

MUSE faculty proposal

\_\_\_\_\_, Ph.D.

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Associate Professor, tenured

Department of Special Education, Language, and Literacy

First-generation college students' experiences in the School of Education

Student collaborator: \_\_\_\_\_

Amount requested: 4,750.00

IRB approval received 2/3/21

Most recent MUSE award: Summer 2020

## 1) Intellectual Merit

The recruitment, retention, persistence, and achievement of first-generation college students are key elements of equity and inclusion in higher education (Collier & Morgan, 2008). Nationally, Schools of Education do not reflect the diversity of public schools, with far more White, middle-class, female students graduating from teacher preparation programs than is reflected in the classrooms in which they will work (Taylor et al., 2017). In Schools of Education, first-generation college students play a critical role in increasing representation in the teacher workforce, as well as within associated related services in schools (e.g. speech pathology). Further, first-generation college students bring diverse perspectives that enrich classroom dialogues and content engagement (Flores et al., 2007). Efforts to recruit and retain talented first-generation scholars in Schools of Education must reflect an awareness of the lived experiences of these students as they navigate complex coursework, financial strains, a myriad of certification and credentialing requirements, and opportunities for leadership and advanced study.

Very few studies to date have specifically considered the experiences of first-generation college students in Schools of Education, yet, this work is of great importance in shaping resources, opportunities, supports, and collaborative experiences for these students. This current study reflects research that began in January 2021 investigating the experiences of first-generation scholars in the School of Education at The College of New Jersey. This study aims to address the following central research questions:

- 1) What are the challenges and successes of first-generation students in the School of Education at TCNJ?
- 2) What resources, opportunities, supports, and collaborative experiences have contributed to these successes for first-generation students?
- 3) What factors have presented barriers to students' success for these first-generation students?
- 4) In what ways do first-generation students come to understand their professional and scholarly options and opportunities upon graduation from their programs?

During the Spring 2021 semester, my research team, which includes my proposed MUSE student, \_\_\_\_\_, will interview approximately 40 first-generation students across all departments and programs in the School of Education to learn more about their experiences in academic, social, and professional settings. The research objectives of this MUSE project center around the analysis of this interview data and efforts to disseminate these findings. Analysis of the interview transcripts will involve a three-step inductive approach of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. This project will yield a manuscript that presents empirical findings to be submitted to the journal, *Educational Researcher*, as well as the annual conferences for the American Educational Research Association, the leading research conference for the field of Education. This research will also directly inform the development of a mentoring program in the School of Education that will be piloted during the 2021-2022 academic year.

## 2) Role of Student and Mentor

For the eight weeks comprising the MUSE program, \_\_\_\_\_, the MUSE student, will code interview transcript data, analyze the data with me, and draft portions of a conference proposals and a manuscript. The MUSE program will follow this work plan:

**Week 1:** \_\_\_\_\_ will complete readings on analyzing qualitative data and receive training from me in coding interview data.

**Weeks 2-3:** (*Open coding*) \_\_\_\_\_ and I will independently code transcripts for the first three interviews. We will meet to review codes and ensure agreement on open coding procedures. \_\_\_\_\_ will code the rest of the data.

**Week 4:** (*Axial coding*) \_\_\_\_\_ and I will review open codes and classify them according to conceptual categories. \_\_\_\_\_ will create a codebook with operational definitions of the larger categories.

**Week 5-6:** (*Selective coding*) \_\_\_\_\_ will review transcripts according to the codebook and identify which categories were prominent in more than half of the transcripts. We will meet to collapse categories into large themes. \_\_\_\_\_ and I will outline a conference presentation and manuscript.

**Week 7-8:** \_\_\_\_\_ and I will collaboratively draft the conference proposals and portions of a manuscript to disseminate these findings.

As a mentor, I will work closely with \_\_\_\_\_ to provide training and guidance on coding and data analysis. As a MUSE scholar, I will expect \_\_\_\_\_ to take the lead in data analysis, but I will meet with her frequently, both in person (three times a week) and via email (daily). Additionally, I will regularly review her work and provide meaningful feedback. As an instructor of our department's graduate course on research in Special Education (*SPED 664*), I regularly teach students the conventions of both qualitative and quantitative research methods, and I have successfully mentored past students in the MUSE program through each stage of the research process. I have co-authored 11 peer-reviewed scholarly products with 10 different TCNJ students, including national conference presentations and journal articles. This research represents a new area of empirical work for me, but I bring ample expertise to this area from my experience mentoring first-generation scholars in my roles as a department Chair (6 months), program coordinator (7 years), and Cooperman faculty mentor (3 years). I have also co-authored 3 peer-reviewed journal articles on mentored research and social justice work in Schools of Education.

### **3) Broader impact**

The findings from this research will have significance for higher education, informing the development of supports and programs for first-generation scholars in Schools of Education. Most directly, this research will inform a mentoring program for first-generation students here at TCNJ. More broadly, disseminating the results in peer-reviewed venues such as a national conference and top-tier journal will help to positively shape practices at Schools of Education across the country. This work will help to improve equity and inclusion efforts and contribute to the recruitment and retention of talented first-generation scholars, who will be future educators and leaders.

My proposed MUSE student researcher, \_\_\_\_\_, is an outstanding student who has a deep interest in research and has been working with me on this project since January 2021. \_\_\_\_\_'s perspective as an African American first-generation scholar is invaluable to this research process. She also brings expertise as a peer mentor in the Cooperman scholars summer program. I have been \_\_\_\_\_'s academic advisor and faculty mentor in the Cooperman program since she began at TCNJ in August 2017. \_\_\_\_\_ aspires to be a speech therapist working in school settings. She will be applying for graduate school in Speech Pathology in Fall 2021, and research experience is heavily valued among the top graduate programs in her field. This MUSE project will develop \_\_\_\_\_'s skills in research analysis and support her future pursuit of graduate studies.

## **Appendix 2: Budget**

- a) Student stipend: \$3,000 for one student
- b) Housing: Not needed
- c) Faculty stipend: \$1,2500
- d) Project related expenses: \$500

*This funding would support the transcription of approximately 33 hours of interview data at \$15 per hour through temi.com. Audio transcripts of interviews have been (and will be) produced through Zoom, however, the quality of transcription is quite poor. This funding would be used to provide higher-level transcription of interviews to improve the quality of data collection for this research.*

Total requested: \$4,750.00