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**DISTRESS IN DISGUISE: MATTERING AND MARGINALITY AMONG  
SELECTED STUDENTS AT ROWAN UNIVERSITY**

by

Charissa M. Burgos

A Thesis

Submitted to the  
Department of Educational Services and Leadership  
College of Education  
In partial fulfillment of the requirement  
For the degree of  
Master of Arts in Higher Education  
at  
Rowan University  
December 1, 2020

Thesis Chair: Dr. MaryBeth Walpole

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## **Dedication**

Dedicated to the students before and after me, who have and will contribute their knowledge, skills, and gifts to the world of higher education.

## Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I would like to thank my family and friends who were so incredibly understanding and supportive during this program, especially when I was too tired or wrapped up in this work to be a present friend. Thank you for motivating me and encouraging me boundlessly.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Dr. MaryBeth Walpole and Dr. Burton Sisco for their continuous support, unwavering patience, and time spent having insightful conversations that have undoubtedly enriched my work and sharpened my perspectives of research in the field.

A huge thank you to my colleagues in every corner of the Rowan community, too countless to mention by name, for providing me a very enthusiastic and stimulating space to discuss my ideas throughout this thesis journey. I am eternally grateful for your collective experiences and prolific discussions.

Last and most importantly, I would like to thank my mom, for you are deserving of gratitude every single day. Thank you for sacrificing immeasurable hours to just listen to my rants about this project. Thank you for your endless prayers over me. You are my anchor, my confidant, and number one fan.

## Abstract

Charissa M. Burgos  
DISTRESS IN DISGUISE: MATTERING AND MARGINALITY AMONG  
SELECTED STUDENTS AT ROWAN UNIVERSITY  
2019-2020

Dr. MaryBeth Walpole  
Master of Arts in Higher Education

The purpose of this research study was to determine the attitudes of low-income, first-generation White students' as it relates to their sense of mattering at Rowan University. In addition to a demographic sheet, data were collected using *Mattering Inventory* (Tovar et al., 2009).

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## Chapter I

### Introduction

In today's economy, postsecondary education is imperative for upward mobility. However, research (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Martin, 2015; Smedley, Myers, & Harrell, 1993) has shown with rising tuition costs and the complexities of the enrollment and financial aid processes, students from first-generation and low-income backgrounds are less likely to enroll and persist through graduation. For many low-income, first-generation students wishing to enroll in an institution of higher education, the path to graduation is seemingly long, complex, and out-of-reach. Educators, policymakers, university researchers, administrators, and other education activists have proposed solutions and presented policies in an effort to reduce achievement gaps by improving access and support for low-income, first-generation students.

There has been a considerable amount of research (Ancis, Sedlacek, & Mohr, 2000; Loo & Rolison, 1986; Smedley, Myers, & Harrell, 1993) that examines the hurdles that underrepresented students face when pursuing a college degree, with particular emphasis on the role of social support. Research (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Loo & Rolison, 1986; Thayer, 2000) has also recognized that even after taking demographic backgrounds and academic preparation into consideration, underrepresented students are still falling short in college persistence; therefore suggesting that the campus experience during their time as a student is as important as their experiences prior to becoming a student. Although considerable progress has been made in regard to providing equal access and opportunities for academic success; low socioeconomic, White students are

underrepresented at 4-year colleges and universities “with only 1% of white matriculates’ coming from families with incomes below \$22,000 with two parents who did not attend college” (Aries & Seider, 2005, p. 419).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Much of the research that currently exists has only focused on low-income, first-generation, ethnic minority students, but there is little existing research on White students who share those characteristics and how they perceive to matter at their institution. Considering the interrelation of race and social class identities, this study employed a mono-racial sample of low SES, undergraduate White students, to minimize the perplexities of the race/class dynamic. “The interrelated effect of having multiple identities from historically oppressed groups suggests the experiences of students of color who are also from low SES backgrounds are likely to be distinct from the experiences of White students from low SES backgrounds” (Martin, 2015, p. 277). In short, using a sample comprised of White and ethnic minorities would make it difficult to determine which data are associated with one’s socioeconomic status versus their ethnicity or race (Martin, 2015).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to explore the college experiences of low income, White students as it relates to their sense of mattering and their overall satisfaction at Rowan University. This study also examined whether factors such as participating in a pre-college summer program, obtaining college credits during high school, and

interactions with administration and faculty influence the mattering and marginality of low SES, White students.

### **Assumptions and Limitations**

This study is governed by several assumptions. The first assumption is that students' responses to the survey items were taken as truthful. One significant limitation that should be considered when interpreting the findings in this study is the fact that the sample population was deliberately designed. Therefore, readers should be cautious when considering the transferability of the findings to ethnic-minority students. Secondly, students self-selected to participate in this research by responding to an e-mail invitation, for that reason, it is reasonable to believe that students were drawn to participate in this study to share their experiences. Lastly, one of the major emphases of this study is perception of mattering, therefore the responses of students at Rowan University in Glassboro, New Jersey may differ from those who attend larger or private institutions. Consequently, this study does not represent the experiences of White, low-income students in other institutions or geographic areas of the U.S.

### **Operational Definitions**

1. Campus Climate and/or Experience: For this study, the terms campus climate and campus experience are used interchangeably.
2. Ego-extension: "feeling that other people will be proud of our accomplishments or saddened by our failures" (Schlossberg, 1989, p.9)
3. Marginality: A polar concept of mattering that describes the appreciation that one does not fit in, is not significant, and is not needed.

4. Mattering: “the feeling that others depend on us, are interested in us, are concerned with our fate, or experience us as an ego-extension exercises a powerful influence on our actions” (Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981, p. 165).
5. Perceptions: Students' views on the five dimensions, based on their experiences as undergraduate students at Rowan University.
6. Transitions: "Any event, or non-event, that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles" (Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995, p. 27). The transitions in this study are those directly, or indirectly, caused by being the first in their family to attend college.

### **Research Questions**

This study addressed the following questions:

1. What are the attitudes of Low-income, White EOF students at Rowan University in the areas of: general college mattering, mattering versus marginality, mattering to counselors or advisors, mattering to instructors, mattering to students, and perceptions of value?
2. In which areas of the campus environment do Low-income, White EOF students who participate in the EOF program perceive they matter most and are most marginalized?
3. Are gender, class level, or completing the PCI program on Rowan’s campus (as opposed to completing elsewhere are transferring to Rowan), correlated to participants’ sense of general college mattering?

## **Overview of the Study**

Chapter II provides a review of literature that is pertinent to the context of this study as it offers insight into the challenges low-income students' experiences as they transition into college. Additionally, this chapter covers the theory of mattering and marginality.

Chapter III clarifies the processes and approach to this research study. Included in this chapter is a description of the population and demographics targeted for the study, an explanation of the data collection instrument and processes and lastly, how the data were collected, and analyzed.

Chapter IV illustrates the discoveries of this research study while simultaneously reexamining the research questions presented.

Chapter V addresses the discoveries of this study in effort to offer recommendations for institutions which do not offer intentional support programs for low-income students.

## Chapter II

### Review of the Literature

#### Who are Low-Income Students?

Research in higher education is one valuable framework in which discussions about socioeconomic status is extensively used. However, because there is a wide variety of variables and their combinations, there has been an enduring dialogue about the ambiguity of results in research (Sirin, 2005). With the aim of understanding the population of students who are the center of this study, it is necessary to be familiar with how this group of students are being defined. Low-income is not exclusive to any ethnic or cultural background; in fact, it consists of varied individuals who experience socioeconomic hardships in similar ways.

Per the EOF eligibility policy, students and their families must not exceed the following household income limitations: applicants with a household size of 2, cannot exceed a gross income of \$33,820.00, adding \$8,840 for each additional family member (Educational Opportunity Fund, 2019). In addition to meeting income requirements, applicants must exhibit an educationally and economically disadvantaged background, as demonstrated by at least one of the following: “(1) Having attended or graduated from a school district where 40% or more of the enrolled students meet the eligibility criteria for the free/reduced price lunch program; (2) Having resided in a municipality that is a high-distress/labor surplus area, or is considered an eligible urban aid municipality; (3) Having resided in an area that historically has been populated by low-income families, commonly called a “pocket of poverty”, has characteristics of a high-distress/labor surplus area; (4)

Being a first-generation college student who is, or whose family is, eligible for government assistance and/or educational programs targeted toward low-income and disadvantaged populations (TRIO programs, free and reduced breakfast/lunch programs, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance” (Educational Opportunity Fund, 2019).

This population of students compared to their privileged peers are more likely to: enroll in an institution that is closer to home, postpone enrollment after high school graduation, enroll part-time, work a full or part-time job while enrolled, and/or reside off-campus (Engle & Tinto, 2008).

### **College Experience of Low-Income Students**

Taken at face value, promises to enroll a diverse student population and provide access and support have seemingly reached record highs. While the American education system has genuinely made significant efforts to close the achievement gap by providing low-income students with equal access, opportunities, and funding; low-income students are less likely to be retained through graduation. Nonetheless, “Students from low-income backgrounds remain at a distinct disadvantage. By age 24, only 12 percent of students from low-income families will earn a bachelor’s degree compared to 73 percent of their higher-income peers” (Engle & O’Brien, 2007). The themes presented below largely highlight how low-income students experience the transition into college.

Considering the quality of one’s K-12 education, there are many factors that position students to enter college feeling underprepared, academically intimidated, socially apprehensive, and financially tied. For low-income students, the experience of



going away to college means moving from a familiar place in which they have found comfort to navigating to a place that is completely unfamiliar both academically and socially. For this reason, it is not unusual for low-income students who are just entering college to have feelings of intimidation, doubt, and pressure about how they will cope and adjust to their new environments (Aries & Seider, 2005). The transition from high school to college is the most difficult for low-income students as they face comparatively significant challenges that impede their path to academic success, such as, but not limited to, juggling obligations outside of their academics, lack of financial support, family circumstances, and health concerns. (Rayle & Chung, 2007).

Being that the number of White, low-income students in pre-college affirmative action programs is relatively low, campus programming “often marginalizes White, low-income student experiences as well as the complicated class differences that affect low-income students’ sense of belonging“ (Hopkins, 2014, p. vii). For many White, low-income students, the stresses of making friends, navigating and/or relating socially, feelings of academic competition and/or inadequacy, and managing the inequalities of wealth within the campus community are factors that contribute to their sense of belonging in a new environment (Aries & Seider, 2005). Furthermore, both Hopkins (2014) and Ostrove and Long (2007) determined that class background not only plays a role in belonging, but the concept of belonging is a substantial predictor of a student’s academic performance and their social adjustment.

## **Summer Bridge Programs: Equal Opportunity Fund (EOF) Program**

Research demonstrates that a significant number of low-income students attend and graduate from low-resource districts that do not offer advance placement courses in any subject. As a result, these students feel under prepared for college-level work and lack confidence when entering this new academic and social environment (Strayhorn, 2011). Scholars have widely acknowledged the contribution of institutional programming that provides social and academic support specific to first-year students (Rayle & Chung, 2007).

The New Jersey Educational Opportunity Fund was established by law in 1968 to guarantee access and opportunity to higher education for students who come from economic and educational disadvantaged backgrounds. The EOF program was intended to provide comprehensive services designed to nurture academic success and persistence to graduation through personal and leadership development opportunities. Programming and support efforts address areas of stress for students such as financial assistance through grants, in addition to building supportive relationships among faculty, staff, and other students within the program (Educational Opportunity Fund, 2019). In Hopkins (2014) research, students reported feeling more equipped and confident in critical academic skills such as time management, public speaking, study skills, organization, and having a social network of peers from similar background.

In order to be eligible for the EOF grant, students must prove a history of poverty which includes: falling within the income requirements, attending a school categorized as an A or B in the District Factor Group, having lived in an area that is populated by low-income families also known as a “pocket of poverty,” being a first-generation student

whose family is supported by government assistance, and being eligible for free or reduced lunch. In addition to meeting state-mandated income requirements, applicants who want to be considered for the EOF program must demonstrate “motivation and talent based on interviews, recommendations, high school records, and other requisite application materials” (Educational Opportunity Fund, 2019)

The EOF program at Rowan University requires that students participate in a six-week, residential, summer orientation program, known as the “Pre-College Institute”, “PCI” for short. Through “learning-community”-type approaches, the Educational Opportunity Fund program focuses on building a sense of community through a structured, academic-focused, orientation programing. Students are required to participate in course work, structured study times, group dialogs, and other on-campus events that support academic and personal success.

Allowing college students to become socially integrated and involved in their college academic environments also increases their likelihood of academic persistence and decreases their reported academic stress.

### **Marginality and Mattering**

The concept of mattering is synonymous with purpose, and provides a sense that the individuals around us are genuinely interested in us, they care about us, and they care about our outcomes; while the feeling of marginality is the contrary feeling- like you do not belong. As a result, our sense of mattering is linked emotionally and mentally to how we perceive to belong to a group and/or place (Tovar et al., 2009).

Through her research, Schlossberg expounded that everyone will experience feeling marginal more than once in their life, but during periods of transition the feelings of marginality are greater (Schlossberg, 1989). Students' in their first-year of college often sense the feelings of marginality as they begin to navigate their new roles, adjust to a new environment, and may have feelings of intimidation but those feelings will decrease as they adapt to their new surroundings; and when they graduate and/or start a new job, the feelings marginality will return. The feelings of marginality are cyclical and have an impact on everyone. In the case of lower-income students, research has shown that this population of students are up against added challenges like their lack of financial resources, cultural capital, and feelings of powerlessness (Aries & Seider, 2005).

College students in transition benefit from making connections in their new environment and report higher levels of satisfaction in their college experience (Rayle & Chung, 2007; Schlossberg, 1989; Tovar et al., 2009). Rosenberg identified five aspects of mattering- attention, importance, ego-extension, dependence, and appreciation. These five facets of mattering provide a framework for programming and support in college bridge programs as it relates to the attrition and satisfaction (Schlossberg, 1989).

As demonstrated during the six-week EOF summer bridge program, Schlossberg (1989) describes the role and significance of rituals in aiding periods of marginality. Rituals can be categorized into three phases and serve to make sense of their new norm. Segregating the individual is the first phase of a ritual; in summer bridge programs this is evidenced by creating residential programs where students are away from the norm of home and placed in a meaningful community of students who are also in transition. The

second phase, liminality, is described as being between the old and the new roles; the individual is in a college experience, but not quite a college student yet. The last phase of a rituals is reincorporating an individual back into the real world, in this case- a college campus. “The final phase of transition will be when they develop identities other than those connected to the high school roles and relationships they previously had” (Schlossberg, 1989, pg. 12).

Aries and Seider (2005) conveyed that a group of low-income students reported in their first year, gaining a new form of self-confidence and self-respect, while their feelings of academic insufficiency diminished and they recognized that their aptitudes measured up to their affluent peers.

## Chapter III

### Methodology

#### Context of Study

This study was conducted at Rowan University's main campus in Glassboro, New Jersey. Rowan University is a state-designated public research university with campuses in Glassboro, Camden, and Stratford, New Jersey. Rowan University is classified as a mid-sized institution with a total population of 19,607 and undergraduate enrollment reaching 16,003 students as of fall 2019. The undergraduate student body is predominately White 66%, and includes 10% African American, 5.3% Asian, 11.5% Hispanic or Latino, 1% American Indian, 3.6% reported being two or more races, and 6% who chose not to report their race.

Rowan University was originally founded in 1923 as Glassboro Normal School which served as a two-year, teacher preparation institution. In 1937, the school was renamed and became New Jersey State Teachers College at Glassboro; and in 1958 became, Glassboro State College. In 1992, Henry Rowan and his wife Betty, donated \$100 million to Glassboro State and was then renamed to Rowan College of New Jersey. In March of 1997, The New Jersey Commission on Higher Education granted Rowan College the approval to be classified as a University thus changing its name to Rowan University. In 2019, *The Chronicle of Higher Education* ranked Rowan University, the nation's 4<sup>th</sup> fastest-growing research university among public doctoral institutions. In addition to a growing student population, the University has seen expansion in new academic programs, the development of two medical schools, making Rowan 1 of 3 universities in the nation to offer both M.D. and D.O. medical degrees.

Rowan is one of 41 New Jersey institutions that participate in the Educational Opportunity Fund program. The EOF program currently serves 543 undergraduate students which includes 34-% African American, 4.4-% who reported two or more races, 7.7-% Asian, 42-% Hispanic or Latino, and 9.7-% White Non-Hispanic. Currently, 53 White EOF students contribute to the University's total population student body, making up .3 % (Rowan University, 2019).

This study addresses the following questions:

1. What are the attitudes of Low-income, White EOF students at Rowan University in the areas of: general college mattering, mattering versus marginality, mattering to counselors or advisors, mattering to instructors, mattering to students, and perceptions of value?
2. In which areas of the campus environment do Low-income, White students who participate in the EOF program perceive they matter most and are most marginalized?
3. Are gender, class level, or completing the PCI program on Rowan's campus (as opposed to completing elsewhere are transferring to Rowan), correlated to participants' sense of general college mattering?

### **Population and Sampling**

To expand the literature on low SES, White college students, this quantitative survey (Appendix A) focused on Caucasian, undergraduate, low-income EOF students. Using Rowan University's 10<sup>th</sup> day enrollment analysis (Rowan University, 2020), Fifty-three students were identified as being White/Caucasian, currently enrolled as a full or

part-time student, and having participated in the EOF Pre-College Institute Summer Bridge program at Rowan, thus being eligible for the Federal PELL and State TAG grants. As an Assistant Director of Undergraduate Admissions at Rowan, I have access and received permission to run an enrollment query using the 10<sup>th</sup> day enrollment analysis (Rowan University, 2020) on students with the abovementioned characteristics. Given the small size of this population, the survey was administered to the total population and no sampling method was used.

### **Data Collection Instrument**

The survey (Appendix A) I used in this study is based on the *College Mattering Inventory (CMI)* created by Tovar, Simon, and Lee (2009). Following up on the work of Schlossberg (1989), and Rosenberg and McCullough (1981); Tovar, Simon, and Lee aimed to create an assessment tool that explored a diverse population of college students experience with mattering. The College Mattering Inventory is dynamic in that it compiles information about students' sense of mattering as it relates to "importance, attention, support, dependence, ego-extension, and marginality and other areas of mattering" (Tovar, Simon, & Lee, p. 173).

The CMI is comprised of 29 Likert-scale statements measured from 1 = not at all, 2= slightly, 3= somewhat, 4= moderately, and 5= very much. Accordingly, higher scores on the scales are evidence of an increased sense of mattering versus marginality. Tovar, Simon, and Lee (2009) determined the reliability and validity of the scales in their instrument in their analysis. Reliability for the overall CMI scale and each of its section was determined using Cronbach's alpha coefficient of internal consistency. The total



matterings scale is  $\alpha = .91$ ; General College Mattering is  $\alpha = .89$ ; Mattering Versus Marginality is  $\alpha = .83$ ; Mattering to Counselors is  $\alpha = .84$ ; Mattering to Instructors is  $\alpha = .76$ ; Mattering to Students is  $\alpha = .77$ ; and Perception of Mattering is  $\alpha = .72$ .

An introduction of the survey prefaced three demographic questions (Appendix A) that collected background information on the participants' related to gender, class status, and involvement with Rowan's pre-college program, since not all EOF students on campus completed the pre-college program; some are transfer students.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

In order to utilize the CMI survey, permission was granted by Dr. Tovar by way of email (Appendix B). The version of the CMI survey that was used in this study was reviewed by the Rowan University Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to distribution. Surveys were conducted electronically through Qualtrics. A link to this survey in Qualtrics was distributed by email, and students were sent a weekly reminder to complete the survey. As of Spring 2020, there are approximately 53 White students enrolled at Rowan who are participants of the EOF program. For a desired participation rate of 70%, 40 students were needed. However, survey distribution coincided with the COVID 19 pandemic and the closing of campus due to the pandemic. Because of this, participation was extremely low, with only six participants completing the survey. Although this is a substantial limitation to this study, it was determined that the study should move forward with this extremely small sample.

## Data Analysis

The data collected from the College Mattering Inventory (Appendix A) in Qualtrics was analyzed and tables were generated to include frequency of responses, mean, and standard deviation. Research question one (What are the attitudes of Low-income, White EOF students at Rowan University in the areas of: general college mattering, mattering versus marginality, mattering to counselors or advisors, mattering to instructors, mattering to students, and perceptions of value?) and question two (In which areas of the campus environment do Low-income, White students who participate in the EOF program perceive they matter most and are most marginalized?) were answered by analyzing descriptive statistics including: frequencies and means. Tables were also generated to exhibit participant responses to the 29 College Mattering Inventory questions. To answer research question three (Are gender, class level, or completing the PCI program on Rowan's campus (as opposed to completing elsewhere or transferring to Rowan), correlated to participants' sense of general college mattering?), the data were exported to the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) for computer analysis to be analyzed for correlations between the background information and the participant's sense of general college mattering at Rowan University.

## Chapter IV

### Findings

#### Profile of the Sample

The participants in this study were White/Caucasian, undergraduate, low-income students who participated in the PCI program for the Educational Opportunity Fund.

Surveys were distributed via Qualtrics to 48 students. Of the 48 students, 6 responded to the survey in its entirety. An additional 3 partial responses were recorded but were not adequately completed.

As illustrated in Table 1, 4 of the respondents were freshman, 1 was a sophomore, 2 were juniors, and 2 were seniors.

Table 1

#### *Subject Background Demographics (N=9)*

Variable	<i>f</i>	%
<b>Class</b>		
Freshman	4	44.4
Sophomore	1	11.1
Junior	2	22.2
Senior	2	22.2
Total	9	100
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	3	33.3
Female	5	55.6
Non Binary	1	11.1
Total	9	100
<b>PCI at Rowan</b>		
Yes	8	88.9
No	1	11.1
Total	9	100

## Analysis of the Data

**Research Question 1:** What are the attitudes of Low-income, White EOF students at Rowan University in the areas of: general college mattering, mattering versus marginality, mattering to counselors or advisors, mattering to instructors, mattering to students, and perceptions of value?

The General College Mattering subscale measures students' attitudes as it relates to mattering to the university as a whole and are focused on how interested and concerned others are with the participant. Data from the General College Mattering subscale are presented in Table 2. In all but one of the statements in this subscale, more than half of the students indicated "Very Much," or "Moderately", which points out that students generally feel supported and of concern of others on the campus.

Table 2

### *General College Mattering (N=6)*

	Very Much		Moderately		Somewhat		Slightly		Not at all	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
There are people at the university who are genuinely interested in me as a person. n=6, M=4.5, SD=0.76, missing=3	4	66.6	1	16.6	1	16.6	0	0	0	0
There are people at the university who are concerned about my future. n=6, M=3.67, SD=1.37, missing=3	3	50.0	0	0	1	16.6	2	33.3	0	0

Table 2 (continued)

	Very Much		Moderately		Somewhat		Slightly		Not at all	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Other students are happy for me when I do well in exams or projects. n=6, M=4.50, SD=0.50, missing=3	3	50.0	3	50.0	0	0	0	0	0	0
People on campus are generally supportive of my individual needs. n=6, M=4.33, SD=0.75, missing=3	3	50.0	2	33.3	1	16.6	0	0	0	0
I sometimes feel pressured to do better because people at the university would be disappointed if I did not. n=6, M=3.50, SD=0.96, missing=3	1	16.6	2	33.3	2	33.3	1	16.6	0	0
Some people on campus are disappointed in me when I do not accomplish all I should. n=6, M=3.33, SD=1.25, missing=3	1	16.7	2	33.3	2	33.3	0	0	1	16.7

Data for the Mattering versus Marginality subscale are displayed in Table 3. The Mattering Versus Marginality subscale measures if respondents' feel a sense of mattering and belonging on campus or if they feel a sense of marginality and not belonging. This subscale is reverse scored, as a result, statements such as "Not at all" agreeing is alike to "Very much".

Table 3

*Mattering Versus Marginality*

	Very Much		Moderately		Somewhat		Slightly		Not at all	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
I often feel isolated when involved in student activities (e.g. clubs, events). <sup>a</sup> n=6, M=2.67, SD=1.49, missing=3	1	16.6	1	16.6	1	16.6	1	16.6	2	33.3
Sometimes I feel that no one at the college notices me. <sup>a</sup> n=6, M=2.67, SD=1.49, missing=3	1	16.6	1	16.6	1	16.6	1	16.6	2	33.3
I often feel socially inadequate at school. <sup>a</sup> n=6, M=2.33, SD=1.60, missing=3	1	16.6	1	16.6	0	0	1	16.6	3	50.0
Sometimes I feel alone at the college. <sup>a</sup> n=6, M=2.83, SD=1.34, missing=3	1	16.6	1	16.6	1	16.6	2	33.3	1	16.6
Sometimes I get so wrapped up in my personal problems that I isolate myself from others at the college. <sup>a</sup> n=6, M=3.17, SD=1.67, missing=3	2	33.3	1	16.6	1	16.6	0	0	2	33.3
Sometimes I feel that I am not interesting to anyone at the college. <sup>a</sup> n=6, M=3.17, SD=1.67, missing=3	2	33.3	1	16.6	1	16.6	0	0	2	33.3

<sup>a</sup> Item reverse scored.

Data for the *Mattering to Counselors or Advisors* subscale are displayed in Table 4, which has a focus on how the student feels they matter to their counselor(s) and/or advisor(s). It is worth pointing out that each student who participates in the EOF program is assigned a counselor who provides students with academic, career, financial and, personal counseling. Additionally, all students are assigned a major specific academic advisor and have access to wellness counselors and career counselors and may have these professional staff in mind while completing the survey. The results for this subscale determine that over 50% of participants agreed “Very Much” with all of the statements indicating that they feel a general sense of mattering to counselors and/or advisors.

Table 4

*Mattering to Counselors or Advisors*

	Very Much		Moderately		Somewhat		Slightly		Not at all	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
My counselor is generally receptive to what I have to say. n=6, M=4.33, SD=0.94, missing=3	4	66.6	0	0	2	33.3	0	0	0	0
If I stopped attending the college, my counselor(s) would be disappointed. n=6, M=4.00, SD=1.15, missing=3	3	50.0	1	16.6	1	16.6	1	16.6	0	0

Table 4 (continued)

	Very Much		Moderately		Somewhat		Slightly		Not at all	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
If I had a personal problem, I believe that counselors/advisors would be willing to discuss it with me. n=6, M=4.33, SD=0.94, missing=3	4	66.6	0	0	2	33.3	0	0	0	0
Counselors/advisors at the university generally show their concern for students' wellbeing. n=6, M=4.33, SD=0.94, missing=3	4	66.6	0	0	2	33.3	0	0	0	0
I believe that my counselor(s)/advisor(s) would miss me if I suddenly stopped attending the college. n=6, M=3.50, SD=1.61, missing=3	3	50.0	0	0	1	16.6	1	16.6	1	16.6

Data for the Mattering to Instructors subscale are displayed in Table 5, which has a focus on how the student feels they matter to the instructors that have taught them. This subscale is reverse scored, as a result, statements such as “Not at all” agreeing is alike to “Very much” agreeing.



Table 5

*Mattering to Instructors*

	Very Much		Moderately		Somewhat		Slightly		Not at all	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
My professors sometimes ignore my comments or questions. <sup>a</sup> n=6, M=2.17, SD=1.67, missing=3	1	16.6	1	16.6	0	0	0	0	4	66.6
Sometimes my professors simply do not listen to what I have to say. <sup>a</sup> n=6, M=2.50, SD=1.80, missing=3	2	33.3	0	0	0	0	1	16.6	3	50.0
I sometimes feel my professor(s) want me to hurry up and finish speaking. <sup>a</sup> n=6, M=2.83, SD=1.67, missing=3	2	33.3	0	0	1	16.6	1	16.6	2	33.3
I often feel my professor(s) care more about other things than me as a student. <sup>a</sup> n=6, M=3.00, SD=1.53, missing=3	1	16.6	2	33.3	1	16.6	0	0	2	33.3

<sup>a</sup> Item reverse scored.

Data for the Mattering to Students subscale are displayed in Table 6, which centers on how the student perceives that their peers need or depend on them. The statement with the highest mean score of 3.83 was, “other students tend to rely on my

contributions” while the statement with the lowest mean score of 2.83 was, “students depend on my guidance or assistance to help them succeed”.

Table 6

*Mattering to Students*

	Very Much		Moderately		Somewhat		Slightly		Not at all	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
When in groups, other students tend to rely on my contributions. n=6, M=3.83, SD=0.90, missing=3	2	33.3	1	16.6	3	50.0	0	0	0	0
Other students rely on me for support. n=6, M=3.50, SD=1.26, missing=3	2	33.3	1	16.6	1	16.6	2	33.3	0	0
Some students are dependent on my guidance or assistance to help them succeed. n=6, M=2.83, SD=1.67, missing=3	2	33.3	0	0	1	16.6	1	16.6	2	33.3

The data presented in Table 7 focuses on the Perception of Value subscale, which measures students’ sense of mattering to people as it relates to their contributions and involvement. This subscale had the highest percentage (83.35) of respondents agreeing

“Very Much” on all three statements and the other 16.6% of respondents agreeing “Moderately” with the statement.

Table 7

*Perception of Value*

	Very Much		Moderately		Somewhat		Slightly		Not at all	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Knowing that other people at the college care for me motivates me to do better. n=6, M=4.83, SD=0.37, missing=3	5	83.3	1	16.6	0	0	0	0	0	0
It is comforting to know that my contributions are valued by my professors. n=6, M=4.83, SD=0.37, missing=3	5	83.3	1	16.6	0	0	0	0	0	0
There are people at the college that sincerely appreciate my involvement as a student. n=6, M=4.83, SD=0.37, missing=3	5	83.3	1	16.6	0	0	0	0	0	0

The data presented in Table 8 explore the correlations between General College Matterring and the class and gender of respondents. Although the sample size was too small to analyze any significant correlations there appeared to be a correlation between class status and General College Matterring,  $p=.035$ , which suggests that respondents who

have been on campus longer felt a stronger connection to the campus. This correlation should be explored further in future research.

Table 8

*Correlations between General College Mattering and Class & Gender*

	Class		Gender	
	P-Correlation	Sig.	P-Correlation	Sig.
There are people at the university who are genuinely interested in me as a person. n=6	-.406	.424	.000	1.000
There are people at the university who are concerned about my future. n=6	.842	.035	-.597	.211
Other students are happy for me when I do well in exams or projects. n=6	.620	.189	.000	1.000
People on campus are generally supportive of my individual needs. n=6	.444	.378	.200	.704
I sometimes feel pressured to do better because people at the university would be disappointed if I did not. n=6	.030	.955	-.108	.838
Some people on campus are disappointed in me when I do not accomplish all I should. n=6	-.232	.658	-.239	.648

## Chapter V

### Summary, Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

#### Summary of the Study

The framework that steered this study was Schlossberg's theory of mattering and marginality (1989). Her theory suggests that students' are more academically engaged and persist when they feel invested in by their university community. Using the College Mattering Inventory and the six subscales, by Tovar, Simon, and Lee (2009) this study aimed to measure in which of areas of the college experience do students' feel like they matter most, and in which areas do they feel least comfortable or marginalized. The data were analyzed to determine the perceptions of mattering of Low income, White students' who participated in the EOF program at Rowan University.

#### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the college experiences of low income, White EOF students as it relates to their sense of mattering and their overall satisfaction at Rowan University. This study also examined whether factors such as participating in pre-college summer program and students' interactions with administration and faculty influence the mattering and marginality of low SES, White students. By focusing on this specific population, we are able to determine which data are associated with one's socio economic status versus their ethnicity and race. This study is intended to draw a focus on the importance of connection and support for, marginalized student populations as they transition into college. Expanding on existing resources would allow for strengthen those services for more students.

## **Methodology**

Fifty-three students were identified as being White/Caucasian, currently enrolled as a full or part-time student, and having participated in the EOF Pre-College Institute Summer Bridge program at Rowan, thus being eligible for the Federal PELL and State TAG grants. The instrumentation used in this study was the College Mattering Inventory (CMI) created by Tovar, Simon, and Lee (2009). Following up on the work of Schlossberg (1989), and Rosenberg and McCullough (1981); Tovar, Simon, and Lee aimed to create an assessment tool that explored a diverse population of college students experience with mattering. The CMI includes 29 Likert-scale statements that assembles information about students' sense of mattering as it relates to "importance, attention, support, dependence, ego-extension, and marginality and other areas of mattering" (Tovar, Simon, & Lee, p. 173). In order to utilize the CMI survey, permission was granted by Dr. Tovar by way of email (Appendix B). The version of the CMI survey that was used in this study was reviewed by the Rowan University Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to distribution. Surveys were conducted electronically through Qualtrics and a link to this survey was distributed by email, and students were sent a weekly reminder to complete the survey.

## **Data Analysis**

The data collected from the College Mattering Inventory (Appendix A) in Qualtrics were analyzed and tables were generated to include frequency of responses, mean, and standard deviation. Research question one (What are the attitudes of Low-income, White EOF students at Rowan University in the areas of: general college

matter, mattering versus marginality, mattering to counselors or advisors, mattering to instructors, mattering to students, and perceptions of value?), and question two (In which areas of the campus environment do Low-income, White students who participate in the EOF program perceive they matter most and are most marginalized?) were answered by analyzing descriptive statistics including: frequencies and means. Research question three (Are gender, class level, or completing the PCI program on Rowan's campus (as opposed to completing elsewhere are transferring to Rowan), correlated to participants' sense of general college mattering?), the data were manually entered from Qualtrics into SPSS and analyzed for correlations between the background information and the participant's sense of general college mattering at Rowan University.

### **Discussion of the Findings**

Research Question 1: What are the attitudes of Low-income, White EOF students at Rowan University in the areas of: general college mattering, mattering versus marginality, mattering to counselors or advisors, mattering to instructors, mattering to students, and perceptions of value?

Overall, the participants had a positive attitude on all six of the subscales. The average mean score on the General College Mattering scale is 3.97 out of 5. Four of the six respondents, agreed "very much" that there are people at the university who show concern and, are genuinely interested in them as a person. Perception of Value had the highest mean with a 4.83 out of 5. On all three statements in that subscale, 83.3% of participants responded with "Very Much", indicating that the participants generally have a strong perception of value at Rowan University. The Mattering to Counselors or

Advisors subscale scored very positive with over 50% of respondents' agreeing "very much" on all statements.

Research Question 2: In which areas of the campus environment do Low-income, White students who participate in the EOF program perceive they matter most and are most marginalized?

The results for the Mattering to Counselors or Advisors subscale determine that over 50% of participants agreed "Very Much" with all of the statements indicating that they feel a general sense of mattering to counselors and/or advisors. Students who participate in the EOF program are assigned a counselor the moment they step

The subscale with the lowest mean score was Mattering to Instructors with a mean score of 2.6 out of 5, keeping in mind that this subscale is inversely scored. The two statements that scored low, with 33.3% of respondents agreeing "Very much" were, "Sometimes my professor simply does not listen to what I have to say" and "sometimes I feel my professor wants me to hurry up and finish speaking". Feelings of marginality in the classroom may be related to factors that position low-income students to enter college feeling underprepared, academically intimidated, and doubtful of ones abilities.

Research Question 3: Are gender, class level, or completing the PCI program on Rowan's campus (as opposed to completing elsewhere are transferring to Rowan), correlated to participants' sense of general college mattering?

## **Conclusions**

The findings of this study suggests that White students who participated in the EOF program at Rowan University generally feel a sense of mattering on Rowan



University's Glassboro Campus and had a positive attitude as it relates to the subscales. There was a particular statement within the subscales that would suggest that students may feel greater degrees of marginality in the classroom.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following suggestions are presented:

1. The EOF program should develop programming that provides strategies to promote self-realization, empowerment in the classroom, and professor/student interaction.
2. A more comprehensive inventory should be made on students who come from a low-income backgrounds, perhaps using the Starfish retention program, so faculty and staff can be aware and feel equipped to offer each student the resources and support they may need.
3. Students who receive PELL and TAG grants and, are not admitted through the EOF program, should be required to participate in a virtual information session that covers all of the student support and resources offered by the University.

### **Recommendation for Further Research**

Based upon the findings and conclusions of the study, the following suggestions for further research are presented:

1. The Mattering subscales for Advisors and Counselors should be examined further to determine in which area of the university do the students feel most supported and connected to.
2. This research should be continued with the same instrument with an increased sample size.
3. Additional Exploration between the correlation of class status and mattering may be a prolific area for research.

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## Appendix A

### Survey Instrument



#### COLLEGE MATTERING INVENTORY

You are invited to participate in this online research survey entitled “Distress in Disguise: Mattering and Marginality among Selected Students at Rowan University”. You are included in this survey because you were identified as being a recipient of the EOF scholarship at Rowan University.

The survey may take approximately 10 to 15 minutes to complete. Your participation is voluntary. If you do not wish to participate in this survey, do not respond to this online survey. Completing this survey indicates that you are voluntarily giving consent to participate in the survey.

The purpose of this research study is to determine the attitudes of White students receiving scholarship through the EOF program as it relates to their sense of mattering at Rowan University.

There are no risks or discomforts associated with this survey. There may be no direct benefit to you, however, by participating in this study, you may help us bring an increased awareness and understanding of how White students with low-socioeconomic backgrounds experience mattering at Rowan. Moreover, this study could provide a foundation in which higher education professionals could learn from and expand initiatives that benefit students alike.

Your response will be kept confidential. We will store the data in a secure computer file and the file will be destroyed once the data has been published. Any part of the research that is published as part of this study will not include your individual information. If you have any questions about the survey, you can contact me or Dr. MaryBeth Walpole at the address provided below, but you do not have to give your personal identification.

Co-Investigator:  
Charissa Burgos  
Higher Education Administration  
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856-256-4214

Principal Investigator:  
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Professor  
Educational Services and Leadership  
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856-256-4706

## Appendix B

### Permission Letter from Dr. Tovar



Hi, Charissa. You have our permission to the CMI in your research as outlined in the request form. Attached you will find the CMI in an Excel file.

Best,

Esau

Esau Tovar, Ph.D.  
Dean, Enrollment Services  
Santa Monica College  
[1900 Pico Blvd.](#)  
[Santa Monica, CA 90405](#)  
Office: [310-434-4012](#) Fax: [310-434-8019](#)  
[tovar\\_esau@smc.edu](mailto:tovar_esau@smc.edu)

**From:** Burgos, Charissa Marie [<mailto:burgos@rowan.edu>]  
**Sent:** Thursday, March 8, 2018 12:37 PM  
**To:** TOVAR\_ESAU  
**Subject:** RE: Permissions for CMI Instrument

Dr. Tovar,

Attached is my completed CMI request form. Thank you again for your consideration.

Best,  
Charissa

*Charissa Burgos*

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ADMISSIONS  
DIVISION OF STUDENT AFFAIRS

ROWAN UNIVERSITY | 201 MULLICA HILL RD, GLASSBORO, NJ 08028  
P: 856.256.4214 | F: 856.256.4430

## Appendix C

### Institutional Review Board Approval Letter

**DHHS Federal Wide Assurance**

**Identifier:** FWA00007111

**IRB Chair Person:** Ane Johnson

**IRB Director:** Sreekant Murthy

**Effective Date:** 5/4/2020

### eIRB Notice of Approval

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#### STUDY PROFILE

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**Study**

**ID:** [Pro2020000967](#)

**Title:** Distress in Disguise: Maternal and Marginality Among Selected Students at Rowan University

<b>Principal Investigator:</b>	MaryBeth Walpole	<b>Study Coordinator:</b>	
<b>Co-Investigator(s):</b>	Charissa Burgos	<b>Other Study Staff:</b>	There are no items to display
<b>Sponsor:</b>	Department Funded	<b>Approval Cycle:</b>	Not Applicable
<b>Risk Determination:</b>	Minimal Risk	<b>Device Determination:</b>	Not Applicable

<b>Review Type:</b>	Exempt	<b>Expedited Category:</b>	There are no items to display	<b>Exempt Category:</b>	2(i)
<b>Subjects:</b>		<b>Specimens:</b>		<b>Records:</b>	

## CURRENT SUBMISSION STATUS

<b>Submission Type:</b>	Research Protocol/Study	<b>Submission Status:</b>	Approved
<b>Approval Date:</b>	5/4/2020	<b>Expiration Date:</b>	N/A
<b>Continuation Review Required:</b>	N/A (exempt)		
<b>Pregnancy Code:</b>	Not Applicable	<b>Pediatric Code:</b>	Not Applicable
		<b>Prisoner Code:</b>	Not Applicable

<b>Protocol:</b>	Survey Instrument Request Form Burgos_IRB Protocol Survey Consent and Questionnaire Department (SEM) Research Permission	<b>Consent:</b>	Survey Consent and Questionnaire.pdf	<b>Recruitment Materials:</b>	Survey Recruitment Email
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**\* Study Performance Sites:**

Glassboro Campus                      201 Mullica Hill Road, Glassboro, NJ 08028

There are no items to display

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