Differences in Navigation of Elite Institutions by Social Class

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Introduction

Background

- Postsecondary educational degrees are becoming increasingly critical for **obtaining prestigious and well-paying jobs**
- Working class students are **underrepresented** in attending and completing college, especially highly-valued elite colleges
- The childrearing practices of middle/upper-middle class families are **more valued** by elite institutions and they have **advantages in applying**

Whether working class students who make it to elite institutions can get prestigious and well-paying jobs is not well researched.

Objectives

1. Compare and contrast navigation of elite college and professional recruiting arenas by working and middle/upper-middle class students
2. Identify how the students developed their navigational practices, and analyze if their class background affects their ability to learn them

Methods

Data Collection: In-depth Interviews

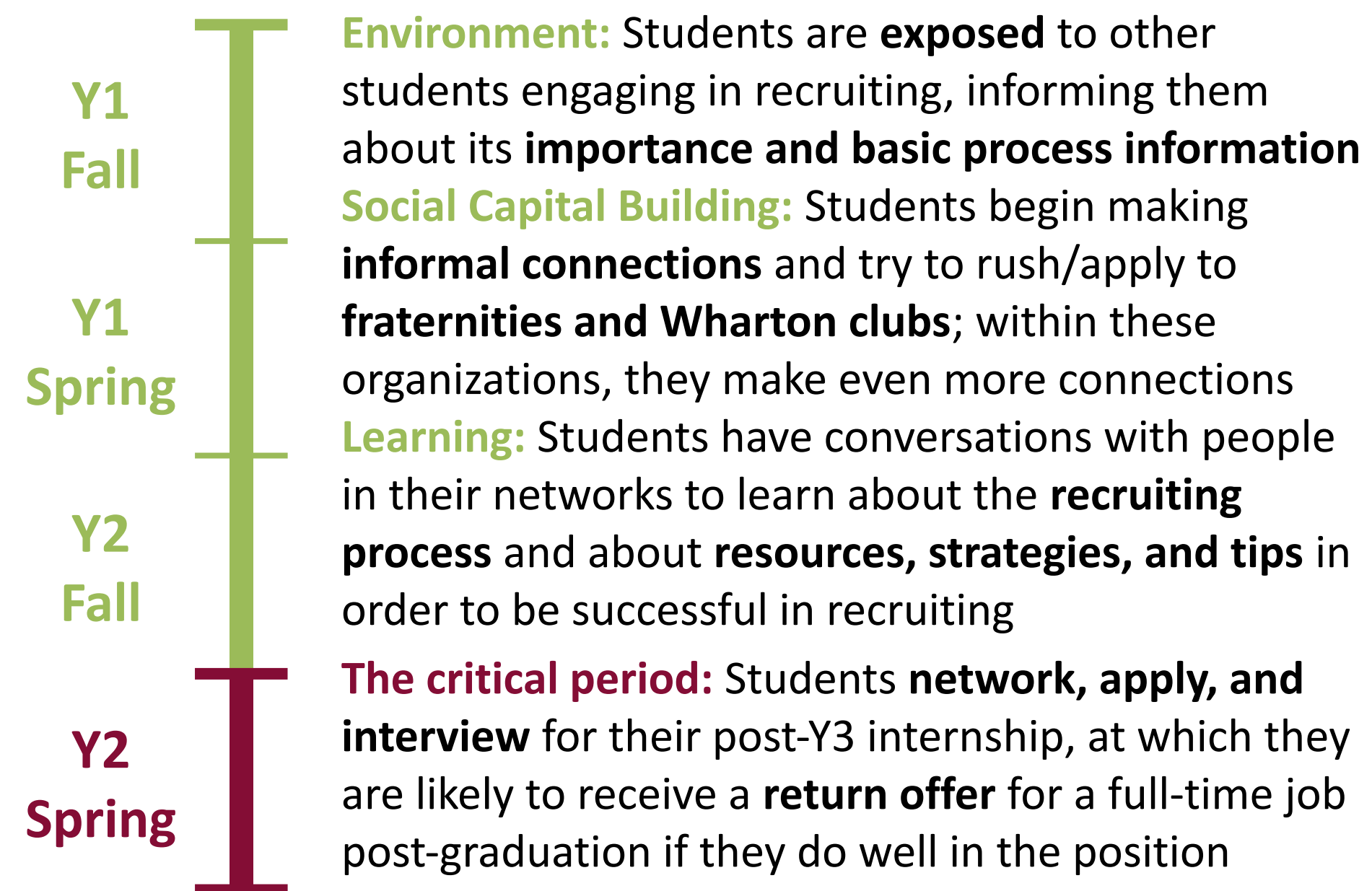| Inclusion Criteria	Sampling
- Wharton students, finance concentration (or otherwise recruiting for finance) - Class of '24-'25 - Asian (includes south, east, southeast) - Male-identifying - Born/grew up in the US or Canada	- 14-20 participants - Strategies: working with personal contacts, snowballing, contacting campus organizations - 2 comparison groups: ○ Middle/upper-middle class families (M/UM-C) ○ Working class families (W-C)

Interview Details	Main Interview Topics
- Took place on Zoom - Time range: 108-152 minutes - Paid with a $25 gift card	- Background before college - College navigation - Recruiting navigation

Preliminary Data and Results

Recruiting Timeline: Preparation and Execution

Y1 Fall

Environment: Students are **exposed** to other students engaging in recruiting, informing them about its **importance and basic process information**

Y1 Spring

Social Capital Building: Students begin making **informal connections** and try to rush/apply to **fraternities and Wharton clubs**; within these organizations, they make even more connections

Y2 Fall

Learning: Students have conversations with people in their networks to learn about the **recruiting process** and about **resources, strategies, and tips** in order to be successful in recruiting

Y2 Spring

The critical period: Students **network, apply, and interview** for their post-Y3 internship, at which they are likely to receive a **return offer** for a full-time job post-graduation if they do well in the position
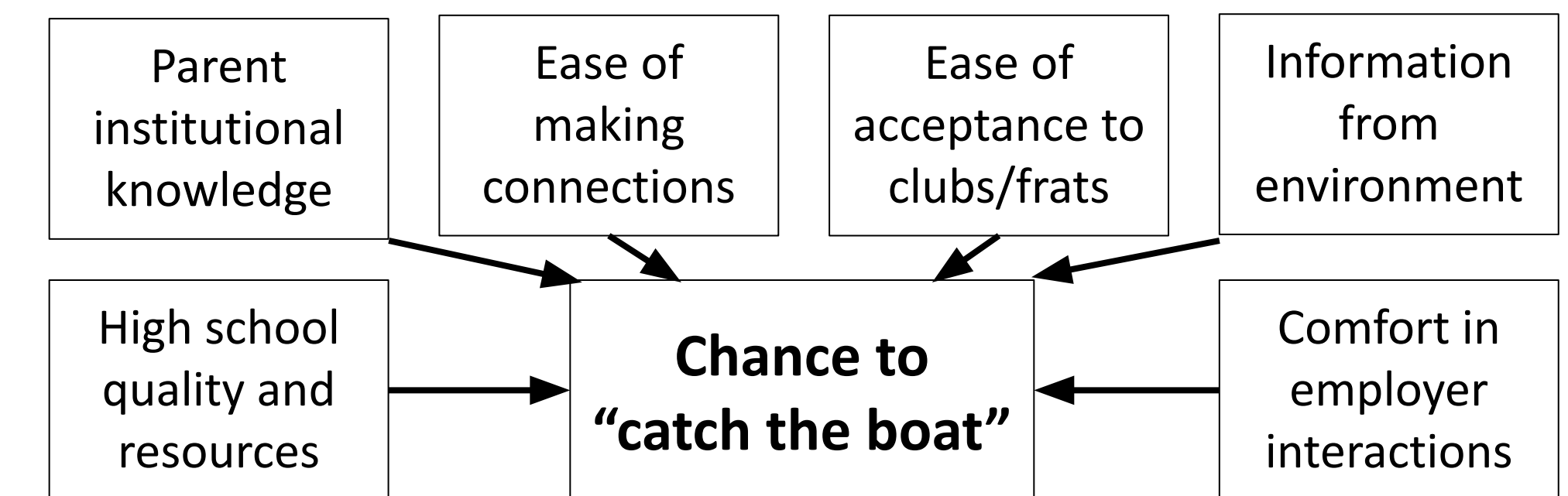
Preliminary Class Comparisons

- **M-C/UM-C students went to high schools with more resources like business clubs to help prepare them for business careers**
  - "I was like the **president of [DECA]**… that one was focused on like…testing like, business knowledge, making presentations…" – Toby, UM-C student
  - "**I didn't know what DECA was**… they already had, like the knowledge… to get into the best clubs or start networking right away." – Keith, W-C student
- **W-C students feel like they belong less in pre-professional pathways**
  - "Yeah, [**I'm**] not the most pre-professional… am I gonna, you know, study for this test, or am I gonna set up a networking call…" – Daniel, W-C student
  - "**It felt so daunting**… Everyone… they're dressed in their nice suits and ties and stuff, and I'm like, "Bro, what the hell is this"… so the club recruiting process was **always scary to me**." – Keith, W-C student
- **W-C students struggled more to get into Wharton clubs**
  - "Like freshman fall, I didn't get into any clubs… **not the most used to [club networking]**… high school wasn't… like prep school." – Daniel, W-C student
  - "I joined… pre-professional clubs… I was able to… meet, upperclassmen, who… **ended up being really good mentors**." – Toby, UM-C student
- **M-C/UM-C students were more at ease in professional interactions**
  - On successful networking calls: "It's hard to describe, why they clicked… **it's pretty natural**. I can't explain it. It's kind of hard." – Keagan, M-C student
  - "**I'm not familiar with… showing face**… you have to interact with them… Honestly, man, I just kinda like woke up one day and was like, "Dude, if I don't show face, like nothing's gonna happen." — Aiden, W-C student
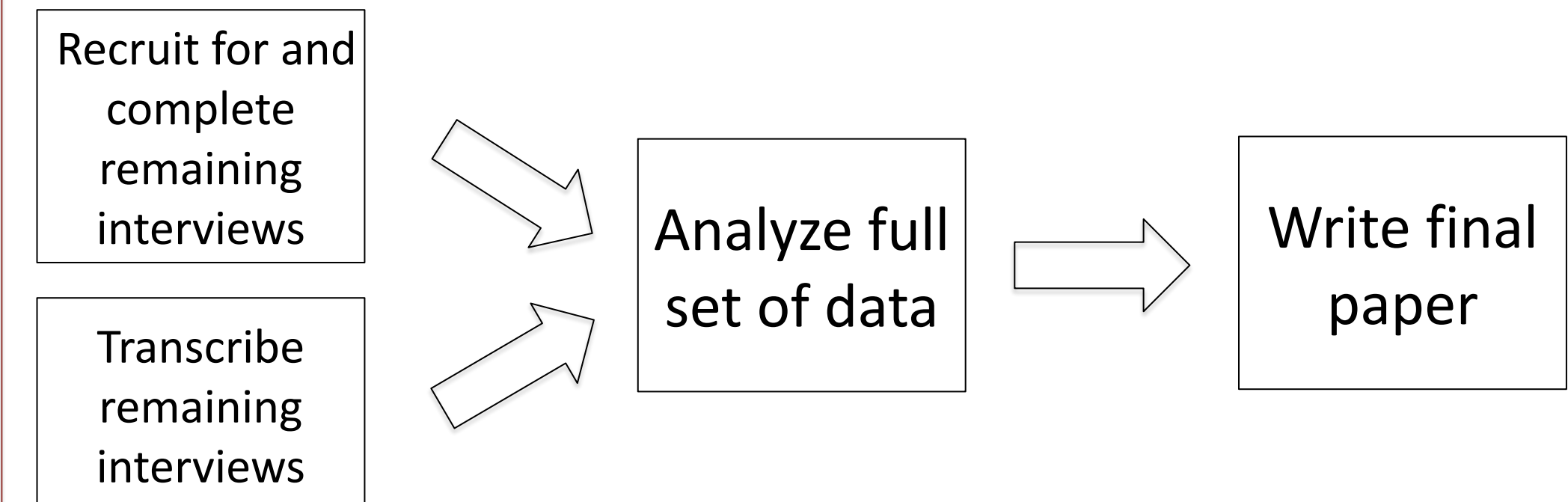
Emerging Themes and Implications

Disparities in solving the "black box" in order to avoid "missing the boat"

- Many factors **collectively contribute** to a student's likelihood of success in "catching the boat" fast enough by Y2 Spring
- M-C/UM-C students inherently are more comfortable in the elite environment of Wharton**,** putting them ahead and **allowing them to do less to be successful**, while also having **more access to key tools**

Parent institutional knowledge	Ease of making connections	Ease of acceptance to clubs/frats	Information from environment
High school quality and resources	**Chance to "catch the boat"**		Comfort in employer interactions

Wharton should create more formal systems focused on teaching the most specific, useful recruiting information to equalize the playing field.

Next Steps

Recruit for and complete remaining interviews		Analyze full set of data	Write final paper
Transcribe remaining interviews			

References and Contact

Please scan this QR code to view a PDF of my current works cited:

If you have any questions or want to hear more about the project, please contact me at: tristly@sas.upenn.edu