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***Minority Students in University Remediation:
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Abstract

The existence of remedial curriculum at four-year universities remains a well-established, albeit controversial, component of contemporary higher education. Incoming students are required to enroll in postsecondary remedial coursework as a direct result of standardized test scores. It is well established in the literature, however, that minority students both underperform on standardized tests and are also overrepresented in remedial courses. This qualitative study explored the intersections of minority students' high school academic experiences with their first-semester university academic experiences. The sample included eight minority students who were each enrolled in three remedial and at least one non-remedial course at a public, research university. Students shared their experiences through sixty-minute semi-structured interviews. The data converged on four major themes: high school ease, navigating new faculty expectations, learning how to study, and soliciting parental support. Recommendations to assist students through this transitory period are proffered for postsecondary educators and practitioners.

Minority Students in University
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Institutions of higher learning nationwide are confronting a steady number of students who require developmental, intermediate, or remedial coursework at the college or university level (Brothen & Wambach, 2012; Saxon & Morante, 2014). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 99.3% of public two-year and 74.8% of public four-year degree-granting postsecondary institutions offered remedial services to students during the 2014-15 academic year (2015). The percentage of students enrolled in remedial coursework, according to the most recent data from the NCES, was 40.3% of first-year students at public two-year institutions, and 21.9% of first-year students at public four-year institutions during 2011-12 (2014). In recent years,

critics of remediation have advocated a reduction or complete elimination of developmental curriculum at four-year institutions (Brothen & Wambach, 2012; Parker, 2007). The argument is twofold: remediation is the responsibility of community colleges, and four-year universities should employ more stringent admission criteria. Yet what is often overlooked in this policy debate is how such changes would impact the lives of students. Those in favor of offering remedial curriculum draw attention to the overrepresentation of low-income students, students of color and English language learners placed in remediation (Attewell, Lavin, Domina & Levey, 2006). Attewell et al. (2006) argues "if higher education systems adopted a policy of not admitting students needing remedial coursework into four-year institutions, then the impact on minority students would be especially heavy" (p. 891). Thus remediation at public four-year universities fulfills an important role in

supporting disadvantaged students towards obtaining their bachelor's degrees (Attewell et al., 2006; Davis & Palmer, 2010; Parker, 2007).

This article presents a snapshot of the lives of minority students who were placed in remedial curriculum at a public, flagship research university in the Southeast. Although researchers have investigated minority students' placement and perceptions of remedial curriculum at both two-year (Di Tommaso, 2010) and four-year (Bachman, 2013) institutions, researchers have not yet examined how these same students contend with standard, non-remedial curriculum during their first-semester at a four-year university. It is critical that researchers in higher education address this gap in the literature as these students may require more curricular support for their non-remedial courses. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore minority students' perceived high school and first-semester university academic expectations. What, if any, challenges did these students encounter, and what academic strategies did they employ during the transition from high school to university?

Literature Review

According to Conley (2008), college readiness can be understood as the "level of preparation a student needs in order to enroll and succeed—without remediation—in a credit-bearing general education course at a postsecondary institution that offers a baccalaureate degree or transfer to a baccalaureate program" (p. 24). Thus, by definition, students enrolled in remedial courses at postsecondary institutions are considered lacking apposite college preparation. The most recent ACT Report on College and

Career Readiness (2015) indicates that while 50% of white students met three or more readiness benchmarks, only 25% of Hispanic students and 12% of African American students met those same benchmarks.

Measures of college readiness and postsecondary remediation are intrinsically tied. Currently no national standards exist, establishing college readiness levels or remediation guidelines for postsecondary institutions. It is the discretion of states or individual colleges and universities to establish standards evaluating college readiness and identifying students in need of supplemental coursework in writing, mathematics, and reading. First-year African American and Hispanic students report taking remedial courses at public institutions at a much greater percentage than their white peers (Sparks & Malkus, 2013). This is not surprising given that the majority of institutions utilize students' incoming national test scores (i.e., ACT or SAT) or other standardized measures (Accuplacer, Compass) for student placement. (Saxon & Morante, 2014). It is well supported in the literature that African American and Latino students score lower than their white peers on standardized tests (Darling-Hammond, 2005; Davis & Palmer, 2010; Nichols, Glass, & Berliner, 2012). Therefore, it is worth considering whether standardized tests scores are accurate measures to place minority students in remediation. The prevalence of African Americans in remedial curriculum is further complicated by Attewell et al.'s (2006) findings that "African American students are significantly more likely to enroll in college remedial courses than are White students [even] *with the same academic skills and preparation and social background*" (p. 903, italics added).

Although it is not completely understood why this phenomenon exists, it is a significant finding for those concerned about minority students enrolled in remedial curriculum. Attewell et al. has also shown that “students in four-year colleges who take many remedial courses are at a disadvantage in earning a degree, over and above any disadvantage stemming from their high school skills and background” (2006, p. 908). Thus, if students are placed in multiple remedial courses, it may negatively affect their ability to obtain a bachelor’s degree.

The inverse relationship between student enrollment in multiple remedial courses and student graduation rates at four-year institutions is far from the only criticism of developmental education in the United States (Attewell et al, 2006). Researchers have critiqued postsecondary remediation on a variety of fronts: placement procedures (Scott-Clayton, 2012), estimated costs (Pretlow & Wathington, 2012), student persistence and retention (Bremer et al., 2013; Crisp & Delgado, 2014) and general programmatic effectiveness (Complete College America, 2012). Despite these criticisms, developmental education continues to be a gateway for minority students seeking postsecondary credentials (Parker, 2007). Further attempts to measure the efficacy and quality of postsecondary remediation are vital but incomplete without a more thorough investigation of the types of students enrolled in remediation, their secondary academic backgrounds, and their postsecondary experiences.

Studies have investigated the relationship between African American and Hispanic students’ secondary backgrounds and subsequent enrollment in postsecondary remediation, finding that

inadequate secondary preparation is a contributing factor for minority student placement into developmental curriculum (Attwell et al., 2006; Bahr, 2010; Davis & Palmer, 2010). In order to understand minority students placement into postsecondary remediation, it is critical to also understand students’ high school academic experiences prior to enrollment in remediation.

Recent qualitative studies have explored the perceptions of students placed into developmental education at the postsecondary level. Bachman (2013) interviewed three Hispanic, two African American and four white students regarding their attitudes towards remediation at two different four-year institutions. Her definition of remedial efforts allowed for “remedial or developmental mathematics or writing courses, supplemental writing courses, tutoring, tutoring labs or centers, supplemental instruction or review sessions, attendance of an instructor’s office hours, and repetition of a failed course” (p. 17). Ultimately, Bachman’s broad inclusion criterion made it difficult to infer students’ specific perceptions of traditional remediation and she did not address students’ experiences of standard, non-remedial courses. Koch, Slate, and Moore’s (2012) phenomenological study examined three (two males, one female) students’ perceptions of developmental coursework but all three participants were enrolled in different remedial courses (e.g., mathematics vs. writing). Furthermore, this study did not explore students’ perceptions of non-remedial coursework, and the racial and ethnic identity of participants was not disclosed. Other studies investigating student placement in remediation are narrowly focused on subject area remediation

including writing (Callahan & Chumney, 2009; Jones, 2008), reading (Nash-Ditzel, 2010) and mathematics (Harwell, Dupuis, Post, Medhanie, & LeBeau, 2014).

This article offers a unique contribution to the current literature on remediation, especially in relation to the distinctive participant group. No other qualitative study has interviewed first-year minorities (six African Americans, one Latina, one Latino), all of whom were enrolled in three or more concurrent developmental courses, at a public, four-year research university. There is also no existing literature examining the non-remedial curricular experiences of students placed in remediation. To fill these gaps, the following research questions were developed to extend the literature on the academic lived experiences of minority students placed in remediation: (a) How do first-semester students placed in remedial curriculum recall their high school academic experiences? and (b) How do first-semester students placed in remedial curriculum compare their high school academic experiences to their current non-remedial curriculum at a four-year university?

Method

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was introduced in the psychology literature in the 1990s by Jonathan Smith as an approach that would “capture the qualitative and experiential dimension” of research subjects (Shinebourne, 2011b, p. 17). The methodology of IPA is grounded in the philosophy of phenomenology set forth by Husserl, the interpretative role of hermeneutics, and the ideographic insistence on the particular. The hermeneutical influence of IPA

acknowledges the process of interpretation, both by the participants’ understandings of their own experiences, and by researchers’ interpretations of participants’ described experiences. The ideographic influence on IPA encourages researchers to pursue in depth examination of the particular and embraces single or small case studies. (Shinebourne, 2011a, 2011b).

Phenomenology as philosophy insists on a deeply reflective examination of one’s everyday experiences, and IPA redirects the focus from the internal self to others’ lived experiences. The epistemology of IPA is grounded in participants’ subjective experiences and seeks to understand how participants construct meaning and significance from their lives. In this, IPA reflects symbolic interactionism with the belief that participants will act based on attributed meanings (Shinebourne, 2011a).

A phenomenological study is primarily concerned with the examination of a particular phenomenon (Smythe, 2011). IPA is often used to investigate “topics of considerable existential significance” including “issues of life transitions and identity” (Shinebourne, 2011a, p. 45). The current study examines students’ recalled high school academic experiences in relation to their current academic experiences as first-year university students. The transition from high school to placement in remedial curriculum at a large predominately white university can be an understandably difficult time for students of color; thus interpretative phenomenological analysis suites the phenomena under investigation and corresponds to the epistemological stance of the research questions.

Participants

Purposeful sampling is used in IPA studies as it is essential for participants to share the same experiential phenomenon (Smythe, 2011). In this case criteria for the sample was: a) enrollment as a first-semester, first-year student without prior college credit, b) enrollment in the Developmental Support Lab, DS 095, c) enrollment in at least two Developmental Studies courses in addition to DS 095, d) enrollment in at least one standard, non-remedial course, and e) at least 18 years of age. The criterion of fall-semester students without prior college credit ensured that our participants would be able to recall their high school experience, and would not compare other college experiences to their current curriculum. It was also critical that students were enrolled in at least three developmental courses to demonstrate the participants' need for broader remediation beyond a single subject area. Finally, in order to understand students' experiences with traditional curriculum, it was essential that students were enrolled in at least one non-remedial course. IPA emphasizes the importance of homogeneous samples (Shinebourne, 2011a) and it was ensured that all eight participants met the five criteria before interviews were scheduled.

A colleague assisted with obtaining volunteers and participating in the interviews. We visited eight sections of DS 095, the Developmental Support Lab, to advertise the study and gauge potential interest. The study and participation criteria were described, students were given an informational handout with contacts, and a sign-up sheet was left in each classroom. Students were offered a ten-dollar Amazon or iTunes gift card for participating in the study. No additional

incentive was offered for participation. Fifteen students from DS 095 initially volunteered as study participants. Immediate follow up generated eight students who scheduled an interview. The sample included six women and two men. Six students were African American; one student was Latina, and one Latino. All participants were students of color at a predominately white university.

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted at times convenient to students over a four-week period. Participants had previously been emailed consent forms, which they signed in-person immediately prior to their interview. The interview process followed Rubin & Rubin's (2005) responsive interviewing model and allowed students to direct the conversation towards describing their own academic experiences. The main questions were:

1. Where did you attend high school and can you describe your experience there?
2. Can you tell me how your classes are going so far this semester?
 - How are they similar to your high school experience?
 - How are they different from your high school experience?
3. Tell me how you approach your current classes at the university.

If necessary, the conversation was redirected by asking follow-up questions and probes (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). I posed the questions while a colleague took notes on students' nonverbal

communication. Students were forthcoming and generated a wealth of data about their experiences. Interviews ranged from fifty to eighty-five minutes.

It was important to transcribe interviews verbatim to capture students' language, inflection, and overall emotional response to their experiences. Once all interviews were transcribed I followed coding recommendations set forth by Saldaña (2013). During the first round, traditional descriptive codes were applied to the data, then an additional level of subcodes. During the second round, values codes were added to each transcript, which identified students' values, attitudes and beliefs (Saldaña, 2013). I then created a matrix in Excel to analyze transcript excerpts according to values, attitudes, and beliefs (Rocco, 2003). These categories were further divided by perception: perceptions of self, perceptions of others, and perceptions of experiences. Each excerpt was color-coded according to participant. Throughout the entire coding process multiple reflective analytical memos (Saldaña, 2013) were created on potential groupings and clusters of student data.

Integrity Measures

As themes emerged students' transcripts were revisited to ensure accuracy of individual views and consistency across participants. I consulted with colleagues to receive feedback on interpretations, and continued to review analytical memos created throughout the interviewing, transcribing, and coding processes. These steps helped to ensure accuracy of interpretation and fair representation of students' experiences.

Results

Students described their high school and current first-semester academic experiences at a four-year university. The data converged on four major themes: high school ease, navigating new faculty expectations, learning how to study, and soliciting parental support. The first theme, high school ease, conveyed students' high school academic experiences in terms of expectations, studying techniques, grades, Advanced Placement (AP) coursework, and ACT testing. The remaining themes addressed students' experiences during their first semester at a four-year university: navigating new faculty expectations, learning how to study, and soliciting parental support. The final three themes revealed students' common difficulties in non-remedial classroom settings and their strategies for persevering through the unfamiliar. Pseudonyms are used to ensure students' anonymity.

Theme 1: High School Ease

The majority of participants felt very positive about their educational experiences before entering the university and being placed into developmental studies. The greater part of this sample were students who were in the top twentieth percentile of their graduating class, maintained strong GPAs, and were enrolled in various Advanced Placement (AP) courses. Students' academic self-perceptions were often the driving factor behind their overall positivity towards their high school experience. Students were therefore surprised upon learning their ACT scores would place them in developmental studies (DS) curriculum at the university level. One student shared her initial response to learning this news:

It kind of frustrated me because here I am, I graduate from high school, special honors and everything else, but the only thing that threw me off was the ACT. When I scored higher on all of my state tests and everything else, but I get over here and I have to take DS classes.

Although students were taken aback by their placement in developmental studies, they most often described their high school academic backgrounds in terms of ease. Malik, one student who had tremendous difficulty adapting to his university curriculum, characterized his high school as a “smooth ride” and had “passed high school [just] like that. Never studied. Never ever studied.” This experience was common across participants, even among those with very high grade point averages. Sharon, who graduated with a 3.94 GPA, recounted her test preparation routine:

Basically in high school everything was so straightforward to where I didn't even have to study for it. And so I could go sit in my car and get to school like five, ten, minutes early, sit in my car reading it. Or, I was on the bus, reading on the bus [snapped fingers] and go ace the test, just like that in high school.

This experience of ease was not limited to students enrolled in standard high school curriculum, but also applied to those enrolled in Advanced Placement courses. One student who took AP English lamented his lack of preparation for college: “we didn't write a term paper...so I never wrote a research paper...it's hard for me [now] because I never wrote a paper before [in high school].” Of eight

students who participated in this study, five had enrolled in AP courses during high school. Only one student described an AP course as challenging.

Not every student experienced high school ease, however. Two participants had attended a school they described as “one of the best” that “emphasized the whole college theme.” Participants recalled taking challenging standard high school curriculum but their own academic performance fluctuated, and their courses were often sidelined due to family or other nonacademic obligations. Although both of these students were from bilingual families, one student in particular felt that language was a barrier to her academic success. Originally from another country, she had difficulty transitioning into English-speaking curricula, and this carried over to her challenges with the ACT.

Overall the majority of students maintained positive academic self-confidence throughout high school until they received their low-performing scores on the standardized ACT. Although disappointed, students persisted by taking the ACT again even though scores did not improve. Most students took the test two, three, and even four times before accepting their scores. Sharon took the test four times:

I always score higher in the science part than I do on the other parts, and I totally guessed on the science, so for me to score higher on that, I was like “how?” Ok. So once I got to the math part, I didn't, I couldn't, I seen it before but I couldn't remember how to work it out. Well I just didn't know

how to work out the problems, so I was still in there, stuck.

Students' self-confidence plummeted when they realized their high school GPAs and other accolades were not enough to bypass developmental studies at the university level. For the first time, their ACT scores forced them to consider whether their high school curriculum had adequately prepared them for their postsecondary education.

Theme 2: Navigating New Faculty Expectations

Students were surprised by the noticeable shift in expectations from their high school teachers to their university professors. Aniyah, a student who took a year off after high school to work before entering the university, was the only participant who felt prepared for the change. She "heard a lot of talk about how college is supposed to be, so I wasn't really surprised, I was kind of prepared for it, plus that one year [off] helped me a lot." On the other hand, she also acknowledged that her high school might not have prepared her adequately: "my high school, it was like very easy, and college you got to study for it." Whereas Aniyah entered with a more realistic expectation of university-level work, by midterms, the majority of students were completely caught off guard by their grades. Imani, who took several AP classes in high school, was one of those students: "I'm thinking History's gonna be so easy...my midterm grade I had an F." Follow-up questions revealed her misconception of traditional university grading structures as she expected the curriculum to mirror her high school experience or even her remedial coursework at the university level:

So I don't have the opportunity to get other, other points – for class participation, for homework – I don't get an opportunity. In my DS classes, I get the opportunity for my grade because I get homework assignments. His [history] class, I got no homework assignments. I just got them tests, and that, which I don't think's fair because one day you fail your test, how you supposed to bring that up with the papers? The papers only worth twenty percent of your grade.

Imani was not alone in voicing grievances over grading expectations at the university level. Students were dismayed that class attendance, participation, homework, and extra-credit opportunities did not heavily influence one's grade in most standard university courses. It was difficult for students to adjust their expectation that three to five assignments would constitute the final grade.

Students expressed the need for "reinforcement" in large, lecture-based classrooms. Catalina, one of the bilingual students, compared her high school biology experience to biology at the university and was disappointed by the lack of worksheets and daily homework assignments. She wished more guidance was available at the university level: "It's just [lecture] notes, and it's up to you whether you review them or not, and it's totally different, totally different, because like I said there's not reinforcement to the lesson." She wished that faculty would provide an outline or "just tell you hey...this is what you need to focus on."

Pacing was another issue of concern for participations in the study. Students felt unprepared for the fast-paced

university lectures, expecting the coverage to parallel what they had experienced in high school. Even those who took AP courses found it difficult to keep up with requirements. Malik quickly clapped his hands as he described the pace of his university classes compared to high school:

Oh, different, different, very different because we take, I guess, in high school we took tests on one chapter, or two chapters. [In college] we taking tests on four chapters, five chapters and so you have to know more information. Some stuff, if you don't copy it down before the slide runs, you miss it and say, if I don't go to the book and read it, then when you see it on the test you don't know what it's talking about.

Although students became more familiar with faculty expectations as the semester progressed, that knowledge did not necessarily help them contend with the rigorous non-remedial coursework presented to them. They were now challenged by a new set of concerns.

Theme 3: Learning How to Study

In response to new faculty demands students were forced to confront additional unfamiliar territory: the act of studying. University curriculum was more difficult than what they had experienced in high school and students quickly realized they needed to study, but were not sure how to go about it. Some students blamed external factors, mainly their high school experience: "they didn't prepare me for college." While others felt personally responsible for their inadequacies: "the teacher go over everything you need to

know, and so if I haven't been paying attention, it's all my fault."

Aniyah, who was enrolled in five courses, set a timer on her phone to monitor her study habits. She allocated sixty minutes for every class, every day, Mondays through Fridays. Yet despite her discipline in studying twenty-five hours a week, when asked to describe her study habits in more detail, she laughed and responded, "I don't know how to study." For others the preferred approach was avoidance: "I don't really study unless I know I have something coming up, and that's how I really do things".

Students may have been unable to articulate their particular study habits, but further prodding revealed students' difficulties were most often related to managing course readings. At times this was due to students' own procrastination or misunderstanding that forced them to read everything in one sitting. Malik often found himself in such situations when preparing for exams:

Well a test, ummm, I would just skim through my notes. I'll try to highlight what I think may be important, what I may see on the test, and I could go to my textbook and it's just so many words piled up in the same spot, it gets tiring and boring, it's just boring. I need a fun way of learning something. And just sitting and reading [a] book is just so boring. I'm like [sighs deeply].

Maintaining focus was an additional challenge for students like Malik, but for others, the primary difficulty remained navigating lengthy texts. Emmanuel, a self-described slow reader, was

disappointed with his midterm grade in history. Once he “realized that I needed to start actually reading” and set aside time to do so, his grade significantly improved. Even though Emmanuel was enrolled in nineteen hours of coursework, more than any other student in the study, he managed his time well and was able to keep up with the readings. In contrast, Imani, who was also enrolled in a survey history course, chose not to purchase the required texts for her class (a decision not due to financial considerations) and her grade suffered as a result.

Overall, if students were unable to manage their required readings then they were often unprepared for their exams and papers; thus reading became an important studying component for these students. Students that read were more prepared for class and students more prepared for class did better on their assignments.

Theme 4: Soliciting Parental Support

Students encountered a variety of academic challenges during their first semester at the university but those who were able to avail familial support felt more confident in their abilities to persevere in the midst of hardship. First-year students often turned to their parents for encouragement and advice, rather than faculty or other networks on campus. This was not unusual given that students only had been enrolled in the university for a few months.

Students’ academic self-perceptions were shaped by the feedback they received from their parents. During their first semester, all students received at least one unfavorable grade from a faculty member. Parents responded in a variety of ways to this news. Whereas some parents

expressed clear dismay, those parents who expressed disappointment in the grade while also offering encouragement were better received, and students responded by working harder on their next assignment. Sharon, who called her mother everyday, wanted to drop a class because it was too hard: “I wanted to get out of there, but my mom was like, you can push it out, you’re just not used to doing things that you don’t want to do, and so she said, push it out, so I’m pushing it out.”

A surprising finding was the level of academic support from parents who themselves did not attend a university after high school. Most students’ parents either did not have bachelor’s degrees, or if they did, had pursued the degree online once their children were already in high school. Although parents’ varying educational trajectories presented a challenge in knowing how to relate to their son or daughter, parents’ given support was essential in framing students’ academic self-perceptions. Malik, who described his mother as a “C student,” shared her expectations of him:

To some people grades are very very important to them. I didn’t grow up like that, because I’ve always been like, I used to be a C / B student and so I guess growing up my mom really didn’t expect for me to have A’s all the time. And that’s pretty much were I stayed even though I knew I could have done better, I just stayed where I knew I was ok and she wouldn’t trip out. Despite Malik’s average high school performance, when he entered the university everyone in his family expected him to excel. And at midterms, when he had failing grades, he did not receive the support he needed to readjust his self-image and persevere through academic challenges: “Everybody expect

for me to go to college...everybody wants so much of me...[I'm the] bragging person in the family...they say they see me as a business man or a doctor or a lawyer...I don't see myself as none of that."

In contrast Aniyah's mother, who did not have a bachelor's degree either, maintained high expectations for her daughter, but was willing to extend support when Aniyah confronted challenging situations. This was evident even from the beginning of Aniyah's academic career when she was placed in developmental studies: "I was very disappointed...so my mom told me, 'it don't matter how you start off now, it's point on how you finish,' so she gave me the motivation." Her mother encouraged her to get up early everyday, pay attention in class, and take responsibility for her own learning at the university. In turn Aniyah, a computer science major, persevered when confronted with formidable coursework.

Overall students' ability to avail parental support influenced their academic self-concept and their willingness to persist when confronted with challenging academic circumstances during their first year at the university.

Discussion

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore students' perceived high school and first-semester university academic expectations. This interpretative phenomenological analysis presents a snapshot of minority students' experiences, from their high school academic backgrounds to their perceived challenges with traditional university coursework. The findings of this study merit closer attention to the placement of

students of color in remediation; their high school curricular and test preparation; their first-semester transition experiences; and the influence of students' familial support.

The prevalence of African American and Latino students placed in remediation is too often a reflection of their secondary school preparation. The perceived lack of college readiness among minority students is related to enrollment in high poverty school districts with limited resources (Condron & Roscigno, 2003), underprepared and ineffective teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2005), limited or nonexistent college preparatory curriculum and standardized testing resources (Davis & Palmer, 2010), and high school curriculum lacking in rigor, as supported in this study.

Descriptions of high school ease correspond to similar research findings on students' academic perceptions within developmental education. Participants in Bachman's (2013) qualitative study described themselves as "good students" in high school who were still "underprepared or unprepared" for their postsecondary education (p. 19 – 20). Koch, Slate, and Moore's (2012) students also expressed dissatisfaction with their high school experiences before being placed into developmental studies. Students felt as if their high schools did not prepare them for the challenges of their postsecondary education.

This study diverges from other research on high school preparation due to the unusual presence of Advanced Placement curriculum taken by these students. Other qualitative studies of first-generation students (Reid & Moore, 2008) and students in developmental curriculum (Bachman, 2013) have expressed the

important role of AP courses in preparing for university-level expectations. Yet in this study, the majority of students were enrolled in at least one AP class in high school, but those courses were not perceived challenging or difficult for students. This finding corresponds to state comparisons of AP passing rates nationwide. For the class of 2013, according to the College Board's *AP Report to the Nation* (2014), of Mississippi students who took an AP exam during high school, 39.1 percent received the lowest possible score (1) while only five percent received the highest possible score (5). Strayhorn (2014) agrees that the presence of AP courses in itself is not enough, but that one must "assess what students gain from such classes and the extent to which they feel the classes prepared them for college" (p. 18). Thus it can be gathered that students in this study enrolled in statewide AP curriculum, but that curriculum did not necessarily prepare them for passing the AP tests or for their postsecondary education.

Students expressed difficulty understanding new faculty expectations and studying responsibilities at the university level. This phenomenon is not unusual for first-year students in general (Denovan & Macaskill, 2013; Reid & Moore, 2008; van der Meer, 2012), but is particularly important for those in developmental studies as they often need to make a larger adjustment academically. Yaworski, Weber, and Ibrahim's (2000) analysis of students placed in developmental curriculum who were consequently successful after several semesters in college emphasized the importance of attending and participating in class, respecting faculty as knowledgeable and approachable, and developing effective study strategies.

Strayhorn's (2014) quantitative analysis of historically underrepresented students' identified number of hours studying as a critical predictor of students' college readiness. This finding extended across first generation and racial/ethnic minorities. Thus learning how to study in high school is essential for students' successful transition into postsecondary education. In this research study, students' high school ease corresponded to students' unfamiliarity with studying, and this became a critical concern for students' engagement with their non-remedial curriculum at the university.

A prevailing misconception among students in this study was that postsecondary education, even at a large, research university, was simply a continuation of high school. It is important that all first-year students are inducted into the differences between secondary and postsecondary expectations, and to "bridge the gap...between expectations and experience" (van der Meer, 2012, p. 82). It is common practice in higher education to allow first-year students to discover and then navigate this adjustment on their own, but for students entering the university at a perceived academic disadvantage, it is recommended that institutions are more proactive. This would involve reaching out to students with low standardized tests scores who will most likely be placed in developmental curriculum. University officials can communicate to students the differing expectations inherent to university-level work, especially for non-remedial courses. General discussions should include faster pacing, amounts of required readings, lower number of assessments, and note-taking strategies. More specifically students can be introduced to better time management skills (van der Meer, Jansen, & Torenbeek,

2010), useful metacognitive reading strategies (Nash-Ditzel, 2010), and techniques for avoiding procrastination (Klingsieck, Grund, Schmid, & Fries, 2013).

Results from this study also suggest the importance of establishing and maintaining parental support prior to and during students' first year at the university. This is especially critical for students of color who may feel academically disadvantaged in relation to some of their peers. Baber's (2014) qualitative examination of African Americans found that familial, and especially parental, support was central to students' aspirations for postsecondary attainment. For Latino males enrolled in higher education, the influence of family was not only a contributing factor for attending college, but parental support and encouragement helped sustain those who received it while enrolled in their postsecondary education (Huerta & Fishman, 2014).

Universities can support students by providing informational content to parents on potential curricular challenges that students may face along with on-campus resources available to students: writing centers, subject librarians, counseling services, and academic advising. When parental support is nonexistent or tenuous, it is central that students of color are able establish personal connections with others on campus who can provide feedback and support (Saddler, 2010). At predominately white institutions, this is especially critical and institutions can provide centralized Black cultural centers (BCCs) where African American students have a safe space to solicit both academic and social support if needed (Strayhorn, Terrell, Redmond, Walton, 2010).

Universities can also directly support students placed in remedial curriculum by embedding programs that help students develop social capital. Possibilities include touring on-campus writing centers and meeting with writing tutors; arranging instructional sessions with academic librarians who can share effective reading strategies and introduce library resources; meeting with upper-division students of color who have already successfully completed remedial coursework; and meeting with upper-division students of color who are in the same major as the student placed in remediation.

Conclusion

The purpose of this article was to provide a snapshot of the lived experiences of minority students placed in remediation at a four-year university. Knowledge gained from such studies will assist in supporting and serving these students as they proceed through their postsecondary education. This study revealed that students who were placed in remedial curriculum lacked challenging coursework at the secondary level, and were subsequently unprepared for their non-remedial classes at the university. The prevailing qualitative literature on minority students placed in postsecondary remediation has narrowly focused on students' experiences with remedial coursework. This study addresses a critical gap in the literature by examining students' experiences with non-remedial, standard coursework. As with most qualitative studies, participants' experiences are relatively localized and therefore research findings should be pursued with larger representative data sets, creating generalizable findings for all four-year postsecondary institutions.

Further quantitative studies are recommended to measure the relationship between students' grades in non-remedial curriculum and attrition at four-year universities, with special attention to race and ethnic considerations. Future qualitative studies should examine the critical junctures that enable students, who are placed in remediation, to feel confident in their academic engagement with non-remedial curriculum. How long does it take before students feel they possess the skills necessary to navigate the academic expectations of standard curriculum at a four-year university?

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