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Small-town Living: Do Illinois Universities Understand the Rural College Student?

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SMALL-TOWN LIVING: DO ILLINOIS UNIVERSITIES UNDERSTAND THE RURAL COLLEGE STUDENT?

ERIK ANDREW DALMASSO

108 Pages

Rural students are confronted with unique challenges when considering postsecondary choices. According to McShane and Smarick (2018), scholarship on this overarching issue is limited, as it is “often shunted to specialized journals that have not been able to integrate findings into the broader education policy conversation” (p. 1). Rural students, and to a broader extent, rural education have little voice in the postsecondary pathways that have been created within higher education (Goldman, 2019). Recruitment of rural students, financial aid policy, remediation/developmental programming, state and federal postsecondary legislation have largely treated rural students in tandem with their urban and suburban peers, when research has shown many of their challenges to be fundamentally different (Tieken, 2016). This dissertation seeks to understand, through narrative historical analysis, how Illinois state higher education policy and structure, Federal higher education policy, state university purpose and state higher education legislation has helped or harmed a rural student’s ability to matriculate to a postsecondary future.

KEYWORDS: Rural, social-capital, dual-credit, outmigration, transition, first-generation

SMALL-TOWN LIVING: DO ILLINOIS UNIVERSITIES UNDERSTAND THE RURAL
COLLEGE STUDENT?

ERIK ANDREW DALMASSO

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Educational Administration and Foundations

ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY

2020

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COLLEGE STUDENT?

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My parents were helpers. My mother was a nurse. My father was an educator. Both inspired me to help. Through this doctoral program, and this dissertation process, I believe that I have found my way to be a helper, too. Though my mother and father won't be present physically to see me defend this work, their actions and lessons continue to inspire me to do good, both professionally and personally. I miss them terribly, but know they continue to support me from their place in this world.

The topic of rural postsecondary transition is deeply personal for me. First of all, I came from a rural community, and experienced many of the struggles that are reflected in this research. I was lucky, however. I had tremendous people around me with the skills and the knowledge to direct me toward a better future. I was lucky because my parents had experienced forms of higher education and could answer questions for me. I was lucky because I had support from faculty and staff at my local community college, Spoon River College. I was not a first-generation student, but persistence to completion still took an immense amount of support, empathy and understanding.

Fast forward to today. I owe a tremendous amount of gratitude to the students of Farmington Central High School, Class of 2018 and 2019, who allowed me to learn alongside them. I was fortunate to spend two years with students preparing for their postsecondary future. I am so incredibly proud of their perseverance and individual achievements. Whether it was college, trades or military, each student I worked with found the path that was right for them. For that, and for them, I am truly grateful.

To Emily, thank you for your help and overall inspiration for this work. Your collegiate experience provided a unique window for this research. To Jason and Travis, I am humbled by

your friendship. I appreciate your encouragement, your belief, and your conversation. Whether it was taco Tuesday or bourbon Friday, I always knew I had your support – Thank you! Without all of you, this achievement would not have happened.

Finally, I need to recognize and thank my committee. This process has been a documented struggle, and one from which I will learn. I am indebted to my committee chair, Dr. Elizabeth Lugg. Dr. Lugg is a true professional who never once compromised in her belief that I was a worthy doctoral student. She followed my file from early in the program until the end, with the utmost belief in me, and constant encouragement. She has taught me the true meaning of student-centered. Dr. Diane Dean was my advocate when I needed it the most and a fierce defender of this opportunity. Dr. John Presley provided incredible focus into my writing, and his higher education experience was paramount to me finishing this dissertation. And, Dr. Jeffrey Bakken willingly gave of his time and expertise to make sure I produced a high quality end product. I consider myself lucky to call each committee member a mentor.

COVID-19 took away the opportunity to publicly recognize this achievement. However, I was quickly reminded, through self-reflection, that this is not about me. It's about our society. I treat this time as a personal reset, recognizing the people and places that helped me succeed, and working to be a force in helping others succeed. It's important to document and recognize this point in our history, as it should teach us much. As my father said, countless times, we are learning, always!

E.A.D.

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CHAPTER I: THE IMPORTANCE OF RURAL [STUDENTS]

As Koricich, Chen and Hughes (2018) stated, “for much of our nation’s history, the majority of the American population resided in rural places. To this day, the United States is still home to some 60 million rural inhabitants, representing nearly 20% of the national population.” (p. 282). The rural population is significant in breadth of population, but also presents unique challenges, when compared to urban and suburban counterparts (Morton, Ramirez, Meece, Demetriou, & Panter, 2018). For example, rural jobs are unique compared to urban employment. The needs, skills and challenges of the rural population are distinctly different. Noted from Koricich, Chen and Hughes (2018):

Rural communities and their residents represent the backbone of American agriculture and other natural resource industries, such as timber, fossil fuels, and clean energy. Rural places are home to critical components of our national transportation, food, and energy infrastructures and to many of our nation's most precious landscapes (p. 283).

Beyond the importance of the overall rural population are the noted challenges of rural students. Many states, including Illinois, have significant rural student populations. These students deserve to have for their problems to be identified in the development of student affairs scholarship at the postsecondary level (Johnson, Showalter, Klein, & Lester, 2014; Strange, Johnson, Showalter & Klein, 2012). Currently, the library of literature focused on the transition of these students from a secondary environment to a postsecondary environment is lacking, and as an underrepresented population, rural students must be considered, and a focus in discussions of college access.

Research Problem

Rural students are subject to significant barriers when applying to, entering, and completing higher education. Some studies have shown that rural students face unique, challenges while transitioning and completing college (Byun et. al., 2012; Guiffrida, 2008; Maltzan, 2006). Because of stated challenges such as socioeconomic concerns, lack of secondary

academic rigor and preparation, geographic isolation and lack of social capital, rural students often choose community college as an avenue for beginning a postsecondary pathway (Schonert, Elliot, & Bills, 1991). Because of this, the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) and the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) have directed policy efforts toward dual credit and developmental education at the community college level. Currently, no such policy efforts are directed toward public, state controlled, 4 year institutions.

Much literature exists regarding the importance of family, friends and the development of social capital for rural students embarking on a postsecondary pathway (Agger et. al., 2018; Dahill-Brown & Jochim, 2018; Israel, et. al., 2001). Gibbs (1998) found that if rural students decided not to attend a community college, and opt for a four year institution, they were more likely to attend a nonselective, regional, public university. The state of Illinois has 48 community colleges and 12 public, 4-year institutions. Eight of Illinois' public universities consider themselves regional, public institutions. Based on stated admission requirements, these regional, public institutions also promote less selective admission standards than that of the Illinois flagship institution (IACAC, 2019).

Because of the overwhelming population of rural students in the state of Illinois, and the number of regional, public institutions within the state, matriculation and persistence of these students should be a priority (Johnson, Showalter, Klein & Lester, 2014). However, other than cited research at the community college level, and some individual studies at the 4-year institution level (not in Illinois), very little research exists for this important population. It is apparent that Illinois regional, public institutions need to have more information available to help create programmatic and policy solutions for rural students transitioning and persisting on each campus.

Research Questions

1. How does Federal and state of Illinois financial aid policy recognize the unique financial challenges presented by rural students?
2. How does Federal and state of Illinois institutional developmental programming address the unique challenges presented by rural students?
3. How do Illinois regional, public institutions identify rural students for social and academic assistance?
4. How does Illinois' approach toward matriculation and persistence of rural students compare to states (Pennsylvania & Georgia) with similar ratios of rural students?

Significance

According to Ganss (2016), enrollment in rural districts outpaces urban districts, with recent data indicating a 10-year secondary enrollment growth rate of 22% compared to 1.7% urban enrollment growth rate during the same period. College degree attainment is lower for rural students, compared to their urban/suburban peers (Johnson, Showalter, Klein, & Lester, 2014; Strange, Johnson, Showalter, & Klein, 2012). According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) (2011), the enrollment rate in rural areas of individuals ages 18-24 was 33%, compared to 48% in urban areas, and 43% in suburban areas. Additionally, rural student college enrollment has increased, up from 27% in 2004, yet urban student enrollment far exceeded rural growth, 37% to 48% during that same time (Ganss, 2016; National Center for Education Statistics, 2011).

Rural students make up a significant population within many states, including Illinois. According to Johnson, et. al. (2014), "Illinois has one of the largest absolute rural student enrollments..." (p. 45). Strange et. al. (2012) indicated that Illinois' rural student population

increased by 30% from 1999-2000 to 2008-2009. Because of these data, rural students remain an important part of the fabric of Illinois regional, public institutions, and are an active part of enrollment recruitment plans. Many promises are made to recruited students about the campus experience, opportunities, academic help and social engagement. Because of this, the onus is on the university to recognize the unique challenges of rural students, and deliver on the promises made during recruitment (AACRO, 2018).

Definitions

Rural: The National Center for Education Statistics ([NCES], 2006) defines rural within three subcategories, “rural fringe” (areas within five miles of an urbanized core), “rural distant” (areas between five and twenty-five miles from an urbanized core), and “rural remote” (areas greater than twenty-five miles from an urbanized core). NCES (2006) defines urbanized core as any location with populations of 50,000 or more persons, as calculated by the U.S. Census. The majority of rural-centered literature use the NCES definition as the foundation of the scholarship.

Social Capital: Bourdieu (1986) described social capital as the resources that are gained through membership in a group and the size of the network of connections that he or she can effectively mobilize (p. 249). According to Kruse et al., (2015) “social capital also offers a framework for understanding how individual and organizations interact and relate to one another...it also allows students to have access to important human, cultural, and other forms of capital that provide them the necessary too to be successful” (p. 327).

Dual Credit: According to Kim, Barnett & Bragg (2003), Dual credit is defined as a structured agreement within which “students receive both high school and college credit for a college-level class successfully completed” (p. 3).

Dual Enrollment: Different from Dual credit, Kim, Barnett & Bragg (2003) define Dual Enrollment as “students concurrently enrolled and taking college level classes in high school and college” (p. 3).

Limitations

This dissertation is inherently limited, as it considers the transition of rural, traditional aged Illinois students to regional, public institutions. It also considers the historiography of Illinois and Federal policy as they apply to rural students pursuing a postsecondary, public university experience. This dissertation will introduce policy from states with similar rural populations as a comparison to Illinois. This dissertation does not consider the transition of rural, Illinois students to private institutions, for-profit institutions, or trade schools. Also, it does not consider adult students, or students re-entering a postsecondary environment. Only the policies within the State of Illinois, or other noted states, are considered for this work – therefore, this research is limited in scope.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In the course of researching rural students' pathways to a postsecondary future, scholars reference poverty, outmigration, and the cultivation of human/social capital, as distinct and unique population characteristics. These challenges, felt daily by the rural public, can determine the likelihood of a cyclical barrier of a rural person's place and position (Israel, Beaulieu, & Hartless, 2001; Theodori & Theodori, 2015; Tieken & San Antonio, 2016). This means that the influence of the rural community, and potential marked plans of departure by higher achieving individuals, with no return, can help determine a rural person's future ambitions.

As Koricich, Chen, and Hughes (2018) stated, "for much of our nation's history, the majority of the American population resided in rural places. To this day, the United States is still home to some 60 million rural inhabitants, representing nearly 20% of the national population" (p. 282). The rural population is significant in the breadth of population, but also presents unique challenges, when compared to urban and suburban counterparts (Morton, Ramirez, Meece, Demetriou, & Panter, 2018). Koricich, Chen and Hughes (2018):

Rural communities and their residents represent the backbone of American agriculture and other natural resource industries, such as timber, fossil fuels, and clean energy. Rural places are home to critical components of our national transportation, food, and energy infrastructures and to many of our nation's most precious landscapes (p. 283).

The purpose of this literature review is to explore the educational component of sociological characteristics of rural communities, and rural students, particularly at the intersection of secondary school and the decision-making processes regarding enrollment for postsecondary training/education. Also explored are the Federal and State of Illinois responses to presented and noted sociological barriers for rural students.

Characteristics of Rural Communities – Poverty

Rural communities and their residents often experience greater levels of poverty than urban areas (Koricich, Chen, & Hughes, 2018). Agriculture, one of the leading employment opportunities in rural communities, continues to shrink as a result of decreased government subsidies and a globalized market (Elder & Conger, 2000). As Hertz, Kusmin, Marré, & Parker (2014) indicate, during the economic crisis of the late 2000s, rural areas, particularly those farthest from urban centers, lost the fewest jobs. That said, the rate of economic growth (1.75%) in non-metropolitan counties after the official conclusion of the recession was less than half the rate experienced in metropolitan counties (3.82%) (Hertz et al., 2014).

Because economic change is slow, rural geographic regions are so broad, and visibility for the rural community is less common, poverty may be a greater issue for rural communities in comparison to their urban counterparts (Jensen, McLaughlin & Slack, 2003). Phillips et al. (2007) notes that “although we usually think of poor children as those living in the city, over the past several decades, child poverty rates have been higher in rural than in urban areas” (p. 65). A review of the literature shows a significant imbalance in urban poverty versus rural poverty. Tickameyer and Duncan (1990) suggest a preoccupation in the American consciousness toward studies of urban large-scale immigration, industrialization, and growth within urban areas. Additionally, the authors suggest that rural poverty did not receive substantial scholarly attention until the 1980s, but even then, it was disproportionate compared to urban poverty (Tickameyer & Duncan, 1990). Clawson (1967) indicates that the problem of visibility toward rural poverty and rural characteristics has spanned decades, positing that urban poverty has received more press time than rural poverty. Rural poverty is pervasive and deserves equal, if not more, scholarly attention (Clawson, 1967). Clawson’s research is more than four decades old, but still raises

similar issues found in today's literature – lack of focus on unique rural issues, including rural poverty.

Rural Poverty and Outmigration

Even during national economic successes, high-tech industries are less likely to look to the rural landscape for talent because of an underprepared, undereducated workforce. As a result, the cyclical nature of underemployment and low-skill occupations persists. This cycle promotes little incentive for completing postsecondary education and encourages the out-migration of the rural communities most educated, to find better, more prosperous opportunities elsewhere (Flora & Flora, 2008).

Over the past several decades, the rural economic base has shifted from goods-based services (manufacturing and agriculture) to service-based employment (food service, data entry, and customer service) (Gibbs, Kusman & Cromartie, 2005; McLaughlin & Coleman-Jensen, 2008). Positions in service-based fields also show a trend of part-time or temporary status, often with limited or no fringe benefits (McLaughlin & Coleman-Jensen, 2008). According to Petrin, Schafft and Meece (2014), employment trends have a “dramatic effect on the residential aspirations of rural youth, whose departure from their communities is often noted as yet another factor contributing to rural decline” (p. 295). Rural communities are faced with pressing challenges, including retaining and attracting younger populations and slowing the problem of youth outmigration (Johnson, 2006).

According to Cushing (1999), youth outmigration is troubling for rural communities because of its impact on educational aspirations, and its impact on socioeconomic composition of local populations. Historically, younger persons within nonmetropolitan areas have outpaced older adults in regards to outmigration. Those leaving have proven to be more highly educated

and/or highly trained (Cushing, 1999; Gibbs & Cromartie, 1994; Mills & Hazarika, 2001). Additionally, Brown and Schafft (2011) indicate that individuals who decide to stay within rural communities, during shifts of outmigration, tend to be less well educated, with lower incomes and fewer skills. Those left behind can have an attitude of ambivalence toward the role and value of postsecondary education, if education is so closely linked to outmigration (Corbett, 2007; Woodrum, 2004). Selective outmigration poses several challenges to rural communities. One of the more obvious challenges includes shrinking economies – young talent, with educational aspirations, are leaving rural areas, thus leaving a dearth of optimism (Gibbs & Cromartie, 1994; Miller, 1995; Petrin, Farmer Meece, & Byun, 2011). This means that young people who go on to a postsecondary future often do not come back home to work. Because of that, they do not invest in the future of the community, pay taxes or support infrastructure in the community – they go elsewhere to do those things.

Educators, school administrators, districts and community members may be playing a role in the outmigration of rural youth. Authors Carr and Kefala (2009) argue that the rural schools, community members, and educators undermine the long term viability of the served community by encouraging the “best and brightest” students to pursue educational and occupations outside the immediate rural area. In tandem with this encouragement educational pursuit toward the “best and brightest” students, is the discouragement of educational pursuits toward students who are lower achieving, and more likely to remain in the rural community as adults. Carr and Kefalas (2009) have termed this practice "educational sorting," and describe it as:

a one-way trip for the most talented and capable rural youth, representing a ‘paradox of preparation’ in which rural schools create human capital that is ‘exported’ through rural youth outmigration to subsidize the development of (nonrural) places elsewhere. (p. 108)

Petrin et. al. (2014) argues:

while a large proportion of rural high school students aspire to leave their communities...data reveal the strong ties many rural youths have to their home areas and suggest that outside of the family structure and residential status, economic factors are the major correlates of youth residential aspirations, rather than the influence of educators and other school-level factors. (p. 298)

Scholars do agree that community, and the communities' involvement in the development of rural student human and social capital, play a direct role in a student's educational aspirations, and whether long-term roots can and/or should be re-established in the rural community (Chen & Starobin, 2019a; Chen & Starobin, 2019b; Hofferth & Iceland, 1998; Israel, Beaulieu, & Hartless, 2001; Kruse, Starobin, Chen, Baul, & Laanan, 2015; Nelson, 2016; Nelson, 2019).

Development of Capital

Scholarship focused within the rural sector, pertaining to student development, educational aspirations, educational persistence and postsecondary achievement, refer to the capital of the student. This rural sector scholarship unifies under the sociological terms of capital, including, but not limited to, human, social, academic and cultural definitions of capital (Chen & Starobin, 2019a; Chen & Starobin, 2019b; Hofferth & Iceland, 1998; Israel et al., 2001; Kruse, Starobin, Chen, Baul, & Santos Laanan, 2015; Nelson, 2016; Nelson, 2019) . According to Wilkinson (1991) communities are forged through social interaction and social relationships. These interactions provide structure and a means for group members to access scarce resources. The construct of capital starts from the first relationships made and grows over a person's life, both as an intrinsic and extrinsic exercise (Coleman, 1988). According to Bourdieu (1986), social capital is "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to the possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (p. 248).

Phillips et al. (2007) noted the inherent difficulties for rural communities to build or access human capital; and as such, rural areas struggle to "attract and retain people with the skills, knowledge, and connections required to...build human capital" (p.67). This means that rural youth are confronted with less exposure to credentialed professionals who have the background and knowledge to build human capital within the student population. Enberg and Wolniak (2010) researched secondary school context and its relationship to college enrollment and found that student experiences and exposure to capital – particularly academic, social and cultural capital – are both effective and predictive regarding college enrollment and matriculation.

The concept of social capital is not unique to rural students; however, it is widely publicized as a major factor in the knowledge-base and aspirations of rural students, and their vision of success. Being exposed to relationships encouraging complex environments of academia, mobility, persistence and career employment have been shown to weigh heavily in the minds of rural students (Israel et al., 2001; Nelson, 2016). Because of their lack of exposure, many rural students are overwhelmed with the nuances of a college campus and lifestyle. Formation of tight-knit communities establish needs for rural students as they pursue postsecondary avenues, and support from the noted community can be a determinate factor in postsecondary persistence (Israel et al., 2001; Nelson, 2016).

According to Nelson (2019), community social capital can define levels of success for rural students in comparison to their non-rural peers. Rural students who maintained close contact with their “home community” benefited from this level of social capital, as opposed to non-rural students, who benefited from high school peers on the same campus, but no other form of community social capital (p. 93). Nelson (2019) notes that rural students face substantial

obstacles when pursuing postsecondary achievement, chiefly, rural parents typically have lower incomes, have lower educational expectations for their children, and are less likely to have graduated from college (p. 94). If parents of rural students have had little exposure to postsecondary education, they might not see the worth or value of a postsecondary experience for their child.

Additionally, McGrath et al. (2001) found that rural students fell within “three class differentiated paths to higher education” (p. 253). Professional-managerial families produce academically involved, ambitious children who move in large numbers from high school to college. Farm youths, despite parental education level, move in similar numbers from high school to postsecondary programs to that of professional-managerial families. This trend is noted because of farm family involvement in community and school events. Lower-status youths are less successful in his/her journey, because of lack resources and social capital. When the behavior of lower-status parents mirrors that of professional-managerial families, collegiate success increased (McGrath, Swisher, Jr, & Conger, 2001). McGrath et al. (2001) also noted that students from low socio-economic backgrounds, may be forced to create their social capital through intrinsic educational ambition, rather than through parental motivations.

Rural Pre-college Academic Preparation

Byun et al. (2012) states that little scholarship has been focused on the P-12 preparation of college-bound rural youth, but the literature that exists is contradictory. Lack of curriculum rigor, including lack of Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) curriculum do not necessarily limit access to higher education options, but limit a rural students' ability to enter a postsecondary environment with the same academic preparation as their non-rural counterparts (Gibbs, 1998; Byun et al., 2012). Byun et al. (2012) also noted that “the

provision of rigorous high school curriculum for students preparing for college is important for all students, but especially beneficial for rural youth” (p. 9). This means that rural students deserve the opportunity for rigorous, college preparatory coursework, in line with their urban and suburban counterparts. Because of funding and hiring challenges, rural schools are forced to scale back rigorous, college preparatory offering (Byun et al., 2012).

One predictor of rural student postsecondary success, and an area of stated concern is the preparation of rural students in the areas of science and math (Yan, 2002). Yan (2002) argued that rural students who took more courses in chemistry, biology, physics, algebra and geometry were more likely to persist in a college academic environment, regardless of socioeconomic status or parental expectations. Within her work, Goldman (2019) found similar concerns from rural students, highly discouraged by their science and math preparation.

Gibbs (1998) argued the college success of students from rural areas could be directly related to their overwhelming enrollment in public, non-selective colleges, which have less demanding entrance requirements. Goldman (2019) states that while academic rigor is lacking within rural school districts, it is not necessarily keeping rural students from persisting on a college campus. While their college choices might be less selective, rural students are faced with different barriers (i.e., poverty, lack of familial support, and social/human capital), rather than purely academic (Goldman, 2019).

Illinois’ P-12 Response to Rural Students

The substantial size of Illinois’ rural area produces 13.4% of Illinois’ students within 23.8% of school districts that are considered rural (Johnson, Showalter, Klein & Lester, 2014). According to Johnson et al. (2014) “Illinois has one of the largest absolute rural student

enrollments...” (p. 45). Strange et al. (2012) indicated that Illinois’ rural student population increased by 30% from 1999-2000 to 2008-2009.

A search of the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) education legislation databases (2019) shows that since 2015 no legislation has been introduced in the State of Illinois directly pertaining to rural students. Of the 288 pieces of education legislation displayed (2015-2019) in the NCSL database for the State of Illinois, zero were targeted toward the specific needs of rural students.

This lack of legislative action is not surprising, according to Dahill-Brown and Jochim (2017). According to them:

When rural superintendents lack the connections, experiences or capacity to influence state political processes directly, they must rely on other avenues. Most salient for many rural superintendents is their state representative. But these can prove fickle allies in the work of school reform. State legislators may care about local schools, but they are also accountable to voters...and may resist efforts of a reform minded rural superintendent. (p. 72)

According to Kinkley and Yun (2019):

The changes [in rural Illinois] represent challenges and opportunities, from major funding shifts to curriculum and instruction, for rural leaders who have likely not had to address these changes in the experiences or in these schools. As such, their research also seeks to serve as a call to attention to the changes happening in the oft-overlooked schools and districts. (p. 60)

Comparison: Pennsylvania’s P-12 Response to Rural Students

According to the Rural Pennsylvania Revitalization Act of 1987, a state agency called the Center for Rural Pennsylvania (CRP) was founded to be an advocate for the rural population of Pennsylvania (The Center for Rural Pennsylvania, 2019). This state agency, with reporting lines directly to the Pennsylvania general assembly, serves nearly 3.4 million rural residents under the tenets of:

- sponsoring research projects to identify policy options for legislative and executive branch consideration and action;
- collecting data on trends and conditions to understand the diversity of rural Pennsylvania;
- publishing information and research results to inform and educate audiences about the diverse people and communities of rural Pennsylvania; and
- participating in local, state and national forums on rural issues to present and learn from best practices. (The Center for Rural Pennsylvania, 2019)

According to the Center for Rural Pennsylvania (2019), 235 of the state's 500 school districts are considered rural, impacting nearly 411,000 students. This state agency is responsible for rural P-12 budget negotiations, grant programs, rural policy analysis, and acts as a liaison for federal rural programs.

The acknowledgement of the rural population through the CRP, and through the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE), has allowed local district administrators, including superintendents, principals, counselors and educators, to adapt and modify curricula within rural schools to meet the postsecondary preparation needs (Kryst, Kotok & Hagedorn, 2018). The authors acknowledge rural schools need to be able to understand the unique needs and challenges of a rural student population. Several rural schools, in concert with the PDE and CRP, have developed Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) with two-year and four-year postsecondary institutions, as well as technical and career pathways, addressing transition and articulation agreements (Kryst, Kotok & Hagedorn, 2018).

As mentioned earlier, Yan (2002), through collaboration and sponsorship from CRP, found that in 2000, 48% of rural Pennsylvania students did not attend postsecondary education,

in any form, compared to 28% for urban students. The author argued that “school programs that develop career awareness and development would help students make informed choices by broadening their range of career possibilities” (p. 15). Yan’s research provided several suggestions for rural youth postsecondary development, including community involvement, earlier career exploration, introduction to technical education within high school curricula and articulated transfer agreements.

According to Kryst, Kotok and Hagedorn (2018), postsecondary matriculate figures for rural students in Pennsylvania have leveled out to those of urban and suburban students. The scholarship within the Pennsylvania P-12 structure, including the CRP, acknowledges the large population of rural students seems to be trending in a more favorable direction. The ability to be nimble at the district level, recognizing the challenges of each community, is a key differentiator when considering Pennsylvania’s approach to that of Illinois.

Illinois Higher Education Response to Rural Students

Katsinas and Hardy (2012) share a quote from Cohen and Brawer (2008) that they believe to be especially true for rural students: “For millions of students, the choice is not between a community college and another institution, it’s between a community college and nothing” (p. 453). Illinois is positioned, through its network of 48 community colleges, and the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB), to provide strong access to college coursework and trade training programs in rural areas (ICCB, 2019).

Illinois’ answer to rural isolation, poverty, underfunded initiatives and postsecondary under preparedness is the responsibility of the local community college network. According to the ICCB website (2019), 63.5% of all students in Illinois public colleges and universities attend Illinois community colleges. Of that percentage, 36.2% are in the baccalaureate transfer area,

making up the largest program area within the community college system. This indicates that a large population of students are using the community college system for the transfer function. However, according to the ICCB website (2019), since 2010, student attendance at Illinois community colleges has been on the decline. The Illinois Board of Higher Education (IHBE) (2019) boasts high rates of transfer success, indicating that Illinois “leads the nation in Bachelor degree completion rates among community college students who transfer to four year college” (pg. 1). This claim of 53.8% of bachelor’s degree completion in six years does not delineate between urban, suburban and rural students, however. Because of that, it is difficult to determine the success of program transfer for rural Illinois students.

To facilitate the transfer process within the state of Illinois, the Illinois Articulation Initiative (IAI) has been established. This initiative includes all 48 Illinois community colleges, 12 Illinois public four-year institutions, 25 Illinois independent four-year institutions and 1 Illinois independent two-year institution. The IAI system can be found on an online database of transferable coursework called iTransfer.org. This database represents a living document of up-to date transferability from any individual course from the community college level, to any listed four-year institution within the state of Illinois.

When considering previously mentioned literature, the resources presented by the ICCB and IBHE do not address the specific needs, concerns and attributes of the rural population. Using the iTransfer website as a main conduit for postsecondary transfer information assumes basic knowledge of higher education language, community and social capital. The website uses terminology and a complex system of coursework articulation language that is highly specialized and unique to the higher education environment. The use of the website also assumes broadband

access to the internet, which is a noted struggle for many rural communities (Dettling, Goodman and Smith, 2015).

According to Lile, et al. (2018), the clear introduction of articulation agreements provides strong access to postsecondary futures for rural students – especially through dual credit enrollment. The authors argue that dual credit enrollment “provides new opportunities for rural students lacking Advanced Placement (AP) or technical programs within their high school; and generally, improve the academic preparation for all students” (p. 96). Also noted, dual credit enrollment exposes rural students to the language and culture of higher education, while in the comfort of their high school setting.

According to the Illinois General Assembly (2019), legislation titled the Dual Credit Quality Act of 2010, acknowledges the impact of dual credit programs within the state of Illinois, but puts the onus of initiating agreements on local secondary school administration/districts. According to the legislation, secondary schools can enter into dual credit agreements with their local community college assigned by district. This agreement establishes the policies, curriculum and qualified educator employed by the local community college (ilga.gov, 2019). Also noted within the language of the legislation is the ownership by the ICCB of dual credit promotion and policies. The overarching goals of the Dual Credit Quality Act of 2010, according to the legislation are to:

- Reduce college costs
- Speed time to degree completion
- Improve the curriculum for high school students and the alignment of the curriculum with college and workplace expectations
- Facilitate the transition between high school and college

- Enhance the communication between high school and colleges
- Offer opportunities for improving degree attainment for underserved student populations

Upon the researcher's review of the ICCB website (2019), very little information was found readily available for college administrators and high school administrators alike. The communication on how to move forward with dual credit opportunities is not clear. The ICCB homepage and school administrator does not provide direct access to dual credit or legislation information. This dearth of easily accessible information forces secondary administrators and districts to rely on their relationships with their local community colleges, and a potential misinterpretation of the dual credit legislation enacted by the General Assembly of Illinois (iccb.org, 2019).

Federal Response to Rural Students

According to Jaeger, Dunstan and Dixon (2015), "the time is now to have a discussion at the federal level focused on pathways for rural students and their postsecondary success" (p. 616). To this point, the federal safety net for rural students and families has focused on the issue of poverty, access to healthcare, food and transportation (Rachidi, 2017). According to Rachidi (2017):

[Federal] programs are typically designed to help those with little to no income, possibly creating disincentives to work or stigma associated with those who do receive benefits. This is why rural schools and safety net programs alone cannot fully solve the problem of rural poverty. Economic development efforts that strengthen the local labor market, combined with government and education efforts are needed" (p. 82).

Rachidi (2017) posits that federal policy asks that rural schools act as a conduit of information for economically depressed families within rural areas, and have a responsibility to communicate to appropriate families regarding possible federal programs that provide meaningful aid. More

pointedly, with limited internet availability in many rural areas, rural schools are one of the more consistent avenues of communication for parents of rural children (Rachidi, 2017).

According to Shuls (2017), the potential for future litigation regarding school finance at the federal level was expunged with the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez*. In a 5-4 decision, the court ruled against the plaintiff's argument of Texas' school funding system being unconstitutional under the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. Because of this ruling, significant precedent was created signifying that education was not a fundamental right under the U.S. Constitution. Also because of this ruling, school finance, adequacy and equity have become largely individual state issues in the eyes of the court. According to Goldrick-Rab et. al. (2016):

In the middle of the 20th century, the United States made substantial investments in expanding postsecondary education to create opportunities for people unable to find work in the labor market and proved more spaces for those seeking a college education, often perceived as a promising pathway to social mobility...In 1965, public policy makers crystalized a specific set of ambitions for education policy, aiming to reduce class stratification by facilitating college degrees. The inaugural Higher Education Act created a grant program that led to the signature federal program known as the Pell Grant (p. 1763).

Jaeger, Dunstan and Dixon (2015) note that while several Presidential administrations have promoted the idea of increasing access to higher education for underserved populations, including rural students, few administrations have passed significant funding for postsecondary access. This public relations argument has prompted the U.S. Department of Education to allow Pell Grant funds to be used toward dual credit coursework. This policy change has provided meaningful funding for students, rural, suburban and urban, to engage in quality postsecondary coursework, as long as they qualify through the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) (Jaeger, Dunstan and Dixon, 2015). As with many Federal aid policies, the requirement of the FAFSA form indicates an assumption of educational awareness of

terminology and structure. Parents of rural students might not understand the many technical aspects of the FAFSA process, and therefore, become complacent (Budge, 2010; Budge, 2006).

Rural population research is gaining traction within the eyes of academics. As colleges and universities work to solidify enrollment campaigns, and retain current students, rural student needs are becoming ever-present. Serving this population of students has shown unique challenges because of financial pressures, first-generation status, lack of educational social capital, outmigration pressures and academic under preparedness. The literature indicates the importance of further research, understanding and policymaking (Budge, 2010; Budge, 2006; Chen, Choi, & Schneider, 2019; Duniak, 2018; Henley & Roberts, 2016; Hlinka, Mobelini, & Glitner, 2015; Jimerson, 2005; Malkus, 2018; McBaer, 2017; San Antonio, 2016; Schafft, 2016; Stone, 2017; Willis & Burns, 2011). This dissertation aims to provide a meaningful narrative for the rural students of Illinois, their needs, and how current legislation and policy applies to them.

Importance of Transition

The research questions posed in this study find students in great moments of transition. It is important to understand seminal transition theory regarding adult transition as an evaluative tool toward historical analysis as conclusions and suggestions for future legislative action will be discussed in the final chapter.

Schlossberg's Transition Theory

Typically thought of as a theory of adult development, Nancy Schlossberg's transition theory (1981), expands on the work of Levinson (1978), Neugarten (1979), and Lowenthal and Chiriboga (1975). Schlossberg's theory has been foundational in the field of student affairs, for its applicability to students, environment and unique challenges (Evans, et al., 2010). Evans, et al. (2010) writes, "Schlossberg's theory provides insights into factors related to the transition, the

individual, and the environment that are likely to determine the degree of impact a given transition will have at a particular time” (p. 212).

Schlossberg’s theory builds on itself from its inception (1981) to current day by constant reflection and adaptation, taking into consideration the changing needs of students, environments and holistic challenges (Evans, et al., 2010). The authors note:

The framework is comprehensive in scope, highly integrative of other theoretical contributions, and conceptually and operationally sound. The authors have taken a vast array of writings and gleaned the most important concepts from them, added their insights, and created a dynamic model that can provide a solid foundation for practice that is responsive to both commonalities and idiosyncrasies. Schlossberg’s openness to criticism and her willingness to revise and extend her theory since its inception have resulted in a practical resource for assisting college students in dealing with change. (p.225)

In her earliest version (1981), Schlossberg introduces her theory as a model for analyzing human adaptation to transition, indicating three variables: (1) perception of the particular transition, (2) characteristics of pretransition and post transition environments, and (3) characteristics of the individual (DeVilbiss, 2014; Schossberg, 1981). Figure 1 illustrates Schlossberg’s early adaptation.

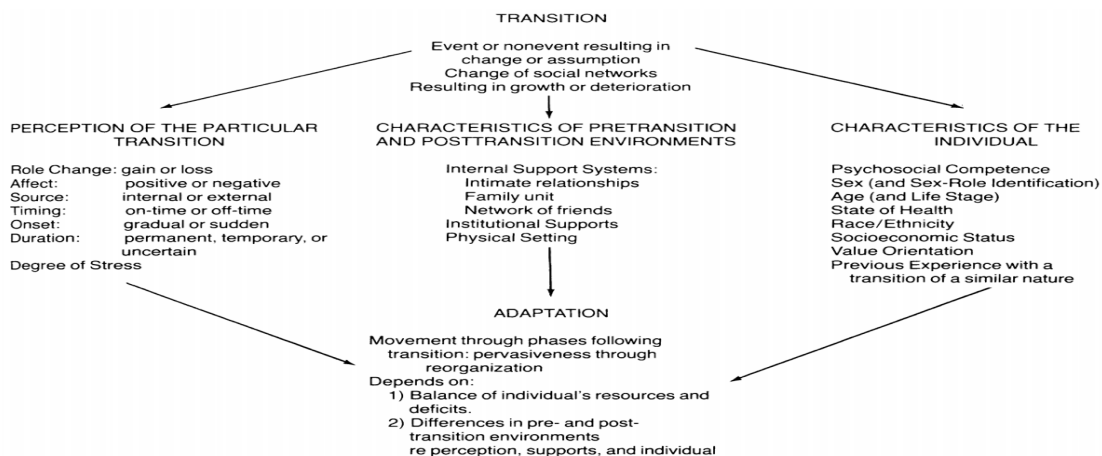


Figure 1. Conceptual Model for Analyzing Human Adaptation to Transition. (Schlossberg, 1981).

In a later adaptation of her theory, Schlossberg (1989) reframed her focus to “three basic truths of adult behavior: (1) Adult behavior is determined by transitions, not age, (2) Adults are motivated to learn and to change by their continual need to belong, matter, control, master, renew and take stock, and (3) Adult readiness for change depends on four S’s – situation, support, self and strategies” (p. 58). This reframe also introduced these phases as approaching change, taking stock, and taking charge. Additionally, the new terms “moving in,” “moving through,” and “moving out” introduced as descriptors within the taking charge phase of the reframe (Schlossberg, 1989).

Since Nancy Schlossberg introduced her theory of transition (1981), she has reframed and refined her work in collaboration with scholars in the fields of adult development, counseling, learning development, management and student affairs (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012; Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006; Sargent & Schlossberg, 1989). With each adaptation and reframe, DeVilbiss (2014) indicates Schlossberg’s theory of transition has noted the “importance of the global community, the continuing impact of technology, and the importance of understanding cultural diversity and spirituality” (p. 28).

Schlossberg’s theory of transition provides immediate applicability to this study as its theoretical framework – rural students considering postsecondary opportunities are in extreme transition. For maybe the first time in their adult life, rural students are faced with important, and unique challenges that administrators and decision makers at the institutional, state and federal level need to consider when creating policies and legislation. Considering the challenges already referenced for rural students – poverty, K-12 preparation and rigor, outmigration and lack of social capital – state and federal lawmakers have created legislation and programs to tackle these issues.

At the federal level, the Higher Education Act of 1965, Perkins program, Pell Grant program, Rural Education Achievement program, among others have been created, at a very basic level, to help students with their transition to a postsecondary environment. Federal programs are mostly focused on the financial transition after high school; however, state of Illinois legislation - Illinois Community College Act, Dual Credit Quality Act, Retention of Illinois Students and Equality act, and the Illinois Higher Education Student Assistance Act - are aimed at both financial, academic rigor and preparation goals. The common thread of all of these pieces of Federal and State of Illinois legislation is the underlying focus of transition of the student from one life moment or environment, to another.

Schlossberg provides four criteria – relationships, routines, assumptions and roles – to help individuals determine whether transition is present (Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006). Students preparing for a move toward a university environment will ultimately find themselves engulfed in at least one of the four areas of Schlossberg’s theory of transition (Byun et al., 2012). Considering the stated aims of Federal and State of Illinois higher education legislation and programs, Schlossberg’s theory of transition is the appropriate conceptual framework lens for this research.

Using Maclean, Harvey, and Clegg’s (2016) historical organizational study model, Schlossberg’s theory of transition plays an important role in the development of the study as its theoretical framework. Figure 2 explains the role of a study’s theoretical framework as a part of the narrating analysis.

Principles	Types			
	Evaluating (Testing and Refining Theory and Arguments)	Explicating (Revealing the Operation of Social Processes)	Conceptualizing (Generating New Constructs)	Narrating (Explaining Origins of Contemporary Phenomena)
Dual integrity (historical veracity and conceptual rigor)	Essential in creating historical organization studies of both disciplines	Essential in creating historical organization studies of both disciplines	Essential in creating historical organization studies of both disciplines	Essential in creating historical organization studies of both disciplines
Pluralistic understanding (openness to alternatives and different ways of seeing)	Useful in suggesting alternative hypotheses	Useful in developing nuanced understandings of specific events and outcomes	Important in stimulating creative thinking and theoretical boldness	Useful in making connections to discern patterns, sequences, and associations
Representational truth (congruence between evidence, logic, and interpretation)	Important in confirming, adopting, or rejecting theoretical ideas	Important in validating inferences drawn from interplay of theory and data	Useful in establishing empirical plausibility of new constructs	Important in demonstrating goodness-of-fit between evidence and interpretation
Context sensitivity (attentiveness to historical specificities)	Useful in unsettling fixed conceptions and reevaluating past judgments	Important in distinguishing between general and particular forces in change processes	Useful in identifying contingencies that shape particular outcomes	Important in revealing the formative influence of situated environments
Theoretical fluency (command of conceptual terrain)	Important in interrogating and refining existing theories	Important in identifying transformative social processes	Important in engendering new constructs and demonstrating novelty	Useful in discerning critical relationships and causal forces

Figure 2. Types and Principles of Historical Organization Studies. (Maclean, Harvey, & Clegg, 2016).

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Design

Historiography, a type of qualitative research, is essentially a means of storytelling using primary and secondary historical sources that probe the stated research questions within the dissertation. According to Brundage (2008) the narration of historiography “offers the opportunity to move beyond a somewhat passive mode of learning into a critical and analytical mode of the self-directed research scholar” (p. 95). This dissertation used primary state and federal legal sources, including state and federal legislation, state and federal policy and university reports. I used these artifacts as primary data, analyzing them using grounded theory, to develop themes and meanings of how they applied to rural students. Much has been written by state and national organizations regarding the topics presented within the research questions of this dissertation.

Using this form of research method allowed a narration of how and why policy and law was written and provided a lens for recommendations moving forward. Two forms of qualitative methods were used to complete this study. First, the Organizational Studies and Analysis Model provided the underpinnings of successful historiography research. Its directives toward creative synthesis indicated what was necessary for a researcher’s historical narrative (Maclean, Harvey, & Clegg, 2016). Second, grounded theory provided the “logically consistent set of data collection and analytic procedures” for historiography research (Charmaz, 1996). It was essential that historical analysis observed biases presented, as well as motives of authors, cultural biases, political influences and historical anomalies that presented themselves (Gunn & Faire, 2012).

Organizational Studies and Analysis Model

Maclean, Harvey and Clegg (2016) define historical organizational studies and analysis as “organizational research that draws extensively on historical data, methods and knowledge, embedding organizations in their sociohistorical context to generate historically informed theoretical narratives attentive to both disciplines” (p. 609). The authors posit that the most effective form of analysis is an integration of both theory and historical analysis, thus providing a more holistic approach toward a creative synthesis (Maclean, Harvey, & Clegg, 2016).

Creative Synthesis

Harvey (2014) defines creative synthesis as “an integration of group members’ perspectives into a shared understanding that is unique to the collective” (p. 325). Maclean, Harvey, and Clegg (2016) identify five underpinning principles for a creative synthesis – *dual integrity, pluralistic understanding, representational truth, context sensitivity and theoretical fluency*. Dual integrity “implies embedding a Janus-like perspective within the research design itself, drawing on the past as a subjective, interpretive means of making sense of the present and future” (p. 616). Additionally, dual integrity “requires a pluralistic understanding open to alternatives and different forms of synthesis” (p. 616).

Pluralistic understanding within the narrating lens refers to the making of connections to “discern patterns, sequences and associations” (p. 617). Representational truth, an important factor within the narrating lens, represents the “congruence between evidence, logic and interpretation” (p. 617). The authors describe contextual sensitivity as “constructing a rounded picture to enhance understanding of the issue in question” (p. 618). Further, “attentiveness to temporal and geographical settings unlocks a deeper understanding of the sociocultural embeddedness of organizations and institutions as the outcome of contingent historical processes

from which they have emerged” (p.618). Theoretical fluency, the fifth principle toward creative synthesis, is useful “in discerning critical relationships and casual forces” (p. 617).

Grounded Theory

To have the most appropriate data available to find creative synthesis, the researcher chose to employ a trusted qualitative data cultivation and analysis method: grounded theory. According the Charmaz (1996), grounded theory “provides a set of strategies for conducting rigorous qualitative research” (p.27). Within grounded theory, the researcher has “simultaneous involvement in data collection and analysis phases of research; creation of analytic codes and categories developed from data; the development of middle-range theories to explain behavior and processes; and writing analytic notes” (Charmaz, 1996, p. 28). According to Charmaz (1996), grounded theory meshes well with other theoretical underpinnings, including Organizational Studies and Analysis model because it provides a “set of procedures to follow” (p.30).

Materials

This dissertation sought to understand the relationship between the significant rural student population in the state of Illinois, and their matriculation toward a postsecondary future. Further, it sought to understand, through narrative historical analysis, how Illinois state higher education policy and structure, state university purpose, and state higher education legislation helped or harmed a rural student’s ability to matriculate to a postsecondary future. Maclean, Harvey, and Clegg (2016) posit that “through engagement with primary materials and critical reading of established narratives, history stimulates thinking on vital organizational and institutional phenomena that might otherwise go underappreciated, engendering new theoretical ideas, propositions and arguments” (p. 626).

Howell and Prevenier (2001) state that “testimonies were usually created for the specific purposes of the age in which they were made...the content of a testimony is thus more important than its form. Still, the form of such a report tells the alert historian a great deal” (p. 18). Howell and Prevenier (2001) define source typologies for historiographical research *as narrative, diplomatic/judicial and social*. Narrative sources include “chronicles or tracts presented in narrative form...written in order to impart a particular message” (p. 20). The authors describe diplomatic/judicial sources as “authenticated documents, intended to provide evidence of a legal transaction or proof of the existence of juristic fact and which could serve as evidence in a judicial proceeding in the event of a dispute” (p. 21). Lastly, the authors describe social documents as:

the products of record-keeping by bureaucracies such as state, charitable organizations, foundations, churches and schools. Containing information of economic, social, political or judicial import, these documents provide accounts of particular charges or agencies, meetings, business policy...administrative structure, fiscal structure, or political administration. (p. 22)

Evidence for this dissertation took all three forms, as described by Howell and Prevenier (2001). Narrative and social pieces of evidence existed in many primary and secondary sources, focused on college and career pathways, rural student persistence in Illinois, and remediation education in Illinois. Since many pieces of legislation have been enacted in the state of Illinois and at the Federal level, since 1965, on behalf of student protections, many diplomatic pieces of evidence were introduced and analyzed. Below, in Table 1, are examples of historical evidence and data that were analyzed by the researcher. This table is not meant to be exhaustive, rather, a starting point toward the historical truth.

Table 1

Referenced Historical Data

Type of Historical Data	Data/Evidence
Narrative	State Transfer Memorandums of Understanding (MOU)
	University Archived Documents
Diplomatic/Judicial – Federal	Higher Education Act of 1965
	Perkins Career and Technical Education Program (CTE)
	Pell Grant Program
	Rural Education Achievement Program (REAP)
	Perkins V Innovation and Modernization Grant Program
	Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act
Diplomatic/Judicial – State	Illinois Community College Act of 1965
	Connect Illinois Act
	College Planning Act
	Dual Credit Act
	Postsecondary and Workforce Transition Act
	Bridge Program for Underrepresented Student Act
	Credit for Prior Learning Act
	Community College Transfer Grant Act
	Higher Education Loan Act
	Higher Education Student Assistance Act
	Retention of Illinois Students and Equity Act
	12 Illinois Public University Charters
Social	Newspapers/News Video

Table Continues

Table 1, Continues
Referenced Historical Data

Type of Historical Data	Data/Evidence
	Illinois Association of College Admission Counseling (IACAC) correspondence
	National Association of College Admission Counseling (NACAC) correspondence
	Admission/University Social Media feeds from 12 Public Illinois Universities
	Scholarly Articles
	University Archived Documents

Note. State documents represented in this table are for the State of Illinois.

Procedures

The process of historical research is intrinsic to the researcher, however; there are several steps necessary to ensure a quality end product (Gunn & Faire, 2012). Grounded theory, according to Charmaz (1996) asserts that analytic categories come directly from the data, not from preconceived concepts or hypothesis. Further, grounded theorists begin their studies with a “point of departure” (p. 32). The starting point, or point of departure, for this study consists of artifacts in all three types of stated historical evidence – Narrative, Diplomatic/Judicial and Social. Noted in the previous section, many artifacts exist within these categories, but further research will be necessary to reach creative synthesis.

Starting with Narrative artifacts, the researcher used the ERIC (EBSCO) search database as provided by the University library. Keywords used for this search came from the themes present within the literature review in Chapter II. Keywords, for the initial search process, included, “Poverty,” “Outmigration,” “Social Capital,” “Capital,” “Academic Preparation,”

“College Recruitment,” and “Isolation.” Additionally, to specify these keywords in a rural setting, the term rural was also be added. For example, “Rural Poverty,” “Rural Outmigration,” “Rural Social Capital,” “Rural Capital,” “Rural Academic Preparation,” “Rural College Recruitment,” and “Rural Isolation.” Table 2 illustrates the initial search keywords.

Table 2
Initial Keywords for Search

Keywords
Poverty
Outmigration
Social Capital
Capital
Academic Preparation
College Recruitment
Isolation
Rural Poverty
Rural Outmigration
Rural Social Capital
Rural Capital
Rural Academic Preparation
Rural Recruitment
Rural Isolation

Note. This list of keywords is not exhaustive.

For Diplomatic/Judicial artifacts, the researcher first separated the initial search between Federal artifacts, and State (Illinois, Pennsylvania and Georgia). The states of Pennsylvania and Georgia were chosen for comparison because of their similar rural student makeup to Illinois and significant university systems. For Federal artifacts, including legislation and legal work, the researcher used Westlaw search database as provided by the University library, and congress.gov. For State artifacts, the researcher used Westlaw search database, as well as individual state legislative databases, including Illinois, www.ilga.gov, Pennsylvania, www.legis.state.pa.us, and Georgia, www.legis.ga.gov. As a starting point of analysis, the researcher used the keywords noted earlier as starting point of cultivation and analysis.

For social artifacts, the researcher used the ERIC (EBSCO) database as provided by the University library. As a secondary database, the researcher searched social media networks Facebook, Twitter and Instagram as used by colleges/universities, as well as government entities. The keywords noted earlier were used as a starting point of artifact cultivation and analysis. Once the starting point was achieved by the researcher, analysis of initial artifacts will proceed.

Data Analysis

Data analysis within the grounded theory concept drives subsequent data collection (Charmaz, 1996). According to Charmaz (1996), “by gathering rich data and by making meanings explicit, [the researcher] will have solid material with which to create an analysis” (p. 37). Grounded theory has four phases of analysis: line by line coding, focused coding, memo writing and conceptual analysis.

Line by line coding was the first step of the coding process. Analyzing each line of data within an artifact, while time consuming, helped the researcher make decisions about the kind of data to collect next in the process. It also provided the researcher intimate knowledge about the various meanings across several categories. Line by line coding led to the formulation of processes and categories, ideal for the creation of step two: focused coding (Charmaz, 1996).

Focused coding is the process of taking large chunks of line by line coding, and pulling concepts, processes and categories out in a larger context. This practice of distilling line by line code into broader, more generic categories led to a truer understanding of the implications of the data. It also provided a clear picture of how data is possibly intermixed or relates to other data collected. The creation of categories leads to the next step of coding within grounded theory: memo-writing.

According to Charmaz (1996), memo-writing “consists of taking categories apart by breaking them into components” (p. 43). Memo-writing led to a further understanding of the data’s characteristics and underlying assumptions. It also led to more data collection and analysis with the goal of intimate familiarity. The researcher compared and contrast different categories. By elaborating the defined categories of focused writing, the researcher showed sufficient knowledge of the topic (Charmaz, 1996).

After creating a conceptual analysis, it was important to reference the literature review to compare and contrast the major themes presented. As Charmaz (1996) mentions, “in short, the researcher hones the abstract analysis to define essential properties, assumptions, relationships and processes while providing sufficient actual data to demonstrate how the researcher’s analysis is grounded in lived experience” (p. 47). The process of grounded theory also illustrated the narration of historical perspectives leading to creative synthesis as prescribed by the Organizational Studies and Analysis model. Together, these research methods served as the framework for this historical analysis.

By experiencing and analyzing this data, the researcher was able to realize the themes and concepts present regarding rural students, and how law and policy, including federal, state and university, applies to them. Using grounded theory provided a rich experience of fluidity and interaction with the data, because of the open-ended nature this type of analysis provided (Charmaz, 2006). This data formed the direction of the analysis, rather an external prescription. Figure 3 shows the progression and process of this study.

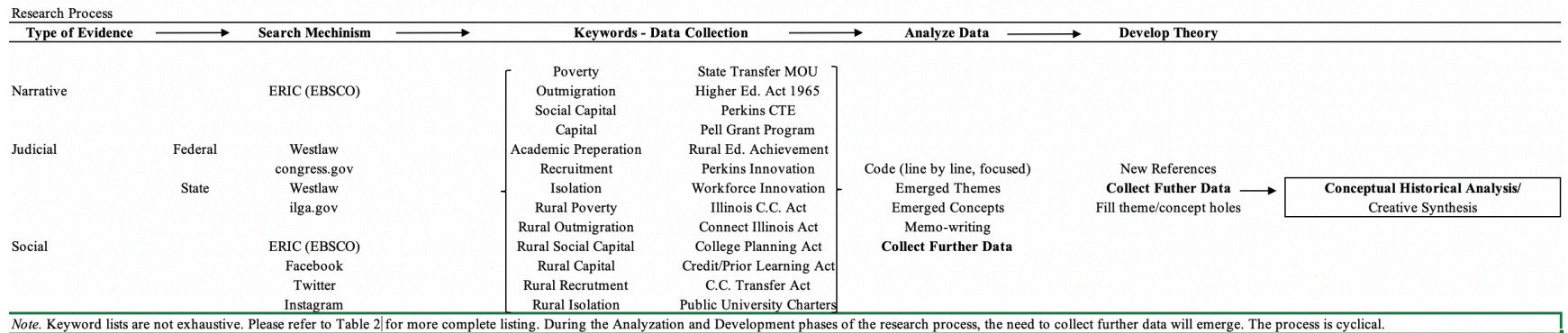


Figure 3. Study Progression and Process

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Introduction – Federal Legislation

The issues of access and equity have been at the foundation of the higher education federal policy discussion. A number of presidential administrations have grappled with this issue of higher education access and equity, starting with Truman’s Commission on Higher Education ([PCHE], 1947). The report was met with mixed reaction by lawmakers, as it was the first formal work with recommendations for higher education access, and government involvement regarding funding financial aid solutions. Even though the report never made it into legislation, scholars argue that the Truman Commission created the first national discourse on higher education policy (Gilbert & Heller, 2013).

The Commission defined equity and access issues as both financial and discriminatory. According to Gilbert and Heller (2013), “the commission’s recommendations about increasing access were also tied to its concern over making public education equally available to all students regardless of their race, creed, sex, or national origin” (p. 418). The Commission’s report, created in a post-World War II era, focused on public college and universities’ ability to answer the demand of an educated public; what factors should determine a worthy college applicant other than economic considerations; and who should be responsible to help? In other words, were there enough seats available for deserving applicants? What made an applicant deserving? And, should states help pay for deserving students when they cannot afford to attend without aid?

The report made clear that higher education was imperative for society moving forward: economic status should not determine a student’s ability to pursue higher education. The commission report read:

It is the responsibility of the community, at the local, State, and National levels, to guarantee that financial barriers do not prevent any able and otherwise qualified young person from receiving the opportunity for higher education. There must be developed in this country the widespread realization that money expended for education is the wisest and soundest of investments in the national interest. The democratic community cannot tolerate a society based upon education for the well-to-do alone. If college opportunities are restricted to those in higher income brackets, the way is open to the creation and perpetuation of a class society which has no place in the American way of life. (Vol. II, p. 23)

The Truman Commission had four major recommendations to rapidly increase access for students pursuing higher education (Gilbert & Heller, 2013). First, end discrimination based on race. Second, end discrimination based on religion. Third, eliminate discrimination based on antifeminism. Fourth, eliminate financial barriers through the development of national scholarship (undergraduate) and fellowship (graduate) programs (Gilbert & Heller, 2013). Though all recommendations were controversial, eliminating financial barriers for students received the most attention, both by the public, and policy makers (Gilbert & Heller, 2013; Freeland, 1992).

Higher Education Act of 1965

Eighteen years separated the Truman Commission report and the Higher Education Act of 1965 (HEA). The only major higher education initiative in the almost two decades separating the Truman Commission report and the HEA was the G.I. Bill (Greenberg, 1997). The G.I. Bill was certainly effective at opening the doors of higher education for a greater population, but was limited in its scope, as it was available only to veterans of World War II (Greenberg, 1997). It was not until 1965 that the government initiated a more focused effort to partner financial resources with eligible, low-income students, hoping for a postsecondary opportunity (TG Research and Analytical Services, 2005).

Fresh off the passage of the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Johnson administration moved forward with the significant passage of the Higher Education Act of 1965. According to Davis et al. (2013), “Prompted by the general acceptance that the federal government had a role to play in equalizing educational opportunity, the HEA promoted equality of opportunity for disadvantaged students through the dissemination of financial resources” (p. 49). The HEA established five titles within the original legislation – (I) continuing education and community service programs; (II) upgraded college and university libraries; (III) aide historically Black colleges; (IV) creation of student aid for college and universities; (V) foundation of the National Teacher Corps. (Mumper, 1996). For the purposes of this study, Title IV is applicable.

As Gilbert and Heller (2013) point out, the preamble to Title IV of the HEA of 1965 reiterates the voice of the Truman Commission recommendations for student aid. The Truman Commission Report reads:

It is the responsibility of the community, at the local, State and National levels, to guarantee that financial barriers do not prevent any able and otherwise qualified young person from receiving the opportunity for higher education. (Vol. II, p. 23)

The preamble of the Higher Education Act of 1965, Title IV reads:

It is the purpose of this part to provide, through institutions of higher education, educational opportunity grants to assist in making available benefits of higher education to qualified high school graduates of exceptional financial need, who for lack of financial means of their own or of their families would be unable to obtain such benefits without such aid. (1965, § 401)

To meet the needs of students referenced in the preamble, Title IV introduced three forms of aid: Educational Opportunity Grants (EOG); federally guaranteed student loans; and continuation of the federal Perkins loan, work-study and other campus-based programs (Mumper, 1996). EOG’s were awarded to institutions via state partnerships and were designed to eliminate the financial

barriers presented to low-income, disadvantaged students (Gilbert & Heller, 2013; Mumper, 1996).

Presidential administrations and political movements have influenced the reauthorizations of the HEA over the past 5 decades. Reauthorizations in 1968, 1972, 1976, 1980, 1986, 1992, 1998 and 2008 have seen increases and decreases to grant aid programs. Reauthorizations have seen the push toward privatization of student loans, and subsequently, the push toward growth in government backed loans. Many foundational programs created within the HEA reauthorization process have developed and remain today.

Pell Grants

The Reauthorization of 1972 proved momentous for Title IV of the HEA. According to Gladieux & Hauptman (1995), scholars acknowledge that the 1972 Reauthorization cemented the “basic charter of today’s federal student aid system” (p. 16). At the core of the 1972 Amendment was the “creation of the Basic Education Opportunity Grant (BEOG), which became known as the Pell Grant in 1980” (TG Research and Analytical Services, 2005, p. 33). The Pell grant program was named after Senator Claiborne Pell; a staunch advocate for higher education funding for the nation’s neediest students (TG Research and Analytical Services, 2005). In cooperation with the BEOG program, the 1972 Amendment also introduced a more systematic and centralized federal process for determining student need. According to Heller (2011), “BEOGs were very successful, with funding expanding quite rapidly in the early years after their introduction, helping solidify the federal government’s role in ensuring equity in postsecondary education access” (p. 426).

The original intent of the BEOG/Pell Grant program was to help the neediest students (Baum, 2015). Initially, the Pell Grant served primarily students 24 or younger because of its

focus on circumstances related to the needs “of recent high school graduates from low-income families” (Baum, 2015, p. 24). As community college programs became more relevant to the needs of working adults, the Pell Grant program became a way for adult students to viably return to a postsecondary program. Since the 1980’s the Pell Grant has been used, disproportionately, toward adult education, as more working adults returned to the classroom. While the success of the Pell Grant program is admirable, dollars have shifted away from its original intent – serving recent high school graduates (Baum, 2015).

The amount of a student’s Pell Grant is figured, today, by a sophisticated formula within the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), offered by the Department of Education. Today, the FAFSA is an online form used for determining a student’s Expected Family Contribution (EFC). The process of filling out a FAFSA as a student, and parent, rely on the use of technology and broadband internet access. As recent as 2003, 22% of applicants still relied on paper forms (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). Today, the online FAFSA is the only form of delivery promoted by the U.S. Department of Education (U.S. Department of Education, 2020).

Because of the shift of dollars, and low completion rates shown by the Pell Grant program’s neediest students, scholars have asked if the Pell Grant program should be restructured to focus more on student success (Baum, 2015). Making the Pell Grant eligibility process more transparent, easier to understand, and earlier in the college planning process are all recommendations presented in the research. Data exists at the federal level, and individual level, to make accurate predictions for Pell Grant amounts for all families, and individuals who qualify. But, the reliance on access to technology remains a concern (Baum, 2015; Capt, 2013; Jackson, 2003).

While technology advancements have made increased access for many, reliance on a sophisticated, internet based forms poses a threat to completion for rural families with little access to broadband, secured internet. Advancements leading to the use of smartphone/tablet devices, internet or application based programming, can be unattainable for rural families. It is the new millenniums' version of accessibility issues that the Truman administration and the HEA of 1965 worked to address.

FAFSA

Stemming from the 1972 Reauthorization of the HEA, and the need for a uniform process to determine eligibility and financial need, the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) was created (Heller, 2011). FAFSA is the modern name and acronym for the Federal Student Aid Application. Data retrieved from this application is used, in concert with Internal Revenue Service tax data, to create an Expected Family Contribution (EFC) for the applicant and his/her family. The complex formula integrated into this online application is used for several financial aid programs, and all Federal grant and loan program consideration (TG Research and Analytical Services, 2005). The FAFSA data, including EFC is shared with postsecondary institutions selected by the applicant. EFC is typically used for individual state programs, as well as institutional programs focused on need based aid (Fuller, 2014).

As mentioned, the FAFSA is an online application portal that requires the use of technology and broadband, secured internet. It also requires students and parents to be prepared with a significant amount of personal information (i.e. tax documents, salary information, assets and liabilities). Scholars argue that it also requires a great deal of human capital to complete the financial aid process, navigating the FAFSA and the complex structure of Federal Financial aid. As Archibald (2002) mentioned,

in its present form, the federal approach to student financial aid is an amalgam of state programs, federal programs and tax credits...one consequence of this complex structure is a bewildering maze of programs and options that, due to inefficiencies, is predisposed to under-perform in meeting students' needs. (p. 46)

The FAFSA is central to the argument of policy makers that the financial aid process is complex and mystifying (Woo & Lew, 2020). The FAFSA completion process has been cited as a barrier to postsecondary success because of the lack of social capital and awareness evidenced by populations displaying the most need (Woo & Lew, 2020).

Federal Student Loans/Parent PLUS Loans

As Adamson (2009) argued, "Of all the transformations that have taken place in the American university..., perhaps the most radical is the shift toward financing higher education through borrowed money" (p. 97). Through each reauthorization, Federal legislation has dictated more emphasis on borrowed money, rather than grant funding for financial aid purposes. During the 1980's and 1990's, government backed loans for postsecondary education expanded dramatically (Fuller, 2014). According to Fuller (2014), "despite an increasingly complex and detailed legislative history, the pattern of increased lending and maximum loan awards remained constant following the 2008 reauthorization" (p. 58).

According to the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), the average amount of student loans received in 2017-2018 by first-time, dependent students in all rural categories of Illinois, as defined by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), is \$5,933 (IPEDS, 2020). Figure 4 shows a nine year snapshot of average student loan amounts by first-time, dependent rural students in Illinois.

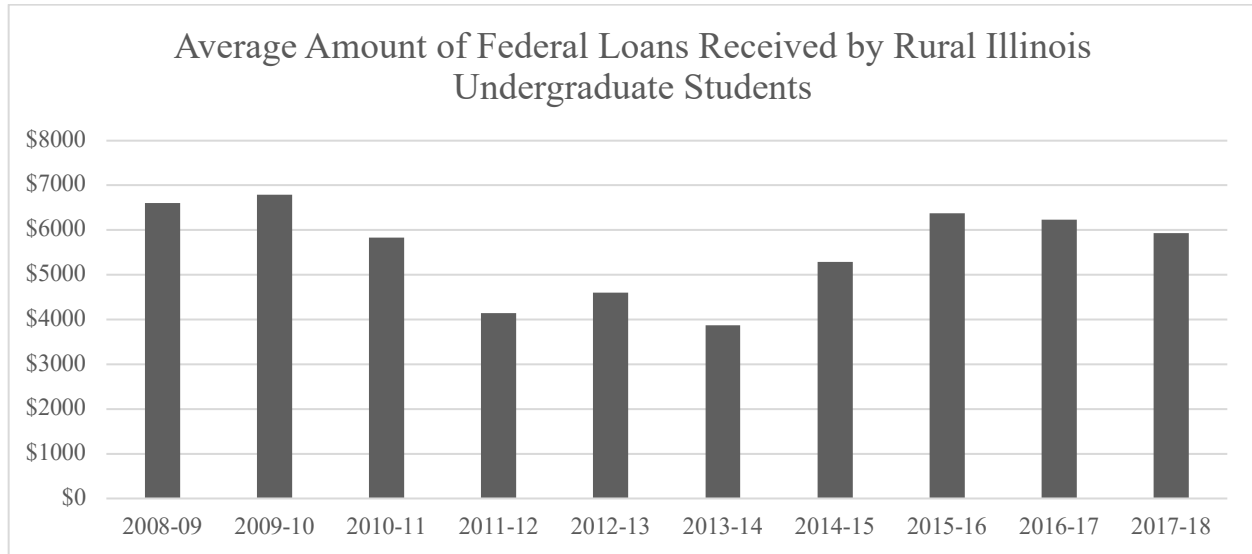


Figure 4. Federal Loans received by Rural Illinois Undergraduate Students

Unfortunately, today, maximum loan awards, mixed with federal grant programs rarely cover all of the expenses of attending a 4-year institution (Janko et al., 2019). According to the U.S. Department of Education (2015), the Parent PLUS loan program exists to fill the need gap between total cost of attendance minus financial aid received. Woo and Lew (2020) write, “created in 1980, the Parent PLUS program allowed middle-income parents to borrow for their children who needed assistance covering the full cost of college” (p. 2). The popularity of Parent PLUS loans has risen over the past four decades to over \$12 billion in new government backed Parent PLUS loans to parents of undergraduates in 2016-17 (Woo & Lew, 2020; U.S. Department of Education, 2017).

Eligibility for Parent PLUS loans is not guaranteed, however. The program is focused on parents that are financially stable, credit-worthy and have a willingness to take on potentially large sums of debt. Chen and Nunnery (2019) argue that reliance on this type loan program moving forward potentially ostracizes first-generation students from low income backgrounds from successfully navigating expenses related to tuition and living. Having the social capital and

support to navigate the financial aid process, as well as necessary resources to pay for the experience has shown to be major indicators of student success and persistence (Woo & Lew, 2020). Alexander and Arceneaux (2015) contend that a more modern Federal-State partnership is most effective way to combat access and financial barriers for low-income, first generation students.

Illinois' Response to Student Financial Aid Barriers

Higher Education Assistance Act

In response to the Truman Commission Report of 1947, and preceding the Higher Education Act of 1965, Illinois legislators drafted the Higher Education Assistance Act (HEAA) in 1957 (ISAC, 2020). 110 ILCS 947§5 states:

The General Assembly finds and declares that (1) the provision of a higher education for all residents of this State who desire a higher education and are properly qualified therefore is important to the welfare and security of this State and Nation and, consequently, is an important public purpose, and (2) many qualified students are deterred by financial considerations from completing their education, with a consequent irreparable loss to the State and Nation of talents vital to welfare and security...A system of financial assistance of scholarships, grants, and loans for qualified residents of college age will enable them to attend qualified institutions of their choice in the State, public or private. (ilga.gov, 2020)

The HEAA outlines the appointment of the Illinois State Scholarship Commission (ISSC), now known as the Illinois Student Assistance Commission (ISAC)(110 ILCS 947 §§ 15-20), and two merit based, and two need based programs managed by ISAC (110 ILCS 947 §§ 25-36).

According to 110 ILCS 947 § 15, ISAC is comprised of 10 persons, appointed by the Governor, with the advice and consent of the Senate. Commissioners represent various entities of higher education throughout the state of Illinois and serve a 6 year term. Qualifications for appointment are very specific within the statute so that a variety of audiences are represented. Public universities, private universities, community colleges, private citizens (with higher

education knowledge and interest, but not employed by the state) and a student are represented. According to ISAC.org (2020), one of the main goals of the commission is to “improve the transition from high school to college for students in need and provide support to students in college or returning to college” (“About ISAC,” 2020). The HEAA and ISAC specify two merit based scholarship programs, and two need based grant programs. All programs are dependent upon Illinois General Assembly budget appropriations (110 ILCS 947 § 15).

Illinois State Scholar

The Illinois State Scholar program is designed to award Illinois’ highest achieving students with recognition and grant dollars (110 ILCS 947 § 25). According to subsection (c) of section 25, an Illinois high school can nominate students that achieve a standardized test score in the 95th percentile of students in Illinois taking an approved exam. High school scholastic records are also used as an evaluative component for the nomination. For students who choose to attend an Illinois public or private institution, a one-time grant of \$1000 is awarded. Student’s also receive a certificate signifying their achievement as an Illinois State Scholar (110 ILCS 947 § 25). The Illinois State Scholar program is a merit based and need-blind, meaning financial need is not considered as a part of the award recognition process (110 ILCS 947 § 25).

Merit Recognition Scholarship

Similar to the Illinois State Scholar program, the Merit Recognition Scholarship is available to eligible residents of Illinois. According to the HEAA, resident students of Illinois who are citizens of the United States or permanent residents are eligible for consideration after their 6th completed semester of high school (110 ILCS 947 § 31). Academically, eligible students’ high school grade point average ranked at or above the 95th percentile within their class after the 6th completed semester are qualified. Also, students’ showing proficiency in state

supported standardized tests at or above the 95th percentile compared against the state average, before or during their 6th semester of high school are eligible.

All eligible students are required to attend an Illinois public or private institution to receive a one-time, \$1000 scholarship, paid directly to the institution. Students' who receive the Merit Recognition Scholarship are not eligible for the Illinois State Scholar recognition and grant monies (110 ILCS 947 § 31). Eligibility and consideration for the Merit Recognition Scholarship is not automatic, and requires a separate application provided by ISAC (110 ILCS 947 § 31). Like the Illinois State Scholar program, the Merit Recognition Scholarship is a merit based and need-blind, meaning financial need is not considered as a part of the award recognition process (110 ILCS 947 § 31).

Monetary Award Program

The Illinois Monetary Award Program (MAP) is defined within Section 35 of the HEAA. Created in 1967, MAP is Illinois' primary need based grant program, available to residents of Illinois, that are also citizens or permanent residents of the United States ("About ISAC", 2020).

According to Section 35, subsection (e-5):

The General Assembly finds and declares that it is an important purpose of the Monetary Award Program to facilitate access to college both for students who pursue postsecondary education immediately following high school and for those who pursue postsecondary education later in life...and are seeking to improve their economic position through education. (110 ILCS 947 § 35, e-5)

To benefit from the MAP grant program, students must "demonstrate financial need" (ISAC.org, 2020). The exact formula for determining financial need is shown in Figure 5 however, a more succinct description is available via ISAC.org:

Colleges use the MAP formula to determine eligibility. The formula distributes the appropriated funds so the neediest students receive grant assistance. Several components are used to determine eligibility, including: information provided on your FAFSA [from

which your expected family contribution (EFC) is calculated], the cost of attendance at the college you plan to attend and the amount of other financial aid you are receiving. (ISAC, 2020)

FY2019 MAP Formula	
Budget	
1.	Use 2009-2010 reported tuition and fees at all institutions, assessed at 100 percent at all institutions.
2.	Use one living allowance for all applicants, set to \$4,875.
Resources	
1.	Use 80 percent of Pell Grant eligibility as determined by the 2009-2010 Pell Grant Payment Schedule, with a \$5,350 maximum.
2.	Calculate the ISAC adjusted EFC by inflating the Federal EFC. <i>Adjusted Dependent Students' Parent Contribution:</i> Adjustment Factor = [Parent Contribution (PC)/11,000 + 1.10] rounded to 2 decimal places Adjusted PC = PC x Adjustment Factor Adjusted EFC = Adjusted PC + highest of Student Contribution or self-help expectation <i>Adjusted Independent Student Contribution:</i> Adjustment Factor = [EFC/11,000 + 1.10] rounded to 2 decimal places Adjusted EFC = EFC x Adjustment Factor or self-help expectation
3.	Use a minimum self-help expectation of \$1,800 for all students.
Award Amounts	
1.	Set the maximum award equal to the lesser of \$4,968 or the tuition and mandatory fees specified in the budget. Set the minimum award to \$300, and round maximum eligibility in \$150 increments to calculate
2.	Provide no award for applicants who have an EFC equal to or greater than \$9,000.
3.	Reduce awards by 2 percent.
4.	As determined necessary when first-term claims are received, cancel release some suspended applications to spend as much of the appropriation without exceeding it OR reduce second-and third-term awards to stay within the appropriation.
5.	Students who have used 75 or more MAP paid credit hours must be a junior or senior to be eligible for MAP. Students who have used 135 or more MAP paid credit hours are not eligible.

Figure 5. 2019 Monetary Award Program Formula for 2019-2020

Beyond meeting the financial requirements for the MAP grant, students must be admitted and enrolled to an approved Illinois college or university; maintain satisfactory academic progress (determined by institution); have not received a bachelor's degree and not exceeded MAP paid credit hours (ISAC, 2020). MAP grant funds are capped at a maximum of 15 credit hours, not to exceed 135 total credit hours total, freshman/sophomore status maximum is 75 total credit hours. The minimum amount of credit hours eligible for is 3 (ISAC, 2020).

MAP grant funding does not last long and is reliant on applicants to file their FAFSA as early as possible. Each year, ISAC announces a suspension date for the awards, as funding has been outpaced by demand. The suspension date is important, not only for applying freshman, but also returning sophomore, junior and senior students at approved Illinois colleges and universities. Once the suspension date is reached each spring, no more awards are announced or awarded (ISAC, 2020). Based on ISAC data, the maximum award for MAP has been capped at \$4,968 since the 2001-2002 fiscal year. After using the MAP formula for awarding grant funds, the maximum has actually fluctuated over the past two decades. Figure 6 shows actual maximum award history from 2001-2019.

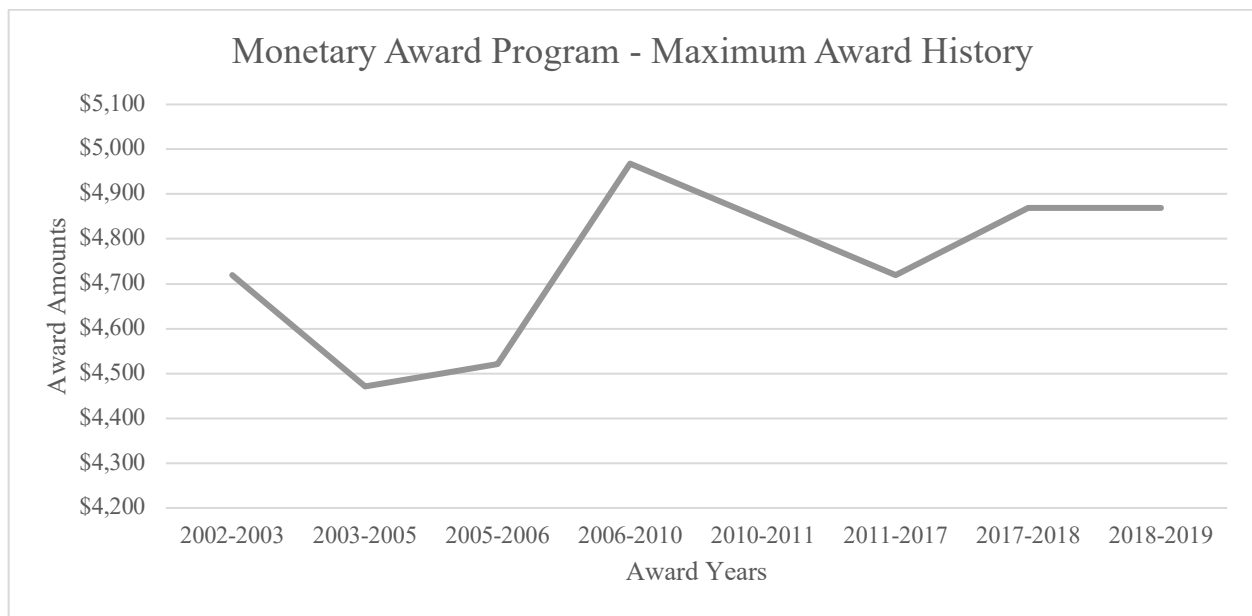


Figure 6. MAP Maximum Award History

According to ISAC (2019), over 75% of MAP grant payouts went to students living in Chicago (Cook County), and collar counties of Cook. According to IPEDS data, for the 2017-2018 academic year, only 3,527 first time students from rural locations in Illinois completed the FAFSA, and received Federal Aid in any form (IPEDS, 2020). Because the MAP grant requires FAFSA completion before the suspension date, and federal data show FAFSA completion in

rural counties in Illinois being lower than collar counties and Chicago, it makes sense that MAP payouts to rural students are dwarfed by those in urban and suburban Illinois locations. Also important to note, outreach efforts, specifically by ISAC, have diminished over the past five years (2015-2019) according to the ISAC Databook (ISAC Databook, 2019). Outreach efforts reported by ISAC are reported in Figure 7.

<u>Activity</u>	<u>FY2015</u>	<u>FY2016</u>	<u>FY2017</u>	<u>FY2018</u>	<u>FY2019</u>
Professional Development Workshops	142	58	51	44	45
Financial Aid Presentations	766	844	878	730	601
FAFSA Completion Workshops	722	840	1,010	924	910
College Fairs	115	106	75	58	43
College Preparation Sessions	1,917	1,400	1,562	910	884
Other Events	1,333	1,333	1,469	1,103	973
<u>Attendance at Outreach Events**</u>					
Students	109,500	98,500	103,000	74,000	70,500
Parents	27,500	30,000	32,000	29,000	24,500
Professionals	11,500	11,500	12,500	8,500	7,500

Figure 7. Summary of ISAC Outreach Activities

Community College Transfer Grant

As outlined in the Community College Transfer Grant Program Act (CCTGPA), students who have earned an associate's degree from an Illinois community college, and have enrolled in an Illinois college or university by the fall semester following the conferment of an earned associate's degree, could be eligible for a recurring grant award (110 ILCS 924 § 15). According to section 15, EFC's of \$9,000 and lower will be considered as long as other eligibility requirements are met. Students are required to show a maintained GPA of at least 3.0 on a 4.0 scale. Like other grant and scholarship programs, ISAC maintains the Community College Transfer Grant, and requires students be residents of Illinois, and U.S. citizens or permanent residents (110 ILCS 924 § 15).

Federal Developmental Programming

TRIO Grant Programs

Stemming from the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, TRIO programs were created to serve low-income, first-generation and/or disabled students seeking postsecondary opportunity leading toward a credential. TRIO programs were funded, originally, under Title IV, Section 402, subsection (d) of the HEA of 1965. Throughout the reauthorization process, TRIO has expanded from three programs (from which the founding name TRIO originates) to eight programs currently (U.S. Department of Education, 2020a). Different than federal student aid programs, the college, university or community organization, rather than students, apply through a rigorous grant application process (U.S. Department of Education, 2020a). If awarded, the institution can offer federally funded opportunities for a specific population of low-income students. The onus is on the postsecondary institution or community organization to offer TRIO opportunities, not the student (U.S. Department of Education, 2020a).

Each TRIO program serves a unique group of students and have distinctive program objectives. Listed in Table 3 are all eight TRIO programs.

Table 3
TRIO Programs

Program Name	Student Level/Participant Level
Upward Bound	Secondary
Educational Talent Search	Middle/Secondary
Educational Opportunity Centers	Adult
Staff and Leadership Training Authority	TRIO Staff
Ronald E. McNair Post-Baccalaureate Achievement Program	Graduate Student
Upward Bound Math and Science	Secondary (Math/Science focus)
Veterans Upward Bound	Veterans
TRIO Student Support Services (SSS)	Postsecondary, Undergraduate

While most TRIO programs have potential to benefit a rural student, depending his or her place in life, this study is focused on the postsecondary experience. With that in mind, TRIO Student Support Services provides the most appropriate service for deeper analysis.

TRIO Student Support Services (TRIO SSS) was created within the Reauthorization of the HEA in 1968, to increase persistence, retention and matriculation of low-income, first-generation, disadvantaged students (U.S. Department of Education, 2020b). TRIO SSS is an application based program, requiring the student to apply, verify program eligibility, and be accepted into the campus' program. Acceptance can be competitive, as campus resources are capped by the competitive grant process. The average number of students being served by TRIO SSS is just under 200 per campus (U.S. Department of Education, 2020b).

As part of the competitive grant process, the Department of Education requires that institutions awarded with TRIO SSS offer services such as tutoring, financial literacy counseling, personal counseling, peer mentoring, disability concerns. Students who apply and are accepted into the TRIO SSS are eligible for services provided immediately. TRIO SSS is available on more than 1000 campuses, nationwide, serving approximately 200,000 students (U.S. Department of Education, 2020b).

TRIO SSS has shown promise in persistence and matriculation of low-income, disadvantaged and/or disabled students. Chaney (2010) identified, after a national evaluation of TRIO SSS, that students involved in the program were 10% more likely to complete an associate's or bachelor's degree program. Additionally, TRIO SSS students were up to 18% more likely to persist or graduate with a baccalaureate degree than would be estimated if they had not received services (Chaney, 2010). TRIO SSS has been identified as a model program for

low-income, first-generation and/or disabled students that produce positive outcomes (Chaney, 2010).

Each campus that has been awarded a TRIO SSS grant is monitored and evaluated individually by the U.S. Department of Education (U.S. Department of Education, 2020b). It is incumbent on each individual TRIO SSS program to understand their unique campus population, recruit eligible participants, and construct an impactful series of services to benefit the most at risk population (U.S. Department of Education, 2020b). Also important to note, eligibility parameters for participants does not guarantee more financial aid from the institution. In fact, most additional aid provided to students within TRIO SSS would be at the institution level, not at the federal level. It is the institution's decision and prerogative as to how institutional aid dollars are stacked within a student's financial aid package. Some TRIO SSS grant funds exist for first and second year TRIO SSS students; however, eligibility is tightly monitored (U.S. Department of Education, 2020b).

All TRIO programs are on a competitive 5 year grant cycle, and the application process is complex. This is important to note, because all TRIO programs, including Upward Bound, Educational Talent Search and Educational Opportunity Centers are separate grant applications (U.S. Department of Education, 2020c). In addition, each grant program has to have an institutional or community organization as the grant applicant. The grant applicant must be highly specialized in federal grant writing and have significant knowledge of the grant disbursement process (U.S. Department of Education, 2020c).

As noted in Table 4.1, Upward Bound, Educational Talent Search and Educational Opportunity Centers serve specific types of students at different places in their educational journey (U.S. Department of Education, 2020d). Providing programming at the middle school

and high school level does show improvement in overall postsecondary goal setting, academic performance and college planning literacy (U.S. Department of Education, 2020d). Based on the unique needs of rural students explored in the literature review section of this study, it is very possible that these middle school and high school grant programs could provide needed services to many first-generation, low-income students.

Illinois' Response to Rural Student Developmental Programming

There are a few pieces of legislation that identify the importance of the transition from high school to college and make recommendations toward a smooth transition. All policy efforts at the state level are focused on transition to a postsecondary environment or career exploration, which is admirable, but none address student development once the student has arrived on the college campus. Through analysis of the data, it is clear that the Illinois General Assembly, Illinois Board of Higher Education and Illinois Community College Board consider student transition, retention and development purely an academic affairs issue, rather than an academic affairs and student affairs issue. As an identified academic affairs issue, Illinois has directed policy efforts toward its system of community colleges in the form of dual credit opportunities and remedial/developmental coursework.

Dual Credit Quality Act

Section 10 of the 110 ILCS 27, known as the Dual Credit Quality Act identifies the purpose of the legislation as (1) to reduce college costs; (2) speed time to degree completion; (3) improve curriculum for high school students and the alignment of the curriculum with college and workplace expectations; (4) facilitate the transition between high school and college; (5) enhance the communication between high schools and colleges; and (6) offer opportunities for improving degree attainment for underserved student populations (110 ILCS 27 § 10).

The Act identifies the role of the community college and the role of the district high school in the creation of dual credit coursework. The curriculum, provided through the community college, is required to be at the level of rigor as the same course on the community college campus. Fees and tuition can be charged, but the community college is charged with keeping costs “reasonable and promote student access to those courses” (110 ILCS 27 § 16). No mechanism is identified, however, to aid in the payment of dual credit cost other than the regular financial aid process offered by the community college. The Act does call for all community college/high school partnerships to offer coursework that falls within the Illinois Articulation Initiative (IAI), so that transfer of the college credit is guaranteed at Illinois public, and most private postsecondary institutions (110 ILCS 27 § 16).

Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness Act

Signed into law into 2016, the Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness Act is another piece of legislation that focuses on the preparation of students, and their navigation career and college planning. This legislation provides the framework for a collaboration of ISAC, IBHE, ICCB and the Office of Education System Innovation (OESI) called Illinois Postsecondary and Career Expectations (Illinois PaCE) (110 ILCS 148 § 10). Still in the pilot phase, Illinois PaCE focuses mostly in the academic preparation of students at the middle and secondary levels and provides career and postsecondary counseling as a part of their framework.

Section 15 of 110 ILCS 148 requires that all postsecondary and career expectations must address (1) career exploration and development; (2) postsecondary institution exploration, preparation and selection; and (3) financial aid and financial literacy. Because remedial education has been identified as a postsecondary barrier, Section 60 of 110 ILCS 148 provides a framework for transitional mathematics in coordination with ICCB in an effort to eliminate the

need for remedial mathematics courses at the community college level. School districts could opt into this framework during the 2019-2020 school year.

Illinois GearUp/ISACorps

Illinois GearUp (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) is a federal and state partnership grant, focused on at risk middle school and high school students. ISAC was awarded a GearUp grant in 2016, and the grant runs on a seven year cycle. Currently, ISAC has partnered with 25 middle schools and 25 high schools across the state of Illinois and has established a curriculum focused on exploration of undergraduate programs (ISAC.org, 2020). ISAC projects that the GearUp grant will have the opportunity to reach as many as 30,500 students across the state of Illinois (ISAC.org). As of 2018, 39 GearUp grants had been awarded to state agencies by the U.S. Department of Education. The average grant amount awarded was 3.4 million dollars (U.S. Department of Education, 2020).

ISACorps was created in 2009 as an outreach mechanism focused on college access and financial aid literacy. The Corps is made up of recent college graduates employed by ISAC. According to ISAC.org (2020), ISACorps is charged with partnering with local schools, businesses and nonprofit organizations “to deliver free career and college planning and preparation services.” ISACorps members are assigned to community college districts, with some corp members representing multiple districts. Additionally, ISACorps promotes one-on-one mentoring for students and families navigating the college admissions process (ISAC.org, 2020).

It is clear that ISAC takes their charge from the HEAA seriously and has worked to bolster programming and outreach over the past ten years. Figure 4.4 shows, however, that the outreach activities and attendance has diminished over the last five years (2015-2019). The research shows that this work is important – more postsecondary competency, earlier in the

student development process is vital toward building the human capital needed to make major decisions. However, as mentioned numerous times within this study, rural students' needs go beyond presentations and financial aid outreach. Their needs are academic, financial and social. Rural students and families face hardships in terms of technology and broadband internet access. Rural students arrive on university campuses, after being helped through the admissions and financial aid process from these meaningful programs and are faced with a dizzying amount of information and higher education jargon to process. What are Illinois universities doing to not only ease the transition, but help rural students persist?

Illinois Public University Response to Rural Students

The Board of Higher Education Act (110 ILCS 205) provides overarching guidelines on how a board of trustees is formed for public universities in Illinois, along with the rules and regulations of the individual university board's reporting requirements to the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IHBE). Section 9.16 of the Act requires all "public institutions to develop and implement methods and strategies to increase the participation of minorities, women and individuals with disabilities who are traditionally underrepresented in education programs and activities" (110 ILCS 205 § 9.16).

Further, in subsection (g) of Section 9.16, boards of trustees must report programs, retention strategies and activities for "all students who are first in their immediate family to attend an institution of higher education" (110 ILCS 205 § 9.16g). Essentially, boards of trustees, as citizen leaders of public institutions in Illinois, must know specifically what is being done on their individual campuses to recruit, retain and graduate students from underserved populations, minority populations, women, disabled students and first-generation students. Within the Act, minority students are identified under the following headings (1) American Indian; (2) Asian; (3)

African American; (4) Hispanic; and (5) Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander (110 ILCS 205 § 9.16).

While the Board of Higher Education Act defines minority students, it leaves all programming, including recruitment, identification, retention/persistence initiatives, etc. to the purview of each, individual Illinois public university campus. The IHBE underserved student report, as mandated by the Board of Higher Education Act, reveals each of the 12 public universities underserved student programs and retention/persistence initiatives (IHBE, 2019).

Chicago State University

Chicago State University (CSU) identified 8 student support programs for underserved students. Purpose and type are listed within Table 4.

Table 4
CSU Student Support Programs

Program Name	Primary Service Area	Student Population
Abilities Office of Disabled Student Services	Student Support	Students w/learning and/or physical disabilities
African American Male Resource Center	Student Support	African American Males
Counseling students	Student Support	All Underserved Students
Latino Resource Center	Student Support	Latino/a Students
RISE Academy (Retention Initiative for Student Engagement)	Study Skills	All Underserved Students
Summer Bridge	Instruction	Identified Underserved Students
TRIO SSS	Student Support	Qualified Underserved Students
Freshman Seminar	Remediation	Freshman Underserved Students

Eastern Illinois University

Eastern Illinois University (EIU) identified 6 student support programs for underserved students. Purpose and type are listed within Table 5.

Table 5
EIU Student Support Programs

Program Name	Primary Service Area	Student Population
Access Granted	Student	50 Identified senior high school students
Early Alert System	Support/Acclimation	All Underserved Students
Gateway Program	Early identification of at-risk student	Provisional Admission
Strong Mentoring (Successful Teaching Relative to Overcoming Negative Generalities)	Student Support	African American Males
TRIO SSS	Student Support	Qualified Underserved Students
PASS (Panther Athletic Support Services)	Student Support	Qualified Student Athletes

Governors State University

Governors State University (GSU) identified 6 student support programs for underserved students. Purpose and type are listed within Table 6.

Table 6
GSU Student Support Programs

Program Name	Primary Service Area	Student Population
Smart Start Program	Remediation	Qualified Incoming Freshmen
Dual Degree Scholarship	Financial Assistance	Qualified Transfer Students
Mastering College	Transition	Qualified Incoming Freshman
GSU Promise	Financial Assistance	Qualified Underserved students
Veterans Resource Center	Student Support	Veteran Students
Latino/a Achievement Scholarship	Financial Assistance	Latino Students

Illinois State University

Illinois State University (ISU) identified 4 student support programs for underserved students. Purpose and type are listed within Table 7.

Table 7
ISU Student Support Programs

Program Name	Primary Service Area	Student Population
Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority Participation	Student Support	Minority Students in STEM majors
MASAI (Mentoring and Academic Support Achievement Initiative)	Mentoring	First-year and Transfer students
Project Success	Retention	Academic Probation
StarProgram	Student Support	City Colleges of Chicago Students

Northeastern Illinois University

Northeastern Illinois University (NEIU) identified 4 student support programs for underserved students. Purpose and type are listed within Table 8.

Table 8
NEIU Student Support Programs

Program Name	Primary Service Area	Student Population
El Centro	Student Support	Latino Students
English Language Program	Student Support	ESL Students
First-Year Experience	Student Support	First-year Students
College Bridge	Student Support	Chicago Public School Students

Northern Illinois University

Northern Illinois University (NIU) identified 3 student support programs for underserved students. Purpose and type are listed within Table 9.

Table 9
NIU Student Support Programs

Program Name	Primary Service Area	Student population
ACCESS	Tutoring	All Underserved Students
Black Male Initiative	Mentoring	African American Male Students
CHANCE	Student Support	All Underserved Students

Southern Illinois University at Carbondale

Southern Illinois University at Carbondale (SIUC) identified 7 student support programs for underserved students. Purpose and type are listed within Table 10.

Table 10
SIUC Student Support Programs

Program Name	Primary Service Area	Student Population
ACHIEVE	Student Support	Students with Learning Disabilities
Upward Bound	Transition	Freshman/Sophomore High School Students within 3 surrounding counties
Saluki Summer Bridge Program	Transition	First-year Students
First Scholars Program	Student Support	20 First-generation College Students
Jump Start Program	Student Support	Freshman Underserved Students
Living Learning Communities	Retention	All Students
EWIP (Early Warning Intervention Program)	Tutoring/Mentoring	All Students

Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville

Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville (SIUE) identified 5 student support programs for underserved students. Purpose and type are listed within Table 11.

Table 11
SIUE Student Support Programs

Program Name	Primary Service Area	Student Population
SOAR (Student Support for Academic Results)	Student Support/Retention	All Underserved Students
SNAP (Student Nurse Achievement Program)	Student Support	Underserved Nursing Students
Higher Education Excellence in Diversity	Student Support	All Underserved Students
Multicultural Center	Student Support/Inclusion	All Students
Diversity Committee	Student Support/Inclusion	All Students

University of Illinois at Chicago

The University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) identified 11 student support programs for underserved students. Purpose and type are listed within Table 12.

Table 12
UIC Student Support Programs

Program Name	Primary Service Area	Student Population
AAAN (African American Academic Network)	Student Engagement	All African American Students
CHANCE Program	Student Support	All Students
Disability Resource Center	Student Support	All Students
Hispanic Center for Excellence	Student Support	All Hispanic Students
LARES (Latin American Recruitment and Educational Services)	Student Support	Latino Graduate Students
MERRP (Minority Engineering Recruitment and Retention Program)	Student Support	Underserved Engineering Students
Native American Support Program	Student Support	Native American Students
President's Award Program	Financial	All Underserved Students
Summer College	Remedial/Transitional	All Underserved Students

Table Continues

Table 12, Continues
UIC Student Support Programs

Program Name	Primary Service Area	Student Population
Urban Health Program	Student Support	Underserved Students within Health Science major
First Year Intergroup Dialogue Course	Student Support	All Students

University of Illinois at Springfield

The University of Illinois at Springfield (UIS) identified 2 student support programs for underserved students. Purpose and type are listed within Table 13.

Table 13
UIS Student Support Programs

Program Name	Primary Service Area	Student Population
Necessary Steps	Mentoring	First-generation Students
STARS (Students Transition for Academic Retention and Success)	Remedial	Selected Underserved Students

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) identified 6 student support programs for underserved students. Purpose and type are listed within Table 14.

Table 14
UIUC Student Support Programs

Program Name	Primary Service Area	Student Population
I-LEAP (Illinois Academic Enrichment Leadership Program)	Retention	All Students
ASPIRE	Recruitment	Underrepresented Students
Illinois Promise	Financial/Scholarship	Low-income Students
TRIO SSS	Student Support	Eligible Underserved Students

Table Continues

Table 14, Continues
UIUC Student Support Programs

Program Name	Primary Service Area	Student Population
Center for Wounded Veterans in Higher Education	Student Support	All Wounded Veteran Students
Cultural Centers	Student Support/Inclusion	All Students

Western Illinois University

Western Illinois University (WIU) identified 4 student support programs for underserved students. Purpose and type are listed within Table 15.

Table 15
WIU Student Support Programs

Program Name	Primary Service Area	Student Population
Building Connections	Mentoring/Retention	All New Freshmen Students
First Year Experience	Student Support	All New Freshmen Students
Office of Academic Services	Recruitment/Retention	Conditional Admits
To and Through Project	Retention	Minority Students from Chicagoland Area

Conclusion

Since the HEA of 1965, the federal government has supplied tremendous financial resources to both students and higher education institutions. Based on the programs offered by the federal government, student support falls into three categories – financial, academic and social (student affairs). Through reauthorizations of the HEA, specific populations of students have been targeted for increased funding for academic support, infrastructure projects, and overall completion to degree. Minority students, urban programming, and low-income students have received more and more attention throughout the reauthorization process. The programs and funding that have been created for marginalized student populations is admirable and

appropriate. However, as future reauthorizations of the HEA occur, it is important to understand that rural students fit many of the descriptions of marginalized students. Rural students represent all races, genders and income levels.

The rural population makes up a great portion of the state of Illinois, yet, individual state programs do not recognize them. There are no programs that specifically target rural students, and their progress toward a postsecondary credential. MAP funding relies on students being critically aware of dates of suspension for grant approval, as well as having tremendous human capital to navigate a complex FAFSA and grant application process. ISACorps has been a boon toward advocacy and outreach; however, the amount of resources and personnel dedicated to rural areas is stark, when compared to Chicago, and collar counties of Cook.

Illinois public universities have a role in this process as well. After analyzing the data, all 12 public Illinois institutions define their student populations differently. The term “underserved” is blurred and seems uncoordinated. This theme will be further discussed in Chapter VI. Rural students, often times, because of their financial, academic and social capital limitations, are underserved. Yet, no one recognizes rural students as a student group at risk. Further, very few institutions list first-generation students within their targeted programming, even though the Illinois General Assembly requires them to do so.

Rural Obstacles Are Unique

As discussed in Chapter II, rural students face unique obstacles. Rural communities and their residents often experience greater levels of poverty than urban areas (Koricich, Chen, & Hughes, 2018). Agriculture, one of the leading employment opportunities in rural communities, continues to shrink as a result of decreased government subsidies and a globalized market (Elder & Conger, 2000). As Hertz, Kusmin, Marré, & Parker (2014) indicate, during the economic

crisis of the late 2000s, rural areas, particularly those farthest from urban centers, lost the fewest jobs. That said, the rate of economic growth (1.75%) in non-metropolitan counties after the official conclusion of the recession was less than half the rate experienced in metropolitan counties (3.82%) (Hertz et al., 2014).

Over the past several decades, the rural economic base has shifted from goods-based services (manufacturing and agriculture) to service-based employment (food service, data entry, and customer service) (Gibbs, Kusman & Cromartie, 2005; McLaughlin & Coleman-Jensen, 2008). Positions in service-based fields also show a trend of part-time or temporary status, often with limited or no fringe benefits (McLaughlin & Coleman-Jensen, 2008). According to Petrin, Schafft and Meece (2014), employment trends have a “dramatic effect on the residential aspirations of rural youth, whose departure from their communities is often noted as yet another factor contributing to rural decline” (p. 295). Rural communities are faced with pressing challenges, including retaining and attracting younger populations and slowing the problem of youth outmigration (Johnson, 2006). One of the more obvious challenges includes shrinking economies – young talent, with educational aspirations, are leaving rural areas, thus leaving a dearth of optimism (Gibbs & Cromartie, 1994; Miller, 1995; Petrin, Farmer Meece, & Byun, 2011).

Phillips et al. (2007) noted the inherent difficulties for rural communities to build or access human capital; and as such, rural areas struggle to "attract and retain people with the skills, knowledge, and connections required to...build human capital" (p.67). This means that rural youth are confronted with less exposure to credentialed professionals who have the background and knowledge to build human capital within the student population. Enberg and Wolniak (2010) researched secondary school context and its relationship to college enrollment

and found that student experiences and exposure to capital – particularly academic, social and cultural capital – are both effective and predictive regarding college enrollment and matriculation.

CHAPTER V: STATE COMPARISON

As a partner to federal student aid programs, different states take different approaches to student support. For this study, the researcher determined through literature review, rural populations relative to urban and suburban populations, and size of the state university system that Pennsylvania and Georgia should be explored. The intention of this chapter is to reveal how state systems of government and higher education account for the rural student population in each respective state. Every attempt was made by the researcher to uncover data and policy comparable to what was found for the State of Illinois research. In keeping with research protocol as established in Chapter 3, fewer artifacts were available because of differences in public data reported by state organizations in Pennsylvania and Georgia.

Pennsylvania

According to the Rural Pennsylvania Revitalization Act of 1987 (RPRA), a state agency called the Center for Rural Pennsylvania (CRP) was founded to be an advocate for the rural population of Pennsylvania (The Center for Rural Pennsylvania, 2019). This state agency, with reporting lines directly to the Pennsylvania general assembly, serves nearly 3.4 million rural residents under the tenets of:

- sponsoring research projects to identify policy options for legislative and executive branch consideration and action;
- collecting data on trends and conditions to understand the diversity of rural Pennsylvania;
- publishing information and research results to inform and educate audiences about the diverse people and communities of rural Pennsylvania; and

- participating in local, state and national forums on rural issues to present and learn from best practices. (The Center for Rural Pennsylvania, 2020a)

Additionally, Section 301 of the RPRRA specifies that two members of the board of directors for the CRP should be from higher education institutions within Pennsylvania – specifically, The Pennsylvania State University and the University of Pittsburgh (P.L. 163 § 301). Further, Section 501 of the Act requires the following:

The State System of Higher Education, in cooperation with its member universities, shall establish a program of education partnerships to provide outreach and services to rural school districts and other rural groups which will result in the sharing of the resources of the universities for the benefit of the rural population. In addition, the education partnership program shall attempt to increase participation in higher education by students from rural areas. (P.L. 163 § 501)

This line of communication has proven useful within the last decade. In 2014, the CRP commissioned a study to learn about the characteristics of rural Pennsylvania students pursuing postsecondary education (The Center for Rural Pennsylvania, 2020b). The 2014 study revealed significant concern about rural students and their postsecondary futures in the state. According to the data, only 20% of rural students applied for FAFSA consideration, revealing that more than 40% of those applications were at or close to poverty level. Beginning, first time rural students were found to be less likely to pursue a BS/BA degree and more likely to pursue an associate's degree or trade school. Rural students were found to be less likely to be financially independent, and more likely to be in poverty than their urban and suburban counterparts (The Center for Rural Pennsylvania, 2020b).

Because of these alarming results, and a political movement from the regional universities serving the majority of rural students, the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE) started a three phase system redesign in the fall of 2016 (PASSHE, 2020a). Previous to the redesign efforts, PASSHE was the sole branch of offering state student aid,

governed all 14 state regional campuses throughout the commonwealth with one board, and offered a complex level of bureaucracy, leading to indecision and frustration by stakeholders (PASSHE, 2020a).

In the fall of 2016, the PASSHE embarked on a system-wide redesign in order to offer more transparent function with a focus on student success. The system-wide redesign had three main priorities: ensure student success, leverage university strengths and transform the governance/leadership structure. Currently, the redesign is in phase two (implementation) of three total phases. The National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) was hired by PASSHE as an independent strategic planning firm offering policy recommendations, governance structure recommendations and procedures for moving the state organization forward. In July of 2017, NCHEMS offered a report to the Pennsylvania General Assembly and the PASSHE and cited a strong rebuke of Pennsylvania's ACT 188 of 1982 (PASSHE, 2020b).

ACT 188, as a single piece of legislation, provides all definition and authority to the PASSHE, through the state Board of Governors, for all state institutions. NCHEMS contends that ACT 188 should be amended to “replace the current Board of Governors with a Board of Regents made up of lay members and to clarify the distribution of authority among the Board, the Chancellor [of PASSHE], the institutional Presidents and the Councils of Trustees” (NCHEMS Report, 2017). In other words, give more authority to the leaders who are directly involved with each respective institution, rather than overarching state board that is out of touch with today's postsecondary realities. Also noteworthy, NCHEMS recommended that a state agency should be created with the sole authority and responsibility to recommend the allocation

of state funds to institutions, community colleges and the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency (PHEAA) (NCHEMS Report, 2017).

The PHEAA is the state's student grant and federal loan guarantor agency. Unfortunately, the PHEAA and PASSHE does not provide average grant allocation data, nor do they provide information on student access outreach (PASSHE, 2020c). ACT 188, as the state's sole legislation on higher education reporting, authority and governance, does not require transparent reporting of individual campus student support planning, student demographics, or average aid by demographic type. NCHEMS has recommended in their 2017 strategic report, that transparency with the greater commonwealth should be a major priority within the redesign of the state-wide system (NCHEMS Report, 2017).

Pennsylvania Public University Response

Since the state of Pennsylvania General Assembly does not require a consolidated report of underserved student programming from its state, public institutions, the researcher searched the individual institution websites for programming information (Pennsylvania General Assembly, 2020). Using the same research protocol and search terms as specified in the methodology chapter, the researcher gleaned some insight into the individual institution's role in providing postsecondary opportunity for rural students. The NCHEMS and RPRA reports indicated the many of Pennsylvania's state institutions were rural serving, because, if for no other reason, their physical locations in rural areas of the state made matriculation less barrier ridden (The Center for Rural Pennsylvania, 2020).

Three of the fourteen Pennsylvania public state supported institutions made mention of individual Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) with local rural school districts, lessening the barriers to admission, and matriculation for students in each respective rural district. These

MOU's, broadcast in regular university press releases, included items such as waiving application fees for students of the district, performing on-site admissions programs and outreach regarding financial aid and the application process. Bloomsburg University, Edinboro University and Kutztown University all reported MOU's for rural surrounding districts. The search on each individual website gleaned no other information or programming focused on rural or first-generation students.

Georgia

The state of Georgia has a public, higher education system made up of 26 higher education institutions falling into 4 categories – research universities, comprehensive universities, state universities, and state colleges (University System of Georgia, 2020a). The University System of Georgia (USG) has launched an aggressive policy challenge to its campuses, addressing four areas of student concern: adaptability, essential skills, lifelong learning and partnerships (University System of Georgia, 2020b). The policy initiative has been named College 2025. Access, and completion of degrees or credentialed programs are down in Georgia, among some of the state's most vulnerable residents: first generation and/or low income students. College 2025 is a policy framework this is designed to meld with other state higher education infrastructure initiatives (University System of Georgia, 2020b).

College 2025

The College 2025 plan is focused on four areas and provides strategic action items for all campuses within the USG to follow. Acknowledging that colleges and universities need to be nimbler and more flexible, the USG plan recommends, first, that campuses be more adaptable to students' life situations. The adaptability subsection calls for alternative financial models; increased entry points for admission and course study; enabling faculty to use instructional

technology to provide engaging learning experiences; and using free or low cost educational resources to enhance and engage the learning experience. The USG acknowledges that significant technology infrastructure improvements need to occur within the state, especially in rural and underserved areas, however, specific plans and policy enhancements have not been shared with the public (University System of Georgia, 2020b).

To build a system that meets the needs of both students and employers, USG recommends that essential skills be an active part of the policy making and curriculum development process (University System of Georgia, 2020b). To do this USG recommends that individual campuses work with community businesses and industry to create meaningful curricular experiences that enhance the employability of student graduates. Further, the plan acknowledges that four year universities and community/technical colleges play an active role in workforce development and life-long learning opportunities and recommends that their campuses be better at extended learning experiences. Developing stackable credentials and short-term curriculum plans to meet student deficiencies is one area that is explored within the College 2025 plan. Creating a broader, statewide coordinated postsecondary educational ecosystem is the main goal of the College 2025 initiative (University System of Georgia, 2020b). The future plans of the USG system is important to understand, but, equally important is the system in place today. How does Georgia meet the needs of rural students today?

Georgia Student Finance Commission

Created in 1965, as a state partner of the federal HEA of 1965, the Georgia Student Finance Commission (GSFC) is the financing arm for postsecondary opportunity in the state. The GSFC is a substantial state entity charged with oversight of all of Georgia's state supported scholarship and grant programs, k-12/postsecondary outreach and dual enrollment programs

(GSFC, 2020a). State lottery funds are used to finance Georgia’s main form of student financial aid – the HOPE scholarship and grant program. For 2020, \$860 million has been allocated for HOPE scholarships, grants and loans (GSFC, 2020b). According to the Georgia Budget and Policy Institute (GBPI) (2020), the HOPE scholarship and grant program is the most generous state financial aid program in the country (GBPI, 2020).

HOPE offers six major scholarship, grant and loan programs. These merit based programs are awarded based on a student’s grade point average, standardized test scores and rigorous course requirements (GBPI, 2020). Shown in Table 16, the HOPE program offers different aid for students based on their qualifications and program goals.

Table 16
HOPE Scholarship/Grant Programs

Program Name	Award
HOPE Scholarship	Partial Tuition for Associate’s or Bachelor’s Degree
Zell Miller Scholarship	Full Tuition for Associate’s or Bachelor’s Degree – partial tuition at private colleges
HOPE Grant	Partial Tuition for certificates or diplomas at Technical Colleges
Zell Miller Grant	Full Tuition for certificates or diplomas at Technical Colleges
HOPE Career Grant	Partial Tuition for specific certificates or diplomas
Student Access Loans	Low interest loans for students maxed out on all other forms of aid

The state of Georgia is one of two states, however, that does not offer a broad need based state aid program (GBPI, 2020). All of Georgia’s aid programs are based on academic performance and do not take into consideration a student’s financial need (GBPI, 2020). While Georgia’s

merit based financial aid program is significant in terms of dollars spent, less than 15% of students in the USG are from rural counties. This statistic is important, because it shows that a family's income, and ability to pay are important factors when pursuing postsecondary opportunity (GBPI, 2020). Persistence of first generation, rural students from low income households currently stands at less than 48% to graduation (GBPI, 2020). Unless a student is awarded a full-tuition scholarship or grant from the HOPE program, there are limited state resources to help make up the gap needed to pay tuition, fees and other living expenses (GBPI, 2020).

REACH Georgia

One of the ways the state of Georgia is attempting to influence the low-income, first generation student toward postsecondary success is the Reaching Educational Achievement Can Happen (REACH) program. This need based program was created in 2012 as a collaboration between the Georgia Institute of Technology and corporate partners. The pilot of the REACH program partnered with 5 school systems, targeting 35 low-income students. Since the end of the pilot program, REACH has partnered with 154 of Georgia's 180 school districts, serving 2600 low-income students (REACH, 2020a).

REACH is a need based program, focused on low-income, first generation students whose families meet the federal income eligibility guidelines. REACH provides a commitment to eligible students focused on financial literacy, career planning and academic success. REACH students are also provided an adult mentor and academic support throughout high school. If the REACH student graduates high school with at least a 2.5 GPA, has a clean discipline record, and continues to show academic promise, he/she receives a renewable scholarship of \$2500 per year

toward cost of attendance at any HOPE eligible Georgia institution. The total scholarship is worth \$10,000 (REACH, 2020b).

The school district is responsible for a portion of the raised funds for all of their eligible students. REACH Georgia's first class of student scholars, eligible for scholarship funds graduated from high school in 2017. The GSFC operates the REACH funding and distributes the scholarship awards directly to the institution to be used toward tuition and/or fees associated with the cost of attendance. Mentorship, and academic assistance are available to REACH eligible students throughout their undergraduate career (REACH, 2020c).

Dual Enrollment

One of the major investments made by the Georgia general assembly is monies toward tuition for all students enrolled in dual enrollment opportunities. The 2020 state budget allocated over \$101 million for dual enrollment tuition costs. This significant investment has allowed over 42,000 high school students per year to dual enroll within the USG, technical colleges and private colleges, tuition free. High school students and families do not pay tuition, fees or book costs for dual enrollment courses through the funding provided to the GSFC from the Georgia general assembly (GSFC, 2020).

Georgia Public University Response

Since the state of Georgia General Assembly does not require a consolidated report of underserved student programming from its state, public institutions, the researcher searched the individual institution websites for programming information (Georgia General Assembly, 2020). Using the same research protocol and search terms as specified in the methodology chapter, the researcher gleaned some insight into the individual institution's role in providing postsecondary opportunity for rural students. 20 out of 26 state public institutions referenced rural students as

an underserved population on campus and referred qualified students to multiple resources on campus (USG, 2020).

Most impressive, however, is the ALL Georgia Program at the University of Georgia. Founded in 2018, the ALL Georgia Program is specifically targeted toward students from rural locations, providing them unique summer transition experiences, specialized freshman seminar courses, and an innovative pathway through freshman or transfer year to familiarize students with campus resources (UGA, 2020a). The ALL Georgia program acknowledges the REACH scholars program, as well as multiple financial resources that are available for first generation/rural students. Students are identified for the program through their FAFSA data, including income and home address (UGA, 2020b). Qualified students are notified about the programs when they receive their financial aid award information (UGA, 2020b).

Conclusion

Postsecondary education stakeholders in both Pennsylvania and Georgia have recognized that major structural and systematic change needed to happen for low-income, first generation students from rural communities and counties. Both states have indicated through government policy bodies and legislation that a major investment will be made moving forward regarding access to postsecondary opportunity. Both states have also shown an ability to navigate a complex system of higher education, where multiple stakeholders have different policies and priorities, and make major structural change.

Unlike Illinois, it appears to be the system(s) of higher education in Pennsylvania and Georgia making major recommendations and change, rather than the state's legislative body demanding it. Pennsylvania is in the middle of major higher education system transformation, with policies and priorities being set currently. Policy initiatives within the PSSHE are focused

on being a more agile state system, rather than a cumbersome, bureaucratic process. Truly it seems that the state, public institutions are wanting to represent their respective student populations, rather than a top down approach. This change, in concert with the RPRA and CRP priority of representing rural citizens of Pennsylvania provides an opportunity for rural students to have a meaningful place in postsecondary environments moving forward.

Georgia seems to be ahead of Pennsylvania towards a transformation that represents low-income, rural students. Recognizing all of the elements of the Georgia 2025 initiative is a strong step forward for the state and sends a message of innovation and inclusiveness to potential students seeking a postsecondary experience. The USG has been clear that their old ways of running a college or university are outdated. Individuals need credentials and postsecondary opportunities for different reasons, and because of that, the USG system needs to be responsive toward its public. USG's efforts are focused not only on access, but also, infrastructure to support students moving through the curriculum. It recognizes experiential learning, apprenticeship models and stacked curricular experiences as possible learning modalities of the future - adapting to the needs of its students, both financial and development. Both of these states are undertaking major change, and the success or failure of these initiatives is unknown. What is known – rural students will have a voice moving forward.

CHAPTER VI: DISCUSSION

In 2019, there were 175,224 rural Illinois students attending public elementary, middle and secondary schools (Showalter et al., 2019). Illinois' total number of rural k-12 population ranks 11th in the nation. (Showalter et al., 2019). Eventually, this substantial number of students will look for a postsecondary path. Do Illinois' policies, in concert with federal policies, support these students? Will rural students be able to adapt to persist on Illinois public university campuses? Rural students continue to be recruited heavily by colleges and universities (Stone, 2018).

This study was designed to investigate four fundamental questions regarding the unique barriers faced by rural students, and how the state of Illinois and Illinois public universities account for this important student population. This chapter will provide the researcher's response to each research question; discussion and implications of current legislation and policy as it applies to Illinois rural students; and recommendations for further research. The rural student population of Illinois is faced with challenges and barriers similar to those of rural students in other states. The state of Illinois' response, however, to these unique challenges is crucial to the upward mobility of this significant student population.

How does Federal and State of Illinois Financial Aid Policy Recognize the Unique Financial Challenges Presented by Rural Students?

Federal

The HEA of 1965, and subsequent reauthorizations have set the standard for financial aid programs and policy at the federal level. Title IV of the HEA, known today as the Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA) of 2008, provides significant financial aid programming for low-income students. Currently, the Pell grant is the most common form of postsecondary

assistance that is not a loan. Title IV of the HEOA also defines the direct loan program and parent plus loan program for qualified students and families. Title IV was created in 1965 out of an abundance of need because of the significant cost of higher education for lower income students. This transformative legislation has led to the investment of millions of students toward the completion of a credential. The last reauthorization of this legislation happened in 2008, however.

Before and since 2008, the cost of attendance has skyrocketed at colleges and universities, both public and private. Institutions within the state of Illinois are no exception. While the issue of tuition and cost of attendance is not the focus of this research, it is central to some of the problems rural students are facing in terms of high education access and equity. Originally, the HEA of 1965 was introduced for access and equity issues precisely related to issues such as cost. Since the HEOA has not been reauthorized since 2008, today's issues of access and equity have not and cannot be addressed.

Prior to the last reauthorization, Pell grants, direct loans and parent plus loans (if qualified) in concert with state need based funding programs not only covered the cost of attendance for students, but in many cases provided a refund for students to help with technology, books and other living expenses. Today, the combination of federal monies, along with state funds is no longer enough to meet a student's cost of attendance, let alone provide a refund. In its current form, the HEOA no longer meets the threshold of today's higher education and equity issues, as it applies to financial aid programming.

Illinois

As a state guarantor of federal higher education loans, and distributor of state need based funding, ISAC exists to help Illinois' neediest students access higher education. Illinois' main

need based aid program, MAP, is determined based on a student's FAFSA EFC results. MAP monies are appropriated each year by the Illinois General Assembly as a part of the state budget process. MAP aid amounts, however, have been figured at the FY 2001 amount, because the appropriation of funds has remained level for the past two decades. The maximum MAP awarded today is relatively the same as the maximum award in 2001 – just under \$5,000. As mentioned, this amount, combined with federal aid, no longer adequately provides the assistance needed for Illinois' neediest students.

ISAC also oversees other merit based grant programs outlined by the Illinois General Assembly. The Illinois State Scholar grant, merit recognition grant and community college transfer grant are individual programs, with specific merit based qualifications. These programs cannot be stacked, meaning students cannot qualify for multiple merit based grants. The community college transfer grant requires a community college student to graduate with an associate's degree before becoming eligible. While these grants do provide assistance, the maximum amount of each grant is \$1000. Students transferring from a community college to an Illinois public university before the conferral of an associate's degree are not eligible.

A student's path through a postsecondary network is not always predictable. Students' transfer from community colleges to Illinois public universities for a whole host of reasons, and the timing of a transfer typically happens for a specific reason. Because the community college transfer grant does not recognize the reverse transfer process, many students lose eligibility for the merit based program strictly because of the timing of the transfer. Reverse transfer refers to the process of awarding an associate's degree credential from the former community college after a student meets the curricular obligations at the student's current university.

Discussion

It has been established in the literature that access to higher education for rural students depends on multiple types of support. Much of the federal and state of Illinois support comes in the form of need based financial aid. These programs, however, have remained stagnant over the past two decades, and therefore, no longer meet the financial needs of many rural students wishing to attend an Illinois public university. In addition, the need based financial aid programs at both the federal and state level require the FAFSA for aid processing. The FAFSA itself is a noted barrier for rural students because of its complexity.

The FAFSA is a complex application for a complex process. Many financial aid scholars have called for an easier, more transparent application process that can estimate, up front, a student and families' eligibility for need based aid programs. This is important because students typically do not find out what their complete financial aid package will be from an institution until late in the admissions process. If a student has missed Illinois' self-imposed MAP deadline – which changes every year – he or she will not be considered for Illinois' only need based financial aid program for the fiscal year. This cycle of application and financial aid awarding happens each year, with different deadlines each year, throughout a student's entire bachelor degree experience. The process takes an incredible amount of social capital and overall knowledge of the process.

In addition to a lack of funding, rural students are known to not persist on a campus because of social capital issues such as the financial aid process. Many times, rural students have little exposure to complex processes and terminology used on a college campus. It is not only important that rural school districts be aware of this to potentially educate, but also the Illinois public universities need to be aware that their rural population needs the guidance through this

incredibly important process. Such guidance can happen within student affairs/development programming.

How does Federal and State of Illinois Institutional Developmental Programming Address the Unique Challenges Presented by Rural Students?

Federal

In addition to the need based financial aid programs outlined in Title IV of the HEA, non-financial student assistance programs are defined as well. Starting in 1968, the federal government recognized, through the creation of Student Support Services (SSS), that students needed additional assistance beyond financial aid. Offering advising, mentorship, career counseling to low income students has proven to be successful toward persistence efforts with this vulnerable population. SSS programming, prevalent on many Illinois public universities and community colleges, makes an impact for many students from many backgrounds, including rural students.

It is important to remember that SSS and all other TRIO services are awarded through a competitive grant process. Most TRIO programs are linked to a physical community college, college or university campus; however, some programs can be executed through a community and/or nonprofit organization. The 5-year competitive grant process is complex and does require a employees within an organization who has specialized knowledge on the grant writing process. The programming also requires capacity to hire specialized employees with essential skillsets for student development. All of these things are certainly possible; however, they are noted barriers to executing federal grant programs with underserved populations.

According to IllinoisTrio.org (2020), Illinois is well served by the TRIO SSS program with 47 total programs, serving more than 8400 students. Figure 8 illustrates the complete number of TRIO SSS program types in Illinois.

SSS Program Type	# Programs in IL	# Students Served	Total Funding (as of 2017)
SSS – Regular	47	8,439	\$13,140,797
SSS - Disabled	2	200	\$464,530
SSS - ESL	1	144	\$232,265
SSS – Teacher Prep	1	140	\$232,265
TOTAL SSS	51	8,923	\$14,069,857

Figure 8. Total TRIO SSS Programs for the State of Illinois

While outreach is strong for TRIO SSS programs in Illinois, individual program capacity is limited. Due to the eligibility rules attached to TRIO programs, many students who reside just above the federal poverty guidelines cannot participate. TRIO requires that 2/3 of the students served by programming must be at 150% or less of the federal poverty level and neither parent graduated from college (illinoistrio.org, 2020).

Illinois

The majority of student aid from the state of Illinois comes in the form of need based grants, such as the Illinois MAP program. The Illinois Student Assistance Commission (ISAC) does offer outreach in the form of the ISACorp members. Given the sheer size of the state of Illinois, it makes sense to have dedicated professionals positioned around the state to offer personalized guidance regarding the college search and application process. According to the ISAC website, outreach from ISACorp members does not have to stop after high school graduation, however, this service is not heavily promoted within the literature and website.

Guidance and outreach up to high school graduation is a great service and provides meaningful information to students and families who might otherwise be left to navigate the college application process alone. Guidance through the matriculation process, offering

mentorship, financial literacy and higher education social capital are vital to the persistence of rural students. Literature and current programming specializing in this population of students has focused on the need for relationships with mentors that have vast types of institutional knowledge, advising beyond academics. ISAC has done a commendable job of scaling the ISACorps program in such a short period of time. Created in 2009, ISACorps is now represented in each part of the state and staffed by community college districts. ISAC has deployed over 50 employees to this effort, with several staff members covering multiple community college districts, especially within rural areas of the state.

Discussion

It is clear through the research that the state of Illinois has put an emphasis on college planning and access. ISAC and other state agencies have bolstered programming and outreach focused academic preparation, financial literacy, college and career options and dual credit opportunities. Many Illinois institutions have taken advantage of federal grant opportunities, including TRIO SSS to provide meaningful programming for low-income students. As noted, eligibility for federal TRIO SSS programming is limited because of the family income guidelines established within the HEOA.

Legislation and statewide outreach for rural students still lacks at the postsecondary level. At this point, everything related to college access and affordability at the state level has been focused on getting students to college. Getting students prepared academically, socially and financially are incredibly important factors for postsecondary opportunity, however, little has been recognized by the Illinois general assembly regarding persistence measures for low income students, including a state mentorship program, ongoing academic advising and food insecurity. At this point, individual campuses are left to create persistence initiatives for unique student

populations, without true recognition from the state government that persistence goes beyond the ability to pay. How do Illinois public institutions respond?

How do Illinois Regional, Public Institutions Identify Rural Students for Social and Academic Assistance?

The Board of Higher Education Act (110 ILCS 205) provides overarching guidelines on how a board of trustees is formed for public universities in Illinois, along with the rules and regulations of the individual university board's reporting requirements to the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE). Section 9.16 of the Act requires all "public institutions to develop and implement methods and strategies to increase the participation of minorities, women and individuals with disabilities who are traditionally underrepresented in education programs and activities" (110 ILCS 205 § 9.16). Further, in subsection (g) of Section 9.16, boards of trustees must report programs, retention strategies and activities for "all students who are first in their immediate family to attend an institution of higher education" (110 ILCS 205 § 9.16g).

After examination of how each 4-year public institution reported their student affairs programming to the IBHE, very few institutions offered programming designed to aid first-generation students as an underserved population. No institution identified rural students as an underserved population. Most universities identified specific minority groups within their individual campus as underserved student populations and offered specific programming or campus infrastructure to support these student populations. The Board of Higher Education Act requires reporting on all underserved student populations, and currently, underserved student populations are defined by the act as all minority students (defined in chapter 4), women, first-generation and disabled students.

The public 4-year institutions in Illinois seem to be uncoordinated in defining what exactly constitutes an underserved student population. Are low income students considered underserved? On some campuses, yes. Are academically underprepared students considered underserved? On some campuses, yes. Does the list provided in the Board of Higher Education Act truly encompass the totality of underserved student populations in Illinois? The answer is no. Public universities across the state of Illinois reported varying levels of programming focused for some minority student populations and specific low-income student populations.

Discussion

The real question is should students from rural backgrounds be considered underserved? The scholarship shows that rural students are more likely to be in poverty, struggle academically, have less social capital and persist in postsecondary environments less than their urban and suburban peers. Their individual experiences cover all races, ethnicities, income levels and educational backgrounds. The state of Illinois has a significant rural population, and they are being recruited by Illinois universities. Rural students are also transferring into Illinois universities from local community colleges.

Community colleges and Illinois universities that have TRIO SSS programs have the potential to make an impact on rural students, if they meet the strict financial qualifications of the program, and if capacity is not an issue. TRIO's programs, however, provide the intensive structure needed for persistence. The academic advising, mentorship, career focus and financial literacy is a shining example of meaningful student development programming. Not all campuses have TRIO SSS, however. Programming for rural students need to meet all of the deficiencies of the population – social, financial and academic. Upon review, most public universities in Illinois

have programming that meets one of these deficiency areas, but not all three. Rural students are underserved, but they do not necessarily look like a specific race, ethnicity or gender.

How does Illinois' Approach Toward Matriculation and Persistence of Rural Students Compare to States (Pennsylvania & Georgia) with Similar Ratios of Rural Students?

Higher education is going through a transformation in both Pennsylvania and Georgia. Rural students, however, have a voice during the transformation. Both Pennsylvania and Georgia have significant rural k-12 student populations, and both states have recognized the significance of the population within the structure of their state higher education. In fact, while Illinois has taken the approach focused on college readiness and access, Pennsylvania and Georgia have focused more on financial aid and college persistence efforts. Both approaches have their merits and their downfalls.

Pennsylvania has the seventh highest total of k-12 students in rural districts at over 272,000 (Showalter et al., 2019). The system of higher education in Pennsylvania was recognized as being bogged down in politics and bureaucracy, and because of that, is going through an entire system-wide transformation. Partially responsible for spurring the transformation, however, was the Center for Rural Pennsylvania with their 2014 report. Having a voice at the table while the new structure of higher education is created should be beneficial to the overall success and persistence of their rural population. Because many of Pennsylvania's public universities are tied to rural communities, they see themselves as higher education destinations for their local rural students. Also, many state institutions boast about forged partnerships with school districts within their immediate area to address issues of poverty and college preparedness.

Georgia ranks third in terms of total students in rural districts at just under 500,000 students (Showalter et al., 2019). Because of this, and a swelling number of rural students on state university campuses, the state university system of Georgia seems to be focused on creating a system of higher education that acknowledges the rural sector. The state's commitment to dual credit at no tuition cost to students demonstrates a meaningful investment in underserved students, including the rural population.

Georgia's approach to state supported financial aid is interesting. Georgia is extremely generous with merit based aid. In fact, the GBPI (2020) writes that the HOPE merit scholarship program is the most generous merit based financial aid program in the country. Georgia does not, however, have a broad based need based grant or loan program for in-state college students. Even with the significant merit based investment, the GBPI (2020) reports that the average gap between financial aid and cost of attendance is approximately \$5,000. This level of need is prohibitive for underserved rural students.

For rural students able to attend the University of Georgia (UGA), one of Georgia's flagship universities, an impressive suite of programs are available. The UGA is the only institution of the state's 26 universities that acknowledges the challenges presented to rural students through specialized programming. Through the financial aid process, students are screened for specialized rural student affairs offerings. Students who meet the rural location designation, and show financial need are invited to a host of programs during summer orientation and throughout freshman year. Also, transfer students who meet qualifications are also offered the opportunity to join upon entering the university.

Beyond the scope of this study, but important to mention, Georgia has gained national attention for their development of the nexus degree and adaptable curriculums for students

entering the workforce. This new endeavor is designed to move students forward from underserved populations to the state workforce. Concepts such as prior work experience, reverse transfer credits, hybrid curriculum are all integral parts of meeting the Georgia 2025 and Complete College Georgia initiatives. These initiatives are further proof of Georgia's policy focus related to developing the rural population toward the completion of a credential.

Discussion

Pennsylvania and Georgia acknowledging rural students within their postsecondary policy work is admirable. Compared to Illinois, Pennsylvania and Georgia provide meaningful examples of rural needs and policy combining to develop a more complete postsecondary experience. Compared to Pennsylvania and Georgia, Illinois is a positive example of outreach and programming at the middle and secondary school level. Illinois has also shown significant growth in the state's career and postsecondary planning when compared to Pennsylvania and Georgia. Even with a programming drop off over recent years, ISAC's approach to state wide outreach far surpasses anything advertised by any state organization within Pennsylvania and Georgia.

Illinois' financial main financial aid program for students is completely need based. Pennsylvania's financial aid is also need based. Georgia has focused its resources toward merit based awards – a decidedly different approach. Based on calculations of cost of attendance versus average award, each state still has an average aid gap of \$5,000-\$8,000. Financial aid must improve for all underserved students, as poverty is prevalent. Georgia's focus on mentorship and scholarship after high school graduation is a significant programmatic commitment statewide.

Limitations

This dissertation is inherently limited, as it considers the transition of rural, traditional aged Illinois students to regional, public institutions. It also considers the historiography of Illinois and Federal policy as they apply to rural students pursuing a postsecondary, public university experience. This dissertation will introduce policy from states with similar rural populations as a comparison to Illinois. This dissertation does not consider the transition of rural, Illinois students to private institutions, for-profit institutions, or trade schools. Also, it does not consider adult students, or students re-entering a postsecondary environment. Only the policies within the State of Illinois, or other noted states, are considered for this work – therefore, this research is limited in scope.

Due to data limitations, because of individual structures of state government, the comparison between Illinois, Pennsylvania and Georgia is limited. The researcher made every effort to do exhaustive data collection, but at this time some of the comparable data simply does not exist.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study is limited and does not consider several types of rural students. First, adult learners from rural areas are a growing area of scholarship. This important population of students have their own challenges and needs and therefore deserve attention from the state of Illinois. Also, since much of the preparation for rural students leads to community college education, it would be beneficial to understand how policy in Illinois benefits or provides barriers to rural students transferring from a community college to a four year university.

Conclusion

Rural student persistence and postsecondary experience is an emerging area of scholarship. While limited, current literature indicates several themes that are consistent with the themes prevalent within this dissertation, as it applies to Illinois public universities. Themes present within this research are bulleted below:

- **Poverty** – students need upfront pricing and financial aid communication.
- **Complexity of process** – students and parents are overwhelmed and lost because of a lack of social capital.

The state of Illinois and ISAC have worked hard over the past decade to increase college and career education and planning. The MAP program, operated by ISAC, and appropriated by the Illinois general assembly is offering need based aid at the 2001-2002 tuition rate. It is apparent that this program is woefully underfunded with respect to today's cost of attendance at any Illinois public university. ISAC uses the FAFSA for automatic consideration for MAP funding. An additional application is not needed, which is good. The formula, however, is complex, and students often do not know what their MAP eligibility is until they receive their financial aid package.

Additional themes include:

- **Mentorship** – establishing relationships throughout a postsecondary experience is especially helpful for rural students.
- **Academic preparedness** – rural students may or may not have access to dual credit coursework. Rural school curriculum's do not have the same college preparatory coursework compared to urban and suburban schools.

Illinois public universities do not acknowledge rural students as a population at risk or underserved. Neither does the state of Illinois through its legislation. It is time to change this lack of acknowledgement, and like Georgia, build programming around the unique needs of rural students. Also, like Georgia, it would be wise for Illinois to make dual credit opportunities more available to underserved students in the state, including rural students. Supplementing a lacking secondary curriculum with college coursework could be an invaluable opportunity for rural students seeking a postsecondary experience.

Illinois' rural student population is significant. It is time to show, both at the state level, and individual campus level, that their postsecondary experience matters. It is more than providing funding – it is providing a caring attitude toward the unique challenges presented by rural students. Each institution has the capacity to follow in the footsteps of the federal TRIO SSS program, offering a variety of services based on student need. Since rural students are actively being recruited to attend Illinois public universities, they should be provided every opportunity to earn a meaningful postsecondary experience promised in the advertisement.

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