’re supposed to do to do well. (3-1: 162-178)

Christina’s turning point occurred at the beginning of the semester. She discussed how she was just getting started and trying to figure things out for herself. To avoid getting overwhelmed by the transition to college, Christina decided that it would be best to talk to her teacher to see what she needed to do to succeed in the class. Once the teacher shared the specifics on what she needed to do to succeed in the class, she was confident that she could do what it took to make a good grade in the class so she could
maintain a high enough GPA to apply and be admitted into a dental hygiene program at another university. Although she was new to the university, his words were reassuring.

He pretty much just said no matter what you’re just going to have to spend the time with it. It’s just the time spent is how well you’re going to do and so from that moment on I’ve always just … had that mindset … just … putting the necessary time in for me personally to do well and experiment [with] what works well with studying. (3-1: 39-43)

After receiving these specific words of advice from her teacher in response to her discussion about the course in general, Christina was able to take his advice and apply it to her other classes where she continued to spend the time needed for her to do well.

When I asked Christina to elaborate on how this turning point changed her relationship with her teacher and affected her as a student, she said

Since it was such a positive experience and I felt like … he really wanted me to do well I felt like maybe all professors had that … deep down and maybe it didn’t seem that way at first but it definitely is that way. … I know I expect more of myself and … those things that he told me … have really guided me into what I should be doing for every class. (3-1: 190-197)

Christina’s statements provide evidence that discussion about the course in general can shape more than just the study habits for that particular course. For Christina, this teacher’s words of advice changed her opinions of other teachers and guided her approach for every class she took.

In a different class, Natasha described a turning point that resulted in a similar positive perception of her teacher. Natasha, a 19 year old freshman with an undeclared
major, described a turning point that occurred during the first semester of her freshman year. During this semester Natasha was enrolled in a math class. She entered this class with some trepidation because she had tested into this math class rather than completing prerequisite math classes. She described her turning point this way.

He just … explained … to me it doesn’t matter where you started in high school or where you finished in high school. … I will get you where you need to be. … I was worried because … I only completed up to pre-calculus in high school and I finished as a junior and I did not do a math course at all my senior year but I’m really good at testing so I tested through the math placement into the Calculus I class … so I just pulled my teacher aside right away like the second week of school and I just asked him should I be concerned with … taking so much time off and he said … as long as you work hard and you’re dedicated then I know that you’ll do fine and that was encouraging ’cause I was really concerned. (3-1: 33-42)

Natasha’s conversation with her math teacher represented a turning point for her prospects in the class as well as her relationship with her math teacher. She described this change this way.

We weren’t … as personable. … We didn’t really talk. I mean I asked questions in class but that was it. I never went to his office hours or anything. He made me realize that I could actually go to his office hours and he would be … willing to help because he actually did care about how I did and he told me that he made sure that if I put in the time and effort that he would make sure that I did just fine in the class. (3-1: 48-55)
As Natasha became more comfortable with her math teacher she began to overcome the
nerves of coming from a really small town where she had not had to work very hard to
earn good grades. Although she initially felt scared about the transition and thought that
students from bigger high schools were more prepared for college than she was, she
eventually gained the confidence she needed to succeed. As she became more confident,
she began to realize that sometimes she needed to find the courage to approach other
teachers with questions even if she was intimidated by them. Natasha’s statements
provide evidence that discussion about the course in general can open the door for
students to approach and form relationships with other teachers in other classes. For
Natasha, having one teacher who cared about her helped her see that other teachers might
care about her as well.

Unlike Christina and Natasha, Alexandra described a turning point that resulted in
a negative perception of her teacher. Alexandra, a 20 year old junior nutrition, health and
exercise science and dietetics double major, described a turning point that occurred
during the second semester of her freshman year. During this semester Alexandra was
enrolled in a chemistry class, a class she struggled with. She described her turning point
this way.

I came into his office one day and he was very rude to me very … you’re a
student you’re below me type of attitude which I absolutely hate in any
profession. I don’t think anybody should be treated like that and he basically told
me that he did not have time when he specifically in the syllabus said this was his
office hours and that really irritated me because I thought professors were
supposed to put office hours just for students not for their research and grant …
stuff so that irritated me. … He basically said that he didn’t really have time and that I should have known this from high school and I should read my book more and that was really frustrating because I can read the book. I need you to explain it to me. … [Chemistry’s] definitely something that needs a lot of attention and work which I was committed to but the fact that his attitude was like that towards [me] really irritated me. (16-2: 221-238)

This negative turning point was especially frustrating for Alexandra because she had heard many positive stories about this teacher who was in high demand. Since she wanted to get the best teachers possible, she decided to enroll in this class with this teacher. Unfortunately, she did not have the same positive experiences her peers had had in past semesters.

Alexandra described this turning point as a blow to her confidence because this teacher did not provide the encouragement she needed. After she met with this teacher she began to doubt her abilities and doubt how smart she was because this was the first time a teacher had made her feel stupid. She equated this feeling to being an underdog because she could not learn the material as quickly as her peers. Alexandra described her reaction to feeling like an underdog this way.

[I was upset that] someone in such a high place of power could just bog you down and put you down like that not necessarily by words but by actions. I always believe that actions speak louder than words and that really irritated me and … unfortunately even in college where we think college is just so accepting of everybody and everything … it’s not sometimes. … It was a life lesson learned and it’s just another step that I just have to [take]. … I’m the type of person that if
you bog me down I will try my hardest and my 200 percent because I don’t like when I feel like an underdog and I don’t like when I get bogged down by someone’s comments. … I’m the type of person that … if you tell me I cannot do it I’ll prove you wrong no matter what. (16-2: 70-76, 34-40)

Although Alexandra was initially frustrated with her chemistry teacher and never approached him again because she believed that he had been a jerk to her, she was determined to do well in the class. Rather than seeking help from her teacher, she sought out a tutor and ended up earning the grade she had hoped to earn in this class. Alexandra’s statements provide evidence that students can begin to doubt their own abilities following a negative conversation with a teacher. This doubt can also inhibit the student’s willingness to approach the same teacher for help in the future because they believe that the next conversation will be equally negative. Although conversations like Alexandra’s can hurt the student-teacher relationship, these conversations can also help motivate students to find other people who are willing to help them.

Similar to the discussion of grades subcategory, turning points included in this subcategory reflected movement from the first phase of transition, moving in, to the second phase of transition, moving through. In their first year of college, Christina, Natasha, and Alexandra left the known context of high school behind to enter the new context of college. Although this process was voluntary for these students as well as the other students who shared turning points that fit this subcategory, this did not make the process easier. Acclimating to college was especially difficult for these students because their college classes did not resemble their high school classes. These three students worked to maximize their inside and outside the classroom learning by asking their
teachers for advice on how to succeed in the course. When students like Christina and Natasha received appropriate advice and encouragement, they reported that they gained confidence in their abilities, succeeded in the class, and sought additional help from their teachers. The opposite was true for students like Alexandra who did not receive the advice and encouragement they sought out from their teachers.

As Christina, Natasha, and Alexandra took charge and moved in and through the transition to college, they also took stock with the four S’s: situation, self, support, and strategies. With regard to situation, these three students used what they had learned in previous experiences with a similar transition to guide their actions as they worked to cope with the transition to college. Since these students had successfully sought help from teachers in high school and college, they tried to cope with college classes in a similar fashion. With regard to self, they all possessed two important psychological resources: commitment and resiliency. Commitment enabled these students to do well despite their lack of experience with the course material or struggles to find people who could help them understand difficult course material. Resiliency enabled these students to find other ways to do well if talking to their teachers failed to provide the support and encouragement they needed. The third S, support, is salient to this particular instrumental turning point subcategory, because the social resources available to the student impacted their transition. Students who found stable support from their teachers also found help during their transition. Students who failed to find stable support from their teachers were hindered during their transition. The fourth S, strategies, is also salient, because discussing the course involves an assertive response that seeks to change or modify the situation as well as an information seeking strategy. All three students approached their
teachers to learn more about how they could succeed in the class. Through this process, Christina and Natasha found a coping response and strategy that worked for them. Alexandra had to diversify her repertoire of coping responses and strategies and demonstrate flexibility by using multiple methods to develop the strengths and skills she needed to cope with the transition. As these students found coping responses and strategies that worked for them, they increased the likelihood that they would have the experience needed to deal with similar transitions in future college classes.

**Discussion of college, major, independent study, and/or internships.** Several students recalled instrumental turning points related to the third subcategory: discussion of college, major, independent study, and/or internships \((n = 17)\). The subcategory which included student-teacher discussions about college, majors, classes, independent study, jobs, goals, study abroad, internships, and/or letters of recommendation accounted for 19.8\% of the turning points reported by participants and 47.2\% of the turning points reported by participants in the supra-category. One instance of this subcategory was described by Elizabeth. Elizabeth, a 19 year old sophomore Spanish education major, spoke with me about a turning point that occurred during the first semester of her freshman year. During this semester Elizabeth decided to switch her major right after she registered for spring classes. Although she was initially unsure about her decision to switch her major from business to education, her new education advisor made her excited to be there, more confident about her decision to switch from business to education, and more comfortable with where she was at as a student. She remarked:

The advisor I had was … really welcoming … really energetic about me being there so it gave me … a really good vibe because I was really unsure going in
there and then … once I got in there and saw how excited she was for me to be
there it made me excited to be there. … I had … emailed her before … telling her
that I wanted to switch my major … so then … I set up an appointment with her
and I went in there and … we mainly just talked about what I needed to do to get
my records and stuff … from the Business College … and then we discussed …
my plan for the next four years … and then … what classes I would need to take
each semester in order to graduate and then … what classes I could take in order
to graduate early or on time or a little behind. (5-2: 175-188)

This appointment marked a turning point for Elizabeth because it differed from
her initial advising appointment that occurred prior to her freshman year at orientation
day. She described that advising appointment this way:

The only other time I’d seen another advisor was … my [orientation] day and that
was … really rushed so … I didn’t have the best experience so then when I went
in to her and just saw … how caring she was and how … excited she was it gave
me definitely a better more optimistic look on advisors. (5-2: 193-197)

After receiving a warm welcome at her second advising appointment, Elizabeth
began to realize that there was someone at the university who was excited for her. This
shifted Elizabeth’s outlook on her major and classes in general. Following this turning
point, Elizabeth was more excited to attend classes and more excited to be at the
university. In turn, this excitement helped Elizabeth become a better student.

In a different class, Jennifer described a turning point that resulted in a similar
positive perception of her advisor. Jennifer, a 21 year old junior geology and math
double major, described a turning point that occurred during the second semester of her
sophomore year. During this semester Jennifer experienced a major transition as she transferred from a college in her home country Malaysia to continue her education in the United States. She described her transition in this way.

I first came to the U.S. in August 2010 so just newly arrived … in America so I was pretty intimidated and getting used to the transition of totally different cultures … so it was a bit of a scary point I guess. … In terms of interacting with … a whole new environment with new people and then also I know that the education system is a bit different but also being in classes which are slightly more challenging than the ones I’ve taken back home. (6-3: 272-277)

As she began coping with this major transition from her home country Malaysia to the United States, she enrolled in a 100 level geology class which was required for her major and met her geology advisor for the first time. Her meeting with her geology advisor went this way.

It was my first time taking a geology class since coming here since my college didn’t have any and then … I felt like I was really lacking in [math] because I really love math and since coming here I didn’t take any math classes so I feel like I’m deprived of math and I was speaking to my advisor [about how] I could do … something math related and I didn’t know what I could do with it. Maybe just a minor and then he told me that it would be good if I majored in it too. He said … if you have the opportunity to do it and doing both at the same time then do it because … in geology that will be very different for you because other people would just understand geology one part but you have the math part and you love it. … I guess I learned that they are very interested in the students’
welfare and their aim is to bring students to greater heights if possible and to … encourage and be interested in the students’ future. (6-3: 93-103, 293-295)

After meeting with her advisor, Jennifer remarked that her geology advisor was the first advisor who had helped her find the direction she wanted to take for her future. In the past, she had turned to family members or cousins rather than someone from school for this advice. The advisor in her home country had only helped her fill in her schedule. After receiving advice from her geology advisor, Jennifer became more engaged and interested in what she was doing and became more excited about being a student at the university. She believed that her education would afford her endless possibilities and additional options she had not had before.

Unlike Elizabeth and Jennifer, Natasha described a turning point that resulted in a negative perception of her teacher. Natasha, a 19 year old freshman with an undeclared major, described a turning point that occurred during the first semester of her freshman year. During this semester Natasha was enrolled in a chemistry class. As part of the requirements for her academic scholarship, she had to get grade reports from all of her teachers. Her meeting with her chemistry teacher represented a negative turning point for her. She described her turning point this way.

I had to get grade slips filled out for my scholarship and I had to go meet with all my teachers and I went to my Chemistry professor and I was not greeted with a pleasant attitude at all and I was so bummed out after that. … I had always been nervous about going in and talking with this professor because we have so many kids in our lecture class he’s not gonna care if he talks to me so I talked to my scholarship leader and she’s like just do it. She’s like it’ll be fine. That’s what
they’re there for and I don’t know if he was having a bad day but he just treated me so rudely when … I asked for my grade and I was like is there any way you can look up my grade for me and he was like what did you get on the last test did not even make eye contact with me just asked me the question, wrote that grade, and signed the paper, and he’s like here you go. Did not make eye contact with me at all and … I never went to his office hours because I felt so rejected from him. I just felt like … he had no desire to help me at all. … I was super disappointed because he’s a good teacher too but [he] was just not personable at all. (9-2: 59-73)

This interaction changed Natasha’s perceptions of her chemistry teacher. Although she initially admired her chemistry teacher’s abilities as a teacher, Natasha lost respect for him as a person. When asked how this turning point changed her relationship with her teacher, she replied:

I was very turned away from him as a person. He was a good teacher but his personality just wasn’t there. … I like being outgoing … so I always try to be the person that beats everyone to saying please and thank you … if a cashier’s checking me out or something I say thank you or have a good day before they can … that’s like my goal so then when he was not at all friendly then that just scared me away from him. (9-2: 219-224)

Although her interaction with her chemistry teacher was brief, Natasha left the interaction believing that her chemistry teacher had not taken the time to be friendly or cordial with her. This disappointed Natasha, because she always made an effort to reach out to others and be outgoing and friendly with them. Her chemistry teacher’s reactions
also represented a departure from her high school experience where all of her teachers had made an effort to be friendly to her. As Natasha turned away from her teacher, she also became reluctant to approach her teacher again even when she needed a letter of recommendation from a science teacher. Although she would have loved to have a letter of recommendation from her chemistry teacher, she elected to get a letter of recommendation from her graduate teaching assistant instead.

Natasha’s reluctance to approach her chemistry teacher extended beyond the semester she enrolled in his chemistry class. The following semester Natasha was equally unwilling to work with this chemistry teacher. She described her feelings this way.

It made me lose respect for him. It really did. I mean this semester I had a choice of taking him or another professor and I chose the other professor because … even though he was a good teacher I had somebody else who had taken the other professor and said he’s just as good a teacher and he’s more personable so I chose the other one. That was definitely a turning point. (9-2: 83-87)

As Natasha weighed her options for the following semester, she decided that she needed a teacher who would be both competent and personable. Since she perceived that her previous teacher did not care about her, Natasha sought out another chemistry teacher who could better meet her needs.

Similar to the first two subcategories, turning points included in this subcategory reflected movement from the first phase of transition, moving in, to the second phase of transition, moving through. In their first year of college, Elizabeth, Jennifer, and Natasha left their known context high school to enter their new context college. This transition
was especially difficult for Jennifer who transition from her known context Malaysia for her new context the United States. These three students enlisted the help of teachers and advisors to help them acclimate to their new roles as college students. This often involved performing academic tasks like deciding on a major, changing a major, or asking a teacher to complete a grade report. When teachers made this process easier, students like Elizabeth and Jennifer were more likely to seek out advice from these teachers when they needed help with future academic tasks. When teachers made this process harder, students like Natasha avoided these teachers and sought out other teachers who could better meet their needs.

As Elizabeth, Jennifer, and Natasha took charge and moved in and through the transition to college, they also took stock with the four S’s: situation, self, support, and strategies. With regard to situation, these three students were dealing with situations that were within their control. They chose to approach these teachers and advisors for help. Although these students could not control whether or not they received the help they sought, they could freely choose who to ask for help initially and who to ask for help if they did not get help the first time. With regard to self, they all possessed one important psychological resource: a positive outlook. This outlook enabled these students to adapt well to change and find solutions that would help them during their transition. Elizabeth was initially unhappy with her choice of business as her major. Rather than becoming frustrated and disillusioned with college, she decided to find another major she was more interested in. She then asked her advisor to help her with this transition. Jennifer was not completely satisfied with her geology major because she missed the math classes she loved. After listening to advice from her advisor, she decided to double major so that she
could pursue two fields she loved and be more prepared for the job market. After she did not get the help she needed from her chemistry teacher, Natasha found a short term solution to this problem when she asked her graduate teaching assistant to write her letter of recommendation and a long term solution to this problem when she found another chemistry teacher who would be both competent and personable. These three students used the positive outlook they possessed to cope with the transition to college effectively.

The third and fourth S’s were also salient to this particular subcategory. Support was salient to the search for additional social resources that would help the students during their transition. Although not all of the students were initially successful in finding the aid and affirmation they sought, they did eventually find the social resources they needed. Strategies were also salient because discussing college, major, independent study, and/or internships involved selecting appropriate coping responses and strategies that would help students reach their desired outcomes. All three of these students demonstrated flexibility and often used multiple methods to get the aid and affirmation they sought.

**Discussion of course policy/rule.** Several students recalled instrumental turning points related to the fourth and final subcategory: discussion of course policy/rule \( (n = 3) \). The subcategory which included student-teacher discussions about a course policy or rule or a teacher’s decision to make accommodations for students that deviated from a course policy or rule accounted for 3.5% of the turning points reported by participants and 8.3% of the turning points reported by participants in the supra-category. One instance of this subcategory was described by Amanda. Amanda, a 19 year old freshman communication studies major, spoke with me about a turning point that occurred during the first semester
of her freshman year. During this semester she was enrolled in a theater class. She remarked:

It was an in-class final and I got there super late because I had some car troubles so I honestly thought she was going to be like oh sorry we already took it like … a lot of professors would do that but she was like you know what you can stay here and I’ll go over it with you and you can take it right now in a little bit so it was really nice of her. (4-4: 305-309)

Amanda was surprised and grateful that her theater teacher was willing to deviate from an established course policy and allow her to take her in-class final after the rest of the class had already completed the in-class final. Taking the in-class final was especially important to Amanda because she likely would have failed the class otherwise if her teacher had been unwilling to let her take the in-class final later. Amanda remarked that this teacher cared more about her than many other teachers who would not have allowed her to take this in-class exam late. This act of caring reflected other conversations Amanda had had with this particular theater teacher. She explained her conversations with her theater teacher this way.

She … sat down with me and she allowed me to do … the in class final instead of just saying well yeah you can’t take it anymore so she was really understanding about that. … I only talked to her when I had … a problem and she always seemed to care and … find me an answer to my question … so it just showed that she was … willing to take other steps to help out her students.

As Amanda completed her theater class, she left with a positive impression of her theater teacher as well as a lasting lesson she applied to other classes. She decided that it would
be important to leave earlier so she would not show up to class late again and miss another in-class final in the future.

In a different class, Lisa described a similar turning point where her teacher made an accommodation for her during the last week of the first five week summer session prior to her freshman year. Lisa, a 46 year old freshman communication studies major, described a turning point that occurred during the first semester of her freshman year. During this five week session Lisa was enrolled in an English class. She described her initial impressions of her teacher this way.

The first teacher that I had was wonderful. She was my age so … she completely understood where I was at and what I was going through and the whole transition. … She gave me awesome ways to get things done and [told me] who to contact on campus and things like that. … There was a lot of incidents that happened to me … in my personal life at the time and so her conversations were more on the side of encouragement … to try and stay on my goals stay on what I wanted to do keep moving forward … and so her encouragement … was wonderful. (8-1: 33-43)

As the first five week summer session progressed, Lisa experienced some challenges in her personal life when she lost a home health care client to death. This caused her to miss a couple classes and fall behind on her final paper assignment. Throughout these challenges, Lisa’s teacher continued to be patient, kind, and understanding. Having a teacher who cared about her helped Lisa remain focused on why she came back to school. She described the impact of her conversations with her teacher this way.
[My conversations with her] just … calmed me down helped me refocus and remember why I started this process in the first place … and I’m thankful for that because … after I started my school year … I just kept remembering what she kept saying … just to keep going forward and … just really … that really there’s always going to be an obstacle somewhere and that’s life … and having lived 46 years that’s true doesn’t matter how well planned out you are there’s always something that’s gonna pop up that … could sidetrack you or deter you from what you’re doing. (8-1: 61-68)

Lisa found her English teacher to be especially helpful at the end of the class.

When asked about this turning point, she responded:

At the end of the class I had to put together this binder of everything that we had done and I had contacted her the day before because one of my girls had already called and said she was gonna be sick and I was struggling to find somebody to go to work. … I own the company so somebody’s gotta be there so if nobody else goes I go period and so … I had already … emailed her and said I might have this problem getting this in on time. … I got the binder in on time but I forgot a couple of the things that were supposed to go in because I ran down here and I turned it in at the last minute and I go back home and I’m like ah and I turn around and … there’s two reports supposed to be turned in. … I just called her instantly and I go … they’re laying here. They’re laying right here and she says don’t worry about it. She says I’m going to have to take a couple points off but not that big of a deal Lisa. I absolutely understand everything you’re going through and you’ll be fine
and … like I said she was very gracious. She did not have to do that. She was very gracious. (8-1: 245-259)

Having a teacher who was gracious helped Lisa build confidence that she could return to college at her age and succeed at taking a semester’s worth of work in five weeks. Lisa described the experience as challenging but not something that would deter her from completing her degree because she received encouragement and support from her English teacher that would help her stay motivated to persist in college.

In a different class, Courtney described a similar turning point where her teacher gave her extra time on an exam she missed. Courtney, a 19 year old sophomore communication studies major, described a turning point that occurred during the second semester of her freshman year. During this semester Courtney was enrolled in a theater class. She described the course policies of this class this way.

Basically … you had to take a bunch of exams and read a bunch of plays and they were required and if you didn’t take them you would essentially fail the course just because of the way the class was structured and one day I … was really sick and I slept through my alarm and I didn’t take the exam and I was like okay I’m going to fail this class. … This is … my fault. I should have talked to him before about it and later that day I just went to his office hours and I’m like I didn’t take the exam. I’m obviously really sick. I slept through. I know I should have told you before like I’m sorry pretty much and he let me retake the exam right there after saying … at the beginning of semester multiple times that … I won’t let you redo this. … If you don’t have an excuse before, you can’t take it. I just was … really
thankful for his understanding and the way that he nudged the rules a little bit to let me take it. (27-2: 63-74)

Courtney was especially surprised that her theater teacher nudged the rules because she perceived that this teacher was a tough teacher who played by the rules and rarely gave exceptions because he had heard many excuses from students over the years. Since her theater teacher was experienced, Courtney assumed that he was going to enforce the course policies he announced on the first day of class and included in his syllabus.

After this theater teacher allowed her to retake her exam, Courtney made some decisions that impacted future classes. She discussed these decisions this way.

It made me realize that I should probably in lectures have a better relationship with my professor because he didn’t know me at all because I sat in the back and I never really participated in class and I don’t think he recognized my face. …

Hopefully … I won’t sleep through another exam but if there is another problem … I would want to be able to go to my professor even if it’s … in a big lecture and be able to talk to them. (27-2: 87-92)

In addition to these decisions Courtney decided that she needed to increase her motivation because this teacher had given her an opportunity she did not have to get.

Similar to the first three subcategories, turning points included in this subcategory reflected movement from the first phase of transition, moving in, to the second phase of transition, moving through. In their first year of college, Amanda, Lisa, and Courtney experienced some struggles as they acclimated to the college setting. They managed these struggles by developing relationships with their teachers and negotiating
accommodations to course policies and rules that would help them succeed in the classroom.

As Amanda, Lisa, and Courtney took charge and moved in and through the transition to college, they also took stock with the four S’s: situation, self, support, and strategies. With regard to situation, these three students were dealing with similar triggers. These three students approached their teachers to ask them to deviate from a course policy or rule when they failed to meet the requirements for an exam or assignment. Amanda and Courtney both missed exams and had to make up these exams at an alternate time. Lisa did not complete an assignment and had to arrange to receive partial credit for the assignment rather than receiving no credit since the assignment was incomplete. With regard to self, they all possessed one important psychological resource: resiliency. This resiliency helped them succeed after they were given a second chance on the test or assignment. Both Amanda and Courtney successfully made up their exams and made conscious decisions to prevent the same problem from happening again. Lisa received partial credit for her work and overcame the personal problems that had inhibited her ability to complete her assignment on time. These three students successfully negotiated the obstacles they encountered by remaining resilient and asking their teachers for help.

The third and fourth S’s were also salient to this particular subcategory. Support was salient because these students sought out aid when they were unable to complete their tests or assignments the initial time. Strategies were also salient because discussing a course policy or rule involved negotiation coping responses that attempted to change or modify the situation as well as direct action coping strategies to rectify the problem.
After these turning points occurred, these students were also able to create a plan for action that helped them develop the strengths and skills they needed to cope with the transition and potentially prevent the situation from happening again.

**Personal turning points.** The second supra-category that emerged in regard to the types of teacher messages and relational turning points which college students reported receiving from their teachers was personal turning points. The teacher messages that were classified into this supra-category were “the sharing of private, personal information or approach/affinity seeking behaviors or statements intended for one person” (Docan-Morgan & Manusov, 2009, p. 166). This supra-category of turning points \( n = 19 \) accounted for 22.1% of the turning points participants reported. Three subcategories of personal turning points emerged from these data: discussion of coursework and personal information, discussion of common interest, and compliment.

**Discussion of coursework and personal information.** Several students recalled personal turning points related to the first subcategory: discussion of coursework and personal information \( n = 9 \). The subcategory which included student-teacher discussions about coursework and personal information accounted for 10.5% of the turning points reported by participants and 47.4% of the turning points reported by participants in the supra-category. One instance of this subcategory was described by Elizabeth. Elizabeth, a 19 year old sophomore Spanish education major, spoke with me about a turning point that occurred during the first semester of her freshman year. During this semester Elizabeth was enrolled in a Spanish class. She described this class as a warm and open atmosphere where she was comfortable participating without fear that she would be punished if she got a particular word wrong. During the course of the semester
Elizabeth faced some health issues that prompted her to talk to her teacher about how her personal information would impact her coursework. She remarked:

I had been going through all these surgeries for my leg and I … knew I was gonna miss classes and so … she was really helpful on making sure that if I missed something she’d be there to help me … make up for it and not … punish me for not being able to be there and so it just made me … appreciate her so much more because she was really … the first professor [who was] willing to help me … outside of class and … catch me up. (5-3: 229-235)

When asked how this turning point changed her relationship with her teacher, Elizabeth responded that this conversation made her closer to her teacher and made her like and appreciate her teacher more. She also reported that she started participating more in class because she felt more comfortable interacting with her teacher because she knew that her teacher had her best intentions in mind. This turning point also changed the way Elizabeth looked at other teachers. She stated that she was more optimistic towards teachers in general because this teacher made her feel like she was in the right spot and pushed her to learn the language better.

In a different class, Lisa described a similar turning point with her teacher. Lisa, a 46 year old freshman communication studies major, described a turning point that occurred during the first semester of her freshman year. During this five week session Lisa was enrolled in a political science class. She described her initial interactions with her teacher this way.

I usually go up and introduce myself to the teachers the first day or the second day and I always explain this is my situation. I’m single. I have four kids, five
grandkids, three foster kids, and their kids. I own my own business and I do home health care so my class with him was at 8:00 in the morning and so the one thing I wanted for him to realize was that sometimes if I do overnights and the girls are running late they’re gonna make me run late but I would always show up and … he was fine with all that.

As the class progressed, Lisa experienced several stressors that made completing her coursework more difficult. As she realized how much she was struggling, she decided to confide in her political science teacher. She described her conversation this way.

When I got down to the end of the semester and I was still struggling to make up the work that I had missed … he was just really cool. You know he came up and he goes these are your options. … You can get an incomplete, you can do this, you can do this, and I just told him … I’m not getting an incomplete. I’ll stay up for the next 72 hours straight and get this work done if I have to. … That’s just how I am. … I just refuse to settle for less but I had to this time in one of the classes anyways because I just couldn’t do it. He also … said the same thing ‘cause I had made mention to him [that] I might have to just stop this for a little while and get myself back in focus and what not and … he said I understand. I certainly understand but I would encourage you not to and he said only because first off because of my age that if I would stop and go back to work full time it would be harder for me to get back into school which it would and I probably would have never came back to finish it out … so he encouraged me a lot to … continue on. (8-3: 138-156)
When asked why this particular conversation was a turning point for her relationship with her teacher, Lisa responded that this conversation was calming for her because it allowed her to refocus her mind on what she was doing and kept her motivated to continue on with her education. In addition to calming her, this conversation also shaped Lisa’s perceptions of her teacher. She remarked:

I really admired him. I admired the fact that … he was very understanding. … I admired the fact that he [said] keep going. You can hang and … he asked me what are you going into? What do you want to do? And I go public speaking or at least I think right now. I don’t know that could change but … he goes well you’re perfect for that … because you don’t have a fear of talking or getting up in front of a class or voicing your opinion right, wrong, or indifferent, … so when you hear those kinds of things it does help. It is a good motivation. (8-3: 435-442)

As Lisa discussed what was going on in her life with her teacher as well as her aspirations for the future, she was thankful that her teacher saw things from her perspective and recognized how difficult it was for her to overcome those circumstances. With the support of this teacher, Lisa was resolute that she was going to succeed. She said:

I’m … really a very stubborn person I guess in a very good way. … I came back to college for a reason and … I refuse to let anything stop me from that not even the top five of my stress checklist that already happened in one semester. … It’s nice that people encourage you and help you along the way. (8-3: 458-463)
Although Lisa insisted that she would stay with or without the help and support of her teachers, this political science teacher helped her find the motivation she needed to stay in school.

In a different class, Christopher described a similar turning point with his teacher. Christopher, a 19 year old sophomore with an undeclared major, described a turning point that occurred during the first semester of his freshman year. During this semester Christopher was enrolled in an English class. He described his interactions with his teacher this way.

She … brought a different kind of teaching into play and she made it really easy to be successful if you wanted to be like she didn’t just hand it to you. You had to get it but if you wanted it it’s there and … she … was … somebody I could … talk to and she was … understanding. Some professors here are … really tough and they’re like this is the rules and just do it and I mean she followed the rules don’t get me wrong but she was more able to understand quicker than having to give an essay on what happened … you could just talk to her, provide her some evidence so she knows you’re not lying or something, and … move on from there and … make the best out of the situation and I think that was just huge and I really needed an influential professor to do that last semester for me. … We’ve had a couple of conversations … if I would miss class or something I’d go to her office and take care of business and afterwards we’d have like a brief … off the record … conversation where it’s just like … two friends no longer like a student-professor thing. … It wasn’t like counseling but … last semester I had things
going on like … I had family deaths and close family friends dying and stuff like that and it was … someone I could just … talk to. (10-2: 228-242)

When Christopher discussed personal information off the record with his English teacher he saw a major turning point in the relationship where the relationship became more than just a teacher-student thing. It became more of a friendship where he would consider asking her to help him with English papers for other classes. When asked to describe why this was a turning point for his relationship with his teacher, Christopher responded:

I think it was just because [of the] sole fact I just felt like … somebody that was a faculty member … was all on my side like they weren’t saying oh well you might not be able to do it like even hearing you might not be able to do it or this could happen if you don’t [do this]. I mean it’s good to hear if you don’t this’ll happen but sometimes you need to hear you can do it you will do it and you shouldn’t even think about the negative things so she … provided me that boost of … no negativity. (10-2: 262-268)

Turning points in this subcategory reflected movement from the first phase of transition, moving in, to the second phase of transition, moving through. In their first year of college, Elizabeth, Lisa, and Christopher struggled to manage their roles as students and decided to seek help from their teachers to help them manage these new roles. This day-to-day management meant discussing personal information that would help them work with their teachers to maximize inside and outside the classroom learning. Often these conversations helped them develop closer relationships with their
teachers which helped them become more comfortable participating in class, deciding whether to take an incomplete for the course, and seeking out help for future classes.

As Elizabeth, Lisa, and Christopher took charge and moved in and through the transition to college, they also took stock with the four S’s: situation, self, support, and strategies. With regard to situation, these three students dealt with personal triggers that were outside their control. These personal triggers often included personal health issues or deaths of close family members and friends that occurred off time in the semester. These triggers became especially difficult when students dealt with concurrent stress from single or multiple sources like Lisa who dealt with declining health as well as her son’s death in the same semester. Through resilience and a positive outlook, these students were able to cope with these transitions and seek out help from teachers when they could not cope with these transitions on their own.

The third and fourth S’s, support and strategies, were also salient to this particular subcategory. Support was salient because these students chose to discuss coursework and personal information because they perceived that their teachers could provide institutional resources that could help them during their transition. Often, affect and affirmation helped these students find the stable support they needed from their teachers. Strategies were salient because teachers helped students develop new strengths and skills that would be useful for similar transitions. They also helped students manage stress in the aftermath of the transition by employing a diverse array of appropriate and effective coping strategies.

**Discussion of common interest.** Several students recalled personal turning points related to the second subcategory: discussion of common interest ($n = 7$). The
subcategory which included course-related and non-course-related student-teacher
discussions about common interests and experiences accounted for 8.1% of the turning
points reported by participants and 36.8% of the turning points reported by participants in
the supra-category. One instance of this subcategory was described by Hannah. Hannah,
a 19 year old freshman elementary education major, spoke with me about a turning point
that occurred during the first semester of her freshman year. During this semester
Hannah was enrolled in an anthropology class. During the course of the semester
Hannah faced some health issues that prompted her to talk to her anthropology teacher.
During this conversation she realized that her teacher and his wife had experienced
similar health issues. She described this conversation this way.

I get … migraines really bad and one of them lasted … for like two and a half
days almost three days so I missed class. … It was bad and I ended up having to
go to the health center and then I brought in my form and I just decided to give it
to him telling him why I was missing class and he … was inquisitive like what’s
wrong and I told him I had migraines and he said him and his wife had them also
and then we just … talked about that a little bit like how much they stink. (7-1:
88-93)

Although this conversation where Hannah and her anthropology teacher
commiserated over suffering with migraines was quite brief, this turning point had a more
lasting influence on Hannah’s perceptions of teachers. She described her perceptions this
way.

It just … reassured [me] to know that the professors … care. Again … that’s
really helpful to know [rather] than coming in and … just thinking oh they don’t
care. It makes … everything so much more rewarding. … It was just more rewarding … when you know that they’re actually invested in your education. (7-1: 110-115)

After her conversation with her anthropology teacher, Hannah realized that her initial expectation that her college teachers would not care about her was not merited. When she realized that her teacher could relate to her being sick because he suffered from the same problem, she realized that she had more in common with her teachers than she anticipated and that she could start talking more with her teachers about other common interests. Hannah described this change in her initial perception of teachers this way.

It’s just made me … more open to different teachers and just not so closed off … like I don’t want to talk to them. It makes me want to go meet my professors and talk to them so … they know who I am and … that might help me in the long run. (7-1: 149-152)

As Hannah’s willingness to approach other teachers grew she became more confident about her ability to go meet other professors. She recognized that getting to know her teachers and letting them know who she was would help her in the long run as she took future classes in future semesters.

In a different class, Michael described a similar turning point with his teacher. Michael, a 20 year old junior hospitality, restaurant, and tourism management major, described a turning point that occurred during the first semester of his freshman year. During this semester Michael was enrolled in an English class. He described his initial impressions of his teacher this way.
She wasn’t afraid to talk to people after class and I ended up talking to her a lot after class because I wasn’t sure about my major at that point and it was completely different than what it is now and she just … talked me through it and … told me what she thought and different things like that so that was mostly during class and after class and through emails sometimes. … I was a pre-vet medicine major … and she kept commenting on my ability to understand literature and … different people’s feelings and usually that doesn’t completely correspond with chemistry and … sciences and … hard facts so she thought that I should delve into different options I guess with emotion possibly psychology. … I heard [her advice] before actually. I heard it before from my high school English teacher … and I love literature and I like analyzing and evaluating it so … almost exactly what I heard from my high school teacher but it was weird to have a college professor [say that] someone that usually holds a higher merit than your high school teacher. (14-1: 133-147)

After Michael and his English teacher began to discuss potential majors and interests, he began to notice that they shared a common interest in literature. As the semester progressed Michael’s teacher began to take the initiative to nurture their common course-related interest. Michael noticed this particular teacher’s interest in him because it contrasted with her interest in other students. He commented:

She stepped up and got to know me. I mean she got to know all of her students but … I didn’t see her outlining stories … in different books … for other people and [she] just did that. I didn’t ask her to and she just did it because she thought that they reminded her of me. (14-1: 158-161)
His teacher’s interest in him represented a turning point in the way Michael saw the learning process. He stated that “it made me want to explore more as a student and explore different things … as a student … and I ended up doing that.” Michael took this fresh approach to the learning process and applied it to other courses he took in subsequent semesters.

In a different class, Alexandra described a similar turning point with her teacher. Alexandra, a 20 year old junior nutrition, health and exercise science and dietetics double major, described a turning point that occurred during the first semester of her sophomore year. During this semester she was enrolled in a Spanish class with a teacher who was also an immigrant. She described this turning point this way.

[Talking with this teacher] definitely made me work harder to keep going at my dreams. He was very encouraging and I think him being also an immigrant [helped me connect with him]. He’s Mexican heritage and came here at a young age as well so that personal connection was there so he knew exactly what it was like to struggle and go against all the challenges and people bogging you down like you can’t do it and I think that really helped a lot to connect because he understood my story and I understood his story so it was … that non spoken bond … when you meet people like that and they’re your professors you definitely have a better understanding of the subject and the way they’re teaching it. He asked me where I was from and just because of my name and things like that but … we just could connect and just talk about how it was hard when growing up and … he comes from a Mexican family and his parents didn’t even have a high school diploma. They could barely read and write and here he is with a Ph.D. very highly
successful and so his life seemed more challenging than mine but that bond was just there because I didn’t have to sit there and explain my life story. He automatically got it and he was like this is what you need to do and not really focus on what others say. You need to focus on positives and believe in yourself because if you don’t believe in yourself no one else will. (16-4: 387-403)

Alexandra was inspired by the unspoken bond she had with her teacher because of their common experiences growing up in immigrant families. She was especially connected to this teacher because she did not have to retell her story to this teacher. He understood her story because he lived a similar story. As Alexandra listened to her teacher’s story about his family’s struggles, she realized that she had the ability to move past her struggles and achieve her dream because her teacher had succeeded at achieving his dream. By focusing on the positives and heeding her teacher’s advice, Alexandra gained the confidence she needed to continue with her college education. When asked about how this turning point affected her likelihood of persisting to graduation, she responded:

If he can do it I can do it. I get very inspired when people who have had the whole … quote unquote rags to riches story because there is hope and it is really hard when you come from a certain background and certain economic status … you always think with the negative but when you meet people like that it definitely is like oh my gosh it’s amazing. It’s an amazing story. It’s literally the American dream that every immigrant dreams of and I want my American dream one day as well. (16-4: 407-413)
As Alexandra reflected on getting her American dream, she discussed how this dream involved keeping her options open and finding a way to serve the immigrant community back home. For her, this dream did not require a huge paycheck. All she wanted was a stable income and the opportunity to help immigrant children from different backgrounds because she believed that she could connect with these children because she came from a similar background.

Similar to the first subcategory in this supra-category, turning points in this subcategory reflected movement from the first phase of transition, moving in, to the second phase of transition, moving through. In their first year of college, Hannah, Michael, and Alexandra left a known context behind for a new context. As they assumed new roles and began to acclimate to the college setting, these students found it reassuring to find common interests that linked the past with the present. Michael found a college English teacher who gave him the same advice his high school English teacher had given him. Alexandra discovered that her Spanish teacher shared her American dream and immigrant past. Finding this common ground rooted in shared interests and experiences formed the foundation for close relationships that helped students adjust to life in the new community.

As Hannah, Michael, and Alexandra took charge and moved in and through the transition to college, they also took stock with the four S’s: situation, self, support, and strategies. With regard to situation, these students drew inspiration from teachers who had previous experience with a similar transition. This experience helped these three students cope with current transitions. With regard to self, finding teachers with common interests helped students with ego development as they began to discover who they were
and who they could be in the future. Michael discovered that his original major was not fully utilizing the talents his high school and college teacher identified. Alexandra found the inspiration she needed to believe in her dream so that she could achieve her dream.

The third and fourth S’s, support and strategies, were also salient to this particular subcategory. Support was salient because these students found people within their institution who had a strong desire to help these students during their transition. Strategies were salient because teachers helped students create a plan for action that would prepare them to cope with similar transitions in the future and manage the stress that was inherent in their transition to college.

**Compliment.** Several students recalled instrumental turning points related to the third subcategory: compliment (n = 3). The subcategory which included expression of praise, commendation, or admiration from teachers accounted for 3.4% of the turning points reported by participants and 15.8% of the turning points reported by participants in the supra-category. One instance of this subcategory was described by Alexandra. Alexandra, Alexandra, a 20 year old junior nutrition, health and exercise science and dietetics double major, described a turning point that occurred during the first semester of her sophomore year. During this semester Alexandra spoke with her academic advisor after she experienced some difficulty with a chemistry class. She remarked:

I went to my advisor and I was like I don’t know if I can do this anymore. I was like I don’t know if I can do college anymore. I don’t know if I can do this major anymore. I was basically having a meltdown about college and she goes okay well relax. I think it’s normal for everybody to have a meltdown some time to doubt what they can and can’t do and … she just was just so encouraging that day and
super nice about things and just gave me a lot of compliments that I guess I did not really see in myself. (16-3: 290-296)

Alexandra’s advisor complimented how she had overcome many obstacles to come to college as an immigrant to the United States. Alexandra recalled this conversation with her advisor this way.

She said that there’s not many students who come here at 8 years old … and they don’t speak a word of English and I learned English in about two years. I took ESL which is English as a Second Language and then I had to get caught up with school and I graduated with a 4.0 in high school. I was top 10 percent of my graduating class and we had about 350 students. … She said … not many people would persevere and to go to college especially being from first-generation immigrant and I also have to pay school myself with scholarships so she definitely enforced some qualities I mean that I knew I had but you don’t really think about it when you’re in such a negative state ’cause you just can’t focus on the positive things … at least that’s how I am and so she definitely encouraged me and I just felt like maybe I can do this. Yes I’m gonna have a lot more challenges than someone who’s maybe being privileged but that’s okay. … Those challenges are gonna make me a stronger person in the end. (16-3, 304-315)

After deciding to focus on the positive things rather than the negative things, Alexandra regained confidence that she could succeed in her major and in college. She began to view the challenges she had faced in the past semester as opportunities to become a stronger person at the end of her college career. This conversation changed her relationship with her advisor. She was more comfortable with her advisor and willing to
talk to her about anything and everything. Alexandra equated her advisor to a cheerleading squad who would not let her quit and continually encouraged her to pursue more. This conversation also played a pivotal role in changing how Alexandra viewed herself as a student. She said:

It definitely made me feel more appreciative of my life even though … it was sometimes hard when you are a first-generation college student and also come from an immigrant family and it made me feel really good about where I was from that I had a culture in my life that I … did not lose my sense of identity who I was ’cause I have two wonderful cultures in my life and I am so happy with that where I feel like some students don’t know how to appreciate where they come from. … She just made me feel really good about myself and just that boosted my self-confidence. [This turning point] definitely made me want to go back on the horse and keep riding … because I wanted to prove my professor wrong who bogged me down and I wanted to get my diploma and not only make my parents proud but make myself proud and also open more doors to … young girls and boys and just kids in general who feel like they cannot go to college because they have financial difficulties or they come from an immigrant family and I just wanted to be a role model for people like that. (16-3, 330-345)

Alexandra’s conversation with her advisor helped her view her culture and family background as an asset rather than liability. She was happy that she had two cultures in her life while many students did not appreciate the single culture they had in their lives. With her self-confidence buoyed by this turning point, Alexandra was prepared to prove
the people who had doubted her wrong and show other children from similar backgrounds that they could succeed and earn their college diplomas.

In a different class, Tara described a similar turning point with her teacher. Tara, a 21 year old senior psychology and international business double major, described a turning point that occurred during the first semester of her freshman year. During this semester Tara was enrolled in an English class. She described her interactions with her teacher this way.

She just really encouraged me and said you’re a really good writer. I know sometimes she even pointed out … we all have the procrastination moments where you write the paper the day before and she could always point out … it’s still a really good paper but it would be … beyond if you would put [more time into] it and one thing we would always do in her class was we would always do the rough draft and we would come in and meet with her one-on-one which I really liked and discuss … all these things so we got that one-on-one interaction after and the feedback from her: … things you did wrong, things you’re doing good, and things you needed to do better. (23-2: 222-230)

After meeting with her teacher, Tara began to realize that her teacher actually cared about how she did in the class and recognized her potential as a writer. Tara believed that her teacher wanted her students to excel. This English teacher was there to do more than just give the information to her students. She wanted them to use the information to achieve their goals. This one-on-one caring also shaped the way Tara viewed college.
I know at first when I was in college being at a big university … I really felt like there was nobody who actually cared about me and how I was doing. I come from a really small school where everybody knows you … and everybody’s all up in your business. Are you doing this? Are you doing that? And then once you go to this big university … you’re on your own. … You’re in charge of you and they’re not gonna look out for you but it’s … nice to see that she actually did care. … I feel like everything’s offered. You just have to go out and find it on your own which through the years I’ve been able to do. (23-2: 240-249)

Tara equated going out and finding opportunities on her own as finding her way as a little fish in a wide open sea. For her, the sea represented the college. As she worked her way through college, she saw herself as a little fish who was trying to find her way around campus, find the right people who could help her, and find the right offices where she could pursue opportunities she was interested in. For Tara, this English teacher who complimented her writing ability represented one of the people who helped her as she navigated the wide open sea of college. She reflected on this conversation this way.

I think it definitely brought my spirit up like I could do well and excel. I’m pretty big on if I do bad on one thing … I let that discourage me so it was … more of the encouragement that … the one thing hasn’t brought me down. … I think it’s really reminded me that I can do good and excel which will keep me on the course to graduation because … I’ve always been the type to excel and I feel like I can’t if I don’t have an end goal or purpose. (23-2: 260-268)
As Tara’s confidence grew as a result of her interactions with her English teacher, she began to realize that she should not let one bad thing derail her end goal of graduating and earning her college diploma. Her teacher’s words helped her remember that she had excelled in the past and had the potential to excel in college as well. With the encouragement from her teacher and increased motivation, Tara was confident that she would complete her degree.

In a different class, Crystal described a similar turning point with her teacher. Crystal, a 23 year old senior communication studies major, described a turning point that occurred during the first semester of her senior year. During this semester Crystal was enrolled in an education class. She described her interactions with her teacher this way.

One of my favorite projects helped me reflect on my education here. … I wrote a poem … and it was supposed to be about yourself and … I wrote about my feelings about being here and I actually started inserting some of my journal that I had about my education and it turned out really good and she said it’s the most powerful one that she’s ever received and that made me feel really good and … I’ve actually been able to use the paper for different things when I do speeches and stuff as far as [my volunteer work goes] and … it was just really good. [It] helped me find my passion … to want to help others that are in my situation because I felt that I’ve had … a difficult time getting through school. (26-4: 118-126)

As Crystal got to know her teacher better, she began to develop a passion for helping other first-generation students. This passion was sparked by the compliment she received from her education teacher as well as the course itself. She remarked:
I talked to her about things because I didn’t know what to write for my paper. … She gave me a few books to read and it was really like she hit that right on as far as what would spark my interest by telling her a little bit about myself so that was really cool … and then … once I got my paper back and we talked about that I mean it brought us closer and we talked about … pursuing seeing each other having coffee again later. … I sent her a thank you card and stuff because … it really … helped enforce … my passions. (6-4: 133-142)

Through her interactions with her education teacher, Crystal realized that she needed to graduate and that graduating was just the first step for her. After taking this class Crystal decided that she might also consider graduate school which she had never even though about before. This was a marked difference from where Crystal had started out prior to the class. She described where she was prior to this turning point in this way.

[I was] still trying to find out what I’m going to do after graduation. … I started taking … electives and I was thinking … education so I wanted to take [an] education course. … [This] turning point … really helped me set forth where I want to go. It’s … helped me … find myself. (26-4: 274-278)

Crystal believed that she was able to find herself because she was willing to open up a little bit more about herself to her teacher. This allowed her teacher to help direct Crystal’s post-graduation plans. Crystal was surprised that asking for help on a paper turned into a life changing experience where she found books and assignments that expressed who she was and who she wanted to be.

Unlike the preceding subcategories, turning points in this subcategory reflected movement through all three phases of transition, moving in, moving through, and moving
out, rather than just the first two phases of transition, moving in and moving through. In 
the moving in phase, Alexandra, Tara, and Crystal began their journey from high school 
to college leaving a known context behind for a new context. Tara equated this phase as 
being a little fish trying to navigate the wide open sea of college. This transition was 
voluntary for these three first-generation students. As these three students began to 
assume new roles and relationships, they found teachers who complimented them and 
encouraged them to succeed. These compliments made the acclimation to the college 
setting easier.

The moving in phase was followed by the moving through phase. In this phase, 
Alexandra, Tara, and Crystal began to struggle with the process of adjustment and day-
to-day management as they performed academic tasks such as deciding on a major and 
maximizing inside and outside the classroom learning in that major. Developing 
relationships with advisors and teachers who encouraged them helped them complete the 
psychosocial tasks of negotiating class and racial differences and finding a place in the 
community. Alexandra completed the psychosocial task of negotiating difference when 
she realized that she could use her diverse racial background to her advantage to prove to 
children in her community that someone from a less privileged background could succeed 
despite teachers who doubted her ability in a particular class. Tara completed the 
psychosocial task of finding a place in the community when she mentioned that she had 
navigated her way through the open sea and found the people and opportunities that could 
leverage her success. Crystal completed both psychosocial tasks when she returned to 
her community to share her message about college with prospective first-generation 
students who might face similar struggles in the future.
The moving through phase was followed by the moving out phase. In this phase, Alexandra, Tara, and Crystal began to figure out where they would go from college and exit the college experience. Alexandra decided to apply to Physician’s Assistant school and use what she had learned in both of her majors to provide quality health care to her community. Tara decided to pursue a career where she could help people. For her, a career was not about the money. It was about putting others before herself and finding a way to give back and help people who needed her. Crystal decided to use college graduation as a stepping stone for pursuing graduate school and a career in student affairs where she could help other first-generation students who shared her background acclimate to college. Through the moving out phase, these three students discussed how moving out of college would involve moving in to something new: their future.

As Alexandra, Tara, and Crystal took charge and progressed through the three phases of transition, they also took stock with the four S’s: situation, self, support, and strategies. With regard to situation, these students responded to transition by viewing their role change from high school student to college student as a role gain that would allow them to help other people in the future. Over the course of their college careers, these students learned to seek out help from teachers and advisors from previous experiences with a similar transition. By seeking out help, they were able to overcome concurrent stress that arose when they doubted their major choice, career choice, and self-worth.

With regard to self, these students viewed their socioeconomic status and/or ethnicity/culture as resources they could use to help others. Alexandra saw her two cultures as something that set her apart from her peers who did not fully appreciate their
single culture. Through her two cultures, Alexandra was confident that children in her community would be able to identify with her because she shared similar struggles and a common background. Crystal used her common socioeconomic background to reach out to students through her volunteer work. She completed several speaking engagements where she encouraged prospective first-generation students to succeed in high school and apply to college. These personal and demographic characteristics helped these students with ego development and embracing a positive outlook that could not be derailed by single events. Through the turning points in this subcategory, Alexandra was able to move past a difficult chemistry class and a teacher who had bogged her down when her advisor encouraged her to focus on the good things rather than the bad things. Tara was able to refocus her end goals and remember that she had excelled before and could still excel in a new context when her English teacher saw her potential as a writer. Crystal found her passion and saw a future goal of graduate school that she had never considered before when her education teacher suggested appropriate books and told Crystal that Crystal’s assignment was the most powerful one she had ever read.

With regard to support, these students found support in people within their institution. These teachers and advisors provided social resources that helped these students progress through the three phases of transition. In these turning points, these teachers provided four functions of support: affect, affirmation, aid, and honest feedback. By complimenting these students, these teachers and advisors showed affect for these students and affirmed these students when they told them that they were special and had future potential. They also provided aid when they helped these students set goals for the
future. These students valued these teachers because they provided honest feedback in their compliments.

With regard to strategies, Alexandra, Tara, and Crystal used coping responses that changed or modified the situation by seeking out help from their teachers and advisors. Seeking out support helped them manage stress in the aftermath of the transition to college. These students also employed the coping strategy of information seeking when they sought help on assignments and academic decisions. Through these coping responses and strategies, these students created long term goals and a plan for action that helped them cope with all three phases of transition.

**Rhetorical turning points.** The third supra-category that emerged in regard to the types of teacher messages and relational turning points which college students reported receiving from their teachers was rhetorical turning points. The teacher messages that were classified into this supra-category were “teacher-directed behavior[s] or statement[s] intended for the entire class, marked by students’ commentary on the instructors’ behaviors that were not directed toward a particular student” (Docan-Morgan & Manusov, 2009, p. 167). This supra-category of turning points ($n = 29$) accounted for 33.7% of the turning points participants reported. Two subcategories of rhetorical turning points emerged from these data: lecture topic or claim and teaching style.

**Lecture topic or claim.** Several students recalled rhetorical turning points related to the first subcategory: lecture topic or claim ($n = 7$). The subcategory which included teacher discussions, claims, and examples directed toward the class during lecture accounted for 8.1% of the turning points reported by participants and 24.1% of the turning points reported by participants in the supra-category. One instance of this
subcategory was described by Christina. Christina, a 20 year old junior pre-dental hygiene major, spoke with me about a turning point that occurred during the first semester of her junior year. During this semester Christina was enrolled in an anatomy class. She described this teacher’s first day lecture this way.

I just met [the professor] in my anatomy class and … it was like physiology it’s … the same difficulty level but he just … expects a lot out of his students and … he doesn’t put up with anything so I definitely think that opened my eyes today for sure. … Today I was like oh my gosh am I going to be able to do this. … We walk into the class and I’m 15 minutes early and there’s probably five seats left and I’m like oh my gosh this class is huge. … I think there’s 350 students in our class and that was an eye opener in itself so that’s just that many more people and he’s got that many more problems to deal with obviously so we sat down and … he went through everything very quickly. He rushed right into the first lecture so … that was an eye opening experience I mean he’s a nice guy but … he’s stern … I guess that would be a good word to describe him. … His appearance is intimidating a little bit and then once he starts talking his vocabulary range and everything … that’s just intimidating and so I just feel like I have my work cut out for me. (3-4: 126-141)

From the first day of class, Christina was intimidated by this teacher and this class. She explained to me why this class was particularly intimidating and important for her this way.

This is just the one class that’s going to make or break my college career ’cause … I think they said it’s like a 70 percent dropout rate within the first month so
that’s scary I mean just him saying that and everything so … I’ve just been trying to stay positive with it but [that’s] hard to do. … I’m just trying to use every part of my time to study for it. (3-4: 145-149)

As she discussed the importance of the class and her commitment to putting in the time necessary to succeed in this class, Christina elaborated on why this lecture represented a turning point.

I feel like I’m less likely to graduate … after this class just because he’s just intimidating and the course is just intimidating itself. [The class has] 350 or 358 students] I think he said so it’s a big class … so that’s intimidating. I mean just coming in and seeing that many people you’re like wow okay … and then he pretty much said there’s one seat open and there’ll be 110 after the first week so that’s intimidating … so like now my mindset’s like crap I set myself [up for this]. It … feels like he not wants us to fail but [he’s] … assuming a lot of us will so that is … not a good feeling at the slightest and then from what I’ve heard obviously from other students that’s also a factor of how I feel about him and about the class. (3-4: 366-375)

After hearing about how this teacher kicked out two of her classmates when he subbed for her physiology class the previous semester, Christina was already intimidated by this teacher. She became even more intimidated when he made the claim that there would be 110 empty seats after the first week of class. After reflecting on the first day of class, Christina mentioned that she had put up a guard toward this teacher and that she thought that it would be harder for her to approach him because she was intimidated by him. Although she was intimidated by her anatomy teacher’s lecture claim, Christina
was resolute in her determination to succeed despite her reservations about this teacher. Although this class was going to be hard for her, Christina said that she was going to put in the work necessary to succeed and stay on track to graduation. She thought that this turning point did not really affect her as a student because she was nearing the end of her college career and this class represented just a little milestone she had to get over.

In a different class, Amanda described another turning point that fit within this subcategory. Amanda, a 19 year old freshman communication studies major, described a turning point that occurred during the first semester of her freshman year. During this semester Amanda was enrolled in a Chicano literature class. She described her teacher’s lecture this way.

She told us a little bit about herself. … I think she’s mixed Mexican with American or her mom was white or something like that and she explained to us how she used to be ashamed of … her Mexican background so then … I guess she was trapped between two different identities I guess you could say and then she said don’t say my last name if you can’t pronounce it right. That … made me mad like okay so you first are ashamed of it and then you’re like all about don’t mess my name up. … It was a little contradictory I guess because first she wanted to be this and now she wanted to be [that]. I mean there’s nothing bad about it but I thought it was just kind of ironic that now she’s teaching this Chicanos class and then most of the material was the way she saw how the Mexican American culture was but she didn’t stop to see how it really is in other people’s opinions. (4-1: 130-141)
Following this lecture claim, Amanda was resentful toward this teacher because she believed that this teacher was misrepresenting her culture. Amanda remarked “I … viewed her differently because she wasn’t portraying what a Mexican American Chicano really is. It was just her opinion of how she saw herself to be.” The way that her teacher saw herself to be represented a stark contrast from how Amanda, a Mexican American herself, saw Mexican Americans. She described her views of Mexican Americans this way.

Me being Mexican American … I’m proud of it and for somebody to come and just … show what it really isn’t like the wrong ideas I guess that upsets me ’cause that’s not how it is. … I think … the books that we read … the way … she would … respond to … my brothers or the other Hispanic students … their comments or opinions or ideas … the way she would you know react to them [made me upset].

Although Amanda was upset about her teacher’s lecture claim as well as the way her teacher responded to the class, Amanda said that this teacher was not going to change the way she saw herself as a student. She remarked:

Since I am first-generation and in college … that’s not gonna stop me … as a student. … I’m not gonna cry about it because I know I can be successful with or without teachers’ ideas or opinions. … Like I said I am first-generation and my parents really struggled to be where we’re at today. … They sacrificed a lot for me and my siblings, so … doing something … for my parents is the way to pay them back. … I think you could say also it has made me want to complete school
even more just to prove … the way that she puts us the way that she puts Chicanos to be … just to prove her wrong. (4-1: 211-222)

When she remembered the sacrifices her parents had made for her and her siblings as well as her teacher’s claim, Amanda became more determined to complete school to prove her teacher and her teacher’s claims wrong. By completing school, Amanda wanted to show what a true Chicano and true first-generation student could do.

In a different class, Melissa described another turning point that fit within this subcategory. Melissa, a 20 year old sophomore psychology and sociology double major, described a turning point that occurred during the first semester of her freshman year. During this semester Melissa was enrolled in a psychology class. She described a visiting teacher’s lecture this way.

Through my [psychology] class they said you should get involved in research and then [a professor] came into our class one day and came in and talked about his lab and then I was thinking I would like that one. I should contact him. Then a few days later he came in and sent everyone an email and said he was looking for people and so that’s how I got started. I don’t get paid for it but I’m applying for [a research grant opportunity] this coming semester. (12-1: 52-57)

Melissa viewed the opportunity to work in the research lab as prestigious especially since she was a freshman when she was selected to participate. She remarked:

It was something I had never done before and it was exciting to see … different ways to apply my major in psychology and it was … prestigious. … It wasn’t just [what an] average freshman [would do]. It was a little more … good for you you’ve gone out and done this. It made me feel good. (12-1: 34-38)
This research opportunity was especially meaningful to Melissa because it helped her grow as a student and helped students like her brother. She described her reactions to this research opportunity this way.

It was a lot of new information at once but it was good information that I could do this and if someone gave me the opportunity ... I could do that and they asked me and I could do that. No problem. I had just never been asked to do that before or never thought [there was a] reason to do that I guess. ... When [the professor] presented the first time to our class he talked about how they’re trying to detect dyslexia in infants and then try [an] intervention ... right away so that they’re not behind when they get to school and I really liked that because my brother was bullied in elementary school because he’s partially deaf so he’s ... behind and I know that it’s not fun when people pick on you for things that you have no control over. He said one person can make a difference ’cause ... him and a couple people ... went and talked with the government and showed them the research findings and it changed their law that they were gonna implement [nationwide]. It was really exciting! (12-1: 138-151)

When Melissa saw the power of research during this teacher’s visit to her psychology class she began to realize what else was out there for her. She had heard about other people doing research but had not actually considered doing research herself since she thought she was too young and inexperienced to do research as a freshman. When she realized that she had the potential to do research as a freshman she seized the opportunity to work in this research lab and explore potential research studies she could conduct with the help of this teacher.
Similar to the compliment subcategory, turning points in this subcategory reflected movement through all three phases of transition, moving in, moving through, and moving out. Christina, Amanda, and Melissa started their transition to college with a less defined sense of who they were as students. Christina wanted to pursue a career in the sciences. Amanda was proud of her heritage but had not thought seriously about what it meant to be Mexican American. Melissa knew that research was something others did that was important. As these three students heard lecture claims from their teachers, they moved from the moving in phase to the moving through phase.

In the moving through phase, Christina, Amanda, and Melissa learned to adjust to the transition to college and maximize their inside and outside the classroom learning. Christina saw her teacher’s claim about the high dropout rate in her anatomy class as an opportunity to invest the time needed to succeed in the class despite the intimidation she felt. Amanda set out to prove her teacher’s claims about Mexican Americans wrong and pay her parents back for the sacrifices they made for her and her siblings by persisting and completing her degree. Melissa’s visiting teacher ignited a passion for research that led her to join this teacher’s lab and begin to develop some research ideas she intended to pursue in her junior and senior years. All three students believed that these lecture claims would also help them as they figured out where they would go from college.

The moving through phase was followed by the moving out phase. In this phase, Christina, Amanda, and Melissa began to figure out where they would go from college. Christina decided to pursue graduate school and a career in the health field as a dental hygienist. Amanda described how she would continue to represent what her culture really was rather than what her teacher said her culture was. Melissa decided to pursue
research opportunities that would increase her chances of being accepted into a psychology graduate program. All three students’ lecture claims helped these students prepare for something new.

As Christina, Amanda, and Melissa took charge and progressed through the three phases of transition, they also took stock with the four S’s: situation, self, support, and strategies. With regard to situation, these students responded to transition by managing the challenges that were embedded in their transition. For some students like Christina and Amanda, these challenges came in the form of teachers and classes. These challenges were outside the student’s control, so these students used these challenges as motivation to reach their long term goals. With regard to self, these students kept a positive outlook and remained optimistic about their potential to succeed and make their families proud. Although students like Christina and Amanda received negative lecture claims, these students remained resilient and determined to succeed in spite of these teachers.

With regard to support, these students found that institutional support often shifted over time as they encountered new classes and new teachers each semester. With regard to strategies, Christina, Amanda, and Melissa used coping responses that controlled the meaning of the problem by recognizing that their teacher’s claims would not impact the way they saw themselves as students and people. By using the coping response of controlling the meaning of the problem, the two students who experienced negative lecture claims were able to create a plan for action that would help them cope with the transition and persist to graduation. With support from the teacher who shared a
positive lecture claim, the remaining student was able to build the strengths and skills she needed to succeed.

**Teaching style.** Several students recalled rhetorical turning points related to the second subcategory: teaching style (*n* = 22). The subcategory which included teachers’ ability to engage students and teachers’ discussion style accounted for 25.6% of the turning points reported by participants and 75.9% of the turning points reported by participants in the supra-category. One instance of this subcategory was described by Michael. Michael, a 20 year old junior hospitality, restaurant, and tourism management major, spoke with me about a turning point that occurred during the second semester of his freshman year. During this semester Michael was enrolled in a choral class. He described his teacher’s teaching style this way.

He stood out to me as a professor because … he could control the room so well and controlling 70 to 80 college age men isn’t easy but … everyone in there absolutely respected him. … I don’t think I knew one person in that room that didn’t respect him and we respected him on a level of friends and … as a superior. He also knew everyone’s name pretty much the second day of class and … always called you by your name. … He was not afraid to step out of the ordinary and I think that eventually I realized that that made it a more positive learning environment. … It kept my attention definitely at the 2:30 time during the day. When everyone starts getting tired and drowsy I was alert and focused and we learned some pretty difficult pieces of music in short periods of time and we did it really well. (14-2: 61-76)
Prior to enrolling in this choral class, Michael was initially skeptical that he would find anything worth learning in an extracurricular class. He anticipated that his college choral class would be similar to his high school choral class. When he took the class he realized that the college choral class was more rigorous and more fun. He contrasted his high school and college choral experiences this way.

My high school chorus was terrible. It was loosely fitting with no direction and our teacher was full of drama and … it wasn’t that great. [In my college class,] it was very directed and … we were singing songs in different languages with really great pronunciation with words I’ve never heard before and by the time we finished I knew this whole song in French and in English and what it meant and to me that’s pretty outstanding and just to … know [that in] half the semester we learned that much … it’s beautiful. (14-2: 183-188)

Over the course of the class, Michael was impressed with his choral teacher’s teaching style. This teaching style had a positive impact on the entire class.

It was fun. Most people came in really lighthearted and at the same time ready to work and to learn. We’d always start off with … loosening up and warming up and … it was a lot of fun at the beginning. It was never any pounding of notes or … boring. … It was always lighthearted and if it got to a part where he thought it was too boring we’d have to stand up or we’d have to do something so it kept everyone real interested. (14-2: 202-207)

Following the class, Michael also began to see his other teachers differently. He said that he could learn about other teachers’ styles from observing the students as they walked out the door. Michael claimed that if students left with their heads up and talking
with their friends rather than with their heads down and texting he could tell that this teacher had an engaging teaching style. Michael also saw extracurricular classes in a different way. He appreciated that this class was more like a structured class than a less structured club.

In a different class, Daniel described a teacher whose teaching style stood out to him. Daniel, a 21 year old junior communication studies and psychology double major, described a turning point that occurred during the first semester of his freshman year. During this semester Daniel was enrolled in a criminal justice class. He described his teacher’s teaching style this way.

The first criminal justice class I took I had an … excellent teacher. … He’s probably the best speaker I’ve had. … He was just an awesome speaker. … He was very confident and he reminded me of Brad Pitt or something … and every presentation he had a personal story and he was very poised very very committed and it almost seemed like honestly when I compare him to Brad Pitt it seemed like every time he was speaking it was like a movie like he had rehearsed and it was like one of those speeches out of a movie or something and … he was … definitely the most memorable teacher I’ve had. I was just really impressed. It was one of the first classes I had. It was my first semester here in college … so I was just really really impressed right off the bat. It was my favorite class to go to. … I lived in the dorms here on campus and … there was like 7 kids who were in the class with me. … We were talking about it constantly. We would walk to class together walk back and study together too and it was just a really good experience right off the bat. (24-1: 62-86)
Daniel viewed this particular teacher as a role model because he was persuasive and commanded respect from his students. Daniel sums up his perceptions of this teacher this way.

He would be one of my role models ’cause he just impressed me so much and his speaking fashion and in everything he did he was a [genius]. He was the boss and that’s what I want to be because he was very persuasive and … he almost demanded respect and it was … awesome. … He completely impressed me every time I went to class and eventually I would like to be like respected like that almost right off the bat. (24-1: 90-100)

When he was asked about why this teacher’s teaching style represented a turning point for him, Daniel responded that he was impressed that his teacher was an educated scholar who also had extensive experience working in the field Daniel hoped to enter following graduation. Since Daniel was impressed with his teacher he wanted to impress his teacher in return so that he could get the A he desired in that course.

In a different class, Samuel described a teacher whose teaching style stood out to him for less positive reasons. Samuel, a 19 year old freshman management information systems major, described a turning point that occurred during the first semester of his freshman year. During this semester Samuel was enrolled in a math class. He described his teacher’s teaching style this way.

He’d come in one minute before class and get set up and just get straight down to business … and he’ll lecture the entire time and … he’ll derive all his formulas and everything like that … not a whole lot of questions during class. He’ll ask you a couple things but I mean for the most part he’ll lecture at you and go through
and just write everything out. Rather than lecturing with students making it more interactive asking … more questions and making sure students understand it he’ll go teach class and walk out. He’s there to teach the rest … you go to your TAs and you go to the Resource Center and … you figure it out. His job was just to present the material and assign homework. I didn’t like that. It makes it really hard to learn. … There was no motivation there to make me want to learn. I mean it got to the point where it was a dreaded task to go to that class and I hated it rather than liking it and wanting it to continue. (30-2: 186-198)

When asked what changes he would have made to make the class more engaging, Samuel replied:

A lot of it would have helped if we’d done some things differently in class … going over things a couple times or maybe teaching things differently. He would just write on a piece of paper up there and … like I said he would lecture at us. … I mean it’s all right if you have to learn some of the material yourself but where the majority of it is still up in the air and you’re not really sure about and you don’t have enough time with TAs to ask that stuff. I mean they’re not there that often for office hours even and so it just makes it really stressful. (30-2: 198-205)

As Samuel began trying to adjust to his teacher’s teaching style which involved lecturing at the class rather than with the class, he realized that not everything in college was going to be easy. In the end, he decided to exercise his option to drop the class so that the class would not negatively affect his GPA. Although he thought there was a possibility that he would be have been able to pass the class if he had completed the class, he decided that the stress and dread he felt each time he went to class outweighed the
benefits of the class. When asked about how this turning point affected him as a student, Samuel replied that if every class was like this class he wouldn’t have graduated. Fortunately for him, Samuel found new classes that held his interest.

Similar to the first three instrumental turning point subcategories, turning points in this subcategory reflected movement through the first two phases of transition: moving in and moving through. Michael, Daniel, and Samuel started their transition to college not knowing what to expect as they entered a new context: college. Some students like Daniel and Samuel hoped that their college teachers would be similar to their high school teachers. Some students like Michael hoped that their college teachers would be different from their high school teachers. As they assumed new roles as college students and acclimated to the college setting, they discovered that their college teachers’ teaching styles differed from their high school teachers’ teaching styles. Michael’s choral teacher gave him a new perspective on the rigor of extracurricular classes. Daniel’s criminal justice teacher exceeded his expectations and stood out as a role model Daniel wanted to model himself after. Samuel’s math teacher failed to meet his expectations of what a math teacher should be. In the moving through phase, Michael, Daniel, and Samuel worked to maximize their inside and outside the classroom learning. For Michael and Daniel, this academic task was quite easy because they respected their teachers and admired their teachers’ teaching styles. For Samuel, this academic task meant dropping the math class he was enrolled in because that teacher’s teaching style did not match his learning style.

As Michael, Daniel, and Samuel took charge and progressed through the first two phases of transition, they also took stock with the four S’s: situation, self, support, and
strategies. With regard to situation, these students used previous experience with a similar transition to shape their perceptions of their teachers’ teaching styles. For some students like Michael and Daniel, past experiences showed them how outstanding their current teachers were. Michael and Daniel used their current experience to shape future experiences. Samuel recognized that he could not excel in the current situation he was in. Based on previous experience with a similar transition, he decided to find another situation that would work better for him. With regard to self, students who were not engaged by their teachers kept a positive outlook on the overall college experience. Although students like Samuel were discouraged about a particular class and teacher, they recognized that this was only one of many teachers and classes they would experience during college and that one teacher and one class could not keep them from reaching their long term goal of graduating from college.

With regard to support, these students found that teachers in their institution varied in the amount of support they provided. Although Michael, Daniel, and Samuel’s teachers provided a baseline of the types of teachers they wanted or did not want in the future, these students recognized that support would shift and change over time. With regard to strategies, students like Samuel chose to change or modify the situation by dropping the class or taking the class with another teacher. This allowed them to control the meaning of the problem and manage stress in the aftermath of the transition. By selecting these coping responses, students were able to create a plan for action that would help them if they faced a similar transition in the future. Being flexible by using multiple methods allowed these students to find teachers who would provide an engaging and rigorous classroom experience.
**Ridicule/discipline turning points.** The fourth and final supra-category that emerged in regard to the types of teacher messages and relational turning points which college students reported receiving from their teachers was ridicule/discipline turning points. The teacher messages that were classified into this supra-category were “events in which they recalled being ridiculed or threatened by the teacher” (Docan-Morgan & Manusov, 2009, p. 168). This supra-category of turning points \((n = 2)\) accounted for 2.3% of the turning points participants reported. One instance of this supra-category was described by Lisa. Lisa, a 46 year old freshman communication studies major, spoke with me about a turning point that occurred during the second five week summer session prior to her freshman year. During this five week class Lisa was enrolled in a pop culture class. She described her interaction with her teacher this way.

I was confused about one of the papers he wanted us to do. We were talking about … pop culture and … naturally you think pop culture is more like a fad a style … and he couldn’t get us to see … what he was trying to get to was pop culture in the media but he didn’t say that … so I went up to him after class and I was like … I’m still confused as far as you want me to do a paper on pop culture in the media … and he goes … what do you watch on TV and I just looked at him and said I don’t watch TV. He goes what do you mean you don’t watch TV and I go I haven’t had cable for … six years. I don’t watch TV. He goes well … what do you do and I go I read a lot … and … he just had this you gotta be kidding me … and then … I say well I’ll go online and I’ll just watch some stuff and I’ll come up with something and … he goes yeah just do it and if not you’re getting an F anyway. (8-2: 84-97)
When Lisa was asked about why this interaction represented a turning point for her, she replied that she lost her enthusiasm for college and lost her respect for this teacher. Although she still planned to stay in school, she lost the joy she had experienced from learning in her previous five week summer session. She described her perceptions of her teacher following this ridicule/discipline turning point this way.

It made me lose respect for him … just because of his role and his position. … You obviously walk into the classroom having a certain amount of respect for somebody just because of their authority position but … because of the way that he talked down basically to everyone in the class and like I said was very not empathetic about anything … anybody brought to his attention … you just have to lose respect for somebody like that. … I understand that these are your rules and this is the way you do things … but in life sometimes we have to have some type of … differentiation. (8-2: 367-374)

Although she lost enthusiasm for the course and lost respect for her teacher, Lisa found the motivation she needed to succeed in the class by looking at this class as an opportunity to prove her teacher wrong. Although he had told her she would likely get an F on the paper, she worked hard and earned an A.

In a different class, Courtney described a similar turning point. Courtney, a 19 year old sophomore communication studies major, described a turning point that occurred during the second semester of her sophomore year. During this semester Courtney was enrolled in a philosophy class. Courtney described this turning point this way.

On the first day of class she said … I expect you to take notes. I expect you to … diligently be taking notes and doing everything … that I say you should so if I tell
you to write down a term write it down and define it and she was very strict about this … so during class I would take notes and I would write down the terms she said but I would also doodle on my paper because it was hard for me to focus when it’s just her standing in front of the class teaching material that I’m … not very interested in and … in the middle of class … last week she yelled at me in front of everyone and said … you’re doodling. I can see it from here. You’re not taking this class seriously. You obviously have no interest in the subject. … I don’t know what you’re doing here. … If you’re not going to take this class seriously you should probably just drop it or just leave and I was … shocked mostly just embarrassed because this was in front of everyone else in the class and … of course I stopped and I just kept taking notes. (27-4: 134-146)

After this turning point, Courtney was shocked and embarrassed because her teacher had disciplined her in front of the class. To rectify the situation Courtney decided to approach her teacher during office hours. She recounted this interaction this way.

I went to her office hours after class that day and … I know I was not too happy about what she did but at the end of the day she is still my professor and someone who grades my papers so I would want a good relationship with her so I apologized to her for doodling in class and she kinda just was cold about it and was like don’t let it happen again. (27-4: 146-150)

When asked why this was a turning point for her relationship with her teacher Courtney replied that she learned that not all teachers were going to be lenient with her and like a friend. Although she could get away with a lot in other classes, she realized that not every teacher was the same and you could not have the same relationship with
every teacher. Courtney also recognized that she needed to be responsible for her actions and make adult decisions even though she thought that her teacher was in the wrong for the way she handled the situation. She described what she learned this way.

I was unhappy with the way that she confronted me in front of everyone. … I felt it was unnecessary for her to do that. … She could have easily … pulled me aside after class and just came over and discreetly said it so I felt like what she did was a little unnecessary and it made me not like her that much. … After … I went to her office and apologized to her … I feel like it … made me more responsible [because I] had to make adult decisions … even though I thought she was … the one who was in the wrong I … bit the bullet and went and apologized to her just so we could have a better relationship. (27-4: 341-355)

Through this turning point Courtney learned that her actions could impact her relationship with her teacher and that she needed to take steps to make amends so that the relationship could be repaired following this turning point. By going and apologizing to this teacher she hoped that the relationship would improve in the future.

Turning points in this supra-category reflected movement through the first two phases of transition: moving in and moving through. Lisa and Courtney moved into the new context of college and found out that their being a college student meant assuming new relationships with teachers, some of whom they did not care for following ridicule/discipline turning points. To succeed in these classes in spite of these turning points, these two students had to learn to complete the academic task of maximizing inside and outside the classroom learning and the psychosocial task of developing a relationship with the teacher. Lisa maximized her inside and outside the classroom
learning by working to improve her familiarity with technology and pop culture so she could prove her teacher wrong and earn an A on her paper. Courtney worked to rebuild her relationship with her teacher by approaching her teacher during office hours to apologize.

As Lisa and Courtney took charge and progressed through the first two phases of transition, they also took stock with the four S’s: situation, self, support, and strategies. With regard to situation, these students experienced stress when they were ridiculed or disciplined by their teachers. Both Lisa and Courtney used previous experiences with a similar transition to determine how to approach their classes. Lisa remembered and used the advice she had taught her children about dealing with teachers they did not like. Courtney recognized that she would still need to maintain a relationship with her teacher because her teacher would be evaluating her papers. With regard to self, both students used these turning points to increase their ego development as they worked to develop inner strength after they had been ridiculed or disciplined by their teachers.

With regard to support, these students found that teachers in their institution could hinder them during their transition. When Lisa and Courtney found that their teachers did not support them, they reflected back on other teachers who had provided support that helped them during their transition. With regard to strategies, both students worked to change or modify the situation. Lisa worked to catch up with her peers so that she could do well on her paper in spite of her teacher. Courtney followed her teacher’s instructions to take notes and approached her after class during office hours to apologize. By selecting this coping response, both students worked to cope with their transitions to college and their transitions to their teachers.
Summary

In this chapter, I discussed four supra-categories and ten subcategories of relational turning points that occurred in the first-generation student-teacher relationship during first-generation students’ transition to college. In doing so, I have addressed the first research question which was asked to determine the types of teacher messages and relational turning points that students perceived being communicated to them by their college teachers during the transition to college. The results related to the remaining three research questions are presented in the following chapter.
Chapter Four: Perceived Persistence, Relationship, and Classroom Outcomes

The data in this chapter reveals the types of teacher message and relational turning point outcomes participants reported experiencing during the transition to college. The results of this data analysis support the premise that teacher messages and relational turning points occur during the transition to college and that students are influenced by their teachers’ messages and relational turning points. This chapter details the emergent themes that helped to answer the last three research questions by providing, through exemplar statements, a clearer picture of the ways that teacher messages and relational turning points influence students’ likelihood to persist to graduation, relationships with teachers, and overall classroom experience.

Persistence Outcomes

The second research question was asked to determine how students perceived that teacher messages and relational turning points influenced their likelihood to persist to graduation. Three categories emerged. These categories included: higher likelihood to persist to graduation, no change to likelihood to persist to graduation, and lower likelihood to persist to graduation. In the sections that follow, I discuss each of these categories in depth, focusing specifically on using the participants’ own words to accurately capture their experiences.

Higher likelihood to persist to graduation. The first category of turning point outcomes was a higher likelihood to persist to graduation. This category of turning point outcomes ($n = 59$) accounted for 68.6% of the turning point outcomes participants reported. One instance of this category was described by Kayla. Kayla, a 19 year old freshman pre-dental hygiene major, spoke with me about an instrumental turning point
outcome that occurred during the first semester of her freshman year. During this semester Kayla met with her academic advisor. She described that meeting with her academic advisor this way.

When I was talking about my major, I learned more information about it. …

Everyone here kept telling me it’s very competitive. You have to get straight As and that discouraged me from [pursuing it]. [My advisor] helped me with [orientation] so I got signed up for classes with her and I really liked her so I continued to go back to her. … She just told me the truth about my major. This is what I’ve been wanting to do for quite a while and when I hear … different facts about it that aren’t so good … it kinda makes me open my eyes a little bit and I might have to change my major if it’s not going so well. (11-1: 33-48)

Since Kayla trusted her academic advisor and continued to go back to her, she took her advisor’s advice seriously. She described how she perceived this advice this way.

She knows what she’s talking about and she’s there to advise me and … so she’s just telling me the different things and so it kinda meant a lot when she said it. It made me want to try harder. … I went into this not sure what to think or what to expect coming from a small private high school … but then … it didn’t seem as scary or difficult when I started it. (11-1: 92-99)

When asked how this turning point affected her likelihood of persisting to graduation, Kayla replied:

It still makes me want to persist showing them that I can. … Well like I said my mom always tells me … you can choose something else if it doesn’t work out and
I don’t want her to say that. I want her to support me … ’cause it’s something I want to do. I want other people to see that. … I want to show them that I can do it. … You can say … it’s difficult it’s challenging but with the right classes and with the right studying skills … you can do it. (11-1: 103-108)

After many of the people Kayla respected told her that her major and potential career would be difficult, she thought that these experiences raised her likelihood of persisting to graduation. She was determined to show these people that she could achieve this challenging dream if she took the right classes and adopted the right studying skills.

In a different class, Michael described a similar turning point outcome. Michael, a 20 year old junior hospitality, restaurant, and tourism management major, described a personal turning point outcome that occurred during the first semester of his freshman year. During this semester Michael was enrolled in a choral class. When asked why this class represented a turning point for him, he replied “[I learned] that there were different [extracurricular] organizations that were worth credit hours that I could be in that are still … worthy of learning something” (14-2: 80-82).

This class and this teacher also affected Michael’s likelihood of persisting to graduation. He summed up this turning point outcome this way.

I want to be relevant someday. I know more and more … people are requiring degrees and I’ve been told by multiple people especially by people in the field out in the hospitality field now that I’m wasting my time getting a degree because you can move up and you can move up through it but I don’t think getting a degree is wasting your time whatsoever. That’s already something that I’ve … sacrificed so much for and that’s outstanding to employers no matter who [they are]. I am in
the service industry … working my way up at the same time as studying and doing and practicing and everything like that. I think that’s just … tenfold above just working your way through. … Extracurricular [are] huge opportunities to build your resume and eventually you know somewhere down the road if I were to be able to be split and my other half would be working only through restaurants and I’m doing what I’m doing now I would like to think that I would get the job because I’m so much more experienced in so many different ways than just working. (14-2: 238-255)

For Michael, pursuing a college degree represented a chance to pursue more experiences than his peers who worked full time in the hospitality field and chose not to pursue a college degree. He stated that he was more likely to persist following this class because he did not view getting a degree as a waste of time. Since Michael had already sacrificed so much to pursue college and extracurricular activities represented opportunities to build his resume, he was confident that he would persist to graduation because it would set him up to be marketable when he pursued a career in the hospitality field.

In a different class, Daniel described a similar turning point outcome. Daniel, a 21 year old junior communication studies and psychology double major, described a personal turning point outcome that occurred during the first semester of his freshman year. During this semester Daniel was enrolled in a criminal justice class. He described his criminal justice class this way.

I always sat with my buddies and … we’d walk in and sit down and of course talk before class a little bit and [my teacher] would walk in and get on his microphone
and we’d all shut up ‘cause we all respected him pretty good just right off the bat … and he’d always just amaze me with a new story every time … and he just had vast connections all over and he just integrated it into [the class]. … I’ve always been really interested in that ’cause I want to go into law so it just grabbed my attention and … I was really passionate about that class right off the bat. (24-1: 171-180)

When asked how this turning point affected his likelihood of persisting to graduation, Michael replied:

I guess he impressed me so I feel like I kinda wanted to impress him and everyone else around so I … worked my butt off to get that A. … You just got to realize that if you don’t get the good grades you’re out of here … and if you want to live more of the other side you’re not gonna be able to do it for very long so … if you can keep in school, you’re doing excellent in school, you’ll get to experience the full college experience and if not you don’t get to experience the full college experience. … A lot of my friends … tried … kinda slacking on the school part and now they’re out of here and now they regret [that] because they see all of us who are still doing good in school and doing what we’re all doing in the first place they’re missing out and they’re just kinda sad and that’s not where I want to be. … I want to live comfortably and this is one of the best ways to do it … so it definitely facilitates being successful. … The new college diploma is the old high school diploma and … so I have a big step ahead of everyone who doesn’t have a diploma. … I just have a lot more doors available that I could go through at any point. … I have a lot more options … to go with the rest of my life. [If I didn’t]
graduate college I’d probably be stuck … getting in with a company at the bottom level whereas I would like to come up with experience, with education, with knowledge, and be able to actually fully engage myself. (24-1: 216-217, 236-256)

Since Michael respected his teacher, he was determined to impress him and all of the other people around him. He worked hard to earn good grades because he wanted a full college experience during college and a comfortable lifestyle after college. Michael believed that earning a college diploma would put him ahead of everyone else and open up doors that would not have been available otherwise.

**No change to likelihood to persist to graduation.** The second category of turning point outcomes was no change to likelihood to persist to graduation. This category of turning point outcomes \((n = 17)\) accounted for 19.8\% of the turning point outcomes participants reported. One instance of this category was described by Daniel. Daniel, a 21 year old junior communication studies and psychology double major, described a rhetorical turning point outcome that occurred during the second semester of his freshman year. During this semester Daniel was enrolled in a math class. He described what occurred in this math class this way.

[There were] around 80 to start off and it was definitely cut down to about 40 within the first two weeks and … I feel like the numbers definitely dropped drastically immediately. … I … evaluated it as I was sitting there in class because I was … frustrated … and I could tell everyone else had … no idea what was going on. … People who were in that class were probably just completely overwhelmed and knew that this was not going to be good and to get out of that before the GPA was hurt and you lose your money.
In this math class, there was limited interaction with the math teacher. Daniel described this interaction this way.

There [were] … very few classroom interactions. … He would turn around and ask if there [were] any questions. I think that was what he was saying. Are there any questions? And no one would respond because they were all lost. … I remembered specifically asking a question about … one of the derivatives and I don’t think he understood me. I was trying to be really clear but he did the exact same thing … and didn’t really go into depth and then he asked me and he turned around and … he was like okay so … I was just like I’m reading my book tonight. … That’s where I went from that and I figured it out myself. … I could have bought the book and sat at home. … I got the credit and the grade for being in class but it … wasn’t really a good experience at all. I guess it was a learning experience in some ways. (24-2: 287-297)

Although Daniel was surprised that the math department chair would put his teacher in charge of an entire class and disappointed that his class was taught poorly, this turning point did not affect his likelihood of persisting to graduation. He summed up his commitment to persistence this way.

Definitely didn’t affect it negatively. … I have down 100 percent because I’m … very ambitious and like I said I’m not gonna let myself fall so other than that I love it here. It’s close to home and I enjoy learning so I’m gonna push through any obstacles put in front of me. (24-2: 330-333)

Since Daniel was ambitious and determined to persist no matter what teachers he encountered, he did not let isolated negative experiences like taking this math class with
his math teacher cause him to fall short of persisting to graduation. He was able to view the overall college experience as positive and push through any obstacles that arose along the way.

In a different class, Jessica described a similar turning point outcome. Jessica, a 19 year old junior communication studies and international studies double major, described a rhetorical turning point outcome that occurred during the first semester of her freshman year. During this semester Jessica was enrolled in 18 credit hours of classes. She described this experience this way.

I was a freshman and I was taking 18 credit hours I … just figured take as many as possible. That was … my goal. I mean I knew I wasn’t gonna get out of here in four years and I heard people are most likely to get 5 and I was like I want to study abroad for half a year so I was taking 18 credit hours. I was dealing with crazy time management issues because you’re getting into college [and] you have this independence. … I’m already a fairly organized person so I was trying to balance my time. First of all … you need your sleep and you need your food and you need your fitness and you know taking care of yourself and then also dealing with homework balancing friends and family and even other relationships that you have outside of our little world here on campus. … It was definitely an experience trying to make connections with … professors and people on campus and getting involved. It’s a lot to handle for a freshman. (25-1: 200-211)

As Jessica struggled to manage her time, she was enrolled in a challenging online class. She described her interactions with her comparative politics teacher this way.
It was not very much interaction. It was … one of those classes you shaft like there’s always gonna be one and that was it. … It was with five other classes I was taking and I’m like I’m gonna shaft this one. I can’t really judge this class on all online classes because they’re all really different and every one there’s different instructors for each class but for this class specifically comparative politics is meant to be done in a classroom in a discussion ’cause that’s where the debate and where the learning comes in is having those interactions with other students but it’s different when you are reading someone’s response and you get different perceptions of the information. (25-1: 219-229)

Although taking this class online was frustrating and Jessica admitted to shafting this class, she stated that this class did not change her perspective on getting her degree. She summed up this perspective this way.

It never changed my perspective of getting my degree but it just changed my perspective of college and the opportunities that I have because you know everyone’s gonna treat different classes differently and I know a lot of people that did take online classes and they [were] successful. It definitely … showed that you just can’t … ignore class. … You can’t just expect to get good grades. I mean I was pretty much expecting to get a good grade and I didn’t really even do that well and by the end of the semester I was like wait what happened. [Overall.] I don’t think it really affected [my likelihood to persist]. I mean there’s always gonna be bumps in the road but that doesn’t mean you … stop running. (25-1: 235-250)
As Jessica reflected on her experience in this comparative politics class, she mentioned that this class changed her perspective of college rather than her perspective of whether or not she was planning to persist. Through this experience Jessica learned that she needed to invest time into all of her classes so she could earn good grades and overcome any bumps in the road that might occur in the future.

In a different class, Amber described a similar turning point outcome. Amber, a 19 year old sophomore communication studies major, described a personal turning point outcome that occurred during the second semester of her freshman year. During this semester Amber was enrolled in a communication studies class. Amber described her turning point with her communication studies teacher this way.

I just talked to her and I wanted to transfer and at first she was like oh I don’t know if you should and then I was like no I should so she was there for me. I was really close to her and I would always talk to her after class ’cause she was my interpersonal communication teacher so she was always talking about family and if we needed to talk to her we could talk to her so I talked to her and she was really nice. … I think she was happy for me. She originally taught at [another school in my home state] and she was like why don’t you go there and I explained to her that I didn’t want to go there and she was like oh then yeah I think it’d be really fun [to transfer to my current school]. (28-1: 62-70)

After this conversation, Amber made the decision to change schools so that she could continue pursuing her goal of earning a college degree. When asked how this turning point affected her likelihood of persisting to graduation, Amber replied:
I think the only thing that really affects me wanting to graduate is my parents ’cause they’ve always been so proud of me so I just want to prove to them that I can do it and I wasn’t very good in high school grades wise. I had like a 2.7 coming out and now I have an average of a 3.5 in college which is a huge change so I guess it’s more of like wanting to prove to my parents and them be proud of me. (28-1: 151-155)

For Amber her parents were the only people who affected her likelihood to persist in college. Although her teacher played a pivotal role in her decision to transfer, Amber was determined to persist in college so that she could prove to her parents that she could succeed and make them proud.

**Lower likelihood to persist to graduation.** The third category of turning point outcomes was a lower likelihood to persist to graduation. This category of turning point outcomes (\(n = 10\)) accounted for 11.6% of the turning point outcomes participants reported. One instance of this category was described by Elizabeth. Elizabeth, a 19 year old sophomore Spanish education major, described a rhetorical turning point outcome that occurred during the first semester of her freshman year. During this semester Elizabeth was enrolled in a business class. She described her initial perceptions of her teacher this way.

The first month I was here I used to be a business student and I had a professor that was definitely not like any of the high school teachers that I had and [it] just … seemed like it was gonna be [on] your own. … He was gonna be there for you but he didn’t really care so that … made me … rethink this whole thing ’cause it’s … a completely different experience than … anything I’ve ever had and so that
was … right when I came to school so that … made me want to not be here. … He just wasn’t … personable and just … seemed like he was there ’cause he had to be there not because he wanted to be or … really cared so it just … turned me off from wanting to be there too. … I could be doing something better with my time. … I really wasn’t used to that because in high school I went to a really small school and … the teachers really cared and were in your best interest so it really just turned me away from wanting to be there because he just didn’t seem to care. (5-1: 33-48)

Since Elizabeth perceived that her teacher did not care about her, she was not interested in developing a relationship with him. This was a stark contrast from her high school teachers who had always shown that they wanted to get to know her and that they wanted her to succeed. When asked how this turning point influenced her likelihood to persist in college, Elizabeth replied:

It was just a really bad first impression. … I knew college was gonna be a lot different than high school but I didn’t think it’d be quite that different and so it just kinda made me nervous that if this is the first one I’m having what are the other ones gonna compare to. … It didn’t really turn me away from graduating but it … just gave me a negative attitude right at the beginning. … I was upset and [I had] a negative attitude towards school because I was just like if this is how it’s all gonna be … throughout every year then why am I here wasting my money. If they don’t care, then why do I have to care? (5-1: 145-148, 161-166)

Although Elizabeth ultimately decided that she was going to persist and stay in school, she experienced a short period of time when she questioned why she was in college
wasting her money when her teachers did not care about her. During this time, she decided that she was not going to care about school if her teacher did not care about her.

In a different class, Tori described a similar turning point outcome. Tori, a 19 year old freshman Environmental Studies major, described an instrumental turning point outcome that occurred during the first semester of her freshman year. During this semester Tori was enrolled in a biology class. She described her perceptions of her biology teacher this way.

I did badly on one of my tests and I know that a lot of times when you start doing badly in a class [people] … change their major. … I already knew that there was going to be a lot of science with my major so I tried to have an appointment with him to talk about it. I went to his office hours and he told me I had to make an appointment so I made an appointment and then he never showed up. … He never showed up so I left him a note on the door with my email address on it and he never contacted me so then a couple weeks later I sent him an email and he still never replied to it ever the whole semester. … I was just mad. … I failed a test and … this is a lot of money and I don’t want to have to retake any courses ’cause for me … it’s over $1800 dollars per class so that was a big deal and so I wanted to make sure I was gonna be able to pass the class ’cause I knew the information would show up on the final so I wanted to be able to talk to him. [When] I came to [orientation] they told me professors are really going to be willing to talk to you. They want you to come to office hours. They want to help you so … I was very offended. It made me really mad. (29-2: 62-78)
After she was unable to meet with her teacher Tori began to understand why other people changed majors or dropped out of college altogether. She summed up her new understanding this way.

It just made me realize that maybe it wouldn’t be as easy to get through my major as I had thought it would be. I thought it’d just be … smooth sailing and I … thought to myself … I understand people when they reach these difficult points they … change their major or drop out because they felt like they can’t do it so … now I can … understand what that comes from. … I guess they’re afraid of a challenge or maybe they think that it won’t pay off for them in the end if they have to go through all this difficulty and especially if you’re doing bad in classes and employers look at your transcripts they’re gonna be like I just went through all of this for nothing. I can understand that because … I was just … worried about that. (29-2: 88-96)

When asked how this turning point affected her likelihood of persisting to graduation Tori replied:

It brought it down ’cause it made me not want to graduate from here ’cause I was really just really put off by that. … I had to realize that … everybody wasn’t gonna be like that. … After that I started to interact with my other professors more and then they were not so rude. (29-2: 229-232)

Tori stated that this turning point brought down her likelihood of persisting to graduation because she was disappointed that her teacher did not make the effort to show up to meet with her for her appointment. Over time, Tori realized that other teachers would care more about her success.
In a different class, Samuel described a similar turning point outcome. Samuel, a 19 year old freshman management information systems major, described a rhetorical turning point outcome that occurred during the first semester of his freshman year. During this semester Samuel was enrolled in a math class. He described his experience in this math class this way.

I started off in calc two. My advisor … pushed me to go into that. … Preferably I would have been in a lower one which I probably should have been. I wound up withdrawing three quarters of the way through the class because … I didn’t have enough time to study the material. … I wasn’t learning as well. It was just stressing me out way too much. … It wasn’t worth it and … our professor didn’t curve anything. It was a class where you got the grade that you earned. … The first test grade … the range was a 98 to a 26. Most of them were on the lower end. … My homework was always great but when it came to the tests it’s one of those classes that calculus you can change a few things and it looks completely different and it makes it a lot harder. (30-2: 74-84)

For Samuel this class was a low point for him. He was unhappy and unsure about whether he would persist to graduation.

Up until then I’ve actually never dropped a class. I mean I’ve always done very well in my classes. … Math was probably one of my weaker subjects but … it was just the turning point in my life where I realized that I was completely unhappy. I had to tell myself … it’s gonna be a good day in the morning … ’cause my class was at 8:30 and it just ruined your day. You’d go there and you’d be so frustrated ’cause I wanted to do well and I couldn’t and the Math Resource Center
that helped but it got to the point where I’d sit there for an hour and they’d say I can’t help you with this. (30-2: 117-123)

When asked how this class affected his likelihood of persisting to graduation, Samuel replied.

Because I’d always done well on everything in the past … it just kinda made me step back and realize … that everything wasn’t always gonna be that easy but that just because I was in that I still had options to get out thankfully. … One of the things … you have to maintain if you’re getting like grants and things from the government [is] a minimum of 12 credit hours so I had 15 and that dropped me to 10 so I had to pick up two more classes. Luckily I made it into those two classes and everything worked out … otherwise I’m not sure what would have happened … ’cause I didn’t want that affecting my GPA. I might have been able to pass but I knew if I did it wouldn’t have been beneficial to me and I stuck out the class long enough and I could have kept attending but I was stressed enough with everything else. … If every class was like that I wouldn’t have graduated. (30-2: 216-225, 245)

Although this class was discouraging and lowered Samuel’s likelihood to persist to graduation, he eventually dropped out of this class and found other ways to maintain the minimum number of credit hours he needed to continue receiving governmental grants. Fortunately, Samuel’s other classes were not like this class so he still believed that he could persist to graduation.
Relationship Outcomes

The third research question was asked to determine how students perceived that teacher messages and relational turning points influenced their relationships with teachers. Six categories emerged. These categories included: change in respect for teacher, change in trust or perceptions of credibility/competence of teacher, change in perceptions of the relationship with teacher, change in own willingness to approach teacher or seek help, change in student’s humanization of teacher, and change in willingness to take or considered taking another course with instructor. In the sections that follow, I discuss each of these categories in depth, focusing specifically on using the participants’ own words to accurately capture their experiences.

Change in respect for teacher. The first category of turning point outcomes was a change in respect for teacher. Participants who indicated “a change in respect for the teacher, or esteem for or a sense of the worth or excellence of a teacher” were categorized as a change in respect for teacher (Docan-Morgan & Manusov, 2009, p. 172). This category of turning point outcomes (n = 8) accounted for 9.3% of the turning point outcomes participants reported and 16.7% of the relationship turning point outcomes participants reported. One instance of this category was described by Jennifer. Jennifer, a 21 year old junior geology and math double major, spoke with me about a rhetorical turning point outcome that occurred during the second semester of her freshman year. During this semester Jennifer was enrolled in a music class. She described this music class this way.

Well I thought it was going to be like a history class … just read off the textbook and say this and that. … She opened up a whole new world. … She doesn’t just
talk about the theoretical part of music but also about the practical uses of that and then … sometimes she would teach us about things that were generalized so it’s not just … what you learn in the textbook so sometimes just any news that comes up current events so she would bring that up and relate it to what we were learning so … it’s more than what I bargained for in that class. (6-1: 179-185)

For Jennifer this teacher and this class exceeded her expectations and gave her more than she bargained for. Over the course of the semester, Jennifer also developed greater respect for her teacher.

I always had a respect for teachers but … from taking a class I had an even greater respect and then I started to share their passion for why they do what they’re doing so to impart knowledge to students. … She was [a] really good professor and … I’m sure I could have taken the same class with other professors but this professor … I think she’s dedicated and she does it for the love of teaching. … She doesn’t just focus on getting the assignment done and handing it in. She wants us to make the most out of everything that we do so when we hand things in she doesn’t just see it. She wants to make sure that we understand what we’re doing so it’s not just based off what we hand in or what we write. (6-1: 189-201)

Although Jennifer originally took this music course just to fulfill a university general education requirement, her teacher changed her mind about music and helped her see that music was more than what she heard on the radio and that music related to other aspects of her life. Jennifer developed a high level of respect for this teacher because this
teacher loved what she did, was dedicated to her students, and demonstrated a passion for teaching and music.

In a different class, Amber described a similar turning point outcome. Amber, a 19 year old sophomore communication studies major, described a personal turning point outcome that occurred during the second semester of her freshman year. During this semester Amber was enrolled in a communication studies class. When asked where she was at in her college career, Amber replied:

[I was] pretty negative about school. Never wanted to be there always wanted to go home. I had bad roommate situations from freshman year and then sophomore year it was kinda becoming bad again. … I actually thought about transferring after my freshman year but I told myself oh give it another semester and we’ll see how it goes. It just wasn’t working. (28-1: 103-110)

One bright spot in her negative experiences was her communication studies class. Amber described her teacher as someone she had something in common with.

We always had positive conversations. We would always talk about jewelry and stuff because she’d always see my jewelry and talk to me about it. … She was older so she would always talk about her past and how she’s been married to her husband for … 65 years. … My grandma and her would both travel a lot so she reminded me about my grandma so I’d always talk to her. (28-1: 118-123)

As Amber developed a relationship with her teacher through these conversations, she began to develop respect for this teacher because this teacher was real and honest with her and her classmates. Amber discussed this personal turning point outcome this way.
I think I gained respect for her after talking to her ’cause she was just real about everything and if we had … questions about life she’d be honest about it while most teachers I don’t think would be honest. … I feel like most teachers would just say what you wanted to hear and she would tell you the truth. … She’s … trying to be there for everyone more like a best friend not just a teacher. (28-1: 127-138)

Since Amber respected this teacher she confided in her when she made the decision to transfer from her past university to her current university. Although her teacher was initially skeptical about Amber’s decision to move out of state, she eventually supported her decision to transfer.

In contrast to Jennifer and Amber, Lisa described a negative turning point outcome where she lost respect for her teacher. Lisa, a 46 year old freshman communication studies major, described a ridicule/discipline turning point outcome that occurred during the second five week summer session prior to her freshman year. During this five week summer session Lisa was enrolled in a pop culture class. She described her teacher this way.

He was just kinda the teacher that was a little ditzy … hard to understand basically and so he wasn’t the best teacher and so everybody in the class was confused by him sometimes me more so because at least they could understand what he was talking about when it came to technology. … He was … abrupt and short and didn’t have the understanding … of different situations and not just for myself but for other kids too. … He was younger than me. I used to think to myself he’s such a smarty pants. (8-2: 74-81)
During this five week summer session this teacher assigned a pop culture paper that was confusing to Lisa because she did not watch television frequently. When she approached this teacher to get clarification on the assignment, he ridiculed her lack of knowledge about pop culture and mentioned that she would probably get an F on the paper. After this conversation Lisa began to lose respect for this teacher. She described her opinion of him this way.

I don’t remember a positive interaction. They’re all negative with [him]. I mean … like I said he’s the one that said well do it anyway or you’ll get an F. I guess the difference between the first teacher and him was that he didn’t really [care] about anything that was going on and the fact of the matter … that … I didn’t even know what programs we’re talking about … it didn’t faze him. … He didn’t care … so … as far as I’m concerned [everything] was negative. … He wasn’t a very patient man and … if we couldn’t answer his question he would get upset even if we told him nobody in here understands ’cause you’re confusing us. It was kind of annoying. … I sure wrote a lot on that evaluation. I put my name on it too. I wanted him to know it was me. (8-2: 351-363)

Although Lisa initially respected her teacher because of his role and position, she lost respect for him because he talked down to the class and was not empathetic about anything. To make sure that he knew that she had lost respect for him, she wrote a lengthy negative evaluation and signed her name to it so he would know her opinions about his teaching and his class.

**Change in trust or perceptions of credibility/competence of teacher.** The second category of turning point outcomes was a change in trust or perceptions of
credibility/competence of teacher. Participants who indicated “a change trusting a teacher, or change in perceived credibility or competence of the teacher” were categorized as a change in trust or perceptions of credibility/competence of teacher (Docan-Morgan & Manusov, 2009, p. 172). This category of turning point outcomes (n = 6) accounted for 7.0% of the turning point outcomes participants reported and 12.5% of the relationship turning point outcomes participants reported. One instance of this category was described by Amanda. Amanda, a 19 year old freshman communication studies major, spoke with me about a rhetorical turning point outcome that occurred during the first semester of her freshman year. During this semester Amanda was enrolled in a Chicano literature class. She described that Chicano literature class this way.

> It seems like every class period every time we had class we had to read and then we would like have group discussions so it seems like every discussion there would seem to be conflict between the teacher and my brother or other … Hispanic students there who saw it differently because I guess it … [wasn’t] only towards my brother that she had … different ideas that they … clashed, but … with other students as well.

As these clashes occurred over the course of the semester, Amanda began to doubt the credibility/competence of this teacher’s views on what it meant to be Mexican American Chicano. Amanda expressed her views this way: “I kinda viewed her differently because she wasn’t portraying what a Mexican American Chicano really is. It was just her opinion of how she saw herself to be” (4-1: 194-196). As Amanda began to doubt her teacher’s expertise because it did not ring true with her own experience as a
Mexican American woman, Amanda began to spot contradictions in what her teacher said and resent that her teacher was misrepresenting her culture. Amanda decided that she would work to complete school so that she could prove that this teacher’s opinion about Mexican Americans was wrong.

Daniel described two similar turning point outcomes. Daniel, a 21 year old junior communication studies major, described two rhetorical turning point outcomes. The first rhetorical turning point outcome occurred during the second semester of his freshman year. During this semester Daniel was enrolled in a math class. He described his math class this way.

It was super challenging … learning calculus from somebody that you can’t understand their accent. [He] talked superfast. … He would be going through steps on the board really fast and writing down and saying stuff you could not understand and it would just completely go over the whole class’ head and I knew what he was talking about because I’ve experienced it before but just looking around at all my peers I could tell that they just had no idea and he would turn around and be like any questions and everyone would not respond. … Everyone did have questions but it was like can you restart the whole entire whatever you just did … so of course no one said anything and of course he just turned around and went to step number 20 when everyone was lost at step number one so it was just bad and … two weeks into it I actually saw like I think a good half of the class had to drop because … at about three weeks into the class it was half the size that it was at the beginning I think because they realize[d] … after the first couple of days they were incredibly behind and we were all freshmen. … The
only way to learn in that environment with him teaching like that would be … to teach yourself through the book … so I feel like a lot of people dropped out. … I’d try and pay attention and eventually … the stuff I didn’t know I did have to teach myself out of the book and use the math resource center … but without that it would definitely just be the worst experience. I would have been dropping out with the rest. (24-2: 112-134)

After seeing most of his classmates drop the class and personally experiencing difficulties with understanding this teacher, Daniel began to doubt this teacher’s credibility/competence. He described his reservations about this teacher this way.

I was trying to learn math from a foreigner … and … he was a grad student and … he was … drastically inexperienced … and that’s … really not a subject where you should be inexperienced and have a bad accent where your pupils can’t understand and … you’re not very experienced at communicating … to a class instead of just one-on-one. …. [Now] I look at last names before I take classes because a teacher does really make a big difference in the … material that you actually learn throughout the course … and I didn’t really learn anything through that course besides what I already knew … and from what I taught myself so it was kinda a bad experience and don’t really want that to happen again especially in math. (24-2: 141-154)

After perceiving that his international graduate teaching assistant was inexperienced and had trouble communicating with the class, Daniel took steps to avoid a similar situation in a future class by pre-screening the course listing to ensure he would
not be taking another class with an international graduate teaching assistant. Overall, he was disappointed with the quality of instruction and the teacher he had for his math class.

Daniel experienced another disappointing experience in a criminal justice class during the second semester of his sophomore year. Daniel described this teacher this way.

She … had this really bubbly personality and she was always laughing and she would always screw up and her presentations … would have a lot of errors and it was … a fun environment and not very serious at times because I feel like … her material wasn’t … her first priority. … She was teaching … and … I felt like she was … recruiting. … A lot of the material that … she communicated during class was her own personal experiences … and her day to day life and how much she loved it because she was completely passionate about being a police officer so I … guess I … took that as … she was trying to persuade us to join her in having fun being a police officer whereas I’m not a big fan of police officers so I guess I was … upset. … I have this tension ’cause everyone in that class was … ROTC and wanting to grow up to be a police officer and I’m … the other guy on the opposite side of that spectrum. … I want to save people who are in trouble. … I want to defend them. … I felt like the bad guy in there. (26-3: 359-372)

After taking a class with a teacher who had errors in her presentation and spent more time recruiting for the police department rather than teaching, Daniel believed that this teacher lacked credibility/competence and decided not to persist with anything else with his criminal justice minor. He decided to focus on his majors instead of taking
future classes in the criminal justice department. Daniel summed up his turning point outcome this way.

I just feel like she wasn’t very educational. … She was trying to advertise and recruit us as students into being police officers. … I want to be a criminal defense lawyer so I was … on the other side of the spectrum from the police guys so we’re gonna butt heads so I wasn’t really into that. … I figured there would be an instructor … that went through [college]. I don’t think she even went through college. I think she said she went right out of high school and she was one of the first … females on the … police force. … She basically taught out of the book and brought in speakers … from the forensic department and stuff. I guess it just probably wasn’t the class for me. (26-3: 37-50)

Overall, this class and this teacher did not meet Daniel’s expectations. He was looking for a teacher who had earned a college degree and taught the class from a more neutral perspective. After taking the class, he doubted the teacher’s credibility/competence and decided the class was not for him.

**Change in perceptions of the relationship with teacher.** The third category of turning point outcomes was a change in perceptions of the relationship with teacher. Participants who indicated “a change in perceptions (i.e., beliefs, realizations) about the relationship between the student and the teacher with whom the turning point occurred” were categorized as a change in perceptions of the relationship with teacher (Docan-Morgan & Manusov, 2009, p. 173). This category of turning point outcomes \( n = 18 \) accounted for 20.9% of the turning point outcomes participants reported and 37.5% of the relationship turning point outcomes participants reported. One instance of this category
was described by Michael. Michael, a 20 year old junior hospitality, restaurant, and tourism management major, spoke with me about a personal turning point outcome that occurred during the first semester of his freshman year. During this semester Michael was enrolled in an English class. He described that English teacher this way.

It was beginning of my freshman year and I guess there was a lot of pressure a lot of new experiences and I was … finding out that college classes were different than high school classes … as far as being less personable. However there was one professor I actually became … more friends with than just acquaintances. It was her … responsibility for that too. I don’t know if I’ll be able to put that many dashes throughout here because I haven’t gone out of my way to talk to very many professors at all but she made an effort to talk to me and do some outside of the class things like she recommended different books for me to read and she even marked different stories within different books that she thought I would like so I thought that was really outstanding. (14-1: 33-41)

At first Michael was scared of this teacher because she was not afraid to be bold. He worried that he would get into trouble, but over time his relationship with her began to change. He described this change this way.

I would say in the beginning of September … [is] when I started getting more comfortable, started speaking up in class more … That’s when she started to … talk to me a little bit more about what I was thinking with the readings that we were doing. (14-1: 52-55)
After Michael had a couple conversations with his teacher about his interests and his major he began to realize that he saw this teacher as more of a friend than a teacher. He described his relationship with this teacher this way.

[I saw her as] more than just as a teacher but as a friend and someone who I could turn to when I was confused or was worried about something and I did quite often after that. (14-1: 152-154)

As the friendship grew, Michael began to consult this teacher for advice as he explored more as a student and tried to figure out what he wanted to do in college. These conversations strengthened his resolve to earn his degree.

In a different class, Alexandra described a similar turning point outcome. Alexandra, a 20 year old junior nutrition, health and exercise science and dietetics double major, described a personal turning point outcome that occurred during the first semester of her sophomore year. During this semester Alexandra visited her academic advisor. Alexandra described her interactions with her advisor this way.

My advisor who I absolutely love … just encourages me [to] keep my options open and … when I didn’t get a grade that I wanted which was really disappointing because I know I gave all my effort she just kept … encouraging me to stay on that track and I can do the major and … there’s other classes that I may be really good at so it can balance my GPA for the grade that I did not do so well. … I just basically came in and I was like I don’t know if I can do this major anymore. I don’t know if I can be in science. I always loved science. That’s all I knew since I was little and she’s just like well you’re one of those people who can totally do it. One grade won’t hurt you. … It does suck that general chemistry is a
requirement but she said … grad schools don’t just look at one grade. … She
definitely encouraged me and told me to keep my options open and just see what
comes my way because there’s a lot that I can do with my major. (16-3: 81-95)
This conversation with her advisor changed Alexandra’s perceptions of her
relationship with this advisor. She described the progression in this relationship this way.
It’s always been … good … formal wasn’t anything … super personal till that day
and I just felt like I got closer to her on a more personal level than just as my
advisor and … after that whole meeting we have … personal chitchats about our
lives and … I love that personal connection because I just feel like I’m [not] just a
number. I actually matter to her in a sense so that’s really nice. … I know that
there’s always that stereotype at university that you’re just a number and
sometimes you are just a number unfortunately but once you get that one-on-one
connection with faculty and staff you definitely are not just a number. You
actually do matter and she knows my name. … When she sees me around campus
she says hi to me. … She doesn’t just ignore me and she’s just very personable.
(16-3: 100-109)

As she got to know her advisor better after this advising appointment, Alexandra
viewed herself as more than just a number to her advisor. When she realized that her
advisor valued her, she was able to gain self-confidence and internalize what her advisor
told her. Alexandra summed up this advice this way:

She’s just encouraging me to work harder and just keep my dreams alive and just
keep believing in yourself because if you don’t believe in yourself no one else
will. (16-3: 116-118)
With her advisor’s encouragement and positivity, Alexandra was able to get the support she could not get from her parents because they did not understand college or the overarching higher education system.

In contrast to Michael and Alexandra, Bianca described a turning point outcome that resulted in her becoming more distant from her teacher. Bianca, a 19 year old sophomore agronomy major, described an instrumental turning point outcome that occurred during the first semester of her freshman year. During this semester Bianca was enrolled in a band class. When asked where she was at in her college career, Bianca replied:

[I was] in a bad place. I was overwhelmed and jumbled up and had no balance whatsoever between this class and that class and practicing my clarinet and working. … That’s when I knew I was in for a bit of a bumpy ride there. I couldn’t concentrate. My priorities weren’t straight. I just didn’t know what to do and I was too ashamed or shy I don’t know which one it was to talk to anybody about it. (20-3: 287-291)

With her GPA plummeting rapidly, Bianca decided that she needed to talk to her band director because she was at risk of losing her marching band eligibility. She described her interaction with this teacher this way.

[I told] him that I was worried especially since with marching band you have to maintain a 2.0 GPA to be in it but it’s only in the fall semester so I … knew that there was a good chance that I wasn’t gonna be able to do it spring. … He was like … work really hard and I ended up falling short and getting that email saying … you can’t do marching band. I’m really sorry. … That kinda changed the
dynamic of our relationship. He seemed really sympathetic towards me and I didn’t want that sympathy because … I’m not blaming him for sending that email. It was my fault that I got bad grades. (20-3: 299-306)

After she failed to earn the GPA necessary to participate in marching band, Bianca’s close relationship with her band director became awkward. She summed up this relationship this way.

I was embarrassed when I was around him. I felt like I had failed well I did but … I guess it made it … just a little awkward for him to know … her GPA’s below a 2.0 and I didn’t really want to advertise that. (20-3: 311-313)

As a result of this instrumental turning point outcome, Bianca’s situation got worse because she lost her confidante, her band director, at a time when she needed his support. Rather than seeking out help from another teacher, Bianca began to doubt her ability to stay in school and continued to feel like a loser. A whole semester would pass before she would regain the confidence needed to approach her band director again.

**Change in willingness to approach teacher or seek help.** The fourth category of turning point outcomes was a change in willingness to approach teacher or seek help. Participants who indicated “a change in approaching, seeking help from, or willingness to approach or seek help from the teacher” were categorized as a change in willingness to approach teacher or seek help (Docan-Morgan & Manusov, 2009, p. 173). This category of turning point outcomes ($n = 8$) accounted for 9.3% of the turning point outcomes participants reported and 16.7% of the relationship turning point outcomes participants reported. One instance of this category was described by Natasha. Natasha, a 19 year old freshman with an undeclared major, spoke with me about an instrumental turning
point outcome that occurred during the first semester of her freshman year. During this semester Natasha was enrolled in a chemistry class. She described her interaction with her chemistry teacher this way.

I had to get these slips filled out for our scholarship and all [you] had to do was [get] your estimated grade, your attendance, … and then you sign your name and I … went in there and no one else was in his office so I … just asked him for my scholarship we need to get these filled out. I was just wondering if you could give me an estimate of what my grade is by any chance and he took the paper from my hand very rudely, did not make eye contact, asked me what I got on the last test, and signed the paper, and gave it back. There was like no goodbye. Have a good day. Nothing at all. (9-2: 209-215)

For Natasha, her teacher’s reaction was surprising. Up until that point she had never spoken to her teacher before and had thought he was an awesome teacher. She was disappointed that he was too busy to help her fill out her slip for her scholarship. Following this event, Natasha turned away from her teacher and started to think that he did not have the personality needed to be a good teacher. When asked what personality her teacher should have had and how he should have responded to her request, she replied:

[College is] so different. I come from … a small high school and all of my teachers were super friendly and I came here and he just wasn’t welcoming. [I learned that] not all teachers are super nice. … It really did bum me out and that’s why it turned me away from asking him for … letters of recommendation which I
would have loved to have had him write me a letter of recommendation but you just gotta keep going. (9-2: 228-239)

After a disappointing meeting with her chemistry teacher, Natasha decided not to approach this teacher when she needed a letter of recommendation. Although she believed that this teacher’s letter of recommendation would have helped her chances of earning a scholarship, she decided to ask her graduate teaching assistant for the letter of recommendation because she was more confident that this graduate teaching assistant would welcome the request.

Conversely, Taylor described a turning point outcome that made her more willing to approach her teacher. Taylor, a 19 year old sophomore pre-radiation science technology major, described an instrumental turning point outcome that occurred during the first semester of her sophomore year. During this semester Taylor was enrolled in a philosophy class. Taylor described her interactions with her teacher this way.

He would always sit down and pull out my last papers and he would go over stuff that I could have done better and then he would always … outline the next paper that I was going to do and just … help me … hit the main points. He always offered to … look over my paper before it was due and make sure I … got the concepts that were needed to be made because the class was just based on the papers that we wrote. (19-3: 214-218)

In addition to becoming a stronger writer during these meetings, Taylor also built a stronger relationship with this teacher. She remarked:

It made it more comfortable just to go and ask him questions. I knew that he was helpful and … at first I was … skeptical to go ask for help in that class but … I
was glad I did and I just think it made … stronger connections … if I ever needed help in a philosophy class again.

After Taylor became comfortable going to talk to that teacher, she knew that he would be willing to help her in that class as well as future classes. Taylor perceived that her relationship with this teacher was different from her relationships with past teachers because she was comfortable going back to this teacher for help after the class was over. In other classes, she would have only been comfortable asking for help in the class she was currently taking. Taylor stated that having this teacher was particularly helpful because she was able to get the extra help she needed to perform better in this class and become a stronger student.

In a different class, Alexandra described a similar turning point outcome. Alexandra, a 20 year old nutrition, health, and exercise science and dietetics double major, described an instrumental turning point outcome that occurred during the first semester of her freshman year. During this semester Alexandra was enrolled in a biology class. When asked where she was in her college career, she replied:

I was a freshman. It was my very first semester in college. It was my very first lecture class and I was scared to death. It was very intimidating and I did not know [my class] did not have a lot of freshmen in it. I guess the advisor just said I could go in because I took AP Bio in high school and I guess I did well in high school so there were not many freshmen that day or that whole semester and so it was definitely nerve wracking. (16-1: 159-163)

Alexandra became even more nervous when her biology teacher called her into his office. She described this interaction this way.
[My teacher] asked me to come into his office. At first I was like oh my god what did I do … and he just sat me down in his office and he’s like okay well I understand you’re a freshman. I don’t mean to be rude but … you need to learn to write emails in [a] more professional way and I was like oh okay because in high school they don’t really teach you that. They don’t really stress on that and in my emails to him I sounded really rude and that’s not what my intention was but he did not take it personally and he goes well I like having freshmen students because I can transform them and so he really helped me out in his office. (16-1: 167-174)

Although Alexandra described her teacher as brutally honest about her lack of professionalism, she did not take this interaction personally and worked to draft more professional emails to this teacher. Although she was initially intimidated by this teacher, this turning point made Alexandra more willing to seek help from this teacher. She described this change this way.

I think he made it more easy to talk to him because later on the material got harder I definitely would go into his office all the time and he would help me with cell structure and function however they worked together so it was definitely more of a one-on-one relationship. … It definitely made me feel more comfortable with the professor and with the subject and that I don’t have to be intimidated since this was a lecture class and I was a freshman so it was hard to adjust to college and take this giant class with such a challenging subject at the time so definitely made me feel better that I could come and approach him about the questions that I had. (16-1: 186-189, 200-204)
Through this turning point outcome, Alexandra learned that her teacher cared enough about her to work together to form a one-on-one relationship with her. Later on in the semester, Alexandra was willing to ask for the help she needed when the material got harder and she had more questions for this teacher.

**Change in student’s humanization of teacher.** The fifth category of turning point outcomes was a change in student’s humanization of teacher. Participants who indicated “a change in perception of their teacher as being more human” or “more of a person” were categorized as a change in student’s humanization of teacher (Docan-Morgan & Manusov, 2009, p. 175). This category of turning point outcomes \( (n = 4) \) accounted for 4.7% of the turning point outcomes participants reported and 8.3% of the relationship turning point outcomes participants reported. One instance of this category was described by Natasha. Natasha, a 19 year old freshman with an undeclared major, spoke with me about an instrumental turning point outcome that occurred during the first semester of her freshman year. During this semester Natasha was enrolled in a math class. She described the atmosphere where her instrumental turning point outcome occurred this way.

He has a table outside of his main office which he shares with two other guys that we just work at. We’d do problems on the chalkboard and sometimes he has a couch in his office and I’d just sit on there and he’d be working on his computer and I’d just ask him questions and so it was a really relaxed environment. (9-3: 248-251)

This relaxed environment facilitated this turning point outcome. Natasha described this turning point outcome this way.
I just spent a lot of time in his office hours just I mean we would do the homework but we’d also talk about … life. … He would tell me stories about him and his wife … nothing … personal but just … little stories to know that he’s a person too. … He’s not just your teacher and he’s not out to make your life suck so it was nice to just spend time with him. (9-3: 255-259)

After spending more time with her math teacher and hearing some of his personal stories, Natasha began to humanize her teacher and see him as a person as well as a teacher. She saw that he had a family outside of his job and was not out there to make his students’ lives miserable. As Natasha saw her teacher as a person as well as a teacher, she visited her teachers’ office hours more frequently to get the help she needed. Through this turning point outcome, she was able to see office hours as a good opportunity to get help rather than an intimidating and awkward experience.

In a different class, Christopher described a similar turning point outcome. Christopher, a 19 year old sophomore with an undeclared major, described a personal turning point outcome that occurred during the first semester of his sophomore year. During this semester Christopher was enrolled in an English class. Christopher described the outcome of this personal turning point this way.

Teachers are human … teachers like to have just as much fun as I would so it … brought more of just … a humanizing kinda light on me seeing teachers ’cause yeah I know they’re human. I know they like to have fun but … they … do the same things I like to do. They’re just doing their job. … I was obviously well aware that … teachers leave here and they wear normal clothes and … they have friends and they do stuff like that but it’s just different interacting … when
everybody is joking around and they’re talking about … crazy stuff that happened over the weekend. … It brings you … to more of a personal level like you guys are … human beings. … They aren’t better than you because you’re learning from them … that kinda humanizing [thing] they’re not godlike. (10-2, 448-459)

After interacting with his English teacher as well as a couple English teachers who shared his English teacher’s office, Christopher began to see teachers as more human because they could have just as much fun as other people. He was initially surprised to find out that his teacher also did the same things he did like having fun on the weekends. As a result of this turning point outcome, Christopher began to see his teacher as someone who was not better than him or godlike. His teacher was a person just like he was. Christopher described this change in more detail in this way.

I watched her interact with other people and its funny too because the one teacher that I actually took like a high liking to … every once in a while I would see her out at [a local restaurant near campus] or something like that. … When I’d be out with my friends … we’d say hi and … keep going. …Professors are just so straightforward usually and she’s just … relaxed and laidback and …it feels more natural like she wasn’t really teaching like we were all teaching each other kinda thing. (10-2: 463-471)

After seeing his teacher outside of the classroom at a local restaurant near campus, Christopher saw his teacher as more multi-dimensional when he saw her out and about while he was out with his friends. He noticed that she spoke to him naturally outside of class and also created a classroom environment that was natural where it felt
like the teacher and students were teaching each other rather than the teacher teaching
everything to her students.

In a different class, Alexandra described a similar turning point outcome.

Alexandra, a 20 year old junior nutrition, health, and exercise science and dietetics
double major, described a personal turning point outcome that occurred during the first
semester of her sophomore year. During this semester Alexandra was enrolled in a
Spanish class. Alexandra described the outcome of this personal turning point this way.

It’s always a little nerve wracking when you don’t know your professors or how
they’re gonna be or what their grading system’s gonna be but he was just
absolutely wonderful. The first day of class he was like okay don’t call me by my
last name. Call me by my first name and I just knew then that this is going to be
great because anyone who says that it just means that they’re super personable
and just because he has a Ph.D. he’s not on you know this whole cloud nine I’m
better than you type of attitude and he was just so down to earth and I loved it. …
It was a turning point [to see] a person with so many degrees and … so many
credentials… just walk into to class and be so personable and be so dressed down
and just cool about everything was amazing because it just showed that … people
like that with higher degrees and credentials … are just like the average Joe just
like you. … There’s not … that space … there was with my chemistry professor
like … I’m the professor. You’re the student. You’re below me and I don’t want
to help you kinda thing. I’m here for my research and that’s it but with this
Spanish professor it was not like that at all. (16-4: 135-155)
Alexandra humanized her Spanish teacher on the first day of class. She was impressed that he asked the class to call him by his first name even though he had his Ph.D. Alexandra saw this request as a way to show the class that he was not better than them. She liked that he was down to earth and did not see himself as better than everyone else because he had higher degrees and credentials. This personal turning point outcome stood out even more because Alexandra had just taken a class with a chemistry teacher who had made a point of showing his students that he was the teacher and they were the students and that they were below him. For Alexandra, removing the teacher-student hierarchy she had seen in other classes like her chemistry class made her feel more comfortable. She described this level of comfort this way.

I was just … so shocked at how down to earth he was. … I never met anyone like that before and it just made me feel super comfortable and I mean I could ask any question and not feel stupid ’cause sometimes it is intimidating when you’re learning a foreign language you don’t want to sound like you’re an idiot in front of everybody else … but he definitely was like there’s no stupid questions in this class. … If you need help with the grammar or whatever just ask. I’d rather have you ask than … mess it up on the exam and get it wrong. (16-4: 368-374)

Because she saw her Spanish teacher as more down to earth and human, Alexandra was able to succeed in this class and get the help she needed when she had questions in class. This level of comfort with asking questions without worrying about sounding foolish made what could have been an intimidating class less intimidating for Alexandra.
Change in willingness to take or considered taking another course with instructor. The sixth and final category of turning point outcomes was a change in willingness to take or considered taking another course with instructor. Participants who indicated “having taken, currently taking, or considered taking another course with the same instructor” were categorized as a change in willingness to take or considered taking another course with instructor (Docan-Morgan & Manusov, 2009, p. 175). This category of turning point outcomes ($n = 4$) accounted for 4.7% of the turning point outcomes participants reported and 8.3% of the relationship turning point outcomes participants reported. One instance of this category was described by Amanda. Amanda, a 19 year old freshman communication studies major, spoke with me about a rhetorical turning point outcome that occurred during the first semester of her freshman year. During this semester Amanda was enrolled in a music class. She described the rhetorical turning point outcome this way.

He didn’t take attendance … but even though he didn’t take attendance I still wanted to attend the class just like I said the way he explained things how he presented … the material. … I really liked the way he taught the class and I really enjoyed the material so the last day of class … I went up to him … and I told him … I really enjoyed your class and I’m thinking about taking a different class with you. (4-3:109-111, 92-95)

Over the course of the semester, Amanda was impressed with the way that her music teacher taught his class. On the final day of class, Amanda decided that she should speak to him for the first time to let him know that she enjoyed the way he taught the class and the material that he had chosen for the class. Amanda considered taking a
different class with this teacher because he clearly demonstrated to her that he loved teaching and loved music. She was impressed that there were people out there who appreciated classic music that had paved the way for the current music she listened to. This teacher’s passion for the class helped Amanda want to attend the class even though attendance was not required.

In a different class, Jessica described a similar turning point outcome. Jessica, a 19 year old junior communication studies and international studies double major, described a rhetorical turning point outcome that occurred during the second five week summer session prior to her sophomore year. During this second five week summer session Jessica was enrolled in a Spanish class at another campus in the university system. Jessica described the turning point that led to this turning point outcome this way.

Five days a week [we would] go in at 8:00 in the morning till 10:30 ... but anyway it was great actually. … It was a very fast-paced class which I needed I mean just because you’re in class so much it was like we did a chapter a week and it was fantastic and my last Spanish class we only did three chapters the entire semester and I was like ugh blow my brains out it was so slow so this class was really great. He was a very funny instructor too. … He was also very motivating like trying to get everyone involved in the community and he told us about how one time he was organizing a strike against parking with students ’cause they were charging a ridiculous amount for faculty and for student parking so they barricaded ‘cause at [this campus] there’s only so many entrances. There was only two at the time so they barricaded the streets ’cause the administration wouldn’t
talk to them … and so yeah it was really cool so he was like you guys need to be active and if there’s anything you want to be changed … write letters do what you can. (25-3: 167-181)

Since this was the first time Jessica had taken a class on this campus, she had some initial trepidation.

I didn’t really know what to expect when going to [this campus]. I assumed that it would be very similar to [my campus] but summer classes are very unique because it brings in a unique crowd like [out of] our students were some that were [from a campus in a neighboring state] and … some that are going on to medical school and were using Spanish for medical reasons and some were full-time nurses and it was interesting … the different diversity in the class. (25-3: 321-325)

Although she had some initial trepidation, Jessica’s perspective on summer classes and taking a class on that campus changed as a result of this teacher. She described this change this way.

My perspective changed because I never really felt the need to do summer classes or really wanted to but I figured … I wanted to get a jump start on Spanish definitely and statistics get that out of the way. … That was the easiest class so great and so it definitely encouraged me to want to go and do more summer classes. (25-3: 329-332)

After taking this Spanish class, Jessica was excited about the opportunity to take more classes at this campus the following summer as well as another Spanish class in the department with this teacher.
In a different class, Crystal described a similar turning point outcome. Crystal, a 23 year old senior communication studies major, described a rhetorical turning point outcome that occurred during the second semester of her sophomore year. During this semester Crystal was enrolled in a communication studies class. Crystal described this rhetorical turning point outcome this way.

I liked that he brought his own life situations into the picture and … just made it seem like he’s a real person. … Well we just talked about life and communication and just what our interests were as far as different things ’cause we did speeches and topics that we were interested in. [After taking a class with him,] I really wanted to take another course with him but I never got to. (26-3: 251-259)

Although Crystal never got to take a class with this teacher, because he graduated and moved to another university, Crystal was impressed with the way he taught his class. Prior to this class, Crystal was still unsure about her major. When asked about where she was in her college career, she described her uncertainty this way.

[I was] still trying to figure out what I’m trying to do as far as graduation or even declare a major because I didn’t know … and then … taking the course it allowed me to … see okay that’s really interesting. I really like the concepts that are taught and it’ll be good for my communication apprehension to be in communication … and I guess … I knew I wanted to graduate by then but I wasn’t sure how and what. … Until then … I didn’t know what kinda degree I would get or where I’m going afterwards and it bothered me but after I declared it kinda helped me [be] like okay communication. (26-3: 233-239)
After a positive experience with this teacher, Crystal became more confident with her major selection. Her initial uncertainty changed to excitement about taking future courses in the department with this teacher as she realized that her life and interests intersected with her major. Crystal described this change this way.

He was a great teacher and he was new too and he was just really awesome and I had a really good time in that class even though I don’t like speeches. … The way he talked about his … education background and everything just made me really interested in … communication studies and so after I took his class I was like yeah that’s what I want to do. … It was a turning point because it allowed me to … get one step closer to … knowing why I’m here and … trying to figure out … the basics of getting an education. (26-3: 85-91, 102-104)

Thus, for Crystal, this change represented moving a step closer to graduation and knowing why she had decided to come to college. Through this class and this teacher, Crystal was able to figure out one more step about what it meant to get an education.

**Classroom Outcomes**

The fourth research question was asked to determine how students perceived that teacher messages and relational turning points influenced their overall classroom experience. Four categories emerged. These categories include: change in willingness or how to approach other teachers or authority figures; change in perceptions of other teachers; change or contemplated a change in decisions about school; and change in own confidence in course, subject, academics in general, abilities, or self. In the sections that follow, I discuss each of these categories in depth, focusing specifically on using the participants’ own words to accurately capture their experiences.
Change in willingness or how to approach other teachers or authority figures. The first category of turning point outcomes was a change in willingness or how to approach other teachers or authority figures. Participants who “indicated being more or less willing to approach or that were said to have affected how they would approach teachers or authority figures” were categorized as willingness or how to approach other teachers or authority figures (Docan-Morgan & Manusov, 2009, p. 173). This category of turning point outcomes (n = 3) accounted for 3.5% of the turning point outcomes participants reported and 7.8% of the classroom turning point outcomes participants reported. One instance of this category was described by Hannah. Hannah, a 19 year old freshman communication studies major, spoke with me about a personal turning point outcome that occurred during the first semester of her freshman year. During this semester Hannah was enrolled in an anthropology class. She described her personal turning point outcome this way.

It’s just made me more … open to different teachers and just not so closed off … like I don’t want to talk to them. It makes me want to go meet my profs and talk to them so I guess they know who I am and … that might help me in the long run. (4-1: 149-152)

After finding out that her teacher and his wife suffered from severe migraines like she did, Hannah began to see that her anthropology teacher did care about her and her well-being. After this personal turning point, Hannah found that it was easier to talk to her anthropology teacher because they shared things in common beyond their common suffering with severe migraines. As Hannah got to know her anthropology teacher she
became more open to approaching other teachers because they could provide the help she
needed to succeed in other classes.

In a different class, Crystal described a similar turning point outcome. Crystal, a
23 year old senior communication studies major, described an instrumental turning point
outcome that occurred during the first semester of her freshman year. During this
semester Crystal was struggling with one of her classes. She was upset that she was
struggling because she had been studying for the class and doing everything she could to
succeed. At that point in time, she thought there was zero hope of staying in school and
seriously considered dropping out. As she considered dropping out, she made a final
effort to talk to her teacher about what she needed to do to pass the class. Crystal
described the outcome of this instrumental turning point this way.

Well that particular class helped me realize that I could do okay in the class and
that the teacher did … care because a lot of people … say well teachers don’t care
at the university … ’cause it’s so big and it’s not high school anymore but … it …
gave me hope [about] being able to pursue teachers and talk to them. (26-1, 169-
172)

During this class Crystal was unsure about whether she had selected the right
college since her college did not seem like the right fit for her. As she continued to
struggle with her classes she decided to approach her teacher. After her teacher told her
that lots of students struggled and shared study strategies that had worked for past
students, she began to realize that that teacher cared about her and that she could
approach other teachers and talk to them about similar problems. Following this turning
point, Crystal began to email other teachers to ask for help or find out what she could do better.

In a different class, Amber described a similar turning point outcome. Amber, a 19 year old sophomore communication studies major, described an instrumental turning point outcome that occurred during the first semester of her sophomore year. During this semester Amber visited her academic advisor. Amber described the outcome of this instrumental turning point this way.

[My advisor was] not very good. I didn’t even know her and I just went in and she’s very negative about [every]thing. I kept asking her what grades will transfer and stuff and she was like well I don’t know and I was like you can’t call someone so I had to call everyone by myself. I did not like any of them. I … pretty much stayed away from them the whole two years I was there. … I would just plan the classes out myself. I would look at the booklet and [I] would figure out what I needed and I would just plan it out myself. They just weren’t very nice and … it just seemed like they didn’t care and they just wanted you to get out of their office. (28-2, 213-224)

Amber disliked her academic advisor because she thought this academic advisor always had negative reactions to what she was doing and did not care about her. She expected her academic advisor to be supportive and help her plan out her college career. When her academic advisor failed to meet her expectations, Amber began to avoid academic advisors in general. Instead of visiting an academic advisor, she would plan out her own classes and register for them without consulting anyone else. Amber believed that planning her own classes made her more independent because she had to
research what classes she needed to take and organize her degree plan so that she was able to graduate on time.

**Change in perceptions of other teachers.** The second category of turning point outcomes was a change in perceptions of other teacher. Participants who indicated “a change in perceptions (i.e., beliefs, judgments, realizations) of other teachers based on the turning point” were categorized as a change in perception of other teachers (Docan-Morgan & Manusov, 2009, p. 174). This category of turning point outcomes ($n = 7$) accounted for 8.1% of the turning point outcomes participants reported and 18.4% of the classroom turning point outcomes participants reported. One instance of this category was described by Elizabeth. Elizabeth, a 19 year old sophomore Spanish education major, spoke with me about a rhetorical turning point outcome that occurred during the first semester of her freshman year. During this semester Elizabeth was enrolled in a business class. She described her initial perceptions of her teacher this way.

It was … the normal first day of classes … telling what was gonna happen in the class and … going through the syllabus and … it was just … the way he handled [it] … just his demeanor and … the way he was talking it … pushed me away from him and [I] didn’t really want to deal with him. … He was just really … short when anyone would ask a question about … how to succeed in the class or anything like that he just gave really … short answers like just do what you’re supposed to. … It was a class with a bunch of freshmen and … new business majors so none of us had … known anything about college or business yet so yeah it … pushed everyone away. I was just overwhelmed. I was … the quiet person in this group of 200 people. (5-1: 123-133)
As a result of the first day of class, Elizabeth pushed away from her teacher and perceived that her relationship with this teacher was going to be distant. This turning point also shaped the way that Elizabeth perceived other teachers. She remarked:

It definitely … made me … nervous for all my other teachers and it was kind of like if this was … what college was gonna be like then … it’s definitely gonna be … a lot different for me and it just … threw me off at first because I didn’t think they’d be quite like that so it just … made me nervous for … everything else that I was gonna encounter … all the other teachers. (5-1: 137-141)

Since she had such a negative first impression with her business teacher Elizabeth worried that the rest of her college teachers were going to be like this business teacher. Although she was initially intimidated by this teacher, Elizabeth decided that if this teacher was not going to help her she was going to get help from others or do things on her own. She believed that this decision made her a stronger student long term.

Conversely, Nancy described a turning point outcome that changed her perceptions of other teachers for the better. Nancy, a 20 year old junior management major, described a personal turning point outcome that occurred during the second semester of her freshman year. During this semester Nancy visited her academic advisor. When asked where she was at in her college career, Nancy answered:

I was a freshman. … I was starting my second semester and … my GPA was struggling … so I was very worried because … I didn’t want to disappoint anyone especially my family. … Disappointment for my family and just the future was kinda scary. It was like [if] I can’t do this what am I going to do. … I took 18 credit hours. … If I would have had somebody who had already gone through
college like a family or a friend … they would have told me not to take 18 credit hours and some of the classes I don’t think they were that hard. I think it was just more … so much classes at once and being a freshman really adapting to everything meeting people and … it was hard. (13-1: 95-104)

Early that semester, Nancy went to an advising meeting with her academic advisor. They discussed her college experience as well as her personal life outside of college. She summed up this conversation this way.

I remember going up talking to my advisor. … I think we were just talking about goals and ways … I can improve … the way I was studying … and just knowing like talking to my college advisors on what would be the best classes to take not … taking so many at once. … It brought us together … ’cause we actually had an actual normal situation. It was not … just about school. (13-1: 112-122)

This advising experience changed Nancy’s perception of her advisor as well as her advisors in general. She described these changes this way.

I saw … why they’re there and I saw how they really do care about every individual even if it’s a lot of people. I mean they really do care about others. (13-1: 47-48)

When she saw that advisors cared about her, Nancy became more comfortable with the college experience and gained the confidence she needed to cope with the transition from high school to college.

In a different class, Michael described a similar turning point outcome. Michael, a 20 year old junior hospitality, restaurant, and tourism management major, described a rhetorical turning point outcome that occurred during the first semester of his freshman
year. During this semester Michael was enrolled in a choral class. When asked where he was at in his college career, Michael answered:

A lot happened freshman year. … I was … moving into a new semester and did pretty well in my first semester and looking to do well in my second semester and … wanted to make more time for fun and extracurricular activities so I joined chorus with my … roommate and … I liked it a lot. … I thought it would be a lot … more similar to … high school chorus but in no way was it similar at all. It was more rigorous but at the same time it was a lot more fun too. (14-2: 177-183)

In this class, the choral teacher made an effort to keep the mood lighthearted. When the class would get bored, the teacher would have the class stand up or do something that kept the class interested. As a result of this class, Michael stated that this teacher changed the way he saw other teachers. He summed up this change this way.

I guess it made different types of teachers stand out to me differently. I mean you can tell when you see a teacher or a professor walk across a lecture hall if … he or she is boring and stiff and dusty or if he’s lighthearted and happy and you can even tell by the way the students walk out of the classrooms: smiles, the way their posture is, if they’re heads up or if they’re heads down, [if] they’re talking with their friends when they leave or if they’re just texting and dazed out. … I thought extracurriculars would be less structured … and it’d be more like a club … but it wasn’t really it was more like a class and I appreciated that. (14-2: 216-228)

After taking this choral class, Michael began to value teachers who made an effort to engage students in the classroom. He believed that he could tell what the quality of the teacher was from the students’ expressions as they left the classroom.
Change or contemplated a change in decisions about school. The third category of turning point outcomes was a change or contemplated a change in decisions about school. Participants who indicated “a change or contemplated change in a college major or minor, in aspirations in a particular field of interest, or in attending post-undergraduate school” were categorized as a change or contemplated a change in decisions about school (Docan-Morgan & Manusov, 2009, p. 174). This category of turning point outcomes (n = 8) accounted for 9.3% of the turning point outcomes participants reported and 21.1% of the classroom turning point outcomes participants reported. One instance of this category was described by Kayla. Kayla, a 19 year old freshman pre-dental hygiene major, spoke with me about a personal turning point outcome that occurred during the first semester of her freshman year. During this semester Kayla met with her academic advisor. She described this meeting this way.

She was helping me decide classes for this semester and … I was telling her about my … major and she was just saying … how difficult it is and the classes I need to take and that sort of thing. … It just kinda makes me feel like I can’t do it but then it also makes me want to show everyone else that I can. … I didn’t really say much or respond much. It was just like okay and I guess to myself my response was just to try as hard as I can and not slack off during school until the last minute. … I’ve been trying to take more challenging classes rather than easy ones and I’m going to be taking classes in the summer so I can get through it and hopefully up my GPA. (11-1: 62-76)

This meeting with her academic advisor helped Kayla see that there were other options outside of the option she had already chosen. She began to look at other careers
outside of dental hygiene to see if there was something that would work better for her. She described this contemplated change in decisions about school this way.

It just opened my eyes and it … made me look at other options to see if there’s anything else I need to do. … expanding what I would want to do like it doesn’t have to be dental hygiene. It could be maybe something close to that similar to that … just seeing what else is out there that would accept the classes that I’ve been taking and that I don’t have to start all over. (11-1: 84-88)

Since Kayla thought that her advisor knew what she was talking about and that advisor’s job was to help Kayla consider different options, the advisor’s words carried weight for Kayla. Although she ultimately decided to keep her original major and career plans, she did carefully consider other options before making that decision.

Tara described two similar turning point outcomes. Tara, a 21 year old senior psychology and international business double major, described two rhetorical turning point outcomes. The first rhetorical turning point outcome occurred during the first semester of her freshman year. During this semester Tara was enrolled in a Spanish class. She described her Spanish class this way.

I had taken Spanish my freshman and sophomore year in high school but didn’t my junior or senior year because it was a small school and … I wasn’t able to take it at the time ’cause it wasn’t offered so I had two years off but I decided I wanted to do Spanish in college so I started off again and it was just … hard and the teacher was of course not from here. I believe he was from Ecuador or some Latin American country and he could barely understand English so it was really hard to communicate with that and I … got lost in that and didn’t do as well in my grades.
I was [a] straight A student and … I think I got a C in that class and everything else was straight As so it was … a big letdown and then it … made me reconsider everything like if I was bad at this … what was to come. (23-1: 56-66)

As she struggled with this class, Tara began to contemplate what she would do if things did not go as planned and she lost her scholarship. She summed up this contemplation this way.

It was really early on so … every other class was good so I don’t think it completely … deteriorated my desire to go on. It just … scared me [to think about] what could come in the future years and what if it didn’t all go as planned and … I was also … on scholarship which was how I was going to pay for it based on grades so if you don’t have the grades you don’t have the scholarship and if you don’t have the scholarship I probably wouldn’t have been able to go so I guess that’s one big factor that made a difference. (23-1: 200-206)

Although Tara struggled with this initial Spanish class and wondered whether she had selected the right major, she eventually found that this teacher was an anomaly and that other classes and teachers in that major were better. After she succeeded in other classes, she became more confident that she wanted to pursue international business and continue to build her Spanish proficiency.

Tara experienced another similar turning point outcome during the second semester of her sophomore year. Tara described the outcome of this rhetorical turning point this way.

Business was the one I was … veering towards. I guess I would say some of the teachers seemed really self-centered conceited types like into business like what
can I get out of this ’cause I feel like in business … a general association is what they’re known for and I think I … looked at them and what they were doing and I didn’t see myself as that and that was the main turning point. It just made me second guess everything that I had [been] planning. I had [been] planning to do business and I couldn’t see myself in that position then I don’t think I’m on the right path. (23-3: 284-293)

After Tara began to see that she could not see herself doing what her business teachers did, she decided that she needed to get out of that and find what she wanted to do and explore other majors. This exploration led her to add psychology as a major. She described this change in decisions about school this way.

It’s definitely increased … my awareness of other possibilities. … I added psychology so I know a lot more about that and I know people through that and working through the psychology labs on campus and learning things. Psychology wise you have an understanding … of people and other things that I think about even when I’m talking to other people there’s things I understand that they don’t or if they are psychology majors there’s … that little link of understanding that … I wouldn’t have otherwise. (23-3: 305-311)

After Tara considered a career path related to her psychology major, her likelihood of persisting increased because she had a goal and a reason for doing what she was doing. This change in decisions about school helped her get back on track and working toward graduation and a potential career that utilized her coursework in psychology.
Change in own confidence in course, subject, academics in general, abilities, or self. The fourth and final category of turning point outcomes was a change in one’s own confidence in course, subject, academics in general, abilities, or self. Participants who indicated “a change in their abilities or confidence in their course, the academic subject being studied, academics in general, or in oneself” were categorized as a change in own confidence in course, subject, academics in general, abilities, or self (Docan-Morgan & Manusov, 2009, p. 175). This category of turning point outcomes ($n = 20$) accounted for 23.3% of the turning point outcomes participants reported and 52.6% of the classroom turning point outcomes participants reported. One instance of this category was described by Alexandra. Alexandra, a 20 year old nutrition, health, and exercise science and dietetics double major, spoke with me about an instrumental point outcome that occurred during the second semester of her freshman year. During this semester Alexandra was enrolled in a chemistry class. She described her chemistry teacher this way.

I didn’t have a quote unquote bad professor till that chemistry semester and I was really disappointed because I have heard such great things about him and he was in high demand and so you want to get the best professors you can to learn the best and unfortunately I did not have that experience with him as some other students did. (16-2: 62-66)

Alexandra perceived her chemistry professor as a bad professor after she went to visit him during his office hours when she was confused about a chemistry concept. During his office hours, this chemistry teacher told her that he did not have time for her and that she should have known that chemistry concept from high school. He suggested
that she read the book more. Alexandra was frustrated because she had read the book already and still did not understand the concept.

After this interaction with her chemistry teacher, Alexandra experienced a change in her confidence in the course. She described this turning point outcome this way.

It definitely made me doubt my abilities and doubt how smart I was because he made me feel … really stupid and I never felt like that in college before. Sure I have had some strict hard professors but they never made you feel like you were stupid and that really bothered me because I already come from a disadvantaged background where you’re always questioned on your intelligence. You’re always questioned on your ability to do something and this wasn’t helping. This was another factor that I have to deal with on a daily basis when coming to class and it was really frustrating. (13-2: 258-264)

This interaction really bothered Alexandra and caused her to doubt herself because this teacher was well-respected in the department. When this well-respected teacher made her feel stupid, she felt like she was nothing and that she did not have the ability needed to succeed in this course.

Conversely, Crystal described a turning point outcome that boosted her confidence in her abilities. Crystal, a 23 year old senior communication studies major, described an instrumental turning point outcome that occurred during the second semester of her sophomore year. During this semester Crystal visited a career advisor. Crystal described the outcome of this instrumental turning point this way.

I once again was not feeling … really confident in my staying in school persisting and … I didn’t really know where I was going as far as what I’m going to do after
graduation. I had talked to [my career advisor] … and we discussed about different things that … were going on and I even mentioned that I … was struggling in my classes and I didn’t know why ’cause in high school I did really good and I got here and I dropped to like a C average instead of like an A or B average in high school and he recommended that I go see if I have a learning disability so I went through all the testing and everything and found out that I did have a learning disability and so after figuring that out I felt better about … the strategies I can use and the accommodations I would get as far as having a learning disability and that I could persist in school because … it would get better with the accommodations I have and I know what my weaknesses are and I can work on those. (26-2: 56-69)

Through her interaction with her career advisor Crystal was able to gain more confidence in her abilities because she was able to figure out why she was not doing well in school, identify strategies and accommodation that could help her improve her grades, and recognize that she had the ability to stay in school and persist to graduation. She summed up this change in her own confidence this way:

After I spoke with [him] … I realized that it was the disability that was the problem. … We talked about that and it just made me realize that I can be successful. (26-2: 192-196)

This interaction with her career advisor helped Crystal see that she could find new ways to succeed and that she was not the only one struggling in school.

In a different class, Tori described a similar turning point outcome. Tori, a 19 year old freshman Environmental Studies major, described an instrumental turning point
outcome that occurred during the first semester of her freshman year. During this semester Tori met with her academic advisor. She described the outcome of this instrumental turning point this way.

I had a conversation with my environmental studies professor … about just the future and how the environmental studies program will shape me for that and help me get ready and … the classes will help me and … building a resume and how we’ll have an interdisciplinary education which will be really marketable. … We just talked about how likely I will be to be able to get a job after I’m spending all this money ’cause I’m [an] out of state student … and it made me feel better that I’ll be able to pay off my college debt. (29-1: 33-41)

This instrumental turning point helped Tori gain confidence in herself because she believed that she would be marketable and able to get a job that would allow her to pay off the college debt she would incur from going out of state for college. She elaborated about this change in this way.

A lot of college students have not been able to get jobs after and it just made me feel confident that … being here in college is actually gonna be helpful to me and not just the investment that’s not really getting anywhere so it was really … important to be able to hear that and know that I picked the right place to go and that it’s gonna be worth it and that it’s gonna pay off. … I feel like I’m really going to know what I’m doing to graduate and not just have a degree where I didn’t really learn much about what I’m doing. (29-1: 50-57)

After meeting with this advisor, Tori gained more confidence as she was exposed to new things, received help with her resume, and learned that her teacher would be
willing to write her a recommendation letter. Tori believed that receiving help with her resume and recommendation letter would prepare her well for future scholarships and jobs she was applying for.

**Summary**

In this chapter, I discussed thirteen categories of turning point outcomes that occurred in the first-generation student-teacher relationship during first-generation students’ transition to college. In doing so, I have addressed the final three research questions which were posed to describe the ways that teacher messages and relational turning points influenced students’ likelihood to persist to graduation, relationships with teachers, and overall classroom experience. The results of this study are discussed with more depth in the next chapter. In addition to a discussion of the results, the following chapter includes the implications of the conclusions from this study, suggestions and implications for teachers and first-generation students, directions for future research, and a discussion of the limitations of this study.
Chapter Five: Discussion and Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to explore teacher-student interaction, teacher-student relationship formation and development, and the ways in which teacher-student interaction and relationships facilitated support and ultimately persistence to graduation for first-generation students in the transition to college. To pursue this purpose, I sought to better understand the nature of interaction in the teacher-student relationship during the transition to college by taking a communication-centered approach.

In this chapter I provide the results, conclusions, and their connection to existing theory and literature. In order to present the data in a clear manner, I have organized it topically. The specific topics and their corresponding research questions that are covered in this chapter include (a) types of teacher messages and relational turning points that occur during first-generation students’ transition to college (RQ1); (b) the perceived outcomes of these teacher messages and relational turning points on the likelihood to persist to graduation (RQ2), relationships with teachers (RQ3), and the overall classroom experience (RQ4); (c) the significance of this study; (d) the implications of the conclusions; (e) suggestions and implications for teachers and first-generation students derived from the results of this study; (f) the limitations of this study; and (g) recommended directions for future research.

Teacher Messages and Relational Turning Points in the Transition to College

Prior to this study, research focusing on relational turning points in the instructional context was restricted to teacher-undergraduate student relationships. Existing typologies of relational turning points were general and meant to encompass all undergraduate students without any student population specificity. For this study, I chose
to extend knowledge of relational turning points to a specific student population by
discovering the specific types of teacher messages and relational turning points that
emerge in the teacher-first-generation student relationship.

**RQ1**: What types of teacher messages and relational turning points occur during
first-generation students’ transition to college? I asked this question to determine the
types of teacher messages and relational turning points that first-generation students
perceived being communicated to them by their college teachers during the transition to
college. Four supra-categories emerged from my interviews with 30 first-generation
students. These supra-categories included: *instrumental turning points* which included
“reports of the teacher helping or assisting a student with class or college-related
issues/concerns” (Docan-Morgan & Manusov, 2009, p. 164) that did not involve
discussions about highly personal matters; *personal turning points* which included “the
sharing of private, personal information or approach/affinity seeking behaviors or
statements intended for one person” (Docan-Morgan & Manusov, 2009, p. 166); *rhetorical
turning points* which included “teacher-directed behavior[s] or statement[s] intended for the entire class, marked by students’ commentary on the instructors’
behaviors that were not directed toward a particular student” (Docan-Morgan &
Manusov, 2009, p. 167), and *ridicule/discipline turning points* which included events in
which [students] recalled being ridiculed or threatened by the teacher” (Docan-Morgan &
Manusov, 2009, p. 168). The first three supra-categories included a total of 9
subcategories. The instrumental turning points supra-category included four
subcategories: discussion of grade; discussion of course assignment, course content,
course more generally; discussion of college, major, independent study, and/or
internships; and discussion of course policy/rule. The personal turning points supra-category included three subcategories: discussion of coursework and personal information, discussion of common interest, and compliment. The rhetorical turning points supra-category included two subcategories: lecture topic or claim and teaching style.

As is evident in the existing research on relational turning points in the instructional context, all of the students in the current study were able to identify at least one relational turning point that occurred with college teachers with some students identifying up to five relational turning points. This suggests that many first-generation students experience such relational turning points in their transition to college.

Although the relational turning points fit into several of the supra-categories Docan-Morgan and Manusov (2009) derived in their study, not all of their categories were represented. Only the dyadic supra-categories, supra-categories that occurred in interaction with another, were represented. Unlike previous research, first-generation students did not discuss relational turning points that fit within the social network or circumstantial supra-categories. Thus, some aspects of the general typology for turning points developed by Surra and Huston (1987) and the general typology for undergraduate student turning points developed by Docan-Morgan and Manusov (2009) were represented in the current study.

As Baxter and Bullis (1986) stated, relational turning points can include both positive and negative experiences. As in past studies, the results from the current study indicate that most relational turning points were perceived by first-generation students to be positive. As might be expected from the nature of the relational turning point supra-
category, first-generation students perceived the ridicule/discipline turning points as solely negative. First-generation students had mixed perceptions of the instrumental and rhetorical turning points with some first-generation students perceiving these turning points as positive and some first-generation students perceiving these turning points as negative. First-generation students perceived the personal turning points as overwhelmingly positive. Looking across the data in the current study as well as past studies that have focused on undergraduate students’ relational turning points with their teachers, students perceived turning points as positive when they perceived that their teacher cared about them, acted on their interests and needs, and/or met or exceeded their expectations for teachers (e.g., discussion of course policy/rule, discussion of common interest, or compliment), whereas students perceived turning points as negative when they perceived that their teacher did not care about them, failed to act on their interests and needs, or failed to meet their expectations for teachers (e.g., discussion of grade, lecture topic or claim, or ridicule/discipline).

**Perceived Persistence, Relationship, and Classroom Outcomes**

*RQ2:* How, if at all, do first-generation students perceive that teacher messages and relational turning points influence their likelihood to persist to graduation? This question was asked to determine the perceived outcomes of these teacher messages and relational turning points on first-generation students’ likelihood to persist to graduation. Three categories emerged from my interviews with 30 first-generation students. These categories included: turning points that resulted in a *higher likelihood to persist to graduation*, turning points that resulted in *no change to likelihood to persist to graduation*, and turning points that resulted in *lower likelihood to persist to graduation*. 
As is evident in the existing research on relational turning points in the instructional context, relational turning points are connected with student’s likelihood to persist to graduation. The results of this study indicate that relational turning points that occurred early in the transition to college often during the first or second semester of the students’ freshman year, the moving in and moving through phases of transition, were particularly salient to students’ likelihood to persist to graduation. These findings suggest that first impressions often formed lasting impressions for first-generation students and that the ways that teachers acted toward students during the first or second semester of the students’ freshman year and students’ perceptions of these behaviors could have strong positive or negative consequences. Many participants remarked that these relational turning points influenced their decisions about whether to drop their class or change their teacher, whether to change their major, whether to enroll in college the following semester, and whether to continue persisting to graduation.

In the moving in phase, first-generation students left a known context behind, high school, and entered a new context, college. For these students, this process was voluntary. As first-generation students entered college, they often found that the teacher-student relationships they developed with their college teachers were dramatically different than the teacher-student relationships they developed with their high school teachers. The main difference between these two types of teacher-student relationships was first-generation students’ perception of the amount of support they received from their teachers. In high school, first-generation students remarked that they perceived that their teachers supported and cared about them and that they were comfortable in their role as a high school student; their daily classroom, extracurricular, and homework routine;
their relationships with their family, friends, teachers, and counselors; and their high school setting which was embedded in their home community. As first-generation students left the familiar behind, they often found that they lost the support network they had relied on back home. Several first-generation students commented that they were lost in the larger college environment and that they struggled to find the help and resources they needed.

When students found the help and resources they needed from teachers, these positive turning points often raised their likelihood to persist to graduation. These students were able to manage change successfully and move into the moving through phase. First-generation students who experienced positive turning points found that their teachers helped ease the process of adjustment and day-to-day management which in turn made the transition to college easier. First-generation students who received help with academic tasks also remarked that deciding on a major; finding study strategies that maximized inside and outside the classroom learning; sharpened test-taking skills; and improved time management skills helped them view the classroom as a comfortable place they could call home. When first-generation students succeeded academically, they were more likely to complete psychosocial tasks successfully such as developing peer, faculty, and staff relationships; negotiating differences; and finding a place in the larger campus community. Unfortunately, not all first-generation students experienced universally positive turning points.

Struggles to find help and resources in the moving in and moving through phases were magnified when first-generation students approached college teachers for help and resources and were disappointed when they were ignored or their needs were not met.
These early negative turning points had varying effects on students. Some first-generation students commented that these early struggles and negative turning points made them stronger students, because they wanted to work hard to prove to the people who doubted them or did not take the time to care about them wrong. These first-generation students remarked that these initial negative turning points raised their likelihood to persist to graduation, because these turning points forced them to refocus their short-term and long-term academic goals and find other teachers who could provide the help and support these first-generation students needed. After these first-generation students overcame these initial negative turning points, they perceived that they were more independent and self-sufficient as students and that they would be able to find help and resources in the future if they needed it.

Some first-generation students commented that nothing was going to stop them from persisting to graduation and that their likelihood to persist to graduation remained at 100% throughout their college career regardless of the valence of their turning points. Some first-generation students were intrinsically motivated to succeed and they were not going to let any teacher change this intrinsic motivation. Other first-generation students relied on a larger support network to help them succeed in college. For these first-generation students, friends, mentors, family members, and teachers provided the help and support they needed. With a large and diverse support network, these students did not allow one negative experience to influence their likelihood to persist to graduation. Other first-generation students saw persisting to graduation as a goal that was more than just a personal goal. These first-generation students saw completing college as an opportunity to create a legacy of college completion for other family members, other
young people in their community, or their future children. For these first-generation students, not persisting to graduation meant failing themselves, their families, and their communities. With that many people counting on them to succeed, these first-generation students did not give up easily.

Some first-generation students perceived that these negative relational turning points lowered their likelihood to persist to graduation. Negative turning points, particularly turning points that influenced the overall classroom experience were particularly damaging (e.g., change in willingness or how to approach other teachers or authority figures; change in perceptions of other teachers; change or contemplated a change in decisions about school; and change in own confidence in course, subject, academics in general, abilities, or self). When first-generation students perceived that these negative turning points had long-range impact beyond one semester, one class, and one teacher, they became discouraged that a single negative turning point meant that other semesters, other classes, and other teachers would include similar negative turning points. As might be expected, the higher the intensity of students’ negative perceptions about a particular turning point, the greater the likelihood that these first-generation students perceived that the negative turning point lowered their likelihood to persist to graduation. Regardless of the valence of the turning points, students’ perceived likelihood to persist was influenced by the results for RQ3 and RQ4.

**RQ3**: How, if at all, do first-generation students perceive that teacher messages and relational turning points influence their relationships with their teachers? This question was asked to determine the perceived outcomes of these teacher messages and relational turning points on first-generation students’ relationships with their college
teachers. Six categories emerged from my interviews with 30 first-generation students. These categories included: turning points that resulted in a change in respect for teacher which included “a change in respect for the teacher, or esteem for or a sense of the worth or excellence of a teacher” (Docan-Morgan & Manusov, 2009, p. 172), a change in trust or perceptions of credibility/competence of teacher which included “a change trusting a teacher, or change in perceived credibility or competence of the teacher” (Docan-Morgan & Manusov, 2009, p. 172), a change in perceptions of the relationship with teacher which included “a change in perceptions (i.e., beliefs, realizations) about the relationship between the student and the teacher with whom the turning point occurred” (Docan-Morgan & Manusov, 2009, p. 173), a change in own willingness to approach teacher or seek help which included “a change in approaching, seeking help from, or willingness to approach or seek help from the teacher” (Docan-Morgan & Manusov, 2009, p. 173), a change in student’s humanization of teacher which included “a change in perception of their teacher as being more human” or “more of a person” (Docan-Morgan & Manusov, 2009, p. 175), or a change in willingness to take or considered taking another course with instructor which included “having taken, currently taking, or considered taking another course with the same instructor” (Docan-Morgan & Manusov, 2009, p. 175).

As first-generation students entered college, they often came in with high expectations and a high level of respect for the credibility/competence of their teachers. Many first-generation students used their high school teachers as a model for what their college teachers should be. They respected their high school teachers because they were knowledgeable individuals who demonstrated a sincere interest in their success. Since some first-generation students came from smaller schools and smaller classes, coming to
a large research institution was a difficult transition particularly when these students enrolled in large lecture classes of several hundred students. In these classes, first-generation students believed that they were just a number to their teachers and that their teachers did not have the time to take an interest in them individually.

Although some first-generation students were initially intimidated by the size of introductory classes, some gained more respect for their teachers when they saw these teachers demonstrate passion for their subject and their teaching. First-generation students found teachers who could clearly translate their research in an accessible fashion to students to be particularly effective. In classes where teachers displayed enthusiasm for the subject and for teaching, first-generation students began to share that passion and develop a high level of motivation for completing assignments well and learning more about the subject. Several students remarked that they wanted to do well because they wanted to make the teachers they respected proud of them. When first-generation students respected their teachers, courses they had taken solely to fulfill university core requirements were transformed into courses that first-generation students wanted to apply to other courses as well as other applied contexts outside the classroom.

First-generation students also gained respect for teachers when teachers reached out to them and made an effort to discuss areas of common interest. These conversation topics included both course and personal content. As first-generation students began to spend time talking to their teachers before or after class, during class, or during office hours, they began to view their teachers as respected advisors they could confide in as they made decisions about their academic future. As teachers continued to help first-
generation students, first-generation students’ respect for these teachers continued to grow.

Conversely, when teachers failed to demonstrate that they were knowledgeable about the subject and teaching, first-generation students began to lose respect for their teachers. First-generation students found interactions with non-native teachers and graduate teaching assistants to be especially problematic. Although several first-generation students remarked that non-native teachers were as knowledgeable as native teachers, they struggled to respect non-native teachers because they believed that these teachers had trouble conveying the course content to students. Several first-generation students viewed graduate teaching assistants as apprentice teachers who were still learning about the course content alongside their students. Consequently, several first-generation students believed that they were wasting their money taking classes with graduate students when they had expected to take those classes with teachers who had earned terminal degrees. Some first-generation students became easily frustrated with graduate teaching assistants’ relative youth and inexperience and dismissed their graduate teaching assistants’ credibility/competence insisting that students were better off teaching themselves the material. The above findings indicate that teachers’ actions influenced first-generation students’ respect for teacher and trust or perceptions of credibility/competence of teacher.

First-generation students also found that their perceptions of teachers and the teacher-student relationship changed over time. Some first-generation students were surprised to find that their teachers were humans and people just like they were. These realizations that humanized teachers often came in informal office settings like shared
graduate teaching assistant offices and departmental resource centers or informal classroom settings where students had opportunities to talk with their teachers one-on-one.

Unlike the previous two outcomes, first-generation students often found that it was easier to relate to graduate teaching assistants who were typically closer in age. Several first-generation students mentioned that it was less scary and intimidating to approach a graduate teaching assistant during office hours or before or after class. After first-generation students worked up the courage to approach their teachers, they were often pleasantly surprised that their teachers had interests outside the classroom. As first-generation students conversed with teachers about areas of common interest or personal stories about their families and friends, they began to view their teachers as people who were just like them even though they had different roles in the classroom.

This out of classroom communication often paved the way for teachers and first-generation students to form a closer relationship. For some first-generation students, this close relationship transferred seamlessly from out of classroom communication to classroom communication. These students were more likely to participate in class and ask questions without fear of getting an answer wrong or asking a stupid question. These students were also more willing to approach their teachers or seek help from their teachers inside and outside the classroom and more willing to take another course with the same teacher or another course in the same department.

Out of classroom communication also had the opposite effect on students when first-generation students perceived that they could not relate to their teachers. When first-generation students perceived that their teachers were out of touch with their experiences,
they perceived that their relationships with their teachers became more distant. These students were more hesitant to participate in class and ask questions because they believed that their teachers were judging the quality and merit of their responses. These students were also less willing to approach their teachers or seek help from their teachers inside and outside the classroom and less willing to take another course with the same teacher or another course in the same department. Thus, the degree of distance or closeness in the teacher-student relationship influenced whether first-generation students chose to continue to pursue relationships with their teachers.

**RQ4:** How, if at all, do first-generation students perceive that teacher messages and relational turning points influence their overall classroom experience? This question was asked to determine the perceived outcomes of these teacher messages and relational turning points on first-generation students’ overall classroom experience. Four categories emerged from my interviews with 30 first-generation students. These categories included: turning points that resulted in a *change in willingness or how to approach other teachers or authority figures* which included students who “indicated being more or less willing to approach or that were said to have affected how they would approach teachers or authority figures” (Docan-Morgan & Manusov, 2009, p. 173), a *change in perceptions of other teachers* which “a change in perceptions (i.e., beliefs, judgments, realizations) of other teachers based on the turning point” (Docan-Morgan & Manusov, 2009, p. 174), a *change or contemplated a change in decisions about school* which included “a change or contemplated change in a college major or minor, in aspirations in a particular field of interest, or in attending post-undergraduate school” (Docan-Morgan & Manusov, 2009, p. 174), or a *change in own confidence in course, subject, academics in general, abilities, or*
self which included “a change in their abilities or confidence in their course, the academic subject being studied, academics in general, or in oneself” (Docan-Morgan & Manusov, 2009, p. 175).

When first-generation students received the help and support they needed from a teacher, this turning point often made them more likely to meet and approach other teachers for help. These students believed that if one teacher cared about them, other teachers would care about them as well. Turning points were especially powerful when first-generation students found a teacher who far exceeded their expectations of college teachers. Finding teachers who cared about them gave first-generation students hope that the university was small enough that they could find teachers who would be willing to help.

Conversely, first-generation students who failed to receive the help and support they needed from a teacher were unlikely to meet and approach other teachers for help. These students believed that if one teacher did not care about them, other teachers would not care about them as well. When first-generation students found a single teacher who did not care about them this discouraged them from even trying to approach another teacher because they were scared of being rebuffed and rejected again. This outcome became problematic when first-generation students were unable to make decisions and needed help and support from teachers. These students continued to struggle and often failed several times because they were unwilling to approach their teachers.

In addition to influencing first-generation students’ willingness to approach teachers, positive and negative turning points also affected first-generation students’ perceptions of other teachers. Some first-generation students made generalizations about
all teachers based on interactions with a single teacher. These global perceptions were
often made on the first day of class when the teacher discussed what to expect from the
class and went over the syllabus. When first-generation students became nervous that
they would be unable to adapt to a teacher’s teaching style, they often pushed away from
the teacher and perceived that their relationship with that teacher would be distant and
that all future relationships would be distant as well. After experiencing one negative
turning point, it often took many positive turning points to counteract the effects of one
negative turning point.

Conversely, some first-generation students experienced positive turning points
when they found teachers who could provide support that they could not receive from
their families. These positive turning points provided a buffer that counteracted potential
future negative turning points. First-generation students who experienced positive
turning points were able to look back on past turning points when they became
discouraged or encountered negative turning points.

Changes in willingness to approach other teachers and perceptions of other
teachers often shaped students’ decisions about school. Several first-generation students
expressed appreciation for teachers and advisors who had told them the truth about what
to expect from college rather than presenting a rosy picture that did not reflect what
college was actually like. First-generation students often confided in these teachers again
when they had to make other academic decisions because they knew that these teachers
would give them honest advice and feedback and not mislead them.

Conversely, when first-generation students struggled to find help and support on
how to improve in a class, they often contemplated changing classes, majors, or even
schools because they were discouraged that their teachers were not providing the help and support they needed. Many first-generation students were reluctant to risk earning a low grade and losing their scholarships or financial aid. This fear of losing their financial ability to attend college motivated these students to make a change in decisions about school at the first sign of trouble or at the first negative turning point.

While some first-generation students chose to make a change quickly, other first-generation students took the time to weigh the pros and cons of the potential change. These first-generations students contemplated a change in decisions about school but did not actually make the decision. First-generation students who elected to wait and find out more information before changing often found that the teacher they had taken a class with or the class they had struggled with did not represent all other teachers and all other classes in their major. Over time, these first-generation students were able to adjust to the difficulties they encountered during their transition to college through support from other teachers and other people at the university.

As might be expected with a major transition, first-generation students were often unsure of themselves when they first started college. Early on, many first-generation students came in with low confidence in the course, subject, academics in general, abilities, or self. When they found teachers who encouraged them, they were able to build the confidence needed to be successful. Many first-generation students were pleasantly surprised at how well they did in a class when they found the confidence needed to succeed. When first-generation students experienced turning points where their teachers discouraged them from pursuing an academic goal or perpetuated the power distance between teachers and students, first-generation students responded in one
of two ways. Some first-generation students viewed these negative turning points as obstacles that could be overcome with hard work, persistence, and support. Other first-generation students viewed these negative turning points as insurmountable obstacles that could not be overcome. Regardless of the valence of the turning points, first-generation students perceived that turning points influenced their overall classroom experience.

**Significance of the Study**

When considering the results of this study, there are four areas of significance. First, the results of this study have added to our existing knowledge of relational turning points by extending this body of literature to include first-generation students who are often at greater risk of dropping out of college. Second, the results of this study have added to our existing knowledge of first-generation students by extending this body of literature to include pivotal communication events that may influence learning and persistence outcomes. Third, the results of this research extend our knowledge of teacher support by demonstrating how first-generation students’ perceptions of relational turning points influence their perceptions of teachers which in turn can help or hinder the development of a supportive teacher-student relationship. Finally, the results of this research have added to our existing knowledge of transition theory by extending this body of literature to include detailed accounts of how students move in, move through, and move out of college and how teachers can play a pivotal role in helping or hindering students’ ability to develop the 4 S’s needed to cope with this transition.

**Contribution to relational turning point literature.** The first contribution of this study is that it adds to the existing literature concerning relational turning points. Few studies have focused on the relational turning points that occur in the teacher-student
relationship and fewer studies consider the ways in which these relational turning points influence undergraduate students (Docan-Morgan & Manusov, 2009). Of these studies, however, relational turning points have been recognized as having a positive and negative influence on students’ academic and developmental outcomes (Barge & Musambira, 1992; Bullis & Bach, 1989a, 1989b; Docan-Morgan, 2011; Docan-Morgan & Manusov, 2009; O’Neill & Todd-Mancillas, 1992). Unfortunately, all of these outcomes deal with general student outcomes and fail to consider whether these outcomes would differ based on students’ generational status. Accordingly, this study focused specifically on including relational turning points in first-generation students’ relationships with their teachers. Furthermore, this study considered how the perceived outcomes of these relational turning points influenced the larger outcome of college persistence. The results of this study indicated that certain relational turning points are more salient to first-generation students particularly when these relational turning points occur early on in the first-generation students’ college career. These early relational turning points provide a foundation for first-generation students’ perceptions of their likelihood to persist to graduation, their future relationships with teachers, and their overall classroom experience.

**Contribution to first-generation student literature.** The second contribution of this study is that it extends the existing literature on first-generation students. To date, our knowledge of first-generation students’ college experience has focused on three phases in first-generation student development: post-secondary preparation (e.g., Attinasi, 1989; Berkner & Chavez, 1997; Choy, 2001; Conklin & Dailey, 1981; Horn & Nunez, 2000; Stage & Hossler, 1989; Warburton et al., 2001), the transition to postsecondary
education (e.g., Bui, 2002; London, 1989; Terenzini et al., 1994; Terenzini et al., 1996), and progress toward degree attainment (e.g., Attinasi, 1989; Barry et al., 2009; Skinner & Richardson, 1988). Although some studies have addressed the college experiences that contribute to first-generation students’ cognitive and psychosocial development during college, this is the first study that has considered how pivotal college experiences or relational turning points that occur in the teacher-first-generation student relationship contribute toward development. As such, this study goes beyond the general typology of undergraduate students’ relational turning points contributed by Docan-Morgan and Manusov (2009) and contributes a specific typology of first-generation students’ relational turning points. This is an especially important contribution as previous research indicates that first-generation students come in with less academic preparation, struggle more with the transition to postsecondary education, and make less progress toward degree attainment than their continuing generation peers, so it is illogical to assume that all of the events undergraduate students perceive as relational turning points will match the events first-generation students perceive as relational turning points (Feeney, 2004; Mills et al., 2002).

It is also reasonable to suggest that this study contributes to our existing knowledge of the persistence, relational, and classroom outcomes that occur following a relational turning point. The results of this study solidify the notion that students perceive relational turning points in a variety of ways, but that the perceived outcomes are largely dictated by the amount of help and support students receive from their teachers (Rendon, 1992; Terenzini et al., 1996).
**Contribution to support literature.** The third contribution of this study is that it adds to the existing literature concerning teacher support. Researchers have linked teacher social support to positive outcomes such as increased student success (Coleman, 1987; Dreyfoos, 1990; Sanders & Joshua, 2000), motivation (Jones, 2008; Sanders & Herting, 2000), satisfaction (Jones, 2008), increased class preparation (Sanders & Joshua, 2000), and reduced maladaptive behaviors (Sanders & Joshua, 2000). Many of these studies have focused on how teachers can help students cope with and manage the transition to college through support. Unfortunately, these studies provide suggestions for how teachers should help students without considering how students perceive specific memorable interactions with their teachers. Accordingly, this study focused specifically on tracing specific interactions and students’ perceptions of these interactions spanning the entire college experience. Furthermore, this study considered how these interactions influenced students’ development. The results indicate that students’ development varied based on students’ perceptions of relational turning points rather than the positive or negative nature of the turning point itself.

**Contribution to transition theory literature.** This study contributes to our understanding of transition theory in several ways. First, this study highlights the types of messages teachers communicate to first-generation students as well as the ways in which teachers build an interpersonal relationship with first-generation students. Teacher messages and teacher-student relationships have the potential to increase the likelihood that first-generation students will persist to graduation. Second, this study expands researchers’ understanding of the social support that is rooted in institutions. Although previous applications of transition theory to the instructional context illustrated the
functions of stable and changing supports (Goodman et al., 2006; Schlossberg et al., 1995), they did not consider how students perceive the social resources available and how these perceptions help or hinder students during their transition. Third, this study extends researchers’ understanding of coping responses and coping strategies students use to cope with transition and the ways in which first-generation students develop the strengths and skills necessary to create a plan for action. Additionally, previous applications of transition theory were strengthened as the conclusions arrived at in the results of this study are congruent with the notion that students bring assets and liabilities to each transition and their success depends on the resources they have at their disposal and how adequate these resources are in helping them manage the demands and challenges that occur during transition (Marks & Robb Jones, 2004; Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988).

**Implications of Conclusions**

As the results of this study signify, students do view communication competence as a critical aspect of effective teaching-learning encounters (McCroskey & McCroskey, 2006). As much of the previous literature in instructional communication suggests, competent, effective, and supportive interactions can positively influence a wide range of outcomes including student-student (Johnson, 2009; Terry, 2006) and teacher-student relationships (Frisby & Martin, 2010; Kerssen-Griep et al., 2008), learning (Frymier, 2007), in class (Auster & MacRone, 1994; Crombie et al., 2003) and out of class communication (Dobransky & Frymier, 2004), and motivation (Kerssen-Griep, 2001; Kerssen-Griep et al., 2008; Pintrich, 2003; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Many of these interactions and the perceived outcomes of these interactions are student perception-based as students make sense of interactions, relationships, and the context within which
these interactions and relationships occur (Kerssen-Griep et al., 2008). When students perceive student-teacher interactions and relationships as supportive, this increases the likelihood that students will take control of their learning (Deci et al., 1996; Haukoos & Penick, 1987; Levine et al., 1996; Nolen, 1995), focus on improvement and mastery (Kaplan & Maehr, 2007; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Pintrich, 2003), interact more with others (Coupland, 2003; Jorgenson, 1992), and experience less anxiety (Patrick et al., 2007).

The results of this study, however, seem to indicate that first-generation students can achieve positive outcomes such as academic integration and social integration (Tinto, 1975, 1993) following both supportive and unsupportive interactions and relationships. In instances where first-generation recalled teachers who did not care about them or treated them as a number rather than an individual, some first-generation students used these negative instances as motivators to prove uncaring teachers wrong or demonstrate that they could overcome the obstacles put in front of them and persist to graduation. This seems to suggest that resilient first-generation students can find support from other positive interactions and relationships to counteract negative interactions and relationships. Although positive outcomes can occur following both supportive and unsupportive interactions and relationships, the results also indicate that unsupportive interactions and relationships can lead to negative outcomes. By interacting with students on a psychological level, teachers demonstrate solidarity with the student. Solidarity may allow trust and respect to develop between teachers and students (Frymier & Houser, 2000) and many types of hurtful messages may be avoided. Thus, teachers should interact with students in ways that contribute to an interpersonal relationship by
communicating “to students that they are valuable, significant individuals” (Ellis, 2000, p. 265) and demonstrating to students that they care through empathy, understanding, and responsiveness (McCroskey, 1992).

Unfortunately, not all teachers facilitate confirming and caring relationships with their students, so much so that many students prefer to distance themselves from all teachers after they encounter one negative experience with a teacher to avoid the risk of encountering another negative experience with another teacher. This conclusion brings forth the importance of teachers understanding that students do generalize relational turning points that occur with one teacher to all teachers in general. While first-generation students may only encounter isolated negative relational turning points, highly negative relational turning points can strongly influence students’ perceptions of classes, majors, teachers, and the university as a whole. While this is largely an issue of perception, the value in this study is that it highlights the fact that students’ perceptions of teacher behaviors do influence students’ perceived persistence, relationship, and classroom outcomes. As a result, even brief conversations with teachers can influence major outcomes such as a decision about a major or a decision to persist rather than dropping out of college. This alone supports the need for teachers to realize the power of their interactions with students and consider the impact of their communication before communicating in ways that do not demonstrate confirmation, caring, and support.

Because many teachers may not realize that their overall teaching style may be perceived as negative, they may be unknowingly communicating negative relational turning points to their students. The students’ perceived outcomes to teacher messages and relational turning points that are discussed in this study may serve as a tool for
teachers to begin acknowledging occasions when they have inadvertently ignored a student’s request for help and support. The responses that students described in this study highlight the contention that there is a change in the student-teacher relationship when students perceive that a relational turning point has occurred. In instances where students do not openly communicate their perceptions with their teacher, they may be unwilling to approach that teacher or unwilling to approach all teachers in future classes. If teachers notice that their relationships with students become more distant or withdrawn following an interaction, there is a possibility that the student perceived this interaction as negative. As a result, the teacher should be willing to discuss the interaction and the ways in which future positive interactions can change students’ perception of the relationship. Teachers whose communication is open are more likely to gain students’ respect and trust. As a result, open communication may be beneficial to changing students’ perceptions of the teacher.

**Practical Application**

As I suggested throughout this chapter, this study is valuable because it provides various pivotal relational turning points for both teachers and first-generation students. Because communication is a process, neither the teacher nor the student is entirely responsible for the outcomes of these relational turning points. Rather, both teachers and students should use the results of this study to work to improve the effectiveness of their communication and teacher-student relationships. In the following sections, I share suggestions for both teachers and first-generation students.

**Suggestions for teachers.** The conclusions derived from first-generation students’ comments provide six practical suggestions for teachers concerning how they
should communicate and develop relationships with their first-generation students. These simple guidelines present reasonable minor adjustments we can make to our communication that can promote positive persistence, relationship, and classroom outcomes for our first-generation students. The key, as represented in the results of this study, is demonstrating that we care about our first-generation students and want to support them as they work to cope with the transition to college and persist to graduation.

First, teachers should recognize that each first-generation student is unique and different. There is no single method that will work for all first-generation students even if they come from similar educational, ethnic, geographic, or socioeconomic backgrounds. To help each first-generation student succeed, we need to use diverse teaching methods, resources, assignments, and assessments so that our first-generation students can demonstrate that they have met our learning objectives for our courses. This may mean integrating supplementary resources that first-generation students can access inside and outside of class, designing several equivalent assignments and assessments that first-generation students can select to meet an assignment or assessment requirement, and learning and implementing new teaching methods that engage our first-generation students.

Second, teachers should help first-generation students make connections between what they learn in the classroom and what they experience in the world outside the classroom. This may mean designing realistic case studies to supplement textbook and class content; sharing personal and professional experiences that are relevant to first-generation students; and creating assignments that encourage first-generation students to
apply what they have learned to their personal experiences, professional experiences, or the community they call home.

Third, teachers should be less quick to judge and stereotype first-generation students and more willing to help first-generation students see their own potential and possibilities. This may mean working to create a welcoming classroom environment where students are comfortable participating, expressing their opinions, and asking questions; designing assignments that allow students to develop writing and presentational skills over the course of a semester; encouraging students to pursue academic, career, and extracurricular interests; and guiding and advising first-generation students as they make academic decisions and plan their future.

Fourth, teachers should encourage and connect with our first-generation students regardless of the size or type of institution we work in. Although it can be difficult to reach out to every student in a large lecture class, we should still make an effort to find time for our students. By being personable, self-disclosing, and showing first-generation students that we care about them, are interested in them, and want to connect with them, we demonstrate that it is safe for them to approach us when they need help or advice. By telling students that they can succeed no matter where they came from and recognizing small and large successes and accomplishments, we help first-generation students develop the confidence they need to persist to graduation.

Fifth, teachers should be a resource for our first-generation students. Since we have already earned our degrees and have experienced many of the educational challenges our first-generation students face, we need to be available to help them take the steps needed to earn their degree. This may mean answering questions during class
and outside of class via email or face to face during office hours, helping first-generation students connect with campus resources, and providing honest and constructive feedback that helps our students improve their study skills.

Sixth, as teachers, we should be committed to continual improvement. This may mean conducting and reviewing current research in our field, attending professional development workshops and conferences with teaching tracks, and developing a course portfolio to assess how we can make improvements from semester to semester. Creating an environment where learning can happen, of course, is not solely the responsibility of teachers. Thus, suggestions for students are provided in the following section.

**Suggestions for first-generation students.** The conclusions derived from first-generation students’ comments provide six practical suggestions for first-generation students concerning how they should communicate and develop relationships with their teachers. These simple guidelines present reasonable minor adjustments first-generation students can make to their communication that can promote positive persistence, relationship, and classroom outcomes. The key for students, as represented in the results of this study, is taking responsibility for their education and seeking out help from teachers and advisors when they need it.

First, first-generation students should recognize that college may be different than high school and that they may need to adopt new study habits and strategies. This may mean taking personal responsibility for academic successes and failures; working to address any deficiencies that may emerge; and acknowledging mistakes when they happen.
Second, first-generation students should work hard, remain focused, and push themselves to succeed. This may mean putting in the time necessary to understand course material, seeking out resources that may help them, setting tangible short-term and long-term academic goals, and keeping track of and meeting deadlines.

Third, first-generation students should be proactive in their education, willing to approach teachers and advisors when they need help or support, and committed to building relationships with their teachers and advisors. If possible, first-generation students should make an effort to approach and build relationships with their teachers early on in the semester rather than waiting until they are struggling. This may mean approaching teachers before or after class or during office hours for help with assignments, classes, or study skills; visiting advisors to learn about class selection and major or minor requirements; or expressing concerns to teachers or advisors when problems arise.

Fourth, first-generation students should remember why they are pursuing their degree. Some first-generation students may be pursuing the degree for themselves because they want a better and more secure future than their parents had. Some first-generation students may be pursuing the degree for their family because they want to show their family that they can succeed and make them proud. Some first-generation students may be pursuing the degree for their community so that they can return to the community and help other people see that they can succeed and earn their degrees too. Regardless of the reason they are pursuing their degree first-generation students should use their reason for pursuing their degree as motivation to finish.
Fifth, first-generation students should not allow one negative experience to shape their entire college experience. They need to view the negative experience as something to learn from and move forward and keep their eyes on the goal of graduation. This may mean figuring out a way around a negative experience rather than being discouraged, finding support and resources that can help them move past that negative experience, and keeping the magnitude of the negative experience in perspective.

Sixth, first-generation students should not allow their first-generation status to define who they are. Although having parents who did not graduate from college can make college more difficult, first-generation students should value the support they receive from their family and seek out the support they need to overcome the obstacles and challenges that may arise as they cope with the transition to college.

As the advice shared in this section of the dissertation indicates, the present study contributed greatly to our knowledge of teacher messages and relational turning points in first-generation students’ transition to college. Despite this contribution, there were several limitations to this study as well. These limitations are discussed in the following section.

Limitations

While this study contributes greatly to our understanding of the teacher-first-generation student relationship, it is not without its limitations. There are two main limitations that should be addressed. The first limitation is the sample that was used in this study. While a convenience sample is good for targeting a specific audience, it has its limitations. Due to the geographic location of this study there was a high number of students enrolled in introductory departmental classes, a majority of the participants were
primarily Caucasian female freshmen and sophomores aged 19-23. While this study was not created with specific attention to differences across cultures or academic classifications, it would benefit from a more diverse sample that includes more juniors and seniors; more male students; more Hispanic, African American, and Asian students; and more non-traditional students. There are likely many differences in regard to the type of relational turning points that young female Caucasian first-generation students perceive as pivotal as opposed to those perceived as pivotal by male, minority, or non-traditional first-generation students.

The second limitation of this study is the emphasis placed on first-generation students’ retrospective perceptions of relational turning points with their teachers. While a perception-based study keeps the focus on how students perceived the message rather than the intent of this message, this focus can also be a limitation. By focusing on first-generation students’ perceptions of the outcomes of relational turning points, I was relying on first-generation students’ recollections of turning points that may have occurred up to four years before. It is possible that, in instances students perceived as ridicule/discipline turning points, students may have internalized specific details of the message based on their initial reactions to what they were feeling. This study would benefit from a semester long diary design that required first-generation students to record descriptions of the physical location, time of day, and other details where the event occurred; the event itself; what their teachers and they did and said; and how this turning point changed their relationship with their teacher, their overall classroom experience, and their likelihood of persisting to graduation. While I do not doubt that these relational turning points occurred in their relationships with their teachers, a more detailed
understanding of what teachers and students actually communicated and how students perceived that communication would add a valuable dimension to this research.

While this study was not without limitations, these limitations do not detract from or negate the value of this study. Rather, these limitations provide a motivation and impetus for further research conducted in the areas of teacher messages, relational turning points in the instructional context, and the teacher-first-generation student relationship as a whole.

**Directions for Future Research**

The results and implications of this study provide a strong foundation for future research concerning teacher messages and relational turning points in instructional communication. Several possible directions for future research include investigations in the areas of: (a) first-generation student dropouts, (b) peer relationships, (c) staff relationships, (d) family relationships, and other underrepresented student populations such as (e) non-traditional students.

First-generation students who choose to drop out rather than persist and stay in school represent one potential area for continued examination of teacher messages and relational turning points in the teacher-first-generation student relationship. Although the present study focused on first-generation students who were currently enrolled in college, the negative relational turning points and relational turning point outcomes of the study indicate that this may be a productive area for further consideration. In the study, first-generation students identified 10 instances where they perceived that relational turning points lowered their likelihood to persist to graduation. However, first-generation students also identified other instances where they perceived the relational turning point
as negative but chose to overcome these negative relational turning points rather than allowing these negative relational turning points to influence their likelihood to persist to graduation. These results seem to indicate that many first-generation students are resilient enough to overcome negative relational turning points. However, these positive perceived outcomes may be the result of a convenience sample that consists of students who have chosen to persist rather than drop out of college. Interviewing first-generation students who have chosen to drop out of college may uncover additional negative relational turning points that influenced their decision to drop out.

An additional area to consider for future research is peer support from continuing generation students and first-generation students. As existing literature and the results of this study state, teachers are not the only source of support, messages, and relational turning points for first-generation students. Many students develop supportive peer relationships (Bennett & Okinawa, 1990; Daugherty & Lane, 1999; Montgomery & McDowell, 2009; Rodriguez et al., 2003; Thompson, 2008; Thompson & Mazer, 2009) in addition to or in lieu of supportive teacher relationships. Broadening the focus of this study to include peers would help us understand other messages and relational turning points that occur in the college environment. As the exemplars provided in this study imply, many students seek out other sources of support when they perceive that their teachers do not care about them or fail to get the support they need from their teachers. Studying other supportive relationships outside the teacher relationship may better explain how students persist despite negative relational turning points in the teacher-student relationship.
Another possibility for future research is an investigation of messages and relational turning points that occur in university staff-first-generation student relationships. As existing literature states, social support from many different sources can buffer stress (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Lamothe et al., 1995; Solberg & Villarreal, 1997; Vaux, 1988), promote personal adjustment (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Sarason et al., 1990), and mediate well-being (Lakey & Cassady, 1990; Lakey et al., 1992). Since student affairs professionals are often charged with promoting student adjustment, transition, and well-being, studying these relationships may enrich our understanding of additional messages that promote first-generation students’ likelihood to persist to graduation and their overall college experience.

Furthermore, focusing on first-generation students’ perceptions of messages and relational turning points that occur in the family relationship would be another interesting area for future research. The results of this study imply that students are frustrated that their parents cannot provide all of the knowledge and support they need to be successful in college. Often, these students seek out teachers and advisors who can supplement the knowledge and support that they are receiving from their family. An investigation of first-generation students’ perceptions of family messages and relational turning points would be a valuable addition to this ongoing line of research.

A final area for research development as it pertains to teacher messages and relational turning points in the teacher-student relationship would be studying teacher messages and relational turning points in other student populations that may be less likely to persist to graduation. Specifically, the communication that occurs between teachers and non-traditional students may provide a fruitful area for future research. Since non-
traditional students may view the transition to college as off time rather than on time and face additional challenges such as working full time or raising a family while attending college, they may face additional challenges, adopt different coping strategies and techniques, and receive different messages than traditional students. If messages and relational turning points have a different perceived impact on non-traditional students, there may be implications for how teachers should approach developing relationships with non-traditional students.

Summary

The central purpose of the present study was to explore teacher-student interaction, teacher-student relationship formation and development, and the ways in which teacher-student interaction and relationships facilitated support and ultimately persistence to graduation for first-generation students in the transition to college. To do so, I focused specifically on the teacher messages that first-generation students perceived to be relational turning points in their relationships with their college teachers as well as first-generation students’ perceptions of these teacher messages and relational turning points using transition theory as a theoretical lens.

In this investigation, it became apparent that first-generation students found four categories of relational turning points to be particularly salient during their transition to college. When first-generation students perceived these relational turning points as positive, they perceived that their teachers supported them and cared about them as individuals. These perceptions led to positive relational turning point outcomes that increased first-generation students’ likelihood to persist, improved the quality of first-generation students’ relationships with their teachers, and enhanced the overall classroom
experience. When first-generation students perceived these relational turning points as negative, some first-generation students perceived that their teachers failed to support them and did not care about them as individuals. These perceptions led to negative relational turning point outcomes that decreased first-generation students’ likelihood to persist, detracted from the quality of first-generation students’ relationships with their teachers, and marred the overall classroom experience. Other first-generation students overcame relational turning points they perceived as negative and found other individuals who supported and cared about them.

Based on the results and implications of this study, it is my goal for teachers to become better equipped to recognize when their interactions can be perceived negatively. This recognition can create an opening for further interactions between the teacher and student that can change students’ negative perceptions of their relationships with their teachers. Furthermore, it is my hope that teachers begin to communicate in ways that demonstrate that they care about building a supportive teacher-student relationship. By recognizing that each student is an individual, negative turning points may be avoided or mitigated.

A secondary goal of this study is to encourage first-generation students to seek out the support, help, and information they need from teachers. First-generation students entering the new context of college from the known context of high school may find the transition to college to be difficult and overwhelming. Some first-generation students may be reluctant to approach teachers after experiencing negative turning point events with past teachers. It is my hope that first-generation students will become more willing to initiate relationships with their teachers so that they can find the support, help, and
information they need to succeed in college and persist to graduation. In doing so, both teachers and students may experience supportive teacher-student relationships that further positive outcomes for both teachers and students.
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Appendix A: Informed Consent Form

Department of Communication Studies

University of Nebraska – Lincoln

Informed Consent: Formative relational turning points in the transition to college:

Understanding how communication events shape first-generation students’ relationships with their college teachers

Researchers tell us that first-generation students experience relational turning points with their college teachers, events or occurrences that are associated with change in the teacher-student relationship. I am currently doing a research study to better understand the relational turning points first-generation students experience in relationships with college teachers.

The following information is provided in order to help you make an informed decision about whether or not to participate. To be included in the study, you must meet the following criteria:

(1) You must be at least 19 years old, and

(2) You must be a first-generation college student (neither parent completed college).

If you do not meet the above criteria, you do not qualify for this particular study and should not proceed with the study.

If you meet the above criteria, you may take part in this interview that consists of two parts. In the first part I will ask you some background demographic questions about you,
such as your age and your classification. In the second part I will ask you questions about the relational turning points you have experienced in your relationships with your teachers. (Note: Please do not include people’s full names during the interview process.)

The entire process will take approximately 60 minutes.

The information I obtain will be kept strictly confidential. Your responses will not be associated with you individually in any way and your name will not be tied to any of your answers. The only place your name will appear is on this consent form and all consent forms will be stored in a separate location from your responses in a secured office at UNL. In order for me to accurately retain all of the responses you provide in the interview, the interview will be recorded using a digital audio recording device, and the digital recordings will be stored on a password protected computer apart from the informed consent forms. I will transcribe these recordings and the transcriptions will be stored on a password protected computer apart from the informed consent forms. Your name and identity will not be linked in any way to any of the information you provide in the interview. The only individuals with access to your interview responses will be the researchers in this study. Results will be presented at an academic conference and possibly published in an academic journal; however, no identifying information will be included in the presentation of these results.

You may be participating in this research study as a way to earn extra course credit. This option is dependent on a prior agreement that you must have arranged with your instructor. If your instructor has chosen to offer this as an extra credit opportunity and you are interested in earning extra credit, you will be asked to indicate your instructor’s name. Your instructor will be informed that you participated in a study in the
Communication Studies department, but not which study you participated in. You will not be penalized in any way in your class for not participating in this study. Your course instructor will provide an alternative option for extra credit if you do not wish to participate in this study.

You should also know that at any time throughout the interview you are free to take a break, ask me to turn off the digital recorder, or refuse to answer any questions. You are free to decide not to participate in this study or to withdraw at any time without adversely affecting your relationship with the investigators or the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Your decision to withdraw from the study will not result in any loss of extra credit you would otherwise be entitled to.

There are no direct benefits to you as a result of participating in this study except potentially gaining a greater understanding of your relationships with your teachers. However, talking about negative relational turning points may make you feel uncomfortable. In the event that you experience discomfort from participating in this study, please contact the UNL Psychological Consultation Center at (402) 472-2351 or other comparable services. Treatment is available on a sliding fee scale. It is your responsibility to pay for treatment if you choose to seek it out. The researcher will not be held liable for treatment expenses incurred.

You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate or after the study is complete. If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to contact me at (402) 472-3348. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant that have not been answered by
the researcher or would like to report any concerns about the study, you may contact the
University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board at (402) 472-6965.

If you meet the criteria and choose to continue participation, please read the entire
informed consent and verify that you fulfill the participant criteria and agree to
participate by signing and dating this form. Please return this informed consent form to
me before starting your interview. If you do not fulfill the criteria or choose to not
participate, please return the blank informed consent form to me.

You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this study. Your
signature certifies that you have decided to participate, having read and understood the
information presented. You are free to decide not to participate in this study or to
withdraw at any time without adversely affecting your relationship with me or the
University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Your decision to withdraw from the study will not result
in any loss of extra credit you would otherwise be entitled to.

Your signature also indicates that you are in fact at least 19 years old, and that you are a
first-generation college student. It also indicates that you understand and agree to be
digitally recorded throughout the interview process, and know that you are free to ask me
to turn off the tape recorder at any time during the interview.

Signed: _______________________________ Date: ________________

Should you have any questions regarding your participation in this study, please feel free
to contact any or all of the following people:

Sincerely,

Tiffany Wang

Doctoral Candidate, Department of Communication Studies
Appendix B: Data Collection

Hello. My name is Tiffany Wang and I am a Ph.D. Candidate from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln working on a study under the supervision of Dr. William J. Seiler. We are conducting interviews to learn more about the relational turning points first-generation students experience in teacher-student relationships.

This whole interview will take about 60 minutes and will have basically three parts to it. First, I’ll ask you some background questions. Second, I'm going to ask you to draw a graph of all of the turning points in the development of your relationships with your teachers, describing them in your own words as we proceed. Third, once we do this part, we'll go back through each turning point and I'll ask you some more structured questions.

Before we begin, there are a few things I would like to go over:

First, are you at least 19 years old?

Second, are you a first-generation college student (neither of your parents completed college)?

Third, upon completing this interview, will you be receiving extra credit from any of your instructors? [If the respondent answers “yes” to this question, I will have participants write their names and their instructors’ names on a sheet of paper that I will turn into the department IRB coordinator following the interview.]

Fourth, in order for me to accurately retain all of the responses you provide in the interview, I will be digitally recording this interview. Your name and identity won’t be linked in any way to any of the information you provide in your interviews; the only people who will be allowed access to the digital recording will be me and the professor overseeing this research project. Even though this interview will be
transcribed, your name will not be indicated throughout the recording of this interview. I would like you to know that you are free to ask me to turn off the digital recorder at any time during the interview. You may also refuse to answer any questions without repercussions.

Finally, there are no direct benefits to you as a result of participating in this study except potentially gaining a greater understanding of your relationship with your teacher. Any responses, oral or written will be regarded with the utmost confidentiality.

I also want to take you through the informed consent form and procedures for the study so you clearly understand your rights today. [Give the participant time to read and sign the form.]

Do you have any questions before we begin?
[TURN ON TAPE RECORDER NOW]

Part I: Demographic Questions

1. What is your age?
2. What is your sex?
3. What is your ethnicity?
4. What is your current classification?
5. What is your major?
6. What is the highest level of education that your mother attained?
7. What is the highest level of education that your father attained?

Part II: Filling out the RIT Graph

Retrospective Interview Technique (Huston et al., 1981)

Explanation of Purpose: The Identification of Turning Points

Ok, now that we're through with the "housekeeping" stuff, we can begin the first part of the interview. What we're interested in is your perceptions of all of the important turning points in the history of your relationships with your college teachers. By "turning point," we mean all of the pivotal communication events that were significant in bringing your relationship with your teachers to where they are today. Most first-generation students experience both positive and negative turning points, so we're interested not only in those events which positively transformed your relationships with your teachers in some way, but also in the darker moments, those points of crisis or difficulty that led you to define your relationships with your teachers in a less positive way. Basically, we want your
views on every major turning point that was involved in coming to see your relationships with your teachers in new ways, both positive and negative.

Since all first-generation students are different and the transition to college is different for each student, there isn’t a right or wrong answer here. What we are interested in are the turning points in the history of your relationships with your teachers. Do you have any questions about what we mean by a "turning point" [hereafter symbolized as TP]?

**Calibrating the RIT Graph**

We’re going to graph your relational turning points with your teacher using this sheet [RIT Graph].

8. First, we need to construct the X- and Y-axes of this graph before filling it in.

9. Along the bottom here, we'll mark your interactions with your teachers off in months, beginning with the month and year when you had your first interaction with a teacher. When was that? [Mark on graph and then mark off successive months, taking as many graph sheets as necessary, ending with TODAY.]

10. Now for the Y-axis. For each TP that you identify, I'll be asking you to indicate how likely you were to persist (continue college and complete your degree) at each turning point, ranging anywhere from 0% “not likely to persist” to 100% "completely likely to persist". Base your persistence judgments on both your own level of “completely likely to persist” and to what you believed other first-generation students’ levels of “completely likely to persist” are.

11. To get some markers in here, we'll place the first point at 0% when you had your first interaction with your teacher. Ok, now can you tell me in your own words what “completely likely to persist” means to you? Great! Now what would you say your
current level of "persistence" is in terms of this 0% - 100% scale? [Place marker dot appropriately along X-axis at TODAY point.]

**Plotting TPs**

12. Now we're ready to draw in all of the TPs in the history of your interactions with your teachers. Think back to the first time when your interactions with your teachers experienced a change of any kind from the first interaction you had with a teacher. This TP need not involve a change in the level of "persistence"; all kinds of changes can take place that transform relationships with teachers in ways that may not affect the level of "persistence" at all. OK, draw a point at the appropriate month and level of "persistence".

- Describe for me, in your own words, what this TP was all about.
- What happened?
- What did your teacher say?
- What did your teacher do?
- What was going on in your relationship with your teacher prior to this event that made this a TP?
- In what ways was this a turning point for your relationship with your teacher?
- [Ask additional probes, as necessary, to get informant to provide a detailed description.]
- [Record number and keyword for the TP to serve as reminder to you and informant about this TP.]

13. Now, think of the next TP when you experienced a change or transformation in your relationships with your teachers, i.e., when you came to see your relationships with
your teachers in a new way, whether positively or negatively. You might recall a change or transformation that is associated with the same level of “persistence” as the prior TP; as I indicated a moment ago, not all of the types of changes experienced in teacher-student relationships translate into a change in levels of "persistence". OK, now plot this second TP according to month and level of “persistence”.

- Describe for me, in your own words, what this TP was all about.
- What happened?
- What did your teacher say?
- What did your teacher do?
- What was going on in your relationship with your teacher prior to this event that made this a TP?
- In what ways was this a turning point for your relationship with your teacher?
- [Ask additional probes, as necessary, to get informant to provide a detailed description.]
- [Record number and keyword for the TP to serve as reminder to you and informant about this TP.]
- Now I want you to draw the line that connects these two TPs in a way that best captures how you experienced the change.

14. [Repeat this plotting process as many times as necessary. If all of the TPs are positive, remind informant that we are interested in the crisis points or "darker side" of their relationship with their teachers, not just the positive. When the informant appears to have identified all TPs, ask him/her to look over the entire graph and to make any changes or additions that are necessary.]
Now that you have completed your graph, let’s talk about all of these relational turning points in greater detail.

**Critical Incident Technique (Flanagan, 1954)**

15. For each turning point:

- Describe where you were at in your college career.
- Describe the physical location, time of day, and other details where the event occurred in as much detail as possible.
- Describe the event itself in as much detail as possible.
- Specifically, what happened?
- What did your teacher say?
- What did you say?
- What did your teacher do?
- What did you do?
- How did this turning point change your relationship with your teachers?
- Explain in detail why you think this event brought about this change.
- How, if at all, has this turning point affected you as a student?
- How, if at all, has this turning point affected your likelihood of persisting to graduation?

**Concluding Questions**

16. What advice would you give to teachers regarding what they can do and say to their students?

17. What advice would you give to other first-generation students regarding what they can do and say to their teachers?
18. What other information do you think would be helpful to me so that I can better understand your relationship with your college teachers?

19. May I contact you with future studies that may involve first-generation college students?

Thank you for sharing your experiences with me. Your time and willingness to talk is appreciated. If you have any questions please feel free to contact me at any time.