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# The Role of Peer Social Capital on Successful Transitions to College and Persistence

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**CENTER FOR INTERCULTURAL  
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# Introduction

1<sup>st</sup> year college experiences are critical to

- » Persistence
- » Completion

-Adjustments

- » Academic
- » Social
- » Psychological

(Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Kim, 2009)

Students of color

- Cultural context
- Racial climate

(Locks, Hurtado, Bowman & Oseguera, 2008)

Students of color

- Making gains
- Still lag in degree completion rates

(Fry, 2011)

As students of

color enter PWIs, there is a need for increased attention to the factors that

- contribute to their successful transition
- academic and social well-being

# Summer bridge programs

- » **Higher retention** (Walpole et al., 2008)
- » **Increased retention for minority students** (Hicks, 2005).
- » **Academic skills and self-efficacy:** use of **technology**; understanding a **syllabus** (Strayhorn, 2011); increased **use of services** (Terzian, Moore & Hamilton, 2009); **self-confidence, reduced anxiety, and realistic personal goals** (Stratton, 1998)

## Gaps

- » **Quantitative ways of measuring success** (GPA, credits earned, etc.) **leaves gaps** in capturing social and personal benefits

# Peers & college success

(Astin, 1993; Renn & Arnold, 2003; Swenson, Nordstrom & Heister, 2008)

## Importance for students of color

- » Latino sample: **peer support** predicted **social adjustment** (Schneider & Ward, 2003)
- » Lack of peer support negatively predicted **adjustment to college** and **GPA** (Dennis, Phinney, & Chuateco, 2005)
- » Latino students (lower achieving): greater probability of **persistence** associated with higher levels of importance on **socializing with friends** (Otero, Rivas, & Rivera, 2007)



# Peer social capital

## **Social capital theory** (Bourdieu, 1986)

- » An individual's social connections provide **differential access to resources**, depending on the **amount, nature, and accessibility** of the resources within their networks.

## **Peer social capital**

- » Peer group connections that encourage “**academic effort engagement, academic success, and educational attainment**” (Stanton-Salazar, 2004, p. 28).
- » **Trusting, and emotionally strong relationships** yield the most substantial effects (Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2005; Swenson, 2008).



# Peer social capital

## Peer Social Capital and Educational Achievement

- » Peer relationships provide **access to multiple types of resources** (Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2005).
- » **Students of color** provide important resources for each other: **modeling pro-academic behaviors and norms** and supporting **ethnic identity development** (Stanton-Salazar, 2004).



# Research questions

- » How does an intensive **summer bridge program** contribute to students' **development of peer relationships**?
- » What **role do peers play** in supporting the **social and academic adjustment** and **well-being of students of color** in their first year of college?





# Methods



# Context and Population

## Context

- » Private liberal arts
- » 900 students
- » 20% students of color and international
- » Grant funding

## S.A.L.T.

- » 3-week residential
- » Students of color
- » 3 academic credit course
- » Academic and social components
- » Academic role models



# Qualitative

## Data sources



	End of SALT	End of 1 <sup>st</sup> Year
<b>2010</b> ( <i>n</i> = 20)	Interviews	Interviews
<b>2011</b> ( <i>n</i> = 22)	Written responses	Interviews

*Interviews lasting up to 1 hour*

*\$5 gift card incentive for participation in end-of-year interviews*

# Sample

- » 3 international  
(Ethiopia, Canada, Zimbabwe)
- » 31 Latino/a
- » 4 Asian
- » 3 African American
- » 1 Native American



- » 60% women
- » 64% 1<sup>st</sup> generation
- » 74% Latino/a

Participants ( $n = 42$ ) >

# Procedures



-Nature of relationships with peers  
-Resources gained through these relationships

Association between peer relationships and social and academic skills



# Findings

# Major Themes

Developing a  
sense of  
community  
during SALT

Confidence to  
face new  
experiences

Utilizing  
peers as  
academic  
resources



Developing a  
sense of  
community  
during SALT

## “Like family”

Living and learning together

SALT has prepared me in many different aspects, not only academically but it has brought me **new family members**, and **people I can rely on** during the school year for a little encouragement. (Paloma)



Developing a  
sense of  
community  
during SALT

“Like family”

Living and learning together

-Residence halls

- » I feel much closer to my fellow SALT students now and I am sure it was due to the fact that we were **roommates** and **dorm neighbors**. **I know which friends can help me academically, spiritually, and emotionally** because I was able to live with them in the dorms. (Salvador)





Developing a  
sense of  
community  
during SALT

## Unity across differences

- » ...I found myself within the first week, connecting with them easily, **but seeing other people** kind of floating around in their own groups and thinking I might not share that much in common with them...but I'm sure there's some aspect... and so just **wanting to know**, I mean **it's such a small group**, and we **interact so closely**, just wanting to know what that person is like really **pushes me to get to know other people**. (Samuel)



Confidence to  
face new  
experiences

## From anxiety to excitement



The SALT program definitely provided preparation for.... [what] I could experience with **my academic ability** and **my social life!** I feel **familiar** and **comfortable** with the campus. I was **nervous** about the academics but after enrolling in English 105, **I feel confident about how I will do during the fall.** I already made great friends and I'm excited to come back for the fall to meet them again, **and others as well!** (Estela) >

**Confidence to  
face new  
experiences**

## **From anxiety to excitement**

- Safety net
- Mutual support

I'm pretty sure SALT friends are going to make college a lot easier....**just knowing there's somebody there who can help you**, not only on **homework**, but if you have a problem in your **personal life**, knowing there's somebody there. It's a lot easier for us. (Anahi)

...So I have a **support system** and **I'm also there if they need support** too. So it's a two way street. (Ana)



**Confidence to  
face new  
experiences**

**SALT helped me to make  
new friends** and so once I  
started college I didn't feel  
lonely and I felt like I could  
hang out with those  
people more....and yeah it  
just really helped with that.  
**Through them I was able  
to meet more friends** and  
so that helped too. (Andrea)

**Skills and confidence to  
expand peer networks**



## Utilizing peers as academic resources

*Who do you turn to?*



Type of difficulty	PEERS	OTHER SOURCES
PERSONAL	20	Family
ACADEMIC	27	Faculty, Staff

## Utilizing peers as academic resources

### Drawing on diverse skills of peers

- Exchange of talents
- Recognizing successful peers

[RAs]. Since they've been through that, they know what I'm taking about if I have questions. I think **they're going to be one of the key helpers** during the academic year, and maybe **some of my friends too....they may be better at a subject and I'll be better at other subjects.** We...can **both help each other.** (Maria)

**I notice if they're responsible,** if they actually **pay attention** in class, **I notice their grades** and...how they work and if those are the kind of people that **I like to work with** and they seem like **people that actually study.** (Mia)



Utilizing  
peers as  
academic  
resources

## Drawing on diverse skills of peers

- Residence halls - convenient access
- Commuters - technology

facebook



...In most of my classes I know like two or three people....So **I just ask them** and sometimes **we get together** or just **talk on the phone** or **text** or **Facebook** works very well, or **Skype**. And then **I can be at my house and they can be here on campus** and I can **Skype** with them and **ask them questions** and then I get my homework done and I actually understand what I'm supposed to do... (Mia)



## Utilizing peers as academic resources

Study with other people, that's basically it....**By myself I won't get the motivation to do it,** but if I'm with other people that are doing the same thing, or just studying in general, I will be a little bit **more motivated.** (Alex)

## Cultivating pro-academic behaviors

- Study groups
- Motivation





Utilizing  
peers as  
academic  
resources

## Cultivating pro-academic behaviors

-Accountability

From the SALT program...**I've seen how homework becomes more of a communal thing**, like pushing each other to sit down, and **keeping each other accountable**....I'm learning how **[studying together] is a resource** that you don't automatically think about, but **it's a major resource**. When you have **other people keeping you accountable for study time**, it makes it so much easier, and at the same time, it makes the studying more enjoyable....And with the SALT program I feel like I'm gonna have such a head start... (José)



## Utilizing peers as academic resources

## Balancing peers as resources and peers as distractions

-Discernment

I'm learning how to manage time and I **learned even about studying by myself** and finding a place to study so I could focus. **But also realizing that it can be good to study with other people** that are in your class, and **going to see the professor to ask questions** and stuff. In high school I didn't really do that much, but I found that it's helpful to do that.

(Andrea)





# Discussion

# Social Capital

## BRIDGE PROGRAMS

### Prime venues for developing social capital

- » Peer relationships can be mobilized to provide access to resources that “ultimately facilitate goal accomplishment” (Stanton-Salazar, 2004, p. 25)
- » To become social capital, peer relationships must connect students with valuable resources



# Confidence in new contexts



- » Transfer of social skills learned in SALT to the larger college context
- » Reduced anxiety in the transition to college (Stratton, 1998)
- » Peers -- a source of comfort and security during this critical entry point
- » Peers served as an important conduit to academic, social, and personal resources for managing the challenges of college life.



# Reciprocity: “two-way street”

**Sense of membership within SALT encouraged reciprocity and the exchange of resources**

- » For social networks to function as social capital, **resources must flow in both directions** (Coleman, 1998)
- » Participants **received** benefits from peers **and** they **made** contributions to the social and academic well-being of peers.



# Drawing on peer relationships

## Instrumental Nature of Social Capital “Investment Strategy”

(Bourdieu, 1986)

- » **Strategically** draw on peer resources
- » **Discernment** when selecting peers as academic resources
- » **Effective** source of academic support, not simply the most convenient source.



# “Like family”

## Importance to students of color

- » Shared, intense experience; Not alone in choice to attend PWI (Swenson, 2008; Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2005)
- » Pro-academic behaviors reinforced through role modeling of other students of color (Stanton-Salazar, 2004)
- » Social and psychological boost: adjustment to college and attachment to the institution (Dennis, Phinney & Chuateco, 2005; Schneider & Ward, 2003)





# Limitations

- » One institution; one program
- » Self-reported experiences of peer engagement
- » Extent to which these relationships contributed to actual academic outcomes
- » Comparison group



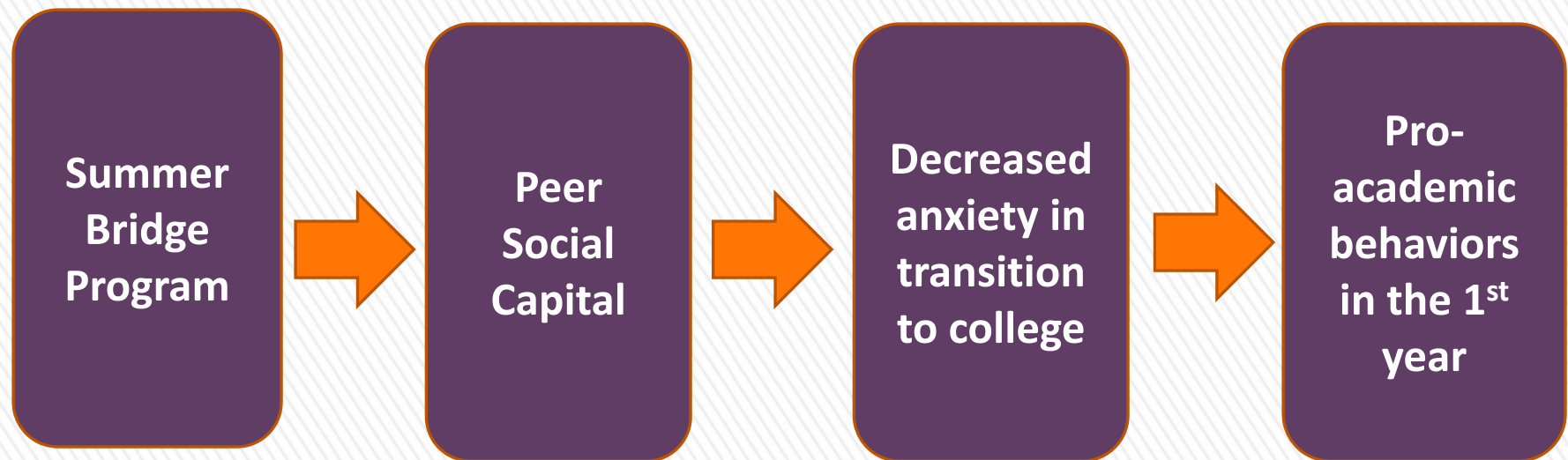
# Implications

## BEYOND SUMMER BRIDGE PROGRAMS...

- » Building a sense of community in the classroom where **academically meaningful peer relationships** can flourish
- » **Small Groups** - instruction on how to function effectively
- » Promoting **social capital** through **new student orientation** and in **clubs** and **organizations**



# Conclusion



» Academically Meaningful Relationships



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