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### Financial Literacy among Buffalo State College Undergraduate Students

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Financial Literacy among Buffalo State College Undergraduate Students

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In partial fulfillment of requirements for PAD 690 Masters Project

SUNY Buffalo State

Dr. Laurie Buonanno

December 15, 2022

### **Abstract**

Financial literacy can be complex and difficult for college students to comprehend. Many students struggle to afford college and are faced with large amounts of student loan debt. Financial awareness needs to be addressed early on for students to make informed decisions about college costs, student debt, and financial aid. However, financial aid applications, terms and conditions, and eligibility requirements are difficult for many students to comprehend on their own. The purpose of this study is to assess financial literacy among undergraduate students at Buffalo State College. A quantitative approach is used in this study by implementing a web-based cross-sectional survey via Qualtrics. All undergraduate students were invited to participate in the survey, which was designed to understand the knowledge and skills of students to manage financial resources efficiently. The study found that there is a need for financial literacy education and students are interested in increasing their financial knowledge.

*Keywords:* Financial literacy, financial awareness, student loan debt, entrance counseling, exit counseling, financial aid, jargon.

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## **Chapter I: Introduction**

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this research is to assess financial literacy among Buffalo State College (BSC) undergraduate students. Financial literacy is when an individual possesses a set of skills and knowledge to make informed decisions about their finances. However, financial literacy can be complex and difficult for many college students to comprehend especially when it comes time to financing their education. According to King et al. (2021), student loans are the largest contributor to household debt. The average undergraduate student that graduates college has about \$25,000 in loan debt (The White House, 2022). In addition, the federal student loan debt is \$1.6 trillion and continues to grow for more than 45 million borrowers (The White House, 2022).

The cost of attending college continues to increase, but federal support has not kept up with the changing times with the increase in college costs. For example, the Pell Grant, unlike a loan, does not have to be paid back and is awarded to undergraduate students. The Pell Grant once covered 80 percent of costs at a four-year public college for students who come from working families (The White House, 2022). However, now, the Pell Grant only covers 33 percent of college costs (The White House, 2022). As a result, many students from low-and middle-income families are forced to borrow loans if they want to pursue a degree (The White House, 2022).

College students are affected by this problem because one of the first major financial decisions for young adults is how to pay for college. Many college students can be left with a large amount of debt and regrets on how they financed their education. In addition, borrowers are burdened with high monthly payments, which makes it harder for them to build wealth (The White House, 2022). 33 percent of undergraduate borrowers have debt, but no degree, which many could not continue their education because they could not afford the cost of attendance (The White

House, 2022). 16 percent of borrowers are in default, which can result in damaging credit scores and garnishing wages (The White House, 2022). Student loan debt is such a significant problem that the Biden administration must step in to relieve many loan borrowers by eliminating or reducing their student loan debt. Individuals who have taken out loans prior to June 30, 2022, would qualify for loan forgiveness if certain eligibility requirements are met. Individuals must make less than \$125,000 a year and married couples must make less than \$250,000 a year to qualify for up to \$10,000 in loan debt forgiveness. In addition, individuals who meet the income guidelines and were Pell Grant recipients would qualify for up to \$20,000 in loan debt forgiveness.

Many college students cannot make responsible financial decisions as many students cannot understand the complex jargon used on financial aid applications, terms and conditions, and eligibility requirements, which are implemented by the U.S. Department of Education. As a professional within financial aid, it is my responsibility to find out how we can improve financial literacy and awareness to the student population at Buffalo State College. Educating students and making them aware of financial aid, which includes federal student loans, and how to manage their finances is important, but how the information is reached or presented to students is key. Information provided should be customized, clear, and timely for students to make informed decisions.

The State University of New York (SUNY), which is the largest comprehensive university system in the United States, addresses that part of their mission is to provide the broadest possible access, and encourages, supports, and participates in facility planning and projects regarding the health of local economies and quality of life (SUNY, 2022). The cost of attending SUNY should be clear and understandable. Therefore, SUNY has an obligation to keep prices reasonable and ensure college students understand costs and get value for their investments. However, SUNY has

implemented SUNY Smart Track to assist students with financial transparency to be able to make the best decisions in college financing (SUNY, 2022).

In addition, the mission at BSC aligns with SUNY. The mission of BSC is the commitment to the intellectual, personal, and professional growth of the student population (SUNY Buffalo State, 2022). In addition, the college is dedicated to excellence in teaching and scholarship, cultural enrichment, and service to enhance the quality of life (SUNY Buffalo State, 2022). The Financial Aid Office at BSC is responsible for preparing and communicating information on financial aid, which includes loans, grants, scholarships, and other types of financial aid. The mission is to manage all available federal, state, and institutional aid funds in a responsible manner. In addition, the office makes higher education accessible by reducing financial barriers while sharing their knowledge with students and parents to be able to make informed decisions about costs and financial aid. For the 2022-2023 academic year, 5,289 BSC undergraduate students are in a matriculated, aid eligible program. Out of the 5,289 students, only 4,555 filed a FAFSA.

The outcome of the study should reflect undergraduate students need stronger financial education and support. In addition, the outcome of this study should demonstrate that undergraduate students will want to increase their financial knowledge and have support on campus to improve their financial wellbeing. This study is important to initiate innovative ways to meet the needs of students and create learning that not only sparks interest, but also benefits students by learning the knowledge and skills needed to manage finances effectively. In addition, a customized approach is needed to combat the problem of financial literacy, awareness, and wellbeing among college students. Financial awareness needs to be addressed earlier on for incoming college students and reiterated for students who will be graduating from college. However, students' participation is needed, and students need to take the initiative to reach out for further



assistance regarding their needs. Students need to ensure they have the accurate information and understand the information provided to make informed responsible decisions when completing the necessary applications required to receive financial aid, such as the FAFSA as well as entrance counseling and exit counseling, which is required by the U.S. Department of Education for federal student loan borrowers.

## **Chapter II: Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

Financial literacy is very complex and difficult to comprehend for many college students. Many college students cannot understand the jargon and complex language used to understand financial aid applications, terms and conditions, and eligibility requirements. Research already conducted has concluded that financial literacy can make a difference for students to obtain the knowledge needed to make informed decisions, but how the information is reached or presented to students is not effective or efficient.

The literature review begins with an overview of entrance counseling that is required for first-time student loan borrowers per federal regulations and how entrance counseling could be more effective to teach key lessons to new student loan borrowers. The second section examines exit counseling that is required for student loan borrowers once they graduate, drop below half-time enrollment, or no longer attend school per federal regulations, and how the complexity to understand key terms and concepts leads to poor financial decisions. The third section examines the results of limited information available to students on college costs, student debt, and financial aid. Lastly, the fourth section reviews the complexity of the FAFSA, eligibility requirements, and the need for financial literacy education in financial aid application processes.

**Entrance Counseling: Perception and Impact**

Research has been conducted on the impacts of financial awareness through entrance counseling and researchers found the information to be ineffective for first-time student loan borrowers. Entrance counseling is required for first-time federal student loan borrowers who accept the Subsidized and/or Unsubsidized Stafford Loans (Letkiewicz, 2017, p.1). The purpose of the entrance counseling is to ensure a student understands the terms and conditions as well as their rights and responsibilities. In addition, it should help a first-time loan borrower understand what a loan is, how interest works, options for repayment, and default avoidance (Letkiewicz, 2017, p.1).

Letkiewicz (2017) explains that the student loan borrowing process should support students in this important investment decision that can have a long-lasting impact (p.1). An estimated 70% of entrance counseling is done online from the Department of Education and the remainder of entrance counseling is completed at a college institution the student attends (Letkiewicz, 2017, p.2). Letkiewicz (2017) explains that the delivery of entrance counseling is problematic as a one-size-fits-all approach (p.2). Fernandez et al. (2015) explains that participants frustrated with the online counseling, sought to learn by pushing researchers into a counseling role to help explain the many financial aid topics, which the online counseling makes no effort to prioritize fundamentals (p.28).

According to Letkiewicz, (2017), “The Department of Education’s online student loan counseling could be more effective. For example, students want fewer technical words, more charts, graphs, and effective infographics and videos” (p.6). However, Fernandez et al. (2015) explains that users regularly failed to follow links to YouTube videos, which users found to be valuable and effective, but misplaced (p.29). In addition, first-time borrowers find a collection of

information that is very detailed, lacks simple explanation, and assumes users have the knowledge, which a first-time borrower would not know (Fernandez et al., 2015, p.2).

Entrance counseling fails to impart key lessons to new loan borrowers. According to Fernandez et al. (2015), “Most first-time borrowers are just beginning their programs and are inexperienced and uncertain with regard to financial aid, personal finance (including loans), and/or higher education; they tend to lack basic financial knowledge and have widely varied plans for the future” (p.12). For example, Fernandez et al. (2015) explains that terms and concepts, such as federal and private loans, federal loans programs, and interest subsidies confused most users completing entrance counseling (p.19).

According to Fernandez et al. (2015), “Users frequently seemed to struggle to truly learn new terms and concepts before proceeding to the next sections, especially when the explanations were lengthy and/or written with undue technical precision and elaboration” (p.19). For example, student focus group data reveals that borrowers do not know or cannot recall terms of repayment for their loans. In addition, surveys also indicated that students feel that entrance counseling has not helped them become informed borrowers (Klepfer et al., 2015, p.10).

### **Exit Counseling: Perception and Impact**

In addition to the entrance counseling, research also has been done on the impact of financial awareness through exit counseling, which also has been deemed to be ineffective for student loan borrowers. Exit counseling is required when a student no longer attends school or drops below half-time enrollment. According to Cox et al. (2018), “It provides student borrowers with information about repayment options and affords them an opportunity to select a repayment plan” (p.3). Exit counseling is to help student loan borrowers understand their loan obligations and assist with repayment preparation. According to Klepfer et al., (2015), “even with mandatory loan

counseling, students are entering default or becoming delinquent on their loans at alarming rates” (p.1).

Klepfer et al. (2015) explains that information provided in large and complex forms results in poor financial choices (p.10). According to Klepfer et al. (2015), “To avoid the consequences of delinquency and default, students need to understand their rights and responsibilities as borrowers and have a strong grasp of the tools available to help them in repayment” (p.2). In addition, Fletcher et al. (2015) explains that students can better manage loan borrowing and repayment if they are provided effective and efficient information that is beneficial and comprehensible (p.4). However, Fernandez et al. (2015) explains that within the exit counseling modules, users struggle with basic navigation of the tool, complex textual language, and the use and interpretation of the calculator feature (p.2).

In addition, on the exit counseling, there are different repayment plan options mentioned that the U.S. Department of Education offers to federal student loan borrowers, such as Standard, Graduated, Extended, Graduated Extended, Income Based Repayment (IBR), Income Contingent Repayment (ICR), Pay as You Earn (PAYE) and Revised Pay As You Earn (REPAYE) plans (Cox et al., 2018, p.8). Cox et al. (2018) explains that the borrowers are placed in a standard repayment plan and remain in that plan unless they take active steps to change it by contacting their loan servicer, which has been assigned by the U.S. Department of Education (p.3). Cox et al. (2018) explains that borrowers with direct loans have the option to choose a repayment plan that adjusts to their income. Under the income driven repayment plans, repayments are a percentage of discretionary income above a threshold with forgiveness after 25 years (p.2).

Income driven repayment plans are a form of insurance against low earnings and provide protection against default. Cox et al. (2018) explains that the U.S. Department of the Treasury

reported that 70% of defaulted borrowers met the criteria for an income driven repayment plan, which would have protected them against default (p.2). However, details of each repayment plan, including eligibility are hard to comprehend on the exit counseling module (Cox et al., 2018, p.8). According to Fletcher et al. (2015), “a growing body of evidence suggests that much of the difficulty borrowers experience may be due more to their inadequate knowledge of the student loan system than to the system itself” (p.2). The following critical factors should be considered to improve the efficacy of student loan counseling, such as personalization, delivery method, timing, and the complexity, frequency, and the volume of information (Fletcher et al., 2015, p.7).

### **The Information Gap**

Studies have suggested that many students have a limited understanding of college costs, student debt, and financial aid. According to Akers and Chingos (2014), “a lack of knowledge about costs and borrowing may lead students to be insensitive to price when they decide to enroll or stay enrolled in college” (p.3). For example, Akers and Chingos (2014) explains many students have an inaccurate perception of their loan balance (p.3). Akers and Chingos (2014) explains that 52% of respondents in a survey that was conducted at a public university were able to identify the cost of their education and living expenses (p.3). In addition, Akers and Chingos (2014) explains that using a nationally representative sample, about 50% of students underestimate how much debt they owe and less than 66% provide an accurate estimate (p.3). Lastly, Akers and Chingos (2014) explains that among students with federal student loans, 28% don’t know they have any federal debt and 14 percent don’t know they have any student debt at all (p.3).

According to Britt et al. (2017), “the overall amount of federal and state financial aid awarded to students has generally increased over the past several years, although tuition has far outpaced the growth in federal and state grants, and benefits per full-time equivalent student have

actually declined” (p.27). Rising tuition, student debt, and financial stress can have a negative impact on student persistence and performance (Britt, et al., 2017, p.27). Britt et al. (2017) explains that the appropriate amount to borrow is difficult to determine for students (p.25). Deciding whether to borrow a loan is a complicated decision to make, but for many students the choice is either to borrow loans or not attend school (Klepfer et al., 2015, p.2).

Britt et al. (2017) recommends that colleges and universities need to include an awareness component in financial counseling programs and multiple strategies need to be used to reach students about college costs and loans (p.28). Hunter and Gillen (2015) explain findings presented within the financial life skill simulations in a college environment study found that active learning strategies enhanced student financial knowledge (p.297). In addition, delivery of financial counseling should be determined by evaluating student preferences to optimize effectiveness (Britt et al., 2017, p.28). Barr et al. (2016) explains that their results show that community college students’ borrowing decisions are influenced by a lack of information about loans and access to financial aid counseling that is offered one-on-one with a financial aid counselor (p.8). Schools should explore ways to increase financial aid counseling in general and about scholarships by establishing relationships with local colleges and universities (Perna, 2008, p.14).

Javine (2013) explains the number of students requiring financial aid has increased due to the rising cost tuition, which results in the increase amount of student loan debt among college students (p.12). Javine (2013) explains that students take on more loan debt the longer a student continues college, which is simply implied. In addition, Javine (2013) explains that evidence suggests that first generation college and minority students are likely to have more student loan debt (p.12). Long and Riley (2007) explains that there are major barriers for college success and access, such as costs, academic preparation, and complexity of financial aid systems (p.41).

Growing costs of tuition have impacted grant programs that have assisted with financial need, and additional funding resources are still needed when grants and loans are accounted for in financial aid packages (Long & Riley, 2007, p.42). Long and Riley (2007) also explains that although student loan debt is an issue due to the rise of tuition costs, student have annual loan limits under the federal loans program, which can be inadequate to meet the needs of students (p.51).

According to Long and Riley (2007), “The failure of federal loan limits to increase in parallel with the rising cost of college, along with the high percentage of students borrowing at or near the maximum, is cited as evidence that students cannot borrow as much as they need” (p.51). If students do not have access to enough financial aid, private loans are obtained as additional loan sources (p.51). Jensen (1981) explains that the negative relationship between aid and persistence in college might be the increasing amount of loans included in the aid award package (p.292). The lack of knowledge on college costs and loans have become burdensome. Burdman (2005) explains that for those who don’t borrow, it would be beneficial for them to have knowledge about federal student loans, which could help them finish college due to struggling with affordability, as well as those who struggle after graduation because of their large student loan debt (p.11).

Flint (1993) explains that a common reason why a student might not apply for college is due to cost or lack of the means to meet the cost (p.311). According to George-Jackson and Gast (2015), “a majority of undergraduate students and their parents said they removed some colleges from their selection process due to cost related reasons, struggled to manage personal funding sources, and worried about rising tuition costs” (p.203). McDonough and Calderone (2006) explains that a lack of information on college costs and a perceived lack, or uncertainty, of financial aid availability contributes to low enrollment of low-income and minority students (p.1705). McDonough and Calderone (2006) explains that a common trend among high school counselors

was identified from conducting interviews, which counselors pushed community colleges as the only affordable option to low-income and minority students.

According to McDonough and Calderone (2006), “school personnel’s expectations are largely influenced by their beliefs about race, ethnicity, and social class. These assumptions in turn affect how they interact with, support, and advise students and their families” (p.172). McDonough and Calderone (2006) explains that many counselors within the study assumed that trust funds mean college opportunity, where limited resources mean attending a community college. This assumption that many counselors have can mislead students to community colleges because of a lack of understanding of affordability of other college options (p.1713).

However, George-Jackson and Gast (2015) explains that high school counselors play an important role to help students become aware of financial aid, but counselor resources, financial knowledge, and guidance methods vary among schools (p.215). In addition, George-Jackson and Gast (2015) explains, “while many students and parents struggle to gain extensive financial awareness to help them navigate complicated financing options and rising college costs, low-income, Black, and Latino families in particular tend to have less exposure to college financing information sources and less confidence in the accuracy of their knowledge of college costs” (p.207). George-Jackson and Gast (2015) explains that a major theme is the information gap that continues among individuals who are underserved in higher education (p.226).

According to George-Jackson and Gast (2015) “the fact that many low-income, Black, and Latino students attend high schools that lack adequate counseling to prepare them financially for college exacerbates this gap” (p.226). Financial aid information must be part of the school and community culture to create opportunity (Rosa, 2006, p.1683). According to Kim (2004), “If one racial group takes advantage of financial aid to attend its choice of college as compared to other



racial groups, who cannot because they do not have enough information about the availability of financial aid, the procedure of applying for financial aid, or the value of different colleges, then we cannot say that financial aid provides equal educational opportunity in terms of college choice for all students regardless of race” (p.63). Financial aid is another obstacle low-income students must face and information about student aid must be provided effectively for these students to make the right decisions that will benefit them in the long run (Tierney & Venegas, 2009, p.382).

For example, Zarate and Pachon (2006) explains that a survey was conducted among Latino youth who attended college and did not attend college, which found that 75% that never attended college and 85% that did attend college reported that financial aid was a huge factor in their consideration for college (p.4). In addition, 98% of respondents felt that it is important to have a college education to be successful, but 38% felt the benefits of college were not worth it due to costs (Zarate & Pachon, 2006, p.4). Over 50% of respondents were not aware of financial aid eligibility. Many respondents thought they had to be a U.S. citizen and/or that their parents had to be U.S. citizens as well. Many respondents were not aware that foreign-born students who are permanent residents of the U.S. qualify for financial aid (Zarate & Pachon, 2006, p.5).

### **FAFSA Jargon and Complexity**

Studies have suggested that the Federal Student Aid Application (FAFSA) is complex and difficult to complete, which can deter students from completing the application. For example, Dynarski and Scott-Clayton (2013) explains that program design and delivery are important. Those who are recent high school graduates are least informed and equipped to figure out the financial aid process (p.81). The design and delivery setup are difficult for families to know if college can be affordable or not. Financial aid does matter, and the complexity of eligibility and application procedures can undermine aid effectiveness for students (Dynarski & Scott-Clayton, 2013, p.86).

In addition, LaManque (2009) and Bird and Castleman (2016) both found within their studies that college students need to complete a complicated application to receive financial aid, which explains the reason students do not complete the FAFSA and file late as indicated by respondents.

Bettinger et al. (2012) and Dynarski and Scott-Clayton (2013) completed a similar study between a control group and treatment group and found similar results based on financial aid counseling and application assistance intervention. Bettinger et al. (2012) explains that there were strong effects based on providing aid eligibility information and assistance with completing the FAFSA application (p.1236). The FAFSA treatment group increased financial aid applications, increased the receipt of need-based grant funds, increased persistence, and college attendance compared to the information only group and the no intervention group (Bettinger et al., 2012, p.1238). In addition, Taylor and Bicak (2020) found that students were unfamiliar with financial aid jargon. Students were unfamiliar with the difference between the subsidized and unsubsidized loans and terms such as FAFSA, work study, and merit based (Taylor & Bicak, 2020, p.17). Financial literacy education in financial aid application processes benefit students. Financial aid personnel alongside student affairs professionals and researchers should consolidate and simplify the language of financial aid (Taylor & Bicak, 2020, p.17).

Page et al. (2020) explains that the complexity of FAFSA filing is not the only issue, but income verification and satisfactory academic progress are as well, which are eligibility requirements. These eligibility requirements create barriers to college access for low-income students. Cochrane (2010) explains that schools should make it clear as possible on how a student can resolve any problems, such as avoid using technical terms and notify them of their eligibility before requesting additional documentation (p.14). Schudde and Scott-Clayton (2016) explains

that academic preparation and additional student support services could help improve financial aid outcomes (p.945).

### **Conclusion**

Financial literacy is very complex and difficult to comprehend for many students and families, especially for first-time low-income students, which many cannot understand the jargon and complex language used to understand financial aid applications, terms and conditions, and eligibility requirements. Students need to be provided information that is clear and concise and should have available resources when further assistance is needed to comprehend the complexity of financial aid applications. Research has shown that financial literacy does influence students to make informed decisions regarding college costs, student debt, and financial aid.

## **Chapter III: Methodology**

### **Design**

The best way to gather and interpret data for this research is to utilize a quantitative approach. Quantitative data is the appropriate method to explain financial literacy among BSC undergraduate students since careful numeric measures of observation are used to explain reality while being unbiased, which leads to more accurate findings. In addition, the researcher implemented a quantitative approach because the analysis of data is communicated through numbers and makes it easier to interpret the data. When using a quantitative approach, insights can be drawn from numerical data and can be highly effective to make important decisions. A cross sectional survey design is used in this study to collect data, which is quantitative.

A cross sectional survey design is where data is collected at one point in time in the present. The researcher decided to use a cross sectional design to measure the needs of educational services such as financial literacy education among BSC undergraduate students. The researcher used a

quantitative web-based survey using Qualtrics, which is site licensed and required to be used at BSC. Survey data helps form information as the researcher collects data based on measures from survey respondents. In addition, implementing a quantitative web-based survey requires less time commitment from participants and large volumes of data can be collected rapidly from a large population, which is cost-effective and time efficient. The goal is to analyze the survey data of BSC undergraduate student respondents regarding financial literacy and relate them to the findings of the literature.

### **Sampling**

The undergraduate student population at BSC enrolled for fall 2022 is used for this study. Approximately 5,464 undergraduate students are enrolled for fall 2022. However, the following students have been excluded from the study: students who have withdrawn from all their coursework for fall 2022, students here on national exchange, foreign exchange, or cross-registered, and students dually enrolled in high school at BSC.<sup>1</sup> The sampling frame of 5,354 BSC undergraduate students were obtained through Banner and their email addresses were extracted from Banner to notify them of the Financial Literacy survey. The entire undergraduate student population received a link to the survey because large n studies provide more accuracy when making inferences about the data and all members of the population are provided with an equal opportunity to participate. Therefore, the goal was to encourage as many students as possible to fill out the survey.

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<sup>1</sup> Students that have withdrawn or are here on national exchange, foreign exchange, cross registered, and dually enrolled in high school are not eligible for financial aid at BSC. National and foreign exchange students study away on exchange in the United States. Cross registered students are attending another SUNY college but are cross registered at BSC to earn credit that can be transferred back to the main SUNY college. High school students dually enrolled at BSC can earn credit for college level course work while still in high school.

Table 1 below reflects the percentages of students based on race/ethnicity from the BSC undergraduate student population and BSC undergraduate student respondents.<sup>2</sup> As Table 1 demonstrates, the sample is a good reflection of BSC's undergraduate student population.

*Table 1: BSC Undergraduate Population and BSC Undergraduate Respondent Percentages by Race/Ethnicity*

		BSC Undergraduate Population	BSC Undergraduate Respondents
Race/	White / Caucasian	47.2%	50.0%
Ethnicity	Asian	6.1%	5.8%
	Hispanic	11.9%	10.4%
	African-American	29.4%	25.7%
	Native-American	0.6%	0.2%
	Mixed race	4.1%	3.2%
	Undisclosed	0.1%	1.7%

Source: <https://suny.buffalostate.edu/facts>

Table 2 reflects the percentage of the undergraduate student population and undergraduate respondents based on gender. The data indicates that female respondents responded at a much higher rate than male respondents. While BSC did not report data on the gender categories non-binary/third gender, other, or prefer not to say, respondents reported 4.3% of non-binary/third gender, 0.4% of other, and 0.9% of prefer not to say.<sup>3</sup> The oversampling of female undergraduates should not present a problem because previous studies (see literature review, above) have not found significant differences among male and female students with respect to financial literacy.

<sup>2</sup> As responses came in from the survey, the researcher discovered a lower response rate from African American and Native American students as compared to the BSC undergraduate population. To generalize the sample more accurately to the population, respondents should be representative of the population. To address this matter of lower response rates among African American and Native American undergraduate students, the researcher contacted the director of the BSC Educational Opportunity Program and the BSC United Students Government. The reason for contacting these two departments is because they have access to reach African American and Native American students as well as students of other ethnic groups to make them aware of the Financial Literacy survey, which would increase the response rate.

<sup>3</sup> Recommendations will be discussed later for this study regarding BSC to include non-binary/third gender in their reporting of gender.

*Table 2: BSC Undergraduate Population and BSC Undergraduate Respondent Percentages by Gender*

		BSC Undergraduate Population	BSC Undergraduate Respondents
Gender	Male	43.5%	28.5%
	Female	56.4%	65.7%
	Non-binary/third gender	-	4.3%
	Other	-	0.4%
	I prefer not to say	-	0.9%

Source: <https://suny.buffalostate.edu/facts>

Finally, Table 3 reflects the percentages of the undergraduate student population and undergraduate respondents based on class level, which indicates that freshmen were less likely to complete the survey compared to the other four classes. There may be two possible reasons for the lower response rates of freshmen. First, anecdotally, freshmen have not acquired the habit of checking their BSC email. Second, perhaps as this is their first semester, freshmen are not as concerned about financial aid, including student loans and higher grades.

*Table 3: BSC Undergraduate Population and BSC Undergraduate Respondent Percentages by Class Level*

		BSC Undergraduate Population	BSC Undergraduate Respondents
Class Level	Freshmen	35.2%	20.1%
	Sophomores	18.2%	17.9%
	Juniors	23.3%	29.1%
	Seniors	25.8%	30.9%
	Other	-	1.9%

Source: <https://suny.buffalostate.edu/facts>

### **Data Collection Methods**

Before data collection can start, the researcher must obtain permission from appropriate personnel, which is part of the IRB process. The director of financial aid as well as the vice president of enrollment management granted permission to conduct a Financial Literacy survey at

BSC among undergraduate students. (See Appendix A.) The director of financial aid contacted 63 SUNY campuses to request any previously deployed Financial Literacy survey instruments. However, no SUNY campuses responded to this request. As a result, the researcher created and administered a 24-question survey through Qualtrics. The researcher constructed the survey using a combination of multiple choice, Likert scale<sup>4</sup>, and open-ended questions. The researcher created the Financial Literacy survey based on a Student Voice survey, created by Kaplan, in association with Inside Higher Ed and College Pulse with some modifications.

For example, the Student Voice survey asked the following question: “You may be following the news about the possibility of student loan debt being cancelled/forgiven by the federal government or specific lenders. How likely do you think it is that some or all the debt you incur in college will be cancelled/forgiven?” However, since the Kaplan survey was administered, the Biden administration announced a student debt forgiveness program. Consequently, the researcher updated the survey question to the following: “Since President Biden has moved to cancel between \$10,000 and \$20,000 in federal student loan debt, do you think you will qualify for debt forgiveness if you have taken out federal student loans prior to June 30, 2022?”

Additionally, the researcher added questions that pertained to financial aid that the Student Voice survey did not ask, such as the following:

- If you have federal student loans, do you know who your federal loan servicer is?
- If you have federal student loans and completed entrance counseling, did you find entrance counseling to be helpful about loans, delinquency and default, interest, and repayment options?

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<sup>4</sup> A Likert scale allows respondents to choose from a series of answers to rate their responses from positive to negative agreements based on the question or statement.

- If you have applied for financial aid, how difficult did you find the application process?
- If you receive financial aid, are you aware that if you do not meet satisfactory academic progress standards each semester that it can impact your financial aid?

Once the survey obtained IRB approval, (see Appendix B), the researcher launched the survey. However, before the Financial Literacy survey launched, a final testing phase was conducted among financial aid personnel to help improve any questions, format, and instructions within the email correspondence and the survey. First, the researcher sent a test email to several financial aid colleagues to review the email correspondence that would be sent to students. Second, the researcher asked financial aid personnel to test the survey link within the email correspondence to ensure it was operational. Third, the researcher invited financial aid colleagues to complete the survey. Fourth, the researcher analyzed the results in Qualtrics to ensure the survey was integrating properly with the Qualtrics data collection.

The Financial Literacy survey launched via email using the blind copy feature in Microsoft Outlook to 5,354 undergraduate students at BSC. The researcher set up a designated folder within Microsoft Outlook to ensure all email correspondences relating to the Financial Literacy survey enter that folder for organization and record keeping purposes. For the study, the researcher used her BSC work email address to notify BSC undergraduate students of the Financial Literacy survey instead of the Financial Aid Office's email address. One reason is to not interfere with normal day to day financial aid operations. A second reason is not to involve financial aid personnel in student inquiries about the Financial Literacy survey.

Once the email launched, the Financial Literacy survey remained open for three weeks and consisted of three phases. The first phase, consisted of the initial email correspondence that



contained the URL link to the Financial Literacy survey, which the researcher sent on Monday, September 26, 2022. The second phase, consisted of an email follow up that contained the URL to the Financial Literacy survey that the researcher sent on Monday, October 3, 2022, to ensure a high response rate. The third phase, consisted of an additional email follow-up that contained the URL to the Financial Literacy survey that the researcher sent on Tuesday, October 11, 2022, to generate more responses. The survey closed on October 17, 2022. (See Appendix C and Appendix D for the survey and the email correspondence, respectively.)

**Chapter IV: Results**

**Descriptive and Inferential Statistics**

Figures 1-3 summarize the demographic information of the survey respondents.

*Figure 1: Percentage of BSC Undergraduate Respondents by Race/Ethnicity*

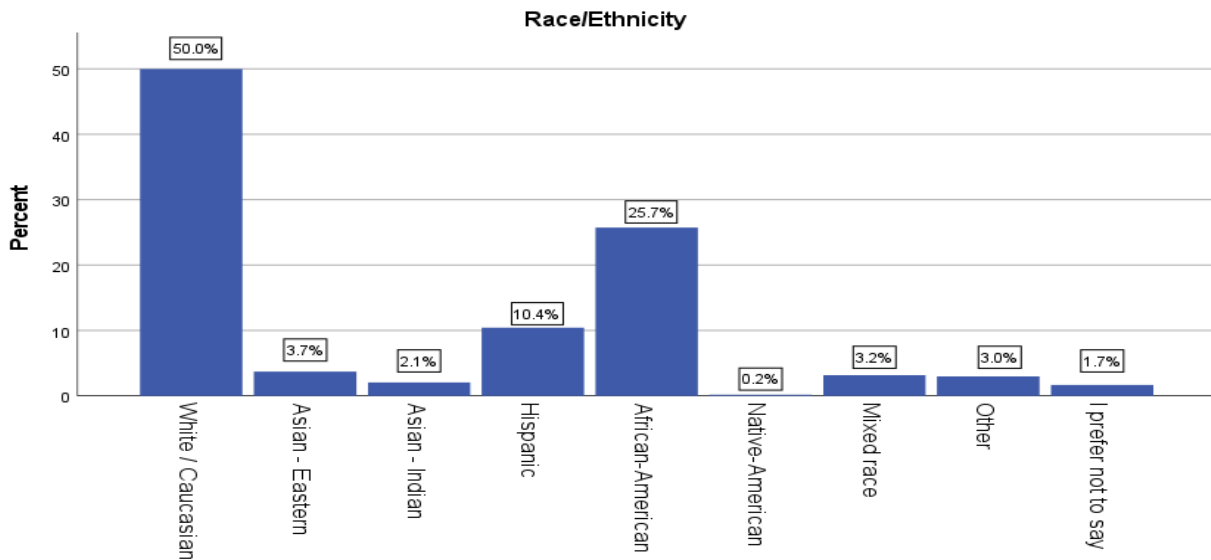


Figure 2: Percentage of BSC Undergraduate Respondents by Gender

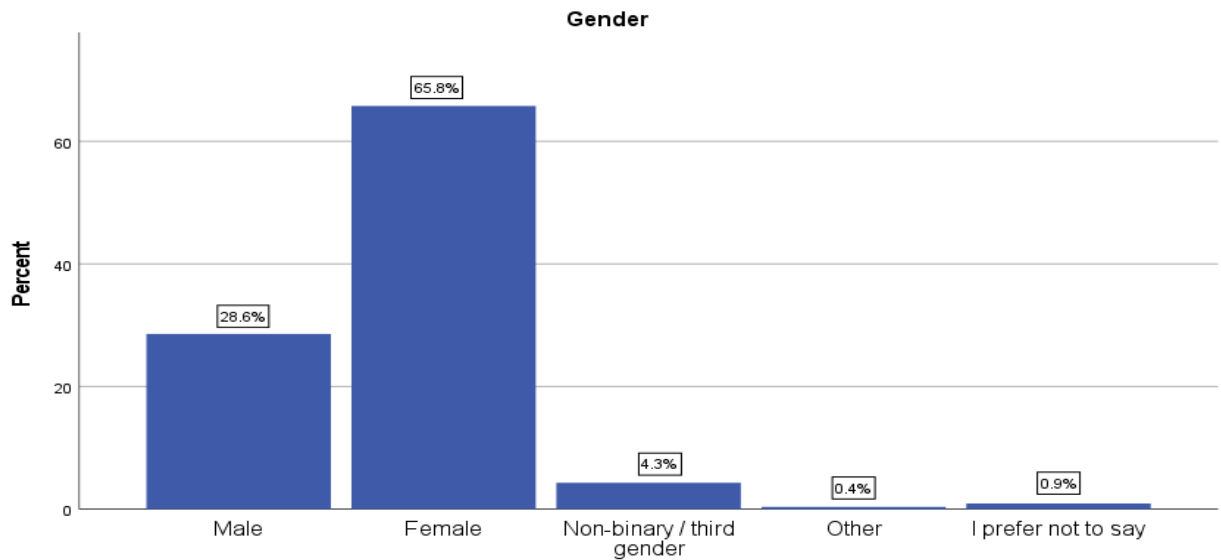
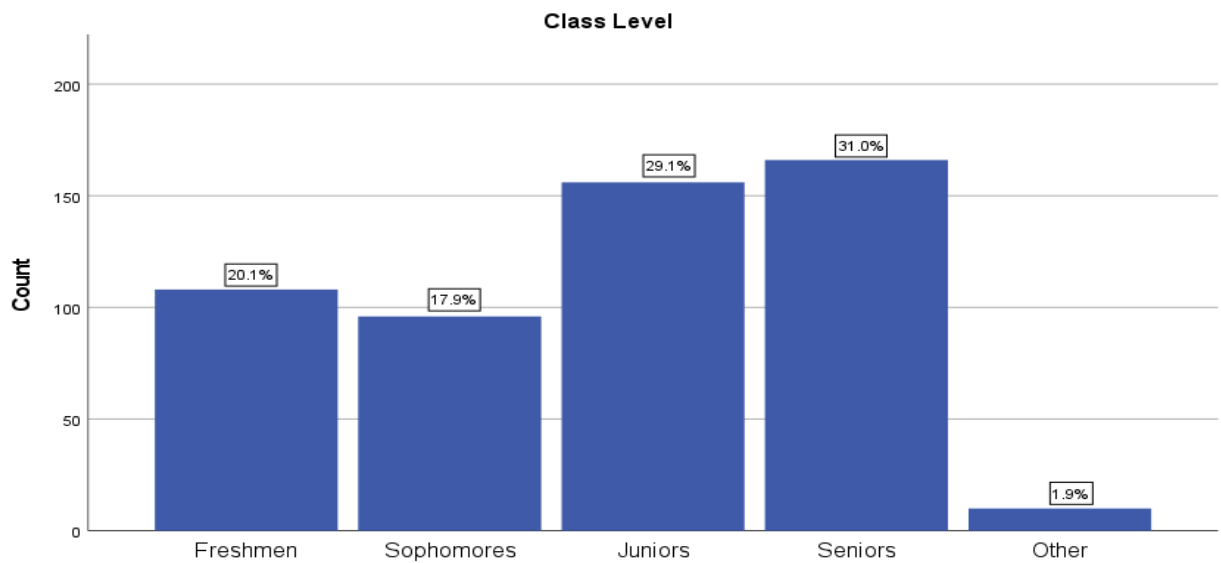


Figure 3: Percentage of BSC Undergraduate Respondents by Class Level



A crosstab was run in SPSS to analyze respondents by class level and were asked if they found entrance counseling to be helpful about loans, delinquency and default, interest, and repayment options. As illustrated in Table 4, 7.7% of freshmen, 3.6% of sophomores, 10.9% of

juniors, and 11.1% of seniors strongly disagree with this statement while 6.6% of freshmen, 1.2% of sophomores, 2.9% of juniors, and 1.4% of seniors strongly agree with this statement. In addition, 53.8% of freshmen, 65.1% of sophomores, 59.9% of juniors, and 66.7% of seniors neither agree nor disagree with this statement.

*Table 4: Helpfulness of Entrance Counseling about Loans, Delinquency and Default, Interest, and Repayment Options by Class Level*

		Class Level					Total
		Freshmen	Sophomores	Juniors	Seniors	Other	
Strongly disagree	Count	7	3	15	16	4	45
	% within Class Level	7.7%	3.6%	10.9%	11.1%	44.4%	9.7%
Somewhat disagree	Count	7	10	11	15	0	43
	% within Class Level	7.7%	12.0%	8.0%	10.4%	0.0%	9.3%
Neither agree nor disagree	Count	49	54	82	96	3	284
	% within Class Level	53.8%	65.1%	59.9%	66.7%	33.3%	61.2%
Somewhat agree	Count	22	15	25	15	2	79
	% within Class Level	24.2%	18.1%	18.2%	10.4%	22.2%	17.0%
Strongly agree	Count	6	1	4	2	0	13
	% within Class Level	6.6%	1.2%	2.9%	1.4%	0.0%	2.8%
Total	Count	91	83	137	144	9	464
	% within Class Level	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

A frequency was run in SPSS to analyze respondents by class level and were asked if they found the financial aid application process difficult. As illustrated in Table 5, 44.2% of freshmen, 37.2% of sophomores, 34.0% of juniors, and 36.8% of seniors find the application process to be somewhat difficult.

*Table 5: Difficulty of Financial Aid Application Process by Student Respondents*

		Class Level					Total
		Freshmen	Sophomores	Juniors	Seniors	Other	
Extremely difficult	Count	20	17	13	20	2	72

	% within Class Level	19.2%	18.1%	8.3%	12.3%	20.0%	13.7%
Somewhat difficult	Count	46	35	53	60	1	195
	% within Class Level	44.2%	37.2%	34.0%	36.8%	10.0%	37.0%
Not too difficult	Count	30	26	71	55	5	187
	% within Class Level	28.8%	27.7%	45.5%	33.7%	50.0%	35.5%
Not at all difficult	Count	5	11	15	19	0	50
	% within Class Level	4.8%	11.7%	9.6%	11.7%	0.0%	9.5%
I've never applied for financial aid	Count	3	5	4	9	2	23
	% within Class Level	2.9%	5.3%	2.6%	5.5%	20.0%	4.4%
Total	Count	104	94	156	163	10	527
	% within Class Level	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

A crosstab was run in SPSS to analyze respondents by class level and were asked if they would qualify for President Biden’s debt forgiveness if they have taken out federal student loans prior to June 30, 2022. As illustrated in Table 6, 61.9% of freshmen, 56.3% of sophomores, 42.6% of juniors, and 29.1% of seniors are unsure if they qualify for debt forgiveness.

*Table 6: Debt Forgiveness Eligibility by Class Level*

		Class Level					Total
		Freshmen	Sophomores	Juniors	Seniors	Other	
Yes, I am eligible for debt forgiveness up to \$10,000	Count	6	6	16	31	0	59
	% within Class Level	5.7%	6.3%	10.3%	18.8%	0.0%	11.1%
Yes, I am eligible for debt forgiveness up to \$20,000 because I am a Pell Grant recipient	Count	14	16	27	50	3	110
	% within Class Level	13.3%	16.7%	17.4%	30.3%	30.0%	20.7%
Unsure	Count	65	54	66	48	4	237

	% within Class Level	61.9%	56.3%	42.6%	29.1%	40.0%	44.6%
No, I do not qualify for debt forgiveness	Count	20	20	46	36	3	125
	% within Class Level	19.0%	20.8%	29.7%	21.8%	30.0%	23.5%
Total	Count	105	96	155	165	10	531
	% within Class Level	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

A crosstab was run in SPSS to analyze respondents by race/ethnicity and were asked if the overall college costs align with their pre-college expectations. As illustrated in Table 8, 66.7% of African American respondents, 53.7% of Hispanic respondents, and 46.6% of White/Caucasian reported overall college costs are more than what they expected. However, 28.8% of African American respondents, 42.6% of Hispanic respondents, and 47.7% of White/Caucasian respondents reported overall college costs are about what they expected.

Table 8: Expectations of Overall College Costs by Race/Ethnicity

		Race/Ethnicity		
		White / Caucasian	Hispanic	African- American
More than I expected	Count	124	29	88
	% within Race	46.6%	53.7%	66.7%
About what I expected	Count	127	23	38
	% within Race	47.7%	42.6%	28.8%
Less than I expected	Count	15	2	6
	% within Race	5.6%	3.7%	4.5%
Total	Count	266	54	132
	% within Race	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

A frequency was run in SPSS to analyze respondents and were asked if they know who their federal loan servicer is. As illustrated in Table 7, 35.7% responded they have federal student loans and are aware of their loan servicer. However, 13.5% of respondents indicated they

have federal student loans but do not know who their loan servicer is and 23.1% are unsure. In addition, 27.7% of class level respondents reported they do not have federal student loans.

*Table 7: Awareness of Federal Loan Servicer by Student Respondents*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes, I have federal student loans and I know who my loan servicer is	188	35.1	35.7	35.7
	No, I have federal student loans and I do not know who my loan servicer is	71	13.2	13.5	49.1
	Unsure	122	22.8	23.1	72.3
	I do not have federal student loans	146	27.2	27.7	100.0
	Total	527	98.3	100.0	
Missing	System	9	1.7		
	Total	536	100.0		

A frequency was run in SPSS to analyze respondents that were asked if they are aware of about how much student loan debt they will have after graduation. As illustrated in Table 9, 17.4% of student respondents are aware of their student loan debt and monthly payment amounts. However, 37.3% of student respondents are aware of their student loan debt but do not know their monthly payment amounts. In addition, 21.2% of student respondents are not aware of their student loan debt and monthly payment amounts.

*Table 9: Student Loan Debt and Monthly Payment Awareness by Student Respondents*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
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Valid	Yes, and I'm aware of approximately what my monthly payment would be	93	17.4	17.4	17.4
	Yes, but I'm not aware of how much my monthly payment would be	199	37.1	37.3	54.8
	I won't have student loan debt after graduation	128	23.9	24.0	78.8
	No	113	21.1	21.2	100.0
	Total	533	99.4	100.0	
Missing	System	3	.6		
Total		536	100.0		

A frequency was run in SPSS to analyze respondents that were asked the following: If Buffalo State College offered a program or class on financial literacy, would you enroll in it? According to Table 10, 52.8% of student respondents would like the option of a credit bearing financial literacy class.

*Table 10: Financial Literacy Class Offering by Student Respondents*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes, an optional for credit class	279	52.1	52.8	52.8
	Yes, an optional non-credit program	51	9.5	9.7	62.5
	Yes, a credit required class	117	21.8	22.2	84.7
	No	81	15.1	15.3	100.0
	Total	528	98.5	100.0	
Missing	System	8	1.5		
Total		536	100.0		

An independent samples t-test was run in SPSS to analyze respondents by gender with respect to taking a class on financial literacy. According to Table 11, no significant difference was found ( $t(495) = 0.611, p > .05$ ). The mean of males enrolling in a financial literacy program

or course (M = 2.05, sd = 1.19) was not significantly different from the mean of females enrolling in a financial literacy program or course (M = 1.98, sd =1.14).

*Table 11: Financial Literacy Program or Class Offering by Gender*

Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Male	152	2.05	1.198	.097
Female	345	1.98	1.149	.062

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances				Significance	
	F	Sig.	T	df	One-Sided p	Two-Sided p
Equal variances assumed	2.900	.089	.611	495	.271	.541
Equal variances not assumed			.601	278.073	.274	.548

A frequency was run in SPSS to analyze respondents that were asked if they are interested in increasing their financial knowledge. According to Table 12, 47.9% are interested in increasing their financial knowledge. In addition, 41.2% of student respondents are somewhat interested and only 4.9% are not interested.

*Table 12: Interest in Increasing Financial Knowledge by Student Respondents*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Not interested	26	4.9	4.9	4.9
	Somewhat interested	219	40.9	41.2	46.1
	Not sure	32	6.0	6.0	52.1
	Very interested	255	47.6	47.9	100.0



Total	532	99.3	100.0
Missing System	4	.7	
Total	536	100.0	

A one-way ANOVA was run in SPSS to analyze respondents by class level and were asked if they are interested in increasing their financial knowledge. According to Table 13, no significant difference is found ( $F(4,527) = 1.51, p > .05$ ).

*Table 13: Interest in Increasing Financial Knowledge by Class Level*

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	6.546	4	1.637	1.511	.198
Within Groups	570.973	527	1.083		
Total	577.519	531			

A frequency was run in SPSS to analyze respondents that were asked what type of support they would like to see, or see more of, from BSC to help improve their financial wellness. According to Table 14, 81.0% of student respondents want to see services to help students navigate their personal finances. In addition, 74.0% of student respondents want to see more emergency aid programs and funds, 59.0% of student respondents want to see workshops or events to teach students about personal finances, and 70.1% of student respondents want to see awareness/education on personal finance now and post-graduation.

*Table 14: Support Services to Help Improve Financial Wellness by Student Respondents*

	Responses		Percent of Cases
	N	Percent	
Services to help students navigate their personal finances	417	27.9%	81.0%
More emergency aid programs/funds	381	25.5%	74.0%

Workshops or other events teaching students about personal finance	304	20.4%	59.0%
Awareness/education on personal finance now and post-graduation	361	24.2%	70.1%
Other	30	2.0%	5.8%
Total	1493	100.0%	289.9%

A frequency was run in SPSS to analyze respondents that were asked what tools or resources they have used if they have applied for financial aid. According to Table 15, 59.5% of student respondents seek advice from family and friends, 43.7% of student respondents use government online tools, 31.6% of student respondents used resources provided by the financial aid office, and 14.8% of student respondents had one-on-one meetings with a financial aid office administrator.

*Table 15: Financial Aid Resources Used by Student Respondents*

	Responses		Percent of Cases
	N	Percent	
Advice from family and friends	301	34.1%	59.5%
The government's online tools	221	25.1%	43.7%
Information the financial aid office makes available to students (online tools, brochures, etc.)	160	18.1%	31.6%
A one-on-one meeting with a financial aid office administrator	75	8.5%	14.8%
I didn't use any tools or resources	55	6.2%	10.9%
NASFAA's online tools	28	3.2%	5.5%

Online tools from nonprofits or news organizations	10	1.1%	2.0%
Third-party financial aid advisor	32	3.6%	6.3%
Total	882	100.0%	174.3%

A frequency was run in SPSS to analyze respondents that were asked considering what they know about money and finances, where did they learn this information. Illustrated in Table 16, 66.4% of student respondents learn money and finances from a parent or guardian and 56.1% of student respondents learn money and finances from personal research.

*Table 16: Money and Finances Learned by Student Respondents*

	Responses		Percent of Cases
	N	Percent	
A parent or guardian	351	31.6%	66.4%
Personal research	297	26.7%	56.1%
A family member (other than parent or guardian)	136	12.2%	25.7%
A high school class	122	11.0%	23.1%
A friend	91	8.2%	17.2%
A high school counselor	48	4.3%	9.1%
A for-credit course through your college	25	2.2%	4.7%
A not-for-credit program through your college	6	0.5%	1.1%
Other	36	3.2%	6.8%
Total	1112	100.0%	210.2%

A frequency was run in SPSS to analyze respondents that were asked to select all the loans or debt they currently have. As illustrated in Table 17, 72.3% of student respondents selected they have student loan debt and 34.5% student respondents stated they have credit card debt.

*Table 17: Loans or Debts by Student Respondents*

	Responses		Percent of Cases
	N	Percent	
Student loans	340	40.0%	72.3%
Credit card	162	19.1%	34.5%
Car loan	116	13.7%	24.7%
Personal loans	48	5.7%	10.2%
Debt to college (past due balance)	77	9.1%	16.4%
Medical debt	25	2.9%	5.3%
Home loan (mortgage)	30	3.5%	6.4%
Other	51	6.0%	10.9%
Total	849	100.0%	180.6%

A frequency was run in SPSS to analyze respondents that were asked to rate their level of financial knowledge. As illustrated in Table 18, 52.6% of student respondents rate their level of financial knowledge as average.

*Table 18: Level of Financial Knowledge by Student Respondents*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Excellent	27	5.0	5.1	5.1
	Good	136	25.4	25.8	30.9
	Average	277	51.7	52.6	83.5
	Poor	87	16.2	16.5	100.0
	Total	527	98.3	100.0	
Missing	System	9	1.7		
Total		536	100.0		

**Chapter V: Discussion**

This study reports several findings. Previous studies have found that entrance counseling should have a long-lasting impact when it comes to making investment decisions, but it fails to teach new loan borrowers crucial lessons. First-time federal student loan borrowers are required

to complete entrance counseling to ensure they understand the responsibilities of taking out a loan. The findings of the survey results are consistent with the literature as BSC students feel entrance counseling has not helped them become informed borrowers. 19.8% of student respondents agree that entrance counseling was helpful and 19.0% of student respondents disagree.<sup>5</sup> However, 61.2% of student respondents neither agree nor disagree if entrance counseling was informative about loans, delinquency and default, interest, and repayment options. This indicates the majority of student respondents do not have an opinion whether entrance counseling is informative.

In addition, previous studies have found that borrowers cannot recall terms of repayment for their loans. To avoid delinquency and default, borrowers must understand their rights and responsibilities, be aware of the repayment tools available to them, and be aware of their loan servicer to stay informed about their student loans. The findings of the survey results are consistent with the literature. 35.7% of student respondents are aware of their loan servicer while 36.6% of student respondents are unaware of their loan servicer. Additionally, 17.4% of student respondents are aware of their student loan debt and monthly payment amounts, 37.3% of student respondents are aware of their student loan debt but do not know their monthly payment amounts, and 21.2% of student respondents are not aware of their student loan debt and monthly payment amounts. In addition, 44.6% of student respondents are unaware if they qualify for President Biden's debt forgiveness.

Also, previous studies found that students who are new to the application process are uninformed and unprepared to figure out the financial aid process. In addition, previous studies

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<sup>5</sup> Strongly disagree and somewhat disagree were combined into disagree and strongly agree and somewhat agree were combined into agree.

found that the design and delivery setups are inefficient for teaching families about the affordability of college. This is an issue because the complexity of eligibility and application procedures can undermine aid effectiveness for students and can deter students from proceeding with the necessary applications needed to determine their financial aid. The findings of the survey are consistent with the literature. 63.4% of freshmen, 55.3% of sophomores, 42.3% of juniors, and 49.1% of seniors find the application to be difficult while 33.6% of freshmen, 39.4% of sophomores, 55.1% of juniors, and 45.4% of seniors find the application process not difficult.<sup>6</sup>

In addition, previous studies found that the information gap regarding college costs and financing options continues among higher education's underserved populations. The survey results are consistent with the literature. 66.7 % of African American respondents, 53.7% of Hispanic respondents, and 46.6% of White/Caucasian respondents reported overall college costs are more than what they expected. However, 28.8% of African American respondents, 42.6% of Hispanic respondents, and 47.7% of White/Caucasian respondents reported overall college costs are about what they expected. Additionally, previous studies mention that many students and parents struggle to gain extensive financial awareness to help them navigate complicated financing options and college costs. The survey findings are consistent with the literature. 59.5% of student respondents seek advice from family and friends about financial aid while 14.8% of student respondents had one-on-one meetings with a financial aid office administrator. The majority of students are obtaining financial aid information from family and friends. Surprisingly, many students are not seeking out the available financial aid professionals to assist them, which helps explain the information gap among BSC students.

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<sup>6</sup> Extremely difficult and somewhat difficult were combined into difficult and not too difficult and not at all difficult were combined into not difficult.

Lastly, previous studies have found that many borrowers are inexperienced with regards to financial aid, personal finance, and higher education and this appears to be the case with BSC students as well. Additionally, previous studies mention that financial literacy education benefits students to assist them in making better financial choices and student support services could help improve financial aid outcomes. The results of the survey are consistent with literature because the study found that 52.6% of student respondents rate their level of financial knowledge as average. 47.9% are interested in increasing their financial knowledge and 52.8% of student respondents would like the option of a credit bearing financial literacy class. Additionally, 81.0% of student respondents want to see services to help students navigate their personal finances.

## **Chapter VI: Conclusion, Recommendations, Limitations, Implications and Future Research**

### **Conclusion**

Financial literacy can be complex and difficult for many college students to comprehend. Many students cannot understand the complex financial jargon which can prevent them from making responsible financial decisions. A major financial decision for young adults is how to pay for college. However, as college costs continue to increase, students struggle to afford a college education. The research suggests that financial literacy can help students make informed decisions regarding college costs, student debt, and financial aid. In addition, the findings of this study suggests that undergraduate students both want to increase their financial knowledge and receive campus support to improve financial awareness.

### **Recommendations**

My first recommendation is to share the results of this study with the Economics and Finance Department chair at BSC and discuss an optional financial literacy course to offer in the

New General Education Program 2023 to attract more students. The Economics and Finance Department offers FIN 110: Personal Finance. The course teaches the basics of personal and household finance, such as saving, debt reduction, home and automobile financing, retirement planning, investment, and insurance.

My second recommendation is to create a financial literacy task force comprised of stakeholders at BSC. The task force can be used to develop a vision that links financial literacy education to student success and retention. The task force can share their experiences and viewpoints to help implement a financial literacy program model based on the needs of the student population at BSC and determine the best fit based on the resources available, such as money, time, staffing, and space. In addition, the task force should research other colleges who have implemented a financial literacy program at their institutions.

My third recommendation is that BSC should provide students with the option to identify as non-binary when asked to specify their gender on its admissions application. 4.3% of survey respondents identified as non-binary/third gender for this study. However, BSC does not provide an option for non-binary on its application. According to Brown (2022), 5.1% of young adults, ages 18-29, identify as being transgender or non-binary in the United States. In addition, Governor Kathy Hochul announced that all 64 SUNY campuses are to implement the Gender X policy by the end of 2022 (New York State, 2022). The Gender X policy allows students the option to select non-binary "X" when asked to provide their gender by the college (New York State, 2022). Currently, SUNY and the University at Buffalo provide gender and pronoun options on their applications for students to select when applying. BSC will need to implement policy changes regarding the use of gender identities to ensure the diversity and needs of students are being met following the Gender X policy.



**Limitations of Study**

This study has three limitations. First, while at least 10 percent of the undergraduate population at BSC completed the survey, the results would be stronger, and perhaps more generalizable across not only BSC and other SUNY comprehensive colleges, but other campuses with similar profiles to BSC, if more students participated in the survey. Second, there is an unequal representation to the demographics of student respondents and the demographics of the student population at BSC. The African American undergraduate population at BSC is 29.4%, but only 25.7% responded to the survey. The Native American undergraduate population at BSC is 0.6%, but only 0.2% responded to the survey. Lastly, the largest discrepancy, however, is that the freshman population at BSC is 35.2%, but only 20.1% responded to the survey. Nevertheless, a 10 percent response rate and a good sampling of all class levels suggests that these results are reliable and that they can be used for decision-making not just at BSC, but at SUNY's other comprehensive colleges.

**Implications and Future Research**

The results show that there is a need for financial literacy education at BSC and innovative ways are needed to create learning that not only sparks interest, but also benefits students by learning the knowledge and skills needed to manage finances effectively. If further research is conducted by repeating this study, the researcher suggests conducting focus groups among BSC undergraduates to obtain a richer interpretation of the quantitative data. For example, based on the questions asked on the survey, it would have been beneficial to ask follow-up questions regarding their choice of selection. In addition, having more options for trying to increase the response rate (e.g. prize drawings) would have been beneficial to try and increase the number of participants to see if the results would have changed. However, IRB

advised against offering an incentive to fill out the survey due to concerns about undermining confidentiality and anonymity.

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### **Declaration of Interest Statement**

I have no potential conflict of interest.

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## Appendix A

Dear Dr. Buonanno,

Below please find Toni Martinucci's official approval to proceed with her fall 2022 educational plans referenced below.

Please be advised that I will contact the other 63 SUNY campuses today and request a copy of a previously deployed Financial Literacy survey/instrument. I will notify Toni directly regarding my findings.

If you require any additional information, please let me know.

Have a great day.

Sincerely,

*Connie F. Cooke*

Director, Financial Aid  
SUNY Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Professional Service  
President's Award for Excellence in Service to the College  
Buffalo State College  
1300 Elmwood Avenue, Moot Hall 230  
Buffalo, New York 14222  
(716) 878-4902  
[cookecf@buffalostate.edu](mailto:cookecf@buffalostate.edu)

## Appendix B

### Notification of Approval

**To:** Toni Martinucci  
**Link:** [STUDY00003729](#)  
**P.I.:** [Toni Martinucci](#)  
**Title:** Financial Literacy  
**Description:** This submission has been approved. You can access the correspondence letter using the following link:  
[Martinucci 3729.pdf\(0.01\)](#)  
To review additional details, click the link above to access the project workspace.

#### Confidentiality Notice

The information contained in and/or attached to this email message may be confidential. If you are not the intended or authorized recipient, you are hereby notified that any unauthorized distribution, dissemination, or copying of this transmission is prohibited. If you have received this transmission in error, please contact the sender immediately and destroy all copies.



## Appendix C

### Financial Literacy Survey

To participate in this research is completely voluntary. You must be at least 18 years of age to participate. The survey should take from 5-9 minutes. If you choose not to participate in this research, please disregard this email. You may discontinue participation from the survey without penalty at any time by closing your web browser. If you choose to participate, please try to complete every question. However, if you feel uncomfortable answering a question or do not want to answer the question, you may skip it. The risk of the research is minimal as it is not greater than those experienced in everyday life. The survey is anonymous as your name or any identifying information of who you are will not be asked to have any link between you and your answers. All data stored electronically will be stored on a secure network server, or on portable devices, such as a laptop with encryption (special software) and password protection. All data will be retained for at least three years in compliance with federal regulations. Your research results, minus any identifying information, may be used in future research studies examining similar topics. If you have any questions, please contact Toni Martinucci directly at [martinta@buffalostate.edu](mailto:martinta@buffalostate.edu). If you are unable to contact the researcher or have general questions about your rights as a participant, please contact Gina Game, IRB Administrator, Sponsored Programs Office/SUNY Buffalo State at [gameg@buffalostate.edu](mailto:gameg@buffalostate.edu).

---

What is your ethnic background?

- White / Caucasian
  - Asian - Eastern
  - Asian - Indian
  - Hispanic
  - African-American
  - Native-American
  - Mixed race
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_
  - I prefer not to say
-

How would you describe your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Non-binary / third gender
- Other \_\_\_\_\_
- I prefer not to say
- 

What is your grade level?

- Freshman
- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior
- Other \_\_\_\_\_
- 

What department does your major fall under?

▼ Africana Studies ... Other

---

Select all of the following loans or debts you currently have:

- Student loans
  - Credit card debt
  - Car loan
  - Personal loans
  - Debt to college (past due balance)
  - Medical debt
  - Home loan (mortgage)
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_
- 

Are you aware of about how much student loan debt you will likely have after graduation?

- Yes, and I'm aware of approximately what my monthly payment would be
  - Yes, but I'm not aware of how much my monthly payment would be
  - I won't have student loan debt after graduation
  - No
-

Since President Biden has moved to cancel between \$10,000 and \$20,000 in federal student loan debt, do you think you will qualify for debt forgiveness if you have taken out federal student loans prior to June 30, 2022?

- Yes, I am eligible for debt forgiveness up to \$10,000
  - Yes, I am eligible for debt forgiveness up to \$20,000 because I am a Pell Grant recipient
  - Unsure
  - No, I do not qualify for debt forgiveness
- 

If you have federal student loans, do you know who your federal loan servicer is?

- Yes, I have federal student loans and I know who my loan servicer is
  - No, I have federal student loans and I do not know who my loan servicer is
  - Unsure
  - I do not have federal student loans
-

If you have federal student loans and completed entrance counseling, did you find entrance counseling to be helpful about loans, delinquency and default, interest, and repayment options?

- Strongly disagree
  - Somewhat disagree
  - Neither agree nor disagree
  - Somewhat agree
  - Strongly agree
- 

Do you currently have a job?

- Yes, a full-time job (at least 30 hours per week)
  - Yes, a part-time job (under 30 hours per week)
  - Yes, multiple part-time jobs (total of at least 30 hours per week)
  - Yes, multiple part-time jobs (total of under 30 hours per week)
  - No, I do not have a job
-

Considering what you know about money and finances, where did you learn this information?  
Check all that apply.

- A parent or guardian
  - Personal research
  - A family member (other than parent or guardian)
  - A high school class
  - A friend
  - A high school counselor
  - A for-credit course through your college
  - A not-for-credit program through your college
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_
- 

How interested are you in increasing your financial knowledge?

- Not interested
  - Somewhat interested
  - Not sure
  - Very interested
-

If Buffalo State College offered a program or class on financial literacy, would you enroll in it?

- Yes, an optional for credit class
  - Yes, an optional non-credit program
  - Yes, a credit required class
  - No
- 

How would you rate your level of financial knowledge?

- Excellent
  - Good
  - Average
  - Poor
-

Have you ever talked about any of the following with your friends? Check all that apply.

- The cost of college
  - Student loans
  - Credit cards
  - Budgeting
  - Investing in the stock market
  - Saving for big purchases (buying a house, travel, wedding, etc.)
  - Saving for emergencies
  - Saving for retirement
  - None of the above
-



What types of accounts or investments do you currently have? Check all that apply.

- Checking account
  - Savings accounts
  - Stock market investments
  - Cryptocurrency investments
  - IRA or other retirement savings
  - 401K
  - None of the above
- 

If you have applied for financial aid, how difficult did you find the application process?

- Extremely difficult
  - Somewhat difficult
  - Not too difficult
  - Not at all difficult
  - I've never applied for financial aid
-

If you have applied for financial aid, what tools or resources have you used? Check all that apply.

- Advice from family and friends
  - The government's online tools
  - Information the financial aid office makes available to students (online tools, brochures, etc.)
  - A one-on-one meeting with a financial aid office administrator
  - I didn't use any tools or resources
  - NASFAA's online tools
  - Online tools from nonprofits or news organizations
  - Third-party financial aid advisor
-

Considering how much it costs for you to attend college (including tuition, fees, course materials, living expenses, etc.), which of the following reflects how the costs align with your pre-college expectations?

	More than I expected	About what I expected	Less than I expected
Tuition	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Course materials	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Housing and living expenses	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Fees	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Total college costs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

---

If you receive financial aid, are you aware that if you do not meet satisfactory academic progress standards each semester that it can impact your financial aid?

- Yes
  - Unsure
  - No
  - I do not apply for financial aid
-

What advice would you give an incoming college student about money and finances that you wish someone had told you?

---

Many students have struggled financially during the pandemic. How true or untrue is the following statement for you: Because of COVID, I was almost unable to attend college or remain in college.

- Very true
  - Somewhat true
  - Somewhat untrue
  - Very untrue
- 

If you were to experience a financial setback, such as a large car repair bill or loss of employment, how worried would you be about your ability to keep up with your bills enough to avoid dropping out of college?

- Very worried
  - Somewhat worried
  - Not too worried
  - Not at all worried
-

What type of support would you like to see, or see more of, from your institution to help improve your financial wellness? Check all that apply.

- Services to help students navigate their personal finances
- More emergency aid programs/funds
- Workshops or other events teaching students about personal finance
- Awareness/education on personal finance now and post-graduation
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

End of Survey

Thank you for taking this survey. A report with the results will be available in late December 2022. Please kindly send your email to Toni Martinucci <<Martinta@buffalostate.edu>> if you would like a pdf version of this report emailed to you.

## Appendix D

Hello,

My name is Toni Martinucci, and I am inviting undergraduate students to take a Financial Literacy Survey. This survey is part of my master's project, and the purpose of this research is to assist students with their financial needs. I was once an undergraduate student, and as a professional within the Financial Aid Office and as a graduate student, I understand the importance of having the knowledge and skills to manage financial resources efficiently. I am asking if you would please complete the survey to assist fellow Bengals. However, your decision to participate in the survey is completely voluntary. In addition, you must be at least 18 years of age to participate. Your responses will be confidential and anonymous.

I appreciate your willingness and time to participate.

If you are interested in completing this survey, please click on the following link below:

[https://buffalostate.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_bIRZEBeiuEHpYbQ](https://buffalostate.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_bIRZEBeiuEHpYbQ)

Thank you,

Toni Martinucci  
Financial Aid Assistant, Financial Aid Office  
Buffalo State College  
1300 Elmwood Avenue, Moot Hall 230  
Buffalo, NY 14222  
(716) 878-3403  
[martinta@buffalostate.edu](mailto:martinta@buffalostate.edu)

Hello,

Last week, you may have received an email about participating in a Financial Literacy Survey. If you have responded to the survey, I appreciate your participation. If you have not responded, please reconsider as your input is important for this research. Having the knowledge and skills to manage financial resources is important and this research is to assist students with their financial needs. However, your decision to participate in the survey is completely voluntary. In addition, you must be at least 18 years of age to participate. Your responses will be confidential and anonymous.

I appreciate your willingness and time to participate.

If you are interested in completing this survey, please click on the following link below:

[https://buffalostate.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_bIRZEBeiuEHpYbQ](https://buffalostate.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_bIRZEBeiuEHpYbQ)

Thank you,

Toni Martinucci  
Financial Aid Assistant, Financial Aid Office  
Buffalo State College  
[1300 Elmwood Avenue, Moot Hall 230](https://buffalostate.edu/1300-Elmwood-Avenue-Moot-Hall-230)  
[Buffalo, NY 14222](https://buffalostate.edu/Buffalo-NY-14222)  
(716) 878-3403  
[martinta@buffalostate.edu](mailto:martinta@buffalostate.edu)

Hello,

For the past two weeks, you may have received an email about participating in a Financial Literacy Survey. If you have responded to the survey, thank you very much for your participation. Your input matters to bring about change. If you have not responded, please reconsider as your input is important for this research. Having the knowledge and skills to manage financial resources is important and this research is to assist students with their financial needs. However, your decision to participate in the survey is completely voluntary. In addition, you must be at least 18 years of age to participate. Your responses will be confidential and anonymous.

I appreciate your willingness and time to participate.

If you are interested in completing this survey, please click on the following link below:

[https://buffalostate.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_bIRZEBeiuEHpYbQ](https://buffalostate.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_bIRZEBeiuEHpYbQ)

Thank you,

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