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**Camille Z. Charles, Mary J. Fischer, Margarita A. Mooney & Douglas S. Massey:
Taming the River**

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1 Entering the Current

A contentious debate has raged over race-conscious admissions policies at selective U.S. colleges and universities since the end of the civil rights era. After decades of exclusion, the nation's elite colleges and universities, beginning in the 1970s, undertook a series of "affirmative actions" designed to ensure the inclusion of formerly underrepresented minorities within bastions of academic privilege. Overnight, college admissions officials sought to transform prestigious campuses from citadels of whiteness into diverse reflections of an increasingly multiracial society. Owing to their historical exclusion from selective institutions of higher education, minority group members generally lacked the family connections that would entitle them to special consideration as "legacy" students. At the same time, owing to the ongoing segregation and stratification of American education, Latinos and African Americans often lacked the academic preparation necessary to succeed in a very competitive admissions process. Paradoxically they also lacked athletic experience, not in football or basketball, but in elite sports such as swimming, tennis, golf, lacrosse, squash, fencing, and water polo that together account for a large share of athletic recruitments at selective institutions.

Inevitably, therefore, efforts by college administrators to incorporate underrepresented minorities somehow had to take race and ethnicity into account, quickly leading to charges of "reverse racism" and "affirmative discrimination" (see Lokos 1971; Glazer 1976). Over the ensuing decades the fight over race-sensitive admissions was enjoined on a variety of fronts—political, legal, administrative, and academic. As with many

contentious public issues, a salient feature of the debate on affirmative action was a lack of reliable information about its implementation and effects. To remedy this situation, William G. Bowen and Derek Bok, in the mid-1990s launched the College and Beyond Survey, which surveyed the 1979 and 1989 cohorts of freshmen from a set of selective colleges and universities, seeking to learn about their college experiences and subsequent achievements.

These data, summarized in *The Shape of the River* (1998), documented the positive consequences of affirmative action for minority students, their communities, and for American society generally in the years following the students' college graduation. The authors argued that instead of abandoning the social experiment, Americans should seek to know more about "the shape of the river" (borrowing a phrase from Mark Twain) and should consider the multiple "downstream" benefits to society as minority students' lives unfolded over many years, weighing these against whatever short-term costs might be incurred by taking race and ethnicity into account during college admissions.

As is often the case with social science research, *The Shape of the River* raised as many questions as it answered, for it also uncovered significant differentials between racial and ethnic groups in their academic achievement during college. Among those admitted to selective institutions in the 1989 cohort, for example, 96% of Asians ultimately graduated, compared with 94% of whites, 90% of Latinos, but just 79% of African Americans. The groups also evinced substantial gaps in grade point average and time taken to graduate. More distressingly, these intergroup differentials persisted after controlling for the usual background variables, such as academic ability (SAT scores) and socioeconomic status (parental education and income).

Sorting out which factors contributed to academic success at selective institutions was impossible using the *College and Beyond Survey*, given that it interviewed students long after their college years had ended. In order to examine the determinants of academic achievement directly, a new prospective study known as the National Longitudinal Survey of Freshmen (NLSF) was launched. Large, representative samples of white, Asian, Latino, and black freshmen entering twenty-eight selective colleges and universities in the fall of 1999 were surveyed and reinterviewed in 2000, 2001, 2002, and 2003, essentially following the cohort of freshmen entering

Bowen and Bok's sample of schools as they became sophomores, juniors, and, ultimately for most, graduating seniors.

The baseline survey—a personal interview lasting up to two hours—gathered detailed information about students' lives up to the point of their arrival on campus and compiled comprehensive data on their attitudes, expectations, and values. The first book analyzing these data sought to document background differences between groups and to determine their effects on academic achievement during the very first term of college. Continuing Bowen and Bok's metaphor, Massey et al. (2003) called their book *The Source of the River*, for it documented individual and group characteristics with respect to family, neighborhood, school, and peer settings—that is, the social origins or “source” of the “river” of students entering elite schools during 1999. After describing intergroup differences along a variety of social and economic dimensions, the authors estimated statistical models to determine their effect on initial academic performance during the first term in college.

The current volume picks up where *The Source of the River* left off. Rather than dwelling on where the students came from, we build on this knowledge to move forward and examine the social and academic experiences of students during the first two years of college. Recent research suggests that most of the improvements in substantive knowledge and academic skill that take place in college transpire in the first two years (Osterlind 1996, 1997), especially in math and science (Flowers et al. 2001). Choices made as freshmen and sophomores—about which courses to take, which majors to select, which professors to seek out, and how much time to devote to academic pursuits—thus have strong effects in constraining or enhancing later academic possibilities (Pascarella and Terenzini 2005).

In a very real way, therefore, the first two years of college constitute the foundation upon which future academic and intellectual achievements will ultimately be built. Continuing the river metaphor begun by Bowen and Bok (1998), we now turn to consider the experiences of students as they wade into the crosscutting currents of college life and begin the long process of *taming the river* of higher education. Before examining the nature of these crosscurrents and the degree to which students are successful in taming them, however, we recap what we have learned—substantively and theoretically—about student origins and their influence on academic achievement from *The Source of the River*.

Substantive Lessons from *The Source*

The NLSF baseline survey offered the first in-depth look at the characteristics not only of blacks, Latinos, and Asians entering America's prestigious institutions of higher education but also of European-origin whites. The process of admission to elite institutions of higher education has never been strictly "meritocratic" and certainly not "scientific" in any meaningful sense of the word. Gaining admission to an elite school has always depended on a complicated alchemy that blends academic qualifications, athletic abilities, geographical location, gender considerations, family connections, and personal interests, not to mention more random chance than most students and college admissions offices would care to admit (Shulman and Bowen 2001; Steinberg 2002).

Among the various "nonacademic" admissions criteria routinely considered in college admissions, race and ethnicity have received by far the greatest attention and the lion's share of the public criticism (see Curry 1996). Minority affirmative action, however, is just one of *three* large preferential admissions programs common at America's selective colleges and universities (Massey and Mooney 2007). In addition to underrepresented minorities, elite schools also give extra consideration to athletes (Shulman and Bowen 2001) and the children of alumni (Karabel 2005). Indeed, statistical analyses show that being an athlete or the child of an alumnus greatly increases the odds of admission to a selective college or university, controlling for a variety of personal and academic variables (Espenshade, Chung, and Walling 2004). In practice, moreover, both athletic and "legacy" recruitment enhance the already advantaged position of affluent whites in the competition for scarce entry slots (Golden 2006; Schmidt 2007), leading some to call for colleges to pay greater attention to social class in the admissions process (Bowen et al. 2005).

Consistent with these findings, *The Source of the River* documented stark differences in socioeconomic background across racial and ethnic groups. Whatever the particular alchemy prevailing in college admissions during 1999, the selection criteria then in force produced socially and economically homogeneous cohorts of white freshmen but diverse cohorts of black and Latino freshmen. Although Asians were slightly more diverse than their white counterparts, their backgrounds were much closer to those of whites than to those of other minority groups. The typical white or Asian student grew up in an intact family and attended a resource-rich

suburban or private school; both parents were college graduates; most fathers held an advanced degree and worked at a professional or managerial job; a large plurality of mothers also held advanced degrees, and most also worked in a white-collar occupation, thus yielding a family income high enough to enable ownership of a valuable home.

In contrast to this relatively clear portrait of homogeneous socioeconomic privilege among white and Asian students, it was virtually impossible to generalize about the socioeconomic status or demographic background of Latino and black students. They were just as likely to be the children of well-heeled, highly educated suburban professionals as to be the offspring of single, inner-city welfare mothers who never finished high school. The most salient feature about black and Latino freshmen was their social, economic, and demographic diversity. They came from all walks of life and all socioeconomic backgrounds.

Prior research has documented a sharp divergence in child-rearing practices along the lines of both class (Kohn 1985; Lareau 2000) and race (Lareau 2003). Whereas middle-class white parents generally adopt a strategy of “concerted cultivation” in raising and educating their children, lower-class and minority parents tend to stand back more passively and simply facilitate “the accomplishment of natural growth” (Lareau 2003: 2–3). Thus, middle- and upper-class parents are very directly involved in scheduling their children’s time, participating in their educational decisions, interacting with teachers and counselors, and promoting a sense of autonomy and, ultimately, entitlement among their children. In contrast, working-class and poor parents assume a more passive role in their children’s development, deferring to educational authorities, promoting obedience at home and school, and leaving children to interact among themselves rather than organizing their lives, all of which tend to produce a “sense of constraint” rather than entitlement among less-advantaged children.

Consistent with Lareau’s work, *The Source of the River* showed that students in different racial and ethnic groups experienced very different styles of child rearing while growing up. Whites generally reported a supportive, companionate style of child rearing, as one would expect given their high average class standing. Parents were involved in their lives, knew their friends, took an active role in developing their educational skills, and were reluctant to make use of punishment, shame, or guilt to secure compliant behavior. Instead they used reasoning and explanation to encourage autonomy, independence, and self-regulation. In contrast, black parents

were much less involved in cultivating their children's educational skills and monitoring their social relationships, and they relied more heavily on a regime of reward and punishment combined with strict limits on behavior, though without much reliance on guilt or shame. Asian parents were the least companionate and in terms of discipline the strictest of all groups. In addition to relying heavily on punishment to secure compliant behavior, they were also the most likely to employ guilt and shame as a strategy in child raising, and they were largely uninvolved in cultivating their children's educational or social skills. As parents, Latinos were a mixed bag—generally more authoritarian and less companionate than white parents, and less involved in their children's education or social relations, but relatively unlikely to rely on shame and guilt as tools in child rearing.

American culture historically has employed a “one-drop rule” to define race, labeling all people with any discernable African ancestry as “black” (Sweet 2005) and thus rendering race what sociologists call a “master status,” a categorization that trumps others and renders diversity within the black population largely invisible to white Americans (Hughes 1945). Nonetheless, recent work has underscored the growing diversity of America's black population (Kasinitz 1992; Spencer 1997; Waters 1999; Rockquemore and Bunsma 2002), especially on college campuses (Smith and Moore 2000; Charles, Torres, and Brunn 2007; Massey et al. 2007). Apart from documenting the heterogeneity of African Americans with respect to socioeconomic status and family background, *The Source of the River* revealed diversity along three additional dimensions, the first of which was gender. Specifically, on the campuses of elite colleges and universities, black males were hugely underrepresented relative to black females. Whereas white, Asian, and Latino freshmen evinced a rough parity between male and female students, black women outnumbered black men by a margin of two to one, with obvious implications for dating, mating, and gender dynamics, issues that we will explore later in this volume.

In addition, we found that immigrants and the children of immigrants were hugely overrepresented among black freshmen at elite institutions. Whereas first- and second-generation immigrants constituted only around 13% of 18–19-year-old African Americans in 1999, they comprised a quarter of all black freshmen entering elite institutions that year (Massey et al. 2007). Although large fractions of Asian and Latino freshmen were also of immigrant origin, in these groups the high percentage of immigrants and their children accurately reflected conditions in the general population.

Whereas 97% of Asians and 73% of Latinos in the NLSF were first- or second-generation immigrants, their respective shares in the population of 18–19-year-olds were 91% and 66% (Massey et al. 2007).

Finally, *The Source of the River* reported that biracial children were substantially overrepresented among African American freshmen. Whereas only around 4% of blacks identify themselves as multiracial nationwide (Spencer 1997), 17% of black freshmen in the NLSF did so, suggesting that a rather large share of black freshmen at selective schools had at least one nonblack parent. Black diversity with respect to class background, when combined with an overrepresentation of foreign and multiracial origins, virtually guarantees a lengthy conversation among African American students on campus about what it means to be “black” and what the “true” components of a black identity really are (Torres and Charles 2004; Charles, Torres, and Brunn 2008; Torres 2008). For collegiate African Americans, especially, racial identity is more problematic and contentious than it used to be.

Within the United States, blacks and to a lesser extent Latinos remain segregated from whites and Asians in schools (Orfield 2001) and neighborhoods (Charles 2003). It is not surprising, therefore, that virtually all white and Asian students interviewed in the NLSF came of age in white-dominant settings that contained very few African Americans or Latinos. Most Asian and white freshmen experienced little interracial contact before college, and their arrival on campus was their first opportunity to meet and interact with blacks and Latinos on a sustained, equal-status, face-to-face basis. The same was true for a significant subset of blacks and Latinos who grew up living in racially isolated neighborhoods and attended segregated, inner-city schools. They also had little experience with other-race peers prior to their arrival on campus. But another subset of blacks and Latinos grew up in integrated neighborhoods and attended racially diverse schools that afforded considerable opportunities for interracial contact and experience.

In terms of the quality of the students’ residential and educational environments, the sample divided clearly into two basic categories. On the one hand were whites and Asians, along with African Americans and Latinos who grew up in integrated settings. They generally experienced high-quality schools filled with resources and well-developed infrastructures, located in peaceful neighborhoods within which disorder and violence were rare. On the other hand were blacks and Latinos who grew up under

conditions of high segregation. For them, the quality of instruction was significantly lower, resources were less plentiful, infrastructures more deteriorated, and daily life in hallways and on the streets was characterized by remarkably high rates of exposure to social disorder and violence.

These contrasting backgrounds yielded different levels of preparation for college life. Perhaps the best prepared were blacks and Latinos who grew up under conditions of integration. Not only were they well prepared academically and possessed of a high degree of self-confidence and self-efficacy; they were also unique among freshmen in having considerable interracial and interethnic experience. By virtue of their upbringing within integrated schools and neighborhoods, they were comfortable in multiracial settings within which they were not a majority and which required interacting with people of diverse backgrounds.

While less prepared socially for the diversity of college life, whites and Asians were highly prepared on most other dimensions. On average, they were the most prepared academically and financially to assume the challenge of an elite college education. Moreover, although their prior experience with blacks and Latinos may have been limited, the campus environment they entered was overwhelmingly white and possessed of an academic culture with which they were quite familiar. The main difference between Asians and whites was that Asians displayed lower levels of self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-efficacy—indeed they were the lowest of all groups on these three psychological dimensions.

At the other extreme of the continuum of self-perception were blacks and Latinos who grew up under conditions of high segregation, who not only evinced high degrees of self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-efficacy, but also a high degree of racial pride and in-group solidarity. As already noted, however, they also perceived themselves as being at the greatest social distance from whites and were least prepared academically in terms of their own self-assessment as well as objective indicators such as high school grades, advanced placement courses, and SAT scores.

Theoretical Lessons from *The Source*

Although *The Source of the River* considered the effect of these background differences on grade performance only during the first term of the freshman year, significant differences had already emerged between groups.

Although grades across all racial and ethnic categories generally fell into the B range and few reported failing a course, intergroup differences in grade point average (GPA) were nonetheless significant. Whereas whites and Asians evinced very similar GPAs of 3.31 and 3.28, respectively, Latinos lagged behind at 3.05, and blacks trailed at 2.95. These performance differentials were most strongly and consistently predicted by indicators of academic preparation (which were, as already mentioned, strongly influenced by segregation), followed by parental education and, to a lesser extent, self-confidence and sensitivity to peer influence.

The analyses performed in *Source* endeavored to test several leading theories of minority underachievement. The theory of *capital deficiency* argues that differences in performance reflect differences in access to various forms of capital while growing up—financial, social, cultural, and, of course, human capital, the label economists have given to skills and education (Jencks 1972). This hypothesis received strong support in that differences in parental education, income, and wealth translated directly into different levels of preparation along a variety of dimensions, and differences in preparation, in turn, translated directly into differences in academic performance. Parental education also had a strong direct effect on college GPA (with preparation and other key variables held constant), underscoring the important role played by parents in shaping the educational trajectories of their children long after they have left home (Cameron and Heckman 1999).

The theory of *stereotype threat* argues that blacks are very well aware of negative societal stereotypes about their group's intellectual ability, and that this awareness transforms any academic evaluation into a psychologically threatening event: if blacks do their best and still come up short, they confirm the stereotype of black intellectual inferiority, not only to themselves but to everyone else. To compensate, they disinvest in academics as a domain of self-evaluation by studying less and generally making less of a scholastic effort (Steele 1998, 1999). If they do not succeed, rather than confirming that the stereotype might be true, they can attribute the failure to their self-conscious lack of effort. *The Source of the River* uncovered considerable evidence for this hypothesis, finding that minority students who doubted their own ability and were sensitive to the views of others earned significantly lower grades than other students.

Another prominent explanation for black underachievement is the *theory of oppositional culture*, which argues that black students view educational success to be a component of “white” identity and reject it as a betrayal of

racial authenticity. This conceptualization of racial identity is strongly reinforced by peer culture, so that even those who are well positioned to do well in school are reluctant to perform well for fear of being accused of “acting white” by their peers (Ogbu 1977). The NLSF data offered no evidence that this mechanism had anything to do with the grade performance of African Americans at selective colleges or universities, however. Both in high school and as college students black respondents reported having peers that strongly supported and valued educational success; and indicators developed to assess susceptibility to negative peer pressure among blacks and Latinos had no significant effect in predicting college grades.

Finally, results were supportive of broader *structural theories of stratification*, which argue that social and economic features of society that are beyond individual or family control put members of some groups in a position to gain access to and excel in selective schools while leaving others without the resources they need to achieve success (Bowles and Gintis 1976; McDonough 1997; Rothstein 2004). In *The Source of the River*, the feature of American social structure that seemed to carry the most weight in accounting for intergroup differences in academic performance was racial-ethnic segregation—which as already noted is still a pervasive feature of American schools and neighborhoods (see Iceland, Weinberg, and Steinmetz 2002; Kozol 2005). Black and Latino students who grew up under conditions of school and neighborhood segregation experienced lower-quality educations and were exposed to higher levels of disorder and violence than those who came of age within integrated schools and neighborhoods, giving the students from segregated backgrounds personal characteristics that left them with less ability to excel in the highly competitive milieu of selective academia.

Beyond *The Source* and into the Stream

To sum up what we have learned so far: prior work with the National Longitudinal Survey of Freshmen has documented very clear differences in early grade performance between whites, African Americans, Latinos, and Asians. These differentials, which emerged during the first term of college study, were strongly associated with preexisting differences in social and academic preparation that themselves reflected differential access to various forms of capital—financial, human, social, and cultural—between blacks

and Latinos, on the one hand, and Asians and whites, on the other. The differential access to education-related capital was, in turn, structured by the ongoing segregation of American society, which isolates blacks and Latinos in disadvantaged settings characterized by a paucity of resources. We found no evidence that segregation contributed to the formation of an oppositional culture that undermined grade performance. We did find, however, that America's historical legacy of racism—and specifically the stereotyping of African Americans as intellectually inferior—lowered the grades of minority students by raising the level of threat implicit in the academic evaluations that are an inevitable part of college life.

Despite the seeming clarity of these findings, the analyses done to date are substantively and theoretically limited because they took no account of developments in the students' lives on campus. *The Source of the River* focused entirely on precollege characteristics and determined their influence on grades earned during the first academic term. Although controlling for preexisting differences mitigated intergroup differences in grade performance, it did not eliminate them; nor did knowing the importance of students' backgrounds provide any insight into *how* differences in grade performance came about within the collegiate context. In addition to these substantive limitations, moreover, the reliance on first-term GPA as the sole academic outcome did not permit the consideration of important theories of college achievement that focus on what students do and how they are incorporated into the academic milieu.

The most prominent of these theories is the model of student integration developed by Vincent Tinto (1993). He focused on the process of dropping out and argued that leaving college is much like the process of exiting other human communities—departure generally reflects the absence of effective integration and the social supports it provides. Although Tinto focused on dropping out, we generalize his analysis here by noting that even though school departure may be signaled by a discrete act such as failing to enroll for the next academic term or not graduating, in reality it is as much a process as an event. In most cases the final action is preceded by the accumulation of a variety of signs of social and academic disengagement. In the academic realm, these signs include earning low grades, failing multiple classes, dropping too many courses, and ultimately failing to accumulate course credits in a reasonable time. In the social realm, the signs include a lack of friends or study partners, nonparticipation in campus groups or organizations, and a sense of alienation and estrangement

from other students, faculty, and the campus community generally. As these manifestations of disengagement accumulate, satisfaction with social and academic life on campus declines and leads ultimately to the expression of a radical outcome: expulsion, transfer, delayed graduation, or the decision to abandon higher education altogether.

In other words, according to Tinto, college students who earn low grades, fail to accumulate credits, and drop out are those who are insufficiently attached, socially and academically, to the college or university they have chosen to attend:

An institution's capacity to retain students is directly related to its ability to reach out and make contact with students and integrate them into the social and intellectual fabric of institutional life. It hinges on the establishment of a healthy, caring educational environment which enables all individuals, not just some, to find a niche in one or more of the many social and intellectual communities of the institution. (1993: 204–5)

Figure 1.1 offers a schematic of our interpretation of Tinto's theory of social and economic integration in college. As indicated on the left side of the diagram, each student enters college with a certain educational background and family background that jointly determine his or her academic skills and abilities. These skills and abilities, along with the student's educational and family background, combine to determine overall aspirations, both in terms of academic goals and overall commitment to the institution. Goals and commitment, in turn, condition a student's experience on campus with respect to academic performance, interactions with faculty and staff members, peer group interactions, and participation in extracurricular activities. These specific campus experiences yield more or less academic and social integration within the particular educational institution, and students who are more integrated are more likely to make additional social and academic investments, which reinforces the foregoing cycle to promote further integration and continued investments in social and academic activities, resulting in higher grades, more courses completed, greater academic and social satisfaction, and ultimately progress toward college graduation.

Whereas *The Source of the River* focused on precollege experiences and the arrows depicted on the left-hand side of figure 1.1, here we focus on the pathways depicted to the right of the figure, seeking to measure aspirations, experiences, and integration during the first two years of higher education

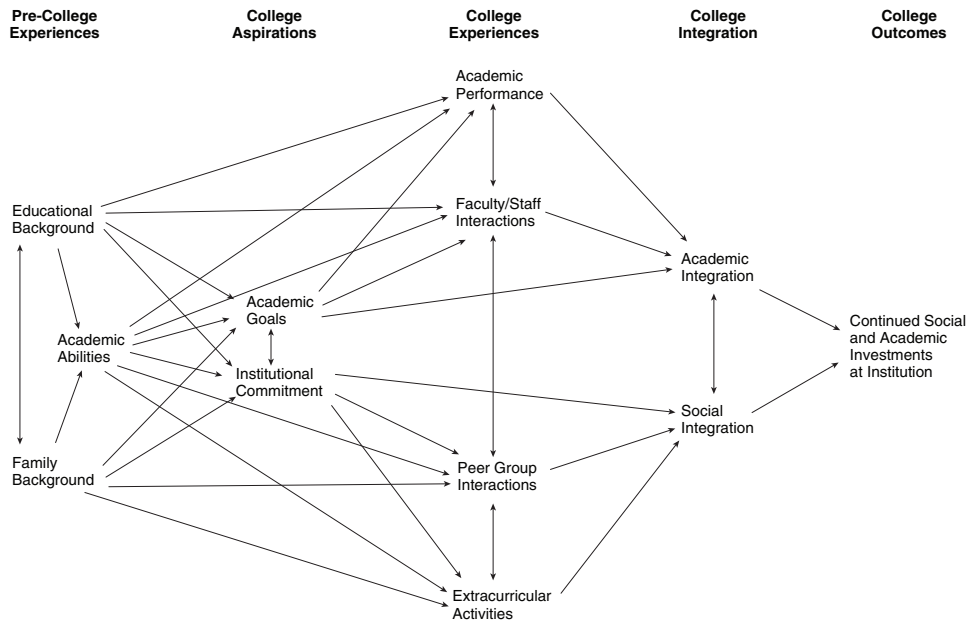


Figure 1.1
Schematic representation of Tinto's model of social and academic progress within college

and to use these measures to predict educational outcomes such as grade performance. In designing later waves of the NLSF, therefore, we self-consciously sought to develop survey instruments that would enable us to measure the constructs and concepts depicted in figure 1.1. The data analyzed in this book come mainly from follow-up surveys conducted among NLSF respondents during the spring of their freshmen and sophomore years (i.e., calendar years 2000 and 2001). In contrast to the baseline survey, the follow-ups were administered via telephone and were much shorter, usually lasting only around forty minutes.

In order to avoid building selection bias into the out-year samples, we attempted to follow and reinterview all students from the baseline survey, including dropouts (those who had left school with no plans to return), “stopouts” (those currently not enrolled but planning to return), and transfers (those who had reenrolled at another institution). In *The Source of the River*, we described in considerable detail the nature and characteristics of the sample, and we included a list of the institutions invited to participate in the NLSF, along with the names and characteristics of those schools that

ultimately joined the study and detailed profiles of the respondents along a variety of social and economic dimensions. Rather than repeat this information, we invite readers to consult the book, whose appendix also contains a copy of the baseline questionnaire (which is also available publicly on the project website).

Table 1.1 shows response rates achieved in the two follow-up surveys. The freshman follow-up occurred only a few months after the baseline, of course, and completion rates are therefore very high, ranging narrowly from 93.7% among whites to 96.0% for blacks, with an overall average of 95%. The sophomore year follow-up, of course, occurred an average of twelve months after the second wave, and the response rates are correspondingly lower but still quite high by the standards of contemporary survey research. The overall response rate on sophomore follow-up was roughly 89%, with a range of 87.8% for whites to 89.3% for Asians. Completion rates are always computed relative to the baseline, not the prior wave. Thus, during all rounds of the survey, interviewers endeavored to reinterview all respondents in the original baseline survey whether or not they had completed the prior wave, unless they had explicitly requested not to be contacted again.

The high response rates reflect the selected nature of the sample—all respondents were by definition smart, well educated, and verbally adept—as well as the salience of the questions being asked to the respondents themselves. Being new arrivals at institutions they had worked long and hard to enter, most were eager to talk about their experiences. A facsimile

Table 1.1
Sampling information on first three waves of the National Longitudinal Survey of Freshmen, 1999–2001

Wave and Outcome	Total	White	Asian	Latino	Black
Baseline Survey					
Completed	85.8%	83.0%	85.8%	85.5%	88.9%
Refused	14.2%	17.0%	14.2%	14.5%	11.1%
Number Selected	4,573	1,202	1,118	1,071	1,182
Freshman Follow-up					
Completed	95.0%	93.7%	95.9%	94.3%	96.0%
Refused	5.0%	6.3%	4.1%	5.7%	4.0%
Number in Baseline	3,924	998	959	916	1,051
Sophomore Follow-up					
Completed	88.6%	87.8%	89.3%	88.4%	88.7%
Refused	11.4%	12.2%	10.7%	11.6%	11.3%
Number in Baseline	3,924	998	959	916	1,051

of the freshman follow-up survey instrument is included in appendix A, and the sophomore instrument is included in appendix B. The freshman survey begins by asking students to list the courses they have taken and are taking and the grades they received or expect. It goes on to ask whether the respondent has declared a major and, if so, which one. The short section on courses and majors is followed by a block of questions about living arrangements at college, including the kind of housing, number of roommates, bedroom and bathroom arrangements, the quality of the study environment, the costs of room and board, and the number of visits to parents during the academic term.

In order to discover how students allocate their time among the many competing demands of college life, the survey compiles an hour-by-hour account of their most recent Tuesday beginning from the time they awakened until the hour they went to bed. This systematic time budget is followed by a module that asks students to consider a typical Monday through Friday and to estimate the number of hours spent in different activities, and then to do the same for a typical weekend. Students then answer a battery of questions about academic-related behaviors on campus, inside and outside the classroom, as well as a series of questions about the frequency with which they have experienced various personal and family problems that could interfere with their studies.

Financial pressures on the student are assessed by asking respondents to estimate the total cost of their first year of college and then to allocate that cost to various potential sources of revenue, such as parents, other relatives, grants, loans, and paid work. Those who report working for pay are asked to identify the specific job, the number of hours worked per week, and the wages earned per hour. At the end of the financial module, students are asked about their use of credit cards and to whom the bills are sent and, apart from birthday or holiday gifts, to report on the receipt of cash remittances from parents or other family members during the school year, as well the sending of any money to parents or other relatives.

In order to get at the shaping and content of students' aspirations, we ask a series of questions about their academic preparation, scholastic goals, perceptions of academic progress, ratings of problems encountered so far, and the degree of effort they are putting into different classes and college in general. We also ask about the nature and extent of their motivation to attend college and to do well academically and specifically inquire about how these compare to the views of their parents, friends, and acquaintances

with respect to academic achievement. Social integration on campus is assessed in a variety of ways. One series of questions asks about prejudice and racism on campus as well as the racial-ethnic background of professors, students, and people in their personal networks. Given that the students are almost all single and 18–20 years old, we also ask about dating, romantic experience, and sexual relationships, including those with members of other racial and ethnic groups.

The sophomore survey instrument is very similar, except that it begins by determining whether the respondent is still enrolled at the same school or a different one and, for those who have left the original institution, the reason for their departure. For those still enrolled in school, as before, the questionnaire determines which courses have been taken, those currently being taken, and the grades earned or expected and majors chosen. In addition to asking about declared majors, however, the sophomore follow-up also asks students to name the highest degree they expect to attain, the number of colleges to which they applied, the degree to which they think they made the right college choice, the importance of college graduation to them and their families, and their satisfaction with their social life and intellectual development on campus, along with their overall evaluation of the college experience so far.

Information about living arrangements, time allocation, academic behaviors, the costs of college, and the meeting of these costs is solicited using the same modules as before. In addition to offering perceptions of progress, ratings of problems, and the degree of effort they put into their studies, sophomores are also asked about their participation in different kinds of social organizations on and off campus. Respondents are also to list and describe their six strongest personal connections, how close they feel to them, and the degree to which they draw on them for different kinds of support. After asking about romantic relationships, perceptions of prejudice, and various interfering problems, the questionnaire ends by compiling specific tracking information to facilitate relocation of respondents on later survey waves.

Looking Downriver

The transition from high school to a selective college or university is bound to be stressful for entering students, regardless of race or ethnicity.

In coming to an elite campus, students move from an academic environment where they were one of a small coterie of “stars” to one where *all* their fellow students were presumably high school “stars” in one way or another. At the same time, they exchange an environment where expectations about students were variable and where they may not have been fully challenged intellectually to one where expectations are universally high and where the academic standards are among the most rigorous to be found anywhere in the world. Finally, in going off to college students make a great social leap, moving out of parental households and into new social settings where they assume responsibility for day-to-day decisions. All students are subject to these pressures to a greater or lesser extent, and in the first part of the volume we explore whether and how these common sources of anxiety differ across groups.

We begin in chapter 2 with academics, the central reason for most students’ presence on campus. We examine the content and characteristics of the courses selected by students during their first two years of college, the majors they choose, the academic difficulties they experience, the efforts they put into schoolwork, their scholastic aspirations, and the influence of these decisions, efforts, and aspirations on the grades that they ultimately earn as freshmen and sophomores. In terms of the model depicted in figure 1.1, this chapter focuses on the components and determinants of academic integration.

In chapter 3 we take a step back to consider academic decisions and behaviors in light of the broader social context of college. We begin by documenting the living situations of freshmen in different groups and how those situations change from the freshman to the sophomore year. In doing so, we measure the frequency of various distractions to studying that might be encountered in different living environments—dormitories versus apartments versus fraternities or sororities. These locations are, of course, filled with fellow students who constitute the respondents’ reference group, and to assess the nature of the peer environment, we present data on the academic, social, and community behaviors valued by students with whom the respondents frequently interact. We also analyze respondents’ degree of involvement in various academic, social, and community activities and then move on to a detailed assessment of time use on a typical weekday and weekend. This chapter thus focuses on social integration and uses time budget data as a concrete way of measuring the relative importance of academic versus social pursuits in their daily lives. We conclude our analysis

of social life by measuring how the living situations, distractions, peer values, participation patterns, and time constraints combine to influence academic performance during the first two years of college.

Attending a selective academic institution—especially one that is private—obviously entails a serious commitment of financial resources, and the socioeconomic differences between groups documented earlier naturally imply that the financial pressures involved in attending college will fall unevenly on members of different racial and ethnic groups. In order to understand these pressures and their effects, in chapter 4 we undertake a detailed analysis of the cost of higher education, how it is financed from different sources, and the pressures that different kinds of support packages impose on students. Whereas 38% of white and 34% of Asian freshmen said their families were paying the full cost of an elite education, only 10% of blacks and 17% of Latinos said their families were doing so. We conclude this chapter with an in-depth analysis of the pressures and stresses that result from a reliance on student loans, consumer credit, and work rather than grants or family funds and conclude by determining how these stresses influence grade achievement.

Navigating a very competitive academic environment, adjusting to new living situations on campus, and putting together the money to finance a college education are pressures that all students face regardless of race or ethnicity. Although the relative burdens of academic, social, and financial adjustment to college may fall disproportionately on minority students, these are nonetheless stresses that all students face and thus constitute a broadly shared experience, even if the experience is more intense for the average black or Latino student. However, Latinos and African Americans face other pressures on campus that arise explicitly from being minority group members.

For African Americans and Latinos, and to a much lesser extent Asians, minority status means there are social undercurrents to be navigated—largely unspoken but nonetheless important ideas and expectations about the nature of race and ethnicity, the qualities and characteristics of different groups, and the norms of interaction between them. Chapter 5 thus looks at social integration on campus from the viewpoint of minority group members. Ideas and preconceptions about race and ethnicity come to bear in the expression of intergroup social relationships such as friendship and especially dating, and in this chapter we undertake a detailed analysis of patterns of intergroup friendships, including romantic relationships

and dating. Our analysis highlights the unique position of black women, who must not only deal with the social reality of race, but within their group manage the social fallout from a sex ratio that militates against finding same-race partners.

Whereas race and ethnicity may be social undercurrents that influence students in subtle ways that are difficult to observe, race also influences the lives of students in ways that are more concrete and direct, and this is the subject of chapter 6. Given the ongoing reality of segregation in the United States, it is inevitable that the social networks of black and Latino students extend back into racially isolated inner-city neighborhoods. Because these neighborhoods are also characterized by high rates of social disorder and violence, negative events are very likely to happen to people to whom the students are socially connected, causing them to devote greater amounts of time, emotional energy, and resources to personal and family issues compared with other students, investments that detract from their studies and undermine academic achievement in a variety of concrete ways that we document using data from the NLSF.

Although less concrete than residential segregation, the influence of stereotype threat is no less real in the lives of minority students. In *The Source of the River* we showed that certain subsets of minority students who doubted their abilities, believed negative stereotypes about their group, and were sensitive to the opinions of others tended to earn lower grades and experience higher failure rates than other students, which we took as supportive of the hypothesis of stereotype threat. In chapter 7, we build on this earlier work to specify a more elaborate model of how stereotype threat operates to sabotage the performance of minority students. Estimates of this model provide further, and more detailed, evidence showing that stereotype threat indeed operates in powerful ways to undermine the grade performance of black and Latino students.

The last topic related to race and ethnicity that we consider is the contentious issue of affirmative action—the use of race-conscious criteria in college admissions and recruiting to bolster minority enrollments. In chapter 8, we develop indicators of the degree to which different institutions have employed race-conscious criteria in admissions and estimate the likelihood that particular minority students might be beneficiaries of such criteria. We then use these two indicators to test a variety of hypotheses developed by critics of affirmative action (see Sowell 2004; Thernstrom and Thernstrom 1999). Although we find little support for the idea that

affirmative action produces a mismatch between the abilities of minority students and the demands of academic institutions they attend, we do find that the use of affirmative action by colleges and universities may inadvertently create social stigma and exacerbate psychological performance burdens for minority students, causing them to underperform.

Finally, in the last chapter we employ key variables from all the foregoing chapters to estimate a series of comprehensive models to determine how each variable independently affects not only grade achievement but also course failing, school leaving, the accumulation of credits, and student satisfaction. Our results suggest the existence of two very different and largely independent components that underlie academic success during the first two years of higher education.

The first is retention—staying in school and progressing from year to year. The second is achievement—earning high grades and avoiding course failures. Remaining in school is more a social than an academic process and is determined by how well students are integrated into campus society generally, not how well they are doing scholastically or the specific academic decisions they might have made. Grade achievement, in contrast, is determined much more by academic factors such as degree of scholastic preparation, the choice of major, the selection of courses in terms of ease or difficulty, interaction with faculty, and educational aspirations. Although social factors have some effect in determining outcomes within courses, they generally play a detracting role: too much time spent on recreation, living off campus in fraternities or sororities or with family members, and relying on peers for academic assistance generally reduce student GPAs.

The major exceptions to the predominance of academic factors in determining course outcomes are those social factors related to membership in a minority group. Social undercurrents relating to race and ethnicity influence the likelihood of failing a course, specific sequelae associated with segregation affect grades earned, and social-psychological influences deriving from stereotype threat and affirmative action affect both outcomes. Once these minority-specific effects are incorporated into models predicting grade point average and the likelihood of leaving school, along with the academic and social factors that are common to all students, intergroup differences in performance disappear.

On the one hand, the fact that minority performance differentials can be eliminated by the application of theoretically specified statistical controls

offers hope that by addressing the specific problems and issues we have identified, faculty and administrators at selective schools may be able to devise workable strategies to mitigate the academic underperformance of black and Latino students. On the other hand, the facts that so many factors are involved and that the unadjusted gaps remain so large suggest that we still have a long way to go.