



I'm First:  
A Phenomenological  
Analysis of the University  
of North Carolina's  
"Carolina Firsts" Interviews

Presented by Clara Martinez



# Description

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- First-generation students at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
  - Interviews and transcripts accessed through university website
- “Carolina Firsts”
  - Recruitment material
  - Students, staff, and faculty
  - 6 interview videos and transcripts

# Purpose of the Study

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- Gain an understanding of lived experiences among University of North Carolina first-generation students, staff, and faculty
- Identify and analyze common themes in “Carolina Firsts” interviews
- Draw conclusions and implications for future research

# Research Question

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- Do common themes emerge in “Carolina Firsts” interviews?

# Methodology

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- Phenomenology
  - Allows interviewees to share their stories in their own words
- Three-step process
  - 1) Collecting the descriptions of firsthand lived experiences
  - 2) Reviewing the descriptions in order to disclose essential themes
  - 3) Interpreting and analyzing the themes

# Analysis

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- Eight themes emerge in the personal stories of the students, faculty, and staff members:
  - 1) The Dream Comes True
  - 2) Facing the Unknown
  - 3) Reaching for the Degree
  - 4) Beating the Odds
  - 5) A Challenging First Semester
  - 6) It Gets Easier
  - 7) The Issue of Pride
  - 8) Carolina Keeps its Promise

# Analysis (cont.): Facing the Unknown

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Courtesy of [Undergraduate Retention @ UNC-Chapel Hill](#)

“The first day I was here . . . I was nervous but the excitement completely overruled that. I was ready to just get to know people, get to know my professor.”

## Analysis (cont.): Reaching for the Degree

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Courtesy of [Undergraduate Retention @ UNC-Chapel Hill](#)

“There’s always that goal that I’ve had of being the first person to finish college in my family. One day it’ll all be worth it, it’s trying and it’s hard but there’s a goal, and just trying to reach it.”



## Analysis (cont.): It Gets Easier

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Courtesy of [Undergraduate Retention @ UNC-Chapel Hill](#)

“Never give up . . . even when it’s finals even when its three in the morning and you still haven’t started studying. . . Just keep going because it really does get a little bit easier as you go through.”

# Analysis (cont.): The Issue of Pride

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Courtesy of [Undergraduate Retention @ UNC-Chapel Hill](#)

“You almost develop this feeling that I don’t need anybody’s help, I can handle it myself. Sometimes that’s an issue of pride and I think a lot of students have this sense of pride.”

# Conclusions and Implications

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- Findings are bound to the context of this study
- Identify valuable themes and areas of consideration for further exploration
- Future research:
  - Conducting a similar project with first-generation Linfield students
- Do first-generation students have the resources necessary to succeed in institutions of higher learning?

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