

How Social Context Affects Students' Educational Outcomes

Julia Krevans and Courtney Clarke

Institute for Economic Mobility

Cuyahoga Community College

The Institute for Economic Mobility

❑ A think tank, an intervention laboratory, a research organization, an advocacy group

❑ A brief history

- Grass-roots beginnings: Faculty and staff address concerns about students' challenges and long-term outcomes with talents and insights
- Chetty et al. (2017) create the metrics for our goals
- A working hypotheses: Our most vulnerable students need additional material and social support

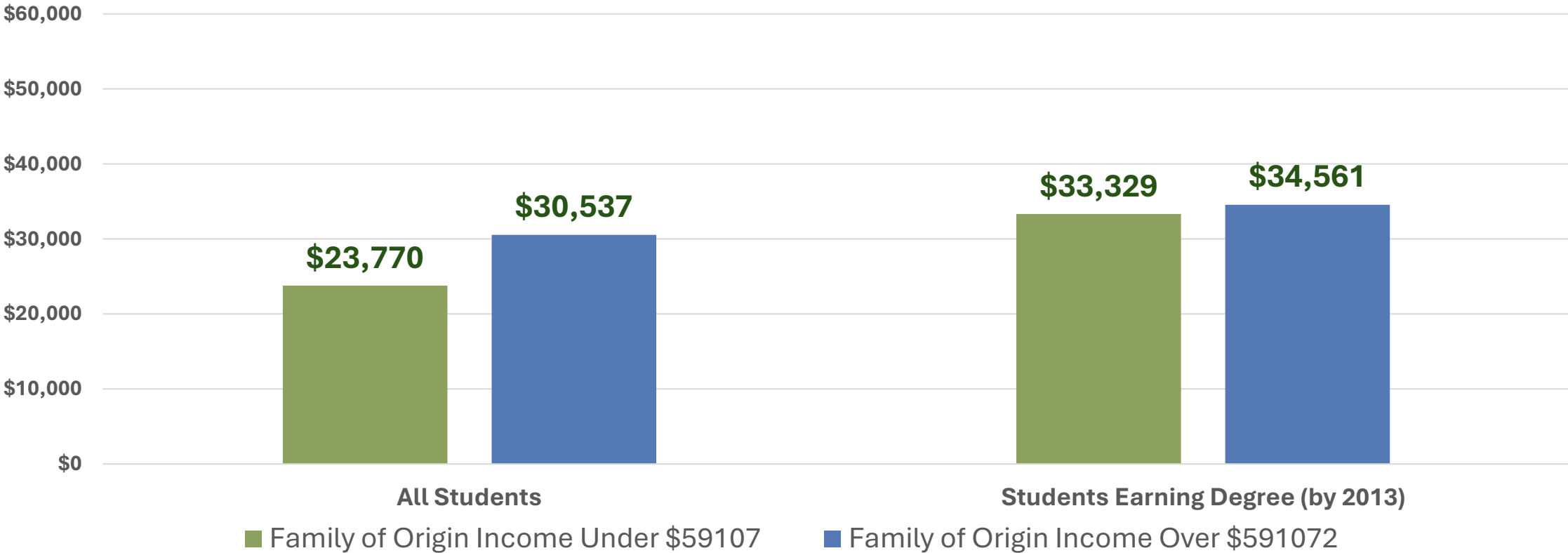
A First Study -Chetty et al. Revisted

- ❑ The 1984 birth cohort of Tri-C students enrolled between 2003 and 2006 were followed for 18 years with de-identified data:
 - Students' parents' incomes based on FAFSAs and 6 semesters of Tri-C grades
 - National Student Clearinghouse records of college attendance and all degrees earned from 2002-2020.
 - Ohio Dept of Job and Family Services records of student incomes in 2014 and 2019.
- ❑ As Chetty et al. found, students from families with lower incomes earned less than their classmates at age 30 and 35.
- ❑ But when only students with degrees were included, the differences between incomes were greatly decreased.

Median 2014 Income of Tri-C Students

Comparison of All Students vs. Only Students Who Completed Degrees by 2013

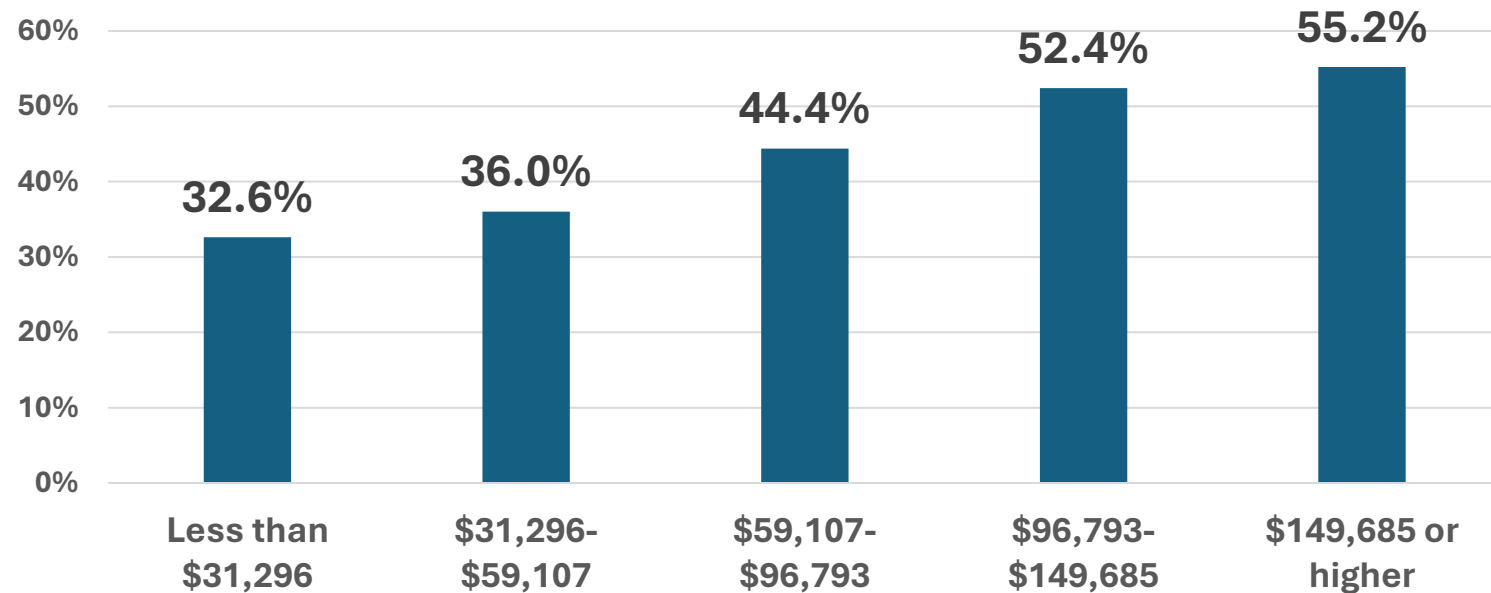
Approximate age: 30



Students from families with lower incomes earned less at age 30 and 35 largely because they did not earn degrees

- ❑ All students took many years to earn degree.
- ❑ Under-resourced students took longer and too often never earned any degree at any institution over an 18-year period.

Percentage of Students Who Earned a Post-Secondary Degree by Family of Origin Income



**Income in constant 2024 dollars
Organized by US Income Distribution Quintiles**

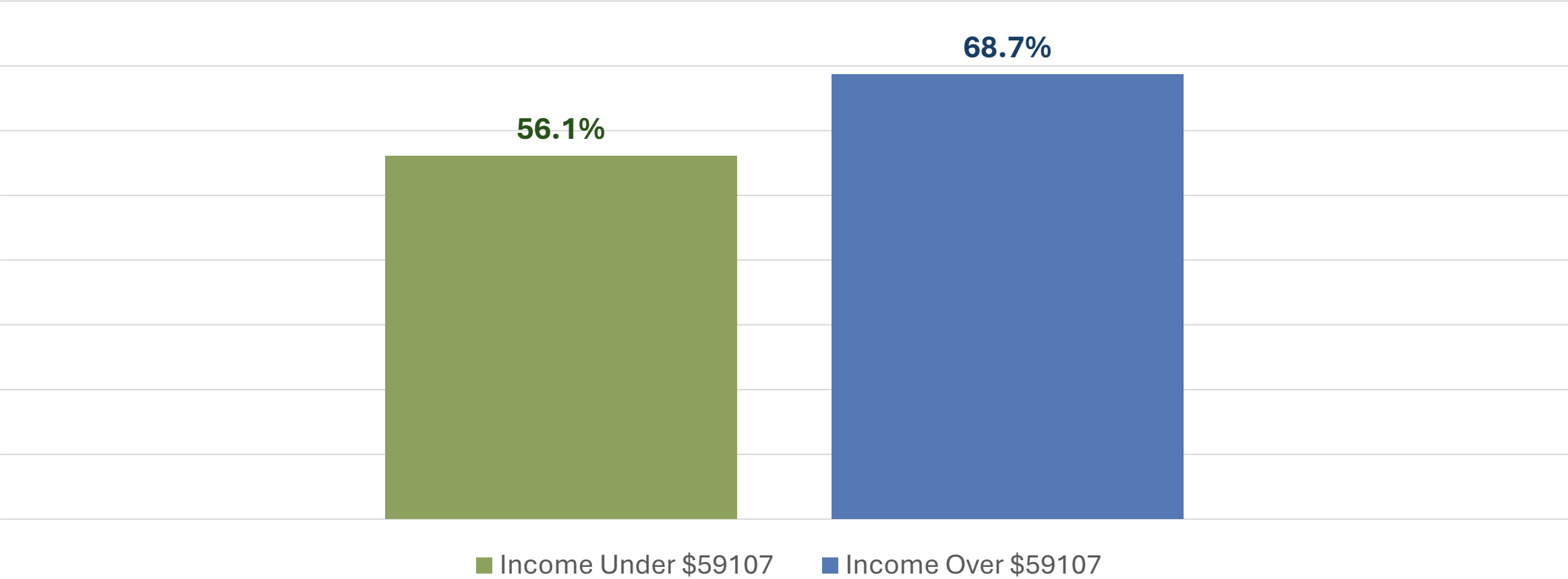
n=2066

Why Did the Under-resourced Students Fail to Earn Degrees?

- ❑ Under-preparation and academic difficulties did not fully explain it.
- ❑ Academically successful under-resourced students nonetheless left college without degrees at relatively high rates.
- ❑ Under-resourced students were likely to attend college intermittently, often just one semester of college a year.
- ❑ Consistency of college attendance is an extremely strong predictor of degree attainment.

Degree Attainment of Students with GPAs of 2.0 or Higher During Their First Two Tri-C Semesters

Percentage of Community College Students 2002-06 earning college degree in subsequent 18 years



Income in constant 2024 dollars

Tri-C Students Who Struggle with Unmet Basic Needs Disengage From College

- ☐ Are students from under-resourced families stopping out of college because struggles make attending college so difficult?
- ☐ Surveyed Tri-C students in 2018, 2019 and 2021
- ☐ Large percentages were food and housing insecure, lacked childcare assistance and had transportation problems.
- ☐ Students who struggled were disengaging from college.
- ☐ If students knew where to get help they were less likely to disengage.
- ☐ But only about half of students with needs knew how to get help.

2025 Survey of Students' Basic Needs

- ❑ Resurveyed students' basic needs.
- ❑ Survey sent to all students enrolled Spring 2025 , age 18 or older who did not ask for confidentiality of their emails.
- ❑ 691 students responded anonymously to our online survey.
- ❑ We saw positive effects of the college's upgraded food pantries and hiring of social workers to help students.
- ❑ However, there was still a great deal of food and housing insecurity.

Basic Needs Insecure Students Are At Risk For Stopping Out

Percentage of Students Who Were Food and Housing Insecure: Comparison of Those at High and Lower Risk of Stopping Out

Difficulties	Lower Risk of Leaving College n=367	Higher Risk of Leaving College n=154
*statistically significant	Has Taken Semesters Off or Thinking About Dropping Out Now or Neither	Taken Semesters Off Before and Thinking About Dropping Out Now
Not enough money to cover living expenses or unsure if they have enough*	44.70%	67.50%
Skips meals because lacks money once a month, once a week or most days*	27.80%	51.00%
Worries about getting enough to eat once a month, one a week or most days*	32.20%	60.40%
Has difficulty getting help needed to care for a child or other relative while in class. t	21.7%	33.3%
Often or sometimes has difficulty with transportation	25.3%	25.5%
Shows at least 1 sign of housing insecurity*	53.50%	78.00%
Worries about having difficulty finding affordable housing or a place to live	22.20%	42.50%

Why Students Stop Out

❑ 303 students or 56% of students who answered our question had taken off a semester in the past.

❑ Reasons they gave included the following:

- I had difficulty paying for my living expenses while in college. 41.9%
- I had difficulty paying for college. 37.3%
- I needed to help my family or others 36.6%
- I was unsure of my direction. 34.3%
- had difficulty succeeding in my classes. 29.0%
- I had a job opportunity 21.8%
- Other (Mainly health concerns) 24.4%

Conclusions About Students' Material Needs

- ☐ Many students at Tri-C are from families with very low incomes.
- ☐ Students from families with low incomes often are assumed to struggle with learning deficits from poor schooling.
- ☐ Some do.
- ☐ However, there are many who do not need remediation, but rather, need food and shelter to succeed.
- ☐ Financial stressors that make it difficult to stay in college also make it difficult for the students who do stay in college to get to class, study and focus.
- ☐ How can we help them succeed and stay and reach their goals?.

Social Capital: Interpersonal Resources for College Success

❑ Interpersonal support can help student with financial struggles.

- Help obtaining food, housing, supplies and tuition,
- Help finding community services
- Logistical assistance

❑ Interpersonal support can help students navigate college.

- Study strategies
- Learning resources
- Opportunities
- Solve problems

❑ Social Capital: interpersonal support that students can call on to help them achieve their educational goals.

Social Capital Access Among Under-resourced Community College Students

□ Hypothesis:

- Students with greater access to social capital are more successful in college.
- Under-resourced students have relatively less access to social capital than better resourced students, which in turn leads to less success in college.
- Among under-resourced students, those with more access to social capital are more successful.

Rationale:

- Under-resourced students know fewer people with college degrees.
- They are less aware of strategies for success and get less help when problems arise.
- Better resourced students get material support from families.
- Under-resourced students' material support is more precarious and less satisfactory
- Under-resourced students have a great need for help, making a lack of support especially impactful.

Research on Social Capital in Support of Students' Material Needs

- ❑ 298 students completed surveys in the summer of 2023 and winter of 2024
- ❑ We asked students who they would turn to if they were worried about affording college and life necessities such as food and rent.

How likely are you to turn to: parents, other relatives, neighborhood friends, classmates, college professors, college counselors or staff, community helpers, co-workers or employers, other?

How likely is it that you would not know where to turn?

How many people can you count on to help you afford college and life necessities?

How satisfied have you been with help received to help you afford college and life necessities?

- ❑ Academic Self-Efficacy : How confident are you that you can:

Write a paper

Do well on your exams

Take good notes

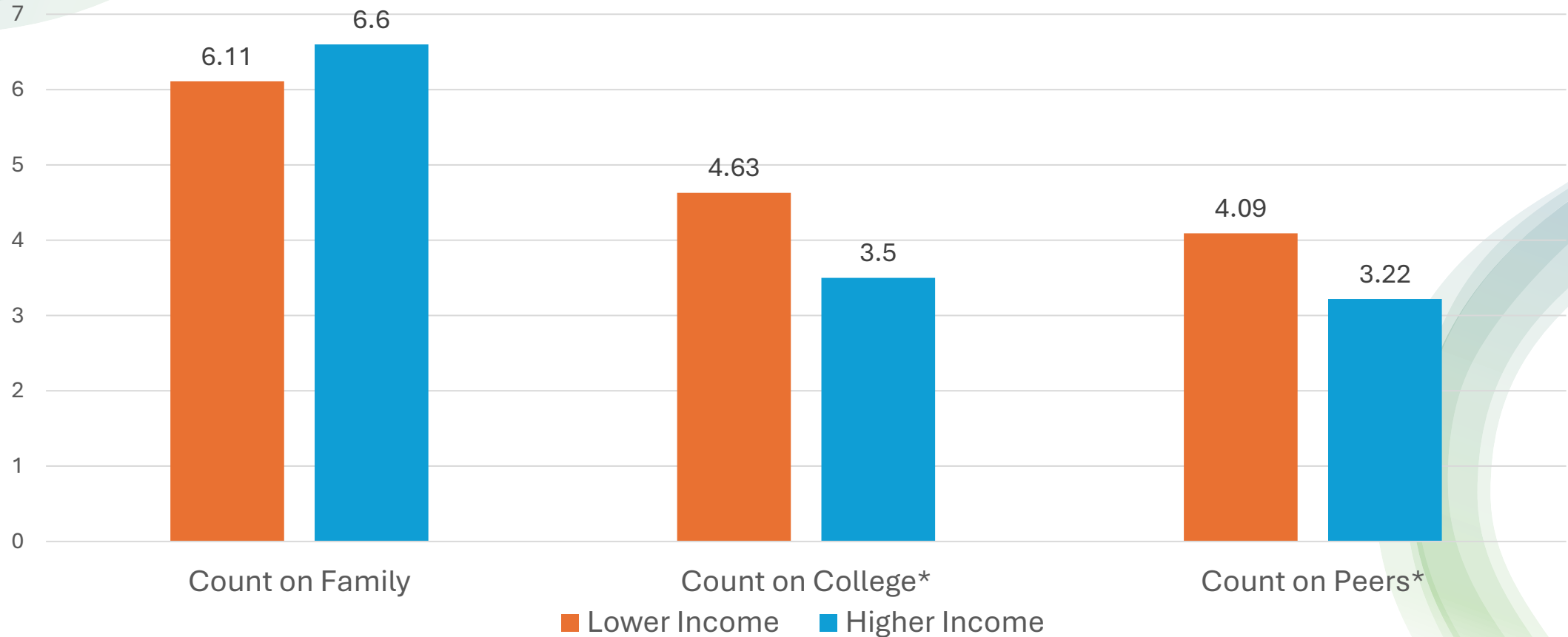
Manage time

Understand your textbooks

- ❑ Under resourced student- Fafsa EC=0, Better resourced student Fafsa EC>0

Social Capital for Material Needs: Students with Lower Versus Higher Incomes

Mean Likelihood of Turning to Family, College and Peers for Material Needs



Correlations between Social Capital for Material Needs and Student Success Indicators For Students with Lower Incomes

Social Capital Measure	Academic Self-Efficacy	Semester GPA
Overall Social Capital Score	.46**	.23,
Count on Family for Material Needs	.31*	.47**
Count on College for Material Needs	.25	-.07
Count on Peers for Material Needs.	.16	-.17
Count on Professors for Material Needs	.09	-.07
Count on College Staff for Material Needs	.27*	.07
Count on Community Helpers for Material Needs	.29*	.12
Count on People at Work for Material Needs	.23	-.34*
Number of People Can Count On	,23	.12
Satisfaction with Type and Amount of Help	,40**	.43**
N=54-57 *p<.05 **p<.01		

Social Capital That Supports Students' Material Needs

- ❑ The power of social capital comes from using it- from getting help when you need it.
- ❑ Can students actually obtain help from others when they need it and does that relate to college success?
4 sorts of help students might need:
 - help with financial aid,
 - help with getting textbooks and supplies
 - help with transportation
 - help with food, housing and other living expenses
- ❑ On average, better resourced students obtained 94% of needed help, but under-resourced students obtained only 80% of needed help a statistically significant difference.
- ❑ Getting needed help was related to higher academic self-efficacy for under-resourced students only, $r=.25$, $n=62$, $p<.05$.

Conclusion: For Under-resourced Students Success is Linked to Help with Material Needs

- ❑ Students with lower incomes are more likely to count on the college and peers for help with material needs.
- ❑ Social capital- the amount of help students can count on for material needs is related to college success but for students with lower incomes only.
- ❑ Under-resourced students who have more and more satisfactory sources of support for material needs have higher self-efficacy and higher grades.
- ❑ Under-resourced students are also relatively unlikely to get help when they need material resources, and for under-resourced students, not getting needed help is associated with reduced confidence in their ability to succeed in essential student tasks.

Social Capital For Academic Help -Variables and Measures

☐ Social capital for academic help- measure

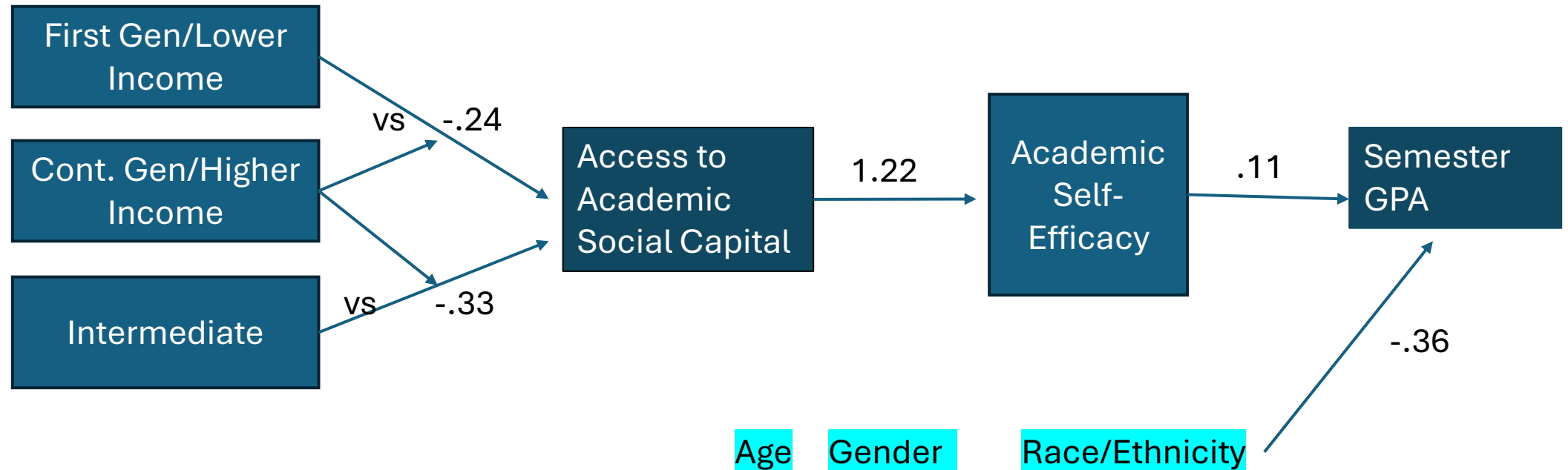
- **Stem1 -If you were struggling with your classes and needed help to figure out how to succeed, how likely is it you would turn to :**
- **Stem 2-If you were looking for opportunities such as educational programs, or scholarships, or internships, how likely is it you would turn to.....**

☐ Three Income/ parent education groups :

- Higher income/ continuing generation had FAFSA EC > 0 dollars and at least one parent who had earned an associates degree or a higher degree
- Lower income/first generation had FAFSA EC = 0 dollars and no parent who had completed a college degree
- Intermediate, had either a degreed parent or an expected contribution of greater than 0 but not both

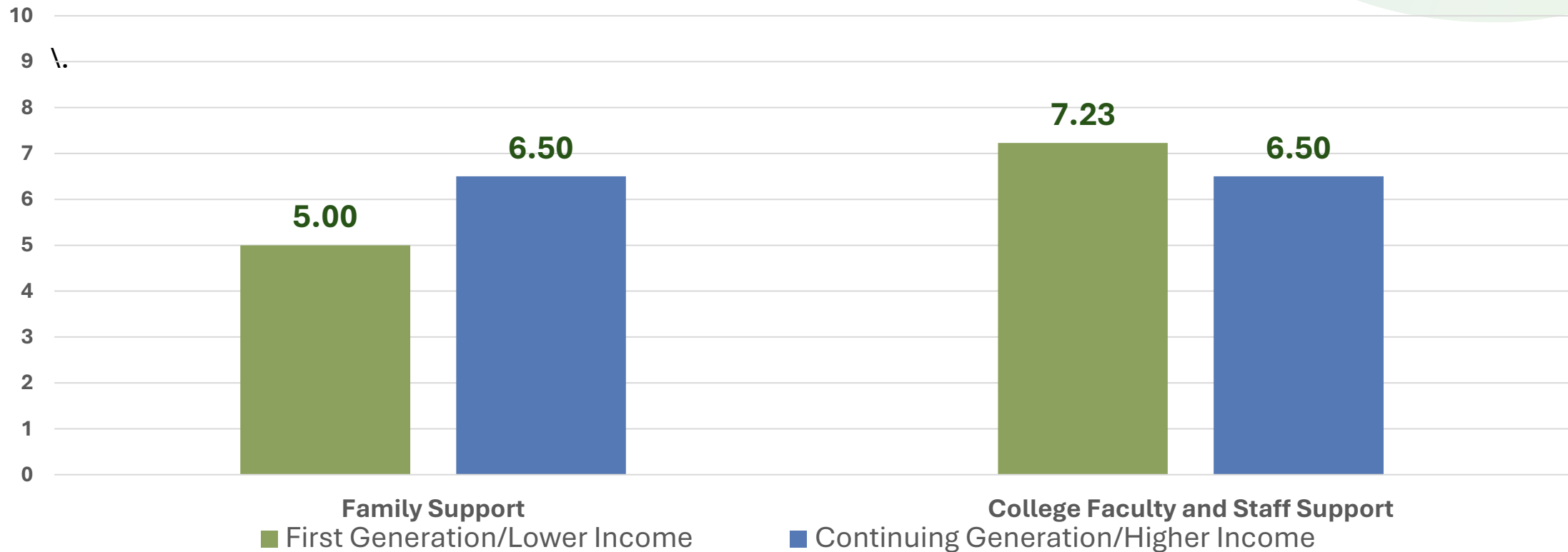
☐ Student success measures: Semester GPA, Academic Self Efficacy

Findings: Income/Parent Education → Social Capital →
Academic Self-Efficacy → Semester GPA



A Closer Look: Who Do Students Turn To?

Mean Likelihood of Turning to Family or College for Academic Support



A Closer Look: Counting on Others for Academic Help

❑ All Students

When students feel they can turn to college faculty and staff for help with academic concerns, they have greater academic self-efficacy

❑ Continuing -Generation Students

- Counting on family members for academic helps is related to greater academic self-efficacy
- Having more helpers and being more satisfied with the amount and types of help received is associated with both more academic self-efficacy and higher grades.

❑ First- Generation Students

- Counting on family members for academic help is not related to academic self-efficacy.
- Counting on community members for academic help is associated with greater academic self-efficacy but lower grades.

Getting Academic Help from Others: General Findings

Academic Concern- Need Help...	Number of students with the concern	Percentage of students who obtained help
Understanding class requirements	71	92%
Understanding the readings	77	89%
With study skills	71	89%
With homework	99	93%
With technology	47	94%
With academic obstacles	94	92%
Understanding degree requirements	113	97%
Finding academic options	56	93%
Finding recommended courses	91	91%

A Closer Look: Getting Academic Help

☐ All Students

- When students got more help for their academic concerns , especially when they got more help from college faculty and staff, they had greater academic self-efficacy.
- Students self-efficacy was not related to help from family or peers.

☐ Continuing -Generation Students

- The amount of needed academic help they obtained was unrelated to academic self-efficacy and grades.

☐ First- Generation Students

- The amount of needed academic help they obtained was related to both their academic self-efficacy and grades
- Help from college faculty and staff was uniquely related to students' academic self-efficacy.

General Conclusions and Summary

- ❑ There are many under-resourced students who attend Tri-C and other colleges in the region and many will not earn degrees and improve their chances for economic mobility
- ❑ Financial hardship itself is one cause.
- ❑ Students leave college because they cannot earn enough money to have food, shelter and meet their other basic needs while attending.
- ❑ And while in college they experience stress as they try to juggle multiple responsibilities and difficulties and hope to do well in their classes
- ❑ Our data shows that having people they can count on for help with material needs and academic concerns is associated with increased confidence and increased grades. This support may be pivotal for some students.
- ❑ Interestingly, we are the people that they are most likely to count on and whose help seems to matter the most, college professors, college counselors and college staff.

What to Do? Suggestions from the Literature

A decorative graphic element consisting of several overlapping, wavy lines in shades of light blue and green, curving from the top right towards the center of the slide.

1. Help holistically
2. Share common ground and Humanize education
3. Be proactive
4. Identify and remove barriers
5. Advocate to the college for more