UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

College Rankings: What Type of Students Use Them and Who Benefits

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in Education

by

Elizabeth Anne Martin

2024

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

College Rankings: What Type of Students Use Them and Who Benefits

by

Elizabeth Anne Martin

Doctor of Philosophy in Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2024

Professor Mark Kevin Eagan Jr., Chair

Despite college rankings' popular yet controversial nature, there is little known about the relationship between college rankings and students. Prior literature suggests that students who make use of rankings are more privileged, yet there lacks a comprehensive analysis surrounding the types of students who place importance on rankings in more modern times. Additionally, there is a lack of information regarding how students' use of rankings impacts their college experiences and outcomes.

Using data from UCLA's Higher Education Research Institute, this study employs logistic regression to determine the demographic characteristics and pre-college experiences of students who place importance on rankings, and this study draws on Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction to hypothesize that valuing rankings in deciding where to attend college correlates with different types of privilege. Next, this study makes use of inverse probability of treatment weighting, t-tests, and linear regression models to determine the extent to which having valued

rankings affects outcomes like sense of belonging and academic adjustment in students' first year of college as well as overall satisfaction in both the first and senior year. This study utilizes the theory of anticipatory socialization to posit that students' use of rankings leads to more informed college decisions, which in turn leads to stronger outcomes.

Findings indicate that students with higher levels of privilege are more likely to use rankings during their college search process. Additionally, students who valued rankings in the selection of their college report slightly better outcomes in terms of sense of belonging and overall satisfaction (both first-year and upon graduation) but not academic adjustment. These findings held even after accounting for student privilege. However, students' experiences while in college, such as interacting with faculty, play a larger role in determining their outcomes than whether the student placed importance on rankings.

This study elaborates on how the findings are relevant for audiences like college counselors, higher education institutions, and researchers. All in all, this study not only provides a current look into the types of students who place importance on rankings but it also examines how importance placed on rankings influences pivotal outcomes like overall satisfaction.

The dissertation of Elizabeth Anne Martin is approved.

Mitchell J. Chang

Darin Eugene Christensen

Cecilia Rios-Aguilar

Mark Kevin Eagan Jr., Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2024

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF APPENDICES

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, I want to acknowledge myself and recognize all of the time and effort I put into writing this dissertation. Writing this dissertation was one of the most mentally challenging tasks I have ever completed, and it took resilience and strength to move past all of the challenges that occurred while writing this dissertation. I am so proud of myself for making it to this point in my educational journey, and I still cannot believe I get to be Dr. Martin moving forward.

I also want to thank my dissertation chair and advisor, Dr. Eagan, for supporting me throughout my time at UCLA. Thank you for bringing me on to HERI as a GSR, which positively shaped my time at UCLA and my research. Thank you for always being kind and encouraging and creating an environment where I felt comfortable coming to you with questions about my dissertation or anything else. I am privileged in that I got to learn from all of your quantitative expertise over the years. Finally, thank you for letting me forge my own path in terms of my future career; I cannot state how validating this was.

On a similar note, I feel obliged to thank my committee: Dr. Chang, Dr. Christensen, and Dr. Rios-Aguilar. I know you hold very important roles within the UCLA community, and I am appreciative that you said yes to being on my committee. Thank you for all of your feedback that helped to strengthen my dissertation, and thank you also for encouraging and supporting me while I wrote my dissertation.

I also need to thank several other individuals at UCLA who were instrumental in me getting to this point. Amy Gershon and Kim Mattheussens, thank you for providing support on the administrative side and for always answering my questions in a timely manner. Van Duong, thank you for all of your help with regard to my GSR appointments and making sure I received

the proper pay, benefits, etc. All three of you do so much behind-the-scenes work that ensured that I could make it to graduation, so thank you.

I was fortunate enough to have 2 GSR positions during my time at UCLA. I will always think fondly upon my time at HERI, and I am so thankful that I could be part of the research institute that has so much valuable longitudinal data on college students. I love that I have gotten to work with the data for all six surveys. My HERI experience would not have been the same without Ellen Stolzenberg. Thank you, Ellen, for being a fierce advocate for the GSRs, for making HERI an enjoyable place to work, and for always offering to help with any issues related to HERI or life in general. Thank you also to my fellow HERI GSRs-I've enjoyed working with you, learning from you, and becoming friends with you. I should also mention Seth Leon of CRESST, who helped clean and prepare a lot of the HERI data needed for my dissertation. I also had a GSR appointment with the Institutional Research team within UCLA Graduate Education, and I am thankful to the team for all of the mentoring I received. I was able to strengthen my data analysis skills with your help, so I am grateful I got to work with you while working on my dissertation.

Outside of UCLA, I had the privilege of being a 2022-2023 David P. Gardner Fellow through UC Berkeley's Center for Studies in Higher Education. I had the opportunity to present my dissertation research to the other fellows and also scholars within the Center for Studies in Higher Education. In addition to receiving critical feedback about my work, I was excited to hear that others saw immense value in my work, which propelled me to keep working on this topic and add much-needed knowledge to the field of higher education.

I also have several friends and family members I need to thank. To my UCLA friends-thank you for being there for me and for all of the wonderful memories we created together. The

same goes for my friends outside of UCLA-thank you for your unwavering support. I want to especially recognize two individuals, who are like sisters to me. Brooke, while I am officially your mentor, you have been so encouraging and have always believed in me, and I look up to you in so many ways. Thank you for checking in on me so often and being my unofficial sister for so many years. Cheyenne, my little, we have been together for many highs and lows since college. Thank you for always taking the time to listen to me, cheer me on, and really be there for whatever I'm dealing with. I know that you will be one of my best friends even when I am 80, and I am so happy we met while at Carnegie Mellon.

Finally, I have to thank several family members who helped me get to where I am today. Thank you to my parents who always encouraged me to pursue my education and go after my goals. Scott, thank you for being with me throughout my PhD journey from the application process to defending my dissertation. Thank you for moving to LA with me so I could enroll at UCLA, and thank you for being there for all my good and bad days. Thank you for reading over my dissertation, for listening to me rant, and for always believing in me. You were an instrumental part in me becoming Dr. Martin. Last but not least, thank you to Lucy, my beautiful dog daughter. Thank you for always loving me and encouraging me to take breaks so we can snuggle together or go on walks to the beach. Each day with you is so special and I cherish all of the time we spend together. I am so lucky to be your mom and you've helped me in more ways than you know.

VITA

Education

2020	M.A. Higher Education and Organizational Change University of California, Los Angeles
2017	M.S. Public Policy and Management, Highest Distinction Carnegie Mellon University
2016	B.S. Decision Science Carnegie Mellon University

Experience

2022-2023	David P. Gardner Fellow Center for Studies in Higher Education University of California, Berkeley
2021-2023	Graduate Student Institutional Research Analyst Division of Graduate Education University of California, Los Angeles
2019-2024	Graduate Student Research Analyst Higher Education Research Institute University of California, Los Angeles
2017-2019	Data Analyst U.S. News & World Report
2016-2017	Research Apprentice Brown Center on Education Policy The Brookings Institution

Select Publications, Reports, and Presentations

2022	**Martin, E**. College Rankings: What Type of Students Use Them and Who Benefits [Presentation]. Gardner Seminar at UC Berkeley's Center for Studies in Higher Education.
2022	**Martin, E**. Findings from the 2021 Administration of the Staff Climate Survey (SCS). Higher Education Research Institute, UCLA.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

With time, society has increasingly valued having a college degree (Spellings, 2006). Currently, around half of the jobs in the United States require at least a bachelor's degree, and fields that are quickly growing like STEM and healthcare prefer to hire individuals with high levels of postsecondary education (Carnevale et al., 2013; Fuller et al., 2022). Consequently, individuals with bachelor's degrees have access to jobs that others do not, and those with bachelor's degrees make on average over $500 more a week than those with just a high school diploma (Carnevale et al., 2016; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022). Additionally, while only 2% of individuals with a bachelor's degree or higher are typically unemployed, 10% of individuals with only a high school degree often find themselves without employment (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). Therefore, higher education is frequently considered the "pathway to upward income mobility" (Chetty et al., 2017, p. 1), especially as the earnings gap between high school and college graduates continues to increase (Federal Reserve Bank of New York, 2021).

As such, the college choice process represents a high-stakes process, as a college degree is increasingly considered essential in today's society (Spellings, 2006). The first step in earning a degree requires students to select an institution that best fits their needs to ensure that they graduate. Yet, with almost 3,000 institutions in the United States that grant bachelor's degrees (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021), identifying which college to attend is often a difficult decision; students consider a number of factors like an institution's size, availability of majors of interest, and mission (Cochran & Coles, 2012; Perna et al., 2021). From an information-processing perspective, a student cannot thoroughly explore each option due to the time and effort it would take to investigate each and every institution (Perna, 2006).

Given this growing market of students and families seeking more information about prospective colleges and universities, companies like *U.S. News & World Report* got into the business of college rankings in 1983 to increase both their sales and popularity (Sanoff, 2007). Since then, several other organizations have produced other versions of college rankings with different foci and emphases (Clarke, 2007; Salmi & Saroyan, 2007). The more prominent rankings are the best colleges or top colleges rankings (Zhou, 2015), and, despite different methodologies, highly selective private institutions continue to flourish in the vast majority of the best colleges rankings (Diver, 2022). Unique rankings like most dangerous schools, most fun colleges, or colleges with the worst food are also prevalent in the college rankings world (Svrluga, 2019). The college rankings industry continues to be a major player in higher education, despite the constant widespread criticism of the rankings (Saul, 2022; The Times Editorial Board, 2022). College rankings are one piece of information that students can consult when deciding where to attend college.

Rankings, however, represent just one of many sources of information or criteria students might consult or consider, respectively, when exploring and selecting their college. Alternatively, many students might never access any of the various proprietary rankings lists and may also ignore or be unaware of the placement of their first-choice institution in any of these lists. Considerations like cost and geography often play a substantial role in the college choice process, and, accordingly, many students' decisions are constrained by these factors (Aydin, 2015; Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000; Stolzenberg et al., 2020).

Problem Statement

Students consult rankings lists or weigh the rank of various colleges they consider during their search process for several reasons. Some students only consider enrolling in the top-ranked

schools, and they consult publications that rank colleges and universities to ensure some level of quality and prestige of the institution where they ultimately enroll. In a 2015 survey of students completing the ACT, 81% of respondents agreed with the sentiment that students who find college rankings important care about prestige and status (Art & Science Group, 2016; Diver, 2022). By contrast, students also consult college rankings lists to gather more information about the institutions they are considering. As these lists contain a wealth of information about institutions (Ehrenberg, 2005; Morse & Brooks, 2021), students can use this information to select an institution that matches their personal preferences. Thus, having the ability to choose an institution based on what best fits their needs, these students can choose a college that will serve them well both in the short- and long-term.

Students who use rankings likely have distinct backgrounds compared to the students who do not use rankings. Therefore, examining how these two student groups differ is pivotal to our understanding of students' relationship with college rankings and how students' use of rankings ultimately relates to college outcomes like academic adjustment, sense of belonging, and satisfaction. Importantly, the information students obtain from rankings helps them to make a knowledgeable and well-researched choice about where to attend college, and as a result, this information likely shapes students' expectations about their future college experience at their chosen institution.

Because rankings provide clues into what students can expect for their college experience (Fombrun, 1996; Kim & Shim, 2019), it is likely that the expectations of students who use rankings could deviate from the expectations of the students who choose institutions without giving consideration to rankings. Given that these differing expectations could lead to different college experiences, a question emerges as to whether students' use of rankings actually

influences their college experiences and outcomes. This study examines differences in the demographic and pre-college experiences of students who consider rankings in their college searches and then investigates whether the use of rankings provides distinct advantages to students in terms of psychosocial outcomes like sense of belonging, academic adjustment, and overall satisfaction.

Most studies related to college rankings focus on the validity of the ranking indicators (Kim & Shim, 2019; Pike, 2004; Porter, 2000), how institutions' behaviors are shaped by rankings (Jin & Whalley, 2007; Meredith, 2004; Monks & Ehrenberg, 1999), and what type of students consider rankings when searching for a college (Kim & Gasman, 2011; McDonough et al., 1998; Teranishi et al., 2004). By contrast, scholars have given less attention to how the use of rankings impacts students throughout their college experiences (Clarke, 2007). This study intends to address this gap in the literature by identifying key demographic and pre-college differences between students who consult rankings and those who do not while also examining whether using rankings lists during this search and selection process boosts students' informational and navigational capital once in college.

Purpose

The first goal of this study was to provide information on whether students with greater privilege are more likely to use rankings. Accordingly, this study examined the characteristics of students who find college rankings important in their college decision, and this part of the study was influenced by Bourdieu's theory of social and cultural reproduction (Bourdieu, 2018). Students who use rankings presumably have increased economic, academic, cultural, and social privilege versus their peers who do not make use of rankings. Thus, this study first determined the extent to which rankings are used by a more privileged set of students.

Furthermore, looking into the characteristics of students who use rankings is needed as there is very little current research on this topic with the most extensive investigation into this topic conducted over twenty years ago by McDonough et al. (1998). While some scholars have examined students' use of rankings, these scholars typically only provide a limited look into the types of students who prioritize the use of college rankings (Bradshaw et al., 2001; Kim & Gasman, 2011; Teranishi et al., 2004). Therefore, it is imperative to have up-to-date information on the comprehensive profile of students who make use of college rankings, and this information also was utilized to inform this study's second aim of exploring the relationship between a student's use of college rankings and their later outcomes. More specifically, since the use of rankings is suggestive of privilege, students who use rankings would be expected to have more positive college outcomes in comparison with their peers who do not use rankings. Thus, this study used this initial analysis to account for the selection bias issue associated with the use of college rankings.

The second goal of this study was to determine whether consulting rankings in the college choice process leads to different outcomes after the first year of college and upon graduation. This goal largely was met by examining differences in outcomes like sense of belonging, academic adjustment, and overall college satisfaction between students who did and did not use college rankings in their college decision. Merton's (1968) concept of anticipatory socialization helped to provide context for why students who do and do not use rankings might come to college with different expectations about their future sense of belonging, academic adjustment, and satisfaction. Merton (1968) defined anticipatory socialization as "the acquisition of values and orientations found in statuses and groups in which one is not yet engaged but which one is likely to enter" (p. 438). Extremely relevant to this study is the idea of pre-entry

effects, which occur when a student starts to think about what their life on campus will be like, and these pre-entry effects help to shape students' expectations for their future days as a college student (DeAngelo, 2008; Kamens, 1981).

Because the use of rankings represents making an informed choice about where to attend college, students who use rankings likely come to college with distinct expectations for their college experience. These expectations likely vary from the expectations of students who cannot or do not use rankings, and as such, these two student groups might have differing levels of sense of belonging, academic adjustment, and overall college satisfaction. Given this background, this study sought to determine whether the consideration of rankings in the college choice process would positively contribute to students' psychosocial outcomes.

Research Questions

The following questions guide this study:

1. What demographic characteristics and pre-college experiences distinguish students who prioritize the use of college rankings in national magazines in their search process versus those who do not find rankings to be important?
2. Controlling for relevant demographic characteristics, pre-college activities, and in-college experiences, to what extent does a student's reliance on rankings during the college choice process contribute to differences by the end of the first (and/or senior) year of college in:
    a. Sense of belonging?
    b. Academic adjustment?
    c. Overall satisfaction?

Significance

Despite the plethora of research examining how different factors influence students' college choices (Garcia & Mireles-Rios, 2020), researchers have not thoroughly investigated the use of rankings as an informational tool in the college search process; therefore, there is a lack of information about how a well-known college choice tool, rankings, affects students. This is especially troubling given college rankings' controversial nature; many critics of rankings have claimed that rankings negatively impact both students and higher education at large (Hickey, 2021; Kelchen, 2018; Wermund, 2017). The popular press has critiqued rankings by claiming that rankings create perverse incentives for institutions to game the system to move up the rankings (Brewer et al., 2004; Dearden et al., 2014; Diep, 2022; Hartocollis, 2022; Kelchen, 2018).

Regarding students, critics have commented on the potentially misleading nature of rankings, as publishers of college rankings often focus too heavily on institutional resources and measures of selectivity instead of prioritizing learning outcomes, instruction, and affordability (Kelchen, 2018; Paterno, 2021; Picchi, 2022). As a result, there is much rhetoric about how college rankings do not accurately measure a college's quality (Hickey, 2021; Kelchen, 2018; Kim & Shim, 2019; O'Shaughnessy, 2013; Perna et al., 2021). Even when *U.S. News & World Report* added to their rankings measures focused on outcomes and social mobility (Berman, 2023; Brooks & Morse, 2023), some institutions took issue with this change, stating that these new measures of social mobility like affordability do not reflect educational quality (Jump, 2023; Knox, 2023). Several institutions even claimed that the substantial changes in the methodology meant that rankings could not be compared from year to year and that the rankings were unreliable as a result (Anderson, 2023a; Knox, 2023).

Even more than normal, there is much discussion within the higher education world about how the use of college rankings can harm students' college experience (Berman, 2023; Jaschik, 2022; The Times Editorial Board, 2022), with the current Secretary of Education calling rankings a "joke" (Hatch, 2022). While there is some literature surrounding students' college application behaviors due to changes in rankings (Bowman & Bastedo, 2009; Clarke, 2007; Luca & Smith, 2013; Sauder & Lancaster, 2006), very few studies have examined how the use of college rankings impacts students after their initial college decision (Clarke, 2007). Given how college rankings are one tool students can use to decide where to go to college, it is vital that students have a thorough understanding of the ramifications of using rankings, particularly with important outcomes such as sense of belonging, academic adjustment, and satisfaction.

Outcomes like sense of belonging, academic adjustment, and student satisfaction continue to be highly researched topics within the field of higher education (Ahn & Davis, 2020; Astin, 1977; Gillen-O'Neel, 2021; Raza et al., 2020; Tessema et al., 2012; Van Rooij et al., 2018), partly because these outcomes have been linked with other outcomes, like persistence, academic success, and completion, that higher education also cares about (Credé & Niehorster, 2012; Drezner & Pizmony-Levy, 2021; Oja, 2011). Even as early as freshman year, institutions focus heavily on students' academic integration, social integration, and satisfaction as students with low levels of sense of belonging, academic adjustment, and satisfaction often drop out of their current institution or higher education at large (Boulter, 2002; Credé & Niehorster, 2012; Gillen-O'Neel, 2021; Hausmann et al., 2007; Kennedy et al., 2000; McGrath & Braunstein, 1997; Miller, 2003; Oja, 2011; Tinto, 1975, 1987, 2012).

Additionally, ensuring that students graduate is also a top priority of institutions throughout the country, and research has shown that students who are satisfied with their overall

college experience are more likely to graduate (Billups, 2008; Kelchen, 2018; Martirosyan et al., 2014; Miller, 2003). Institutions also care about students' overall satisfaction, as measuring the overall college experience captures students' interactions with many parties on campus including faculty, service providers, and peers (Astin, 1993; Beltyukova & Fox, 2002; Sevier, 1996; Thiuri, 2011). Students who graduate from college with higher levels of satisfaction tend to remain more involved and give more money as alumni (Drew-Branch, 2011; Drezner & Pizmony-Levy, 2021; Iskhakova et al., 2016; Miller, 2003). This study explores the association between students' use of college rankings in selecting their college and these important psychosocial outcomes at the end of students' first and senior years in college.

Overview of Study Design

This study relied upon secondary data analysis, and more specifically, I used data from the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) at UCLA's Higher Education Research Institute (HERI). CIRP is considered "the most comprehensive source of information on college students" (Higher Education Research Institute, n.d.-a., para. 1). I made use of data from the Freshman Survey (2015 administration), Your First College Year Survey (2017-2019 administrations), and the College Senior Survey (2017-2019 administrations). These data were collected prior to the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic, which might have altered students' college experiences and the ways in which they search for and evaluate colleges before deciding where to enroll. As the names of these surveys suggest, students take the Freshman Survey (TFS) before entering college or in the first few weeks of their freshman year of college, they take the Your First College Year Survey (YFCY) when finishing their first year of college, and they take the College Senior Survey (CSS) upon graduation. Using all three surveys allowed me to track students over time and see how the use of rankings affected their sense of belonging, academic

adjustment, and satisfaction. More particularly, I scrutinized the first-year outcomes (sense of belonging, academic adjustment, and satisfaction) of students who completed the YFCY survey between 2017 and 2019 and had corresponding TFS data. In addition, I inspected the senior-year satisfaction of students who completed the CSS between 2017 and 2019 and also had corresponding TFS data.

For the first research question, I ran a logistic regression using the Freshman Survey data to predict the characteristics of students who found rankings important in their college decision, and before I ran the regression models, I reported on what I found looking at the descriptive statistics. Since the use of college rankings is indicative of various forms of economic, social, cultural, and/or academic privilege, it is necessary to account for this fact when examining the use of rankings and student outcomes. Several independent variables revolved around the idea of privilege, and McDonough et al.'s (1998) study also informed this study's selection of variables, as McDonough and her colleagues also used TFS data to illustrate the profile of students who find rankings important. Finally, Astin's Input-Environment-Output model (Astin & antonio, 2012) informed the organization of independent variables in the regression models.

In preparation for addressing the second research question, I used a form of propensity score matching techniques (inverse probability of treatment weighting) to account for the selection bias issue associated with the use of rankings. Using this technique to reduce the selection bias in the treatment (i.e., use of rankings in selecting a college) is necessary to provide a more realistic estimate of the effect or influence of rankings on student outcomes, particularly given the inability to conduct a randomized controlled experiment.

Having statistically adjusted the sample to account for the selection bias related to which students are more likely to consult rankings in their college search, I used a variety of methods to

examine differences in psychosocial college outcomes related to students' use of rankings. I first conducted t-tests with both the weighted and unweighted data to see if there were significant differences in the three outcomes for students who did and did not use college rankings. Next, I conducted multivariate regression for the three outcomes of interest with the goal of being able to provide more detailed information on the use of rankings and student outcomes, and several of the variables in these models related to students' experiences in college. Drawing from the literature review, variables that have been shown to predict each dependent variable were added to the relevant regression model. All in all, this study used a combination of statistical techniques to first provide information on the profile of students who think college rankings are important, and then this study inspected the relationship between use of rankings and sense of belonging, academic adjustment, and overall satisfaction.

Positionality

My interest in studying the use of rankings is because of my experience working at *U.S. News & World Report*. From 2017 to 2019, I was on the team that calculated the education rankings, which consist of several rankings including but not limited to the infamous college and graduate school rankings. I first worked on the data collection side where I assisted campus representatives with filling out the surveys we sent out. After about six months, I moved to the data analysis side focusing largely on quality assurance, internal data inquiries, and the creation of our survey instruments. I applied to work at *U.S. News & World Report* because I used the rankings when deciding where to go to college, and I also was interested in higher education accountability. When I was deciding where to go to college, I used the rankings as an information source and also because attending a highly-ranked institution was very important to me. Focusing my search on a handful of top-ranked institutions, I chose the institution I thought

was the best for me considering factors like location, major offerings, student population, and campus culture. I was recruited to play tennis for Carnegie Mellon, so I also made my decision to attend Carnegie Mellon because I bonded well with both the tennis team and coaches. With all of that in mind, I acknowledge the privilege I had in my ability to use rankings, and without this privilege, I am not sure I would have found an institution that felt like home to me.

I left *U.S. News and World Report* in the summer of 2019 to pursue my PhD at UCLA. I am extremely fortunate in that I know the inner workings of the rankings and many aspects of the rankings that very few people in the world know. While at *U.S. News and World Report*, I started to become aware of the criticisms of the rankings, and after starting at UCLA, my understanding only deepened. I certainly agree with the shortcomings of the rankings and acknowledge that rankings might be altering higher education for the worse. I understand that not all students can make use of rankings and that rankings likely worsen existing economic inequalities. Yet, I also believe that at least for the near future, college rankings will continue to be prevalent in higher education.

With that being said, I think it is extremely important to understand how college rankings affect institutions, students, and other higher education constituents. Especially given my background and expertise of the *U.S. News and World Report* rankings, I believe that I am in a strong position to study college rankings. I first conducted a study on college rankings for Dr. Eagan's 221 class in 2020, and I have been a consumer of the college rankings literature since. While I acknowledge that there are myriads of institutions and students who ignore college rankings, there still is a need for information regarding the effect of college rankings on student outcomes. I am excited that my study is one of the first studies to provide this type of knowledge.

Overview

This study is necessary in that it adds much to the conversation on how the use of rankings acts upon sense of belonging, academic adjustment, and overall satisfaction. In addition, this study also provides up-to-date information regarding the profile of students who find rankings important in their college decision. In this chapter, I make a case for why this study is significant and noteworthy, and I also briefly elaborate on the study's methodology and my positionality. Chapter 2 includes a review of the relevant literature, and I also expand upon the study's theoretical frameworks. In Chapter 3, I move to a discussion of the study's methodology and include information on key aspects of the study like the data source, variables, analytical approach, and limitations. Chapter 4 elaborates on the results of the study, and Chapter 5 details how the results are relevant for higher education, research, and certain audiences like students.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND THEORY

This study aims to provide an updated profile of the students who find rankings important in their college choice. Additionally, this study explores the question of whether the use of rankings in the college choice process contributes to differences in students' sense of belonging, academic adjustment, and overall satisfaction. The chapter begins by defining prestige in higher education and elaborating on how college rankings from an institutional perspective largely serve as a measure of an institution's selectivity; this section also details the various types of college rankings. Next, the chapter describes Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction and how this theory provides a lens to understand students' use of rankings when deciding where to attend college. This framework informs an examination of empirical research focused on the type of students who use college rankings.

The chapter then offers a description of anticipatory socialization and how this framework may be beneficial for understanding the extent to which the use of rankings may socialize students in ways that help them prepare for, or anticipate, the transition and adjustment to college. Building on this framing, the chapter expands on why students who make use of the informational aspect of rankings could have a stronger sense of belonging, an easier time adjusting to the academic demands of college, and greater satisfaction with their college experience versus their peers who do not use rankings. Finally, the chapter moves to a conversation on how the use of rankings could help to form expectations surrounding certain in-college experiences, and this section provides information on how these in-college experiences are related to this study's outcomes of interest.

Prestige and Rankings in Higher Education

Although used often, prestige is a subjective and poorly defined term within the context of higher education (Kim, 2018). Brewer et al. (2004) define prestige as a college's status in comparison with other institutions, and the most prestigious institutions are thought to be of the highest quality. Yet, what determines quality is also a debate within higher education (Kim, 2018). More prestigious institutions often emphasize quality by highlighting their selectivity in regard to selecting both students and faculty (Brewer et al., 2004). Despite the broad set of criteria included by *U.S. News & World Report* (Ehrenberg, 2005; Morse & Brooks, 2021), researchers have discovered that selectivity predicts an institution's *U.S. News & World Report* ranking more than any other factor (Brint et al., 2020; Kuh & Pascarella, 2004; Webster, 2001). More specifically, Kuh and Pascarella (2004) found that the correlation between an institution's average SAT/ACT scores and *U.S. News & World Report* ranking is -0.89, so around 80% of variance in institutional rankings can be accounted for by average standardized test scores of entering first-year students. Therefore, a college's *U.S. News & World Report* ranking is largely synonymous with its level of selectivity (Kuh & Pascarella, 2004).

It is important to remember that several other media companies create best colleges rankings, too (Kelchen, 2018). College rankings increasingly have focused on economic returns to college including rankings from *Wall Street Journal/Times Higher Education* and Payscale, and these types of rankings often incorporate earnings data from the College Scorecard (Kelchen, 2018). It is also common to see best colleges rankings include some type of value-added calculation in order to determine if colleges are providing an education at a reasonable cost, and rankings that make use of this type of analysis include the ones from *Washington Monthly* and *Money* (Kelchen, 2018). All in all, in addition to the rankings from *U.S. News & World Report*, a multitude of best colleges rankings exist within higher education (Kelchen, 2018).

In addition to developing lists that rank colleges in an overall sense, some media companies have created rankings based on particular characteristics of institutions (Niche, 2022; Princeton Review, 2022). There are some media companies that release a wide range of rankings yearly, and these companies often publish their methodologies (Moran, 2018; Niche, 2022; Princeton Review, 2022). *Princeton Review* produces various rankings lists based on institutions' academics/administration, quality of life, politics, campus life, town life, extracurriculars, and social scene; some of the rankings produced by *Princeton Review* include colleges with the most religious students, colleges with the happiest students, and best-run colleges (Princeton Review, 2022). *Princeton Review* exclusively uses student survey data to rank colleges, and for their 2023 rankings, the company surveyed 160,000 students (Princeton Review, 2022). *Niche*, on the other hand, uses a combination of student college reviews and data from sources like the U.S. Department of Education and National Science Foundation to create college rankings (Niche, 2022). *Niche* rankings fit into a total of seven categories: best colleges, best by state, best by major, admissions, campus life, students, and academics (Niche, 2022). Examples of some of the *Niche* rankings are best college dorms, most liberal colleges, and colleges with the best professors (Niche, 2022). All in all, there are a few media companies that publish a myriad of college rankings, and these companies often make use of data collected from students (Niche, 2022; Princeton Review, 2022).

By contrast, several college rankings are based entirely on the opinions of the individuals who created the rankings (Kelchen, 2018). A number have garnered attention from colleges and the public, like the top party schools created by *Playboy* (Kelchen, 2018; Playboy, 2015). To exemplify the nature of these types of rankings, *Thrillist* ranked NCAA Division 1 institutions on their "subjective gut feelings about whether we'd want to go to these schools, the tolerability of

the student body and alums, and other random things" (Lynch & Alexander, 2015, para. 1). Other examples of these types of rankings include Buzzfeed's list of swankiest colleges (Edelman, 2021) and *Architectural Digest's* most beautiful colleges ranking (Waldek & McLaughlin, 2022). Despite how these rankings are quite arbitrary, these rankings can still be quite popular (Kelchen, 2018).

This study's conceptualization of rankings revolves around students' use of the various types of rankings that exist. It is evident that college rankings are not just limited to the best colleges rankings, and as such, this study assumes that students could be utilizing one of the many types of college rankings. Keeping this fact in mind throughout the study is pivotal to understanding how students' use of rankings could impact their sense of belonging, academic adjustment, and overall satisfaction.

Bourdieu's Theory of Social Reproduction

This study provides an updated profile of the type of students who use rankings in their college choice, and Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction and corresponding subsequent research informed the modeling approach and variables selected to predict, or understand, whether students use rankings when deciding where to enroll in college. The following section explores Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction and explains in more detail how Bourdieu's theory influenced this study. This study posits that students with greater privilege tend to have a higher likelihood of consulting rankings in their search for and selection of a college. Thus, this study considers the specific types of privilege that some students have and how this affects their use of rankings. Additionally, in this study, the use of rankings is representative of informational capital, and the following section elaborates on this perspective.

Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction provides a framework to understand inequality and why we continue to have a classed society (Bourdieu, 2018; Košutić, 2017). According to Bourdieu, power is inherent to our society (Bourdieu, 1984; McCaleb, 2007), and social reproduction occurs due to social inequalities perpetually reproduced by the culture of the dominant class (Bourdieu, 1986; Košutić, 2017). In other words, culture is the way in which dominant groups display their power and exert influence over others (Bourdieu, 1984; McCaleb, 2007). Bourdieu was one of the first theorists to look at capital not just as something related to economics, but Bourdieu also believed that many forms of capital could be converted from one form to another (Bourdieu, 1984; McCaleb, 2007). The four main types of capital include economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1984). This study focuses on how students with greater access to capital (economic, social, academic, and cultural), and thus are more privileged, may be more likely to incorporate information from college rankings into their college search process.

Economic Capital

According to Bourdieu (Pinxten & Lievens, 2014), economic capital pertains to material assets that are "immediately and directly convertible to money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 242). Economic capital consists of material resources like land, property ownership, or financial resources (Pinxten & Lievens, 2014). Economic capital can be converted into money, but examining only economic capital does not provide a complete picture of society and the reproduction of capital (Bourdieu, 1986). For this study, since not all college rankings information is free (Chirikov, 2021; Lim, 2021; U.S. News & World Report, n.d.), students must have access to economic capital in order to access this information. As such, the use of rankings could be a sign of economic capital.

Cultural Capital

Cultural capital is often considered synonymous with having knowledge of high culture or knowing how to behave in certain social settings (DiMaggio & Useem, 2017; Winkle-Wagner, 2010). More specifically, Bourdieu (2018) thought of cultural capital as "instruments for the appropriation of symbolic wealth socially designated as worthy of being sought and possessed" (p. 73). Bourdieu originally developed the idea of cultural capital after observing how the educational system and family socialization were contributing to the inequality in society (Bourdieu, 2018; Lamont & Lareau, 1988). More specifically, children from upper-class families came to school with understandings of social and cultural cues, which were reinforced by the educational experience, and as such, privilege continued to persist (Bourdieu, 2018; Lamont & Lareau, 1988). Lastly, cultural capital has the potential to be converted to economic capital through the possession of educational qualifications as having a degree can result in increased economic capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Košutić, 2017).

Bourdieu (1986) theorized that cultural capital exists in three forms: the embodied state, the objectified state, and the institutionalized state. The embodied state comes into form beginning in early childhood, where families teach their children manners, norms, and values necessary to thrive in society, and these manners, norms, and values shape an individual over time (Bourdieu, 1986; Cheng, 2012). On the other hand, the objectified state of cultural capital refers to material possessions that signify an individual's membership in a particular group (Bourdieu, 1986; Chew, 2020; Tierney, 1999), and examples would include owning cultural goods like books, instruments, or paintings (Cheng, 2012). Finally, the institutionalized state of cultural capital is in reference to the "institutional recognition of particular tastes, norms, or values" (Chew, 2020, p. 24), and academic credentials and professional certifications are

illustrations of institutionalized cultural capital (Cheng, 2012). Altogether, these three forms of cultural capital work in cohesion to preserve structural inequality; possessing the same types of cultural capital as those in the dominant class creates a sense of collective identity, which privileges this group of individuals in terms of networking and opportunities (Bourdieu, 1986). Regarding this study, the use of rankings could be considered an indication of cultural capital as students who use rankings might come from families who place certain expectations on them about the type of institution they should attend.

Social Capital

Bourdieu defined social capital as "the aggregate of the actual and potential resources which are linked to the possession of a durable network of more or less institutional relationships of mutual acquaintances and recognition" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 251). In other words, membership in an esteemed group is a major component of social capital (Bourdieu, 1986), and by being a member of a certain group, one can utilize the group's social networks to profit and improve one's overall social position (Siisiainen, 2003). Bourdieu gives an example of how individuals in the business field often play golf as a way to network and strengthen relationships (Bourdieu, 1984). Membership in organizations like political parties, secret societies, or trade unions are current examples of the embodiment of social capital (Siisiainen, 2003). When an individual is a member of a respected and recognized organization, other forms of capital will often become amplified as well (Bourdieu, 1986).

Students who make use of rankings likely have more access to social capital than those students who do not utilize rankings. Individuals who discuss the college choice process with college-going peers, college-educated parents, teachers, and/or counselors likely become more aware of the existence and importance of rankings in helping to select a college. Consequently,

because of their increased access to social capital, these students can use information in the rankings to select an institution that best fits their needs.

Symbolic Capital

Finally, symbolic capital refers to "the various forms of distinction and prestige acquired through cultural recognition" (Rose-Redwood, 2008, p. 434), and symbolic capital is often represented by awards, diplomas, publicity, and reputation (Pret et al., 2016). Having symbolic capital is instrumental in generating trust and legitimacy (De Clercq & Voronov, 2009), and symbolic capital can be converted to social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Lawrence, 2004). Attending a prestigious institution could serve as a form of symbolic capital that might be useful in searching for a job after college, so students might make use of rankings to attend a top-ranked institution that they believe can help to further their capital. Knowledge about the benefits of attending a prestigious institution likely flows from increased access to cultural and social capital.

Relation to Privilege

It is evident that individuals with increased levels of capital have distinct advantages that allow them to be members of the dominant class (Bourdieu, 1984, 1986, 2018). As there are many types of capital (Bourdieu, 1986), individuals who possess multiple forms of capital can utilize their capital in society's "perpetual struggle over privilege, advantage, and relative positionality" (Reiter, 2020, p. 113). As such, capital can be thought of as synonymous with privilege, and this study refers to privilege when examining the characteristics of students who decide to make use of rankings when deciding which college to attend.

Applying Bourdieu's Conceptions of Capital to This Study

Rankings are one source of information that students can use when deciding which college to attend, and as the admissions processes of institutions often vary, having access to information about higher education is important for students who are applying to college (Hill, 2020; Karen, 2002; O'Connor et al., 2010). However, research has found that students from more privileged backgrounds have greater access to information about higher education (Gewertz, 2018; Glass, 2023; Klasik, 2012; Person & Rosenbaum, 2006). For example, students who come from higher-income families often possess more information about higher education than their lower-income peers (McDonough, 1997; Person & Rosenbaum, 2006). For rankings, this could especially be true as rankings are sometimes not free to access (Chirikov, 2021; Lim, 2021; U.S. News & World Report, n.d.). Additionally, students who are not first-generation often have more knowledge about the college process as these students' parents can inform them about key aspects of the college admissions process (Glass, 2023; Klasik, 2012; Saenz, 2007).

College counselors are also key information providers for students looking to attend college (Glass, 2023; Klasik, 2012), yet one in five high schools do not even have a college counselor (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights Data Collection, 2016). Additionally, schools that primarily serve low-income students are less likely to have a college counselor (Gewertz, 2018), and first-generation students generally have decreased access to well-trained college counselors (McDonough & Fann, 2007; O'Connor et al., 2010). Moreover, it is common to have a high ratio of students to counselors, which means that many students are potentially missing out on vital information about higher education (Gonzalez et al., 2003). According to the National Association for College Admission Counseling, the average student-to-college counselor ratio is around 309-to-1 (Clinedinst, 2019). On a final note, private college

counselors can cost around $200 an hour on average, so only economically privileged students are typically able to make use of private college counselors (Jaschik, 2019).

Additionally, selective institutions often have ties to high schools that have a majority of affluent and white students, further perpetuating inequalities in access to information about higher education (Gewertz, 2018; Glasener, 2021; Person & Rosenbaum, 2006; Salazar et al., 2021; Stevens, 2009). Selective institutions recruit from these types of high schools, as they know a lot of students from these schools will apply to their university (Glasener, 2021). Institutions have also targeted certain students based off information they have received from student lists from places like the College Board (Han et al., 2019). All in all, selective institutions often recruit students who are likely already privileged (Glasener, 2021; Salazar et al., 2021; Stevens, 2009), and, by focusing largely on this type of student, students who come from non-privileged backgrounds are left without vital information about the potential institutions they could attend.

It is clear that information about higher education is often more accessible to more privileged individuals (Gewertz, 2018; Glass, 2023; Jaschik, 2019; Klasik, 2012; Person & Rosenbaum, 2006), and as college rankings contain a plethora of information about higher education institutions (Ehrenberg, 2005; Morse & Brooks, 2021), this study investigates the extent to which students from more privileged backgrounds have a greater likelihood of utilizing rankings when deciding where to apply to and enroll in college. Because the use of rankings indicates access to several forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1986), understanding the differences between students who make use of rankings and students who do not is pivotal in understanding how the use of rankings could impact student outcomes.

After examining the distinguishing characteristics and pre-college experiences of students who are more likely to use rankings versus those who do not consider rankings in their search for an institution, this study investigates the extent to which the use of rankings represents informational capital. By consulting rankings in the college search process, students gather information on a wide variety of factors like major, campus community, and extracurricular offerings, and thus, the use of rankings represents an information-rich approach to selecting a college. Students who are able to use rankings to access information about higher education could indeed have stronger outcomes than students who do not use rankings, so this study inspects whether students' use of rankings positively impacts their sense of belonging, academic adjustment, and overall satisfaction.

College Choice: Profile of Students Who Find Rankings Important

Several studies and student surveys have examined the characteristics and pre-college experiences associated with using rankings in the college choice process (Art & Science Group, 2002, 2016; Lipman Hearne, Inc., 2006; McDonough et al., 1998; Teranishi et al., 2004). This section elaborates more on findings from these studies and surveys, and it will conclude by explaining why there is a need for updated information with regard to the characteristics of students who make use of college rankings. This conclusion also expands upon this study's contribution to the literature in that this study thoroughly examines how multiple types of privilege continue to affect students' utilization of rankings.

Differences in the Use of Rankings by Race/Ethnicity

The literature reveals that Asian American students place great value on college rankings when choosing where to attend college (Art & Science Group, 2013; Howard, 2002; Lipman Hearne, Inc., 2006; McDonough et al., 1998; Teranishi et al., 2004). McDonough et al. (1998)

conducted a logistic regression model using the 1995 HERI Freshman Survey data to better understand the characteristics of students who use college rankings in their college decision, and McDonough et al. (1998) found that, compared with other race groups, Asian American students were the most likely to find college rankings important. Likewise, a 2006 survey of 600 high school seniors admitted to a number of institutions also reveals that Asian American students state that rankings were instrumental when choosing between colleges (Lipman Hearne, Inc., 2006). Looking more closely within the Asian American student group, Chinese Americans and Korean Americans use rankings at higher rates than other Asian American student groups, and Teranishi et al.'s (2004) study made use of HERI data. In addition to Asian American students making use of rankings, parents can also be heavily influenced by rankings (Kim & Gasman, 2011). Kim and Gasman's (2011) interviews of 14 Asian American students at a highly selective institution revealed that parents' reliance on rankings impacted their children's decisions to enroll at a top-ranked institution. These students often felt immense pressure from their parents to attend the best ranked schools as their parents cared a great deal about their child's education, but the students in the study typically were grateful of their parents' involvement (Kim & Gasman, 2011).

In comparison with students of other races/ethnicities, Hispanic students are the least likely to report that rankings are important when deciding where to attend college (Art & Science Group, 2013; Howard, 2002; McDonough et al., 1998). For example, a 2013 student survey from the Art & Science Group saw that 45% of Hispanic students said that the *U.S. News & World Report* rankings were instrumental in their college choice process. White, African American, and Asian American students all found these rankings important at much higher rates, with 75% of Asian American students reporting that the *U.S. News & World Report* rankings were of great

value to them when choosing between colleges (Art & Science Group, 2013). In addition, McDonough et al.'s (1998) seminal study concluded that Chicano/a students were significantly less likely to reference rankings in the college choice process compared with students of other races. In summary, the literature demonstrates that among students of different races/ethnicities, Asian American students are the most likely to prioritize the use of rankings and Hispanic students are the least likely (Art & Science Group, 2013; Howard, 2002; McDonough et al., 1998).

Differences in the Use of Rankings by Economic Privilege

Students who have greater economic privilege also prioritize the use of college rankings (Art & Science Group, 2002, 2016; Howard, 2002; McDonough et al., 1998; Morphew & Swanson, 2011; Perna et al., 2021; Richards et al., 2018; Teranishi et al., 2004). McDonough et al. (1998) defined *upper-class* as families who made over $75,000 a year, and the authors concluded that students from these more affluent families had significantly higher odds of valuing rankings when deciding where to attend college. Likewise, Teranishi et al.'s (2004) study and surveys from the Art & Science Group (2002, 2016) also demonstrate that students from high-income families are those who prioritize the use of college rankings. Finally, it is important to point out that due to their increased use of rankings and/or their income, students from higher SES backgrounds also tend to enroll at more selective institutions (Hearn, 1990; Teranishi et al., 2004). To recap, there is much evidence that students with considerable economic privilege utilize rankings when deciding where to attend college (Art & Science Group, 2016; Howard, 2002; McDonough et al., 1998; Perna et al., 2021; Teranishi et al., 2004).

Differences in the Use of Rankings by Academic Privilege

Additionally, the literature illustrates that students with greater academic privilege are those students who tend to place importance on the use of rankings in the college search process (Art & Science Group, 2002, 2016; Bradshaw et al., 2001; Howard, 2002; Lipman Hearne, Inc., 2006; McDonough et al., 1998; Perna et al., 2021). Students with higher levels of accumulated academic privilege (i.e., high school GPA and SAT scores) had significantly higher odds of prioritizing rankings when deciding where to enroll in college (McDonough et al., 1998), and others have affirmed the relationship between SAT scores and reliance on rankings in the college search process (Art & Science Group, 2002, 2016; Lipman Hearne, Inc., 2006). In addition, Bradshaw et al. (2001) interviewed high-achieving students (e.g., high GPA, high ACT scores, and were National Merit Scholars) at a Carnegie Research 1 institution and concluded that these participants reported using college rankings while also feeling pressure from parents, teachers, counselors, and peers to attend a prestigious university because of their previous academic achievements. There is substantial evidence that students who make use of rankings often have increased levels of accumulated academic privilege (Art & Science Group, 2002, 2016; Bradshaw et al., 2001; Howard, 2002; McDonough et al., 1998; Perna et al., 2021).

Cultural Privilege Considerations in Students' Use of College Rankings

Students who are first in their families to attend college often place less importance on college rankings (Art & Science Group, 2016; Hossler & Foley, 1995; McDonough et al., 1998; Zilvinskis & Rocconi, 2018). In McDonough et al.'s (1998) study, 65% of first-generation students found rankings unimportant in their college choice, but this was only true of 58% of students who had college-educated parents. Based on this analysis, McDonough et al. (1998) conclude that first-generation students are less likely to make use of rankings when deciding where to attend college. A related finding from the Art & Science Group (2016) is that first-

generation students reported making use of fewer rankings than their peers, perhaps suggesting that rankings are less important to this group of students. Students with parents who went to college likely possess the knowledge needed to successfully navigate higher education, and as such, these students have greater cultural privilege than first-generation students. To reiterate, the literature suggests that students with college-educated parents are more likely to place greater importance on the use of rankings in their college search (Art & Science Group, 2016; Hossler & Foley, 1995; McDonough et al., 1998).

Students who are concerned with an institution's reputation also more frequently utilize college rankings (McDonough et al., 1998). Students who concentrate on an institution's reputation likely understand the value of having a degree from a well-respected institution in terms of future networking and opportunities, and consequently, they possess more cultural privilege than students who do not consider an institution's reputation. Cross-tabulations demonstrated that students who placed more importance on rankings were more concerned with an institution's academic and social reputation, along with an institution's reputation regarding graduates getting good jobs and going to top graduate/professional schools (McDonough et al., 1998). Additionally, McDonough et al. (1998) created a factor with the variables focused on a school's academic reputation, graduates getting good jobs, and graduates going to top graduate/professional schools, and this latent measure significantly predicted students' increased likelihood of considering rankings in their selection of a college.

Students who are thinking about their education past a bachelor's degree have typically made use of rankings when deciding between colleges (McDonough et al., 1998). Individuals with a graduate degree typically make around 20% more than those with just a bachelor's degree (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023a), and graduate programs can offer specialized

training not seen at the undergraduate level (Posselt & Grodsky, 2017). As such, knowledge of the benefits of graduate education and aspiring to obtain a graduate degree can be seen as a form of cultural privilege. In McDonough et al.'s (1998) study, for individuals who only wanted to obtain a bachelor's degree, 14% said that college rankings were very important, yet almost half (46%) of students wanting to obtain a graduate degree said that rankings were very important. In the logistic regression model, McDonough et al. (1998) also found that students who had plans to attend graduate school were more likely to consult college rankings. McDonough et al. (1998) mention how having graduate school intentions can be seen as status-seeking, as students are looking to set themselves up for future success and job opportunities. In conclusion, students who are thinking beyond their undergraduate education have more cultural privilege and are traditionally more likely to prioritize college rankings (McDonough et al., 1998).

Finally, students who place importance on advice from a private counselor often place importance on college rankings (McDonough et al., 1998; Palmer et al., 2004). Private college counselors can help students navigate the uncertain college admissions process and get accepted to a top-ranked institution (Palmer et al., 2004), so students who make use of private college counselors have greater cultural privilege than students who cannot or do not utilize private counselors. Compared with students who said that rankings were not important, students who said rankings were very important were six times more likely to state that the advice of a private college counselor was also very important (McDonough et al., 1998). Students who prioritize advice from a private counselor additionally prioritize the use of college rankings when deciding where to attend college (McDonough et al., 1998).

School Counselors and Teachers Provide Social Privilege

Although the strength of the relationship was not as strong as for private college counselors, students who said rankings were very important were more than twice as likely to rely on the advice from their high school counselor in comparison with their peers who did not find college rankings important (McDonough et al., 1998). High school counselors are thought to be a more accessible resource than private college counselors, but they still can be very helpful in the college choice process (Mulhern, 2020). For the students who took part in the Art & Science Group surveys, around a third discussed rankings with their high school counselors (Art & Science Group, 2013, 2016). By and large, students who utilize high school counselors are those with greater social privilege, and the literature demonstrates that these students often make use of college rankings (Bradshaw et al., 2001; McDonough et al., 1998).

In addition, students who frequently ask their teachers for advice also utilize college rankings at high rates (McDonough et al., 1998). Students who asked a teacher for advice perhaps received valuable knowledge that will help them in college, so these students have greater social privilege than students who did not consult their teachers. McDonough et al.'s (1998) study provides evidence that as a student's reliance on rankings increases, so does their likelihood of asking their high school teacher for advice after class.

Closing the Gap in the Literature

This study contributes to the literature by providing a recent profile of the type of students who consider college rankings important when deciding where to attend college. This study is especially needed as there are very few studies or surveys that comprehensively address this topic. McDonough et al.'s (1998) study provides the greatest insight regarding the experiences and characteristics related to incoming college students' reliance on newsmagazine rankings. However, given that the study relied on data collected nearly 30 years ago, it is

important to determine what, if anything, has changed in the profile of students who use college rankings in their college choice process. Accordingly, this study closes the gap in the literature regarding a more current investigation into the types of students who make use of college rankings.

Furthermore, this study adds to the literature by determining the extent to which privilege predicts students' likelihood of using rankings. Studies that have investigated students' use of rankings largely have not comprehensively examined how privilege impacts utilization of rankings (Bradshaw et al., 2001; Hossler & Foley, 1995; Howard, 2002; Kim & Gasman, 2011; McDonough et al., 1998; Teranishi et al., 2004). McDonough et al.'s (1998) study does make use of Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction to hypothesize that students with greater access to capital are those who make use of rankings, yet as previously mentioned, the data from McDonough et al.'s study was collected almost 30 years ago. As such, this study provides updated information on whether students with greater privilege are those students who utilize rankings when deciding where to attend college.

Merton's Concept of Anticipatory Socialization

After the first analysis aimed at understanding how privilege impacts students' use of rankings, this study moves to explore if the use of rankings provides certain advantages to students' psychosocial outcomes during college. Before addressing how the use of college rankings might alter students' outcomes, the following section will explain how the theory of anticipatory socialization provides context for why students who use college rankings might have distinct expectations for their time in college. More particularly, these expectations might differ from the expectations of students who do not use college rankings, and as such, these unalike expectations might cause these student groups to have unique experiences while in college. The

following section will first review Merton's (1968) theory of anticipatory socialization and how it has been applied to higher education, and finally, this section goes into depth regarding how the study utilizes the ideas of anticipatory socialization.

Development and Explanation of Merton's Theory

In 1968, Merton developed the concept of anticipatory socialization, which he defined as the following: "the acquisition of values and orientations found in statuses and groups in which one is not yet engaged but which one is likely to enter" (Merton, 1968, p. 438). The theory is based on a previous study Merton (1968) conducted looking at members of the United States military and the privates who aspired to become officers. Merton (1968) concluded that privates who matched the behaviors and attitudes of officers were those more likely to be promoted. In other words, privates who took on the officers' values had a less demanding adjustment to their future role as officers because of their anticipatory socialization experience (Merton, 1968). The theory of anticipatory socialization has shaped many studies in a variety of fields (Marsh, 2010), and applications of the theory include examining how individuals prepare for and adjust to retirement (Curl & Ingram, 2013), investigating why high school age students use marijuana (Mauss, 1969), looking at the transition from middle to high school (Waerdahl, 2005), learning how the sex of an unborn child affects a mother's future behavior (Barnes, 2015), and demonstrating how pre-professional programs can aid in future professional success (O'Brien, 2018).

Merton (1968) identified two main purposes of anticipatory socialization when a member of an outside group is transitioning to a new role: (1) smooth transitions between roles and (2) reductions to the "abruptiveness and discontinuity of individual reorientations required" (Marshall & Hill, 1968, p. 2). Additionally, individuals who go through the anticipatory

socialization process are more likely to become a member of their new group (Merton, 1968). However, there often is a cost of the anticipatory socialization process in that an individual is removing themselves from their current group to become part of a new group (Merton, 1968; Yamaguchi, 1998).

Merton (1968) describes how anticipatory socialization can be done intentionally through a formal training program, and Merton defines this process as "deliberate" (p. 349). However, Merton (1968) believed that most of the anticipatory socialization experience is often "implicit, unwitting, and informal" (p. 349). Merton (1968) expounds on how this form of anticipatory socialization is not done by those who are to officially train an individual for a future role, but informal anticipatory socialization can happen in these more formal settings. For example, in schools, individuals learn outside of the skills they are taught in the classroom; individuals learn from unspoken behavioral cues and decipher how to act in a future role as a result (Merton, 1968). Merton (1968) discusses how individuals who experience this informal type of anticipatory socialization often go through this process unnoticed, while anticipatory socialization experiences that are more formal are more prominent and seen by others. The examples Merton (1968) gives for the latter include "celebrative rites of passage" or "legally enacted changes of status" (p. 349).

Anticipatory Socialization: Application to Higher Education and This Study

Kamens (1981) adapted the ideas of anticipatory socialization to better understand educational institutions and their role in socializing students. The anticipatory socialization process begins even before students arrive at college in what Kamens (1981) calls "pre-entry effects". These pre-entry effects take place when a student starts to imagine what it is like to attend their institution of choice and be a student there (DeAngelo, 2008; Kamens, 1981). Pre-

entry effects are powerful in that they set up expectations regarding the college experience and future opportunities, and they also shape an individual's self-concept and ambitions (DeAngelo, 2008; Kamens, 1981). Once on campus, students work steadfastly to assimilate by adopting the values and norms of their campus (DeAngelo, 2010; Kamens, 1981). In conclusion, pre-entry effects are a pivotal aspect of this study in that they help us understand why students might have different college experiences after arriving on campus.

In this study, given that the use of rankings provides additional information to students and their families (McDonough et al., 1998), students' use of rankings will shape their anticipatory socialization experiences. Thus, a student's use of college rankings will set up expectations before the student arrives on campus. It is very possible that students who do and do not use college rankings have different expectations for their time in college. A student's valuing of rankings can be thought of as a pre-entry effect as these effects may shape a student's expectations even before the student steps foot on campus (DeAngelo, 2008; Kamens, 1981). Another important note is that these pre-entry effects often lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy when a student adapts their behavior to better align with their expectations (DeAngelo, 2008; Kamens, 1981). These expectations have the potential to alter students' outcomes, and this study examines three particular outcomes to see how the use of rankings may operate in different ways for students. This study looks into sense of belonging, academic adjustment, and overall satisfaction at the end of the first year, and this study also delves into overall satisfaction upon graduation. In conclusion, the use of rankings will likely impact a student's anticipatory socialization experience, and this study attempts to understand how the use of rankings affects student outcomes.

While no scholars have investigated how the use of rankings impacts sense of belonging, academic adjustment, and satisfaction, Chang et al.'s (2008) study did partially examine the use of rankings in regard to biomedical/behavioral science major persistence. Using HERI data, Chang et al. (2008) inspected whether the status of an institution affected a student's persistence in a biomedical or behavioral science major. The scholars defined the status of an institution as many factors including not only institutional characteristics like selectivity but also student perceptions like the student's view of the institution's reputation (Chang et al., 2008). One of the variables in the student's view of the institution's reputation measure is the use of rankings variable with the idea that a student's view of their college's reputation is influenced by college rankings (Chang et al., 2008). One of the takeaways from the study is that students who have a positive view of their institution's reputation are more likely to persist in biomedical/behavioral science majors, which points to how students' beliefs about their institution are powerful forces in students' future successes (Chang et al., 2008).

This study also has the possibility to extend other findings supporting the work of Kamens (1981), yet this study deviates from Chang et al.'s (2008) study in its aim to more clearly and explicitly explore how a student's use of rankings affects their outcomes. Additionally, this study considers the possible indirect effect of considering rankings on later outcomes in college; the use of rankings may lead to students becoming involved on campus in particular ways, which may contribute to their academic adjustment, sense of belonging, and overall satisfaction. Accordingly, this study provides new information on student perceptions and outcomes in contexts that have not been studied to this date.

Association between Use of Rankings and Sense of Belonging, Academic Adjustment, and Overall Satisfaction

With an understanding of how students' valuing of rankings might prime them for different college expectations versus students who do not use rankings, this next section will elaborate on why students who use college rankings might have more realistic expectations about their time in college. These expectations are formed largely through the use of information in the rankings, which results in students finding an institution that is a good fit for them. Because this study examines how the use of college rankings affects students' sense of belonging, academic adjustment, and overall satisfaction, it is important to keep in mind that both perceived student-institutional fit and students' expectations can influence psychosocial outcomes.

Sense of Belonging

Students' use of rankings leads them to make more informed choices about which college to attend, and this better fit could result in more realistic expectations about one's college experience. As such, students could feel a stronger sense of belonging to their campus as a result of having expectations that better match their actual college experience. Hurtado and Carter (1997) were some of the first scholars to study sense of belonging, and the scholars considered sense of belonging to be a psychological outcome. More specifically, Hurtado and Carter (1997) defined sense of belonging as "the individual's view of whether he or she feels included in the college community" (p. 327). This study utilizes HERI's sense of belonging construct, which is defined as the following: "the extent to which students feel a sense of academic and social integration on campus" (Higher Education Research Institute, 2017, p. 20).

Students who believe they chose an institution that is a good fit typically feel an increased sense of belonging to their institution (Nora, 2004; Plummer, 2018). Students often

attend a certain institution because they believe the institution will meet their needs, and consequently, these students feel a strong connection to their college (Nora, 2004). In addition to choosing an institution that is a solid fit, students' use of the informational aspect of rankings could also prime them to form expectations that reflect their actual college experience, and students' expectations about their future sense of belonging can shape their experience while on campus (Hausmann et al., 2007; Kantanis, 2000; Keup, 2007; Pleitz et al., 2015). In particular, scholars report that when expectations are not met regarding sense of belonging, students consequently feel a weaker sense of belonging as a result (Hausmann et al., 2007; Kantanis, 2000; Pleitz et al., 2015). In conclusion, this study investigates whether students' use of rankings factors into their later sense of belonging.

Academic Adjustment

Students' use of rankings assists them in selecting an institution that aligns with their skills, interests, and goals, and, as a result, these students likely have a better understanding of what to expect academically. Consequently, it follows that students' use of rankings could lead them to have a smoother transition to the academic demands of college. Academic adjustment is frequently defined as how successful students are at coping with the educational demands of college (Baker & Siryk, 1989; Melendez, 2006), and this study utilizes HERI's ease of academic adjustment construct.

For students who select an institution that they think is a good fit, these students typically have an easier time adjusting to the academic demands of college in comparison with their peers (Denson & Bowman, 2015; Martin & Williams-Dixon, 1991; Nora, 2004). Additionally, for students who have a more realistic idea about what to expect academically, these students also have a less difficult transition in regard to their academic adjustment (Cook & Leckey, 1999;

Kantanis, 2000; Smith & Wertlieb, 2005). Students' use of rankings could assist them in finding an institution that is a better fit academically and socially, and as a result, these students likely know what to expect for their college experience. As such, this study investigates whether students' use of rankings affects their academic adjustment measured at the end of their freshman year.

Overall Satisfaction

Students who make use of the informational aspect of rankings likely will be satisfied with their institution as a result of attending an institution that is a good fit for them, which helps with forming realistic expectations about one's time in college. Astin states that examining overall satisfaction "covers the students' subjective experience during the college years and perceptions of the value of educational experience" (Astin, 1993, p. 273). HERI's overall satisfaction construct measures how satisfied students are with their comprehensive college experience (Higher Education Research Institute, 2017), and this study uses HERI's construct to conceptualize satisfaction.

Students who perceive they are attending an institution that is a good fit often have higher overall satisfaction (Bowman & Denson, 2014; Gilbreath et al., 2011; Nora, 2004; Plummer, 2018; Williams, 1987). More specifically, students who thoroughly research colleges to choose an institution that best fits their needs frequently are more satisfied with both their college choice and overall college experience (Hossler et al., 1999; Nora, 2004). As a result of choosing an institution that is a good fit, students likely form pragmatic expectations about their time in college. There is a clear link between a student's expectations and their future satisfaction (Beloucif et al., 2018; Gopal et al., 2021; Rosenbaum et al., 2016; Shahsavar & Sudzina, 2017) as too high expectations often result in lower satisfaction (Alves & Raposo, 2007; Eskildsen et

al., 1999; Shahsavar & Sudzina, 2017). This might not be the case for students who use college rankings as they are making a more informed choice about which college to attend. Accordingly, this study determines if the use of college rankings impacts students' first-year and senior-year overall satisfaction.

Relevance to Study

Students who come to college with more realistic expectations about their satisfaction, sense of belonging, and academic adjustment frequently have stronger outcomes, and the same can be said for the outcomes of students who believe their institution is a good fit (Alves & Raposo, 2007; Cook & Leckey, 1999; Kantanis, 2000; Nora, 2004; Pleitz et al., 2015; Plummer, 2018; Shahsavar & Sudzina, 2017). Students who use college rankings are likely choosing an institution that matches their personal preferences, and as a result of choosing an institution that fits well with their needs, these students' expectations about their college experience will likely match what they will actually experience while on campus. In closing, this study explores whether students' use of rankings ultimately has an effect on their sense of belonging, academic adjustment, and overall satisfaction.

Other Factors that Impact Students' Psychosocial Outcomes

As previously mentioned, the use of rankings likely shapes a student's anticipatory socialization experience, so students who use rankings presumably have distinct expectations for their time in college. These expectations could be related to both students' in-college experiences and their outcomes, so this section will explore how students' use of rankings might shape expectations surrounding campus racial climate, student-faculty interaction, involvement in extracurricular activities, and academic self-concept. The following section also elaborates on how these in-college experiences relate to this study's outcomes of interest, especially as it is

important to investigate how other covariates impact students' psychosocial outcomes. With all of that being said, this study examines the extent to which the use of rankings contributes to students' anticipatory socialization as they transition to college. If the anticipatory socialization process does cause students to form expectations about certain in-college experiences, the impact of the use of rankings should diminish as these in-college experiences are added to the regression models.

Campus Racial Climate

Relevance to Use of Rankings

Campus racial climate is often defined as "a part of the institutional context that includes community members' attitudes, perceptions, behaviors, and expectations around issues of race, ethnicity, and diversity" (Hurtado et al., 2008, p. 205). This study makes use of HERI's negative cross-racial interaction construct, which measures students' experiences with and perceptions of interactions with students from different racial/ethnic backgrounds (Higher Education Research Institute, 2017). Several studies that examine campus racial climate have made use of campus racial climate measures that are similar to HERI's negative cross-racial interaction construct (Cabrera et al., 1999; Johnson et al., 2007; Locks et al., 2008; Mack et al., 1997; Ncube et al., 2018).

Students who use rankings could be more aware of the racial tension on campus, but at the same time, they also might be more cognizant of the type of support/resources on campus that could help them feel less of the effects of the campus racial climate. As such, does the effect of campus racial climate vary based on whether a student used college rankings? This study examines if the use of rankings acts as a buffer against a hostile campus racial climate; in other words, the use of rankings could mitigate the direct effects of hostile campus racial climates.

Differences in Perceptions of Campus Racial Climate by Race

Students of color more frequently report feeling a poor campus racial climate in comparison with white students (Fischer, 2010; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Hurtado, 1992; Leath & Chavous, 2018; Mack et al., 1997; Rankin & Reason, 2005). For example, Mack et al. (1997) surveyed students who attended small private colleges in California. Looking at 12 items to measure interracial climate, Mack et al. (1997) found that overall, white students had a more positive view of the interracial climate than black students. Furthermore, black students often defined their campus as hostile and uninviting (Mack et al., 1997). Specifically, black students felt that other students seemed uneasy around them, and this sentiment aligns well with how HERI measures negative cross-racial interaction (Higher Education Research Institute, 2017; Mack et al., 1997). Additionally, Fischer's (2010) study reaffirms that white students have more favorable perceptions of the campus racial climate than students of color. Fischer (2010) analyzed data from 4,000 students who took the National Longitudinal Survey of Freshmen. The campus racial climate measure consisted of several variables: hearing derogatory remarks made by other students, receiving an unfair grade because of one's race, being discouraged to take a class because of one's race, and experiencing other problems on campus because of one's race (Fischer, 2010). Black students had the greatest perception of a negative campus racial climate among all races, and white students thought at the lowest rates that their campus had a negative racial climate (Fischer, 2010). Asian and Hispanic students had perceptions of the campus racial climate more consistent with black students (Fischer, 2010). In conclusion, white students often think more positively of the campus racial climate in comparison with students of color (Fischer, 2010; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Hurtado, 1992; Leath & Chavous, 2018; Mack et al., 1997; Rankin & Reason, 2005).

Relationship to Sense of Belonging

Several studies have demonstrated that a negative campus racial climate can weaken students' sense of belonging (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Johnson et al., 2007; Locks et al., 2008; Nuñez, 2009). Using data from the 2004 National Study of Living Learning Programs, Johnson et al. (2007) discovered that for African American, Asian Pacific Islander, multiracial, and white students, their perceptions of the campus racial climate significantly impacted their sense of belonging; however, this was not true for Hispanic students. Johnson's measure of campus racial climate relates very closely to HERI's negative cross-racial interaction construct; both measures examine the extent to which students feel respected by and comfortable with students of other races (Higher Education Research Institute, 2017; Johnson et al., 2007). Locks et al.'s (2008) study differed from Johnson et al.'s (2007) study in that Locks et al. (2008) did not disaggregate different racial groups for students of color. More particularly, Locks et al. (2008) found that for both white students and students of color, students who had frequent positive interactions with diverse peers had a stronger sense of belonging. Similarly, HERI's measure of negative cross-racial interaction also deals with students' interactions with diverse peers (Higher Education Research Institute, 2017). Finally, studies analyzing data from the National Survey of Hispanic Students (Hurtado & Carter, 1997) and the Diverse Democracy Project (Nuñez, 2009) found that perceptions of and experiences with more hostile campus racial climates contributed to a reduced sense of belonging for Latino students.

Relationship to Academic Adjustment

Studies examining how campus racial climate affects academic adjustment often conclude that the more negatively a student feels about the campus racial climate, the less able they are to adjust to the academic demands of college (Cabrera et al., 1999; Hurtado et al., 2007;

LeSure, 1994; Solorzano et al., 2000). Hurtado et al. (2007) examined how perceptions of a hostile racial climate affected students' success at managing the academic environment, which was a measure containing all four of the variables in HERI's academic adjustment construct. For underrepresented minority students, students who felt their campus had a hostile racial climate were not able to manage the academic environment as well as their peers who did not perceive a hostile racial climate (Hurtado et al., 2007). Cabrera et al.'s (1999) study dealt with academic development, which they defined as perceived gains in learning. More particularly, African American students who perceived more prejudice on campus reported lower academic development (Cabrera et al., 1999), but the same relationship did not occur for white students. Like with HERI's negative cross-racial interaction construct (Higher Education Research Institute, 2017), Cabrera et al.'s (1999) conceptualization of perceptions of prejudice also attempted to determine if students had hostile interactions with students of another race/ethnicity.

Also for Latino students, campus racial climate predicts academic adjustment (Fischer, 2007; Hurtado et al., 1996). In Hurtado et al.'s (1996) study of Latino students who were top achievers on the PSAT, students who perceived racial/ethnic tension on campus were not able to adjust to the academic demands of college as well as students who did not perceive racial/ethnic tension. Hurtado et al. (1996) used the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire measure of academic adjustment, along with their own measure of perceptions of racial/ethnic tension. This measure was a factor which combined survey items like if students of different races/ethnicities communicated well with each other and if there was a lot of racial conflict on campus (Hurtado et al., 1996). Likewise, Fischer's (2007) study saw that for Hispanic students, perceptions of a negative campus racial climate impacted cumulative GPA measured at the beginning of a student's sophomore year.

Relationship to Overall Satisfaction

Finally, several studies have found that students who have more positive perceptions of the campus racial climate are often more satisfied with their overall college experience (Fischer, 2010; Helm et al., 1998; Milem et al., 2005; Museus et al., 2008; Ncube et al., 2018). Looking at students of all races at the University of Maryland College Park, Helm et al. (1998) used their own campus climate questionnaire to discover a negative correlation between satisfaction and perception of racial tension. In their questionnaire, Helm et al. (1998) defined racial tension as perception of racial conflict on campus, and Helm et al. defined overall satisfaction as the belief that one's college experience was academically and socially rewarding (Ancis et al., 2000).

Using 2016 Student Experience in the Research University survey data, Ncube et al. (2018) saw a significant positive correlation between perceptions of respect for students of different races/ethnicities and satisfaction with both academic and social experiences on campus. In addition, the respect for students of different races/ethnicities variable predicted both academic and social satisfaction in the linear regression models, demonstrating that perceptions of campus racial climate can impact students' satisfaction (Ncube et al., 2018). It should be noted that Ncube et al.'s (2018) measure of respect for students of different races/ethnicities relates to HERI's negative cross-racial interaction construct in that both measures aim to understand if students of different races/ethnicities feel respected by others on campus (Higher Education Research Institute, 2017). Lastly, Museus et al. (2008) utilized data from the Beginning Postsecondary Students study to examine the relationship between perceptions of campus racial climate and degree completion. Relevant to this study, students who were satisfied with the campus racial climate also were generally satisfied with their overall college experience, and this was true for students from a variety of racial groups (Museus et al., 2008).

Student-Faculty Interaction

Relevance to Use of Rankings

Students who make use of rankings likely have done extensive research on their chosen institution, and consequently, they likely are aware of what they should expect regarding student-faculty interaction. Their personality could match the culture of student-faculty interaction on campus. For example, students might come to an understanding that they will need to seek out faculty on campus, but perhaps they know they are comfortable doing so. Consequently, these students might have more situational awareness of the academic environment versus the students who do not make use of rankings.

Relationship to Sense of Belonging

The literature demonstrates that there is a link between student-faculty interaction and sense of belonging (Booker, 2016; Freeman et al., 2007; Glass et al., 2015; Hausmann et al., 2007; Hoffman et al., 2002; Kim & Lundberg, 2016; Meeuwisse et al., 2010; Vaccaro et al., 2015). More particularly, student-faculty interaction helps to increase students' sense of belonging, and several studies using student questionnaires have come to this conclusion (Freeman et al., 2007; Hausmann et al., 2007; Hoffman et al., 2002; Kim & Lundberg, 2016; Meeuwisse et al., 2010). In addition, interviews with a wide variety of student groups including international students, African American women, and students with disabilities have also confirmed this finding that students who have frequent, positive interactions with their professors often feel a stronger sense of belonging to their institution (Booker, 2016; Glass et al., 2015; Vaccaro et al., 2015).

Relationship to Academic Adjustment

Like with sense of belonging, student-faculty interaction also significantly shapes students' first-year academic adjustment (Boulter, 2002; Chhuon & Hudley, 2008; Lamport, 1993; Pascarella, 1985; Sevinç & Gizir, 2014; Terenzini & Pascarella, 1980). In fact, Delaney (2008) used YFCY data at a single institution to discover that the more students interacted with faculty, the easier it was for them to adjust to the academic demands of college, which supported findings from earlier studies (Boulter, 2002; Hurtado et al., 1996). Furthermore, Chhuon and Hudley (2008) used interviews to conclude that having quality interactions with faculty helps with students' academic adjustment.

Relationship to Overall Satisfaction

Finally, several scholars have consistently found that student-faculty interaction is one of, if not the most important, factor in explaining students' overall satisfaction (Astin, 1977; Endo & Harpel, 1982; Ko, 2011; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1976; Siming et al., 2015; Wilson et al., 1975). Using several years of HERI data and examining over 200,000 students, Astin (1977) found that student-faculty interaction predicted students' overall satisfaction more than any other student or institutional variable. Other scholars have also tested the relationship between student-faculty interaction and overall satisfaction, noting this relationship to be particularly strong (Cotten & Wilson, 2006; Endo & Harpel, 1982; Ko, 2011; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1976; Siming et al., 2015). In addition, qualitative studies utilizing student focus groups have also echoed this finding; students who are in contact with their professors feel listened to and accepted, which boosts their satisfaction (Cotten & Wilson, 2006).

Involvement in Extracurricular Activities

Relevance to Use of Rankings

Because students who use rankings have made use of the information in rankings when deciding where to attend college, they likely have an idea of the extracurricular activities offered at their college. They are probably aware of the popular extracurricular activities and perhaps what clubs or organizations they would like to take part in. As a result, these students can join clubs of interest upon arriving to campus whereas their peers who do not make use of rankings might need more time getting to know the various extracurricular activities at their college.

Relationship to Sense of Belonging

Students who are involved in extracurricular activities feel more connected to their campus, therefore increasing their sense of belonging (Johnson et al., 2007; Montelongo, 2002), and scholars have used a variety of methods to consistently come to this conclusion (Bentrim & Henning, 2022; Bowman et al., 2019; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Johnson et al., 2007; Strayhorn, 2018; Vaccaro & Newman, 2016; Wiseman et al., 2004). Based on analysis of student survey data, research has found that being part of a student organization positively affects Latino students' sense of belonging (Hurtado & Carter, 1997) and that more frequent extracurricular involvement more generally contributes to a stronger sense of belonging (Bowman et al., 2019; Wiseman et al., 2004). These relationships have been reinforced in qualitative research (Vaccaro & Newman, 2016; Van Gijn-Grosvenor & Huisman, 2020).

Relationship to Overall Satisfaction

There is also a plethora of research supporting the idea that students who are involved in extracurricular activities on campus are habitually satisfied with their overall college experience (Astin, 1977; De Sisto et al., 2022; King et al., 2021; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Webber et al., 2013). Astin's (1977) previously mentioned study using HERI data discovered that the more time students spent taking part in student clubs and organizations, the more satisfied they were

with their college experience. This finding has also been validated using more recent data from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) (Webber et al., 2013) and surveys of students at several universities (De Sisto et al., 2022; King et al., 2021). Students' active involvement in student organizations reinforces them wanting to have a favorable college experience, which in turn leads to greater satisfaction (Astin, 1977; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

Academic Self-Concept

Relevance to Use of Rankings

Students who use rankings are making an informed choice about where to enroll in college, and as such, they are likely attending an institution that is a solid fit for them. Consequently, they likely feel confident about their academic abilities as a result of being at an institution that is aligned with them academically. As a result, it is possible that students who use rankings have stronger academic self-concept than students who do not use rankings and may be more constrained in their college choice.

Relationship to Academic Adjustment

Students with high levels of academic self-concept are often those students who can more easily adjust to the academic demands of college, and several studies using student questionnaires have reaffirmed this finding (Boulter, 2002; Chemers et al., 2001; De Clercq et al., 2013; Falls, 2001; Haktanir et al., 2021; Kamel, 2018; Martin et al., 1999; Robbins et al., 2004; Wouters et al., 2011). Some studies have made use of the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire's academic adjustment subscale, finding that higher levels of academic self-efficacy lead to greater academic adjustment (Kamel, 2018; Ramos-Sánchez & Nichols, 2007).

Additionally, using TFS data, Falls (2001) confirmed this relationship between academic self-concept and academic adjustment.

Closing Thoughts

This section provides information on how the use of rankings can impact a student's anticipatory socialization experience by helping the student form expectations for college regarding campus racial climate, student-faculty interaction, involvement in extracurricular activities, and academic self-concept. This section also elaborates on how these in-college experiences have a relationship with one or more of the outcomes of interest for this study. For students who use rankings, the anticipatory socialization process could cause these students to have a better understanding of what to expect for their college experience, which likely affects their outcomes. This study determines if anticipatory socialization is at work by inspecting whether the effect of the use of rankings diminishes as students' in-college experiences are introduced to the regression models. This decrease would occur not only because the use of rankings has a relationship with in-college experiences but also because both the use of rankings and the in-college experiences predict the outcomes of interest. As such, this study provides information on the extent to which the anticipatory socialization process affects both in-college experiences and psychosocial outcomes for students who use rankings.

Conclusion

In closing, one of the ways in which this study adds to the literature is by providing an updated profile of students who use college rankings when deciding where to continue their educational journey. While this topic was investigated by McDonough et al. (1998) using 1995 HERI data, almost 30 years has passed, and a more current look into this topic is needed. Like McDonough et al.'s (1998) study, this study makes use of Bourdieu's theory of social

reproduction (Bourdieu, 2018), and as such, this study determines if privilege affects students' use of rankings when deciding where to attend college.

Looking at the use of rankings as an indication of informational capital, this study examines whether students' use of college rankings impacts their sense of belonging, academic adjustment, and overall satisfaction after their first year of college, and this study also explores how the use of rankings impacts overall satisfaction upon graduation. Drawing from Merton's concept of anticipatory socialization, students who use rankings might come to college with different expectations for their college experience in comparison with students who do not make use of rankings. Because of students' utilization of the informational aspect of rankings, these students likely choose an institution that is a good fit for them, and students who believe they are attending an institution that is a good fit often have stronger sense of belonging, academic adjustment, and satisfaction (Denson & Bowman, 2015; Nora, 2004; Plummer, 2018).

In addition, students who use rankings likely form realistic expectations for their time in college as a result of conducting extensive research on their institution of choice. The literature demonstrates that student expectations that are too high can negatively influence students' outcomes (Alves & Raposo, 2007; Cook & Leckey, 1999; Kantanis, 2000; Pleitz et al., 2015; Shahsavar & Sudzina, 2017). Therefore, students who use rankings might have more positive sense of belonging, academic adjustment, and satisfaction than their peers who do not use rankings.

Students who use rankings also might have expectations about certain in-college experiences, such as student-faculty interaction. These in-college experiences have the ability to affect students' outcomes (Booker, 2016; Delaney, 2008; Haktanir et al., 2021; Johnson et al., 2007; Ncube et al., 2018; Siming et al., 2015; Solorzano et al., 2000; Webber et al., 2013).

Importantly, these in-college experiences can help to discover the extent to which anticipatory socialization is at work. All in all, this study contributes to the literature because there are very few studies examining how students' use of rankings shapes their college experience (Clarke, 2007). The following chapter discusses the methodology used to answer this study's two research questions.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The intent of this study was to first provide a profile of the students who use college rankings to aid in their college decision, and secondly, this study examined whether students' use of college rankings significantly relates to their first-year sense of belonging, academic adjustment, and overall satisfaction, as well as satisfaction by the end of their senior year. This study applied Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction, as I hypothesized that students who use rankings have greater privilege than those students who do not use rankings. Exploring the differences between these groups helped to better isolate the effect of considering rankings on sense of belonging, academic adjustment, and overall satisfaction. This study also drew from the theory of anticipatory socialization to examine if the valuing of rankings impacts students' psychosocial outcomes, while also investigating if the valuing of rankings predisposes students to participate in certain activities while in college, such as interacting with faculty or becoming more involved in extracurricular and other social activities.

The data for this study came from the Higher Education Research Institute's student surveys. To answer the first research question and determine the profile of students who utilize rankings in their college choice, this study employed logistic regression models using data from entering freshman students. Because students who use rankings likely have greater privilege, this study leveraged parameter estimates from the initial logistic regression models to calculate propensity scores and then relied on inverse probability of treatment weighting to adjust the sample and account for the selection bias issue associated with the use of rankings. A combination of t-tests and linear regression models helped to answer the second research question, which is focused on whether there are differences in sense of belonging, academic

adjustment, and overall satisfaction between students who do and do not find college rankings important in their college choice.

This chapter's main purpose is to describe in detail the methodological approach for this study. First, this chapter begins by examining the hypotheses for this study's research questions. In addition, the chapter provides more information on the study's data source, independent and dependent variables, and analytical approach. This chapter will also elaborate on how the theoretical frameworks guide the methodological choices, and the chapter ends by describing the limitations of the study.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The following section will dive into the hypothesis for each research question, and the rationale for each hypothesis will also be provided. The reasoning behind the study's hypotheses is largely drawn from the literature mentioned in Chapter 2, and this study's theoretical frameworks also informed the hypotheses.

1. What demographic characteristics and pre-college experiences distinguish students who prioritize the use of college rankings in national magazines in their search process versus those who do not find rankings to be important?

Hypothesis for Research Question 1: I hypothesized that students with greater economic, cultural, social, and academic privilege would be the students who make use of rankings. To give some examples, students who come from higher-income families will be more likely to utilize rankings, along with students who have high GPAs and/or standardized test scores. Additionally, students who focus on an institution's reputation will prioritize rankings when deciding where to attend college, and this will also be true for students who received college advice from individuals like teachers, high school counselors, or private counselors. Finally, students who

attend highly selective institutions will also make use of rankings. Table 3.1 provides more information on the variables related to types of privilege, and I hypothesize that all of the variables related to privilege will be significant when predicting students' use of rankings in the college search process.

Rationale for Hypothesis for Research Question 1: This study makes use of Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction (Bourdieu, 2018) to posit that students with greater privilege are more likely to make use of rankings. Looking at the literature, McDonough et al. (1998) used Freshman Survey data to discover the characteristics of students who utilize rankings, and the authors found that students with increased economic, social, academic, and cultural privilege used rankings at higher rates than their peers. In addition, numerous other studies have also provided information on the relationship between privilege and utilization of rankings in the college search process (Art & Science Group, 2002, 2016; Bradshaw et al., 2001; Hossler & Foley, 1995; Howard, 2002; Kim & Gasman, 2011; Lipman Hearne, Inc., 2006; Morphew & Swanson, 2011; Perna et al., 2021; Richards et al., 2018; Teranishi et al., 2004).

2. Controlling for relevant demographic characteristics, pre-college activities, and in-college experiences, to what extent does a student's reliance on rankings during the college choice process contribute to differences by the end of the first (and/or senior) year of college in:
   a. Sense of belonging?
   b. Academic adjustment?
   c. Overall satisfaction?

Hypothesis for Research Question 2: I hypothesized that a baseline comparison (e.g., t-test, simple regression) of sense of belonging, academic adjustment, and overall satisfaction based on

whether students used rankings will reveal that students who use rankings would have a stronger sense of belonging, academic adjustment, and overall satisfaction. I also expected that a baseline comparison of the outcomes based on rankings use would show differences for a weighted comparison, which will account for the differences in pre-college characteristics predicting students' use of rankings. For the regression models, which included weighted data along with in-college covariates, I speculated that differences in sense of belonging, academic adjustment, and overall satisfaction would wane as in-college experiences enter the model, so ultimately, there would be no significant differences in outcomes between students who relied on rankings in searching for a college and those who did not.

Rationale for Hypothesis for Research Question 2: For the baseline, unweighted comparison, it is likely that because students who use rankings presumably have greater privilege than their peers who do not use rankings (Bourdieu, 2018), students who use rankings will have stronger outcomes. Access to capital (Bourdieu, 2018) likely has a substantial effect on sense of belonging, academic adjustment, and overall satisfaction. When accounting for these differences in privilege, it is very likely that students who use rankings will still have stronger outcomes due to the theory of anticipatory socialization (Kamens, 1981; Merton, 1968). Students who are making use of the informational aspect of rankings are utilizing the information present in the rankings to choose an institution that is a good fit for them. As a result, these students likely have a realistic idea of what to expect for their college experience, which likely leads to more positive outcomes. However, when adjusting for in-college covariates such as student-faculty interaction, I believe that these measures will eliminate the differences based on the use of rankings. The theory of anticipatory socialization (Kamens, 1981; Merton, 1968) suggests that for students who use rankings, they are perhaps more likely to participate in certain activities while in college.

Because these in-college activities all have a relationship with one or more of the outcomes of interest in this study (Booker, 2016; Cabrera et al., 1999; De Sisto et al., 2022; Haktanir et al., 2021; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Ncube et al., 2018; Sevinç & Gizir, 2014; Siming et al., 2015), the impact of the use of rankings on psychosocial outcomes will consequently cease to exist.

Research Design

Data Source

The data in this study came from the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) at UCLA's Higher Education Research Institute (HERI). Because CIRP has data for over 15 million students from 1,900 institutions spanning over 50 years, CIRP is considered the "most comprehensive source of information on college students" (Higher Education Research Institute, n.d.-a, para. 1). HERI administers a total of six surveys including the Freshman Survey (TFS), Your First College Year Survey (YFCY), Diverse Learning Environments Survey (DLE), College Senior Survey (CSS), Staff Climate Survey (SCS), and the Faculty Survey (FAC). For the student-centered surveys, HERI's focus on longitudinal data allows researchers to thoroughly investigate the impact of college, and this study analyzed data from the TFS, YFCY, and CSS surveys.

HERI's Freshman Survey examines students' background characteristics, attitudes, values, beliefs, pre-college experiences, and lifelong educational and career goals, and students take this survey before or early on in their freshman year (Higher Education Research Institute, n.d.-b). At the end of their freshman year, students have the opportunity to take the YFCY survey, which asks a variety of the same demographic questions as the TFS, and the YFCY also asks questions about academic experiences, student life, satisfaction, and self-rated skills (Higher Education Research Institute, n.d.-d). As an exit survey before graduating college, students can

take the CSS. The CSS focuses on college outcomes and post-college goals, and students provide information on their cognitive and affective development, student-faculty interaction, degree aspirations, and satisfaction with their college experience (Higher Education Research Institute, n.d.-c).

This study analyzed data from the full 2015 TFS administration, and this data was weighted to be nationally representative of the first-time, full-time freshmen entering four-year colleges and universities in fall of 2015 (Eagan et al., 2015). This study also analyzed longitudinal cohorts completing the YFCY and CSS between 2017 and 2019. This study examined the first-year outcomes of students who entered college between 2016 and 2018, and this study inspected overall satisfaction for college seniors who graduated college between 2017 and 2019. I included three years of YFCY and CSS data given the relatively limited range of selectivity for the institutions that administered the surveys in 2017-2019. Furthermore, the YFCY typically has a smaller sample size due to the number of institutions that administer the survey, so having multiple years of data is necessary. Data collected during and after 2020 was purposely excluded because of the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic, which likely affected students' time in college.

Sample

Because this study used TFS, YFCY, and CSS data, there were multiple student samples. For Research Question 1, the sample was 102,234 first-time, full-time students who completed the 2015 TFS at 198 four-year institutions. HERI created a population weight to upwardly adjust the sample to represent the more than 1,500,000 first-time, full-time undergraduate students who began college at 1,574 four-year colleges and universities in the United States in fall 2015 (Eagan et al., 2015). To avoid artificially increasing the sample size for my analyses, I rescaled

that weight by dividing the weight by the mean of the weight in the unweighted sample. For Research Question 2 when examining first-year outcomes, the sample ranged from 14,289-15,614 students who completed the YFCY survey between 2017 and 2019 and had corresponding TFS data. Finally, to investigate senior-year overall satisfaction, the sample was 40,661 students who completed the CSS between 2017 and 2019 and had corresponding TFS data.

Research Question 1: Variables and Analysis

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable for Research Question 1 related to whether students considered rankings to have been important in their college decision. The TFS asks the following: "Below are some reasons that might have influenced your decision to attend this particular college. How important was each reason in your decision to come here?". The relevant item in this survey bank is rankings in national magazines, and students can state that rankings were not important, somewhat important, or very important. In order to create a binary variable necessary for logistic regression, the very important and somewhat important response options were combined, indicating more broadly if students believed rankings were important in their college choice. The combination of the very important and somewhat important response options matches how McDonough et al. (1998) coded this variable in their study.

Independent Variables

I organized the independent variables into seven blocks, with each block representing a key domain. This study made use of Astin's Input-Environment-Output model (Astin & antonio, 2012), which calls for the creation of blocked variables to control for a student's background characteristics to better understand the student's experience in college and outcome of interest.

The Input-Environment-Output model first controls for inputs (such as demographic characteristics) before adding a number of environment variables in the next blocks. In this study, the first block was centered on student demographics, and the next four blocks each contained variables related to a certain type of privilege (economic, academic, cultural, and social). These blocks each focused on one type of privilege to determine how much more improvement in fit was attained when adding different types of privilege to the prediction equation. The sixth and seventh blocks accounted for the characteristics of the institutions students attended, and Table 3.1 contains more information on the variables in each block. Many of the included variables were also present in McDonough et al.'s (1998) study, yet McDonough et al.'s blocks of variables did not revolve around types of privilege. Instead, McDonough et al. (1998) had blocks of variables based on student demographic characteristics, the high school experience, expectations for college and beyond, the college choice process, and institutional characteristics. This study is innovative as including blocks of variables focused on different types of privilege helped to determine how each type of privilege affects students' use of rankings.

None of the variables in the regression had over 15% missing data. For the first block, deviation effect coding was utilized with the citizenship variable as this variable has 3 subgroups (Duran et al., 2020); the income variable in Block 2 was also effect coded. Effect coding allows the researcher to compare the mean of a subgroup of students to the overall group mean (Duran et al., 2020; Mayhew & Simonoff, 2015). This is in contrast to choosing a reference group, which is often the majority identity, and comparing the majority group with minoritized groups continues to other these groups (Duran et al., 2020; Mayhew & Simonoff, 2015). When

appropriate, for the other variables which are less focused on demographic characteristics, reference groups were determined by examining the frequency information for each variable.

Table 3.1
List of Variables for Research Question 1

Variable	Response Values
Dependent Variable	
Use of rankings	0=Not Important, 1=Somewhat or Very Important
Block 1: Demographic Characteristics	
Sex	0=Male, 1=Female
White/Caucasian	0=Not marked, 1=Marked
African American/Black	0=Not marked, 1=Marked
American Indian/Alaska Native	0=Not marked, 1=Marked
East Asian (e.g., Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Taiwanese)	0=Not marked, 1=Marked
Southeast Asian (e.g., Cambodian, Vietnamese, Hmong, Filipino)	0=Not marked, 1=Marked
South Asian (e.g., Indian, Pakistani, Nepalese, Sri Lankan)	0=Not marked, 1=Marked
Other Asian	0=Not marked, 1=Marked
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0=Not marked, 1=Marked
Latino (Mexican American/Chicano, Puerto Rican, Other Latino)	0=Not marked, 1=Marked
Other Race	0=Not marked, 1=Marked
Citizenship: U.S. citizen/permanent resident	-1=U.S. citizen/permanent resident
Citizenship: International student	1=International student, 0=Other, -1=U.S. citizen/permanent resident
Citizenship: Other	1=Other, 0=International student, -1=U.S. citizen/permanent resident
Block 2: Economic Privilege	
Income: Lower income ($0-$49,999)	-1=Lower income
Income: Middle income ($50,000-$199,999)	1=Middle income, 0=Upper income, -1=Lower income
Income: Upper income ($200,000 or more)	1=Upper income, 0=Middle income, -1=Lower income
Financial concern for paying for college: None	0=No, 1=Yes
Financial concern for paying for college: Some	Reference Group
Financial concern for paying for college: Major	0=No, 1=Yes
Worked for pay in high school: None	Reference Group
Worked for pay in high school: Less than 5 hours	0=No, 1=Yes
Worked for pay in high school: 6-15 hours	0=No, 1=Yes
Worked for pay in high school: More than 15 hours	0=No, 1=Yes

Could not afford first choice college	0=Not Important, 1=Somewhat or Very Important
Block 3: Academic Privilege	
Average grade in high school: B- or lower	0=No, 1=Yes
Average grade in high school: B	0=No, 1=Yes
Average grade in high school: B+	0=No, 1=Yes
Average grade in high school: A-	0=No, 1=Yes
Average grade in high school: A or A+	Reference Group
Block 4: Cultural Privilege	
College reputation importance	Continuous
Degree aspirations: Bachelor's degree or lower	Reference Group
Degree aspirations: Master's degree or J.D.	0=No, 1=Yes
Degree aspirations: Doctorate or medical degree	0=No, 1=Yes
Received college advice from private college counselor	0=Not Important, 1=Somewhat or Very Important
Deciding to go to college to prepare myself for graduate or professional school: Not important	0=No, 1=Yes
Deciding to go to college to prepare myself for graduate or professional school: Somewhat important	Reference Group
Deciding to go to college to prepare myself for graduate or professional school: Very important	0=No, 1=Yes
Status-seeking goals	Continuous
Block 5: Social Privilege	
Asked a teacher for advice after class	0=Not at All, 1=Occasionally/Frequently
Received college advice from teacher	0=Not Important, 1=Somewhat or Very Important
Received college advice from high school counselor	0=Not Important, 1=Somewhat or Very Important
Block 6: Institutional Characteristics	
Institutional type	0=University, 1=4-year
Institutional control	0=Public, 1=Private
Block 7: Selectivity	
Selectivity [a] (average standardized test scores)	Continuous

[a] This variable was divided by 100 to aid with regression interpretation.

Block 1: Demographic Characteristics. The first block focused on student demographic characteristics including a student's sex, race, and citizenship status. McDonough et al. (1998) found that non-U.S. citizens were more likely to use rankings than U.S. citizens. In addition, Asian American students were significantly more likely to report using rankings and Chicano/a

students were less likely (McDonough et al., 1998), and this finding has been replicated in other studies and surveys of students (Art & Science Group, 2013; Howard, 2002; Lipman Hearne, Inc., 2006; Teranishi et al., 2004). The race question on the Freshman Survey asks students to mark all of the races they identify with, so the total percentage for this variable is over 100%. One advantage to this variable is that it allows for a more inclusive understanding of students who identify as multiracial. This study follows the same approach as Teranishi et al. (2004) in disaggregating the Asian student category into the different subgroups. Starting in 2015, the Freshman Survey broke out the Asian American student group into several variables including East Asian, Southeast Asian, South Asian, and other Asian. Disaggregating the overall Asian American student group into its constituent subgroups paints a more accurate picture of the diversity of Asian Americans without homogenizing the group as the "model minority" (Teranishi et al., 2004). The Mexican American/Chicano, Puerto Rican, and other Latino race variables were combined to create a Latino race variable. On a final note, 2018 was the first year the Freshman Survey started asking students if they identified as gender queer/gender non-conforming, so the 2015 administration only asked students if they identified as male or female. Including a gender queer/gender non-conforming option helps to better understand the diversity within gendered lives (Westbrook & Saperstein, 2015).

Block 2: Economic Privilege. The second block of variables had a focus on economic privilege, and there were variables related to a student's family income, employment during high school, and a student's ability to afford and pay for college. A student's family income has been shown to impact students' use of rankings with students from higher-income families being more likely to utilize rankings (Art & Science Group, 2002, 2016; Howard, 2002; McDonough et al.,

1998; Teranishi et al., 2004). This study provides a more extensive look into how economic privilege shapes students' use of rankings.

Block 3: Academic Privilege. There was one variable related to academic privilege; this variable was a student's average grade in high school. Students with high GPAs use rankings at higher rates (Bradshaw et al., 2001; McDonough et al., 1998). As such, this study included high school GPA as a measure of academic privilege.

Block 4: Cultural Privilege. The fourth block of variables revolved around students' cultural privilege. The five variables in this block include importance placed on a college's reputation, highest degree aspirations, college advice received from a private college counselor, decision to go to college to prepare for graduate/professional school, and a factor related to status-seeking goals. More information about this factor is found in Chapter 4. For McDonough et al.'s (1998) study, students who said professional advice (including the advice from a private counselor) was important to them in their college choice frequently utilized rankings, and this was also true for students who said their college's reputation was very important and for students who had plans to attend graduate school. Altogether, these five variables in this block determined how cultural privilege affects students' use of rankings.

Block 5: Social Privilege. Students who have greater social privilege may be more likely to place importance on college rankings when deciding where to attend college, and this was the focus of Block 5. Students who have access to advice from teachers and high school counselors have tended to rely more heavily on rankings in national magazines (McDonough et al., 1998). Additionally, students who asked a teacher for advice generally are more likely to make use of rankings (McDonough et al., 1998). In closing, this block had three variables to determine how social privilege could influence a student's use of rankings.

Block 6: Institutional Characteristics. Block 6 considered the relationship between use of rankings and type and control of institutions students attended. McDonough et al. (1998) found that an institution's type and control predict students' use of rankings, and students who attended private institutions (versus public institutions) and universities (versus four-year colleges) were those students who made use of rankings. This study investigated the connection between institutional characteristics and use of rankings.

Block 7: Selectivity. Finally, an institution's selectivity was added in Block 7. Students who attend highly selective institutions are more likely to place importance on college rankings (McDonough et al., 1998). The selectivity variable was included in its own block given the strong relationship between selectivity and importance placed on rankings.

Analysis

For Research Question 1, the main analytical technique was logistic regression to predict if students found rankings important or not in their college decision. However, first, descriptive statistics were utilized to provide a picture of the sample. Since most of the variables were categorical, frequency information for each variable helped to better understand the students in the study. For the remaining continuous variables, information about the variables' means and standard deviations rounded out this part of the descriptive analysis. In addition, variables were cross tabulated with the use of rankings variable. This analysis was also completed by McDonough et al. (1998), who reiterated that these cross-tabulations give insight into what types of students find rankings important when deciding where to attend college.

The next stage of the analysis was to run logistic regression models in order to predict the characteristics of students who find rankings important. Like previously mentioned, the use of rankings variable was coded to be binary with 0 representing that rankings are not important and

1 representing that rankings are important. Variables were entered into the models via the seven blocks previously described. After each block of entered variables, I considered various goodness-of-fit indices to evaluate the extent to which the model adequately fit the data. I considered the classification table (percentage of cases correctly classified) (Peng et al., 2002), significant improvement in the -2 log likelihood value, and improvement in the Hosmer-Lemeshow chi-square statistic to evaluate the model after entering each block. Odds ratios helped to describe the strength of association between each independent variable and the dependent variable, and step-by-step beta changes were assessed with the addition of each block of variables. Finally, a step-by-step beta table was used to present the step-by-step beta changes in a straightforward manner.

Research Question 2: Variables and Analysis

Dependent Variables

The first dependent variable is students' sense of belonging at the end of their first year of college, and this study makes use of HERI's sense of belonging construct. To measure latent traits, HERI created several constructs using Item Response Theory, and these constructs appear on the TFS, YFCY, and CSS (Sharkness et al., 2010). Additionally, these constructs can be used both by institutions and researchers (Sharkness et al., 2010). HERI's YFCY sense of belonging construct measures the extent to which students feel like they are academically and socially integrated on campus (Higher Education Research Institute, 2017). The specific items from the YFCY survey included in this construct are the following: I feel I am a member of this college, I feel a sense of belonging to this college, I see myself as part of the campus community, and if asked, I would recommend this college to others. Students rate on a scale of strongly agree to strongly disagree the extent to which they agree with each of the items.

The second dependent variable is students' ease of academic adjustment at the end of their freshman year. Once again, this study employs one of HERI's YFCY constructs. HERI's academic adjustment to college construct measures how easy it is for students to adjust to the academic demands of college (Higher Education Research Institute, 2017). On the YFCY survey, students are asked "since entering this college, how has it been to", and the items incorporated into this construct include understand what professors expect of you academically, develop effective study skills, adjust to the academic demands of college, and manage your time effectively. The response options include very easy, somewhat easy, somewhat difficult, and very difficult.

Finally, this study focuses on students' overall satisfaction at the end of their freshman year and upon graduation, and accordingly, there are two dependent variables. To reiterate, these two variables are overall satisfaction at the end of the freshman year and overall satisfaction senior year, and HERI has an overall satisfaction construct for both the YFCY and CSS surveys. While the two constructs are slightly different due to the nature of the questions on the YFCY and CSS surveys, they both are a comprehensive measure of how satisfied students are with their college experience (Higher Education Research Institute, 2017). The YFCY overall satisfaction construct contains a total of four variables. Three of the variables relate to students' satisfaction with various aspects of their time in college. The relevant question asks the following: "Please rate your satisfaction with your college in each area", and students respond about the overall quality of instruction, overall academic experience, and overall college experience. Response options for the overall quality of instruction and overall college experience items include very satisfied, satisfied, neutral, dissatisfied, and very dissatisfied. The response options for the overall academic experience item are the same except for the addition of a can't rate/no

experience option. The final variable is a variable that asks students if they would choose the same college again. More specifically, the question is the following: “If given the choice, would you still choose to enroll at your current (or most recent) college?”. Students can select definitely yes, probably yes, probably no, definitely no, or not sure yet. Like mentioned previously, the CSS overall satisfaction construct deviates from the YFCY overall satisfaction construct; the CSS overall satisfaction construct includes only three variables. One difference between the two constructs is that the CSS construct does not ask about students’ satisfaction with the overall academic experience. In addition, instead of asking students if they would still choose to enroll at the same institution if given the choice, the CSS asks students a very similar but slightly different question: “If you could make your college choice over, would you still choose to enroll at your current college?”. All in all, the two constructs both assess students’ satisfaction with their overall college experience.

Independent Variables

Use of Rankings. The use of rankings variable was coded the same way as in the first research question, and this study uses inverse probability of treatment weighting to account for the selection bias issue associated with the use of rankings. More information is provided later in the chapter.

Blocks 1-5: Variables from Research Question 1. The student-centered variables from the logistic regression models also were included in the linear regression models for Research Question 2. More specifically, the linear regression models made use of Blocks 1-5 from the logistic regression models as these blocks relate to student characteristics. Again, these variables are listed in Table 3.1, and these variables likely are directly related to students’ psychosocial outcomes. More specifically, we might expect differences by demographic characteristics and

privilege in terms of how students develop a sense of belonging, adjust to college, and become satisfied with their college experience.

Block 6: Cohort Year. The cohort year variable was entered into the linear regression equation after the variables from Research Question 1. As this study is utilizing three years of YFCY and CSS data, including a cohort year variable can help to account for any nuances in the survey administrations, differing types of institutions participating in the survey year-to-year, or any other factors that might bias the results.

Block 7: In-College Experiences. Several in-college variables were included in Block 7 of the regression models as these variables are expected to demonstrate potential indirect effects of college rankings. When these variables are introduced to the models, there likely will be a reduction in the predictive power of the use of rankings variable. Research has indicated that these in-college measures (campus racial climate, student-faculty interaction, involvement in extracurricular activities, academic self-concept) relate to the psychosocial outcomes this study is examining (Booker, 2016; Delaney, 2008; Haktanir et al., 2021; Johnson et al., 2007; Ncube et al., 2018; Siming et al., 2015; Solorzano et al., 2000; Webber et al., 2013).

Campus Racial Climate. Students who do and do not use college rankings might experience different campus racial climates at their institutions as the use of rankings could act as a buffer against a hostile campus racial climate. For all four regression models, the campus racial climate variable serves as an independent variable as there is a relationship between campus racial climate and sense of belonging, academic adjustment, and overall satisfaction (Hurtado et al., 2007; Johnson et al., 2007; LeSure, 1994; Locks et al., 2008; Museus et al., 2008; Ncube et al., 2018). This study makes use of the YFCY and CSS negative cross-racial interaction

constructs to measure campus racial climate. Both constructs measure how often students have negative interactions with diverse peers (Higher Education Research Institute, 2017).

Student-Faculty Interaction. As mentioned in Chapter 2, students who use rankings might have a strong awareness of what to expect regarding the student-faculty interaction on their campuses. Student-faculty interaction has been shown to affect overall satisfaction, academic adjustment, and sense of belonging (Astin, 1977; Booker, 2016; Delaney, 2008; Ko, 2011; Sevinç & Gizir, 2014; Siming et al., 2015; Vaccaro et al., 2015). Thus, this variable enters the regression models for overall satisfaction (both first-year and upon graduation), first-year academic adjustment, and first-year sense of belonging. For the first-year outcomes, this study makes use of HERI's YFCY faculty interaction: contact and communication construct. This construct measures both the amount and type of contact students have with faculty, along with how satisfied students are regarding their amount of contact with faculty (Higher Education Research Institute, 2017). When looking at overall satisfaction upon graduation, this study utilizes the CSS faculty interaction: mentorship construct, which is focused on the extent to which students have faculty who mentor them in regard to both personal and academic issues (Higher Education Research Institute, 2017).

Involvement in Extracurricular Activities. Students' use of rankings might prime them to better understand the student clubs and organizations on campus in comparison with the students who do not make use of rankings. Involvement in extracurricular activities has been linked with greater overall satisfaction and sense of belonging (Bowman et al., 2019; De Sisto et al., 2022; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Johnson et al., 2007; King et al., 2021; Webber et al., 2013). Accordingly, this variable is part of the regression models predicting overall satisfaction (both first-year and upon graduation) and first-year sense of belonging. This study employs a variable

on both the YFCY and CSS surveys that asks students how much time they spend participating in student clubs/groups in a typical week, so this study considers the number of hours that students are participating in student clubs/groups at large.

Academic Self-Concept. Chapter 2 details why students who use college rankings could have stronger first-year academic self-concept than students who do not use rankings. Research shows that students with stronger academic self-concept have an easier time adjusting to the academic demands of college (Haktanir et al., 2021; Kamel, 2018; Wouters et al., 2011). As such, academic self-concept is one of the independent variables in the regression model predicting academic adjustment. HERI's YFCY academic self-concept construct is utilized, and this construct is a measure of students' beliefs about their abilities in academic settings (Higher Education Research Institute, 2017).

Block 8: Institutional Characteristics. Block 8 includes institutional characteristics like type, control, and selectivity as these institutional contexts might have an impact on students' psychosocial outcomes. Regarding selectivity, the use of rankings might signal a valuing of symbolic capital for some students, so these students might be more likely to end up at a highly ranked, and thus highly selective, institution (Kuh & Pascarella, 2004). An institution's level of selectivity does have an impact on sense of belonging, academic adjustment, and satisfaction (Astin, 1977; Elliott, 2014; Hurtado et al., 2007; Li, 2018; Medinets, 2004). Depending on the student population analyzed, studies have found that students who attend more selective institutions have both stronger and weaker sense of belonging (Hurtado et al., 2007; Li, 2018). However, for academic adjustment, researchers consistently tend to conclude that students at more selective institutions have a harder time adjusting to the academic demands of college versus their peers who attend less selective institutions (Elliott, 2014; Hurtado et al., 2007). Yet,

students at more selective institutions often are more satisfied with their overall college experience (Astin, 1977; Medinets, 2004). In conclusion, the institutional characteristic variables in this block help to determine if different institutional contexts affect sense of belonging, academic adjustment, and overall satisfaction.

Table 3.2
List of Variables for Research Question 2

Variable	Response Values
Dependent Variables	
First-Year sense of belonging	Continuous (latent construct)
First-Year academic adjustment	Continuous (latent construct)
First-Year overall satisfaction	Continuous (latent construct)
Senior-Year overall satisfaction	Continuous (latent construct)
First Variable	
Use of rankings	0=Not Important, 1=Somewhat or Very Important
Blocks 1-5: Variables from Research Question 1	
Refer to Table 3.1	
Block 6: Cohort Year	
2017	Reference Group
2018	0=No, 1=Yes
2019	0=No, 1=Yes
Block 7: In-College Experiences	
Campus racial climate	Continuous (latent construct)
Student-faculty interaction	Continuous (latent construct)
Involvement in extracurricular activities: None	Reference Group
Involvement in extracurricular activities: Less than 5 hours	0=No, 1=Yes
Involvement in extracurricular activities: 6-15 hours	0=No, 1=Yes
Involvement in extracurricular activities: More than 15 hours	0=No, 1=Yes
Academic self-concept	Continuous (latent construct)
Block 8: Institutional Characteristics	
Institutional type	0=University, 1=4-year
Institutional control	0=Public, 1=Private
Selectivity [a] (average standardized test scores)	Continuous

[a] This variable was divided by 100 to aid with regression interpretation.

Analysis

Propensity Score Analysis. Before diving into Research Question 2, this study makes use of propensity scores to address the selection bias issue associated with the use of rankings. In comparison with students who do not use rankings, students who do use rankings very likely have greater privilege, and this greater privilege would lead them to have more positive college outcomes, without even considering their use of rankings. Not adjusting for the unique profile of students who use rankings would likely lead to an overestimate of the effect of the use of rankings on sense of belonging, academic adjustment, and overall satisfaction. Thus, using the results from the logistic regression models from Research Question 1, this study makes use of inverse probability of treatment weighting to account for the characteristics of students who use rankings.

This study utilizes Rosenbaum and Rubin's (1983, 1984, 1985) counterfactual framework to address the selection bias issue previously mentioned. A counterfactual is defined as "a potential outcome, or the state of affairs that would have happened in the absence of the cause" (Guo & Fraser, 2010, p. 24). In this study, for students who did make use of rankings, their counterfactual would be their sense of belonging, academic adjustment, and overall satisfaction if they had not used rankings. For students who did not use rankings, their counterfactual would be their outcomes if their treatment status was different (i.e., if they had used rankings). Examining the counterfactuals allows the researcher to understand the true impact of the treatment on the outcome of interest, but the fundamental issue of causal inference is that an individual cannot be both treated and in the control group at the same time (Rosenbaum & Rubin, 1983, 1984, 1985). Propensity scores estimate the probability of receiving treatment (i.e., using rankings) (Gertler et al., 2016), and they can be used to balance, match, or statistically

adjust the sample to account for the endogeneity of having a greater likelihood of self-selecting into the treatment. A student's propensity score can be thought of as the probability that a student finds rankings important, and the covariates identified in Research Question 1 that predicted students' use of rankings were utilized to estimate propensity scores. More specifically, logistic regression was used to calculate each student's propensity score.

Inverse probability of treatment weighting helps to create a pseudo-population where the covariates are not related to the treatment assignment (Eagan et al., 2013; Thoemmes & Ong, 2016). Inverse probability of treatment weighting uses the inverse of the propensity scores to create weights (Thoemmes & Ong, 2016). An individual who is unlikely to take the treatment but does end up taking the treatment will be weighted heavily and vice versa (Thoemmes & Ong, 2016). In the case of this study, students who were predicted to use rankings but did not were given more weight, and in addition, students who were predicted to not use rankings but did also were given more weight. Inverse probability of treatment weighting assumes that all relevant covariates have been accounted for (Thoemmes & Ong, 2016). The region of common support was examined to determine if there was sufficient overlap for the students who did and did not use rankings (Eagan et al., 2013). Covariate balance was also inspected to see if there were differences in means between the covariates for the control and treatment groups; there should be no differences if balance is present (Thoemmes & Ong, 2016). One of the advantages to inverse probability of treatment weighting is that more observations can be kept in the sample, which is in contrast to a method like propensity score matching which discards some cases (Thoemmes & Ong, 2016). However, analysis can become very dependent on individuals with high weights, and these individuals could become very influential in the analysis (Thoemmes & Ong, 2016).

Moreover, these individuals become representative of their entire group, despite the fact that they likely differ at least somewhat from others in their group (Arellano, 2022).

Baseline Comparison. The first analysis is a baseline comparison t-test with data that is not weighted. This t-test provides an initial glimpse into whether there are significant differences in sense of belonging, academic adjustment, and overall satisfaction between students who do and do not use college rankings.

Weighted Comparison. The initial baseline comparison t-test does not account for the selection bias issue associated with the use of rankings, so further analysis is needed. Conducting a t-test with the weighted data provides additional information if there are significant differences for sense of belonging, academic adjustment, and overall satisfaction (both after freshman year and upon graduation) between students who do and do not make use of rankings. The weighted data helps to more clearly understand how the use of rankings affects student outcomes by taking into account how students who use rankings likely have greater privilege than their peers.

Weighted Regression Models. After the t-tests, this study moves to multivariate linear regression models, and there are a total of four models predicting sense of belonging, academic adjustment, and overall satisfaction (both after freshman year and upon graduation). The outcomes are continuous, so linear regression is the appropriate analytical choice. The point of this analysis is to look into how certain in-college experiences affect the relationship between the use of rankings and students' outcomes. This analysis helps to provide evidence whether anticipatory socialization is at work and helping students to set up expectations for their time in college. More specifically, this study examines whether the use of rankings has a direct effect on psychosocial outcomes and whether this direct effect diminishes when accounting for in-college experiences.

Variables, again, were entered into the models in the eight blocks described earlier in this chapter. It should be noted that all of the variables in the YFCY and CSS regression models had around or under 15% missing data. The use of rankings variable was always the first variable entered into the regression equations to better understand how the addition of variables affects the relationship between the use of rankings and student outcomes. For the in-college experiences block, the relevant variables were entered for each regression model. Like with the logistic regression models, step-by-step changes in the standardized regression coefficients were assessed whenever a new variable was added to the regression models. More specifically, tracking the changes in the standardized regression coefficients helped to determine the extent to which anticipatory socialization was at work for the in-college covariates.

This study makes use of the R-squared value and F-test results to determine the adequacy of the linear regression models. The R-squared value is a goodness-of-fit test that determines how well the data fits the regression model (Montgomery et al., 2021). More particularly, it indicates what percentage of the variance in the outcome can be predicted from the independent variables (Montgomery et al., 2021). An F-test of overall significance answers the question of whether the group of independent variables helps to predict the dependent variable (Montgomery et al., 2021), and a small p-value is desirable. Altogether, these two measures help to assess the overall linear regression models.

Limitations

As this study makes use of HERI data, it is important to consider the limitations relevant to utilizing a secondary data source. For instance, researchers making use of survey data are limited to the questions present on the survey. When predicting the characteristics of students who use rankings, it would have been helpful to have more information about the high schools

students attended. Knowing more about a high school's college-going population, student/counselor ratio, and student/teacher ratio could potentially help to better identify the types of students likely to use rankings. In addition, the YFCY and CSS surveys do not contain information on certain college experiences that have been shown to impact students' psychosocial outcomes. For example, a student's perception of their residence hall environment (like how noisy their residence hall is, how available the resident assistants are, and if there is any racial tension) is an important factor in explaining their sense of belonging, academic adjustment, and overall satisfaction (Garvey et al., 2020; Helm et al., 1998; Johnson et al., 2007; Kaya, 2004; Motter, 2003; Strayhorn, 2018).

As mentioned previously, the 2015 TFS administration asked students about their sex, which is less inclusive than asking about gender (Westbrook & Saperstein, 2015), and consequently, I am left not knowing students' identified gender for students who took the TFS in 2015. Another limitation to be aware of is that while the TFS data is generalizable to first-time, full-time freshmen entering four-year colleges and universities in a given fall (Eagan et al., 2015), this is not true for the YFCY and CSS longitudinal samples. As such, the findings from Research Question 2 are not representative of higher education at large. On this note, this study only focuses on students at four-year institutions due to the low number of two-year institutions participating in HERI surveys. Yet, around 40% of undergraduate students attend community colleges (Community College Research Center, n.d.), so this study ignores a large population of students in higher education. The TFS also does not systematically collect data on students who are enrolled part-time, despite the nearly three million students who were enrolled part-time at four-year institutions in fall 2021 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023b). Similar issues are present with the YFCY and CSS data, along with the fact that students in these

samples tended to be more privileged. Finally, it should be noted that this study is intentionally not using the most up-to-date HERI data due to the ongoing worldwide COVID-19 pandemic. However, this means that the data in this study are slightly dated.

In addition, the use of rankings variable does not provide comprehensive information about what types of rankings students are using in their college search process. Although the TFS variable asks if rankings in national magazines were important when deciding where to attend college, there are a plethora of different rankings in national magazines including best college rankings and also more unique rankings like best college food, best Greek life, most loved colleges, and most beautiful campuses (Niche, 2022; Princeton Review, 2022; Svrluga, 2019; Zhou, 2015). As such, it is not clear which rankings students are making use of, and the use of information present in different types of rankings could lead to differing expectations and experiences while in college. This study does not have the ability to discern exactly which types of rankings students are using and how the use of information in certain rankings affects students' time in college, so this study refers to college rankings in a broader sense.

Conclusion

This chapter provides in-depth knowledge about this study's methodology. The chapter begins by reviewing the study's research questions, along with the accompanying hypotheses. Following is a section about the study's data source and analytic sample. For the two research questions, both the dependent and independent variables are discussed in great detail, along with the methodological techniques used to answer each question. Finally, this chapter dives into the limitations of the study. The following chapter spells out the results from the study and provides answers to the research questions.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

This chapter provides the results for this study. I present the results by research question. From my results, I was able to determine not only the types of students who use rankings in their college choice process but also whether and to what extent the use of rankings ultimately contributed to different outcomes during students' freshman and senior years of college. The outcomes of interest in this study include overall satisfaction, sense of belonging, and academic adjustment, and this study made use of data from three separate HERI surveys.

Research Question 1

Research Question 1 aimed to discover the characteristics and types of privilege that define students who place importance on college rankings when deciding which college to attend. In order to answer this research question, I analyzed data from HERI's 2015 Freshman Survey using logistic regression as the main analytical tool.

Exploratory Factor Analysis

In order to address multicollinearity in the regression models, I used exploratory factor analysis. More specifically, I relied upon principal axis factoring to explore potential factors within the groups of variables related to economic privilege, social privilege, and cultural privilege. Factor loadings were examined for each potential factor to determine if the individual variables were correlated with the broader measure, and factor loading values of 0.4 or greater are ideal. Additionally, a reliability analysis was conducted in order to measure the overall internal consistency, and factors with Cronbach's alpha between 0.6 and 0.9 were examined more closely.

Ultimately, only the factor related to cultural privilege was deemed appropriate to use in the regression models. The other factors that were tested suffered from low Cronbach's alpha

values and several variables with factor loadings less than 0.4. The factor related to cultural privilege dealt with students' aspirations and was a measure of status-seeking goals; the three variables included in this factor were wanting to become an authority in my field, obtaining recognition for contributions to my special field, and being well off financially. Cultural capital has been thought of as preferences and behaviors in congruent with high status culture (Lareau & Weininger, 2003). More information about this factor can be found in Table 4.1. Despite the modest reliability coefficient (0.62) and weak factor loading for one of the items (0.32), I proceeded with creating this factor and including it in my subsequent logistic regression models.

Table 4.1
Factor Loadings, Eigen Value, and Reliability (N=102,234)

Factor Items	Loading
Status-seeking goals (α = 0.62, Eigen value=1.73)	
Goal: Obtaining recognition from my colleagues for contributions to my special field	0.84
Goal: Becoming an authority in my field	0.68
Goal: Being very well off financially	0.32

Note. Data are weighted by the adjusted weight.

Sample Descriptive Statistics

The final analytic sample for Research Question 1 consisted of 102,234 students. This sample is generalizable to the more than 1,500,000 first-time, full-time undergraduate students who entered college at 1,574 four-year colleges and universities in fall of 2015 (Eagan et al., 2015). Looking at demographic characteristics, the sample had a slightly larger percentage of female students (54.4%), and the vast majority were U.S. citizens/permanent residents (97.1%). In regard to racial representation, 69.2% identified as White/Caucasian, 14.9% identified as Latino, and 10.7% identified as African American/Black. Nearly three out of five (58.0%) respondents classified themselves as middle-income, and about half (52.1%) had some concern

about financing their college education. Concerning grades in high school, 60.8% of students had at least an A- GPA and 78.5% had at least a B+ GPA.

Table 4.2
Descriptive Characteristics of the Analytic Sample (N=102,234)

	Percent Distributions	Mean	Standard Deviation
Sex:			
Male	45.6		
Female	54.4		
Race: [a]			
White/Caucasian	69.2		
African American/Black	10.7		
American Indian/Alaska Native	2.7		
East Asian (e.g., Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Taiwanese)	7.7		
Southeast Asian (e.g., Cambodian, Vietnamese, Hmong, Filipino)	4.4		
South Asian (e.g., Indian, Pakistani, Nepalese, Sri Lankan)	2.6		
Other Asian	0.5		
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	1.0		
Latino (Mexican American/Chicano, Puerto Rican, Other Latino)	14.9		
Other Race	2.8		
Citizenship:			
U.S. citizen/permanent resident	97.1		
International student	2.2		
Other	0.7		
Income:			
Lower ($0-$49,999)	25.9		
Middle ($50,000-$199,999)	58.0		
Upper ($200,000 or more)	16.1		
Financial concern for paying for college:			
None (I am confident that I will have sufficient funds)	35.9		
Some (but I probably will have enough funds)	52.1		
Major (not sure I will have enough funds to complete college)	12.0		
Worked for pay in high school:			
None	44.4		
Less than 5 hours	17.0		
6-15 hours	20.8		
More than 15 hours	17.8		
Could not afford first choice college:			
Important	25.4		
Average grade in high school:			
B- or lower	7.0		

B	14.6		
B+	17.7		
A-	27.9		
A or A+	32.9		
College reputation importance		54.91	6.66
Degree aspirations:			
Bachelor's degree or lower	22.3		
Master's degree or J.D.	46.8		
Doctorate or medical degree	30.9		
Received college advice from private college counselor:			
Important	18.0		
Deciding to go to college to prepare myself for graduate or professional school:			
Not important	13.4		
Somewhat important	27.9		
Very important	58.7		
Status-seeking goals		0.01	0.88
Asked a teacher for advice after class:			
Yes	85.6		
Received college advice from teacher:			
Important	35.2		
Received college advice from high school counselor:			
Important	37.3		
Institutional type:			
University	46.2		
4-year	53.8		
Institutional control:			
Public	64.5		
Private	35.5		
Selectivity [b]		11.52	1.51

Note. Data are weighted by the adjusted weight.

[a] The percentages might exceed 100% for this variable because students could mark all that apply.

[b] This variable was divided by 100 to aid with regression interpretation.

Considering participants' reasons for going to college and their goals for the future, most students (77.7%) aspired to obtain a graduate degree, and similarly, 58.7% said that in deciding to go to college, it was very important for them to prepare themselves for graduate or professional school. Around one-third of students said that college advice from their teacher (35.2%) or high school counselor (37.3%) was important.

Students in the analytic sample attended a wide range of institutions. Just over half (53.8%) attended four-year liberal arts colleges and masters comprehensive universities, and 46.2% attended research or doctoral universities. More students (64.5%) attended public (versus private) institutions. Students attended institutions with a range of selectivity; I defined selectivity as the median SAT verbal and math scores or concordant ACT composite scores of the entering class. The non-adjusted selectivity scores for institutions in the sample ranged from 790 to 1500.

I used crosstabulations to further explore the data. The results, which are generalizable to the population of first-time, full-time undergraduate students entering four-year colleges and universities in fall 2015 (Eagan et al., 2015), are shown below. An initial look into the data seems to confirm that students with more privilege tended to place greater importance on the use of rankings in selecting which college to attend.

Importance of Rankings by Demographic Characteristics

Crosstabulations between the variables in Model 1 and the use of rankings variable revealed several characteristics of students who utilize rankings when deciding which college to attend. Looking at demographic characteristics, across racial/ethnic groups, South Asian (72.3%) and East Asian (63.4%) students valued rankings in their college search process at higher rates than other students. By contrast, American Indian/Alaska Native (45.6%) and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (44.9%) students tended to be the least likely to report rankings as an important consideration in choosing a college. Additionally, international students were much more likely to make use of rankings than their peers. Four out of five (78.5%) international students said rankings were important, yet 55.7% of U.S. citizens/permanent residents and 55.8%

of other citizenship status students (likely undocumented students) reported that rankings were important when deciding between colleges.

Table 4.3
Crosstab Results for Demographic Characteristics (N=102,234)

	% Saying Rankings are "Somewhat" or "Very" Important
Sex:	
Male	58.4
Female	54.3
Race:	
White/Caucasian	56.6
African American/Black	52.4
American Indian/Alaska Native	45.6
East Asian (e.g., Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Taiwanese)	63.4
Southeast Asian (e.g., Cambodian, Vietnamese, Hmong, Filipino)	52.5
South Asian (e.g., Indian, Pakistani, Nepalese, Sri Lankan)	72.3
Other Asian	59.5
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	44.9
Latino (Mexican American/Chicano, Puerto Rican, Other Latino)	51.3
Other Race	51.4
Citizenship:	
U.S. citizen/permanent resident	55.7
International student	78.5
Other	55.8

Note. Data are weighted by the adjusted weight.

Importance of Rankings by Economic Privilege

Looking at the variables related to economic privilege, it is evident that students who have more economic privilege make use of rankings more often. For example, only about half (48.5%) of low-income students utilized rankings in comparison with the 70.1% of upper-income students who did so. Additionally, 61.6% of students who had no concern about paying for college said that rankings were important, yet only 50.5% of students with major concerns about paying for college placed importance on rankings. When considering weekly hours worked in

high school, students who worked a few hours each week were the most likely (61.2%) to report that rankings were important in choosing their college. By contrast, students who worked more than 15 hours per week were the least likely (49.2%) to place any importance on rankings when deciding where to enroll.

Table 4.4
Crosstab Results for Economic Privilege (N=102,234)

	% Saying Rankings are "Somewhat" or "Very" Important
Income:	
Lower ($0-$49,999)	48.5
Middle ($50,000-$199,999)	55.8
Upper ($200,000 or more)	70.1
Financial concern for paying for college:	
None (I am confident that I will have sufficient funds)	61.6
Some (but I probably will have enough funds)	53.8
Major (not sure I will have enough funds to complete college)	50.5
Worked for pay in high school:	
None	57.2
Less than 5 hours	61.2
6-15 hours	56.0
More than 15 hours	49.2
Could not afford first choice college:	
Not important	55.3
Important	58.8

Note. Data are weighted by the adjusted weight.

Importance of Rankings by Academic Privilege

The only variable related to academic privilege is high school GPA, and students with higher GPAs tended to find rankings more salient in their college choice process. For students who had an A or A+ GPA, 64.7% placed importance on rankings, while 59.7% of students with an A- GPA considered rankings an important factor in making their college selection. However, less than half (44.5%) of students with a B GPA in high school utilized rankings, and even fewer students with a B- or lower GPA did so.

Table 4.5

Crosstab Results for Academic Privilege (N=102,234)

	% Saying Rankings are "Somewhat" or "Very" Important
Average grade in high school:	
B- or lower	39.0
B	44.5
B+	51.3
A-	59.7
A or A+	64.7

Note. Data are weighted by the adjusted weight.

Importance of Rankings by Cultural Privilege

Cultural privilege also seems to play a role in understanding students' use of rankings. As shown in Table 4.6, there were stark differences in terms of importance placed on college reputation and importance placed on rankings; students who cared more about their college's reputation were much more likely to value rankings when deciding upon which college to attend. Students who placed importance on advice from private college counselors also consulted rankings at higher rates. About half (52.6%) of students who stated that advice from private college counselors was not important made use of rankings. By contrast, among students who said this advice was either somewhat or very important, 72.8% found rankings to be an important consideration in choosing a college. These findings, along with the fact that status-seeking students use rankings at higher rates, provide evidence that students with additional forms of cultural privilege tend to place greater importance on rankings when making their decisions about which college to attend.

Table 4.6
Crosstab Results for Cultural Privilege (N=102,234)

	% Saying Rankings are "Somewhat" or "Very" Important
College reputation importance:	
Low	18.6
Average	47.6
High	66.2
Degree aspirations:	

Bachelor's degree or lower	47.2
Master's degree or J.D.	58.1
Doctorate or medical degree	59.9
Received college advice from private college counselor:	
Not important	52.6
Important	72.8
Deciding to go to college to prepare myself for graduate or professional school:	
Not important	43.7
Somewhat important	55.1
Very important	59.6
Status-seeking goals:	
Low	39.7
Average	54.3
High	62.4

Note. Data are weighted by the adjusted weight.

Importance of Rankings by Social Privilege

There were also differences in terms of importance placed on advice from teachers and high school counselors and importance of rankings, demonstrating that social privilege also is a factor in understanding use of rankings. For example, 65.3% of students who said advice from a high school counselor was important also said that rankings were important. By contrast, about half (50.8%) of students who said that this advice was not important said that rankings were important. Additionally, 64.7% of students who said that college advice from their teacher was important also prioritized the use of rankings in their college decision.

Table 4.7
Crosstab Results for Social Privilege (N=102,234)

	% Saying Rankings are "Somewhat" or "Very" Important
Asked a teacher for advice after class:	
No	49.0
Yes	57.4
Received college advice from teacher:	
Not important	51.6
Important	64.7
Received college advice from high school counselor:	
Not important	50.8
Important	65.3

Note. Data are weighted by the adjusted weight.

Importance of Rankings by Institutional Characteristics

Regarding institutional type, students who attended universities tended to rate rankings as an important consideration in their college decision-making, as nearly two-thirds (65.1%) of students who ultimately attended universities made use of rankings compared to less than half (48.6%) of students who attended four-year institutions and relied on rankings. There did not appear to be a difference regarding institutional control (public versus private) and utilization of rankings. Additionally, students who attended highly selective institutions tended to be more likely to have valued rankings compared to students who attended less selective institutions. For example, 76.7% of students who attended a highly selective institution utilized rankings, in comparison with the 36.4% of students at institutions of lower selectivity who used rankings. About half (53.4%) of students who attended institutions with average selectivity prioritized rankings when deciding which college to attend.

Table 4.8
Crosstab Results for Institutional Characteristics (N=102,234)

	% Saying Rankings are "Somewhat" or "Very" Important
Institutional type:	
University	65.1
4-year	48.6
Institutional control:	
Public	55.4
Private	57.7
Selectivity: [a]	
Low (7.90-10.26)	36.4
Medium (10.27-12.63)	53.4
High (12.64-15.00)	76.7

Note. Data are weighted by the adjusted weight.
[a] This variable was divided by 100 to aid with regression interpretation.

Logistic Regression Results Predicting Consideration of Rankings in College Choice

To answer the first research question and determine the characteristics of students who make use of college rankings, I ran seven nested logistic regression models that featured distinct blocks of variables, including demographic characteristics, different types of privilege, and institutional characteristics. Ultimately, the following variables were removed from the regression models to improve model parsimony and fit: taking on loans to pay for college, SAT/ACT scores, first-generation status, pre-med status, and pre-law status.

The total number of students in the regression models was 102,234, and with the adjusted population weight developed by HERI (Eagan et al., 2015) applied, this sample represents the 1.5 million first-time, full-time undergraduate students who began college at four-year colleges and universities in fall 2015. The following sections discuss more specific details about the regression models including the goodness of fit tests and model results.

Assessing Model Fit

I relied upon several measures to assess the overall fit of the logistic regression models, including the -2 log likelihood value, Hosmer-Lemeshow chi-square statistic, and the classification table. The -2 log likelihood value decreased with each successive group of variables, indicating that the models improved upon the addition of each group of variables (Siregar & Yulianti, 2020). The classification table used a "cut value" of 0.554 given that 55.4% of students in the overall sample indicated rankings played a "somewhat" or "very important" role in their college choice process. The proportion of cases correctly classified tended to increase across the nested models; by model 7, the logistic regression model correctly classified 70.38% of cases. In regard to predicting if rankings were important versus not important, the model correctly predicted 68.75% of the not important cases and 71.65% of the important cases.

Finally, a non-significant Hosmer-Lemeshow chi-square statistic suggests an adequate fitting model (Hosmer et al., 2013). The Hosmer-Lemeshow test was significant at the 0.001 level for some models (Models 2, 4, 5, 6) and not others (1, 3, 7). The final Hosmer-Lemeshow test was not statistically significant in Model 7 ($p<0.002$), demonstrating that the model is a good fit.

Table 4.9
Regression Measures for Regressions Predicting Importance Placed on Rankings (N=102,234)

		Hosmer and Lemeshow Test		Classification Table (% of Cases Classified Correctly)		
	-2 Log Likelihood	Chi-square	P-Value	Not Important	Important	Overall
Model 1: Demographic Characteristics	138745.66	5.00	0.416	65.05	42.79	52.54
Model 2: Economic Privilege	136421.83	26.16	**0.001**	62.20	52.55	56.78
Model 3: Academic Privilege	134046.25	18.26	0.019	55.80	63.41	60.08
Model 4: Cultural Privilege	121799.44	50.81	**0.000**	63.55	70.77	67.61
Model 5: Social Privilege	121084.80	35.06	**0.000**	64.12	70.82	67.88
Model 6: Institutional Characteristics	119652.83	51.14	**0.000**	65.57	70.78	68.50
Model 7: Selectivity	115468.80	24.78	0.002	68.75	71.65	70.38

Note. Data are weighted by the adjusted weight. A bolded value means the value is statistically significant at the 0.001 level.

Model Results

Table 4.10 provides the full results including variables from all seven blocks. As can be seen in Table 4.10, several demographic characteristics significantly predicted whether respondents placed any importance on rankings when deciding where to enroll in college. For example, women tended to value rankings significantly less than men. In accordance with the descriptive analyses presented above, students identifying as South Asian placed significantly

more importance on rankings in deciding where to enroll in college than students who did not identify as South Asian, and Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander students were much less likely to value rankings.

Although the final model indicates a significant, positive association between use of rankings and being black (and negative association between rankings and being white), these relationships actually represent changes in significance that occurred after accounting for institutional selectivity. This change in the significance of these coefficients occurred after accounting for the fact that black and other non-white students tend to be less represented at more selective institutions. Adding institutional selectivity in the final model fully attenuated other differences by race/ethnicity for American Indian/Alaska Native and East Asian students.

In addition to differences by race and ethnicity, the results in Table 4.10 suggest that U.S. citizens and permanent residents had significantly reduced odds of considering rankings in their college choice process. By contrast, international students were significantly more likely to place importance on rankings in national magazines when deciding where to attend college.

With respect to economic privilege, several variables predicted whether students reported valuing rankings in choosing a college. For example, higher-income students were more likely to prioritize the use of rankings than students who did not come from a higher-income family. This finding highlights how salient income is in understanding students who make use of rankings when deciding which college to attend. Additionally, students who worked more than 15 hours were less likely to use rankings than students who did not work during high school.

The model also tested three other forms of privilege: academic, cultural, and social. In terms of academic privilege, students who had a B GPA in high school or lower were less likely to utilize rankings in comparison with students who had an A or A+ GPA. With respect to

cultural privilege, students who cared about their college's reputation were more likely to consult rankings, and the same is also true of students who had status-seeking goals or placed importance on advice from a private college counselor. Likewise, students who placed importance on college advice from teachers or high school counselors had significantly greater odds of consulting rankings; these findings demonstrate that forms of social, cultural, and academic privilege are important factors in predicting students' likelihood of valuing rankings in selecting a college.

Finally, in terms of institutional characteristics, students who attended universities and/or highly selective institutions were those students who utilized rankings more frequently. A 100-point increase in selectivity corresponds with being 1.53 times as likely to report having valued rankings in the college search process.

Table 4.10
Model 7 Results for Regression Predicting Importance Placed on Rankings (N=102,234)

	B	S.E.	Exp(B)	P-Value	r (with Use of Rankings)
Constant	-8.89	0.11	0.00	**0.000**	
Demographic Characteristics					
Sex	-0.19	0.01	0.82	**0.000**	
White/Caucasian	-0.14	0.02	0.87	**0.000**	
African American/Black	0.14	0.03	1.16	**0.000**	
American Indian/Alaska Native	-0.12	0.05	0.89	0.007	
East Asian (e.g., Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Taiwanese)	0.08	0.03	1.09	0.010	
Southeast Asian (e.g., Cambodian, Vietnamese, Hmong, Filipino)	-0.07	0.04	0.93	0.050	
South Asian (e.g., Indian, Pakistani, Nepalese, Sri Lankan)	0.18	0.05	1.20	**0.000**	
Other Asian	0.11	0.10	1.11	0.278	
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	-0.28	0.07	0.75	**0.000**	
Latino (Mexican American/Chicano, Puerto Rican, Other Latino)	0.01	0.02	1.01	0.726	
Other Race	-0.08	0.04	0.93	0.086	
U.S. Citizen/Permanent Resident	-0.26	0.04	0.77	**0.000**	
International Student (F-1, or M-1 visa)	0.32	0.05	1.37	**0.000**	
Other Citizenship	-0.06	0.06	0.94	0.330	
Economic Privilege					

Lower Income ($0-$49,999)	-0.14	0.01	0.87	**0.000**	
Middle Income ($50,000-$199,999)	-0.05	0.01	0.95	**0.000**	
Upper Income ($200,000 or more)	0.19	0.02	1.21	**0.000**	
Concern about Ability to Finance College Education: None	0.02	0.02	1.02	0.316	
Concern about Ability to Finance College Education: Major	-0.02	0.02	0.98	0.346	
Worked for Pay: Less than 5 hours	0.12	0.02	1.12	**0.000**	
Worked for Pay: 6-15 hours	0.03	0.02	1.03	0.103	
Worked for Pay: 15+ hours	-0.12	0.02	0.89	**0.000**	
Could not Afford First Choice College	0.28	0.02	1.33	**0.000**	
Academic Privilege					
High School GPA: B- or lower	-0.16	0.03	0.85	**0.000**	
High School GPA: B	-0.12	0.02	0.89	**0.000**	
High School GPA: B+	-0.05	0.02	0.95	0.025	
High School GPA: A-	-0.03	0.02	0.97	0.073	
Cultural Privilege					
College Reputation Orientation	0.08	0.00	1.09	**0.000**	
Highest Academic Degree Planned: Master's degree or J.D.	0.01	0.02	1.01	0.534	
Highest Academic Degree Planned: Doctorate or medical degree	-0.16	0.02	0.85	**0.000**	
Importance of Advice from Private College Counselor	0.70	0.02	2.02	**0.000**	
Attending College to Prepare Myself for Graduate or Professional School: Not important	-0.14	0.02	0.87	**0.000**	
Attending College to Prepare Myself for Graduate or Professional School: Very important	0.04	0.02	1.04	0.034	
Status-Seeking Goals	0.21	0.01	1.23	**0.000**	
Social Privilege					
Asked a Teacher for Advice after Class	0.04	0.02	1.04	0.078	
Importance of Advice from Teacher	0.22	0.02	1.24	**0.000**	
Importance of Advice from High School Counselor	0.32	0.02	1.38	**0.000**	
Institutional Characteristics					
Institutional Type	-0.15	0.02	0.86	**0.000**	
Institutional Control	0.01	0.02	1.01	0.604	
Selectivity					
Selectivity [a]	0.43	0.01	1.53	**0.000**	0.33

Note. Data are weighted by the adjusted weight. A bolded value means the value is statistically significant at the 0.001 level.

[a] This variable was divided by 100 to aid with regression interpretation.

Reflecting on the Results of Research Question 1

The goal of Research Question 1 was to determine the demographic characteristics and pre-college experiences associated with the use of rankings when deciding which college to attend. Looking at the relevant literature and making use of Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction, I hypothesized that students with greater economic, academic, social, and cultural privilege prioritized college rankings, and the results from the logistic regression models support this hypothesis. Looking at economic privilege, students from high-income families had significantly stronger odds of having placed importance on rankings in their decision on where to attend college, and students who worked more than 15 hours for pay were less likely to utilize rankings than students who did not work during high school. For academic privilege, students with higher GPAs were more likely to have factored rankings into their college decision. Regarding cultural privilege, students who cared about a college's reputation, placed importance on advice from a private college counselor, and were status seekers (e.g., those who want to become an authority in their fields, obtain recognition for contributions to their special fields, and/or be well off financially) were those who prioritized the use of rankings. Students who placed importance on advice from teachers or high school counselors also utilized rankings, demonstrating that social privilege affects use of rankings. Taken together, these results corroborate many of the findings reported by McDonough et al. (1998), and, consequently, privilege continues to play a role in understanding students' use of college rankings.

Research Question 2

Research Question 2 aimed to determine whether consideration of college rankings in deciding where to attend college contributed to differences in sense of belonging, academic adjustment, and overall satisfaction. I examined all three outcomes among first-year students,

and I looked at college satisfaction among college seniors. After creating inverse probability weights to adjust for the fact that students from different backgrounds with different motivations for college considered rankings in their choice of institution, I primarily relied on t-tests and linear regression models to determine whether those who placed importance on rankings differed in each outcome relative to their peers who did not report rankings as important in deciding where to attend college.

Propensity Score Analysis

As students who use rankings have greater privilege than students who do not use rankings, I needed to adjust for this bias to reveal an accurate picture of how the use of rankings impacts student outcomes. For both the YFCY and CSS data, I estimated a logistic regression model to predict use of rankings, and the probability estimates from these regression models were later used for the inverse probability of treatment weighting.

YFCY Logistic Regression Model Predicting Consideration of Rankings

For the YFCY regression model, the variable list was the same as with the TFS regression model for Research Question 1 given that this previous model was successful in predicting students' importance placed on rankings. As much as possible, the variables were coded in the same way as with the TFS regression model. The status-seeking goals factor was created as before and mirrored the psychometric properties reported above. Slight differences in other measures from the TFS model include the addition of a genderqueer/gender non-conforming category within the gender variable and different classifications of the income classes, as HERI updated the coding for both of these items in survey administrations after the 2015 Freshman Survey. The total number of students in this regression model was 9,270, and a p-value of 0.01 was utilized for this regression. The same model fit measures were assessed as

with the TFS regression model, and more about these fit indices for the YFCY model can be found in Appendix G.

Fewer variables emerged as significant predictors of whether students considered rankings in this model, as the subset of students included in the longitudinal TFS-YFCY dataset looked quite different from the larger and more representative sample in the cross-sectional 2015 Freshman Survey. For example, 54% of students in the 2015 TFS sample identified as female, but in the YFCY sample, this number was 63%. Additionally, a larger proportion of students in the longitudinal YFCY dataset identified as international; the YFCY sample had 7% international students and the TFS sample had 2%. Finally, the institutional characteristics also differed. More than half (54%) of students in the YFCY sample attended research or doctoral universities, while only 46% of students in the TFS sample did so. In regard to institutional control, the YFCY sample consisted of a majority of students at private institutions, while the TFS sample leaned more heavily towards students at public institutions. I tested a more parsimonious model that focused on a subset of variables that emerged as significant, but model fit statistics suggested that the full regression model had a better fit. As mentioned previously, this model closely matched the regression model from Research Question 1. For the results for the specific variables within the full YFCY regression model, please see Appendix H.

CSS Logistic Regression Model Predicting Consideration of Rankings

A logistic regression model was also run with the CSS data to predict importance placed on rankings, and as much as possible, the same variables were used and coded in a similar manner as with the initial TFS model. For example, the TFS-CSS dataset included an expanded set of racial/ethnic indicators, including South American. On a similar note, the CSS gender variable had categories of male, female, and genderqueer/gender non-conforming/other identity,

so this more inclusive variable was included instead of the sex variable. Finally, the income variable was coded like the YFCY income variable because of the frequency distribution for this variable. Like with the YFCY model, a p-value of 0.01 was utilized, and additionally, there were not as many significant variables compared to the TFS model. This, again, had to do with the different population of students who took the surveys for the relevant years. For example, just looking at the type of institutions students attended, almost 90% of students in the CSS sample attended private institutions; by contrast, only 36% of students in the 2015 TFS sample also chose to go to a private institution. In total, 22,860 students were included in the CSS sample, and information about the regression fit indices and regression results can be found in Appendices I and J.

Inverse Probability of Treatment Weighting

The results from the regression models used to predict students' importance placed on rankings helped to inform the inverse probability of treatment weighting. Making use of the propensity scores (a student's likelihood of placing importance on rankings), three types of weights were created. The average treatment effect (ATE) is the effect of using rankings for the entire sample, while the average treatment for the treated (ATT) effect provides an estimate of the outcomes for students most likely to make use of rankings (Eagan et al., 2013). Finally, the average treatment for the untreated (ATU) effect helps to understand what the effect of rankings would be for those least likely to use rankings (Eagan et al., 2013). More about the calculations behind these weightings can be found in Eagan et al. (2013), Guo and Fraser (2010), and Nichols (2008).

Before the weights were implemented, several steps were taken for students in the treated and untreated groups. First, the region of common support was examined, and students without

sufficient overlap were trimmed from the sample. In practice, this means that students with very high or very low probabilities of using rankings were removed. For the YFCY sample, 40 cases were trimmed from the not important group, and five cases were trimmed from the somewhat/very important group. For the CSS sample, I also trimmed 40 cases from the not important group for having too low of a probability, and I removed 10 cases from the somewhat/very important group for having too high of a probability. I also assessed covariate balance before and after the weights were implemented. Before weighting, there were distinct differences for several of the variables in regard to students who did and did not find rankings important. For example, for the YFCY dataset, 33.0% of the students who said that rankings were important were upper-income. In contrast, only 22.8% of the students who said that rankings were not important identified as upper-income. For the unweighted CSS dataset, 27.6% of students who said that rankings were not important said college advice from their teacher was important. In contrast, 39.6% of students who reported that rankings were important also reported that college advice from their teacher was important too. These differences demonstrate the fact that privilege affects use of rankings, and as it is important to have an unbiased estimate of how the use of rankings affects student outcomes, inverse probability of treatment weighting was utilized.

Table 4.11
YFCY Sample Before and After Weighting

	Importance Placed on Rankings			
	Unweighted		ATE Weight	
	Not Important (n=2,926)	Somewhat/ Very Important (n=6,298)	Not Important (n=2,926)	Somewhat/ Very Important (n=6,298)
Gender: Man	32.2%	38.5%	36.9%	36.7%
Gender: Woman	67.4%	61.3%	62.7%	63.0%
Gender: Genderqueer, gender non-conforming, other identity	0.3%	0.2%	0.4%	0.4%

Lower Income ($0-$59,999)	25.1%	18.0%	21.1%	20.6%
Middle Income ($60,000-$199,999)	52.1%	49.0%	49.2%	50.1%
Upper Income ($200,000 or more)	22.8%	33.0%	29.7%	29.4%
Concern about Ability to Finance College Education: None	35.3%	41.0%	37.8%	37.9%
Concern about Ability to Finance College Education: Some	54.3%	50.9%	52.8%	52.9%
Concern about Ability to Finance College Education: Major	10.4%	8.0%	9.5%	9.2%
High School GPA: B- or lower	3.8%	1.3%	1.7%	1.7%
High School GPA: B	9.7%	5.7%	7.0%	6.6%
High School GPA: B+	16.6%	13.4%	14.2%	14.5%
High School GPA: A-	31.8%	34.3%	33.5%	33.6%
High School GPA: A or A+	38.1%	45.2%	43.7%	43.6%
Highest Academic Degree Planned: Bachelor's degree or lower	25.3%	18.0%	19.9%	19.7%
Highest Academic Degree Planned: Master's degree or J.D.	45.8%	52.0%	50.9%	50.1%
Highest Academic Degree Planned: Doctorate or medical degree	28.9%	30.0%	29.2%	30.2%
Importance of Advice from Private College Counselor: Important	15.3%	26.6%	23.7%	22.8%
Attending College to Prepare Myself for Graduate or Professional School: Not important	17.8%	11.0%	12.6%	12.5%
Attending College to Prepare Myself for Graduate or Professional School: Somewhat important	30.1%	29.4%	29.5%	29.1%
Attending College to Prepare Myself for Graduate or Professional School: Very important	52.1%	59.6%	58.0%	58.4%
Importance of Advice from Teacher: Important	28.0%	37.9%	35.3%	34.8%
Importance of Advice from High School Counselor: Important	30.2%	44.1%	40.2%	39.9%
Institutional Type: University	44.0%	57.7%	53.5%	53.7%
College Reputation (mean)	48.01	53.40	51.97	51.95
Status-Seeking Goals (mean)	-0.19	0.09	0.00	0.01
Selectivity [a] (mean)	12.05	12.80	12.55	12.56

[a] This variable was divided by 100 to aid with regression interpretation.

With the ATE weight applied, many of the differences between the two groups of students were greatly reduced. Looking at the ATE-adjusted YFCY data, 29.4% of individuals who said rankings were important identified as upper-income, and 29.7% of students who said

rankings were not important also identified as upper-income. For the weighted CSS data, 36.1% of students who stated that rankings were not important in their college choice said that college advice from their teacher was important. Similarly, 35.7% of students who said that rankings were important also placed importance on college advice from their teacher. Altogether, applying the ATE weight helped to achieve balance between the control and treatment groups on key observable TFS covariates. Tables 4.11 and 4.12 provide more information about what the student groups looked like before and after the weighting for the YFCY and CSS datasets. Note that variables that had negligible differences for the two groups before the weighting were not included in these tables.

Table 4.12
CSS Sample Before and After Weighting

	Importance Placed on Rankings			
	Unweighted		ATE Weight	
	Not Important (n=7,002)	Somewhat/ Very Important (n=15,810)	Not Important (n=7,002)	Somewhat/ Very Important (n=15,810)
Gender: Male	32.7%	38.2%	36.5%	36.9%
Gender: Female	65.4%	60.4%	61.8%	61.6%
Gender: Genderqueer, gender non-conforming, other identity	1.9%	1.4%	1.6%	1.5%
Lower Income ($0-$59,999)	31.1%	21.8%	24.4%	24.0%
Middle Income ($60,000-$199,999)	51.4%	50.2%	50.6%	50.9%
Upper Income ($200,000 or more)	17.5%	28.0%	24.9%	25.1%
Concern about Ability to Finance College Education: None	31.2%	36.9%	35.1%	34.8%
Concern about Ability to Finance College Education: Some	56.6%	53.8%	54.7%	55.0%
Concern about Ability to Finance College Education: Major	12.2%	9.3%	10.3%	10.2%
High School GPA: B- or lower	3.3%	1.5%	1.8%	1.8%
High School GPA: B	12.3%	7.1%	8.1%	8.0%
High School GPA: B+	18.4%	15.2%	16.0%	15.7%
High School GPA: A-	30.2%	31.5%	31.7%	31.3%
High School GPA: A or A+	35.8%	44.7%	42.4%	43.2%
Highest Academic Degree Planned: Bachelor's degree or lower	23.3%	16.4%	17.7%	18.0%

Highest Academic Degree Planned: Master's degree or J.D.	46.3%	50.7%	49.2%	49.3%
Highest Academic Degree Planned: Doctorate or medical degree	30.4%	32.9%	33.0%	32.7%
Importance of Advice from Private College Counselor: Important	14.2%	25.1%	22.1%	21.5%
Attending College to Prepare Myself for Graduate or Professional School: Not important	17.1%	10.0%	12.0%	11.9%
Attending College to Prepare Myself for Graduate or Professional School: Somewhat important	31.1%	28.3%	27.9%	28.3%
Attending College to Prepare Myself for Graduate or Professional School: Very important	51.8%	61.7%	60.1%	59.8%
Importance of Advice from Teacher: Important	27.6%	39.6%	36.1%	35.7%
Importance of Advice from High School Counselor: Important	29.9%	44.8%	40.6%	40.1%
Institutional Type: University	37.0%	57.5%	52.7%	52.8%
Institutional Control: Public	18.5%	9.0%	10.1%	10.4%
College Reputation (mean)	48.06	52.86	51.82	51.68
Status-Seeking Goals (mean)	-0.19	0.09	0.01	0.01
Selectivity [a] (mean)	11.88	12.68	12.53	12.50

[a] This variable was divided by 100 to aid with regression interpretation.

Use of Rankings and First-Year Outcomes

Several analytical approaches were utilized to determine if importance placed on rankings impacted first-year sense of belonging, academic adjustment, and overall satisfaction. The following section discusses the results from the unweighted and weighted t-tests, and then this section elaborates on the results of the three linear regression models.

T-Tests

T-tests were conducted with the unweighted data and the weighted data; three different weights (ATE, ATT, ATU) were utilized. A p-value of 0.01 was utilized for the t-tests, and for all four t-tests, the findings were the same. More specifically, students who said rankings were important had significantly higher sense of belonging and overall satisfaction versus students

who said rankings were not important. There were no significant differences regarding academic adjustment.

Table 4.13
YFCY T-Tests Based on Importance Placed on Rankings (N=9,224)

	Unweighted	ATE	ATT	ATU
Academic Adjustment				
Mean: Not Important	50.46	50.71	50.76	50.61
Mean: Somewhat/Very Important	50.67	50.72	50.79	50.56
P-Value	0.28	0.96	0.85	0.81
Sense of Belonging				
Mean: Not Important	50.19	50.63	50.81	50.21
Mean: Somewhat/Very Important	52.03	51.91	52.21	51.24
P-Value	**0.00**	**0.00**	**0.00**	**0.00**
Overall Satisfaction				
Mean: Not Important	50.27	50.64	50.74	50.41
Mean: Somewhat/Very Important	51.38	51.40	51.60	50.96
P-Value	**0.00**	**0.00**	**0.00**	**0.00**

Note. A bolded value means the value is statistically significant at the 0.01 level.

I originally hypothesized that for the unweighted and weighted data, students who used rankings would have stronger sense of belonging, academic adjustment, and overall satisfaction, and this ultimately was true for sense of belonging and overall satisfaction but not academic adjustment. For the unweighted data, students who found rankings to be important in selecting their college reported a stronger sense of belonging and overall satisfaction compared to students who did not value rankings. The weighted data t-test results, which adjust for the different experiences and traits associated with considering rankings to be important in the college search process, suggest that students who valued rankings in making their college decision tended to feel a stronger sense of belonging and more satisfied by the end of their first year of college; however, I did not find any significant differences between the two groups with respect to academic adjustment. Interestingly, for the ATU weighted data, the t-test provides evidence that for students not likely to use rankings, these students would have had significantly higher sense of belonging and overall satisfaction if they had used rankings. These findings provide modest

evidence in partial support of anticipatory socialization (Kamens, 1981; Merton, 1968). In particular, students who use rankings are making use of information in the rankings to select an institution that is a good fit for them, while also having realistic expectations about what they will experience while in college.

Linear Regression Models

To better understand the relationship between use of rankings and first-year outcomes, three linear regression models were estimated, and for all three of these models, the data was weighted by the ATE weight. Only the ATE weight was used as the t-test findings were the same for all three of the different weighted datasets. I used a p-value of 0.01 for all regression models and results in this section. The following section will provide some descriptive information about the YFCY analytic sample and then discuss the results from the linear regression models. It should be noted that these findings are robust against sensitivity checks that looked at a different specification of the rankings variable. Specifically, the use of rankings variable was coded where not and somewhat important were compared with very important.

Sample Descriptive Statistics. Table 4.14 includes information about the YFCY analytic sample, defined as students who were in any three of the YFCY linear regression models. Roughly two out of three students (62.7%) identified as a woman, and the vast majority (93.0%) said they were either a U.S. citizen or permanent resident. In terms of race/ethnicity, 71.2% of students marked that they were White/Caucasian and 12.4% marked that they were East Asian. About half (49.7%) came from a middle-income family, and 30.1% identified their family as upper-income. Around four out of five (78.3%) had an A- GPA in high school or above. In terms of types of institutions students attended, 54.0% were enrolled at a university, and 77.3% were

enrolled at a private institution. Finally, relevant to the regression models, about half of students said that rankings were important (49.2%).

Table 4.14
Characteristics of the YFCY Analytic Sample (N=16,304)

	Percent Distributions	Mean	Standard Deviation
Importance placed on rankings:			
Not important	50.8		
Important	49.2		
Gender:			
Man	36.9		
Woman	62.7		
Genderqueer, gender non-conforming, other identity	0.4		
Race: [a]			
White/Caucasian	71.2		
African American/Black	6.2		
American Indian/Alaska Native	1.0		
East Asian (e.g., Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Taiwanese)	12.4		
Southeast Asian (e.g., Cambodian, Vietnamese, Hmong, Filipino)	5.8		
South Asian (e.g., Indian, Pakistani, Nepalese, Sri Lankan)	3.3		
Other Asian	0.5		
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0.4		
Latino (Mexican American/Chicano, Puerto Rican, Other Latino)	10.9		
Other Race	1.3		
Citizenship:			
U.S. citizen/permanent resident	93.0		
International student (F-1, or M-1 visa)	6.7		
Other citizenship	0.3		
Income:			
Lower income ($0-$59,999)	20.2		
Middle income ($60,000-$199,999)	49.7		
Upper income ($200,000 or more)	30.1		
High school GPA:			
B- or lower	1.6		
B	6.1		
B+	14.0		
A-	33.3		
A or A+	45.0		
Institutional type:			
University	54.0		

4-year	46.0		
Institutional control:			
Public	22.7		
Private	77.3		
Selectivity [b]		12.60	1.13

Note. Data are weighted by the ATE weight.
[a] The percentages might exceed 100% for this variable because students could mark all that apply.
[b] This variable was divided by 100 to aid with regression interpretation.

Academic Adjustment Regression Results. For the final linear regression model, 21% of the variance in first-year academic adjustment could be explained by the variables in the model. After entering the in-college experiences, there was a substantial change in the adjusted R-squared value; the adjusted R-squared value increased from 0.06 to 0.20. As such, students' experiences during their first year of college are a major factor in understanding how well they are able to adjust to the academic demands of college. Finally, the p-value for the F-test was significant at the 0.01 level for Models 1-8, which indicates that each model is helping to predict academic adjustment.

Table 4.15
YFCY Regression Measures for Regression Predicting Academic Adjustment (N=14,289)

	Adjusted R^2	F	P-Value	β (Importance Placed on Rankings)
Importance Placed on Rankings	0.00	0.30	0.581	0.00
Models 1-5: Student Privilege	0.06	23.89	**<.001**	0.00
Model 6: Cohort Year	0.06	24.74	**<.001**	-0.01
Model 7: In-College Experiences	0.20	88.67	**<.001**	**-0.03**
Model 8: Institutional Characteristics	0.21	85.96	**<.001**	**-0.03**

Note. Data are weighted by the ATE weight. A bolded value means the value is statistically significant at the 0.01 level.

Also included in Table 4.15 are the standardized regression coefficients for the use of rankings variable. With just the use of rankings variable in the model, the standardized

regression coefficient indicates that there is no significant relationship between importance placed on rankings and academic adjustment, which is also seen in the t-test results. Only after adding in the in-college experiences did I see a significant standardized regression coefficient for the use of rankings variable; the relevant value was -0.03. A closer analysis into these results revealed that the use of rankings standardized regression coefficient moved to -0.03 after academic self-concept entered the model. This suggests that the use of rankings predicts weaker academic adjustment than we would expect given the higher academic self-concept held among students who had placed value on rankings. Table 4.16 contains information on the correlations between the in-college experiences variables and the importance of rankings variable.

Table 4.16
YFCY In-College Experiences Correlation with Importance of Rankings (N=14,289)

	Importance Placed on Rankings
Campus Racial Climate	**0.03**
Student-Faculty Interaction	0.00
Academic Self-Concept	**0.05**

Note. Data are weighted by the ATE weight. A bolded value means the value is statistically significant at the 0.01 level.

Looking at the in-college experiences, student-faculty interaction and academic self-concept were positive and significant predictors of first-year academic adjustment. Students who more frequently interacted with faculty during their first year of college had a significantly easier time adjusting to the academic demands of college. However, the biggest factor in understanding students' academic adjustment was academic self-concept; students with more confidence in their academic abilities reported a significantly smoother adjustment to college. In conclusion, student-faculty interaction and academic self-concept had pronounced impacts on academic adjustment.

Other variables besides the in-college experiences also were significant predictors of first-year academic adjustment. In comparison with students who did not identify as a U.S.

citizen or permanent resident, students who did identify with one of these citizenship statuses had lower academic adjustment. In addition, students who aspired to obtain a doctorate or medical degree had a harder time adjusting to the academic demands of college versus students who only wanted to obtain a bachelor's degree or lower. Finally, students at more selective institutions had significantly more difficult experiences in trying to adjust to the academic demands of college compared to their counterparts who enrolled at less selective institutions. Altogether, these findings help to provide a picture of the many factors that influence how easy it is for students to adjust to the academic demands of college.

Table 4.17
YFCY Regression Results Predicting Academic Adjustment (N=14,289)

	B	SE B	β	P-Value
Constant	36.35	1.36		**0.000**
Importance Placed on Rankings	-0.53	0.14	-0.03	**0.000**
Demographic Characteristics				
Man	-0.43	0.35	-0.02	0.220
Woman	0.60	0.35	0.03	0.083
Genderqueer, gender non-conforming, other identity	-0.17	0.68	-0.01	0.802
White/Caucasian	0.23	0.25	0.01	0.369
African American/Black	0.28	0.34	0.01	0.399
American Indian/Alaska Native	-0.43	0.68	0.00	0.525
East Asian (e.g., Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Taiwanese)	0.17	0.29	0.01	0.556
Southeast Asian (e.g., Cambodian, Vietnamese, Hmong, Filipino)	-1.08	0.33	-0.03	**0.001**
South Asian (e.g., Indian, Pakistani, Nepalese, Sri Lankan)	-1.06	0.42	-0.02	0.012
Other Asian	-0.52	0.92	0.00	0.573
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	-2.02	1.11	-0.01	0.070
Latino (Mexican American/Chicano, Puerto Rican, Other Latino)	-0.18	0.26	-0.01	0.492
Other Race	0.32	0.60	0.00	0.593
U.S. Citizen/Permanent Resident	-1.56	0.39	-0.09	**0.000**
International Student (F-1, or M-1 visa)	-0.49	0.42	-0.03	0.250
Other Citizenship	2.04	0.76	0.06	**0.007**
Economic Privilege				
Lower Income ($0-$59,999)	-0.50	0.13	-0.04	**0.000**
Middle Income ($60,000-$199,999)	0.38	0.10	0.03	**0.000**
Upper Income ($200,000 or more)	0.13	0.12	0.01	0.302

Concern about Ability to Finance College Education: None	0.87	0.16	0.04	**0.000**
Concern about Ability to Finance College Education: Major	-0.56	0.24	-0.02	0.022
Worked for Pay: Less than 5 hours	0.82	0.19	0.03	**0.000**
Worked for Pay: 6-15 hours	0.16	0.19	0.01	0.410
Worked for Pay: 15+ hours	0.71	0.22	0.03	**0.002**
Could not Afford First Choice College	-0.17	0.17	-0.01	0.317
Academic Privilege				
High School GPA: B- or lower	1.82	0.56	0.03	**0.001**
High School GPA: B	0.96	0.31	0.03	**0.002**
High School GPA: B+	0.95	0.22	0.04	**0.000**
High School GPA: A-	0.37	0.16	0.02	0.024
Cultural Privilege				
College Reputation Orientation	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.856
Highest Academic Degree Planned: Master's degree or J.D.	-0.51	0.21	-0.03	0.016
Highest Academic Degree Planned: Doctorate or medical degree	-2.03	0.24	-0.10	**0.000**
Importance of Advice from Private College Counselor	-0.34	0.18	-0.02	0.068
Attending College to Prepare Myself for Graduate or Professional School: Not important	-0.19	0.25	-0.01	0.453
Attending College to Prepare Myself for Graduate or Professional School: Very important	0.32	0.17	0.02	0.059
Status-Seeking Goals	-0.21	0.08	-0.02	0.014
Social Privilege				
Asked a Teacher for Advice after Class	0.01	0.23	0.00	0.948
Importance of Advice from Teacher	0.32	0.17	0.02	0.054
Importance of Advice from High School Counselor	0.25	0.17	0.01	0.139
Cohort Year				
2018	0.45	0.17	0.02	**0.009**
2019	-0.53	0.17	-0.03	**0.002**
In-College Experiences				
Campus Racial Climate	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.254
Student-Faculty Interaction	0.10	0.01	0.09	**0.000**
Academic Self-Concept	0.38	0.01	0.39	**0.000**
Institutional Characteristics				
Institutional Type	-0.77	0.16	-0.04	**0.000**
Institutional Control	1.16	0.19	0.05	**0.000**
Selectivity [a]	-0.69	0.08	-0.08	**0.000**

Note. Data are weighted by the ATE weight. A bolded value means the value is statistically significant at the 0.01 level.

[a] This variable was divided by 100 to aid with regression interpretation.

Sense of Belonging Regression Results. For the final regression model predicting sense of belonging, 20% of the variance in first-year sense of belonging could be explained by the

variables in the regression model. Once again, I saw a considerable increase in the adjusted R-squared value after adding in the in-college experiences variables. This indicates that in-college experiences like involvement in extracurricular activities play a major role in determining a student's sense of belonging. Also seen in Table 4.18 are the results of the F-test for each step of the regression building process, and for each step, the p-value for the F-test was significant at the 0.01 level. As such, each particular regression model provides a better fit as opposed to a regression model with no independent variables.

Table 4.18
YFCY Regression Measures for Regression Predicting Sense of Belonging (N=15,559)

	Adjusted R^2	F	P-Value	β (Importance Placed on Rankings)
Importance Placed on Rankings	0.00	70.12	**<.001**	**0.07**
Models 1-5: Student Privilege	0.08	39.78	**<.001**	**0.06**
Model 6: Cohort Year	0.09	38.31	**<.001**	**0.06**
Model 7: In-College Experiences	0.19	86.16	**<.001**	**0.06**
Model 8: Institutional Characteristics	0.20	83.44	**<.001**	**0.06**

Note. Data are weighted by the ATE weight. A bolded value means the value is statistically significant at the 0.01 level.

Looking again at Table 4.18 reveals that the use of rankings standardized regression coefficient remained consistent across the nested models, and this trend does not support my original hypothesis, which anticipated that the use of rankings standardized regression coefficient would decrease with the addition of the in-college experiences variables. With just the importance placed on rankings variable in the model, the standardized regression coefficient was 0.07 and significant at the 0.01 level. The variables related to students' privilege slightly attenuated the strength of the relationship between the importance students placed on rankings and their sense of belonging at the end of the first year of college. The standardized regression

coefficient of 0.06 suggests a statistically significant but modest relationship between consideration of rankings and first-year sense of belonging. Table 4.19 provides evidence for why the use of rankings standardized regression coefficient did not decrease after adding in the in-college experiences variables; there was practically no correlation between the in-college experiences and importance placed on rankings.

Table 4.19
YFCY In-College Experiences Correlation with Importance of Rankings (N=15,559)

	Importance Placed on Rankings
Campus Racial Climate	0.02
Student-Faculty Interaction	-0.01
Involvement in Extracurricular Activities: Less than 5 hours	**0.02**
Involvement in Extracurricular Activities: 6-15 hours	**0.03**
Involvement in Extracurricular Activities: 15+ hours	**-0.03**

Note. Data are weighted by the ATE weight. A bolded value means the value is statistically significant at the 0.01 level.

Looking more closely at the regression results, there were several prominent factors that influenced first-year sense of belonging. In particular, the in-college experiences were the largest predictors of sense of belonging, indicating that a student's experiences while in college are more important in understanding their sense of belonging than whether they valued rankings in choosing a college or other pre-college experiences and characteristics. Students who interacted with faculty more often and were more satisfied with these interactions had a significantly stronger sense of belonging, and student-faculty interaction was the strongest predictor of first-year sense of belonging. In addition, students who were involved in extracurricular activities had increased sense of belonging in comparison with students who were not involved in extracurricular activities. Finally, students who had increased negative interactions with diverse peers had a weaker sense of belonging. These findings point to the powerful relationship between students' activities during their freshman year of college and their subsequent sense of belonging.

Besides in-college experiences, other factors can affect first-year sense of belonging. Regarding gender, women had significantly higher sense of belonging than non-women, and students who identified as genderqueer, gender non-conforming, or other identity had a weaker sense of belonging than students who did not identify as one of those genders. Relating to cultural privilege, students who cared about their college's academic reputation had stronger sense of belonging. Finally, compared to students at universities, students at four-year institutions felt more socially and academically integrated on campus. In closing, these findings lend evidence to the fact that use of rankings is just one of many significant predictors of first-year sense of belonging.

Table 4.20
YFCY Regression Results Predicting Sense of Belonging (N=15,559)

	B	SE B	β	P-Value
Constant	31.56	1.31		**0.000**
Importance Placed on Rankings	1.13	0.14	0.06	**0.000**
Demographic Characteristics				
Man	0.56	0.34	0.03	0.100
Woman	1.29	0.34	0.07	**0.000**
Genderqueer, gender non-conforming, other identity	-1.86	0.67	-0.10	**0.005**
White/Caucasian	0.55	0.26	0.03	0.030
African American/Black	-1.12	0.33	-0.03	**0.001**
American Indian/Alaska Native	-3.58	0.69	-0.04	**0.000**
East Asian (e.g., Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Taiwanese)	-0.33	0.29	-0.01	0.246
Southeast Asian (e.g., Cambodian, Vietnamese, Hmong, Filipino)	-1.38	0.33	-0.03	**0.000**
South Asian (e.g., Indian, Pakistani, Nepalese, Sri Lankan)	-2.54	0.42	-0.05	**0.000**
Other Asian	1.10	0.97	0.01	0.258
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	-0.53	1.05	0.00	0.611
Latino (Mexican American/Chicano, Puerto Rican, Other Latino)	-0.21	0.25	-0.01	0.400
Other Race	-1.08	0.61	-0.01	0.079
U.S. Citizen/Permanent Resident	0.91	0.41	0.05	0.028
International Student (F-1, or M-1 visa)	0.11	0.44	0.01	0.806
Other Citizenship	-1.02	0.80	-0.03	0.202
Economic Privilege				
Lower Income ($0-$59,999)	-0.03	0.13	0.00	0.789

Middle Income ($60,000-$199,999)	-0.01	0.09	0.00	0.913
Upper Income ($200,000 or more)	0.04	0.12	0.00	0.708
Concern about Ability to Finance College Education: None	0.66	0.16	0.03	**0.000**
Concern about Ability to Finance College Education: Major	-0.93	0.25	-0.03	**0.000**
Worked for Pay: Less than 5 hours	1.04	0.19	0.04	**0.000**
Worked for Pay: 6-15 hours	0.57	0.19	0.02	**0.002**
Worked for Pay: 15+ hours	0.55	0.22	0.02	0.013
Could not Afford First Choice College	-1.67	0.17	-0.07	**0.000**
Academic Privilege				
High School GPA: B- or lower	-1.62	0.57	-0.02	**0.005**
High School GPA: B	-1.06	0.30	-0.03	**0.000**
High School GPA: B+	-0.21	0.22	-0.01	0.329
High School GPA: A-	0.08	0.16	0.00	0.608
Cultural Privilege				
College Reputation Orientation	0.07	0.01	0.07	**0.000**
Highest Academic Degree Planned: Master's degree or J.D.	-0.31	0.20	-0.02	0.125
Highest Academic Degree Planned: Doctorate or medical degree	-0.54	0.24	-0.03	0.021
Importance of Advice from Private College Counselor	0.41	0.18	0.02	0.023
Attending College to Prepare Myself for Graduate or Professional School: Not important	-0.24	0.25	-0.01	0.333
Attending College to Prepare Myself for Graduate or Professional School: Very important	-0.28	0.16	-0.01	0.094
Status-Seeking Goals	0.13	0.08	0.01	0.101
Social Privilege				
Asked a Teacher for Advice after Class	0.49	0.23	0.02	0.030
Importance of Advice from Teacher	-0.27	0.17	-0.01	0.099
Importance of Advice from High School Counselor	0.00	0.16	0.00	0.976
Cohort Year				
2018	-0.58	0.18	-0.03	**0.001**
2019	0.08	0.17	0.00	0.627
In-College Experiences				
Campus Racial Climate	-0.13	0.01	-0.12	**0.000**
Student-Faculty Interaction	0.26	0.01	0.24	**0.000**
Involvement in Extracurricular Activities: Less than 5 hours	2.62	0.18	0.14	**0.000**
Involvement in Extracurricular Activities: 6-15 hours	4.67	0.23	0.19	**0.000**
Involvement in Extracurricular Activities: 15+ hours	6.37	0.40	0.13	**0.000**
Institutional Characteristics				
Institutional Type	1.26	0.16	0.07	**0.000**
Institutional Control	0.96	0.19	0.04	**0.000**
Selectivity [a]	0.17	0.08	0.02	0.026

Note. Data are weighted by the ATE weight. A bolded value means the value is statistically significant at the 0.01 level.
[a] This variable was divided by 100 to aid with regression interpretation.

Overall Satisfaction Regression Results. Looking at the final regression model predicting first-year overall satisfaction, 19% of the variance in overall satisfaction could be explained by the eight groups of variables in the model. Like with the other freshman year models, there was a notable change in the adjusted R-squared value when adding in the in-college experiences; the adjusted R-squared value jumped from 0.07 to 0.18. Students' experiences during their first year of college play a large role in understanding their outcomes, even more so than factors like demographic characteristics, amount of privilege, or characteristics of the institutions students attended. The p-value for the F-test was also significant at the 0.01 level for all of the models, which indicates that the regression models fit the data better than an intercept-only model.

Table 4.21
YFCY Regression Measures for Regression Predicting Overall Satisfaction (N=15,614)

	Adjusted R^2	F	P-Value	β (Importance Placed on Rankings)
Importance Placed on Rankings	0.00	32.60	**<.001**	**0.05**
Models 1-5: Student Privilege	0.07	32.53	**<.001**	**0.04**
Model 6: Cohort Year	0.07	31.19	**<.001**	**0.04**
Model 7: In-College Experiences	0.18	81.00	**<.001**	**0.04**
Model 8: Institutional Characteristics	0.19	79.50	**<.001**	**0.04**

Note. Data are weighted by the ATE weight. A bolded value means the value is statistically significant at the 0.01 level.

Like with the first-year sense of belonging regression model, the use of rankings standardized regression coefficient remained consistent across the nested models. With just the importance placed on rankings variable in the model, the use of rankings standardized regression

coefficient initially was 0.05 and significant. However, this regression coefficient reduced to 0.04 after entering in the student privilege variables, indicating that student privilege to a small degree attenuated the strength of the relationship between importance of rankings and first-year overall satisfaction. From these results, it can be said that importance placed on rankings plays a statistically significant but relatively modest role in understanding the extent to which students are satisfied with their college experience. Table 4.22 is important in understanding why the use of rankings standardized regression coefficient did not lessen after adding in the in-college experiences variables. In particular, there was virtually no correlation between the in-college experiences and importance placed on rankings.

Table 4.22
YFCY In-College Experiences Correlation with Importance of Rankings (N=15,614)

	Importance Placed on Rankings
Campus Racial Climate	**0.02**
Student-Faculty Interaction	-0.01
Involvement in Extracurricular Activities: Less than 5 hours	**0.02**
Involvement in Extracurricular Activities: 6-15 hours	**0.03**
Involvement in Extracurricular Activities: 15+ hours	**-0.03**

Note. Data are weighted by the ATE weight. A bolded value means the value is statistically significant at the 0.01 level.

As with sense of belonging, the in-college experiences also were some of the biggest factors in understanding first-year overall satisfaction. Student-faculty interaction predicted overall satisfaction more than any other variable in the models; students who had higher levels of student-faculty interaction felt more satisfied with their college experience. On the other hand, students with higher levels of negative cross-racial interaction felt less satisfied. Finally, students who participated in student clubs/groups weekly had increased overall satisfaction versus students who did not participate. In conclusion, the activities students partake in while in college are more impactful in determining their overall satisfaction than whether or not they used college rankings when deciding which college to attend.

A few other variables were important factors in predicting first-year overall satisfaction. Compared with non-South Asian students, South Asian (e.g., Indian, Pakistani, Nepalese, Sri Lankan) students had significantly lower satisfaction. Looking at factors related to privilege, students who valued their college's reputation felt more satisfied with their first-year college experience. One finding related to institutional characteristics is that students at four-year liberal arts colleges and masters comprehensive universities were more satisfied with their college experience in comparison with students who attended research or doctoral universities. In closing, it is important to remember that in addition to use of rankings, several other factors influence first-year overall satisfaction.

Table 4.23
YFCY Regression Results Predicting Overall Satisfaction (N=15,614)

	B	SE B	β	P-Value
Constant	32.21	1.23		**0.000**
Importance Placed on Rankings	0.78	0.13	0.04	**0.000**
Demographic Characteristics				
Man	0.09	0.32	0.01	0.775
Woman	0.47	0.32	0.03	0.143
Genderqueer, gender non-conforming, other identity	-0.56	0.63	-0.03	0.372
White/Caucasian	0.75	0.24	0.04	**0.002**
African American/Black	-1.04	0.31	-0.03	**0.001**
American Indian/Alaska Native	-2.42	0.65	-0.03	**0.000**
East Asian (e.g., Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Taiwanese)	-0.05	0.27	0.00	0.850
Southeast Asian (e.g., Cambodian, Vietnamese, Hmong, Filipino)	-0.35	0.31	-0.01	0.262
South Asian (e.g., Indian, Pakistani, Nepalese, Sri Lankan)	-2.75	0.40	-0.06	**0.000**
Other Asian	-0.27	0.91	0.00	0.771
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	-1.42	0.99	-0.01	0.152
Latino (Mexican American/Chicano, Puerto Rican, Other Latino)	0.00	0.24	0.00	0.995
Other Race	0.56	0.58	0.01	0.330
U.S. Citizen/Permanent Resident	0.07	0.39	0.00	0.861
International Student (F-1, or M-1 visa)	-0.78	0.42	-0.04	0.062
Other Citizenship	0.71	0.75	0.02	0.343
Economic Privilege				
Lower Income ($0-$59,999)	0.22	0.12	0.02	0.067

Middle Income ($60,000-$199,999)	-0.01	0.09	0.00	0.909
Upper Income ($200,000 or more)	-0.21	0.11	-0.02	0.059
Concern about Ability to Finance College Education: None	0.98	0.15	0.05	**0.000**
Concern about Ability to Finance College Education: Major	-0.63	0.23	-0.02	**0.007**
Worked for Pay: Less than 5 hours	0.35	0.17	0.02	0.042
Worked for Pay: 6-15 hours	-0.15	0.18	-0.01	0.383
Worked for Pay: 15+ hours	0.27	0.21	0.01	0.201
Could not Afford First Choice College	-1.79	0.16	-0.08	**0.000**
Academic Privilege				
High School GPA: B- or lower	-2.14	0.54	-0.03	**0.000**
High School GPA: B	-1.84	0.29	-0.05	**0.000**
High School GPA: B+	-0.85	0.20	-0.03	**0.000**
High School GPA: A-	-0.59	0.15	-0.03	**0.000**
Cultural Privilege				
College Reputation Orientation	0.07	0.01	0.07	**0.000**
Highest Academic Degree Planned: Master's degree or J.D.	-0.18	0.19	-0.01	0.352
Highest Academic Degree Planned: Doctorate or medical degree	-0.23	0.22	-0.01	0.302
Importance of Advice from Private College Counselor	-0.31	0.17	-0.01	0.065
Attending College to Prepare Myself for Graduate or Professional School: Not important	-0.29	0.23	-0.01	0.205
Attending College to Prepare Myself for Graduate or Professional School: Very important	-0.40	0.15	-0.02	0.010
Status-Seeking Goals	-0.22	0.08	-0.02	**0.005**
Social Privilege				
Asked a Teacher for Advice after Class	-0.01	0.21	0.00	0.960
Importance of Advice from Teacher	-0.37	0.16	-0.02	0.018
Importance of Advice from High School Counselor	0.29	0.15	0.02	0.062
Cohort Year				
2018	-0.46	0.17	-0.02	**0.006**
2019	0.03	0.16	0.00	0.832
In-College Experiences				
Campus Racial Climate	-0.12	0.01	-0.12	**0.000**
Student-Faculty Interaction	0.31	0.01	0.30	**0.000**
Involvement in Extracurricular Activities: Less than 5 hours	1.59	0.17	0.09	**0.000**
Involvement in Extracurricular Activities: 6-15 hours	2.08	0.22	0.09	**0.000**
Involvement in Extracurricular Activities: 15+ hours	4.13	0.37	0.09	**0.000**
Institutional Characteristics				
Institutional Type	1.73	0.15	0.10	**0.000**
Institutional Control	-0.35	0.18	-0.02	0.049
Selectivity [a]	0.27	0.07	0.03	**0.000**

Note. Data are weighted by the ATE weight. A bolded value means the value is statistically significant at the 0.01 level.
[a] This variable was divided by 100 to aid with regression interpretation.

Use of Rankings and Senior-Year Outcomes

This study made use of t-tests and a linear regression model to ascertain if importance of rankings affects senior-year overall satisfaction. The following section provides the results for the t-tests and linear regression model used to determine if use of rankings has an impact on student's overall satisfaction during their senior year.

T-Tests

Like with the YFCY data, t-tests were conducted for both the unweighted and weighted data, and again, the p-value utilized was 0.01. The results match with what was seen for the YFCY overall satisfaction t-tests. For the CSS data, students who placed importance on rankings had significantly greater overall senior-year satisfaction than students who did not place importance on rankings, and this was true for the unweighted and all the weighted (ATE, ATT, ATU) t-tests.

Table 4.24
CSS T-Tests Based on Importance Placed on Rankings (N=22,812)

	Unweighted	ATE	ATT	ATU
Overall Satisfaction				
Mean: Not Important	52.32	52.72	52.84	52.44
Mean: Somewhat/Very Important	53.27	53.23	53.41	52.82
P-Value	**0.00**	**0.00**	**0.00**	**0.00**

Note. A bolded value means the value is statistically significant at the 0.01 level.

These results support my original hypotheses. First, with the unweighted t-test, students who use rankings likely have greater satisfaction because of the various types of privilege they possess. The weighted t-test results support the theory of anticipatory socialization and the fact that students who use rankings are likely finding an institution that is a good fit for them.

Looking at the weighted t-tests also demonstrates that for students who are likely and not likely to use rankings, their overall satisfaction would be significantly higher if they had used rankings.

Linear Regression Model

In order to further examine how importance placed on rankings relates to senior-year overall satisfaction, a linear regression model was estimated, focusing specifically on the use of rankings variable. An important note is that the linear regression model was weighted by the ATE weight, and a p-value of 0.01 was used for this particular model and results in this section. The following section discusses the results from this regression model, along with providing some descriptive information about the analytic sample. Like with the YFCY data, these findings are robust against sensitivity checks where the use of rankings variable was coded to compare not and somewhat important to very important.

Sample Descriptive Statistics. In total, there were 40,661 students in the linear regression predicting overall satisfaction. Around three out of five (61.7%) of the students in the sample identified as female, and the vast majority were white/Caucasian (76.1%). Latino was the racial group identified second most frequently (11.4%), and in terms of citizenship status, 96.5% of students said they were a U.S. citizen or permanent resident. About half (51.0%) came from a middle-income family, with the remaining half coming from either a lower-income (23.6%) or an upper-income family (25.4%). Around 75% (75.4%) had an A- GPA or above in high school, and 90.9% chose to attend a private institution. Finally, 53.7% of students in the CSS sample were enrolled at a university, and 49.5% reported that rankings were important in their college choice decision. For more information, see Table 4.25.

Table 4.25
Characteristics of the CSS Analytic Sample (N=40,661)

	Percent Distributions	Mean	Standard Deviation

Importance placed on rankings:			
Not important	50.5		
Important	49.5		
Gender:			
Male	36.8		
Female	61.7		
Genderqueer, gender non-conforming, other identity	1.5		
Race: [a]			
White/Caucasian	76.1		
African American/Black	5.1		
American Indian/Alaska Native	1.0		
East Asian (e.g., Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Taiwanese)	8.9		
Southeast Asian (e.g., Cambodian, Vietnamese, Hmong, Filipino)	4.6		
South Asian (e.g., Indian, Pakistani, Nepalese, Sri Lankan)	2.5		
Other Asian	0.4		
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0.5		
Latino (Mexican American/Chicana/o/x, Puerto Rican, Other Latina/o/x, South American)	11.4		
Other Race	1.6		
Citizenship:			
U.S. citizen/permanent resident	96.5		
International student (F-1, or M-1 visa)	2.2		
Other citizenship	1.4		
Income:			
Lower income ($0-$59,999)	23.6		
Middle income ($60,000-$199,999)	51.0		
Upper income ($200,000 or more)	25.4		
High school GPA:			
B- or lower	1.6		
B	7.4		
B+	15.6		
A-	31.5		
A or A+	43.9		
Institutional type:			
University	53.7		
4-year	46.3		
Institutional control:			
Public	9.1		
Private	90.9		
Selectivity [b]		12.56	1.39

Note. Data are weighted by the ATE weight.

[a] The percentages might exceed 100% for this variable because students could mark all that apply.

[b] This variable was divided by 100 to aid with regression interpretation.

Linear Regression Results. As seen in Table 4.26, for the final regression model, 27% of the variance in senior-year overall satisfaction could be explained by the eight blocks of variables, and there was a large increase in the adjusted R-squared value when adding in the in-college experiences. This means that students' experiences and involvement while in college, such as interacting with faculty, help to explain students' overall satisfaction above demographic characteristics and amount of student privilege. Additionally, for each model, the p-value for the F-test was significant at the 0.01 level, indicating that each model is helping to predict overall satisfaction.

Table 4.26
CSS Regression Measures for Regression Predicting Overall Satisfaction (N=40,661)

	Adjusted R^2	F	P-Value	β (Importance Placed on Rankings)
Importance Placed on Rankings	0.00	42.64	**<.001**	**0.03**
Models 1-5: Student Privilege	0.05	61.25	**<.001**	**0.03**
Model 6: Cohort Year	0.07	81.84	**<.001**	**0.02**
Model 7: In-College Experiences	0.26	332.26	**<.001**	**0.02**
Model 8: Institutional Characteristics	0.27	319.43	**<.001**	**0.02**

Note. Data are weighted by the ATE weight. A bolded value means the value is statistically significant at the 0.01 level.

Table 4.26 also includes the standardized regression coefficients for the use of rankings variable for each model. With just the use of rankings variable included in the model, the standardized regression coefficient was 0.03, and it remained the same when the student privilege variables were added to the regression equation. When the cohort year variable entered the regression model, the standardized regression coefficient decreased to 0.02, which demonstrates that cohort year slightly attenuated the strength of the relationship between

importance placed on rankings and senior-year overall satisfaction. The standardized regression coefficient of 0.02 is statistically significant but not large, so it can be said that the use of rankings has a small effect on senior-year overall satisfaction. Table 4.27 provides information about the correlation between the in-college experiences and importance of rankings, and as seen in this table, there was no relationship between these particular in-college experiences and use of rankings.

Table 4.27
CSS In-College Experiences Correlation with Importance of Rankings (N=40,661)

	Importance Placed on Rankings
Campus Racial Climate	0.01
Student-Faculty Interaction	-0.01
Involvement in Extracurricular Activities: Less than 5 hours	**0.02**
Involvement in Extracurricular Activities: 6-15 hours	0.01
Involvement in Extracurricular Activities: 15+ hours	0.00

Note. Data are weighted by the ATE weight. A bolded value means the value is statistically significant at the 0.01 level.

The in-college experiences proved to be important predictors of senior-year overall satisfaction, so a student's activities while in college are major influencers on their level of satisfaction. Students who felt they had stronger mentoring relationships with faculty had greater overall satisfaction, and student-faculty interaction had the strongest effect on overall satisfaction in comparison with the other variables in the models. Another factor that positively influenced overall satisfaction was involvement in student clubs/groups; students who were involved weekly in some type of student club or group had higher satisfaction than students who were not involved. Finally, negative cross-racial interaction had a significant effect on satisfaction in that students who had more frequent negative interactions with their peers reported feeling less satisfied with their overall college experience.

Other factors that affected senior-year overall satisfaction included the year in which the student took the CSS survey and the characteristics of the institution the student attended.

Compared with students who took the CSS in 2017, students who took the CSS in 2018 or 2019 had significantly lower overall satisfaction. This finding could be due to the different types of institutions that participated in these survey cycles or other outside factors like the higher education atmosphere. On a different note, students who attended more selective institutions had higher levels of satisfaction, and compared to students at public institutions, students at private institutions had lower overall satisfaction. These findings demonstrate that many factors besides use of rankings shape the extent to which a student is satisfied with their overall college experience.

Table 4.28
CSS Regression Results Predicting Overall Satisfaction (N=40,661)

	B	SE B	β	P-Value
Constant	35.92	0.61		**0.000**
Importance Placed on Rankings	0.39	0.07	0.02	**0.000**
Demographic Characteristics				
Male	0.64	0.10	0.04	**0.000**
Female	0.65	0.10	0.04	**0.000**
Genderqueer, gender non-conforming, other identity	-1.29	0.19	-0.08	**0.000**
White/Caucasian	0.50	0.14	0.03	**0.000**
African American/Black	-0.54	0.19	-0.01	**0.003**
American Indian/Alaska Native	0.25	0.36	0.00	0.489
East Asian (e.g., Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Taiwanese)	-1.19	0.16	-0.04	**0.000**
Southeast Asian (e.g., Cambodian, Vietnamese, Hmong, Filipino)	-0.23	0.19	-0.01	0.223
South Asian (e.g., Indian, Pakistani, Nepalese, Sri Lankan)	0.35	0.25	0.01	0.152
Other Asian	-2.06	0.53	-0.02	**0.000**
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0.43	0.49	0.00	0.385
Latino (Mexican American/Chicana/o/x, Puerto Rican, Other Latina/o/x, South American)	0.15	0.13	0.01	0.245
Other Race	-0.88	0.28	-0.01	**0.002**
U.S. Citizen/Permanent Resident	0.04	0.14	0.00	0.743
International Student (F-1, or M-1 visa)	-0.71	0.19	-0.03	**0.000**
Other Citizenship	0.66	0.22	0.02	**0.002**
Economic Privilege				
Lower Income ($0-$59,999)	-0.24	0.06	-0.02	**0.000**
Middle Income ($60,000-$199,999)	-0.04	0.05	0.00	0.393
Upper Income ($200,000 or more)	0.28	0.06	0.02	**0.000**

Concern about Ability to Finance College Education: None	0.10	0.08	0.01	0.209
Concern about Ability to Finance College Education: Major	-0.37	0.12	-0.01	**0.002**
Worked for Pay: Less than 5 hours	-0.10	0.09	0.00	0.307
Worked for Pay: 6-15 hours	-0.30	0.09	-0.01	**0.001**
Worked for Pay: 15+ hours	-0.55	0.12	-0.02	**0.000**
Could not Afford First Choice College	-0.66	0.09	-0.03	**0.000**
Academic Privilege				
High School GPA: B- or lower	-1.19	0.28	-0.02	**0.000**
High School GPA: B	-0.75	0.14	-0.02	**0.000**
High School GPA: B+	-0.82	0.11	-0.04	**0.000**
High School GPA: A-	-0.62	0.08	-0.04	**0.000**
Cultural Privilege				
College Reputation Orientation	0.04	0.01	0.04	**0.000**
Highest Academic Degree Planned: Master's degree or J.D.	-0.32	0.11	-0.02	**0.003**
Highest Academic Degree Planned: Doctorate or medical degree	-1.11	0.12	-0.06	**0.000**
Importance of Advice from Private College Counselor	0.12	0.09	0.01	0.183
Attending College to Prepare Myself for Graduate or Professional School: Not important	0.09	0.13	0.00	0.511
Attending College to Prepare Myself for Graduate or Professional School: Very important	0.11	0.09	0.01	0.206
Status-Seeking Goals	-0.20	0.04	-0.02	**0.000**
Social Privilege				
Asked a Teacher for Advice after Class	-0.02	0.11	0.00	0.836
Importance of Advice from Teacher	0.04	0.08	0.00	0.630
Importance of Advice from High School Counselor	-0.06	0.08	0.00	0.461
Cohort Year				
2018	-2.37	0.09	-0.13	**0.000**
2019	-2.70	0.09	-0.16	**0.000**
In-College Experiences				
Campus Racial Climate	-0.13	0.00	-0.15	**0.000**
Student-Faculty Interaction	0.30	0.00	0.43	**0.000**
Involvement in Extracurricular Activities: Less than 5 hours	0.76	0.10	0.05	**0.000**
Involvement in Extracurricular Activities: 6-15 hours	1.44	0.12	0.07	**0.000**
Involvement in Extracurricular Activities: 15+ hours	1.10	0.19	0.03	**0.000**
Institutional Characteristics				
Institutional Type	0.46	0.08	0.03	**0.000**
Institutional Control	-1.35	0.14	-0.05	**0.000**
Selectivity [a]	0.54	0.03	0.09	**0.000**

Note. Data are weighted by the ATE weight. A bolded value means the value is statistically significant at the 0.01 level.

[a] This variable was divided by 100 to aid with regression interpretation.

Revisiting Research Question 2

The aim of Research Question 2 was to examine the effect of use of rankings on first-year outcomes such as academic adjustment and also senior-year overall satisfaction. For the first-year outcomes, students who placed importance on rankings had significantly higher overall satisfaction and sense of belonging but not academic adjustment. Importantly, the differences in first-year sense of belonging and satisfaction were statistically significant but quite small. Senior-year students who used rankings in their decision-making process also had higher overall satisfaction, but the difference, again, was modest. The regression models demonstrated that use of rankings was just one of many predictors of student outcomes; in-college experiences, like student-faculty interactions, were much more important predictors of first-year and senior-year outcomes. Altogether, from these results, it is evident that rankings do provide some advantages to students, but use of rankings should be one of many factors considered when examining what impacts students' college experiences and outcomes.

Conclusion

This chapter focused on the results for this study, broken out by research question. This study used a combination of analytical approaches including regression models, inverse probability of treatment weighting, and t-tests. This chapter also revisited my hypotheses, finding that my hypotheses were correct in some instances but not others. The following chapter will engage more broadly with the results, elaborating on how they are relevant for certain audiences and future research.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Chapter 5 begins by providing an overview of the study and then reiterating key findings. Next, the chapter discusses how this study's findings relate to higher education at large and also the literature and theoretical frameworks. Finally, implications for relevant parties and future research are considered.

Study Overview

This study aimed to better understand the types of students likely to place importance on college rankings when deciding where to go to college, and this study addressed a gap in the literature by providing current information about the characteristics of students who make use of rankings. Additionally, this study investigated whether students' utilization of college rankings impacted their sense of belonging, academic adjustment, and overall satisfaction. Prior literature had not considered whether students' use of rankings impacts affective outcomes in college.

The data in this study came from the Cooperative Institutional Research Program at HERI. To answer Research Question 1, I analyzed 2015 TFS data using logistic regression models to identify the characteristics and experiences of students associated with the likelihood of placing importance on college rankings. Bourdieu's theory of social and cultural reproduction (Bourdieu, 2018) and McDonough et al.'s (1998) seminal work helped to guide the variable selection and overall hypothesis that more privileged students prioritize rankings when making their college choice. For Research Question 2 to better understand whether students who considered rankings as important in their college choice process had significantly different outcomes in college, I employed a variety of statistical techniques including inverse probability of treatment weighting, t-tests, and linear regression models. The data for this analysis came from the 2017-2019 YFCY and CSS. Merton's (1968) concept of anticipatory socialization

provided insight into why student expectations might differ in regard to outcomes like sense of belonging and also in-college experiences like student-faculty interaction.

Summary of Key Findings

Consideration of Rankings Correlates with Having More Privilege

For Research Question 1, this study found that students who placed importance on rankings had greater levels of economic, academic, social, and cultural privilege. For example, upper-income students were more likely to use rankings than students from less affluent families. For academic privilege, students who had higher GPAs in high school also were more likely to report valuing rankings in their decision of where to attend college. Students who made use of college advice from private college counselors, high school counselors, and/or teachers tended to be more likely to prioritize rankings. These findings demonstrate that social and cultural privilege are important factors in understanding the types of students who likely value rankings when deciding where to enroll in college. Also related to cultural privilege, students who cared about a college's reputation and were status seekers were the students who consulted rankings in their college choice process. These findings can be generalized to the population of first-time, full-time undergraduate students entering four-year colleges and universities in fall 2015 (Eagan et al., 2015).

Consideration of Rankings Weakly Correlates with College Outcomes

For Research Question 2, the t-tests revealed that students who used rankings had significantly higher sense of belonging and overall satisfaction (both freshman and senior-year), but there were no significant differences for academic adjustment. This was true for the weighted and unweighted data. However, the linear regression models demonstrated that use of rankings was just one of many factors that influenced sense of belonging and overall satisfaction (both

freshman and senior-year). The in-college experiences in this study were much stronger predictors of sense of belonging and overall satisfaction. Thus, it can be said that rankings do provide some advantages to students even after adjusting for privilege, but the activities a student partakes in while in college affect their outcomes to a much larger degree.

Discussion of Findings

Student Characteristics and Use of Rankings

The main takeaway from the analysis from the first research question is that more privileged students continue to place greater importance on college rankings when deciding between colleges. These students have substantial advantages across multiple forms of privilege including economic, academic, social, and cultural privilege, and this finding supports the application of Bourdieu's forms of capital (Bourdieu, 2018) to this study. McDonough et al.'s (1998) study demonstrated that, in the mid-1990s, privilege strongly predicted whether incoming college students considered rankings when selecting a college, and this study's findings reinforce those conclusions. The following section focuses on results from the final regression model unless specified otherwise.

Looking more closely at this study's results versus McDonough et al.'s (1998) results reveals how students' use of rankings has both remained the same and changed over time. Regarding sex, McDonough et al.'s (1998) study did not find any differences by sex, but this study found that men were more likely to prioritize rankings compared to women. Perhaps the reason for this finding is that men tend to be status seekers and value prestige more often than women (Barth et al., 2015; Delhey et al., 2022; Diekman & Eagly, 2008). For the McDonough et al. (1998) study, the only significant findings regarding race were for Asian American and Chicano students, yet this study found several differences by race. However, this study did not

find that Latino students were more or less likely to utilize rankings, which contradicts the literature (Art & Science Group, 2013; Howard, 2002; McDonough et al., 1998). This finding might be attributed to the growing diversity of the college-going Latino population (Barshay, 2023; Kim et al., 2024; Mora, 2022; National Center for Education Statistics, 2022) and this study's decision to collapse multiple subgroups (e.g., Mexican American, South American, Puerto Rican) under the broad category of Latino. Furthermore, South Asian students were the only Asian American student group who were significantly more likely to consider rankings after accounting for all variables in the regression models, despite significant relationships for several Asian American student groups and importance placed on rankings in the first regression model.

The literature has consistently demonstrated that Asian American students prioritize rankings at higher rates than students from other racial backgrounds (Art & Science Group, 2013; Howard, 2002; Lipman Hearne, Inc., 2006; McDonough et al., 1998; Teranishi et al., 2004), yet most studies, including the McDonough et al. (1998) study, looked at Asian American students as an aggregate group. This study adds to the scant evidence (e.g., Teranishi et al., 2004) of significant variation *within* the Asian American community with respect to how they value rankings, providing a more critical and recent look into the use of rankings within the Asian American student group.

For other demographic characteristics, both this study and McDonough et al.'s (1998) study found that students who were U.S. citizens were less likely to place importance on rankings. Similarly, this study also found that international students had greater odds of prioritizing rankings when choosing a college in comparison with non-international students. Rankings are a helpful source of information, as international students often lack knowledge about universities outside of their home countries (Hazelkorn, 2015), and rankings may be the

only available form of comparison for students less familiar with a particular higher education context (Soysal et al., 2022). Many international students look to rankings as an indicator of academic reputation and understand that potential employers might consider the reputation of the institution they attended, suggesting that this group of students could be status seekers (Cebolla-Boado et al., 2018; Hazelkorn, 2009, 2015). Importantly, the number of international students continues to increase in the United States (Anderson, 2023b). Additionally, this study supports the idea that income plays a role in students' likelihood of prioritizing rankings when selecting a college (Art & Science Group, 2002, 2016; Howard, 2002; McDonough et al., 1998; Teranishi et al., 2004). Thus, it appears financial privilege continues to be used to leverage additional status (i.e., higher-ranked institutions), and higher-income students have greater access to the information found in college rankings materials/publications. Likewise, McDonough et al. (1998) point to how college knowledge has become a commodity that only certain students can afford. Ensuring that students have access to necessary resources to choose a college that is a good fit for them will be important to remedy any gaps due to income.

Findings for other forms of privilege aligned closely with the findings from McDonough et al.'s (1998) study. Although often operationalized in different ways, academic privilege continues to be a major factor in understanding which students value rankings in selecting a college (Art & Science Group, 2002, 2016; Lipman Hearne, Inc., 2006; McDonough et al., 1998). Additionally, students who listened to college advice from high school counselors, teachers, and/or private college counselors also placed importance on rankings, and this study moved beyond McDonough et al.'s (1998) study by having separate variables for each college advice giver, whereas McDonough et al. used a composite variable. This study provides more information about how advice from others affects use of rankings. In McDonough et al.'s (1998)

study, the most salient predictor of use of rankings was the importance placed on a college's reputation, and, in this study, importance of college reputation also influenced importance placed on rankings. Because some college rankings are considered reflective of a college's reputation (Bowman & Bastedo, 2009), this finding suggests that students might be thinking critically about their future and understand the value of having a degree from a well-known university, and advice from significant others (i.e., counselors, teachers) may aid them in aligning their aspirations and talents with perceived reputations of potential institutions.

Reflecting back on the application of Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction, rankings contain a plethora of information about institutions (Ehrenberg, 2005; Morse & Brooks, 2021), and this study found that more privileged students access this information to select an institution. McDonough et al. (1998) elaborated on the fact that, while college rankings information is relatively cheap, higher-SES students typically made use of rankings, as lower-SES students did not have access to guidance from counselors, parents, etc. that could be used to select a college. McDonough et al. (1998) also believed that most college rankings when they conducted their study were focused on prestige and status, and, while many of these same rankings magazines still exist today, new rankings lists have emerged focusing on other parts of the college experience (Niche, 2022; Princeton Review, 2022; Svrluga, 2019; Zhou, 2015). It is essential that all students have access to information about higher education and the various institutions they are considering, but findings from this study corroborate McDonough et al.'s (1998) conclusions that there is a market for college information that remains accessible almost exclusively to more privileged students and that more privileged students have greater access to information about higher education (Gewertz, 2018; Glass, 2023; Klasik, 2012; Person & Rosenbaum, 2006).

It is also still true that students who attend highly selective institutions place importance on college rankings (McDonough et al., 1998). As more selective institutions often are thought of as elite institutions (Blair & Smetters, 2021; Bowman & Bastedo, 2009), this relates to students valuing the name of an institution and where it can potentially take them in life. As such, the findings from this study reinforce the idea that rankings represent a critical source of information for students from affluent families intending to enroll in highly selective institutions. There are benefits to attending a selective institution in terms of financial gains, improved social networks, and graduate school attendance (Chetty et al., 2017; Ovink et al., 2018; Thomas, 2003; Witteveen & Attewell, 2017), and because students who use rankings are typically already very privileged, it can be said that rankings are reinforcing existing inequalities.

Impact of Use of Rankings on Student Outcomes

This study hypothesized that one of the advantages of college rankings is the information these publications provide to students (Ehrenberg, 2005; Morse & Brooks, 2021), potentially enabling students to make more informed decisions when selecting an institution that aligns with their values. This study is important as it adds to the relatively scant literature that has examined how students' use of rankings correlates with their college experience (Clarke, 2007). As seen with Research Question 2, students who valued rankings when deciding where to enroll tended to report having a significantly stronger sense of belonging to the institution and higher levels of overall satisfaction (both freshman year and senior year), but the difference in outcomes was relatively weak. By contrast, students' adjustment to the academic demands of college during the first year did not significantly differ based on whether they had considered rankings in selecting their college. These findings were the same before and after accounting for the various types of privilege of the students who typically make use of rankings. The lack of difference in academic

adjustment between students who do and do not use rankings could be due to the fact that academic adjustment is influenced by factors like intrinsic motivation (Montgomery et al., 2019; Otanes et al., 2022; Van Rooij et al., 2018) and support from friends and/or family (Kamel, 2018; Swenson et al., 2008), which may or may not be related to use of rankings. Future studies should more closely investigate why there is no link between importance placed on rankings and students' first-year academic adjustment.

The results from this study lend partial support to Merton's (1968) theory of anticipatory socialization. Students who make use of the informational aspect of rankings likely choose an institution that is a good fit for them, which leads to realistic expectations for the college experience. These more realistic expectations lead to modestly more positive outcomes, which was seen with sense of belonging and overall satisfaction. Additionally, the theory of anticipatory socialization (Kamens, 1981; Merton, 1968) suggests that students who use rankings would be more likely to participate in certain activities while in college, such as interacting more often with faculty; however, results from nested regression models tracking the strength of the relationship between use of rankings and the in-college experiences did not support this proposition. Moreover, bivariate correlations between use of rankings and in-college experiences suggested no relationship between these measures.

Although results suggest rankings only weakly predict students' sense of belonging and first- and senior-year college satisfaction, this study adds to the literature regarding other salient factors predicting these outcomes (Astin, 1977; De Sisto et al., 2022; King et al., 2021; Locks et al., 2008; Ncube et al., 2018; Vaccaro et al., 2015). A closer look into the regression models revealed that use of rankings was only one of many variables that significantly predicted sense of belonging, academic adjustment, and overall satisfaction, and there were several variables that

were more strongly associated with the outcomes of interest. In particular, the experiences students had while in college were very much related to their future sense of belonging, academic adjustment, and overall satisfaction. In fact, student-faculty interaction was the strongest predictor of sense of belonging and overall satisfaction; students with higher levels of student-faculty interaction had greater sense of belonging and overall satisfaction at both time points. Students with increased first-year student-faculty interaction also had an easier time adjusting to the academic demands of college. This being said, the amount of times students interacted with faculty and the quality of these interactions are more impactful than whether or not students used rankings when deciding which college to attend. The literature corroborates this finding; scholars have consistently found a strong link between student-faculty interaction and sense of belonging, academic adjustment, and overall satisfaction (Astin, 1977; Chhuon & Hudley, 2008; Freeman et al., 2007; Hausmann et al., 2007; Sevinç & Gizir, 2014; Siming et al., 2015; Vaccaro et al., 2015). Faculty are key institutional agents because they help students integrate into the college environment (Kim & Sax, 2017; Pascarella, 1985; Tinto, 1987), and students who interact with faculty are often more motivated and engaged in their educational experience (Komarraju et al., 2010).

On the other hand, students who experienced more frequent negative interactions with diverse peers had weakened sense of belonging and overall satisfaction. This finding corroborates previous studies that concluded that a negative campus racial climate can diminish students' sense of belonging and overall satisfaction (Johnson et al., 2007; Locks et al., 2008; Museus et al., 2008; Ncube et al., 2018; Nuñez, 2009). A negative campus racial climate often contributes to feelings of alienation from the campus community, feelings of discrimination, and/or academic environment stress, especially among students of color (Hurtado & Carter,

1997; Johnson et al., 2014; Smith & Moore, 2002). Given how much campus racial climate and student-faculty interaction affect sense of belonging and overall satisfaction, it is important to remember that use of rankings is just one of many factors that could influence students' time while in college.

Finally, academic self-concept was the biggest factor in understanding a student's academic adjustment. Other scholars have echoed the sentiment that academic self-concept can influence how easily a student adjusts to the academic demands of college (Chemers et al., 2001; Haktanir et al., 2021; Kamel, 2018; Robbins et al., 2004; Wouters et al., 2011). Confidence in one's academic abilities is powerful in determining a student's future academic success, as students with higher academic self-concept have more positive attitudes when faced with challenges (Chemers et al., 2001; Kamel, 2018). In conclusion, this study found that students' in-college experiences are very important when examining students' outcomes such as sense of belonging or academic adjustment.

Implications

Given this study's contributions to the knowledge base on college rankings, it is important to reflect on the study's implications. The following section explains how this study is relevant for various audiences including students, college counselors, higher education institutions, and college rankings companies. Directions for future research are also discussed.

College Counselors

College counselors should be aware of several things when helping students decide which college to attend. College counselors should provide students with equitable access to information about college; this could be through college rankings that schools subscribe to or through public information like the College Scorecard (Kelchen, 2018). College counselors

could also consider moving away from rankings and utilize tools like Forget the Rankings, which helps students find colleges that align with their values (Forget the Rankings, 2024). Because selecting a college is not an easy process, Forget the Rankings aims to help students select a college where they can thrive, regardless of whether or not that institution is ranked highly (Forget the Rankings, 2024). Given the critical role that college counselors play in the college search and selection process, college counselors need to ensure that all students they advise have access to information about the plethora of higher education institutions. College counselors should empower students to find the best institution for them by focusing closely on a student's priorities when looking at college. By advising a student to attend an institution that is the best fit for them, college counselors will be able to best serve their students and inspire students to look beyond college rankings when choosing between colleges.

The use of rankings does provide a slight advantage to students in terms of sense of belonging and overall satisfaction, but in-college experiences play a much larger role. Consequently, college counselors should recommend that students choose an institution where they feel they would want to get involved as this study indicated that students who participated in student clubs/groups weekly had stronger sense of belonging and overall satisfaction (both first-year and senior-year) in comparison with students who did not participate. Additionally, college counselors should encourage students to select an institution where they will feel comfortable reaching out and getting to know faculty, taking into account factors like average class size and access to faculty. Finally, especially for students of color, college counselors should advise that students consider the campus racial climate given how increased negative interactions with diverse peers often leads to poorer outcomes. As such, college counselors can help ensure that

their students have positive college experiences by encouraging them to get involved in certain ways when they arrive to campus.

Students

Students looking to attend college can select from over 3,000 institutions in the United States that grant bachelor's degrees (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021); however, the complexity of choices and limited time restrict students' ability to critically consider each of these options (Perna, 2006). Rankings (e.g., *U.S. News & World Report*) and ratings lists (e.g., College Scorecard) serve as valuable resources for students to efficiently narrow the menu of choices they have for college. Students should also consider tools like Forget the Rankings, which helps students find an institution that is compatible with their values; this reflects a different approach to selecting an institution where fit is emphasized over measures of prestige (Forget the Rankings, 2024). Some students may not use rankings as their college choice process is more constrained by considerations like cost or geography (Aydin, 2015; Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000; Stolzenberg et al., 2020), and students who do use rankings could be using the rankings to make more informed decisions about overall fit or to identify more prestigious institutions. While the College Scorecard is free to access (Kelchen, 2018), there is generally limited awareness of the tool as a source of information to help select a college, and many students who make use of the College Scorecard are searching for elite institutions and likely come from privileged backgrounds (Huntington-Klein, 2017; RTI International, n.d.; Steffel et al., 2020). Similarly, this study found that students with various types of privilege typically make use of rankings, and consequently, these students who consult rankings lists may be at an advantage in terms of slightly higher levels of sense of belonging and overall satisfaction (both first-year and senior-year).

However, this study found that in-college experiences like student-faculty interaction were more strong predictors of students' outcomes than use of rankings. Given these results, it is important for students to find ways to connect to campus and interact with key institutional agents – especially faculty – as early as possible into their freshman year. Joining student clubs/groups and getting to know faculty are ways for students to better their college experience. Given how students' activities on campus play a substantial role in determining their outcomes, students should keep this in mind when first stepping foot on campus.

Higher Education Institutions

This study found that more privileged students tend to be more likely to consider rankings when deciding where to attend college, and these students often attend highly selective institutions. Research has found that selective institutions often recruit from and have ties to high schools with more affluent and white students (Glasener, 2021; Salazar et al., 2021; Stevens, 2009). Universities often have relationships with affluent high schools because students at these schools are high-achieving and can afford tuition (Stevens, 2009). Additionally, it is often easier for highly selective universities to recruit from these types of high schools as they know a fair amount of students from these schools will apply to their university (Glasener, 2021). Institutions have also been known to buy student lists from companies like the College Board; these lists contain information about students like their socioeconomic and academic background (Han et al., 2019). It is evident selective institutions work to recruit students who come from privileged backgrounds (Glasener, 2021; Salazar et al., 2021; Stevens, 2009), and these students are the students who very likely value rankings. As such, college rankings are furthering an existing inequity regarding access to highly selective institutions, and rankings are likely "contributing to social reproduction in college access" (McDonough et al., 1998, p. 532). Institutions should

ensure that they are working on attracting students from all different types of backgrounds, especially given how higher education has long been considered a public good (Williams, 2016). As many highly selective institutions claim they want to create a more diverse student body (Knox, 2024), it will be imperative for these institutions to take a critical look at their recruiting practices and actively work to recruit students who do and do not come from privilege.

Moreover, this study found that use of rankings only had a small positive effect on overall satisfaction and sense of belonging, but in-college experiences had a much larger effect. Importantly, student outcomes such as sense of belonging and overall satisfaction have been linked with other outcomes like persistence and completion (Drezner & Pizmony-Levy, 2021; Hausmann et al., 2007; Kennedy et al., 2000; McGrath & Braunstein, 1997; Tinto, 2012). Weekly involvement in student clubs/groups was associated with stronger sense of belonging and overall satisfaction (both first-year and senior-year), so institutions should find ways to get their students engaged in extracurricular activities and ensure that they offer activities and student groups that align well with the diverse interests of their campus communities. The vast majority of students in the YFCY and CSS samples attended private institutions, so this implication is especially relevant for this type of institution.

Additionally, students who had major concerns about their ability to pay for college had significantly lower sense of belonging and overall satisfaction than students who were only somewhat concerned, so institutions, especially those that are private, should work to close this equity gap. Institutions might consider providing information about various activities on campus through social media (Heiberger & Harper, 2008; Munir & Zaheer, 2021), target students like working-class students who might be less likely to participate in extracurricular activities (Stuber, 2009), and communicate the benefits of student organizations (Dickinson et al., 2021).

Additionally, private institutions should work to increase student-faculty interactions, as student-faculty interaction leads to greater sense of belonging, academic adjustment, and overall satisfaction. Possible ways to increase the amount in which students interact with faculty include promoting undergraduate research programs (Bjorklund et al., 2004; Cox et al., 2010), building a culture in which student-faculty interaction is valued (Cox & Orehovec, 2007), demonstrating what can be gained from attending faculty office hours (Smith et al., 2017), and offering faculty mentorship training (Retallick & Pate, 2009).

Students' academic self-concept was the biggest factor in understanding students' first-year academic adjustment, so institutions should look for ways to foster students' beliefs about their abilities in academic environments. Institutions can work to improve their students' academic self-concept by having faculty utilize peer feedback (Simonsmeier et al., 2020), and engagement with students of other races/ethnicities also strengthens a student's confidence in their academic abilities (Chang, 1999; Gurin, 1999). Additionally, having faculty who are approachable and available to students increases students' academic self-concept (Kim & Sax, 2014; Komarraju et al., 2010). Compared with students who did not identify as lower-income, lower-income students had lower academic adjustment, so institutions can use these strategies to improve students' academic self-concept and their subsequent academic adjustment. This implication, once again, applies largely to private institutions.

Finally, as campus racial climate is one of the largest negative predictors of sense of belonging and overall satisfaction, private institutions should help students foster positive relationships with peers from different backgrounds than their own. This is especially important as students of color had lower overall satisfaction (both first-year and senior-year) than white students. Strategies proven to better the campus racial climate include creating learning

environments where students of diverse backgrounds can interact (Gregory, 2000; Hurtado et al., 1999), having administrators who promote and value ethnic diversity (Gilliard, 1996; Harper & Hurtado, 2007), and forming multicultural centers that support the needs of students of color (Landry, 2002; Mwangi et al., 2018). In conclusion, while this study did not find a strong relationship between use of rankings and student outcomes, it did demonstrate that higher education institutions, especially private institutions, can help improve students' outcomes by focusing on students' experiences while in college.

Ranking Companies

Many ranking companies state that they created their rankings given how important choosing a college is, and as such, they believe that the information in their rankings can be helpful for students in their college choice process (Kelchen, 2018; Morse & Brooks, 2023; Niche, 2022). This study found that while rankings can potentially be useful in providing more information about institutions, students with more privilege typically make use of rankings. While there are many factors in selecting a college (Cochran & Coles, 2012; Perna et al., 2021), there are still economic costs in accessing some college rankings, as some of this information is only available behind a paywall (Chirikov, 2021; Lim, 2021; U.S. News & World Report, n.d.). Given that privileged students already have greater access to more information about higher education (Gewertz, 2018; Glass, 2023; Klasik, 2012; Person & Rosenbaum, 2006), ranking companies are adding to this inequity by choosing to charge students to view certain information. Companies like *U.S. News & World Report* got into the rankings business to increase their sales and popularity (Sanoff, 2007), so it is unlikely that we will see rankings companies alter their business model and provide open access to their rankings. This is unfortunate to see that rankings companies are putting profits over their purported desire to help students, and in the process,

they are furthering an already existing inequity regarding access to information about higher education (Gewertz, 2018; Glass, 2023; Klasik, 2012; Person & Rosenbaum, 2006).

McDonough et al. (1998) mention how students and their families are largely responsible for the college choice process given factors like high counselor-to-student ratios, and it is true today that counselors are spending less time with students (Blake, 2020). It is imperative that students have basic information to make informed decisions about college (McDonough et al., 1998) like knowing the difference between a research university and liberal arts college and what it means to attend a small versus large institution. Yet, rankings often attempt to rank a wide array of diverse institutions using the same criteria (Diver, 2022). If college rankings companies are indeed trying to provide students with critical information about colleges (Diver, 2022; Morse & Brooks, 2023), they should include basic information about the different types of institutions in order to serve all students looking to attend college. This, again, is especially important given how access to information is often in the hands of more privileged students (Gewertz, 2018; Glass, 2023; Klasik, 2012; Person & Rosenbaum, 2006).

This study found that for students who were unlikely to use rankings, their first-year sense of belonging, first-year overall satisfaction, and senior-year overall satisfaction would have been greater if they had used rankings. As mentioned before, the impact of the use of rankings was on the smaller side as there were other factors that more strongly impacted students' outcomes. However, if rankings information was free to access for high school students and their families, perhaps students who did not use rankings before could have made use of rankings and had slightly better outcomes as a result. As such, rankings companies are adding to inequities that some students face when trying to decide which college to attend. If college rankings

companies are serious about supporting students, they should strongly consider making rankings information free for all students looking to attend college.

Research

Unfortunately, the data from this study did not represent a diverse population, so researchers should consider this for future studies. Less than 30% of students in the YFCY and CSS samples identified as students of color. Unlike results from analyses of TFS data (Eagan et al., 2015), the results from the analyses of YFCY and CSS datasets are not generalizable to the college-going population like with the TFS data. In 2020, it was estimated that around 48% of undergraduate college students were students of color, a nine percentage point increase since 2011 (Barshay, 2023). In addition, Hispanic students are attending higher education at higher rates (Barshay, 2023; Mora, 2022; National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). Given that more students of color are attending higher education over time (Barshay, 2023; Mora, 2022), it is important that this is reflected in the data made available for researchers to use for their studies.

Additionally, the YFCY and CSS samples had very high percentages of students attending private institutions, but the majority of college students attend a public institution (Census Bureau, 2023; Hanson, 2024). Perhaps the results from this study would have looked different if there was a more diverse and representative sample. Given that the results from research should be relevant to a wide array of college students, future researchers should look closely into the makeup of their data when examining use of college rankings and their effect on student outcomes.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, there potentially are other factors that would have helped to predict importance placed on rankings that were not part of the 2015 Freshman Survey.

Information about the high schools students attended could be valuable in understanding students' use of rankings. This could be knowing more about the high school's college-going population, student/counselor ratio, and student/teacher ratio. Additional useful information related to the privilege of students could be if the student was a legacy or knew current students, staff, or faculty at their institution. Questions added in later years to the TFS include whether a student has ever experienced homelessness and whether a student's parents owned the property where the student lived during high school. If these questions had been on the 2015 TFS, they could have been used in this study to better understand a student's level of economic privilege. All in all, this study examined a multitude of student characteristics that affected importance placed on rankings, yet there could have been other factors impacting use of rankings not included in this analysis.

Additionally, this study does not have the ability to disaggregate or parse the particular rankings lists students are using and for what purpose. Given the variety of college rankings (Niche, 2022; Princeton Review, 2022; Svrluga, 2019; Zhou, 2015), this study really cannot say which rankings students were using and why. For example, some students might want to focus on one particular aspect of a college like colleges where Greek life is popular or colleges with the most liberal students (Niche, 2022; Princeton Review, 2022). On the other hand, some students might turn to the *U.S. News & World Report* rankings, as these rankings are typically thought to be a measure of prestige (Diver, 2022). Given these examples, it is not clear if college rankings are helping students find the college that is the best fit for them. In other words, did students use rankings for reasons like prestige or to find a college that was a good fit overall? Having more concrete information about the nature of students' consultation or valuing of rankings might further support the application of Merton's (1968) theory of anticipatory

socialization to this study. On that note, it would have been helpful to have information about the specific rankings that students made use of and why a student decided to use each ranking. Additionally, knowing which institutions students applied to and the ranking of those institutions would have helped to paint a better picture of students' use of college rankings.

Researchers could consider making use of the High School Longitudinal Study, which asks a variety of questions about students' backgrounds, the institutions students applied to and were accepted to, students' first choice college, financial aid offers, and the institution where the student ultimately enrolled (Duprey et al., 2018). Using this data would allow for a better understanding of the role of rankings in determining where students chose to apply and attend college, particularly with respect to the selectivity of the institutions students considered. This is especially important as this study analyzed data collected after students had already made their college choice.

The aforementioned examples illustrate that students can have very different priorities when choosing between colleges, and as a result, their college experiences and outcomes might vary considerably. Researchers should more thoroughly investigate which rankings students use in order to provide a more nuanced look into students' use of college rankings. Providing a more comprehensive picture of the types of rankings students are using and how this affects their outcomes is important given the many types of rankings present in the higher education world (Svrluga, 2019; Zhou, 2015).

Given this study's results, one could wonder what might be missing from the models to explain why importance placed on rankings did not have a stronger effect on student outcomes and in-college experiences. The TFS asks how important rankings were in a student's decision to attend a particular college. Perhaps a student used rankings earlier in the college choice process

but not when deciding to attend their particular institution; this student could still have gained important information from the rankings that positively impacted their outcomes. Likewise, surveys from the Art & Science Group (2024) indicate that a high percentage of students use rankings when exploring different institutions and deciding where to apply. As such, the importance placed on rankings variable in this study is an imprecise measure, especially as students could make use of rankings at different points in their college search and selection process. Consequently, having more knowledge about when students are deciding to make use of rankings and whether that impacted where they ultimately enrolled would be pivotal in better understanding whether importance placed on rankings impacts student outcomes. Additionally, students have been shown to consult different rankings at various time points (Art & Science Group, 2024), so researchers should also examine which rankings students used at certain points and why different rankings were consulted. All in all, this point relates to earlier conclusions that researchers should more closely investigate what it means when students say they made use of college rankings.

Finally, a qualitative study should be considered to dive more into students' use of college rankings. This study could first interview first-year students, diving into whether or not students used rankings in their college choice, what type of rankings students used and why, and the characteristics of students who decided to use particular rankings. This study could then interview these students at two time points: after their freshman year and upon graduation. For first-year students, students would be asked to reflect on their time in college thus far and the extent to which they felt a strong sense of belonging, felt they could adjust to the academic demands of college, and felt satisfied with their overall college experience. The researcher could ask what factors impacted their first-year college experience and if rankings were one of those

factors. For example, why did a student decide to use rankings, and did their reasons for using rankings affect their first year in college? Looking at these students upon graduation, the researcher could ask similar questions about a student's four or so years while in college and the extent to which they were satisfied with their college experience. Why did students feel satisfied or not satisfied with their overall college experience, and did their use of rankings play a role? In conclusion, allowing students to share about their college choice process and subsequent time in college will provide a more complete picture of the types of students likely to make use of rankings, their reasons for placing importance on particular college rankings, and whether or not their use of rankings ultimately affected their outcomes.

Closing Thoughts

This study was motivated by the current lack of knowledge surrounding what type of students use college rankings when deciding which college to attend. Informed by Bourdieu's forms of capital (Bourdieu, 2018) and existing literature, this study found that privilege was indeed a salient characteristic of students who make use of college rankings. In particular, students who utilized rankings had higher levels of economic, academic, cultural, and social privilege. The first part of this study was largely a replication of McDonough et al.'s (1998) study, which was previously the most comprehensive look into this topic.

Additionally, this study is important as there are very few studies that explore how students' use of rankings impacts their college experience (Clarke, 2007). This study explored if students' use of rankings sets up expectations for their college experience, and this study ultimately found that students who used rankings had significantly higher sense of belonging and overall satisfaction (both freshman year and senior year). However, the more telling finding was that students' in-college experiences mattered a lot more in terms of what affects students'

outcomes. This study supports the idea that use of rankings can shape students' outcomes, but what a student does while in college is far more influential.

Overall, this study helped to provide insight into a popular yet controversial aspect of higher education, college rankings (Diep, 2022; Hartocollis, 2022; Hickey, 2021; Kelchen, 2018). This study has implications certainly for students, who might be considering using college rankings to aid in their college decision. College counselors and higher education institutions likely want their students to have a positive college experience, so this study should be of interest to these groups. Additionally, rankings companies should consider how the rankings they create are affecting students, and in terms of research, avenues for further investigation are discussed. In conclusion, this study helped to fill a knowledge gap about what types of students utilize college rankings and the effects of using college rankings on outcomes like sense of belonging, overall satisfaction, and academic adjustment.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Model 1 Results for Regression Predicting Importance Placed on Rankings (N=102,234)

	B	S.E.	Exp(B)	P-Value	r (with Use of Rankings)
Constant	0.59	0.04	1.81	**0.000**	
Demographic Characteristics					
Sex	-0.15	0.01	0.86	**0.000**	-0.04
White/Caucasian	0.11	0.02	1.12	**0.000**	0.01
African American/Black	-0.05	0.03	0.95	0.040	-0.03
American Indian/Alaska Native	-0.37	0.04	0.69	**0.000**	-0.04
East Asian (e.g., Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Taiwanese)	0.29	0.03	1.34	**0.000**	0.04
Southeast Asian (e.g., Cambodian, Vietnamese, Hmong, Filipino)	-0.12	0.03	0.88	**0.000**	-0.02
South Asian (e.g., Indian, Pakistani, Nepalese, Sri Lankan)	0.72	0.05	2.05	**0.000**	0.05
Other Asian	0.10	0.09	1.10	0.260	0.01
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	-0.47	0.07	0.63	**0.000**	-0.02
Latino (Mexican American/Chicano, Puerto Rican, Other Latino)	-0.14	0.02	0.87	**0.000**	-0.04
Other Race	-0.13	0.04	0.87	**0.001**	-0.02
Citizenship					0.04
U.S. Citizen/Permanent Resident	-0.34	0.03	0.71	**0.000**	
International Student (F-1, or M-1 visa)	0.58	0.04	1.78	**0.000**	
Other Citizenship	-0.23	0.05	0.79	**0.000**	

Note. Data are weighted by the adjusted weight. A bolded value means the value is statistically significant at the 0.001 level.

Appendix B

Model 2 Results for Regression Predicting Importance Placed on Rankings (N=102,234)

	B	S.E.	Exp(B)	P-Value	r (with Use of Rankings)
Constant	0.63	0.04	1.88	**0.000**	
Demographic Characteristics					
Sex	-0.11	0.01	0.89	**0.000**	
White/Caucasian	0.00	0.02	1.00	0.915	
African American/Black	0.00	0.03	1.00	0.984	
American Indian/Alaska Native	-0.31	0.04	0.74	**0.000**	
East Asian (e.g., Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Taiwanese)	0.24	0.03	1.27	**0.000**	
Southeast Asian (e.g., Cambodian, Vietnamese, Hmong, Filipino)	-0.12	0.03	0.88	**0.000**	
South Asian (e.g., Indian, Pakistani, Nepalese, Sri Lankan)	0.57	0.05	1.77	**0.000**	
Other Asian	0.08	0.09	1.08	0.364	
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	-0.45	0.07	0.64	**0.000**	
Latino (Mexican American/Chicano, Puerto Rican, Other Latino)	-0.07	0.02	0.93	**0.001**	
Other Race	-0.13	0.04	0.88	**0.001**	
U.S. Citizen/Permanent Resident	-0.36	0.03	0.70	**0.000**	
International Student (F-1, or M-1 visa)	0.51	0.04	1.66	**0.000**	
Other Citizenship	-0.15	0.05	0.86	0.005	
Economic Privilege					
Income					0.13
Lower Income ($0-$49,999)	-0.36	0.01	0.70	**0.000**	
Middle Income ($50,000-$199,999)	-0.10	0.01	0.91	**0.000**	
Upper Income ($200,000 or more)	0.46	0.01	1.58	**0.000**	
Concern about Ability to Finance College Education (Some concern is reference group)					-0.08
Concern about Ability to Finance College Education: None	0.14	0.01	1.15	**0.000**	
Concern about Ability to Finance College Education: Major	-0.03	0.02	0.97	0.168	
Worked for Pay (None is reference group)					-0.05
Worked for Pay: Less than 5 hours	0.16	0.02	1.18	**0.000**	
Worked for Pay: 6-15 hours	0.00	0.02	1.00	0.792	
Worked for Pay: 15+ hours	-0.21	0.02	0.81	**0.000**	
Could not Afford First Choice College	0.26	0.02	1.30	**0.000**	0.03

Note. Data are weighted by the adjusted weight. A bolded value means the value is statistically significant at the 0.001 level.

Appendix C

Model 3 Results for Regression Predicting Importance Placed on Rankings (N=102,234)

	B	S.E.	Exp(B)	P-Value	r (with Use of Rankings)
Constant	0.98	0.04	2.67	**0.000**	
Demographic Characteristics					
Sex	-0.20	0.01	0.82	**0.000**	
White/Caucasian	-0.06	0.02	0.94	0.004	
African American/Black	0.14	0.03	1.15	**0.000**	
American Indian/Alaska Native	-0.29	0.04	0.75	**0.000**	
East Asian (e.g., Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Taiwanese)	0.18	0.03	1.20	**0.000**	
Southeast Asian (e.g., Cambodian, Vietnamese, Hmong, Filipino)	-0.14	0.03	0.87	**0.000**	
South Asian (e.g., Indian, Pakistani, Nepalese, Sri Lankan)	0.50	0.05	1.66	**0.000**	
Other Asian	0.07	0.09	1.08	0.413	
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	-0.35	0.07	0.71	**0.000**	
Latino (Mexican American/Chicano, Puerto Rican, Other Latino)	-0.01	0.02	0.99	0.717	
Other Race	-0.10	0.04	0.91	0.016	
U.S. Citizen/Permanent Resident	-0.32	0.03	0.73	**0.000**	
International Student (F-1, or M-1 visa)	0.49	0.04	1.64	**0.000**	
Other Citizenship	-0.17	0.06	0.84	0.002	
Economic Privilege					
Lower Income ($0-$49,999)	-0.32	0.01	0.73	**0.000**	
Middle Income ($50,000-$199,999)	-0.11	0.01	0.89	**0.000**	
Upper Income ($200,000 or more)	0.43	0.01	1.54	**0.000**	
Concern about Ability to Finance College Education: None	0.11	0.02	1.12	**0.000**	
Concern about Ability to Finance College Education: Major	0.00	0.02	1.00	0.991	
Worked for Pay: Less than 5 hours	0.19	0.02	1.20	**0.000**	
Worked for Pay: 6-15 hours	0.05	0.02	1.06	0.002	
Worked for Pay: 15+ hours	-0.13	0.02	0.88	**0.000**	
Could not Afford First Choice College	0.29	0.02	1.34	**0.000**	
Academic Privilege					
High School GPA (A or A+ is reference group)					0.17
High School GPA: B- or lower	-1.01	0.03	0.36	**0.000**	
High School GPA: B	-0.79	0.02	0.46	**0.000**	
High School GPA: B+	-0.53	0.02	0.59	**0.000**	
High School GPA: A-	-0.21	0.02	0.81	**0.000**	

Note. Data are weighted by the adjusted weight. A bolded value means the value is statistically significant at the 0.001 level.

Appendix D

Model 4 Results for Regression Predicting Importance Placed on Rankings (N=102,234)

	B	S.E.	Exp(B)	P-Value	r (with Use of Rankings)
Constant	-4.42	0.08	0.01	**0.000**	
Demographic Characteristics					
Sex	-0.27	0.01	0.76	**0.000**	
White/Caucasian	-0.03	0.02	0.97	0.183	
African American/Black	0.01	0.03	1.01	0.614	
American Indian/Alaska Native	-0.24	0.04	0.79	**0.000**	
East Asian (e.g., Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Taiwanese)	0.35	0.03	1.42	**0.000**	
Southeast Asian (e.g., Cambodian, Vietnamese, Hmong, Filipino)	-0.08	0.04	0.92	0.028	
South Asian (e.g., Indian, Pakistani, Nepalese, Sri Lankan)	0.44	0.05	1.56	**0.000**	
Other Asian	0.15	0.10	1.16	0.112	
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	-0.39	0.07	0.68	**0.000**	
Latino (Mexican American/Chicano, Puerto Rican, Other Latino)	0.00	0.02	1.00	0.974	
Other Race	-0.08	0.04	0.92	0.049	
U.S. Citizen/Permanent Resident	-0.34	0.03	0.71	**0.000**	
International Student (F-1, or M-1 visa)	0.52	0.05	1.68	**0.000**	
Other Citizenship	-0.18	0.06	0.84	0.002	
Economic Privilege					
Lower Income ($0-$49,999)	-0.30	0.01	0.74	**0.000**	
Middle Income ($50,000-$199,999)	-0.09	0.01	0.91	**0.000**	
Upper Income ($200,000 or more)	0.39	0.01	1.47	**0.000**	
Concern about Ability to Finance College Education: None	0.06	0.02	1.07	**0.000**	
Concern about Ability to Finance College Education: Major	0.02	0.02	1.02	0.437	
Worked for Pay: Less than 5 hours	0.13	0.02	1.14	**0.000**	
Worked for Pay: 6-15 hours	-0.01	0.02	0.99	0.587	
Worked for Pay: 15+ hours	-0.24	0.02	0.79	**0.000**	
Could not Afford First Choice College	0.19	0.02	1.21	**0.000**	
Academic Privilege					
High School GPA: B- or lower	-0.81	0.03	0.45	**0.000**	
High School GPA: B	-0.63	0.02	0.53	**0.000**	
High School GPA: B+	-0.43	0.02	0.65	**0.000**	
High School GPA: A-	-0.17	0.02	0.84	**0.000**	
Cultural Privilege					
College Reputation Orientation	0.10	0.00	1.10	**0.000**	0.32

Highest Academic Degree Planned (Bachelor's degree or lower is reference group)					0.09
Highest Academic Degree Planned: Master's degree or J.D.	0.16	0.02	1.17	**0.000**	
Highest Academic Degree Planned: Doctorate or medical degree	0.09	0.02	1.10	**0.000**	
Importance of Advice from Private College Counselor	0.86	0.02	2.37	**0.000**	0.16
Attending College to Prepare Myself for Graduate or Professional School (Somewhat important is reference group)					0.10
Attending College to Prepare Myself for Graduate or Professional School: Not important	-0.14	0.02	0.87	**0.000**	
Attending College to Prepare Myself for Graduate or Professional School: Very important	-0.07	0.02	0.93	**0.000**	
Status-Seeking Goals	0.17	0.01	1.18	**0.000**	0.14

Note. Data are weighted by the adjusted weight. A bolded value means the value is statistically significant at the 0.001 level.

Appendix E

Model 5 Results for Regression Predicting Importance Placed on Rankings (N=102,234)

	B	S.E.	Exp(B)	P-Value	r (with Use of Rankings)
Constant	-4.54	0.08	0.01	**0.000**	
Demographic Characteristics					
Sex	-0.26	0.01	0.77	**0.000**	
White/Caucasian	-0.01	0.02	0.99	0.654	
African American/Black	0.03	0.03	1.03	0.276	
American Indian/Alaska Native	-0.25	0.04	0.78	**0.000**	
East Asian (e.g., Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Taiwanese)	0.36	0.03	1.43	**0.000**	
Southeast Asian (e.g., Cambodian, Vietnamese, Hmong, Filipino)	-0.09	0.04	0.92	0.016	
South Asian (e.g., Indian, Pakistani, Nepalese, Sri Lankan)	0.44	0.05	1.55	**0.000**	
Other Asian	0.16	0.10	1.17	0.102	
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	-0.39	0.07	0.68	**0.000**	
Latino (Mexican American/Chicano, Puerto Rican, Other Latino)	-0.02	0.02	0.98	0.512	
Other Race	-0.09	0.04	0.91	0.034	
U.S. Citizen/Permanent Resident	-0.32	0.03	0.73	**0.000**	
International Student (F-1, or M-1 visa)	0.51	0.05	1.66	**0.000**	
Other Citizenship	-0.19	0.06	0.83	0.002	
Economic Privilege					
Lower Income ($0-$49,999)	-0.32	0.01	0.73	**0.000**	
Middle Income ($50,000-$199,999)	-0.08	0.01	0.92	**0.000**	
Upper Income ($200,000 or more)	0.40	0.01	1.49	**0.000**	
Concern about Ability to Finance College Education: None	0.07	0.02	1.08	**0.000**	
Concern about Ability to Finance College Education: Major	0.02	0.02	1.02	0.381	
Worked for Pay: Less than 5 hours	0.12	0.02	1.12	**0.000**	
Worked for Pay: 6-15 hours	-0.02	0.02	0.98	0.271	
Worked for Pay: 15+ hours	-0.25	0.02	0.78	**0.000**	
Could not Afford First Choice College	0.16	0.02	1.17	**0.000**	
Academic Privilege					
High School GPA: B- or lower	-0.83	0.03	0.44	**0.000**	
High School GPA: B	-0.65	0.02	0.52	**0.000**	
High School GPA: B+	-0.45	0.02	0.64	**0.000**	
High School GPA: A-	-0.18	0.02	0.83	**0.000**	
Cultural Privilege					
College Reputation Orientation	0.09	0.00	1.10	**0.000**	

Highest Academic Degree Planned: Master's degree or J.D.	0.17	0.02	1.18	**0.000**	
Highest Academic Degree Planned: Doctorate or medical degree	0.11	0.02	1.12	**0.000**	
Importance of Advice from Private College Counselor	0.65	0.02	1.91	**0.000**	
Attending College to Prepare Myself for Graduate or Professional School: Not important	-0.12	0.02	0.89	**0.000**	
Attending College to Prepare Myself for Graduate or Professional School: Very important	-0.08	0.02	0.93	**0.000**	
Status-Seeking Goals	0.16	0.01	1.17	**0.000**	
Social Privilege					
Asked a Teacher for Advice after Class	0.08	0.02	1.09	**0.000**	0.06
Importance of Advice from Teacher	0.19	0.02	1.21	**0.000**	0.13
Importance of Advice from High School Counselor	0.30	0.02	1.35	**0.000**	0.14

Note. Data are weighted by the adjusted weight. A bolded value means the value is statistically significant at the 0.001 level.

Appendix F

Model 6 Results for Regression Predicting Importance Placed on Rankings (N=102,234)

	B	S.E.	Exp(B)	P-Value	r (with Use of Rankings)
Constant	-4.40	0.08	0.01	**0.000**	
Demographic Characteristics					
Sex	-0.23	0.01	0.80	**0.000**	
White/Caucasian	-0.02	0.02	0.98	0.430	
African American/Black	0.05	0.03	1.05	0.093	
American Indian/Alaska Native	-0.19	0.04	0.83	**0.000**	
East Asian (e.g., Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Taiwanese)	0.27	0.03	1.32	**0.000**	
Southeast Asian (e.g., Cambodian, Vietnamese, Hmong, Filipino)	-0.07	0.04	0.93	0.046	
South Asian (e.g., Indian, Pakistani, Nepalese, Sri Lankan)	0.30	0.05	1.35	**0.000**	
Other Asian	0.10	0.10	1.10	0.317	
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	-0.35	0.07	0.70	**0.000**	
Latino (Mexican American/Chicano, Puerto Rican, Other Latino)	0.03	0.02	1.03	0.207	
Other Race	-0.08	0.04	0.92	0.055	
U.S. Citizen/Permanent Resident	-0.30	0.04	0.74	**0.000**	
International Student (F-1, or M-1 visa)	0.45	0.05	1.57	**0.000**	
Other Citizenship	-0.15	0.06	0.86	0.012	
Economic Privilege					
Lower Income ($0-$49,999)	-0.25	0.01	0.78	**0.000**	
Middle Income ($50,000-$199,999)	-0.06	0.01	0.94	**0.000**	
Upper Income ($200,000 or more)	0.32	0.01	1.37	**0.000**	
Concern about Ability to Finance College Education: None	0.16	0.02	1.18	**0.000**	
Concern about Ability to Finance College Education: Major	0.00	0.02	1.00	0.976	
Worked for Pay: Less than 5 hours	0.10	0.02	1.11	**0.000**	
Worked for Pay: 6-15 hours	-0.05	0.02	0.95	0.010	
Worked for Pay: 15+ hours	-0.26	0.02	0.77	**0.000**	
Could not Afford First Choice College	0.17	0.02	1.18	**0.000**	
Academic Privilege					
High School GPA: B- or lower	-0.68	0.03	0.51	**0.000**	
High School GPA: B	-0.53	0.02	0.59	**0.000**	
High School GPA: B+	-0.35	0.02	0.71	**0.000**	
High School GPA: A-	-0.14	0.02	0.87	**0.000**	
Cultural Privilege					
College Reputation Orientation	0.09	0.00	1.10	**0.000**	

Highest Academic Degree Planned: Master's degree or J.D.	0.15	0.02	1.17	**0.000**	
Highest Academic Degree Planned: Doctorate or medical degree	0.07	0.02	1.07	0.004	
Importance of Advice from Private College Counselor	0.67	0.02	1.95	**0.000**	
Attending College to Prepare Myself for Graduate or Professional School: Not important	-0.10	0.02	0.90	**0.000**	
Attending College to Prepare Myself for Graduate or Professional School: Very important	-0.07	0.02	0.93	**0.000**	
Status-Seeking Goals	0.16	0.01	1.18	**0.000**	
Social Privilege					
Asked a Teacher for Advice after Class	0.08	0.02	1.08	**0.000**	
Importance of Advice from Teacher	0.20	0.02	1.23	**0.000**	
Importance of Advice from High School Counselor	0.29	0.02	1.34	**0.000**	
Institutional Characteristics					
Institutional Type	-0.58	0.02	0.56	**0.000**	-0.17
Institutional Control	0.12	0.02	1.13	**0.000**	0.02

Note. Data are weighted by the adjusted weight. A bolded value means the value is statistically significant at the 0.001 level.

Appendix G

YFCY Regression Measures for Regression Predicting Importance Placed on Rankings (N=9,270)

		Hosmer and Lemeshow Test		Classification Table (% of Cases Classified Correctly)		
	-2 Log Likelihood	Chi-square	P-Value	Not Important	Important	Overall
Model 1: Demographic Characteristics	11510.52	8.70	0.069	59.06	51.09	53.64
Model 2: Economic Privilege	11364.52	9.14	0.331	61.01	53.78	56.09
Model 3: Academic Privilege	11231.22	11.64	0.168	56.53	60.25	59.06
Model 4: Cultural Privilege	10276.30	7.29	0.505	63.41	69.17	67.32
Model 5: Social Privilege	10227.29	18.96	0.015	63.78	68.79	67.18
Model 6: Institutional Characteristics	10152.76	9.42	0.308	64.49	69.04	67.58
Model 7: Selectivity	9696.95	16.98	0.030	67.59	71.82	70.46

Note. A bolded value means the value is statistically significant at the 0.01 level.

Appendix H

YFCY Regression Results Predicting Importance Placed on Rankings (N=9,270)

	B	S.E.	Exp(B)	P-Value
Constant	-9.17	0.46	0.00	**0.000**
Demographic Characteristics				
Man	0.27	0.17	1.31	0.108
Woman	0.06	0.16	1.06	0.731
Genderqueer, gender non-conforming, other identity	-0.32	0.33	0.72	0.322
White/Caucasian	0.00	0.10	1.00	0.973
African American/Black	0.12	0.12	1.13	0.326
American Indian/Alaska Native	0.14	0.22	1.15	0.544
East Asian (e.g., Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Taiwanese)	0.17	0.11	1.18	0.122
Southeast Asian (e.g., Cambodian, Vietnamese, Hmong, Filipino)	0.01	0.13	1.01	0.915
South Asian (e.g., Indian, Pakistani, Nepalese, Sri Lankan)	-0.03	0.16	0.97	0.865
Other Asian	-0.21	0.32	0.81	0.500
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	-0.62	0.36	0.54	0.084
Latino (Mexican American/Chicano, Puerto Rican, Other Latino)	-0.08	0.09	0.93	0.424
Other Race	-0.37	0.21	0.69	0.083
U.S. Citizen/Permanent Resident	-0.26	0.18	0.77	0.138
International Student (F-1, or M-1 visa)	0.06	0.19	1.06	0.766
Other Citizenship	0.21	0.34	1.23	0.548
Economic Privilege				
Lower Income ($0-$59,999)	-0.18	0.05	0.84	**0.000**
Middle Income ($60,000-$199,999)	0.03	0.03	1.03	0.424
Upper Income ($200,000 or more)	0.15	0.04	1.16	**0.001**
Concern about Ability to Finance College Education: None	-0.05	0.06	0.95	0.388
Concern about Ability to Finance College Education: Major	-0.11	0.09	0.90	0.222
Worked for Pay: Less than 5 hours	-0.01	0.07	0.99	0.828
Worked for Pay: 6-15 hours	0.04	0.07	1.04	0.543
Worked for Pay: 15+ hours	0.03	0.08	1.04	0.664
Could not Afford First Choice College	0.14	0.06	1.15	0.031
Academic Privilege				
High School GPA: B- or lower	-0.21	0.19	0.81	0.260
High School GPA: B	-0.27	0.10	0.76	**0.009**
High School GPA: B+	-0.17	0.08	0.85	0.028
High School GPA: A-	-0.03	0.06	0.97	0.646
Cultural Privilege				
College Reputation Orientation	0.07	0.00	1.07	**0.000**

Highest Academic Degree Planned: Master's degree or J.D.	-0.07	0.07	0.93	0.352
Highest Academic Degree Planned: Doctorate or medical degree	-0.29	0.09	0.75	**0.001**
Importance of Advice from Private College Counselor	0.48	0.07	1.61	**0.000**
Attending College to Prepare Myself for Graduate or Professional School: Not important	-0.17	0.09	0.85	0.054
Attending College to Prepare Myself for Graduate or Professional School: Very important	0.05	0.06	1.05	0.453
Status-Seeking Goals	0.25	0.03	1.28	**0.000**
Social Privilege				
Asked a Teacher for Advice after Class	0.02	0.08	1.02	0.823
Importance of Advice from Teacher	0.07	0.06	1.07	0.246
Importance of Advice from High School Counselor	0.35	0.06	1.42	**0.000**
Institutional Characteristics				
Institutional Type	-0.08	0.06	0.92	0.146
Institutional Control	-0.30	0.06	0.74	**0.000**
Selectivity				
Selectivity [a]	0.54	0.03	1.72	**0.000**

Note. A bolded value means the value is statistically significant at the 0.01 level.

[a] This variable was divided by 100 to aid with regression interpretation.

Appendix I

CSS Regression Measures for Regression Predicting Importance Placed on Rankings (N=22,860)

		Hosmer and Lemeshow Test		Classification Table (% of Cases Classified Correctly)		
	-2 Log Likelihood	Chi-square	P-Value	Not Important	Important	Overall
Model 1: Demographic Characteristics	28042.54	0.62	0.961	21.77	83.48	64.48
Model 2: Economic Privilege	27615.08	9.98	0.267	50.76	63.65	59.68
Model 3: Academic Privilege	27326.41	11.44	0.178	51.64	65.69	61.36
Model 4: Cultural Privilege	25105.98	19.50	0.012	61.43	70.60	67.77
Model 5: Social Privilege	24939.72	12.74	0.121	62.10	70.70	68.00
Model 6: Institutional Characteristics	24489.86	11.61	0.170	63.56	71.69	69.19
Model 7: Selectivity	24110.42	18.51	0.018	64.45	72.40	69.90

Note. A bolded value means the value is statistically significant at the 0.01 level.

Appendix J

CSS Regression Results Predicting Importance Placed on Rankings (N=22,860)

	B	S.E.	Exp(B)	P-Value
Constant	-6.25	0.24	0.00	**0.000**
Demographic Characteristics				
Male	0.08	0.05	1.08	0.100
Female	-0.06	0.05	0.94	0.154
Genderqueer, gender non-conforming, other identity	-0.01	0.09	0.99	0.888
White/Caucasian	-0.09	0.06	0.91	0.141
African American/Black	0.10	0.08	1.11	0.216
American Indian/Alaska Native	-0.06	0.15	0.94	0.698
East Asian (e.g., Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Taiwanese)	0.08	0.07	1.09	0.245
Southeast Asian (e.g., Cambodian, Vietnamese, Hmong, Filipino)	-0.11	0.08	0.90	0.193
South Asian (e.g., Indian, Pakistani, Nepalese, Sri Lankan)	0.21	0.12	1.23	0.090
Other Asian	-0.07	0.25	0.93	0.781
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0.05	0.23	1.06	0.813
Latino (Mexican American/Chicana/o/x, Puerto Rican, Other Latina/o/x, South American)	-0.09	0.06	0.91	0.124
Other Race	-0.19	0.12	0.83	0.125
U.S. Citizen/Permanent Resident	-0.21	0.06	0.81	**0.001**
International Student (F-1, or M-1 visa)	-0.05	0.09	0.95	0.558
Other Citizenship	0.26	0.10	1.30	**0.009**
Economic Privilege				
Lower Income ($0-$59,999)	-0.16	0.03	0.85	**0.000**
Middle Income ($60,000-$199,999)	-0.02	0.02	0.98	0.358
Upper Income ($200,000 or more)	0.18	0.03	1.19	**0.000**
Concern about Ability to Finance College Education: None	0.07	0.04	1.07	0.063
Concern about Ability to Finance College Education: Major	-0.07	0.05	0.93	0.196
Worked for Pay: Less than 5 hours	0.12	0.04	1.13	**0.006**
Worked for Pay: 6-15 hours	0.11	0.04	1.12	**0.007**
Worked for Pay: 15+ hours	-0.09	0.05	0.91	0.069
Could not Afford First Choice College	0.10	0.04	1.10	0.016
Academic Privilege				
High School GPA: B- or lower	-0.21	0.11	0.81	0.057
High School GPA: B	-0.26	0.06	0.77	**0.000**
High School GPA: B+	-0.09	0.05	0.92	0.063
High School GPA: A-	-0.08	0.04	0.92	0.027
Cultural Privilege				
College Reputation Orientation	0.07	0.00	1.07	**0.000**

Highest Academic Degree Planned: Master's degree or J.D.	0.05	0.05	1.05	0.283
Highest Academic Degree Planned: Doctorate or medical degree	-0.13	0.06	0.88	0.016
Importance of Advice from Private College Counselor	0.38	0.05	1.46	**0.000**
Attending College to Prepare Myself for Graduate or Professional School: Not important	-0.14	0.06	0.87	0.011
Attending College to Prepare Myself for Graduate or Professional School: Very important	0.05	0.04	1.05	0.178
Status-Seeking Goals	0.20	0.02	1.22	**0.000**
Social Privilege				
Asked a Teacher for Advice after Class	0.00	0.05	1.00	0.978
Importance of Advice from Teacher	0.18	0.04	1.20	**0.000**
Importance of Advice from High School Counselor	0.32	0.04	1.38	**0.000**
Institutional Characteristics				
Institutional Type	-0.34	0.04	0.71	**0.000**
Institutional Control	0.09	0.05	1.10	0.081
Selectivity				
Selectivity [a]	0.29	0.02	1.34	**0.000**

Note. A bolded value means the value is statistically significant at the 0.01 level.
[a] This variable was divided by 100 to aid with regression interpretation.

REFERENCES

Ahn, M. Y., & Davis, H. H. (2020). Four domains of students' sense of belonging to university. *Studies in Higher Education*, *45*(3), 622-634.

Alves, H., & Raposo, M. (2007). Conceptual model of student satisfaction in higher education. *Total Quality Management*, *18*(5), 571-588.

Ancis, J. R., Sedlacek, W. E., & Mohr, J. J. (2000). Student perceptions of campus cultural climate by race. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, *78*(2), 180-185.

Anderson, N. (2023a, September 18). U.S. News College rankings are scrambled as its formula changes. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved November 7, 2023, from https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2023/09/18/us-news-college-rankings-methodology-changes/

Anderson, N. (2023b, November 13). With surge from India, international students flock to united states. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved December 1, 2023, from https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2023/11/13/us-colleges-international-students-increase-post-pandemic/.

Arellano, L. (2022). Questioning the Science: How Quantitative Methodologies Perpetuate Inequity in Higher Education. *Education Sciences*, *12*(2), 116.

Art & Science Group. (2002). StudentPOLL, 5(1).

Art & Science Group. (2013). StudentPOLL, 10(3).

Art & Science Group. (2016). StudentPOLL, 12(3).

Art & Science Group. (2024). StudentPOLL, 17(3).

Astin, A. W. (1977). Four critical years: Effects of college on beliefs, attitudes and knowledge. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Astin, A. W. (1993). What matters in college? Four critical years revisited. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Astin, A. W., & Antonio, A. L. (2012). *Assessment for excellence: The philosophy and practice of assessment and evaluation in higher education (2nd Ed.).* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Aydin, O. T. (2015). University Choice Process: A Literature Review on Models and Factors Affecting the Process. *Journal of Higher Education/Yükseköğretim Dergisi*, *5*(2).

Baker, R. W., & Siryk, B. (1989). *Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ): Manual*. Los Angeles: Western Psychological Services.

Barnes, M. W. (2015). Anticipatory socialization of pregnant women: Learning fetal sex and gendered interactions. *Sociological Perspectives*, *58*(2), 187-203.

Barshay, J. (2023, February 20). *Proof points: New higher ed data by race and ethnicity*. The Hechinger Report. https://hechingerreport.org/proof-points-new-higher-ed-data-by-race-and-ethnicity/

Barth, J. M., Guadagno, R. E., Rice, L., Eno, C. A., Minney, J. A., & Alabama STEM Education Research Team. (2015). Untangling life goals and occupational stereotypes in men's and women's career interest. *Sex Roles*, *73*, 502-518.

Beloucif, A., Mehafdi, M., & Komey, N. A. (2018). Expectation as a key determinant of international students' satisfaction: A case study of business school MSc students. *Journal of Applied Research in Higher Education*.

Beltyukova, S. A., & Fox, C. M. (2002). Student satisfaction as a measure of student development: Towards a universal metric. *Journal of College Student Development*.

Bentrim, E. M., & Henning, G. W. (2022). *The Impact of Sense of Belonging in College: Implications for Student Persistence, Retention, and Success*. Stylus Publishing, LLC.

Berman, J. (2023, September 20). *What the backlash to U.S. News' New College rankings methodology is really about*. MarketWatch. Retrieved November 7, 2023, from https://www.marketwatch.com/story/what-the-backlash-to-u-s-newss-new-college-rankings-methodology-is-really-about-682e6860

Billups, F. D. (2008). Measuring College Student Satisfaction: A Multi-Year Study of the actors Leading to Persistence. Paper presented at the 39th annual meeting of the Northeastern Educational Research Association, October 23, 2008, Rocky Hill, CT.

Bjorklund, S. A., Parente, J. M., & Sathianathan, D. (2004). Effects of faculty interaction and feedback on gains in student skills. *Journal of Engineering Education*, *93*(2), 153-160.

Blair, P. Q., & Smetters, K. (2021). *Why Don't Elite Colleges Expand Supply?* (No. w29309). National Bureau of Economic Research.

Blake, M. K. (2020). Other duties as assigned: The ambiguous role of the high school counselor. *Sociology of Education*, *93*(4), 315-330.

Booker, K. (2016). Connection and commitment: How sense of belonging and classroom community influence degree persistence for African American undergraduate women. *International journal of teaching and learning in higher education*, *28*(2), 218-229.

Boulter, L. T. (2002). Self-concept as a predictor of college freshman academic adjustment. *College Student Journal*, *36*(2).

Bourdieu, P. (1984). Distinction: A social critique of the judgment of taste. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital. In J. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education* (pp. 241-258). New York: Greenwood Press.

Bourdieu, P. (2018). Cultural reproduction and social reproduction. In *Knowledge, education, and cultural change* (pp. 71-112). Routledge.

Bowman, N. A., & Bastedo, M. N. (2009). Getting on the Front Page: Organizational Reputation, Status Signals, and the Impact of U.S. News and World Report on Student Decisions. *Research in Higher Education*, *50*(5), 415–436. doi: 10.1007/s11162-009-9129-8

Bowman, N. A., & Denson, N. (2014). A missing piece of the departure puzzle: Student–institution fit and intent to persist. *Research in Higher Education*, *55*(2), 123-142.

Bowman, N. A., Jarratt, L., Jang, N., & Bono, T. J. (2019). The unfolding of student adjustment during the first semester of college. *Research in Higher Education*, *60*(3), 273-292.

Bradshaw, G., Espinoza, S., & Hausman, C. (2001). The college decision-making of high achieving students. *College and University*, *77*(2), 15.

Brewer, D., Gates, S. M., & Goldman, C. A. (2004). *In Pursuit of Prestige: Strategy and Competition in U.S. Higher Education*. Transaction Publishers.

Brint, S., German, K. T., Anderson-Natale, K., Shuker, Z. F., & Wang, S. (2020). Where ivy matters: The educational backgrounds of US cultural elites. *Sociology of Education*, *93*(2), 153-172.

Brooks, E., & Morse, R. (2023, September 18). *Key Changes in How the 2024 Best Colleges Rankings Were Calculated*. *U.S. News & World Report*. Retrieved November 7, 2023, from https://www.usnews.com/education/blogs/college-rankings-blog/articles/2023-09-18/key-changes-in-how-the-2024-best-colleges-rankings-were-calculated

Cabrera, A. F., & La Nasa, S. M. (2000). Understanding the college-choice process. *New directions for institutional research*, *2000*(107), 5-22.

Cabrera, A. F., Nora, A., Terenzini, P. T., Pascarella, E., & Hagedorn, L. S. (1999). Campus racial climate and the adjustment of students to college: A comparison between White students and African-American students. *The Journal of Higher Education*, *70*(2), 134-160.

Carnevale, A. P., Jayasundera, T., & Gulish, A. (2016). America's Divided Recovery: College Haves and Have-Nots. *Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce*.

Carnevale, A. P., Smith, N., & Strohl, J. (2013, July 1). Recovery: Job Growth and Education Requirements Through 2020. *Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce*.

Cebolla-Boado, H., Hu, Y., & Soysal, Y. N. (2018). Why study abroad? Sorting of Chinese students across British universities. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, *39*(3), 365-380.

Census Bureau. (2023, October 11). *Census Bureau releases new data showing the highest school enrollment count in years*. United States Census Bureau. https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2023/highest-school-enrollment-count.html

Chang, M. J. (1999). Does racial diversity matter?: The educational impact of a racially diverse undergraduate population. *Journal of College Student Development*.

Chang, M. J., Cerna, O., Han, J., & Saenz, V. (2008). The contradictory roles of institutional status in retaining underrepresented minorities in biomedical and behavioral science majors. *The Review of Higher Education*, *31*(4), 433-464.

Chemers, M. M., Hu, L. T., & Garcia, B. F. (2001). Academic self-efficacy and first year college student performance and adjustment. *Journal of Educational psychology*, *93*(1), 55.

Cheng, S. T. (2012). *Cultural capital, economic capital, and academic achievement: Some evidence from Taiwan*. Michigan State University. Sociology.

Chetty, R., Friedman, J. N., Saez, E., Turner, N., & Yagan, D. (2017). *Mobility report cards: The role of colleges in intergenerational mobility* (No. w23618). National Bureau of Economic Research.

Chew, E. M. R. (2020). *Cultural Capital, Habitus, College Persistence and Graduation among Black Immigrant-Origin Undergraduates: A Basic Interpretive Qualitative Study* (Doctoral dissertation, Old Dominion University).

Chhuon, V., & Hudley, C. (2008). Factors supporting Cambodian American students' successful adjustment into the university. *Journal of College Student Development*, *49*(1), 15-30.

Chirikov, I. (2021). Does Conflict of Interest Distort Global University Rankings? Research & Occasional Paper Series: CSHE. 5.2021. *Center for Studies in Higher Education*.

Clarke, M. (2007). The impact of higher education rankings on student access, choice, and opportunity. *Higher Education in Europe*, *32*(1), 59-70.

Clinedinst, M. (2019). 2019 State of College Admission. *National Association for College Admission Counseling*.

Cochran, T., & Coles, A. (2012). Maximizing the College Choice Process to Increase Fit & Match for Underserved Students. Research to Practice Brief. *Pathways to College Network*.

Community College Research Center. (n.d.). *Community College FAQS*. https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/community-college-faqs.html

Cook, A., & Leckey, J. (1999). Do expectations meet reality? A survey of changes in first-year student opinion. *Journal of further and higher education*, 23(2), 157-171.

Cotten, S. R., & Wilson, B. (2006). Student–faculty interactions: Dynamics and determinants. *Higher Education*, *51*(4), 487-519.

Cox, B. E., McIntosh, K. L., Terenzini, P. T., Reason, R. D., & Lutovsky Quaye, B. R. (2010). Pedagogical signals of faculty approachability: Factors shaping faculty–student interaction outside the classroom. *Research in Higher Education*, *51*, 767-788.

Cox, B. E., & Orehovec, E. (2007). Faculty-student interaction outside the classroom: A typology from a residential college. *The review of higher education*, *30*(4), 343-362.

Credé, M., & Niehorster, S. (2012). Adjustment to college as measured by the student adaptation to college questionnaire: A quantitative review of its structure and relationships with correlates and consequences. *Educational Psychology Review*, *24*(1), 133-165.

Curl, A. L., & Ingram, J. G. (2013). Anticipatory socialization for retirement: A multilevel dyadic model. *Clinical Gerontologist*, *36*(4), 375-393.

DeAngelo, L. T. (2008). *Increasing faculty diversity: How institutions matter to the PhD aspirations of undergraduate students*. University of California, Los Angeles.

DeAngelo, L. T. (2010). Preparing for the PhD at a Comprehensive Institution: Perceptions of the" Barriers.". *Journal of the Professoriate*, *3*(2).

Dearden, J. A., Grewal, R., & Lilien, G. L. (2014). Framing the university ranking game: actors, motivations, and actions. *Ethics in Science and Environmental Politics*, *13*(2), 131-139.

De Clercq, D., & Voronov, M. (2009). Toward a practice perspective of entrepreneurship: Entrepreneurial legitimacy as habitus. *International small business journal*, *27*(4), 395-419.

De Clercq, M., Galand, B., Dupont, S., & Frenay, M. (2013). Achievement among first-year university students: an integrated and contextualized approach. *European Journal of Psychology of Education*, *28*(3), 641-662.

Delaney, A. M. (2008). Why faculty-student interaction matters in the first year experience. *Tertiary Education and Management*, *14*(3), 227-241.

Delhey, J., Schneickert, C., Hess, S., & Aplowski, A. (2022). Who values status seeking? A cross-European comparison of social gradients and societal conditions. *European Societies*, *24*(1), 29-60.

Denson, N., & Bowman, N. (2015). The development and validation of an instrument assessing student-institution fit. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, *40*(8), 1104-1122.

De Sisto, M., Huq, A., & Dickinson, G. (2022). Sense of belonging in second-year undergraduate students: the value of extracurricular activities. *Higher Education Research & Development*, *41*(5), 1727-1742.

Dickinson, J., Griffiths, T. L., & Bredice, A. (2021). 'It's just another thing to think about': encouraging students' engagement in extracurricular activities. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, *45*(6), 744-757.

Diekman, A. B., & Eagly, A. H. (2008). Of men, women, and motivation. *Handbook of motivation science*, *434*.

Diep, F. (2022, September 12). *Columbia U. Gets a lower 'U.S. News' ranking after scrutiny of its Data*. The Chronicle of Higher Education. Retrieved September 19, 2022, from https://www.chronicle.com/article/columbia-u-gets-a-lower-u-s-news-ranking-after-scrutiny-of-its-data?cid2=gen_login_refresh&cid=gen_sign_in

DiMaggio, P., & Useem, M. (2017). The arts in class reproduction. In *Cultural and economic reproduction in education* (pp. 181-201). Routledge.

Diver, C. (2022). *Breaking Ranks: How the Rankings Industry Rules Higher Education and What to Do about It*. JHU Press.

Drew-Branch, V. L. (2011). *Student engagement, alumni satisfaction, and alumni donations at a public four year institution: An analysis of how the undergraduate experience influences alumni donations*. West Virginia University.

Drezner, N. D., & Pizmony-Levy, O. (2021). I belong, therefore, I give? The impact of sense of belonging on graduate student alumni engagement. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, *50*(4), 753-777.

Duprey, M. A., Pratt, D. J., Jewell, D. M., Cominole, M. B., Fritch, L. B., Ritchie, E. A., Rogers, J. E., Wescott, J. D., Wilson, D. H., & Christopher, E. M. (2018, June). *High School Longitudinal Study of 2009 (HSLS:09) Base-Year to Second Follow-Up*. Institute of Education Sciences. https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2018/2018140.pdf

Duran, A., Dahl, L. S., Stipeck, C., & Mayhew, M. J. (2020). A critical quantitative analysis of students' sense of belonging: Perspectives on race, generation status, and collegiate environments. *Journal of College Student Development*, 61(2), 133–153. https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2020.0014

Eagan, K., Stolzenberg, E. B., Bates, A. K., Aragon, M. C., Suchard, M. R., & Rios-Aguilar, C. (2015).

The American freshman: National norms fall 2015. Los Angeles: Higher Education Research Institute, UCLA.

Eagan, M. K., Jr., Hurtado, S., Chang, M. J., Garcia, G. A., Herrera, F. A., & Garibay, J. C. (2013). Making a difference in science education: The impact of undergraduate research programs. *American educational research journal*, *50*(4), 683-713.

Edelman, A. (2021, November 5). *The 16 Swankiest College Campuses, Ranked By Their Luscious Vibes*. BuzzFeed. Retrieved December 20, 2022, from https://www.buzzfeed.com/amandaeedelman/the-16-swankiest-college-campuses-ranked-by-luscious-vibes

Ehrenberg, R. G. (2005). Method or Madness? Inside the US News & World Report College Rankings. *Journal of College Admission*, (189), 29.

Elliott, D. C. (2014). Trailblazing: Exploring first-generation college students' self-efficacy beliefs and academic adjustment. *Journal of the First-Year Experience & Students in Transition*, *26*(2), 29-49.

Endo, J. J., & Harpel, R. L. (1982). The effect of student faculty interaction on students' educational outcomes. *Research in Higher Education*, 16(2), 115-138.

Eskildsen, J., Martensen, A., Gronholdt, L., & Kristensen, K. (1999, August). Benchmarking student satisfaction in higher education based on the ECSI methodology. In *Proceedings of the TQM for higher education institutions conference: Higher education institutions and the issue of total quality* (pp. 30-31).

Falls, I. (2001). *The relationship between academic self-concept and the achievement expectancies on the academic achievement and persistence rate of African-American freshmen students*. Old Dominion University.

Federal Reserve Bank of New York. (2021, February 12). *The Labor Market for Recent College Graduates*. Federal Reserve Bank of New York. Retrieved May 25, 2022, from

https://www.newyorkfed.org/research/college-labor-market/college-labor-market_wages.html

Fischer, E. M. J. (2007). Settling into campus life: Differences by race/ethnicity in college involvement and outcomes. *The Journal of Higher Education*, *78*(2), 125-161.

Fischer, M. J. (2010). A longitudinal examination of the role of stereotype threat and racial climate on college outcomes for minorities at elite institutions. *Social Psychology of Education*, *13*(1), 19-40.

Fombrun, C. J. (1996). *Reputation: Realizing value from the corporate image*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.

Forget The Rankings. (2024). *Our Process*. Forget The Rankings: The Values-Driven College Search. https://www.forgettherankings.com/our-process

Freeman, T. M., Anderman, L. H., & Jensen, J. M. (2007). Sense of belonging in college freshmen at the classroom and campus levels. *The Journal of Experimental Education*, *75*(3), 203-220.

Fuller, J. B., Langer, C., Nitschke, J., O'Kane, L., Sigelman, M., & Taska, B. (2022, February 9). *The Emerging Degree Reset*. The Burning Glass Institute. Retrieved May 25, 2022, from https://static1.squarespace.com/static/6197797102be715f55c0e0a1/t/6202bda7f1ceee7b0e9b7e2f/1644346798760/The+Emerging+Degree+Reset+%2822.02%29Final.pdf

Garcia, N. M., & Mireles-Rios, R. (2020). “You were going to go to college”: The role of Chicano fathers’ involvement in Chicana daughters’ college choice. *American Educational Research Journal*, *57*(5), 2059-2088.

Garvey, J. C., Ballysingh, T. A., Dow, L. B., Howard, B. L., Ingram, A. N., & Carlson, M. (2020). Where I sleep: The relationship with residential environments and first-generation belongingness. *College Student Affairs Journal*, *38*(1), 16-33.

Gertler, P. J., Martinez, S., Premand, P., Rawlings, L. B., & Vermeersch, C. M. (2016). *Impact evaluation in practice*. World Bank Publications.

Gewertz, C. (2018, November 13). College advising is in short supply in U.S. high schools, study finds. Education Week. Retrieved April 26, 2023, from https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/college-advising-is-in-short-supply-in-u-s-high-schools-study-finds/2018/11

Gilbreath, B., Kim, T. Y., & Nichols, B. (2011). Person-environment fit and its effects on university students: A response surface methodology study. *Research in Higher Education*, *52*(1), 47-62.

Gillen-O'Neel, C. (2021). Sense of belonging and student engagement: A daily study of first-and continuing-generation college students. *Research in Higher Education*, *62*(1), 45-71.

Gilliard, M. D. (1996). *Racial climate and institutional support factors affecting success in predominantly White institutions: An examination of African-American and White student experiences*. University of Michigan.

Glasener, K. (2021). *Shaping elite college pathways: Mapping the field of feeder high schools in the United States* (Doctoral dissertation).

Glass, C. R., Kociolek, E., Wongtrirat, R., Lynch, R. J., & Cong, S. (2015). Uneven Experiences: The Impact of Student-Faculty Interactions on International Students' Sense of Belonging. *Journal of International Students*, *5*(4), 353-367.

Glass, L. E. (2023). Social capital and first-generation college students: examining the relationship between mentoring and college enrollment. *Education and Urban Society*, *55*(2), 143-174.

Gonzalez, K. P., Stoner, C., & Jovel, J. E. (2003). Examining the role of social capital in access to college for Latinas: Toward a college opportunity framework. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, *2*(2), 146-170.

Gopal, R., Singh, V., & Aggarwal, A. (2021). Impact of online classes on the satisfaction and performance of students during the pandemic period of COVID 19. *Education and Information Technologies*, 1-25.

Gregory, S. T. (2000). Selected Innovations in Higher Education Designed To Enhance the Racial Climate for Students of Color in Predominately White Colleges and Universities.

Guo, S., & Fraser, M. W. (2010). *Propensity score analysis: Statistical methods and applications*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Gurin, P. (1999). Expert report of Patricia Gurin. *Michigan Journal of Race and Law*, *5*(1), 363-425.

Haktanir, A., Watson, J. C., Ermis-Demirtas, H., Karaman, M. A., Freeman, P. D., Kumaran, A., & Streeter, A. (2021). Resilience, academic self-concept, and college adjustment among first-year students. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, *23*(1), 161-178.

Han, C., Jaquette, O., & Salazar, K. (2019). *Recruiting the Out-of-State University: Off-Campus Recruiting by Public Research Universities*.

Hanson, M. (2024, January 10). *College Enrollment & Student Demographic Statistic*. Education Data Initiative. https://educationdata.org/college-enrollment-statistics

Harper, S. R., & Hurtado, S. (2007). Nine themes in campus racial climates and implications for institutional transformation. *New directions for student services*, *2007*(120), 7-24.

Hartocollis, A. (2022, September 12). *U.S. News dropped Columbia's ranking, but its own methods are now questioned*. The New York Times. Retrieved September 19, 2022, from https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/12/us/columbia-university-us-news-ranking.html

Hatch, B. (2022, August 12). *College rankings are 'a joke,' education secretary says*. The Chronicle of Higher Education. Retrieved September 19, 2022, from https://www.chronicle.com/article/college-rankings-are-a-joke-education-secretary-says

Hausmann, L. R., Schofield, J. W., & Woods, R. L. (2007). Sense of belonging as a predictor of intentions to persist among African American and White first-year college students. *Research in higher education*, 48(7), 803-839.

Hazelkorn, E. (2009). Rankings and the battle for world-class excellence: Institutional strategies and policy choices. *Higher education management and Policy*, *21*(1), 1-22.

Hazelkorn, E. (2015). The effect of rankings on student choice and institutional selection. In *Access and expansion post-massification* (pp. 107-128). Routledge.

Hearn, J. C. (1990). Pathways to attendance at the elite colleges. *The high-status track: Studies of elite schools and stratification*, *121*, 145.

Heiberger, G., & Harper, R. (2008). Have you Facebooked Astin lately? Using technology to increase student involvement. *New directions for student services*, *2008*(124).

Helm, E. G., Sedlacek, W. E., & Prieto, D. O. (1998). The relationship between attitudes toward diversity and overall satisfaction of university students by race. *Journal of College Counseling*, *1*(2), 111-120.

Hickey, W. (2021, July 21). *College rankings have made school less affordable, less equitable, and more miserable for students. the pandemic exposed just how broken the system is.* Business Insider. Retrieved January 27, 2022, from https://www.businessinsider.com/why-college-rankings-are-bad-for-students-2021-7

Higher Education Research Institute. (n.d.-a). *ABOUT HERI*. HERI. Retrieved January 31, 2022, from https://heri.ucla.edu/about-heri/

Higher Education Research Institute. (n.d.-b). *CIRP Freshman Survey*. HERI. Retrieved June 23, 2022, from https://heri.ucla.edu/cirp-freshman-survey/

Higher Education Research Institute. (n.d.-c). *College Senior Survey*. HERI. Retrieved June 23, 2022, from https://heri.ucla.edu/college-senior-survey/

Higher Education Research Institute. (n.d.-d). *Your First College Year Survey*. HERI. Retrieved June 23, 2022, from https://heri.ucla.edu/your-first-college-year-survey/

Higher Education Research Institute. (2017). *CIRP Construct Technical Report: 2016-17 Appendix: Construct Parameters*. Higher Education Research Institute. Retrieved October 28, 2021, from https://www.heri.ucla.edu/PDFs/constructs/Appendix2017.pdf.

Hill, J. D. (2020). *The Hustle Ethic and the Spirit of Platform Capitalism*. Stanford University.

Hoffman, M., Richmond, J., Morrow, J., & Salomone, K. (2002). Investigating "sense of belonging" in first-year college students. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, *4*(3), 227-256.

Hosmer, D. W., Jr., Lemeshow, S., & Sturdivant, R. X. (2013). *Applied logistic regression*. John Wiley & Sons.

Hossler, D., & Foley, E. M. (1995). Reducing the noise in the college choice process: The use of college guidebooks and ratings. *New Directions for Institutional Research*, *1995*(88), 21-30.

Hossler, D., Schmit, J., & Vesper, N. (1999). *Going to college: How social, economic, and educational factors influence the decisions students make*. JHU Press.

Howard, M. (2002). Student use of rankings in national magazines in the college decision-making process. An EdD dissertation, The University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Retrieved from: http://etd.utk.edu/2002/HowardMichele.pdf 16/08/04.

Huntington-Klein, N. (2017). The search: The effect of the college scorecard on interest in colleges. *Unpublished manuscript*, *16*.

Hurtado, S. (1992). The campus racial climate: Contexts of conflict. *The Journal of Higher Education*, *63*(5), 539-569.

Hurtado, S., & Carter, D. F. (1997). Effects of college transition and perceptions of the campus racial climate on Latino college students' sense of belonging. *Sociology of education*, 324-345.

Hurtado, S., Carter, D. F., & Spuler, A. (1996). Latino student transition to college: Assessing difficulties and factors in successful college adjustment. *Research in Higher Education*, 37(2), 135-157.

Hurtado, S., Griffin, K. A., Arellano, L., & Cuellar, M. (2008). Assessing the value of climate assessments: Progress and future directions. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, *1*(4), 204.

Hurtado, S., Han, J. C., Sáenz, V. B., Espinosa, L. L., Cabrera, N. L., & Cerna, O. S. (2007). Predicting transition and adjustment to college: Biomedical and behavioral science

aspirants' and minority students' first year of college. *Research in Higher Education*, *48*, 841-887.

Hurtado, S., Milem, J., Clayton-Pedersen, A., & Allen, W. (1999). *Enacting Diverse Learning Environments: Improving the Climate for Racial/Ethnic Diversity in Higher Education. ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report, Vol. 26, No. 8*. ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education, One Dupont Circle, NW, Suite 630, Washington, DC 20036-1181.

Iskhakova, L., Hilbert, A., & Hoffmann, S. (2016). An integrative model of alumni loyalty—An empirical validation among graduates from German and Russian universities. *Journal of Nonprofit & Public Sector Marketing*, *28*(2), 129-163.

Jaschik, S. (2019, March 17). *Wealth and Admissions*. Inside Higher Ed. Retrieved May 1, 2023, from https://www.insidehighered.com/admissions/article/2019/03/18/look-many-legal-ways-wealthy-applicants-have-edge-admissions

Jaschik, S. (2022, September 12). *'U.S. News' changes policy on testing*. Inside Higher Ed. Retrieved September 19, 2022, from https://www.insidehighered.com/admissions/article/2022/09/12/us-news-changes-policy-testing

Jin, G. Z., & Whalley, A. (2007). The Power of Information: How Do U.S. News Rankings Affect the Financial Resources of Public Colleges? *National Bureau of Economic Research*, 1–43. doi: 10.2139/ssrn.963194

Johnson, D. R., Soldner, M., Leonard, J. B., Alvarez, P., Inkelas, K. K., Rowan-Kenyon, H. T., & Longerbeam, S. D. (2007). Examining sense of belonging among first-year undergraduates from different racial/ethnic groups. *Journal of College Student Development*, 48(5), 525-542.

Johnson, D. R., Wasserman, T. H., Yildirim, N., & Yonai, B. A. (2014). Examining the effects of stress and campus climate on the persistence of students of color and White students: An application of Bean and Eaton's psychological model of retention. *Research in Higher Education*, *55*, 75-100.

Jump, J. (2023, October 9). *Oh, Vandy*. Inside Higher Ed. Retrieved November 7, 2023, from https://www.insidehighered.com/opinion/views/2023/10/09/vanderbilts-criticism-us-news-tone-deaf-opinion

Kamel, O. M. (2018). Academic overload, self-efficacy and perceived social support as predictors of academic adjustment among first year university students. *Psycho-Educational Research Reviews*, 86-93.

Kamens, D. H. (1981). Organizational and institutional socialization in education. *Research in sociology of education and socialization*, *2*, 111-126.

Kantanis, T. (2000). The role of social transition in students': adjustment to the first-year of university. *Journal of Institutional Research*, 9(1), 100-110.

Karen, D. (2002). Changes in access to higher education in the United States: 1980-1992. Sociology of education, 191-210.

Kaya, N. (2004). Residence hall climate: Predicting first-year students' adjustments to college. *Journal of the First-Year Experience & Students in Transition*, *16*(1), 101-118.

Kelchen, R. (2018). *Higher education accountability*. JHU Press.

Kennedy, P. W., Sheckley, B. G., & Kehrhahn, M. T. (2000). The Dynamic Nature of Student Persistence: Influence of Interactions between Student Attachment, Academic Adaptation, and Social Adaptation.

Keup, J. R. (2007). Great expectations and the ultimate reality check: Voices of students during the transition from high school to college. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*, 44(1), 3-31.

Kim, J. (2018). Prestige, Rankings and the Competition for Status. *Controversies on campus: Debating the issues confronting American universities in the 21st century*, 99-133.

Kim, J., & Shim, W. J. (2019). What do rankings measure? The US News rankings and student experience at liberal arts colleges. *The Review of Higher Education*, *42*(3), 933-964.

Kim, J. H. "Jane," Soler, M. C., Zhao, Z., & Swirsky, E. (2024). *Race and Ethnicity in Higher Education: 2024 Status Report*. American Council on Education. https://www.equityinhighered.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/REHE2024_Full_Report.pdf

Kim, J. K., & Gasman, M. (2011). In Search of a "Good College": Decisions and Determinations Behind Asian American Students' College Choice. *Journal of College Student Development 52*(6), 706-728. doi:10.1353/csd.2011.0073.

Kim, Y. K., & Lundberg, C. A. (2016). A structural model of the relationship between student–faculty interaction and cognitive skills development among college students. *Research in Higher Education*, *57*(3), 288-309.

Kim, Y. K., & Sax, L. J. (2014). The effects of student–faculty interaction on academic self-concept: Does academic major matter?. *Research in higher education*, *55*, 780-809.

Kim, Y. K., & Sax, L. J. (2017). The impact of college students' interactions with faculty: A review of general and conditional effects. *Higher education: Handbook of theory and research: Published under the sponsorship of the Association for Institutional Research (AIR) and the Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE)*, 85-139.

King, A. E., McQuarrie, F. A., & Brigham, S. M. (2021). Exploring the relationship between student success and participation in extracurricular activities. *SCHOLE: A Journal of Leisure Studies and Recreation Education*, *36*(1-2), 42-58.

Klasik, D. (2012). The college application gauntlet: A systematic analysis of the steps to four-year college enrollment. *Research in Higher Education*, *53*, 506-549.

Knox, L. (2023, September 22). *Rankled by Rankings*. Inside Higher Ed. Retrieved November 7, 2023, from https://www.insidehighered.com/news/admissions/traditional-age/2023/09/22/us-news-rankings-changes-spur-complaints-and-apologies

Knox, L. (2024, April 22). *Wealthy Colleges Boost Financial Aid Post–Affirmative Action*. Inside Higher Ed . https://www.insidehighered.com/news/admissions/traditional-age/2024/04/22/wealthy-colleges-boost-financial-aid-post-affirmative

Ko, M. S. (2011). College student satisfaction: Examining influences and differences in a public university system. University of California, Los Angeles.

Komarraju, M., Musulkin, S., & Bhattacharya, G. (2010). Role of student–faculty interactions in developing college students' academic self-concept, motivation, and achievement. *Journal of college student development*, *51*(3), 332-342.

Košutić, I. (2017). The role of cultural capital in higher education access and institutional choice. *Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal*, *7*(1), 149-169.

Kuh, G. D., & Pascarella, E. T. (2004). What does institutional selectivity tell us about educational quality?. *Change: The magazine of higher learning*, *36*(5), 52-59.

Lamont, M., & Lareau, A. (1988). Cultural capital: Allusions, gaps and glissandos in recent theoretical developments. *Sociological theory*, 153-168.

Lamport, M. A. (1993). Student-faculty informal interaction and the effect on college student outcomes: A review of the literature. *Adolescence*, *28*(112), 971.

Landry, C. C. (2002). Retention of women and people of color: Unique challenges and institutional responses. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, *4*(1), 1-13.

Lareau, A., & Weininger, E. B. (2003). Cultural capital in educational research: A critical assessment. *Theory and society*, *32*, 567-606.

Lawrence, T. B. (2004). Rituals and resistance: Membership dynamics in professional fields. *Human relations*, *57*(2), 115-143.

Leath, S., & Chavous, T. (2018). Black women's experiences of campus racial climate and stigma at predominantly white institutions: Insights from a comparative and within-group approach for STEM and non-STEM majors. *Journal of Negro Education*, *87*(2), 125-139.

LeSure, G. E. (1994). Ethnic Differences and the Effects of Racism on College Adjustment.

Li, Y. (2018). Do All Asian Americans Feel Alike? Exploring Asian American College Students' Sense of Belonging on Campuses (Doctoral dissertation, Bowling Green State University).

Lim, M. A. (2021). The business of university rankings: the case of Times Higher Education. In *Research Handbook on University Rankings* (pp. 444-453). Edward Elgar Publishing.

Lipman Hearne, Inc. (2006). High-achieving seniors and the college decision. Retrieved March 2, 2022.

Locks, A. M., Hurtado, S., Bowman, N. A., & Oseguera, L. (2008). Extending notions of campus climate and diversity to students' transition to college. *The Review of Higher Education*, *31*(3), 257-285.

Luca, M., & Smith, J. (2013). Salience in Quality Disclosure: Evidence from the U.S. News College Rankings. *Journal of Economics & Management Strategy*, *22*(1), 58–77. doi: 10.1111/jems.12003

Lynch, M., & Alexander, K. (2015, September 13). *All 128 division I colleges ranked by everything other than sports (also, sports)*. Thrillist. Retrieved December 20, 2022, from https://www.thrillist.com/lifestyle/nation/every-bcs-division-i-school-ranked

Mack, D. E., Tucker, T. W., Archuleta, R., DeGroot, G., Hernandez, A. A., & Cha, S. O. (1997). Interethnic relations on campus: Can't we all get along?. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development*, *25*(4), 256-268.

Marsh, R. M. (2010). Merton's sociology 215-216 course. *The American Sociologist*, *41*(2), 99-114.

Marshall, D. G., & Hill, R. C. (1968). Social Rank, Morale, and Anticipatory Socialization to the Retirement Position.

Martin, O. L., & Williams-Dixon, R. (1991). The Student-Institutional Fit for the African American Student: Do College Retention Programs Facilitate Academic and Social Access?.

Martin, W. E., Jr., Swartz-Kulstad, J. L., & Madson, M. (1999). Psychosocial factors that predict the college adjustment of first-year undergraduate students: Implications for college counselors. *Journal of College Counseling*, *2*(2), 121-133.

Martirosyan, N. M., Saxon, D. P., & Wanjohi, R. (2014). Student satisfaction and academic performance in Armenian higher education. *American International Journal of Contemporary Research*, *4*(2), 1-5.

Mauss, A. L. (1969). Anticipatory socialization toward college as a factor in adolescent marijuana use. *Social Problems*, *16*(3), 357-364.

Mayhew, M. J., & Simonoff, J. S. (2015). Non-White, no more: Effect coding as an alternative to dummy coding with implications for higher education researchers. *Journal of College Student Development*, *56*(2), 170-175.

McCaleb, C. S. (2007). *Differences in bachelor's degree attainment: Are college degrees a function of habitus?*. Western Michigan University.

McDonough, P. M. (1997). *Choosing colleges: How social class and schools structure opportunity*. Suny Press.

McDonough, P. M., Antonio, A. L., Walpole, M. B., & Pérez, X. (1998). College Rankings: Democratized College Knowledge for Whom? *Research in Higher Education*, *39*(5), 513–537.

McDonough, P. M., & Fann, A. J. (2007). The study of inequality. *Sociology of higher education: Contributions and their contexts*, 53-93.

McGrath, M., & Braunstein, A. (1997). The prediction of freshmen attrition: An examination of the importance of certain demographic, academic, financial and social factors. *College student journal*.

Medinets, A. F. (2004). Determinants of school effectiveness and student satisfaction in colleges and universities. Rutgers The State University of New Jersey-Newark.

Meeuwisse, M., Severiens, S. E., & Born, M. P. (2010). Learning environment, interaction, sense of belonging and study success in ethnically diverse student groups. *Research in Higher Education*, *51*(6), 528-545.

Melendez, M. C. (2006). The influence of athletic participation on the college adjustment of freshmen and sophomore student athletes. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, *8*(1), 39-55.

Meredith, M. (2004). Why Do Universities Compete in the Ratings Game? An Empirical Analysis of the Effects of the U.S. News and World Report College Rankings. *Research in Higher Education*, *45*(5), 443–461. doi: 10.1023/b:rihe.0000032324.46716.f4

Merton, R. K. (1968). *Social theory and social structure* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Free Press.

Milem, J. F., Chang, M. J., & Antonio, A. L. (2005). *Making diversity work on campus: A research-based perspective* (pp. 1-39). Washington, DC: Association American Colleges and Universities.

Miller, R. (2003). Student satisfaction and institutional success. Paper presented at the 43rd annual AIR Forum, Tampa, FL, May, 2003.

Monks, J., & Ehrenberg, R. (1999). The Impact of US News and World Report College Rankings on Admission Outcomes and Pricing Decisions at Selective Private Institutions. *National Bureau of Economic Research*, 1–13. doi: 10.3386/w7227

Montelongo, R. (2002). Student participation in college student organizations: A review of literature. *Journal of the Student Personnel Association at Indiana University*, 50-63.

Montgomery, D. C., Peck, E. A., & Vining, G. G. (2021). *Introduction to linear regression analysis*. John Wiley & Sons.

Montgomery, S., Gregg, D. H., Somers, C. L., Pernice-Duca, F., Hoffman, A., & Beeghly, M. (2019). Intrapersonal variables associated with academic adjustment in United States college students. *Current Psychology*, *38*, 40-49.

Mora, L. (2022, October 7). Hispanic enrollment reaches New High at four-year colleges in the U.S., but affordability remains an obstacle. https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2022/10/07/hispanic-enrollment-reaches-new-high-at-four-year-colleges-in-the-u-s-but-affordability-remains-an-obstacle/

Moran, J. D. (2018). Endowments, Price Discrimination, and Amenities: The Economics of Private Colleges. *Undergraduate Economic Review*, *15*(1), 3.

Morphew, C. C., & Swanson, C. (2011). On the efficacy of raising your university's rankings. In *University rankings* (pp. 185-199). Springer, Dordrecht.

Morse, R., & Brooks, E. (2021, September 12). *How U.S. News Calculated the 2022 Best Colleges Rankings*. *U.S. News & World Report*. Retrieved January 13, 2022, from https://www.usnews.com/education/best-colleges/articles/how-us-news-calculated-the-rankings

Morse, R., & Brooks, E. (2023, September 17). *Frequently Asked Questions: 2024 Best Colleges Rankings*. *U.S. News & World Report*. Retrieved May 3, 2024, from https://www.usnews.com/education/best-colleges/articles/rankings-faq#1-1

Motter, K. L. (2003). *Student versus staff perceptions of selected university student services and relationships between student satisfaction and academic perseverance*. The University of Southern Mississippi.

Mulhern, C. (2020). Beyond teachers: Estimating individual guidance counselors' effects on educational attainment. *Unpublished Manuscript, RAND Corporation*.

Munir, S., & Zaheer, M. (2021). The role of extra-curricular activities in increasing student engagement. *Asian Association of Open Universities Journal*, *16*(3), 241-254.

Museus, S. D., Nichols, A. H., & Lambert, A. D. (2008). Racial differences in the effects of campus racial climate on degree completion: A structural equation model. *The Review of Higher Education*, *32*(1), 107-134.

Mwangi, C. A. G., Thelamour, B., Ezeofor, I., & Carpenter, A. (2018). " Black elephant in the room": Black students contextualizing campus racial climate within US racial climate. *Journal of College Student Development*, *59*(4), 456-474.

National Center for Education Statistics. (2020, May 19). *Employment and unemployment rates by educational attainment*. Institute of Education Sciences. Retrieved May 26, 2022, from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/pdf/coe_cbc.pdf

National Center for Education Statistics. (2021, February). *Digest of Education Statistics, 2019*. Retrieved January 13, 2022, from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d19/ch_3.asp

National Center for Education Statistics. (2022). *Fast Facts: Enrollment*. Institute of Education Sciences. https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=98.

National Center for Education Statistics. (2023a, May). *Annual Earnings by Educational Attainment*. Institute of Education Sciences. https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cba/annual-earnings#suggested-citation

National Center for Education Statistics. (2023b). *Characteristics of Postsecondary Students*. Institute of Education Sciences. https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/csb/postsecondary-students#suggested-citation

Ncube, T., Jacobson, W., Whitfield, T., & McNamara, C. (2018). The effect of student perception of campus climate for diversity and inclusion on overall university experience:

A race/ethnicity comparison study. In *Evaluating Campus Climate at US Research Universities* (pp. 185-207). Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.

Niche. (2022, August 26). *About Niche's College Rankings*. *Niche*. Retrieved December 19, 2022, from https://www.niche.com/colleges/rankings/methodology/

Nichols, A. (2008). Erratum and discussion of propensity-score reweighting. *The Stata Journal*, *8*(4), 532-539.

Nora, A. (2004). The role of habitus and cultural capital in choosing a college, transitioning from high school to higher education, and persisting in college among minority and nonminority students. *Journal of Hispanic higher education*, *3*(2), 180-208.

Nuñez, A. M. (2009). A critical paradox? Predictors of Latino students' sense of belonging in college. *Journal of diversity in higher education*, *2*(1), 46.

O'Brien, M. (2018). Professional Socialization of Accounting Students: Suggested Activities to Enhance Students' Experience at the Anticipatory Stage. *Journal of Accounting and Finance*, *18*(9), 174-179.

O'Connor, N., Hammack, F. M., & Scott, M. A. (2010). Social capital, financial knowledge, and Hispanic student college choices. Research in Higher Education, 51, 195-219.

Oja, M. (2011). Student satisfaction and student performance. *Journal of Applied Research in the Community College*, *19*(1), 47-53.

O'Shaughnessy, L. (2013, September 10). *Why U.S. news' college rankings hurt students*. CBS News. Retrieved May 25, 2022, from https://www.cbsnews.com/news/why-us-news-college-rankings-hurt-students/

Otanes, M. E. M., Bangalan, S. G., Escalona, A. M., & Sibug, N. L. (2022). College motivation, self-efficacy and college adjustment of freshmen college students: The structural equation

model approach. *International Journal of Health Sciences, 6*(S6), 817– 825. https://doi.org/10.53730/ijhs.v6nS6.9675

Ovink, S., Kalogrides, D., Nanney, M., & Delaney, P. (2018). College match and undermatch: Assessing student preferences, college proximity, and inequality in post-college outcomes. *Research in Higher Education*, *59*, 553-590.

Palmer, M., Hayek, J., Hossler, D., Jacob, S. A., Cummings, H., & Kinzie, J. (2004). Fifty years of college choice: Social, political and institutional influences on the decision-making process.

Pascarella, E. T. (1985). College environmental influences on learning and cognitive development: A critical review and synthesis. *Higher education: Handbook of theory and research*, *1*(1), 1-61.

Pascarella, E. T., & Terenzini, P. T. (1976). Informal interaction with faculty and freshman ratings of academic and non-academic experience of college 1. *The Journal of Educational Research*, *70*(1), 35-41.

Pascarella, E. T., & Terenzini, P. T. (1991). *How college affects students: Findings and insights from twenty years of research*. Jossey-Bass Inc., Publishers, PO Box 44305, San Francisco, CA 94144-4305 (ISBN-1-55542-304-3--$75.00, hardcover).

Paterno, S. (2021, August 6). *Perspective | college rankings have fueled an arms race that has pushed Higher Education Astray*. The Washington Post. Retrieved September 22, 2022, from https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2021/08/06/college-rankings-have-fueled-an-arms-race-that-has-pushed-higher-education-astray/

Peng, C. Y. J., Lee, K. L., & Ingersoll, G. M. (2002). An introduction to logistic regression analysis and reporting. *The journal of educational research*, *96*(1), 3-14.

Perna, L. W. (2006). Studying college access and choice: A proposed conceptual model. In *Higher Education:* (pp. 99-157). Springer, Dordrecht.

Perna, L. W., Wright-Kim, J., & Brickfield, J. (2021). The implications of ranking for equity in higher education. In *Research Handbook on University Rankings* (pp. 295-306). Edward Elgar Publishing.

Person, A. E., & Rosenbaum, J. E. (2006). "Chain Enrollment" and College "Enclaves": Benefits and Drawbacks for Latino College Students. *New directions for community colleges: Community colleges and Latino educational opportunity*, *133*, 51-60.

Picchi, A. (2022, November 14). *College rankings are under fire. is there a better way to rate the value of a degree?* CBS News. Retrieved December 1, 2022, from https://www.cbsnews.com/news/college-rankings-the-value-of-a-college-degree/

Pike, G. R. (2004). Measuring quality: A comparison of US News rankings and NSSE benchmarks. *Research in higher education*, *45*(2), 193-208.

Pinxten, W., & Lievens, J. (2014). The importance of economic, social and cultural capital in understanding health inequalities: using a Bourdieu-based approach in research on physical and mental health perceptions. *Sociology of health & illness*, *36*(7), 1095-1110.

Playboy. (2015, September 14). *Playboy's top party schools 2015*. Retrieved December 20, 2022, from http://www.playboy.com/articles/playboys-top-party-schools-2015

Pleitz, J. D., MacDougall, A. E., Terry, R. A., Buckley, M. R., & Campbell, N. J. (2015). Great expectations: Examining the discrepancy between expectations and experiences on college student retention. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, 17(1), 88-104.

Plummer, L. M. (2018). *The Importance of Student-institution Fit for First-year College Satisfaction, Persistence, and Sense of Belonging: A Quantitative Correlational Study* (Doctoral dissertation, Northcentral University).

Porter, S. R. (2000). The robustness of the graduation rate performance indicator used in the US News & World Report college rankings. *International Journal of Educational Advancement*, *1*(2), 145-163.

Posselt, J. R., & Grodsky, E. (2017). Graduate education and social stratification. *Annual review of sociology*, *43*, 353-378.

Pret, T., Shaw, E., & Drakopoulou Dodd, S. (2016). Painting the full picture: The conversion of economic, cultural, social and symbolic capital. *International Small Business Journal*, *34*(8), 1004-1027.

Princeton Review. (2022). *The Princeton Review's College Ranking Methodology*. *The Princeton Review*. Retrieved December 19, 2022, from https://www.princetonreview.com/college-rankings/ranking-methodology

Ramos-Sánchez, L., & Nichols, L. (2007). Self-efficacy of first-generation and non-first-generation college students: The relationship with academic performance and college adjustment. *Journal of college counseling*, *10*(1), 6-18.

Rankin, S. R., & Reason, R. D. (2005). Differing perceptions: How students of color and white students perceive campus climate for underrepresented groups. *Journal of college student development*, *46*(1), 43-61.

Raza, S. A., Qazi, W., & Yousufi, S. Q. (2020). The influence of psychological, motivational, and behavioral factors on university students' achievements: the mediating effect of academic adjustment. *Journal of Applied Research in Higher Education*.

Reiter, B. (2020). A theory of whiteness as symbolic racial capital: Bourdieu 2.0. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Research*, *6*(5), 111-117.

Retallick, M. S., & Pate, M. L. (2009). Undergraduate student mentoring: What do students think?. *NACTA Journal*, 24-31.

Richards, D. A., Awokoya, J. T., Bridges, B. K., & Clark, C. (2018). One size does not fit all: A critical race theory perspective on college rankings. *The Review of Higher Education*, *42*(1), 269-312.

Robbins, S. B., Lauver, K., Le, H., Davis, D., Langley, R., & Carlstrom, A. (2004). Do psychosocial and study skill factors predict college outcomes? A meta-analysis. *Psychological bulletin*, *130*(2), 261.

Rosenbaum, J. E., Becker, K. I., Cepa, K. A., & Zapata-Gietl, C. E. (2016). Turning the question around: Do colleges fail to meet students' expectations?. *Research in Higher Education*, *57*(5), 519-543.

Rosenbaum, P. R., & Rubin, D. B. (1983). The central role of the propensity score in observational studies for causal effects. *Biometrika*, *70*(1), 41-55.

Rosenbaum, P. R., & Rubin, D. B. (1984). Reducing bias in observational studies using subclassification on the propensity score. *Journal of the American statistical Association*, *79*(387), 516-524.

Rosenbaum, P. R., & Rubin, D. B. (1985). Constructing a control group using multivariate matched sampling methods that incorporate the propensity score. *The American Statistician*, *39*(1), 33-38.

Rose-Redwood, R. S. (2008). From number to name: Symbolic capital, places of memory and the politics of street renaming in New York City. *Social & Cultural Geography*, *9*(4), 431-452.

RTI International. (n.d.). Report and Suggestions from College Scorecard Technical Review Panel 1: Consumer Information. https://edsurveys.rti.org/IPEDS_TRP_DOCS/prod/documents/CS1_Summary.pdf

Saenz, V. B. (2007). *First in my family: A profile of first-generation college students at four-year institutions since 1971*. Higher Education Research Institute.

Salazar, K. G., Jaquette, O., & Han, C. (2021). Coming soon to a neighborhood near you? Off-campus recruiting by public research universities. *American Educational Research Journal*, *58*(6), 1270-1314.

Salmi, J., & Saroyan, A. (2007). League tables as policy instruments: The political economy of accountability in tertiary education. *Report: Higher Education in the World 2007: Accreditation for Quality Assurance: What is at Stake?*.

Sanoff, A. (2007, April). *The U.S. News College Rankings: A View from the Inside.* Institute for Higher Education Policy. Retrieved September 29, 2021, from https://immagic.com/eLibrary/ARCHIVES/GENERAL/IHEP_US/I070412C.pdf#page=17

Sauder, M., & Lancaster, R. (2006). Do Rankings Matter? The Effects of U.S. News & World Report Rankings on the Admissions Process of Law Schools. *Law and Society Review*, *40*(1), 105–134. doi: 10.1111/j.1540-5893.2006.00261.x

Saul, S. (2022, September 15). *Despite years of criticism, the U.S. News College Rankings Live On*. The New York Times. Retrieved September 15, 2022, from https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/15/us/us-news-college-ranking.html

Sevier, R. A. (1996). Those Important Things: What Every College President Needs to Know About Marketing and Student Recruitment. *College and University*, *71*(4), 9-16.

Sevinç, S., & Gizir, C. A. (2014). Factors Negatively Affecting University Adjustment from the Views of First-Year University Students: The Case of Mersin University. *Educational Sciences: theory and practice*, *14*(4), 1301-1308.

Shahsavar, T., & Sudzina, F. (2017). Student satisfaction and loyalty in Denmark: Application of EPSI methodology. *PloS one*, 12(12), e0189576.

Sharkness, J., DeAngelo, L., & Pryor, J. (2010, January). *CIRP Construct Technical Report*. Higher Education Research Institute. Retrieved November 1, 2021, from https://www.heri.ucla.edu/PDFs/constructs/technicalreport.pdf.

Siisiainen, M. (2003). Two concepts of social capital: Bourdieu vs. Putnam. *International journal of contemporary sociology*, *40*(2), 183-204.

Siming, L., Niamatullah, G. J., Xu, D., & Shaf, K. (2015). Factors leading to students' satisfaction in the higher learning institutions. Power, 6(31), 114-118. Retrieved from http://www.eric.ed.gov/contentdelivery/servlet/ERICServlet?accno=EJ1083362

Simonsmeier, B. A., Peiffer, H., Flaig, M., & Schneider, M. (2020). Peer feedback improves students' academic self-concept in higher education. *Research in Higher Education*, *61*, 706-724.

Siregar, I., & Yulianti, E. (2020, December). Predicting Financial Distress of Manufacturing Sectors in Indonesia Using Logistic Regression. In *Proceedings of The International*

Conference on Environmental and Technology of Law, Business and Education on Post Covid 19, ICETLAWBE 2020, 26 September 2020, Bandar Lampung, Indonesia.

Smith, J. S., & Wertlieb, E. C. (2005). Do first-year college students' expectations align with their first-year experiences?. *NASPA Journal*, 42(2), 153-174.

Smith, M., Chen, Y., Berndtson, R., Burson, K. M., & Griffin, W. (2017). " Office Hours Are Kind of Weird": Reclaiming a Resource to Foster Student-Faculty Interaction. *InSight: A Journal of Scholarly Teaching*, *12*, 14-29.

Smith, S., & Moore, M. (2002). Expectations of campus racial climate and social adjustment among African American college students. *African American education: Race community, inequality, and achievement*, 93-118.

Solorzano, D., Ceja, M., & Yosso, T. (2000). Critical race theory, racial microaggressions, and campus racial climate: The experiences of African American college students. *Journal of Negro education*, 60-73.

Soysal, Y. N., Baltaru, R. D., & Cebolla-Boado, H. (2022). Meritocracy or reputation? The role of rankings in the sorting of international students across universities. *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, *22*(2), 252–263. https://doi.org/10.1080/14767724.2022.2070131

Spellings, M. (2006). *A test of leadership: Charting the future of US higher education*. US Department of Education.

Steffel, M., Kramer, D. A., McHugh, W., & Ducoff, N. (2020, November). *Information disclosure and college choice*. The Brookings Institution. https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/ES-11.23.20-Steffel-et-al-1.pdf

Stevens, M. L. (2009). *Creating a Class*. Harvard University Press.

Stolzenberg, E. B., Aragon, M. C., Romo, E., Couch, V., McLennan, D., Eagan, M. K., & Kang, N. (2020). *The American Freshman: National Norms Fall 2019*. Los Angeles: Higher Education Research Institute, UCLA.

Strayhorn, T. L. (2018). *College students' sense of belonging: A key to educational success for all students*. Routledge.

Stuber, J. M. (2009, December). Class, culture, and participation in the collegiate extra-curriculum. In *Sociological forum* (Vol. 24, No. 4, pp. 877-900). Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

Svrluga, S. (2019, April 29). *College rankings that matter: Hottest students, most weed, Ugliest Campus*. The Washington Post. Retrieved October 11, 2021, from https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/grade-point/wp/2015/09/09/college-rankings-that-matter-hottest-students-most-weed-ugliest-campus/.

Swenson, L. M., Nordstrom, A., & Hiester, M. (2008). The role of peer relationships in adjustment to college. *Journal of College Student Development*, *49*(6), 551-567.

Teranishi, R. T., Ceja, M., Antonio, A. L., Allen, W. R., & McDonough, P. M. (2004). The College-Choice Process for Asian Pacific Americans: Ethnicity and SocioEconomic Class in Context. *The Review of Higher Education 27*(4), 527-551. doi:10.1353/rhe.2004.0025.

Terenzini, P. T., & Pascarella, E. T. (1980). Student/Faculty Relationships and Freshman Year Educational Outcomes: A Further Investigation. *Journal of College Student Personnel*, *21*(6), 521-28.

Tessema, M. T., Ready, K. J., & Yu, W. (2012). Factors affecting college students' satisfaction with major curriculum: Evidence from nine years of data. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 2(2), 34-44.

Thiuri, P. (2011). International Student Satisfaction with Student Services at the Rochester Institute of Technology. *ProQuest LLC: Ann Arbor, MI, USA*.

Thoemmes, F., & Ong, A. D. (2016). A primer on inverse probability of treatment weighting and marginal structural models. *Emerging Adulthood*, *4*(1), 40-59.

Thomas, S. L. (2003). Longer-term economic effects of college selectivity and control. *Research in Higher Education*, *44*, 263-299.

Tierney, W. G. (1999). Models of minority college-going and retention: Cultural integrity versus cultural suicide. *Journal of Negro education*, 80-91.

The Times Editorial Board. (2022, April 4). *Editorial: College rankings are misleading. so why do we still use them?* Los Angeles Times. Retrieved September 15, 2022, from https://www.latimes.com/opinion/story/2022-04-04/editorial-college-rankings-us-news-challenges

Tinto, V. (1975). Dropout from higher education: A theoretical synthesis of recent research. *Review of educational research*, *45*(1), 89-125.

Tinto, V. (1987). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition*. University of Chicago Press, 5801 S. Ellis Avenue, Chicago, IL 60637.

Tinto, V. (2012). *Completing college: Rethinking institutional action*. University of Chicago Press.

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2022, May). *Education pays, 2021*. Retrieved May 25, 2022, from https://www.bls.gov/careeroutlook/2022/data-on-display/education-pays.htm

U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights Data Collection. (2016). *Chronic absenteeism in the nation's schools: An unprecedented look at a hidden educational crisis*. https://www2.ed.gov/datastory/chronicabsenteeism.html

U.S. News & World Report. (n.d.). *College compass marketing page*. *U.S. News & World Report*. Retrieved October 3, 2022, from https://www.usnews.com/usnews/store/college_compass

Vaccaro, A., Daly-Cano, M., & Newman, B. M. (2015). A sense of belonging among college students with disabilities: An emergent theoretical model. *Journal of College Student Development*, *56*(7), 670-686.

Vaccaro, A., & Newman, B. M. (2016). Development of a sense of belonging for privileged and minoritized students: An emergent model. *Journal of College Student Development*, *57*(8), 925-942.

Van Gijn-Grosvenor, E. L., & Huisman, P. (2020). A sense of belonging among Australian university students. *Higher Education Research & Development*, *39*(2), 376-389.

Van Rooij, E., Jansen, E. P., & van de Grift, W. J. (2018). First-year university students' academic success: the importance of academic adjustment. *European Journal of Psychology of Education*, *33*(4), 749-767.

Waerdahl, R. (2005). 'Maybe I'll Need a Pair of Levi's Before Junior High?' Child to youth trajectories and anticipatory socialization. *Childhood*, *12*(2), 201-219.

Waldek, S., & McLaughlin, K. (2022, September 20). *The 53 most beautiful colleges in America*. Architectural Digest. Retrieved December 20, 2022, from https://www.architecturaldigest.com/gallery/most-beautiful-colleges-in-america

Webber, K. L., Krylow, R. B., & Zhang, Q. (2013). Does involvement really matter? Indicators of college student success and satisfaction. *Journal of College Student Development*, *54*(6), 591-611.

Webster, T. J. (2001). A principal component analysis of the US News & World Report tier rankings of colleges and universities. *Economics of Education Review*, *20*(3), 235-244.

Wermund, B. (2017, September 10). *How U.S. News College Rankings promote economic inequality on campus*. POLITICO. Retrieved January 27, 2022, from https://www.politico.com/interactives/2017/top-college-rankings-list-2017-us-news-investigation/

Westbrook, L., & Saperstein, A. (2015). New categories are not enough: Rethinking the measurement of sex and gender in social surveys. *Gender & Society*, *29*(4), 534-560.

Williams, J. (2016). A critical exploration of changing definitions of public good in relation to higher education. *Studies in Higher Education*, *41*(4), 619-630.

Williams, T. E. (1987). *Student-institution fit: An ecological perspective* [Paper presentation]. Conference on Enrollment Management, New Orleans, L.A., United States.

Wilson, R. C., Gaff, J. G., Diensky, E. R., Wood, L., & Bavry, J. L. (1975). College professors and their impact on students. New York: Wiley and Sons.

Winkle-Wagner, R. (2010). *Cultural Capital: The Promises and Pitfalls in Education Research: AEHE, Volume 36, Number 1*. John Wiley & Sons.

Wiseman, R. L., Gonzales, S. M., & Salyer, K. (2004). A cross-cultural analysis of students' sense of community, degree of involvement, and educational benefits. *Intercultural Communication Studies*, *13*, 173-189.

Witteveen, D., & Attewell, P. (2017). The earnings payoff from attending a selective college. *Social Science Research*, *66*, 154-169.

Wouters, S., Germeijs, V., Colpin, H., & Verschueren, K. (2011). Academic self-concept in high school: Predictors and effects on adjustment in higher education. *Scandinavian journal of psychology*, *52*(6), 586-594.

Yamaguchi, K. (1998). Rational-choice theories of anticipatory socialization and anticipatory non-socialization. *Rationality and Society*, *10*(2), 163-199.

Zhou, L. (2015, November 9). *A roundup of the many college rankings*. The Atlantic. Retrieved October 11, 2021, from https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2015/11/the-listicle-of-higher-education/414519/.

Zilvinskis, J., & Rocconi, L. (2018). Revisiting the relationship between institutional rank and student engagement. *The Review of Higher Education*, *41*(2), 253-280.