EXPLORING THE CHICANO/LATINO MALE NARRATIVE OF HIGHER EDUCATION ATTAINMENT VIA COMMUNITY COLLEGES

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Oscar Alonzo Mendoza

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Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies
Abstract

of

EXPLORING THE CHICANO/LATINO MALE NARRATIVE OF HIGHER EDUCATION ATTAINMENT VIA COMMUNITY COLLEGES

by

Oscar Alonzo Mendoza

Brief Literature Review

The Latino population is the fastest growing group in the nation, demands further consideration in academic research as well as a place in higher education (Brown, Santiago, & Lopez, 2003). The number of Latino students earning a bachelor’s degree increased by 105% from 1990 to 2000 (NCES, 2003). But only 18.6% of these students achieved their goal of receiving a bachelor’s degree within 8 years compared to 37.5% of Caucasian students (Swail, Cabrera, & Lee, 2004). This statistic becomes even more alarming when gender is considered; Latino males are more underrepresented in colleges compared to their Latina counterparts (NCES, 2003; Bailey, Jeong & Cho, 2010).

Statement of the Problem

This research explores how family members, higher education personnel and peers supported Latino males transferring from a community college into a four year university. Using the following questions this study aims to understand the barriers, achievements and persistence of Latino male students who have historically been
underrepresented in higher education, and are now becoming part of the rising number of ethnically diverse groups at colleges and universities.

1. What role does family play in supporting Latino male transfer students’ in succeeding in higher education?

2. What role do higher education programs and the institution play in supporting Latino male transfer students’ persistence in higher education?

3. What role do peers play in supporting Latino male transfer students’ persistence in higher education?

Methodology

This qualitative study attend to the ways in which academic, family and social factors impact Latino male students’ success through the lived experiences of six Latino male transfer students. The author proceeded to analyze the data in order to determine common themes and experiences of Latino male students in higher education.
Conclusion and Recommendations

This study concluded that Latino males who successfully transferred to Northern California University shared certain characteristics and experiences. Although Latino males experienced obstacles and challenges in academia, the support of family and the development of a sense of belonging in college appear to key to their academic success. It is the intention of this study for the result to be used by administrators and policy makers in order to create and maintain initiatives that speak to the needs of minority students and with special attention to the missing Latino male in higher education.

___________________________________, Committee Chair
José Chávez, Ed.D.

_______________________________
Date
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I can honestly say that accomplishing my goal and completing this Master’s program is not only of my doing. I have had great people throughout my undergraduate and graduate career that have believed in me, and their constant encouragement has helped me through. The list is large, but I would want to make mention of at least a few.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Background

With 35 million of Hispanic-Latinos in the United States, this minority has become the largest in the United States, now surpassing African Americans (Pew Hispanic Center, 2006). By the year 2050 it is projected that Hispanic-Latinos will compose 25% of the United States population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004). By the year 2025 the number of non-Hispanic workers will decline by 5 million, as the number of Hispanic-Latinos of working age will see an increase of 18 million (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004). Latinos are the largest ethnic minority in the United States as well as the fastest growing, representing 13% of the total U.S. population (Fry, 2002). Despite the growth the Latino population has experienced, the number of Latinos attending and graduating college has not improved since 1990 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2003). Regrettably a mere 16% of college students are Latino, which is hardly representative of the Latino population in this country (Chavez, 2009). Having such a large population of Americans undereducated will hinder this nation’s possibility to compete globally (Abrego, 2008).

Contrary to popular belief, the growth of the Latino population is mainly driven by native-born Latinos and not immigrants as it is sometime speculated (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2011). The importance of the Latino population in the United States has become such that continuing to ignore their lack of educational attainment will become extremely detrimental for the overall productivity of the country (Guerrero-Avila, 2001).
As a recent project from the Harvard Graduate School of Education mentions, in 1973 of the 91 million workers employed in the United States, nearly one third did not finish high school and an additional 40 percent did not continue their education past high school (2011). The project also states that in 2007 the number of jobs available to those with limited education dropped by 2 million while the overall employment in the United States increased by 63 million. The project attributed this drastic shift to an increase in technical jobs that require some form of post-secondary education (2011). It is unrealistic to believe that America can compete in the global market with undereducated citizens (Symonds, William, Schwartz & Ferguson, 2011).

The career and occupational opportunities Latinos will have are directly correlated with the education they receive (Valladares, 2003). Education is undoubtedly imperative to provide the best opportunities for social and economic equality for any community in the United States (Guerrero-Avila, 2001), especially noting that college graduates earn twice as much as non-graduates over their lifetime (Swail et al., 2004). Understanding that the Latino population is one of the largest in the United States and has become one of the least educated, also presents a financial problem for the United States (Swail et al., 2004). Unfortunately, understanding the importance of higher education does not necessarily equate with access to such. The academic gap minority students face due to an uneven distribution of resources hinders the achievement of many (Garcia, 2001). Secretary of Education Roderick Paige (cited by Jost, 2004) once mentioned that, if it was the goal of Brown v. Board of Education to achieve educational equality in order
to provide an equal opportunity for all, especially minority students who traditionally have not been represented in higher education, the goal has yet to be achieved.

With this in mind, it is important to note that despite the obstacles often present, Hispanic-Latino students do aim to become further educated, but many times obstacles out of their control prevent their progress (Zalaquett, 2006). Community colleges have become the preferred higher educational institutions for Latinos (Striplin, 1999; Fry, 2004). Among 18 to 24 year-olds, 44 percent of Hispanic-Latino undergraduates attend a community college, compared to 30% of both African-American and Whites (National Center for Education Statistics, 2001). Although Hispanic-Latinos have the highest enrollment rates at two year institutions, only 18.9% of them achieve their goal of transferring to a four year institution (Swail, et al., 2004). Latinos transfer at a much lower rates from community colleges (Fry, 2004). Six years after enrolling, 80% of degree seeking Latino students had not completed a certificate or degree, and had not transferred to a four year college/university. The majority of these students had been victims of attrition and only 15% of the non-completers continued to be enrolled (Moore & Shulock, 2010).

Statement of the Problem

A disparity in enrollment and degree completion is what is mainly known about the Latino population, males furthermore are in more danger of dropping out or never beginning a college education (Gloria, Castellanos, Scull, & Villegas, 2009). When this student population begins a college education, they mainly utilize the California
community colleges as a way to achieve their educational goal (Striplin, 1999; Fry, 2004). Further exploration of the gendered question in the Latino student population is not only evident, but urgent considering the population growth of Latinos in the United States (Gloria, Castellanos, Scull & Villegas, 2009). Although gender attainment disparities exist within all ethnicities, this disparity is ever more evident within the Latino population. This study aims to gain knowledge of ways in which academic and social factors impact Latino male students’ community college success through the students lived experiences. The academic and social components create an integration that helps students determine goals and commitments that subsequently determine students’ decision to remain or withdraw from an academic institution (Velasquez, 1999). In order to further explore these themes, the research poses the following questions. First, what role does family play in supporting Latino male transfer students in succeeding in higher education? Secondly, what role do higher education programs and the institution play in supporting Latino male transfer students’ persistence in higher education? And finally, what role do peers play in supporting Latino male transfer students’ persistence in higher education?
Definition of Terms Used

The following is a list of special terms and their definitions used in the study. The terms Latino, Hispanic and Chicano will be used interchangeably to identify the participants of this study.

Access to Student assistance Programs In Reach of Everyone (ASPIRE): Offers eligible students in-depth academic support through individualized academic, financial and personal counseling, coupled with career exploration and cultural enrichment activities.

American Association for Community Colleges (AACC): Founded in 1920, the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) has, over four decades, become the leading proponent and the national voice for community colleges.

Attainment Gap: The disparity in academic attainment between groups of students.

College Assistance Migrant Program: Federally-funded educational support and scholarship program that helps more than 2,000 students annually from migrant and seasonal farm working backgrounds to reach and succeed in college. Participants receive anywhere from $750 to $4,000 of financial support during their freshman year of college and ongoing academic support until their graduation.

Chicano: Term adopted by Mexican-American activists during the 1960’s and 1970’s movements in the Southwestern United States. This term is preferred by some people of Mexican origin over the term Latino or Hispanic (Nieto, S. 2004).
**CRECE**: Central American Refugee Committee (CRECE) is a grassroots self-help organization which empowers and assists Oakland's Latino immigrant community.

**Educational Opportunity Program (EOP)**: State funded program designed to improve access and retention of historically low-income and educationally disadvantaged students.

**Extended Opportunity Programs and Services (EOPS)**: State funded retention and support program. EOPS assist students who are affected by social, economic, educational, or language disadvantages.

**Ethnicity**: The distinguishing national or cultural characteristics shared by a particular group (Atkinson, Morten, & Sue, 1993).

**First-Generation**: A student who is from a home where neither parent obtained a college degree.

**Hispanic**: The federal government defines Hispanic or Latino as a person of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture origin regardless of race (Ramirez, 2004).

**Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI)**: Term used for a Federal program designed to assist colleges or universities in the United States that attempt to assist first-generation, majority low income Hispanic students. Institutions must reach a 25% Latino student population to be considered a HSI (Laden, Hagedorn & Perrakis 2008).

**Latino**: A term used in the United States to identify persons of Spanish speaking origin or descent who designate themselves as Mexican American, Chicano, Puerto Rican, Cuban, or of some other Hispanic origin (Torres Campos, et.al., 2009).
Math Engineering Science Achievement (MESA): Established in 1970, the program provides academic support to students from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds throughout the education pathway so they will excel in math and science and ultimately attain four-year degrees in science, technology, engineering or math (STEM) fields.

Mexican/s: Native or inhabitant of Mexico

Native Born: Born in the country or area indicated.

Persistence: To remain at an institution of higher learning until degree completion, until graduation, or until one’s academic goals are met (Tinto, 1987).

Pre-College Program: Educational opportunity outreach programs designed to motivate and support students to attain a higher education.

Predominately White Institutions (PWI): Institutions of higher education in the United States that have historically served a student body of 50% or more Americans of European descent.

Remediation: It is composed primarily of sequences of increasingly advanced courses designed to bring underprepared students to the level of skill competency expected of new college freshmen.

Transfer: A student who graduates from a community college and enrolls in a four-year institution (Striplin, 1999).
TRiO Programs): Federal outreach and student services programs designed to identify and provide services for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds. TRIO includes eight programs targeted to serve and assist low-income individuals, first-generation college students, and individuals with disabilities to progress through the academic pipeline from middle school to post baccalaureate programs.
Significance of the Study

The Latino population is the youngest population in the United States with an average population age of 26 years (Zalaquett, 2006; Chapa & De La Rosa, 2004), as well as the fastest growing non-White population (Zalaquett, 2006; Vernez & Mizell, 2001; Santiago & Brown, 2004; Locks, Oseguera, & Vega, 2009; Sciarra & Whitson, 2007). It is predicted that by the year 2025, the majority of young adults from 18 to 24 years old in the United States will be of Latino decent (Martinez, 2002). Also by the year 2025, one in four students in public schools under the age of 18 in the United States would be of Latino (Locks et al., 2009; Zalaquett, 2006) and by the year 2030, it is estimated that 3 out of 10 people living in the United States will be Latino (Pew Foundation, 2008). Latinos compose the largest population of all groups up to the age of 35; school-age children, college aged-students and recent entries in the workforce populations and it continues to grow (Chapa & Schink, 2006). Despite the increase in population, Latinos continue to rank low amongst those receiving a college education (Saenz, Perez, & Cerna, 2007). Within this number of Latinos without a college education, the majority are males (Laden, Hagedorn & Perrakis 2008). Latino males are the only group Minimal attention has been given to the issue of the dismal numbers of Latino males in higher education; one of the reasons may be the assumption that the educational system has historically favored males (Kindlon & Thompson, 2000). The feeling of favoritism towards males was such that Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act as well as the Title IX of the Equality Opportunity in Education Act were enacted (Equal Employment Opportunity, n.d.). It is also hard to fully understand the disparity between Latino male
and female academic attainment with reports with opposing views where it states how education shortchanges girls. Despite the sense of male favoritism in education, the current epidemic of the almost extinct Latino male in education, demands that this issue is given prompt attention (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2008).

If California does not address the lack of Latino attainment in higher education, a vast majority of this population will become undereducated, thus widening the attainment gap not only between Latino and non-Latino, but between Latino males and Latina females as well. It is imperative for student affairs practitioners to further understand the cultural factors that affect the Latino students’ educational experiences to best serve this special population, that although is incrementing their numbers in the American society, for the most part it is still missing in higher education (Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, Greenfield, & Quiroz, 2001).

Limitations of the Study

Several limitations were present while conducting this study, including a small sample of students, which may not be representative of the Latino population. Limited time was also a factor, which limited the number of participants for this study. This study focused only on one institution, Northern California University, and other institutions need to be analyzed as well. Although participants identified themselves as Latino, most of them were Mexican or Mexican-American, therefore making an assumption from this population may not be accurate with other Latinos from other nationalities. Students in the study attended a predominant white institution (PWI); perceptions of Latinos
attending Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSI) may differ from the participants in this study. Lastly, only five community colleges were represented within the respondents. Respondents from other community colleges need to also be included.

Organization of the Remainder of the Study

This literature review is divided into themes that speak to Latino/a students’ experience navigating the higher educational system as well as the historical aspects of Latinos in the United States and the development of their identity. The literature will then take us to explore the California master plan and the California community college system and its vital role in educating the Latino population. The Latino/a student experiences in terms of support and obstacles managing the complex system of higher education as well as the support from family and peers will also be addressed. Retention models and their relevance to the Latino/a student experience within higher education will be reviewed. Latino/a students’ self-identity and the relationship to their persistence in higher education will also be considered. Initiatives aimed to bridging the educational gap of minorities will be discussed. The final portion of the literature review will describe programs that have proven effective in addressing the needs of these students towards a successful transfer from community colleges to four-year institutions and beyond. Chapter 3 describes the methodology of the study including the survey of Latino male students at a four year public university to gauge their attitudes and experiences coming from a community college. The data from this study is examined and analyzed in Chapter 4 and leads to the conclusions and recommendations that Chapter 5 discusses.
Chapter 2

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

This review of literature focuses on the unique college experience of Latino male transfer students. This chapter presents and discusses a historical background of Latinos in higher education, the experience of the Latino male in higher education as well as the factors which impact their academic success. This chapter will cover an extensive review of the literature with focus on the following areas: historical background in the education of Latinos in the United States, cultural identity, family as a source of identity and support, peers as a source of support, Institutional barriers and support for Latinos, the struggle and barriers in higher education for Latinos, the master plan, educational initiatives, retention models and summary.

Historical Background

Latinos are the fastest growing group in the United States. People identified as Hispanic or Latinos accounted for more than a half of the nation’s growth, Latinos make up 16.3% of the total U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). This increase in population has heightened the need to further understand the experiences of Latino college students. The growing Latino population in the United States may begin to see an impact in the number of Latino/a students in higher education over the past couple of decades (Downs, Martin, Fossum, Martinez, Solorio, & Martinez, 2008). Despite these academic gains, the numbers of Latino/a students receiving a higher education remained
significantly low (Velasquez, 1999). Researchers, such as Velasquez, attribute the lack of representation of Latino/as in higher education in part to “the historical, sociocultural experience of racism and internal colonialism” (1999, p. 4). Discriminatory behaviors, both inside and outside the classroom have a detrimental impact in Latino students’ academics (Nora, Cabrera, Hagedorn, & Pascarella 1996). It is imperative that educators and personnel at institutions of higher education understand the diverse background of students of color to best serve them (Ancis, Sedlacek, & Mohr, 2000). An environment perceived to be hostile or unreceptive to minority students’ backgrounds contributes to particular difficulties which may hinder the students’ academic performance (Ancis, et Al., 2000). Latino students often experienced “stereotyping and prejudice in the form of limited respect and unfair treatment by faculty, teaching assistants and students” as well as “pressure to conform to stereotypes” (Ancis, et al., 2000, p. 183). Such pressures may also be attributed to the limited representation of Latino/as in the form of faculty and staff. Latino students who perceive their institution as being ethnically diverse had a higher percentage of retention and degree completion (Longbeam, Sedlacek, & Alatorre 2004). Some researchers hold higher education responsible for the advancement of social progress (Hurtado, 2007), within this social advancement the education of its citizens is a priority (Gutmann, 1987).

Although there is a high college attrition rate among Latino college students (Hurtado, et al., 1997), there are those Latino students who do succeed in academia (Lono, 2004) which merit further consideration. This focus on Latinos and higher education has produced prominent reports in noteworthy organizations, such as the
RAND Corporation and the Pew Hispanic Center, whose purpose is to educate and advance Latinos in education. Latino males are mainly known for their disparities in enrollment and degree completion in higher education (Saenz, & Ponjuan, 2008). The experience of Latinos in higher education too often has been seen through the deficit model (Valencia & Black, 2002) highlighting the missing Latino male from higher education, the barriers of retention and the high attrition rates (Saenz, & Ponjuan, 2008) and often dismisses the experiences of those Latinos who are successful in higher education. Of the Latino students who do graduate from high school, more enroll in some form of postsecondary education as compared to the total high school graduate population—10% of Hispanic high school graduates versus 7% of the total population (Fry, 2002). The majority of Latino students opt for community colleges as their entry way into higher education (Swail, et al., 2003; Fry, 2002). Most of the research in academia in regards to access, retention and attrition to higher education involves four year institutions and not the community college system (Kirst & Bracco, 2004; Perna, 2006; Perna & Thomas, 2008). The California community college system is by far the largest educational system in the nation, enrolling approximately 1,045 students, and encompassing 23% of all students in the nation (National Center for Education Statistics, 2008). This neglect becomes even more unforgiving when taking into account the large number of Latino students who utilize the community college system as a gateway into higher education (Striplin, 1999; Fry, 2004).

There are many reasons why Latino students choose to attend a community college over a four year institution, but the main two are proximity to their home towns
due to the vast number of them and affordable tuition costs (Fry, 2002). Most of these students enter the community colleges with specific goals of transferring to a four year institution and furthering their education (Hagedorn, & Cepeda, 2004; Suarez, 2003; Fry, 2002). With their high enrollment in the community college system, it would be assumed that these students would transfer and continue with their goal of graduating with a bachelor’s degree or higher, unfortunately that is not the case (Fry, 2002). Only a few achieve the goal of transferring from a community college (Fry, 2004; Swail et al., 2004).

The problem of Latino educational attainment becomes ever more evident and requires urgent consideration and action when gender is considered. Latino males are trailing behind their Latina counterparts in higher education degree attainment (Castellanos, Gloria, & Kamimura, 2006).

When reporting on Latino students’ educational trends, statistics are not optimistic, but there are those students who do manage to reach their educational goals and more emphasis should be given to investigating what those key factors were that made the difference in their academic career (Velasquez, 1999). In order to positively affect this negative trend, it is imperative to fully understand the factors that contribute to not only the attrition but also the success of those students who remain in higher education (Velasquez, 1999). Some researchers attribute the success of these Latino students to the sense of belonging within the institution, and the feeling of their culture being validated within the institution which makes students feel a sense of belonging in higher education (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Mendoza, 2005).
Latinos have been severely underrepresented in higher education and the reasons for it appear to be several (Hurtado, 2007). Although we have been experiencing an increase in Latino students entering institutions of higher education, (Fry, 2002) and utilizing the community college as a primary entrance to higher education, (Torres, 2003) Latinos continue to trail behind the mainstream students (Velasquez, 1999). Such disparity in attainment becomes more evident in certain racial/ethnic and socio-economic groups (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2008). In terms of educational attainment, Latino males are the least represented (Saenz, Perez, & Cerna, 2007). Fewer Latino college-age males are enrolling into higher educational institutions compared to their female counterparts (Saenz, Perez, & Cerna, 2007). Females are achieving greater overall success in higher education compared to their male counterparts; as a result some research has shifted focus to highlight the missing male in higher education (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2008). The need to address the missing minority male in higher education is such that organizations like the American Association for Community Colleges (AACC) have developed a “Minority Male Student Success Database” to identify those programs whose objectives are to improve the success rate of minority males at their community college (“Minority Male Student Success Programs,” 2012). Currently, within this database, there is only one program identified from a California Community College, which is Coastline Community College in San Bernardino, CA which focuses on African American male education network and development (“Minority Male Student Success Programs”, 2012). What is most problematic about this troubling gender academic gap is that many continue to be unaware of it (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2008).
The profile of an average Latino student is that of a low-income, unrepresented, underprepared, first-generation college students who predominantly enrolls in community colleges (Brown, Santiago, & Lopez, 2003). Latinos students also tend to be non-traditional students who are many times older students attending part-time and who tend to work and often care for a family. Although Latinos are the large majority in the United States, more than 50 percent of the entire Hispanic college going population is concentrated in just two states, California and Texas (Brown, Santiago, & Lopez, 2003). Researchers have identified a need to further understand the growing minority populations at these institutions of higher education by implementing such tools as the identity development theory (Torres, 2003). It is by utilizing this tool that researches attempt to explain the developmental process that minority students encounter in higher education and possibly attempt to assist to bridge the educational attainment gap (Torres, 2003).

Continuing research on Latino students, Stanton-Salazar and Dornbusch (1995) focused their investigation on the relationship amongst social networks and academic achievement as well as aspirations of Mexican high school students. They found strong positive links among these variables. Adding to the knowledge of Latino students, the research of Stanton-Salazar and Dornbusch suggests that cultural capital played a key role in their academic attainment (1995). Valenzuela and Dornbusch’s (1994) research focused on the role of family networks and in the academic achievement of Mexican-origin students. This research suggests that immigrant families cope with the lack of
knowledge of higher education by emphasizing on social capital, such as family support (Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995; Valenzuela & Dornbusch, 1994).

“Identidad Cultural:” Cultural Identity

Developing an identity may be more challenging for Latinos due to the complexity of labels utilized in the United States. In one study, the researcher provided fifteen different ethnic identifications for Latino students to choose from (Ono, 2002). These terms included, “Mexican, Mexicano/a, Mexican American, Chicano/a, Cuban, Puerto Rican, Hispanic, Latino/a, Spanish, Spanish American, Raza, American, Hispano, and Other” (p. 732). Identity is known to be strongly defined by the influence peers and family has on an individual (Para, 2008). The influences these groups offer are also known as social support (DuBois, Burk-Braxton, Swenson, Tevendale, Lockerd & Morgan, 2002). Family assists in the formation of the individual’s distinctive points of view and values while peers provide models, the opportunity for exploration for the known values and believes (Bosma & Kunnen, 2001). Both, family and peer support is equally important in the development of identity; researchers suggest that an imbalance of influence between the two would be detrimental to the development of identity (DuBois, et al., 2002).

Although the knowledge of self may constantly change due to new experiences and information often received from daily interactions with others (Bosma & Kunnen, 2001), the identity minority students develop during their college years will dramatically influence how they adapt and manage educational experiences (Chickering & Reisser,
Although the Latino population continues to increase, there is still much needed research to be conducted on Latino ethnic identity, especially during the college years (Phinney, 1993). Torres, (2003) looked at the cultural orientation construct of Hispanic college students which was analyzed using the Bicultural Orientation Model (MOB). Torres determined that students could have one of four orientations which further explained their self-identity: Bicultural Orientation, Anglo Orientation, Hispanic Orientation and Marginal Orientation (2003). Torres’ study also generated two major Hispanic Identity Development categories, which are Situation Identity and Influences on Change. Situational Identity as the condition for this model, deals with the environment where the individual grew up, family influences and generational status as well as the self-perception of societal status (Torres, 2003). Loss of extended family support may create feelings of isolation and a sense of loss (Hurtado, 2007).

**Family and Identity**

The early stages of identity formation are severely influenced by familial interactions (Bosma & Kunnen, 2001), which is where individuals obtain values, points of views, norms and expectations. Researchers suggest that it is at this early stage where individuals begin their search for their self-identity using personal crisis to guide their search (Bosma & Kunnen, 2001). Family provides the sense of security and trust by providing the individual with the necessities as well as developing a sense of independence by allowing the individual to make decisions and learn from them, hence creating a positive identity for the individual (Para, 2008). The quality of interaction as well as the extent of support the individual receives from family highly influences the
individual’s development of identity (Meeus, Oosterwegel, & Vollebergh, 2002). Due to the level of involvement of family in the development of self image, positive relationships between family and the individual is key to developing a positive self-image (Kenny, Gallagher, Alvarez-Salvat, & Silsby, 2002).

Familial Influence and Academic Support

The level of parental involvement in their students’ education is directly correlated to the level of education parents have completed (Vargas, 2004; Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch & Hernandez, 2003). Parents formally educated in the United States’ system of higher education are able to develop college aspirations for their children as well as being better acquainted with the preparation and entrance requirements for higher education (Vargas, 2004). Students’ academic qualifications may not suffice when applying for college. Vargas’ (2004) research shows that having the knowledge of the college process may be a more determinant factor of attendance than academic preparedness. Although Latino parents may be unable to provide financial support or even guidance in terms of higher education, the support Latino parents provide for their students is significantly important for the development of college aspirations which is critical for Latino students’ college attendance (St. John, 1991).
Peers Influence and Support

The level of importance of family in the development of self-image has been found to be imperative (Bosma & Kunnen, 2001). In certain instances when the level of commitment or support families provide is insufficient or of inadequate quality, the individual may lack the ability to effectively cope with certain situations (DuBois, et al., 2002). It is in these situations when peer support may be found to be of extreme importance to an individual (Para, 2008). Peers are believed to particularly influence individual’s attitudes, behaviors and characteristics (Berndt, 2002), which include attitude about education (Para, 2008). Individuals may emulate peers which have a great impact on their identity (Para, 2008). Similarly as family may provide the support through the developmental stages of identity, peers may assist the developmental process by providing resources and guidance through crisis situations (Bosma & Kunnen, 2001). Ultimately, peers assist by developing a network which provides alternatives to individuals which family may not (Para, 2008). Just as the quality and level of interaction of family directly affects individual’s image of self, similar effects are known for peers (Bagwell, Schmidt, Newcomb, & Bukowksi, 2001).

Berndt (2002) suggested that positive interactions amongst school friends translate in greater school acceptance, greater commitment to education, higher self-esteem and an overall better academic perception of self. As individuals search for self-identity, peers’ perceptions of self are incorporated into ones identity therefore taking on peers’ beliefs (Paras, 2008). Therefore, it is imperative for students to surround themselves with peers that can provide positive influence (Bagwell, et al., 2001). Peers
act as models providing students with diverse views and a range of opportunities (Bosma & Kunnen, 2001). Researchers also suggest that the amount of time and energy devoted to activities related to education were high predictors of student’s personal and academic development (Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

Institutional Support

Brown et al.’s (2003) research stated that a successful campus for Latinos is the one that welcomes them and acknowledges their vital role as assets to the institution by accomplishing the academic endeavors. It is also stated that Latino students need to feel a sense of belonging, a feeling of community where they can feel less isolated (Brown et al., 2003). Although family and peer support has been determined to be influential in developing self-identity (Bosma & Kunnen, 2001), this may not be sufficient to escape academic attrition. Hurtado et al. (1997) found that having a large population of Hispanic students in a particular institution as well as having developed a positive interaction amongst each other and faculty increased their retention rate at four year institutions.

College campuses with a predominant white population, contribute to the feeling of sociocultural alienation in minority students (Loo & Rolison, 1986). Saldana (1990) concluded that Latino students who possessed a positive ethnic identity were less susceptible to stress and simultaneously achieved a higher success in activities related to their education. However, the opposite is also true: Latino students who were uncertain or who questioned their ethnic identity were more vulnerable to stress and other pressures (Saldana, 1990). Misunderstanding or lack of understanding of values between the
educational institution and the student may contribute to stress, alienation and isolation which contributes to what it has been known as drop-out or stop-out (Castellanos, Gloria & Kamimura, 2006; Gloria, Castellanos, & Orozco, 2005). Limited cultural and personal legitimation in higher education may result in diminished academic effectiveness contributing to attrition (Castellanos, Gloria, & Kamimura, 2006; Castellanos & Jones, 2004). The increasing Latino population has influenced universities to pursue a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) status which would attract Hispanic/Latino students in search for a higher education institution in which to continue their higher education (Laden, Hagedorn & Perrakis 2008). Although Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) have been known to significantly contribute to African-American college students’ educational outcomes (Flowers, 2002; Outcalt & Skewes-Cox, 2002), research proving the significance of attending a HSI for Hispanic/Latino students is not widely accessible and that which is accessible has yield mixed results (Abraham, Lujan, Lopez, & Walker, 2002; Benitez, 1998; Dayton, et al, 2004; Laden 2004). Information is imperative to the development of a college going culture. Researchers have suggested several key elements for educational institutions to effectively inform parents and students of their higher education choices (Vargas, 2004). One example is an early intervention which begins during the elementary school years which would expose parents and students to the various career and educational options which would assist parents adjust and prepare for the students educational needs (Hossler, Schmit & Vesper, 1999). Information in regards to financing education as well as financial aid should be targeted to parents in order to demystify college affordability and provide options to
finance it (Hossler et al., 1999). Taking challenging courses beginning at the middle school and continuing through high school as well as taking the college entrance exams are linked to higher rates of college attendance, therefore parents and students need to be informed of the availability of such courses and deadlines of exams (Hossler et al., 1999). Overall assistance with completing financial aid and admissions applications as well as researching a variety of college options, even if they were not originally thought of as a possibility by the student or parent, is also critical (Ikenberry & Hartle 1998).

“La Lucha” The Struggle

Previous research has reported that males are less likely to advance through higher education than their female counterparts (NCES, 2003; Bailey, Jeong & Cho, 2010). According to the most recent Bureau Labor of Statistics, youth not enrolled in school in October 2010, men are more likely than females to participate in the labor force; 83.7 percent compared to 74.8 percent (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010). This contrast is also more pronounced within the Latino community where Latino students are trailing behind their Latina counterparts not just in college enrollment where Latinas enroll 7% more than Latinos nationwide, but as well as completing college (US Census, 2005). Latino males tend to dropout of educational institutions more often than Latinas (Castellanos, Gloria, & Kamimura, 2006). In recent years, the trend of Latino males opting to enter the work force or join the armed forces instead of striving for a higher education or even ending their higher education career early without completing a degree or certificate seems to have increased (Yosso & Solorzano, 2006). Latino males are also
incarcerated at an alarming rate. There are 2.7 Latino males’ ages 18-24 living in prison dorms for every 1 Latino male at a college dorm (Statewide Database, n.d.). Although this number does not reflect those students who do not live on-campus dormitories, the number is still alarming. It may be somewhat difficult to picture males being referred to as underrepresented at institutions of higher education, but it is crucial to highlight the different barriers males may face to fully grasp their educational outlook.

“Otras Barreras” Other Barriers

Throughout the research the extent of barriers Latino students face in their journey in achieving a higher education is evident (Crisp & Nora, 2010). Those barriers include stereotypes (Valencia & Black, 2002), culture (Dayton, Gonzalez-Vasquez, Martinez, & Plum, 2004; Ortiz, 2004), limited knowledge of higher education (Brown, et al., 2003), poor academic preparation (Brown, Santiago & Lopez, 2003) and socioeconomic factors (Schmid, 2001). Although these barriers have proven to have a negative impact in Latino students’ academic achievement, the profound misconception of Latino parents not valuing higher education appears to be one of the prevailing thoughts in american society (Valencia & Black, 2002).

Stereotypes

There have been several stereotypes which illustrate the Latino families as not being too encouraging in terms of supporting their children to pursue a higher education (Brown, Santiago, & Lopez, 2003). Such stereotypes illustrate the Latino families not valuing education: therefore, Latino students may not see education as a viable
alternative after graduating high school (Dayton, Gonzalez-Vasquez, Martinez, & Plum, 2004). Reality is that many students become discouraged from the same institutions which should motivate, prepare and assist them to continue their pursuit of a higher education (Brown, et al., 2003; Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, & Hernandez, 2003). Fear of not belonging at institutions of higher education, messages which depict stringent admissions requirements, limited financial assistance and increasing cost of enrollment are often the reason why many Latino students become discouraged of applying to institutions of higher education (Brown, et al., 2003), messages which are ill founded and for the most part untrue. Within the Latino community, family is highly valued, the reason why many came to the United States was to provide a better future to their children and education played a key role in that decision (Brown, et al., 2003). A better education and a brighter future are two primary reasons why families immigrated to the U.S (Brown, et al., 2003). Unlike many immigrants, Latino immigrants tend to be not formally educated and not acquainted with higher education which heavily disadvantages their children’s ability to achieve a higher education (Brown, et al., 2003). The barriers parents and community face, significantly affect the persistence and performance of Latino students at institutions of higher education (Dayton, et al., 2004).

Cultural Barriers

First-generation Latino college students rely on what they consider formal sources of information to effectively guide them to the academic process (Brown et al., 2003). Unfortunately such information rarely is available to non-English speaking parents.
Therefore parents often feel excluded and not valued in their children’s educational process (2003); students are often left with misinformation, or confused with the admissions process and its requirements. Low-income students attending urban schools in areas considered to be of high poverty were found to receive less timely information about college (Kimura-Walsh, Yamamura, Griffin & Allen, 2008). Such misinformation is in part due to the lack of effective counseling at the high school level (Kimura-Walsh et al., 20008). Other challenges besides academic under preparedness come into play once Latino students enroll in institutions of higher learning. Such include, but are not limited to, racism, status as first-generation college students, and culturally conflicting messages which may cause tension between the pursuit of higher education and the student’s familial cultural norms, obligations and values (Dayton, Gonzalez-Vasquez, Martinez, & Plum, 2004; Ortiz, 2004).

Limited Knowledge of Higher Education

Possessing the knowledge about how to prepare for and apply to college is essential to students’ obtaining the opportunity to attend. Yet, getting information and advice about college preparation, financial aid, and planning is most difficult for those young people who are found least often in higher education institutions, namely, low-income students, racial and ethnic minorities, and youth from families with no previous college-going history. (Garret, 2004, p. 3)
It has been determined that middle and high school years are critical in developing the knowledge required to access higher education, from acquiring the aspirations for attending college, to choosing and learning the process of applying for admissions and financial aid (Vargas, 2004). Many immigrants, especially recent immigrants, are unfamiliar with this country’s educational system and depend heavily on their family for guidance (Brown, et al., 2003). First-generation Latino students are left to fend for themselves when navigating the educational system in this country due to the unfamiliarity of the process to their families (Torrez, 2004). Researchers call this lack of knowledge a great barrier to education, due to the lack of cultural capital to navigate the environment in higher education (Torrez, 2004). Having access to college information as well as being participants of programs that provide college information improves the college attendance rates (Corwin, Venegas, Oliverez & Colyar, 2004; Vargas, 2004). Although high schools and other institutions of education make college information available to students, this information is rarely made available to non-English speaking parents (Brown, Santiago, & Lopez, 2003). Limited knowledge of the college process and system increases barriers for Latino students and their parents in terms of accessing higher education information and becoming admitted (Auerbach, 2004; Gandara, 2002; Torrez, 2004; Brown, Santiago, & Lopez, 2003). Students who lack the prior knowledge of higher education tend to rely heavily on their counselors and teachers to guide them through the process; unfortunately, they are the least informed (Vargas, 2004). This may leave the student feeling like higher education may not be a realistic option for them (Torrez, 2004). Latino parents’ lack of understanding of services and resources which
may assist with such concerns as financing higher education may limit the extent of encouragement they provide their student (Tornatzky, Cutler, & Lee, 2002). Although Latino families understand the value of a higher education, the lack of understanding of the complex process of higher education greatly limits their ability to see higher education as viable (Brown, Santiago, & Lopez, 2003). When surveyed in regards to basic college knowledge, Latino parents missed at least half of the questions (Tornatzky, Cutler, & Lee, 2002). When further investigating the lack of knowledge of higher education in Latino parents, several factors were mainly present, including the following: lower parental educational levels and income; first-generation immigrant status; lack of access and exposure to college representatives and college access and parent involvement programs; limited access to technology; language barriers that prevents Latino parents from obtaining information from counselors, teachers, college representatives and the media; as well as a lack of genuine efforts from schools and counselors to reach out to the Latino population and inform them in regards to higher education and the benefits of such (Auerbach, 2004; Chacon, 2000; Gandara, 2002; Torrez, 2004).

In order to increase Latino students’ opportunity for higher education, parents need to be further informed and taken in consideration in their children’s educational process (Auerbach, 2004). Parents need to be fully informed and included in the conversations of higher education and the academic progress of students in order to increase the probability of academic success of Latino students (Auerbach, 2004). What may appear as Latino parents not valuing their student’s education may in turn be a lack
of understanding of the process, hence having a gap in information, not a gap in values (Brown, et al., 2003).

Poor Academic Preparation

There is an established relationship between the college success of minority students and the level and quality of education they received prior to being enrolled in college (Castellanos & Jones, 2004). It has been established that students that take more rigorous academic courses during their high school years are more prepared and are more likely to attend college (Akerhielm, Berger, Hooker & Wise, 1998). Underrepresented ethnic minority students often come from low socioeconomic backgrounds in areas where federal funding for education is low; therefore they attend low performing high schools which in turn provide them with inadequate preparation for higher education which often leads to high dropout and low college going rates (Orfield, 1996; O’Brien & Zudak, 1998; Garcia, 2001). Low-attaining schools may also be plagued with inadequately prepared educators who lack a major or a minor in the field they currently teach (Sciarra & Whitson, 2007). If enrolled in a secondary institution that offers college preparatory courses, often times Latino students are placed in low-ability tracks which do not equate to admissions to an institution of higher education (Thomas, 1998). Placement in such inadequate courses occurs even when Latino students achieve similar placement levels as their white counterparts (Oakes, 1995). A report published by the Pew Hispanic Center, indicated that a mere 28% of Latino students in the United States were academically qualified for admissions to colleges and universities upon completion of high school
Standardized tests demonstrate that Latinos are amongst the least academic prepared minorities. Miller and Garcia (2004) took the national average SAT GPA from the graduating class of 2002 and established that Latinos obtained on average a 3.14 SAT GPA compared to Caucasians and Asian Americans who had a 3.37 and a 3.43 SAT GPA respectively. Inadequate guidance from counselors often results in enrollment in non-academic courses which will not prepare students for the rigor or acceptance for colleges and universities (Ortiz & Gonzales, 2002). Being admitted to an institution of higher learning presents other obstacles for Hispanic students coming from predominantly low income first-generation backgrounds. Hispanic students often face a constant “distrust of institutional infrastructures, fear of failure, fear about asking questions, fear of being perceived as ‘stupid’ or ‘lazy….doubts about being ‘college material,’ trauma associated with making the transition to college, and being intimidated by the system” (Rendon, 1994 p. 9). Such fear of inadequateness is heightened with the placement in academic development courses (Hoyt, 1999). Latino students tend to not take academically preparatory courses compared to their Caucasian and Asian counterparts. The graduating class of 1998 included 55 percent of Asian American students and 45 percent of Caucasian students who reportedly took college preparatory math compared to a mere 26 percent of Latino students (Miller & Garcia, 2004). Being academically underprepared increases students’ probability of being enrolled in remedial courses and as the number of areas for which a student needs remediation increases, so does the percentage of attrition (Hoyt, 1999).
Socioeconomic Factors and Academic Achievement

Influence of family income, family structure, and parental occupation has been determined to have an impact on the student’s educational and social stratification (Schmid, 2001). Some researchers state that the opportunity to achieve a college degree is more bound by class than by academic potential (Carey, 2004; Kao, & Tienda, 1995). The Latino population is one of the most affected by the rising cost of higher education and the limiting of state and federal grant based aid (Auerbach, 2004; Pew Hispanic Center/Kaiser Family Foundation, 2004). Some researchers attribute the lack of clear and stable aspirations of Hispanic students for higher education to their socio-economic status (Kao, & Tienda, 1995; Tornatsky, Cutler & Lee, 2002).

Institutions may assist students in many forms, from academic to personal, an area which Latino students seem to truncate their academic persistence is economic need. Other researchers have associated the level of stress that Latino students undergo with their high dropout rate. Latino college students experience a greater amount of stress resulting from academic, financial and personal stress than their Anglo counterparts (Quintana, Vogel, & Ybarra, 1991). Students coming from a low-income background tend to be the most fearful and uniformed population when it comes to the application and financial aid process for college (Vargas, 2004). The concern of college affordability is well founded. Unfortunately the lack of information in regards to financial resources, such as the FAFSA, available drives students to make an ill-informed decisions about higher education (Brown, et al., 2003). It is such misinformation about the actual cost of a college education that limits Latino students’ choices of colleges (Brown, et al., 2003).
Although students may qualify for more academically rigorous colleges and universities, the cost of attendance and the unfamiliarity of the process and availability of financial assistance generally limits their choices of colleges to community colleges (Hearn, 1991). Enrolling in a less selective college in turn reduces the students’ likeliness of success in higher education (Bowen & Bok, 1998; Kane, 1998). Guidance in terms of college preparation has been determined to increase the college going rate of low-income students (Vargas, 2004). It has become ever so evident that it is in the best interest of the United States, socially and economically, to invest in their Latino population and assist with increasing the college attendance and graduation rates of this population (Sciarra & Whitson, 2007).

“El Plan Maestro:” Master Plan for Higher Education

Making higher education a viable option for those who aspire to obtain it was the main purpose for the creation of the Master Plan for Higher Education (Nevarez & Woods, 2010). By establishing standards for admissions and policies for transferring, education would cease to become a reality (Henriksen, 1995), especially for those groups which up to this point were nonexistent in educational institutions. The Master Plan stated that public higher education in California should consist of the three systems; the University of California which would admit the top one-eighth of the California high school students, the California State University which would admit the top one-third and the California Community Colleges, would function with an open door policy (Chapa & Schink, 2006). The University of California had the task of developing research and
offering professional degrees as well as Bachelors, Masters, and Ph.D. (Leigh & Gill, 2007). The California State University system would be dedicated to offering Bachelors and Masters degrees as well as educating future teachers by also granting teaching credentials (Leigh & Gill, 2007). The community colleges would have the task of preparing those students who wished to transfer to four year institutions as well as training those who pursued a vocational career (Leigh & Gill, 2007). Community colleges, as it states in the Master Plan, are to provide students the opportunity to transfer to four year institutions, which is vital to access in higher education (Nevarez & Woods, 2010).

It was the intention of the Master Plan to provide an education for all, including those who were unable to afford an education. The California Community College system was originally free of cost; unfortunately that changed in 1984, but they remain the most affordable higher education system in California and throughout the nation (Leigh & Gill, 2007). Since the community college system was established, the student population has been as diverse as the reasons for attending such. The community college system seems the most practical option for a majority of Latinos, specifically considering the poor academic preparation many begin their higher education with (Miller & Garcia, 2004). Although the three tier system was created to provide all California students with equal access to postsecondary education, the enrollment and attainment gap for Latino students continues to widen (Alvarez, Rivas, Perez, & Solorzano, 2007).
Poor academic preparation limits students’ choices after high school, with many Latinos choosing community college as a viable option to furthering their education (Miller & Garcia, 2004). Latino students choose community colleges overwhelmingly over four year institutions. Over 60% of Latinos choose to begin their education at a community college rather than a four year college (Fry, 2004). It may be that community college is the only educational system that Latinos graduate at similar rates as Caucasians and African Americans; unfortunately the education attainment gap is evident in bachelors and higher degrees (Chapa & Schink, 2006). Limited academic preparedness may not be the main reason why Latino students choose a community college over a four year institution. Research shows factors such as: inexpensive tuition compared to four year colleges, academic programs that accommodate part time enrollment, evening courses, technical training and certificates are amongst the reasons why Latino students choose community colleges (Fry, 2002). Although a less expensive education with flexibility in their courses may sound appealing to many, research shows that more than half of students who begin their education at community colleges do not obtain a bachelor’s degree (Fry, 2004; Fry, 2002). Latino students continuing to be the least formally educated ethnic group in the United States is problematic due to the overrepresentation of this population amongst the poor (Sciarra & Whitson, 2007).
“Iniciativas Educativas” Educational Initiatives

Although much work needs to be done in terms of advocacy for Latino students in the United States, there are noteworthy gains in this aspect which merit mention. Latinos have been historically disregarded from higher education, but that changed in the 1960’s when the Latino community demanded equal opportunity in higher education (MacDonald, Botti, & Hoffman, 2007). It was President Lyndon B. Johnson who passed legislation specifically designed to protect the political, social and economic opportunities of groups who were traditionally disadvantaged (McDonald et al., 2007). The clearest example of such legislation is the Higher Education Act of 1965 which became a beacon of hope for Latinos attempting to gain access to higher education (McDonald et al., 2007).

Due to such progressive efforts, Latinos drastically gained education access which resulted in reducing the academic achievement gap between Latinos and Caucasians from 14% to 11% by 1990, unfortunately such gains have not been experienced since then (Vernez & Mizell, 2001). Colleges and universities began efforts to increase the enrollment of Latinos and other minority groups traditionally not included in higher education resulting in increasing graduation rates for Latinos and other minorities (Miller & Garcia, 2004). The progress gained by Latinos in higher education deserves merit; unfortunately the growing Latino population requires such gains to be greater. As the Latino population increases, so should the percentage of Latinos enrolling in postsecondary institutions, unfortunately that is not the case (Downs et al., 2008; Miller & Garcia, 2004). In order to continue this trend of access to higher education and
increase diversity in colleges, states, especially those with the largest population of Latinos, which are California, Texas and Florida, have adopted a percent solution (Brown, et al., 2003). California adopted a measure that grants admissions to public colleges and universities to those students who score in the top 5 percent of high school graduates, Texas adopted a similar plan for those who score in the top 10 percent and Florida similarly a plan that admits the top 20 percent of high school students who complete all college preparatory courses at their high schools (Brown, et al., 2003).

Universities have also recognized that having access to higher education alone is not sufficient to increase Latinos in higher education. Universities recognize the importance of providing financial assistance; both need and merit based to effectively attract and retain Latino students (Brown, et al., 2003). Other initiatives that have assisted this population with their goal of higher education include, ENLACE, Affirmative Action, the Higher Education Act and most recently the partial passing of the DREAM ACT. An important aspect of affirmative action, although highly misunderstood, was the access to higher education it granted to many minority students (Kaufmann, 2007). Due to much opposition, mainly from the misunderstanding of it, affirmative action ceased to exist in 1998. Although Affirmative Action is no longer in effect, different initiatives have surged to further assist the Latino community advance in education, such is the case of Engaging Latino Communities in Education (ENLACE) (Brown, Santiago, & Lopez, 2003). ENLACE is an initiative created by the Kellogg Foundation dedicated to empowering historically underrepresented Hispanic/Latino communities through resources beginning from pre-school to graduate school (Brown,
Santiago, & Lopez, 2003). The Higher Education Act, Title V of 1998 to be more precise, granted Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSI) extra funding to increase the availability of courses and to improve the quality of courses offered to this population (Brown, Santiago, & Lopez, 2003). The Dream Act, which was signed into law by California Governor Jerry Brown in July of 2011, will allow undocumented students access to Cal Grants, which is a public program that in the prior year provided financial assistance to more than 370,000 qualifying low-income college students. The Dream Act will not take effect until fall of 2013 (“Gov. Jerry Brown signs Dream Act”, 2011).

The Higher Education Act may be by far the most significant legislation for Latinos and educational access (Brown, et al., 2003). This act authorized institutional and outreach programs such as the TRiO programs (Brown, et al., 2003) which provide college information and allows students to be informed and participants of the college process which increases the students’ likelihood of attending college (Vargas, 2004). Students from low income families are more at risk of not attending college, but speaking to someone about college and the steps towards attending an institution of higher education increased their likelihood of being enrolled in college (Vargas, 2004).

Financial need has been established to be one of the main obstacles to achieving a college education for Latinos. However, the Higher Education Act was not aimed to alleviate this obstacle (Brown, et al., 2003). Private forms of financial assistance were created to act in conjunction with the Higher Education Act to provide a more complete type of college assistance for Latinos. Such is the creation of the Hispanic Scholarship Fund (HSF) in 1975 (Brown, et al., 2003). Since its creation, the HSF mission has been
to provide Latino students in the United States and Puerto Rico need and merit based scholarships totaling more than $60 million (Brown, et al., 2003). The goal of the HSF goes beyond proving financial assistance to those in need, it has also aimed to increase the number of Hispanics graduating from colleges (Brown, et al., 2003).

President Obama announced one of his most ambitious projects yet, which is to make the United State the number one college degree granting country in the world (Education, n.d.).

“I ask every American to commit to at least one year or more of higher education or career training. This can be community college or a four-year school; vocational training or an apprenticeship. But whatever the training may be, every American will need to get more than a high school diploma. And dropping out of high school is no longer an option. It’s not just quitting on yourself, it’s quitting on your country — and this country needs and values the talents of every American. That is why we will provide the support necessary for you to complete college and meet a new goal: by 2020, America will once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world.”

This was President Obama’s message on February 24, 2009, addressing a joint session of Congress. Canada currently leads in educational attainment (Santiago, Kienzl, Sponsler, & Bowles, 2010). United States trails behind with a mere 39 percent of the United States’ adult population, ages 25-64, holding an associate’s degree or higher (Santiago, Kienzl, Sponsler, & Bowles, 2010). In order for Obama’s higher education
plan to work, the issue of dismal higher education completion rates of Latinos needs to be addressed (Santiago, 2011).

The need for a more diversified curriculum in efforts to become more inclusive has been advocated by several scholars (Orfield, 1996). It has been established that a diverse curriculum is important, especially where faculty and staff lack diversity. Responding to the Michigan affirmative action case, Justice Sandra Day O’Connor stated, “numerous studies show that student body diversity promotes learning outcomes, and better prepares students for an increasingly diverse workforce and society, and better prepares them as professionals” (Grutter v. Bollinger, 539 U.S. 306, 2003). Many students may feel isolated, alone at such institutions where their background or ethnicity may not be represented; therefore it is the duty of the institution to provide these students with diverse curriculum in which they can feel represented (Orfield, 1996).

Educational Equity Programs

First-generation low-income students are often at a loss when confronted with the task of planning or applying for college. Latino students are often intimidated by the college admissions process, their lack of knowledge of the educational process greatly hinders the students’ likelihood of applying and being admitted to a college or university (Oliva, 2008). This assumption often leaves many students at a loss due to the lack of understanding of the higher education system. Such negligence in higher education result in what literature calls the “revolving door” theory (Oliva, 2008). Parents’ limited knowledge of higher education may limit the educational outlook for some Latinos,
therefore pre-college programs become essential for these students’ academic awareness. The Higher Education Act authorized programs such as TRiO, which have served to bridge the knowledge gap amongst many first-generation, low income college going students (Brown, et al., 2003). The creation of pre-college programs originated as an attempt to close the academic achievement gap amongst the most underserved. Providing access to higher education is only half the battle. As mentioned before, without the proper guidance once in college, Latino students who lack the educational capital to navigate the educational system may see their experience in higher education short lived (Torrez, 2004). To further ensure academic success of these students, the educational pipeline needs to follow their progress while in higher education. In order to do so, educational programs need to be available at the institution.

Many Latino students enter institutions of higher learning, but the lack of guidance or instruction on navigating the higher education system leads to drop-outs or stop-outs (Haro, 2008). For low-income, first-generation college going students, programs that can provide such guidance are not only beneficial, but crucial for their retention and academic success in higher education (Haro, 2008; Oliva, 2008). When mentioning effective retention programs for Latino students, it is important to mention the College Assistance Migrant Program which serves students whose parents’ are migrant or seasonal farm workers (Lowther & Langley, 2005). Although the College Assistance Migrant Program, also known solely as CAMP, does not exclusively serve Latino students, it is this population which composes majority of the Migrant working
population in California according to the California Migrant Education Comprehensive Needs Assessment (2007).

“Modelos de Retencion” Retention Models

When addressing attrition and retention, Tinto (1993) is often viewed as having the greatest influence on the current understanding of student retention and departure. Tinto presents student persistence as a longitudinal process developed between the institution and the student (Tinto, 1993). He utilized information such as pre-college schooling, skill, family background as well as attitude towards higher education and commitment to education and the institution (Tinto, 1993). Tinto’s findings further advanced the understanding of college attrition and retention by noting the importance of social integration for academic success. With this in mind, Tinto further suggests that although the institution may not be able to change the pre-enrollment characteristics of students, it can and should assist by creating an environment that could lead to integration which would further enhance the student’s commitment to the institution and translate in higher persistence (1993). Tinto stressed the importance of the institutions’ responsibility towards the students’ success. Institutions play a critical part in developing the students’ academic as well as social needs to ensure academic success. If an institution fails to provide either; it has failed the student (Tinto, 1993).

Although Tinto’s model may serve as a guide for addressing college attrition, his neglect to incorporate minority students in his study negated Latino students need for their culture by suggesting they separate from it, which may be traumatic for Latinos
hence increasing the risk of attrition (Rendon, 1994). Understanding the importance of sense of belonging in furthering students’ higher education is imperative. Researchers found that membership in social-community organizations developed Latino students sense of belonging (Hurtado, et al., 1997). Further analysis of programs and organizations that foster Latino students’ sense of belonging needs to be conducted.

Rationale for the Study

The participation of Latino males in higher education has been minimal compared to their female counterparts. Latino males enroll in community colleges at higher rates than four year colleges, unfortunately most fall short of their goal of transferring to a four year institution. Such absence from higher education has initiated a trend of research which focuses on, as researchers call it, the vanishing Latino male in higher education (Saenz, & Ponjuan, 2008). The obstacles males face in higher education are several and severe. The focus of Latinos and especially males has constantly been viewed through a deficit model lens which highlights the negative aspects of this population and often neglects to bring forth the achievements of those who succeed in academia. Further research is necessary to advance the body of knowledge in regards to programs, activities and procedures which enhance and assist Latino males in their academic careers. It is important to highlight the obstacles these males need to overcome in higher education, such as the lack of knowledge of academic programs, requirements and procedures. Latino males are often misguided and misinformed in terms of requirements necessary to be eligible to attend college as well as possessing limited knowledge of financial
assistance such as completing the Free Application for Federal Students Aid (FAFSA) and other educational programs for which they may qualify. Overall, the limited knowledge presents a grim scenario in education, which often limits their outlook of higher education.

Regardless of the obstacles present, each year many Latino males venture into higher education often misguided and misinformed, fortunately they succeed in their colossal task of transferring into a four year institution. Such narratives of academic success are what this researcher intends to identify and document. By noting the achievements of Latino males, others with similar backgrounds may see themselves reflected in the stories of achievement and continue their educational goal.

With this in mind, the following research focuses on the role that family, educational programs as well as the institution and the role peers play in supporting Latino male transfer students’ persistence in higher education. Research needs to also take into account those transfer Latino males who are succeeding in academia in order to develop a robust body of knowledge which fully encompasses their stories of success. This research presents information that may be used by administrators and policy makers in order to create and maintain initiatives that speak to the needs of the missing Latino male in higher education.
Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The collection and analysis of the data collected are addressed in the following chapter. The researcher collected the data during the winter of 2012. It was the intention of the research to gain greater insight to the factors associated with the experiences of Latino male undergraduate transfer students, especially how these students insure their academic prosperity in higher education both at community colleges and after transferring to a four year institutions. The research also aimed to further understand the effect families, school personnel and peers have on transfer students’ education. It is the intention of the researcher to gain the knowledge necessary to develop support for Latino transfer students and to effectively educate and intervene to positively impact the Latino males’ retention rates in higher education. The qualitative data for this research was collected from six Latino male participants. Information regarding the design of the study, data collection, instrumentation and the data analysis procedure were presented in this chapter.

Setting of the Study

The study was conducted at a larger public university in northern California with an undergraduate population of 27,033 students, 9,955 are males. Latino students compose 17% of the entire student population.
Population & Sample

Researchers (Cowan 2007) have established that populations are “a group of elements that are all alike on at least one characteristic, but usually more than one” (p. 113). This study analyzed a cluster sample of Latino males who had transferred from a community college. This research utilized two focus groups, one being undergraduates and another that had already graduated from Northern California University, of three Latino male students who have transferred from a community college to Northern California University.

Design of the Study

This researcher uses the constructivist (Schwandt, 1994) approach to guide the design and the analysis of the research. Constructivism allows human beings to generate their own meaning of reality by the interactions between ideas and experiences individuals bring with them (Kukla, 2000). Utilizing this perspective, the researcher aims to further understand the participants’ educational journey through their own experiences. For this study, the researcher also utilizes the interpretive research method, which is considered to be a “process and school lived experience” (Merriam, 1998, p.4). A case study method was utilized as means to collecting data. For this study, two focus groups were conducted with three participants in each. Participants were Latino male students who had transferred to Northern California University from a community college. One focus group was composed of current undergraduate students and the other of students who have recently graduated Northern California University. It is imperative to illustrate
the success of this subgroup and note the factors Latino male students considered beneficial as well as influential for their retention and academic progress both at community colleges and at four year institutions. This interviewer utilizes a qualitative interview format to determine prominent themes. Greenbaum (1997) suggested that, "researchers who use qualitative methods seek a deeper truth. Qualitative methods aims to make sense and, interpret, phenomena in terms of meaning people bring to them" (p. 120).

There is great meaning that arises from the experiences of the participants, and the rapport that can be developed between the participants and the interviewer is valued, rather than evaded. This researcher fully believes that qualitative research is, “…the view that reality is constructed by individuals interacting with their social worlds” (Merriam, 1998, p. 6) therefore a narrative approach was preferred.

Data Collection

In accordance with California State University, Sacramento’s Institutional Review Board process, the researcher completed necessary forms, submitted, and was approved to begin the study. Upon approval, the researcher searched for participants by e-mailing several Latino based fraternities at Northern California University as well as students at the College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP) and asking to direct potential participants to the researcher. The participants were asked to refer the researcher to other potential participants who might fit the desirable characteristics. This method is known as the “snowball effect” which was the method of acquiring participants utilized in this
study. The researcher opted for the implementation of this method due to the likelihood of individuals being recommending by other individuals, “likely to yield relevant, information-rich data” (Gall, Gall, and Borg (2010) p. 348).

Instrumentation

The questions in the research instrument were developed considering the following areas of inquiry.

1. What role does family play in supporting Latino male transfer students' in succeeding in higher education?

2. What role do higher education programs and the institution play in supporting Latino male transfer students’ persistence in higher education?

3. What role do peers play in supporting Latino male transfer students' persist in higher education?

Using the previously mentioned areas of inquiry, the researcher developed twenty-two open-ended interview questions. Utilizing an open ended method, the researched hoped participants would identify additional factors which supported their academic attainment as well as obstacles in pursuing such. Questions 1-3 addressed the background of the student. Questions 4-7 questioned the role of parents in the student’s decision to attend a community college as well as their support in such. Questions 8 and 9 addressed the participants’ interest in attending college. Questions 10-12 spoke about the role of peers in the student’s decision to attend a community college and persisting in higher education beyond it. Question 13-17 addressed the students’ perception of the higher education institution in terms of educational support. Question 18 addressed
programs and their influence on the students’ academic attainment. Question 19 addressed the possible types of financial support students may have had to pay for higher education expenses. Questions 20-23 dealt with the students’ ethnic identity and the importance of it for them in higher education. Question 14 provided an opportunity for students to share thoughts and experiences the researcher may not have previously addressed.

Data Analysis Procedures

The intent of this study was to gather and analyze data to identify contributing factors in order to positively affect the attrition pattern of Latino males transferring to four-year institutions of higher learning from community colleges. After gathering and transcribing the recordings from the interviews, the researcher designed a spreadsheet in Excel where for each question, common themes were extracted and coded. The qualitative coding analysis procedure identified themes that were further analyzed to refine overall themes from respondents. Respondents’ quotes were also included in the analysis of the findings and used as support in chapter four.
Chapter 4

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to further understand how family members, higher education personnel and peers supported Latino males transferring from a community college into a four year institution of higher education. Using the following questions this study aimed to understand the achievement and persistence of Latino male students who have historically been excluded from higher education, and are now becoming part of the rising number of ethnically diverse groups in higher education.

1. What role does family play in supporting Latino male transfer students’ in succeeding in higher education?

2. What role do higher education programs and the institution play in supporting Latino male transfer students’ persistence in higher education?

3. What role do peers play in supporting Latino male transfer students’ persistence in higher education?

This chapter discusses the results from the interviews and concludes with a discussion of the findings. Demographic information of the participants is first discussed within this chapter. The results have been presented by order of the research questions. Themes that emerged from the discussions are also further analyzed.
Demographics

Table 1 indicate participants’ home city (city of residence prior to attending community college), whether participant is a first-generation college student, type of high school participant attended, major in college and the community college the participant attended prior to transferring.

Table 1

Demographic Information for Research Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Home City</th>
<th>First-Generation</th>
<th>High School Type</th>
<th>College Major</th>
<th>Community College</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Richmond</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Ethnic Studies</td>
<td>Contra Costa Community College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oakland</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Business</td>
<td>Chabot Community College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watsonville</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Mechanical Engineering</td>
<td>Cabrillo Community College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union City</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>Chabot Community College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacramento</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Marketing and Public Relations</td>
<td>Sacramento City College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union City</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Criminal Justice</td>
<td>Ohlone Community College</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Interview Results

Findings from the two focus groups with six Latino male students are found in this chapter. The participants’ lived experiences document the academic and social factors impacting Latino male community college transfer students through the use of their own narrative.

The Role of Family

For the Latino community, family is primordial. Family guides the formation of individuals’ self-identity (Meeus, Oosterwegel, & Vollebergh, 2002; Para, 2008) as well as providing individuals with the ability to cope with different situations (DuBois, et al., 2002). Family also develops individuals’ expectations which include views of higher education attainment (Bosma & Kunnen, 2001).

Family Expectations

Parents often times did not expect participants to attend college, but emphasized the importance of getting ahead in life. Some participants equated getting ahead in life with achieving a college education as a participant mentioned, “I would say my parents didn’t say that I had to go to school, but my parents’ ethics like my dad is a very hard worker made me want to better myself, our parents came to this country to give us a better future the least we can do is get an education.” When parents were supportive of their child’s efforts to achieve a higher education, they often had more questions than answers in regards to higher education. A participant referred to his mothers’ encounter
with higher education by mentioning how “in some aspects she was kind of like in the dark because she didn’t know how things were actually running.”

The limited knowledge and involvement in higher education by Latino parents has been seen by some educators as parents being uninterested and a lack of care of higher education. The truth is actually the opposite, while parents lacked higher education; they understand the importance of it. Higher education is an unchartered territory for most Latino parents and sending their students to face it alone is a daunting task. Understanding the Latino culture is imperative to understand the sacrifice families make when they let one of their children go to college. Latino parents’ reservations on allowing their child attend college is not due to not valuing higher education, but the act of leaving the protective environment the parents can provide for their children. Higher education is an unknown for the majority of Latino parents which enhances their uncertainty of their children’s wellbeing while in college away from home. For this reason many parents prefer their children to attend a local community college, which is often closer than a major college or university.

Parental Support

Respondents identified support from their parents being a critical part of their education. Although respondents mentioned their parents’ lack of understanding of the higher education or financial aid process, respondents mentioned other ways in which parents essential to their academic success.
Emotional Support

Respondents identified support from their parents being a critical part of their education. Although respondents mentioned their parents’ lack of understanding of the higher education or financial aid process, the emotional support parents provided was vital for participants to continue their education. Parents’ constant reiteration that a higher education was possible and the continuous support emotional support participants received, motivated the participants to continue with their education. As a participant mentioned, “I didn’t get the guidance part from my parents, they never went to school, they never knew what it was to go to college and apply for all these things, so of course for them it was hard to guide me in the right directions so I had to ask a lot of questions but one of the things they always did was they always said “hechale ganas.” Another participant mentioned, “they (parents) didn’t necessarily could help with filling out paperwork and like finding out about programs but at the end of the day they were there for moral support.” Although participants mentioned wishing their parents were more aware of the educational process so they would have not felt alone doing it, participants do not blame their parents for their lack of knowledge. As a participant mentioned, “they were never like, what university are you going, what classes are you taking you know like did you do your financial aid, nothing like that but at the same time they didn’t know either.”

Although parents were unsure of the process of higher education, they continue to regard education as imperative to succeed in this country. “My parents would say you gotta get a degree you’re not going to find a good job without it. My dad was a
construction worker and he would say you need an education unless you want to do this kind of job.” Another participant also mentioned, “I would say my parents’ ethics like my dad is a very hard worker made me want to better myself, our parents came to this country to give us a better future. The least we can do is get an education.”

Parents demonstrated their commitment to higher education the best way they knew how, which was to continuously state the importance of higher education as well as monitoring students’ grades while in high school. As a participant mentioned, “my parents made sure I had good grades. I would get in trouble if I didn’t have good grades.” Another participant mentioned, “my parents couldn’t really help me because all they would say is go to school and get good grades and everything that’s all they know and they couldn’t help me with it cause they didn’t go through it. That’s why they couldn’t help me; I had to find things on my own.” Participants mentioned their parents’ commitment to their education as being significant, although it was limited by the lack of understanding of the process as well as the limited financial support they could provide.

*Financial Burden*

While parents understood the importance of education, the financial burden of the cost of college attendance for their children often became an obstacle. As a participant mentioned, “my parents would always bribe me to go to college, they said they would find a way to pay for anything for college, but knowing how they have struggled financially so I didn’t want to put that burden on them so I decided that when I went to community college I would pay for it, so I worked, I applied to financial aid which cover my classes my books and everything else I cover with my job.” Students were able to
find financial resources to continue their education which minimized the need for financial support from most of the participants. “I didn’t want to ask my parents more than I needed to. Fortunately I was able to find people at school to help me sign up for the BOGG waiver so it paid for tuition. FAFSA provided me with the financial support I needed without it I wouldn’t be able to afford it.” Students became aware of their parents financial and educational limitations which students were able to compensate to a certain extent by becoming more aware of such processes on their own.

Unaided Process

Participants unanimously responded that it was themselves who navigated the complicated process of higher education because their parents were not familiar with it. “They had no idea when I university. They never asked me did you get your application before the deadline. They didn’t even know when I applied to Sac State I think…until this day, never did they ever know how many colleges did I apply to.” Another participant mentioned, “they supported me emotionally, but they didn’t really help me. I pretty much did it all on my own” referring to his parents. Some participants mentioned other sources of knowledge that assisted them navigating the educational process when their parents were unable to. “Thankfully I was able to do it on my own. Thankfully I was able to find people who could help me. I don’t blame my parents for not being able to help me, they didn’t know how, but I kind of wish they would have helped me get where I am now.” Although participants appreciate their parents emotional and to a certain extent financial support, all participants made mention of specific areas in the
process of higher education where participants wished their parents would have been more knowledgeable.

*Parental Awareness of Higher Education*

Some areas described by participants where they would have wished their parents could have been more knowledgeable of included, college requirement, financial aid, required tests and overall understanding of the educational system with the different institutions. A participant referring to his parents mentioned, “they had no idea when I applied to the university. They never asked me did you get your application before the deadline. They didn’t even know when I applied to Northern California University I think, until this day, never did they ever know how many colleges did I apply to”. Participants suggested for parents to become familiar with these topics as early as students begin their elementary education, “at the high school level or even middle school or elementary school level there should be more efforts and provide more resources so parents can help their kids progress through their education, especially when kids get to that crucial point where students decide to continue their higher education or drop out.” Students participating in this research all recognized the need to further educate parents in these topics. Participants also suggested that educating parents in the process of higher education will not only make parents active participants of the students education, but will also make students more accountable to their education knowing that parents can be partners in such process as mentioned by a participant. “If parents would be better prepared to guide their students through the process of higher education and actually push them, they would really help increase the statistics of Latinos going to college”
mentioned a participant. Participants became engaged in a conversation in regards to ways to improve parent knowledge and involvement in higher education. Participants suggested several ways to accomplish such task.

*Parental Involvement*

On the importance of educating parents as well as student on the higher education process, one participant mentioned, “it is very important to get the kids and the parents involved so parents can start building up college knowledge even if they know it already. The ones that know can help out those ones that don’t know.” Participants suggesting forming parents self-help groups where they could discuss issues, concerns and questions in regards to higher education. A participant suggested that resources available to students through educational programs should also be available for parents. “All the resources we may have available should be available to parents as well like field trips and learn about the differences of the campuses they would better understand why some students want to go to other campuses that are further from their homes.” Informing parents about the educational programs offered at the different educational institutions will help parents further understand their students’ decisions to attend certain colleges and universities which may not be closest in proximity to their parent’s home. The decision of students opting for colleges and universities which may not be the closest from home often creates friction with parents and students. A participant added, “that was one of the biggest things my parents had, why are you going to Northern California University, why aren’t you staying and going to San Francisco State.”
Educational Support for Parents

Participants also mentioned the need for workshops to educate parents on the subject of college awareness, “having workshops would also help because a lot of the times your traditional Mexican family, they know that you go to school and then you get a job and you go to work, that’s it and they do not know the process.” Participants mentioned that counselors should take on the role to teach parents about higher education, in order to guide a student into the college, educating parents is key and should be a priority. A participant replied, “I think counselors should play that role” when asked who should provide such information for parents.

Providing workshops was mentioned as a priority. Some participants stressed the need to provide these educational opportunities during the early educational stages of their students’ education. A participant mentioned that, “workshops to teach parents the different types of financial aid at the high school, and even at the middle school, they would give parents the tools and more knowledge about how their kids can progress with their education.” Lack of knowledge of the education process may result in parents giving students the wrong information or at times deterring their students from continuing their education. Teaching parents about the educational system and the difference between campuses would help them understand why some students decide to attend colleges further from home, which creates stress between parents and student at times, “I know that some of my friend’s parents were like education is a waste of time, so start prepping parents from high school and letting them know of the resources available to not just go to the local community college, but how there are other universities.” A
participant mentions how his parents did not visited Northern California University either before or during his education at such institution. “I remember being at Northern California University and seeing a family taking a tour of the campus and even had the dog with them.” My parent don’t even know where Northern California University is at, they never been there”

First-Generation College Students

Latino students, often being first-generation attending college, are required to learn the higher education process on their own as well as becoming the main source of information on this matter for future siblings. All participants concurred that they were their parents’ source of knowledge about higher education and they all responded not being sure on the educational process and having many doubts when they began their education. Participants’ responses were the following when asked who their parents would go to for answers to their inquiries in higher education. “Me, it was when they had questions about college what was going on or any information about it they asked me.” “They would go to me, especially right now because I have a younger brother they come to me with questions like have you talked to him about this and that.” Another participant replied, “me, they sent me to orientation, so I came by myself and stuff like that so when they wanted to know they would just ask me.”

Role of Educational Personnel

First-generation Latino college students for the most part lack role models in higher education which can instruct them on the process or the rigor of higher education.
Limited knowledge of parents in the area of higher education limits the resources where to obtain information of higher education. For most of these students, high school counselors are the only viable means of obtaining such information. Unfortunately, not all students have a positive experience with them, leaving participants often feeling alone in the process. A responded added, “for me I would say the best way to put it is that there was a huge wall that I didn’t know how to climb. It was something new, it was after high school I didn’t know what to do.” The lack of guidance some of the respondents felt drove them to search for answers through other sources. One participant responded that, “I didn’t know anyone else I could go to and my parents didn’t know either so no one else would help me. The only one I would go to was my coach, but he didn’t always know.”

The unfamiliarity or disconnectedness with counselors continues while at community colleges. Respondents replied, “I noticed that at community college there are not many people willing to help you. The counselors at community college I felt like you would go in there with some hope and then you would get out of there like, damn I’m not going to get out of here like.” Another respondent referring to community college counselors mentioned, “they questioned you a lot and then you began to question yourself, like you can’t do that and you began to believe maybe I can’t do that taking 21 units I guarantee you can’t do it and when I would come out I was like, but I can do it and I started questioning myself.” Another responded added, “am I even going to be able to succeed in community college? I often questioned.” Not being able to connect with counselors and perceiving counselors as not being friendly or helpful contributes to
student’s feelings of disconnectedness and a perceived lack of guidance or interest in their academic success which may translate to the loss of motivation and increased attrition.

Role of Peers

The majority of respondents did not have positive educational experiences with their high school peers. Para’s research on peers demonstrates the significant influence these have on students’ attitudes about education (Para, 2008). Respondents mentioned being amongst the few of their high school peers that continued with their higher education, which often left respondents feeling isolated. “My immediate friends in high school didn’t go to college.” One respondent mentioned, “growing up in Richmond most of my friends did not continue their higher education. Only one of them, we moved here to Northern California University together so that was pretty cool, it was a whole new place so that was cool. I didn’t know anybody here so that helped out.” The majority of the respondents added that many of their community college peers did not differ much from their high school peers in the lack of desire to strive for academic achievement. Respondents attributed the environment at the community college as not being conducive to achieving educationally. “I don’t know what it is about junior college. There is a lot of negativity. Not necessarily because you are a Latino, but the vibe is so different, the environment.”

Respondents replied not having found a supportive environment in terms of peers until entering the Northern California University. Respondents replied that they felt a
need to connect with the students and faculty, but being unable to do so at any level until they transferred to Northern California University, “I would say when you go to a four year college you find people who are more like you, they have similar interest and you can connect with them, but you will find that more in four year colleges than community colleges.” Creating a connection with peers became important to the participants. Participants reported their social network to be very important in continuing their higher education. While participants were the only ones in their high school or community college group of friends to continue their higher education; it became extremely important to establish a connection with peers at Northern California University. When asked about the impact of peers in their education, participants responded to considering their peers, “very influential, I came to Northern California University and I didn’t know anyone. The only person I knew was Alfonzo, a bother from Nu Alpha Kappa Fraternity. Joining that organization has helped tremendously getting through college also becoming more of a leader.” More than having friends at the educational institution, having peers who students can relate to develops students’ educational network, empowers them to become active participants of their education. “I used to be very shy just keeping to myself, just doing what I needed to do, so that’s when I noticed that college didn’t had to be that way, that’s when I joined a fraternity and mainly what I like about the organization is that our conversations are always about school, we can relate.” Respondents replied feeling a sense of belonging which they identified as being beneficial to their higher education. “I joined a fraternity which was what kept my motivation going. I felt that I was always a part of something, coming here not being a
part of anything I was lost. Now I felt I had that moral support and now I felt that now I could do it and that was my drive and motivation to continue because when you don’t have anyone you don’t have anyone to ask or rely on.” Another participant replied, “having those friends who are the same color as you, the same background as you, whose parents came to the U.S. from other countries, it feels good to know that you are not alone, at my community college I felt like I was alone. Not knowing many people with my same situation as you in it makes you feel at peace, that you’re not a stranger. It makes you feel that you can do it, it is not that bad.” A respondent also added that at community college, “I was losing my motivation, my drive, like everyone just goes there and there are no clubs and no organizations. Well there are organizations but I wasn’t part of them, you kind of feel you go to school you go home.” A participant added speaking to the lack of sense of belonging with the institution due to the limited involvement on campus with students who shared goals and culture.

Participants emphasize the important of positive role models which were found through the organizations they joined at Northern California University. Student organizations helped students find other students like them, who share interests and background. Finding such connections assists students by developing a sense of belonging which translates in a stronger commitment to higher education. Respondents expressed the importance of finding peers who share their interests and goals in higher education due to misconnections many students experience with friends who did not chose higher education.
Continuing in higher education has created a division between some respondents and friends who opted to not continue in higher education. “When I go back home my conversations with my friends are not about school. They cannot relate, you always need to relate to other people at least me personally.” Although students found the support they much needed in student organizations, many mentioned the need for educational programs to make the transition from high school to community college and from community college to a four year institution. Few respondents mentioned having been part of educational programs at their community college. Respondents did not only refer to these programs as beneficial for students’ awareness, but also for parents.

Role of Educational Equity Programs

Participants were able to not only identify areas in which parents and students like themselves need to further be educated. Participants were able to suggest processes and programs to best assist parents’ guide their students through the educational process. Students provided much information in terms of needed resources in order to better inform parents and even predicted outcomes if those programs were both created and made available. “If parents would be better prepared to guide their students through the process of higher education and actually push them, they would really help increase the statistics of Latinos going to college but it all starts with programs like EOP, EOPS, CAMP at the high school, like someone else previously mentioned, ASPIRE.”

Participants also believe that if they had the opportunity to be in educational programs that taught them such lessons as SAT/ACT prep, college requirements and
scholarships their confidence would have been greater and they would have ventured into a four year college after high school as well as being better prepared for the rigor and the application process for higher education and financial aid amongst others. Only one student reported being part of such programs at their community college (ASPIRE) and constantly reported the difference this program made in his education and how it contributed to his prompt transferring. “At the junior college I was not involved in any programs. They (community colleges) lack the money CSU’s have to have programs.” Another respondent mentioned, “I was not in any either, it is just the type of environment at community colleges, students do hang out, but I feel it is not a really educational type of environment, you go there, go to class, play soccer or whatever and go home pretty much.”

Respondents learned about educational programs through peers who began their educational career at Northern California University and recognized the impact such programs would have had in their own educational experience. “I was never involved in any programs and when I got to Sac State I would hear like EOP and people would mention the CAMP program, what is CAMP and I would say those kinds of things are out there and would be like god if I would have been part of them I would have come to Northern California University more focused and I would have know what was available for me. What was FAFSA and those kinds of things you know and what’s something I really regret and that is something I really advocate to all.” Respondents who were involved in such programs at community college responded that such programs as, “EOPS and MESA helped me a lot they gave me the tools I didn’t have. They supported
me in every way actually needed and they are still there for me if I ask them. I was able to make those connections, like networking and stuff like that”. Another responded attributed his educational success to ASPIRE. “What these programs like ASPIRE do is huge. Thank god these programs exist to help students. A few weeks ago I was at Chabot and that’s where my little cousin goes now and I made sure he got into that program.”

Other Themes

Respondents identified that having Latino professors would eliminate the unfamiliarity these they felt with higher education. Respondents felt uncomfortable asking questions or even participating in class due to fear of appearing uneducated, or unprepared to be in higher education. A participant replied, “I would never raise my hand to ask or answer questions, even though I had it in my mind and I had the right answer that was one thing I never took advantage of.” Another participant added “when some of my professors would ask questions and I would know the answer and I would be shy to raise my hand a lot of those times I would know the answer and someone else raises theirs hand and answers and the answer was the same I was thinking and I would say, damn that could have been me looking smart in class.”

Having more Latino professors would not only make students feel comfortable to ask questions and more actively participate in class, but would also provide those role models which students desperately need to see themselves reflected in higher education. Respondents also mentioned cultural values playing a role in the way they behaved in
higher education. Raised in the Latino culture, the male respondents learned to respect their elder which included not questioning or challenging those perceived as authority figures, which contradicts the pedagogy in higher education. A highly achieving responded who graduated with a grade point average from high school of above 4.0 felt intimidated to raise his hand and be an active participant in class although he grasped the material. A respondent replied, “As Latino, in our culture, like you respect your elders you don’t talk back. One of my biggest challenges was sitting in class and actually raising my hand challenging the professor if something didn’t sound right”. Another participant added, “at first when you enter college you see these professors like these gods like you can’t talk to them, like they have all the answers, they have the knowledge.” For most of the respondents, being actively involved on campus helped them overcome the intimidation and become active participants of their education. A responded replied, “It’s just getting out of that comfort zone. In college being involved in organizations and kind of getting more out there helps,” when asked about ways he coped with the intimidation he felt in higher education.

Respondents mentioned the importance of role models as well as the lack thereof in college, when asked if they had someone they considered a mentor while attending college, respondents replied not having mentors for the most part. “I never had a mentor, my parents were always there for support, and well I didn’t ask them because they knew as much as I did when it came to college. My parents were there for support but as far as a mentor in school I didn’t’ have one.” Another respondent added, “as far as a mentor, for us being Latino, none of us really has a mentor we have no one to look up to, to ask
questions, there really are no one out there for us.” Many participants responded to seeing peers as role models or mentors. Respondents found role models within their peers. Often respondents felt the academic accomplishments of peers, although may seem small to some, encouraged them to continue with their academics. Latino males need to see themselves represented in higher education through professors, peers and professionals in order to fully realize their potential.

Discussion

This qualitative study allowed for the examination of academic, family and social factors and their impact on Latino male students’ success through the lived experiences of six Latino male transfer students. The participants’ narratives provide insight to what Latino males perceive as important to their academic success in transferring from a two year to a four year institution. The participants’ responses confirm as well as dismiss some assumptions about this population and their perceptions in higher education. Due to a large quantity of research focusing on the deficit model (Valencia & Black, 2002) when addressing the Latino male, the research focused on Latino males’ perceived as being vital to their academic success. All respondents noted that early intervention and knowledge of higher education for parents as well as students was vital to effectively navigate the educational system and plan for higher education. It was this knowledge which was often times absent from their middle schools.

Educators need to reevaluate the efforts and ways in which information regarding higher education is disseminated in order to effectively promote higher education to
Latino students and parents. Respondents mentioned the importance of family in their decision to continue their higher education. It is imperative to inform and empower parents to be advocates and partners in the educational success of their children. Misconceptions of Latino parents’ lacking interest in their children’s higher education allows for educators’ unfounded assumptions which may result in misleading students’ which may negatively affect students’ academic persistence. Respondents also identified the limited Latino male role models in higher education as a concern. These students mentioned having a role model or a mentor as being essential to their academic progress in higher education. Knowing that there was an authoritative figure that they could rely on for advice was vital. Respondents found these role models in coaches, deans, family members and professors.

Summary of Findings

This research provides a further examination of the experience of Latino males in higher education and their narrative with such. Chapter four also contains the findings as well as the analysis of the interviews with six Latino male students who transferred from community college to Northern California University.
Chapter 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

Findings from the narrative of the participants of the study are consistent with the literature. The research on the academic attainment of Latinos is often seen through a deficit model (Valencia & Black, 2002). The constant view of Latino males in higher education from the deficit model continues to highlight the missing Latino male in higher education, describing the barriers of retention and noting the high attrition rates (Saenz, & Ponjuan, 2008). Research focusing on the deficit model too often dismisses the experiences of those Latino males who are successful in higher education.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to further understand how family, higher education personnel and peers supported Latino males transferring from community colleges into a four year institution. The research turned to the following questions to attempt to understand the obstacles, achievements and persistence of Latino male students in higher education.

1. What role does family play in supporting Latino male transfer students' in succeeding in higher education?

2. What role do higher education programs and the institution play in supporting Latino male transfer students’ persistence in higher education?

3. What role do peers play in supporting Latino male transfer students' persistence in higher education?
This study concluded that Latino males who successfully transferred to Northern California University shared certain characteristics and experiences which are shared with Nevarez and Woods (2010) which are background factors, personal factors, social factors, macro level support (e.g., financial support), and institutional (e.g., created a sense of belonging) factors.

This research established that for Latino students, parent involvement is crucial to their academic development. Although Latino parents were often undereducated and lacked formal education and knowledge of the higher education process in the United States to assist their students, respondents often reported parents’ support as being crucial in being successful academically. The support respondents received from parents is important for the development of the student’s values and points of views (Bosma & Kunnen, 2001), for some respondents, the constant support and encouragement assisted in the determining that achieving a higher education was possible.

Parents’ knowledge of higher education appears to directly affect students’ aspirations and goals of higher education attainment. Therefore, it is imperative to educate parents in order to effectively increase and retain the number of Latino students in higher education. Although the majority of the respondents indicated that their parents did not have a former education, their parents understood the value of education. Education is also one of the main reasons families immigrate to the United States. It is the parents’ hope to change their children’s future by providing a better education (Brown, et al., 2003). Unfortunately the lack of understanding of the educational process in this country, for the most part leaves Latino parents with great uncertainties. The
uncertainties create barriers which hinder their students’ opportunities in higher education (Dayton, et al., 2004).

Latino parents may be unable to effectively guide their student through the higher education process or even finance it, but the support Latino parents provide for their students is significantly important for their students’ development of college aspirations which is essential for Latino students’ college attendance (St. John, 1991). By educating parents in the educational process of their students, they become allies in ensuring students’ academic success. It is also worth noting that the academic personnel in charge of guiding students to academic success need to be culturally conscience of the Latino population in order to effectively guide and support their academic success.

There is a need to further educate Latino parents in a way that validates their role as parents and partners in educating their children. Parents need to be made aware of requirements as well as opportunities available to facilitate their students’ education. Despite the overwhelming obstacles the Latino males interviewed in this study experienced in their path to transferring to Northern California University, they are success stories. These accounts should help guide the creation of programs to better support male students in their advanced studies. Respondents often spoke about the need for role models. Latino males need to see themselves represented in higher education in order to make higher education realistic. The connectedness Latino males felt with those who shared their culture created a sense of belonging. Latino males who developed a sense of belonging with other Latino males at such institutions of higher learning were
more likely to feel represented and an obligation to not just complete college, but to assist other Latinos continue with their academic career by creating a support system.

Developing a sense of connectedness to the institution through social groups appears to have the greatest impact on Latino students’ academic success. Latino students not only utilize student organizations as support, but see their academic success through the success of their peers hence providing motivation and a path to follow in higher education. Latino students also see themselves reflected in their Latino faculty. Unfortunately the limited Latino faculty and staff on college campuses has created a cultural disconnectedness and a lack of representation which may convey the message of limited academic success to Latino students. There is a clear disconnect with the educational path of Latino students and what they perceive as being attainable. Increasing the number of Latino faculty and staff will not only provide role models, but transmit the message of academic success for Latinos as a reality.

Conclusions

Latino male participants in this study proved to be successful academically despite the many obstacles presented in their academic path. Respondents attributed their academic success in part to the, although academically limited, emotionally supportive parents and family. All respondents mentioned the importance of a supportive family in their academic achievements. Participants also noted that establishing a support system amongst peers at the educational institution was crucial. It was the constant positive affirmation and guidance respondents mentioned receiving from peers, which positively
contributed to their academic success and personal wellbeing. In addition to the peer support, respondents made mention of programs that were also supportive in their academic efforts. Such programs assisted students with guidance and developing a sense of belonging that translated into an environment in which they were able to flourish and succeed academically. These programs provided resources and guidance respondents lacked prior to entering the academic institution due to their financial and academic disadvantaged backgrounds.

The support the students found in parents, peers and academic programs are in line with Nevarez and Woods’ (2010) study which indicates the presence of background, personal, social and institutional factors, which are present in effective transfer Latino community college students.

Recommendations

Educating Latino males about higher education begins at home and at an early age. Providing parents with the information necessary to be educational partners is essential. It is imperative to inform policy makers and education administrators to develop programs that educate Latino parents of higher education in their native language, Spanish. Parents often feel alienated and foreign from the educational system and it is time to incorporate them into their children’s education. The implementation of programs that address the Latino culture in higher education as well as establishing outreach efforts that directly speak to the needs of this population, are essential in not only increasing, but also retaining Latino students in higher education.
Representation in higher education needs to also be addressed. It is also vital to incorporate faculty and staff that can serve as role models which can relate to the experiences of Latino males in education. The lack of representation indirectly implies that higher education may be unattainable for Latinos. Institutions of higher education need to address the missing Latino faculty in academia to effectively address the missing Latino males.

This research established the need to better inform Latino parents and students in regards to higher education, processes and opportunities. Their reasons respondents had for beginning their higher education at a community college were diverse, but consistent with lack of information in regards to the process of application and financing higher education and expectations both at community college and once transferred at Northern California University. The panorama of higher education is often changing and the outreach efforts from institutions of higher education as well as educational efforts from high schools are often deficient. Such inefficient service to this undereducated population translates to ill-advised decisions in higher education which lead to low enrollment and high attrition rates of Latino students in higher education.

Recommendation for Future Research

It is imperative to learn about the struggles and the achievements of such an underrepresented population in higher education, such as Latino males. It is important to hear the voices of those who often become silenced. Qualitative research of successful Latino males in academia is necessary to create a conscious of success, in order for
Latino males to see themselves reflected in those who succeed. Latino males are just as capable as others of academic success; it is time research makes note of them.
APPENDIX A

Consent Form

February 11, 2012

Dear Participant,

You are being invited to participate in a research study about the academic narrative of Latino transfer students. This research project is being conducted by Oscar Mendoza, graduate student of the California State University, Sacramento. The objective of this research is to further understand the male Latino community college students’ persistence in higher education. It is being conducted at California State University, Sacramento. The interview is being conducted with Latino male students who attended community colleges before transferring to CSU, Sacramento.

There are no known risks for participation in this study. However, you may feel some emotional discomfort when answering questions about personal experience. There are neither costs nor compensations for participating in the study. The information you provide will assist with the understanding of what factors are most important for Latino male students as well as obstacles encountered when transferring to a four year institution of higher education and remaining in the four year institutions. The information collected may not benefit you directly, but what it is learned from this study should provide general benefits to students, colleges and universities.

I am requesting that you participate in one focus group to share your experiences as community college transfers. The focus group will be with two other participants for approximately 45-60 minutes. The focus group will be digitally recorded and transcribed.

This interview is anonymous. Your rights to privacy and safety will be protected through the use of pseudo names in the research. Any audio recordings will be destroyed after data has been thoroughly reviewed and analyzed.

If you have any questions about this research, you may contact Oscar Mendoza at (xxx)xxx-xxxx or by e-mail xxxxx@yahoo.com or Dr. Jose Chavez, CSUS faculty advisor for this investigation at (xxx)xxx-xxxx or e-mail at xxxxx@csus.edu.

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You are free to decide not to participate, or to decide at a later time to stop participating. The researcher may also end your participation at any time. By signing below, you are saying that you understand the risks involved in this research and agree to participate in it.

I have read, understood, and received a copy of the above consent.

________________________________________      _______________________
Signature of Participant                      Date
APPENDIX B

Interview Questions

1. Please describe your background (where you grew up, your schooling, your family, your age).

2. What is your mother’s highest level of education?
3. What is your father’s highest level of education?
4. What is your ethnicity?
5. What made you decide to go to community college?
   a. What were your expectations about college?
   b. Did you have a plan for your community college career?
   c. What was the greatest challenge you faced when you decided you wanted to go to college?
   d. Describe how you picked your major and/or classes.
6. Describe the role that your parents had in your decision to go to college.
7. Describe the role that your friends/peers had in your decision to go to college.
8. How long did you attend community college for?
   a. Roughly how many units did you take each semester?
9. When you had questions about your education, who did you asked?
10. Think back since you began your college career.
    a. What role, if any, has your parents have had in your education?
    b. What role, if any, has educational programs have had in your education?
    c. What role, if any, have your peers had in your education?
11. Did you join any groups or student associations on campus and if so, what was the impact of this organization in your academics?
12. Were there any areas where your parents were not sure how to support you?
13. Describe the resources/support the community college provided you outside of the classroom that you believe were significant to your education attainment this far.
14. Did you have someone you would consider as a “mentor” while at a community college? Explain who your mentors were and what suggestions and advice they provided you with.
15. Explain your relationship with the community college counselors.
16. Explain your experience with the different student services on campus.
a. Were you aware of any student support services? If yes, how did you become aware of them?

17. Describe your financial situation while you were enrolled at a community college?
   a. Did your parents help you financially to attend college?
   b. Did you receive financial aid?
      i. If so, was it enough to cover your expenses?

18. Did you work while you attended community college?
   a. If so, roughly how many hours did you work?

19. How important was it for you to see your ethnicity being represented on campus?
   a. Did you feel that your ethnicity and culture were represented on campus?
   b. If so, how and if not, how would you have liked to see your culture being represented?

20. What could have made the transition from high school to community college smoother for you?

21. What could have made the transition from community college to the four year university smoother for you?

22. What advice would you give to other Latino male students who are attending community college with a goal of transferring to a four year institution?

23. Is there anything you want to add that you think is important to include in this interview?
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